Foreword
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I've always thought entrepreneurs had guts.
Lots of guts.

I'm what you would call a “risk-averse” person.

Just listening to Kevin Kimle recount how he left behind a successful career at a well-established company to strike out on his own with a brand new company made me sweat. No health insurance? Just the thought makes me feel ill.

I imagined that entrepreneurs were risk-takers welcoming “opportunities” that would make many of us squirm. Sleepless nights, dwindling bank accounts and neglected home lives? I figured they were all part of the game.

Then I talked with a few of our most successful entrepreneurial alumni (see Q&A on page 18). They helped me realize that to entrepreneurs, it is about not taking a risk. They believe so strongly in their idea that, to them, leaving it idle is the real risk.

This issue of STORIES will offer insight into the lives of selected alumni, students, faculty and staff who embody the entrepreneurial spirit that is prevalent in agriculture and life sciences.

This issue highlights the educational efforts of our Agricultural Entrepreneurship Initiative and other student programs that are giving our students the tools to strike out on their own, or be entrepreneurial within the organization of their choice.

Kevin Kimle, the director of the initiative (profiled on page 6), makes entrepreneurship contagious. Through his classes and programs, entrepreneurial principles sound exciting, rewarding and achievable. Even the most risk-averse of us may just be inspired to take a risk and live out our passion.

Kind regards,

Melea Reicks Licht
Recently, student tuition surpassed state of Iowa funding as the primary contributor to the base of resources that keep our campus functioning. A main challenge now is to ensure students continue to receive an outstanding education and a promising future at a competitive price, while maintaining state support as much as we are able.

It also means that success in external research funding is even more critical. It’s essential to be able to expand the frontiers of science—and, as state resources shrink, to shoulder greater responsibility for the vital education and training of our graduate students and a greater share of the basic infrastructure expenses that run our campus.

That is why I feel fortunate and grateful our faculty in agriculture and life sciences are some of the very best at competing for external grants and contracts. They work very hard at it. During a span of six months in 2010, they submitted nearly 160 proposals to federal agencies, which remain a primary source for research funds.

External sources recognize innovation. In fiscal year 2010, our faculty were awarded more than $58 million in sponsored funding.

A recent shining example of success: In February, the USDA announced three major grants to study climate and agriculture. Iowa State was awarded one of the $20 million grants, thanks to the leadership of sociology professor Lois Wright Morton and a team of 42 scientists at nine land-grant universities.

Also, John Patience, professor of animal science, received a $5 million grant to study nutrient utilization and feed efficiency in pigs. Basil Nikolau, professor of biochemistry, biophysics and molecular biology, was awarded $1.4 million to study metabolomics, a tool to understand plant gene function.

And Joe Cortes of the Seed Science Center was awarded one of the most competitive grants you can hope for—a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant of $1.4 million to enhance seed policies in regions of Africa.

Our faculty understand the ingredients of success. Whether it’s in the classroom and lab or engaging with partners, the ingredients remain the same—long hours, dedication, a collaborative spirit and an ever-present awareness of our mission. I am grateful for their efforts, and I hope you are, too.

Wendy Wintersteen
Endowed Dean of Agriculture and Life Sciences