



## College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

*Tifton Campus Assistant Dean*

June 24, 2021

### UGA Tifton Campus:

I could not be prouder nor more appreciative of the effort and determination that you (our faculty, staff, students and ARS cooperators) have exhibited in this most difficult year. Despite budget cuts, working from home, reduced support staff, and endless virtual meetings, we continue to develop and extend cutting-edge knowledge and value to our students and Georgia agricultural stakeholders. I am excited to report that the state legislature has restored 60% of our original fiscal year 2021 budget cuts and we are in the process of replacing some of our recent personnel losses. Further, the UGA Tifton Campus Conference Center is back to holding events with a busy summer and fall schedule ahead of them. Our faculty are expecting near-record numbers of graduate students this fall and our research farms are operating at full capacity with exciting research projects. These are all very positive signs for our campus and the Tifton community.

An infusion of one-time state and federal dollars provided unusual opportunities to improve our campus infrastructure. The whitefly research team has a newly renovated, state-of-the-art greenhouse to conduct research. New irrigation pumps, pivots and stand guns are greatly improving the productivity of our Field Research Service (FRS) farm supervisors. The first of three new tractors for our campus farms has been delivered and we are expecting the other two shortly. Thanks to the generosity of Drs. Roberts and Culpepper, a new laser projector and high-contrast screen are being installed in the small auditorium at the conference center to improve our Extension delivery. We've just outfitted the NESPAL seminar room with built-in mics and cameras that will allow more effortless hosting of webinars and Zoom meetings, such as graduate defenses. Completion of all first-floor interior spaces in the new gambrel barn has been contracted and we are working with the Office of University Architects to improve several other buildings on campus. Even our sweater-wearing colleagues in the Plant Science Building will have heat this coming winter! Planned upgrades in the coming year include additional graduate student bullpen offices, roof and laboratory upgrades at NESPAL, additional greenhouse renovations, and parking upgrades for the annex buildings.

Given that background, it's easy to become optimistic about the future. But let's not forget the carnage caused by the ongoing worldwide pandemic. Many of us have experienced the loss of family and friends, not to mention employees on our own campus that have been forced into long-term disability, extended hospital stays, and untold amounts of leave. Our own USDA-ARS cooperators here in Tifton have yet to return to the office full time. Further, the pandemic continues to have a vice-like grip on multiple countries around the world. Despite the efforts of the CDC and Georgia Dept. of Health, just over 30% of people in Tift County are fully vaccinated. The remaining population will remain susceptible until being vaccinated for this preventable disease.

Today, we celebrate the culture of excellence that is a hallmark of the UGA Tifton campus. Whether by length of service or category of achievement, there are few better examples of cooperation and unity around a central mission than we get to experience daily. Our campus is a cohesive, diverse and inclusive community of professionals that collaborate with a goal of improving agriculture in Georgia. The awards of excellence that we are honoring today were submitted by colleagues and supervisors that genuinely want to acknowledge the extraordinary talents of their peers and subordinates. Selection committees are comprised of current employees and past award winners. I extend a sincere thanks to Dr. Tim Brenneman and Teri Hughes for organizing the awards process and to the various panels for their work adjudicating the packets. Additionally, a big thanks to the nominators for making the time to recognize their peers and subordinates. UGA-Tifton is a more special place as a result of the efforts that each of you make to support each other.

In closing, I must be transparent with the UGA-Tifton community: not enough of you are vaccinated yet for us to safely gather to celebrate these achievements. I am hopeful and optimistic that conditions on the ground will continue to improve and that we will gather in-person at the Christmas breakfast, planned for the first week in December. My congrats to all the award recipients and best wishes to all of you for a safe and productive summer field season.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael D. Toews". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael Toews, Ph.D.  
Assistant Dean