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Colleg of Agriculture Convocation Speech

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Welcome and congratulations to all the graduates and your families. This is an important milestone for both students and parents. Today we are celebrating and honoring years of hard work. You have come far, you have done well, and now it is time to be rewarded.

It is an honor for me to be up here today, not only for myself but also for the Forestry Department. While at Iowa State, I have been involved in the Forestry Club, Society of American Foresters, and Ag Council. These experiences were extremely valuable in developing my leadership and communication skills. I had the great opportunity to work with many people from the College of Agriculture. I will always remember and treasure these experiences for the valuable skills that I learned and the wonderful people that I met.

Each of you has had many academic and social experiences over the years. There are ones that you will look back on with fondness. And there may be a few you wished had not occurred. If you have not already noticed, the world is small and you never know whom you may run into in the future. For example, the person sitting next to you may one day be your boss, or you may be their boss, or you may be co-workers.

Iowa is changing - its agriculture, businesses, communities, and environment. Risks, uncertainties and rewards lie ahead. We need to seek them with care and respect. I don’t know about you, but the future is a bit intimidating. Yet as I reflect on my education at Iowa State University, I realize that there are several key principles that are the building blocks of all programs in the College of Agriculture. Today, I am going to illustrate some of the key principles of our agricultural disciplines.

I would like to invite you to take a journey with me. We are going to travel through the Iowa landscape that we have all come to know and love. As I lead you on this journey, visualize a tree in the Iowa landscape.

To me as a forester, I see a beautiful oak tree that provides shade for our communities, wood products for everyday use, recreation, beauty, and food for wildlife. I have come to know this tree very well over the last four years and now I know how this tree relates to the human and natural landscapes.

Maybe your tree is planted along a fencerow as a windbreak. Agronomy majors may see the tree and the soil that provides nutrients and stability to it.

Or, environmental science majors see trees growing along our creeks and rivers and how they interact with the water cycle.

Horticulture majors may picture a tree in a community park. This tree may have an abundance of flowers and fruits. Or they may see an oak tree growing alongside a groomed golf course.

Animal ecology majors may picture a tree and a forest that provide habitat for wildlife.

The animal science majors may picture a tree that borders a cornfield producing feed for livestock.
or a tree that is providing shade for animals in a pasture.

The Ag Education, Ag Studies, and Public Service and Ag Administration majors who work with communities may visualize a tree that is providing beautiful spring and fall colors, shade, and an outdoor classroom to a school or office building.

Entomology and Plant Pathology majors may picture a tree that is being harmed by a pathogen or insect in an urban area, a forest, or in a crop field.

The Ag Business Economics majors may be picturing a tree that is of economic value and how to manage a whole farm to optimize all assets.

Food Science and Human Nutrition majors may see a tree that is producing sugars or other food substances for human consumption.

Zoology/Genetics, Microbiology, Biochemistry, Biophysics, and Molecular Biology majors all may picture a tree growing next to a field of corn. They may be thinking of ways to grow the crops faster, produce more fruit, and are more resistant to pests.

Underlying principles run through the maze of disciplines I have just described. The first principle is that each major, though unique, seeks to maintain the vigor, beauty, productivity, and sustainability of the Iowa landscape. Second is that sustaining agriculture, natural resources, and communities require an interdisciplinary approach. Third is that working together can accomplish more than if we try to solve big issues facing agriculture by ourselves. And fourth, it is important that we must be inclusive of all disciplines and seek ways to include all viewpoints when making decisions related to food, fiber, the environment, and our communities.

Several times, I have mentioned the word sustainability. This word is one that we normally apply to our fields of study, however it is just as important in our personal lives. In order to maintain sustainable resources, communities, and businesses, we have to manage them so they will not become exhausted. But how do we sustain ourselves? This is relatively simple yet can be quite complex. We need to work hard to achieve our individual goals, but not so hard that we forget to have fun or we forget each other. We need to experience all things in life without regrets.

No matter how far away from Iowa State University you plant yourself, there always will be the lessons you have learned and the four underlying principles. I hope that all of you will look back to your roots at Iowa State with fond memories and laughter. We may have completed a chapter in our lives today, but we have not yet finished learning. Learning is a life long process. Take every opportunity to sustain your knowledge and use wisely the resources that you have acquired over the years by experiencing new ideas, thoughts and activities.

Congratulations on all your accomplishments and hard work. Good luck in your future endeavors.