Agriculture’s Leadership

The Need: In the increasingly competitive global marketplace, North Carolina agriculture needs leaders who can effectively advocate for our food, fiber and forestry industries, which account for $68.3 billion of North Carolina’s $336 billion gross state product. Policies developed at the state, local and national levels impact agriculture and agribusiness. Agricultural leaders need the tools to advocate for agriculture at all levels to ensure that government policies and public opinion related to agriculture remain positive to ensure profitability.

Serving the Need: Since the 1980s, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has conducted an Agricultural Leadership Development Program to promote personal development and teach leadership skills to professionals from government, commodity and farm organizations. In the early years, the program targeted mainly those involved in the production and marketing of tobacco, but today group members reflect great diversity in the roles they play and the products they grow. The program has spawned some of the state’s strongest agricultural leaders, including Larry Wooten of the N.C. Farm Bureau and Lawrence Davenport, president of the agribusiness firm J.P. Davenport and Son, Inc.

The 2005-2007 class of Agricultural Leaders toured Brazil, a major agricultural competitor of the United States, and California, now dealing with many of the agricultural issues that North Carolina agriculture is facing.

In the fall of 2006, the College expanded its leadership offerings to include a four-part workshop directed at the state’s commodity leaders. About 20 individuals participated in the fall workshops, which focused on leadership, board management, media relations and crisis management and innovation and change.

Impact beyond North Carolina: Members of the current agricultural leaders class already have had an impact on agricultural policy, developing white papers on five major agricultural issues: biofuels, public education about agriculture, green space protection, farm labor and the 2007 Farm Bill. The group working on the Farm Bill paper traveled to Washington, D.C., to share their concerns with the state’s elected leaders.

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