

To: N.C. Cooperative Extension Employees  
Date: February 12, 2016  
Subject: Introduction & Welcome Letter from Dr. Richard Bonanno

Extension colleagues,

As we begin the next phase of our journey together, I wanted to take some time to share a little about myself and what drives my passion and vision for Extension. First, I'm incredibly honored for the opportunity to lead and serve this great organization of ours. It is both a very gratifying and humbling experience to be welcomed back to the Extension Service and Wolfpack family with open arms.

I'd like to thank Dr. Travis Burke for his leadership as interim director; he has done a tremendous job leading our organization since last summer. He will continue playing a valuable role over the next several months helping me transition into my new position.

### **Who Am I?**

For those that might not be aware, I spent the first six years of my career at NC State as an Extension weed specialist from 1983 to 1989, and I'm truly thankful to return now and lead this proud organization through a critical juncture of its history.

Prior to returning to Raleigh, I was an adjunct professor and Extension educator with the University of Massachusetts since 1989. My focus was vegetable and small fruit weed management for the six New England states. I also served for the past six years as president of the Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation, as well as on the American Farm Bureau Federation board of directors. In addition to my role with Extension, my family still owns and operates a successful vegetable and flower operation north of Boston.

More recently, I've been fortunate to spend time with Tom Melton, Sheri Schwab and Mike Yoder – our Extension Service leadership team – as well as college and university leadership, and I can say that I've never been more enthusiastic and encouraged; together we'll accomplish great things.

### **Why Are We Here?**

As Extension Director, I will be as open and transparent as possible. I believe that to be great, an organization has to constantly look within and be able to assess both its successes and failures. Looking to improve constantly is the key to continued success. I'd like to touch on just a few key organizational objectives here, but you can expect an ongoing dialogue and regular updates from leadership.

#### Strategic Plan moving forward

For 17 months now, the Extension Service has been implementing a new Strategic Plan & Vision to position Extension for ongoing success and sustainability. We will see the plan through to completion. I am eager to hear your thoughts on this process. What has and hasn't worked? What are your suggestions and criticisms?

#### Agent-specialist collaboration

Delivering trusted, research-based programs to North Carolinians is at the core of our mission. To fulfill this promise to the public, we need to continue exploring ways to foster agent-specialist working relationships and streamline the flow of information from research to practical application. I welcome your suggestions.

## Employee training & tools

At the end of the day, our employees are our greatest asset. You're the subject-matter experts building partnerships, providing leadership in experiential education and delivering solutions across the state. It's imperative that we enhance and better coordinate training opportunities for employees, and provide you with the tools and information you need.

I'm here for the same reason I believe you are: to make a positive difference in the lives of North Carolinians and help create prosperity across the state.

### **What Do We Do Next?**

I believe in open access, transparency and healthy dialogue. As such, we'll have monthly communication in the form of short videos and written updates from the director and Extension leadership.

I look forward to meeting many of you during the district visits the week of February 22 ([see the schedule here](#)), and you can always email me or submit feedback for our monthly leadership updates using the info below:

**Submit feedback** | [go.ncsu.edu/BonannoFeedback](https://go.ncsu.edu/BonannoFeedback)  
**Email** | [abonann@ncsu.edu](mailto:abonann@ncsu.edu)

I look at this organization, its people, its partners, and I can't ask for a better foundation to build upon as the new director. Our future is bright. Working together with the college, the university, our many partners and, most importantly, with one another, we will create the best Extension organization in the country!

All the best,  
Rich



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