



SUL ROSS STATE UNIVERSITY

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Dear Alumni and Friends:

A number of events have occurred over the past few months that will have important impacts on Sul Ross and the School of Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences. I would like to share with you some of these developments, to ensure that you have the facts and, I hope, put you at ease regarding the status of Sul Ross agriculture programs.

To begin, our bachelor's – and master's – level degrees in animal science and natural resource management are sound and remain whole. They have solid enrollment and graduation rates, and I anticipate no major changes in these programs.

The state budget crises and policy changes by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), the state body that regulates higher education in Texas, have led to changes that will affect our two-year associate degree programs and the B.S. degree in agricultural business. By THECB definition, a low-producing program is one that has fewer than 25 graduates in a five-year period. Four of our ag programs fall short of that criterion: Agricultural Business (B.S.) and A.A.S. (two-year) degrees in Farrier Technology, Meat Technology and Veterinary Technology. These programs have all been low-producing, or near low-producing, for many years. Under past THECB rules, it was a relatively simple process for us to keep these programs, and that is what we did. The new rules are more stringent, and require detailed justification for continuance. It is worth noting that earlier this year the THECB predicted that more than 700 programs at Texas universities would be consolidated or phased-out.

Consequently, our A.A.S. degrees in farrier technology, meat technology, and veterinary technology will be phased out over the next two to three semesters. Each student in these areas with a current degree plan will be able to complete that degree. The ag business degree will be consolidated as a concentration within the B.S. in Natural Resource Management. Currently, the NRM bachelor's degree has three concentrations: conservation biology, range management, and wildlife management - agricultural business will become a fourth concentration. This will require some restructuring of the ag business curriculum, but the courses will basically remain intact. Students with current ag business degree plans will be able to complete that degree. All students potentially affected by these changes received notification by mail, and we are working with them individually to minimize any adverse impact they might experience.

Within the B.S. degree in animal science, we continue concentrations in agricultural education, animal health management, equine science, meat science, production, and reproductive physiology – this

degree is not affected. We will continue to offer all of our meat science classes. Many farrier courses will continue as part of the animal science program – some as a component of the equine science concentration. Although we will phase-out the vet tech associates' degree, we will continue animal science courses geared toward students interested in animal health management, as well as for those pursuing a pre-veterinary medicine-advising track. These curriculum changes are challenging, as well as heart-rending. After last winter's effort by so many to preserve the vet tech program, this is a particularly tough realization.

The budget situation has left us with unfilled faculty positions in the department of animal science. These are in agricultural education and animal science-equine. Further, our recently hired veterinarian has vacated that position. We hope to augment these openings (all vacant positions are presently frozen) with adjunct faculty, and with some luck, perhaps permanent hires before long.

Like all state universities and institutions having to make drastic cuts to meet our unprecedented state budget shortfall we face some daunting challenges. As is often the case, though, challenges create opportunities. As we reconfigure our ag curriculum we will redouble our efforts to improve and enhance our strong, core programs at the bachelor's – and master's – level in the School of Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences. As we fill faculty positions, we will build on the core disciplines that fit our region, for example, promoting a ranch horse focus through our equine concentration. To support our recruiting and retention efforts, Sul Ross hired the marketing firm Sosa and Sosa that has a record of accomplishment helping small universities improve recruiting and retention. President Maestas has demonstrated a firm commitment and passion to increase enrollment, as well as to improve student graduation rates. Our new marketing approach, which includes an emphasis on recruiting in smaller high schools and rural areas, is an effort that I feel will directly benefit our ag programs. The university recruiters are now focusing their efforts in these smaller communities, and the marketing firm has been working with animal science, natural resource management, and rodeo to make our recruiting materials and web presence more appealing to potential students. We had the opportunity to roll out our new recruiting materials to a strong reception at the State FFA Convention in Lubbock this month. ANRS is in forefront of this recruiting effort, and our marketing partners will use our recruiting materials as the template for the other Sul Ross departments.

If you have questions or suggestions, please feel free to contact me. I look forward to visiting with many of you at this summer's reunion.

Best wishes,

Rob Kinucan, Dean