
View from the President's Office: The Power of Partnerships

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I am delighted that our Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (OARDC) is hosting this twentieth annual meeting. I visited OARDC in January and saw firsthand some of the remarkable research that is being conducted there, and each time I visited that place in my first tenure at the university I was very impressed by what they were doing. If my memory is right, nearly all of the research at OARDC is interdisciplinary in nature, involving external partnerships. The big ideas that we are confronting are the issues of food and sustainability, but also in that mix is the notion of external partnerships. And that notion of partnership is exactly the same thing you are doing here. I believe that through this conference and through your regular ongoing work together you are pursuing exactly the right course to assure America's future. And I mean this not just for your own impressive and growing industries, but for all of the conceivable kinds of enterprises. You have formed successful partnerships across industries and across the public/private sectors as well.

COMPETING NEEDS

The old silo approach—a good land-grant term—no longer works in higher education and I would suggest it no longer works in business or industry or in life in general, especially not in an industry where the issues are changing so rapidly. You are in a rapidly changing part of the world, intellectually. Not only that, two of the larger human needs that many of you seek to address—providing both adequate nutrition and an ample energy supply for the world's expanding population—seem to be in conflict. During the past few weeks we have all come to a fuller understanding of the world's immediate food crisis. The potential for political instability caused by scarcity of food is very real in many corners of the world. Certainly, we in the United States are not immune to the problems of hunger. We all share a concern that the basic needs of our neighbors are becoming more acute in this difficult economic period. At the same time, the earth's supply of fossil fuel is dwindling and we face an additional crisis with similar result: political turmoil brought about by diminishing resources. So, I think you are on the right track because I

have a great deal of faith, and indeed hope, in what you are doing. I believe, for example, that biobased fuels offer much promise. In fact, we at Ohio State are proud that our campus buses run on soy biodiesel. Likewise, ethanol is increasingly used throughout many parts of the country. But this of course is what it is all about. It is the crux of the question that many of you are grappling with: how do we simultaneously meet growing food needs and increased energy needs? Others of you are balancing similar, if not quite so dire, competing needs. Creating biobased industrial products such as packaging, using soybean instead of foreign oil, is in itself a tremendous notion. But, choosing to grow crops for non-consumption purposes presents the issue of whether we are inadvertently taking food from those who need it most.

PRESSING GLOBAL PROBLEMS

I'm a lawyer by training. I know little of the science underpinning what you are doing—although I am most interested in it—so I cannot pretend to know the answers to any of those difficult questions. But I do know this: we will find solutions to our most perplexing problems only by working together, only by joining together in the spirit of true collaboration. The full synergistic measure of our collective talents will be required to solve these problems. With us today are industrial scientists, entrepreneurs, faculty and graduate students from many different universities and leaders from Battelle and the Ohio Department of Agriculture. Finding solutions to pressing global problems, including balancing both food and energy needs, will surely require all of you and more. But with a 20-year history of working together, you have hit the ground running.

From an admittedly partisan perspective, I have to say that land-grant universities also have a long history of working in partnership to improve lives. That was the founding mission of those great institutions. As you may remember, land-grant universities were established under the Morrill Act of 1862, which was passed during the height of the Civil War. In the middle of those terrible days and months, President Lincoln had the foresight to invest in young people and communities. Perhaps more than any other kind of higher education institutions—I'll even be so bold as to say perhaps more than any other kind of institution—land-grant universities have a special covenant to meet pressing needs as they arise. Today, my own university's ability to help facilitate and develop solutions is important on several levels. It is, quite frankly, critical to Ohio's economic well-being. I believe that the American university is the essence and the stimulus for our economic future. The industries represented here are the state's top income producers.

OHIO BIOPRODUCTS INNOVATION CENTER

As you may know, agriculture is Ohio's leading economic sector with a current value of some \$93 billion. The polymer industry, with a proud history rooted in Akron and northeast Ohio, is the state's second leading economic sector with a current value of approximately \$50 billion. To put it simply, agricultural biosciences are vital to Ohio's future. And there is much work to do, a great deal to accomplish in developing new bioproducts, devising more-efficient production methods, managing growing water-use needs, enhancing efficiency of biofuels and determining optimal renewable bioresources.

Each of the organizations represented here today is committed to addressing these issues. At Ohio State, we are fortunate in our work to have a strong partnership with the State of Ohio. Through its Third Frontier Program, the state has funded the Ohio Bioproducts Innovation Center as well as a facility dedicated to biomass-to-energy conversion. Those have been true collaborations and real success stories. The Ohio Bioproducts Innovation Center brings together Ohio State, Battelle, several corporations, the Ohio Soybean Council and PolymerOhio to drive the development of bioproducts. The Center, which has offices in both Columbus and Wooster, links genetics, biotechnology and chemistry to develop and commercialize new products. And the research conducted through the center is sure to act as a catalyst for additional investment and growth.

WASTE NO MORE

Another success story is the biomass-to-energy facility located at OARDC. As good fortune would have it, Ohio is rich in certain types of waste, which the biomass facility is putting to great use. Ohio State is working with Technology Management, Inc., and NewBio to create distributed scalable waste-energy conversion for use by farms and corporations. Their work is at the forefront of efforts to search for environmentally sound approaches to energy generation. Beyond the immediate gains, those partnerships have stimulated many scientists to think in new, creative ways to solve common problems.

Those are just a couple of Ohio State's partnerships. Increasingly we all are realizing the critical need to set aside zero-sum me-first thinking. I often say that higher education is the foundation for the future of this state, our nation and our world, and I believe that our well-being—economically, environmentally, artistically and politically—is closely tied to the generation of ideas. In saying that, I want to make one thing perfectly clear: we in higher education do not operate in a vacuum isolated from others of good intent and great ideas. Public universities are very much a part of the society that sustains them. We are truly a part of our communities and our communities—local and global if a distinction still exists at all—need us now as never before. I am personally committed to making my own university, this great institution we call Ohio State, even more aggressive in applying knowledge to real-world problems and conducting research for the public good and in fueling our economic prosperity.

SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES AND SOLVING PROBLEMS

Turning again to our founding mission as a land-grant institution, Ohio State is duty-bound to act as a responsible global citizen. That commitment to rolling up our sleeves, to partnering with others, to applying ourselves to solving problems of the gravest concern, I submit, is the new American university. The global challenges we seek to resolve are vast and they are immediate. There's no doubt about it. But, I believe profoundly that the problems we face are surpassed by our enormous opportunities. I am utterly optimistic about our ability to seize opportunities and solve problems. To do so, of course, we must forcefully pursue the course of collaboration in which you serve as a strong example, indeed as a beacon on the hill. Many of us can remember a time when the worlds of academia and industry seemed light years apart, never to intersect. But yesterday's *status quo* will

not light the way. Now there is mutual recognition of the power of partnerships. Now the world's commanding need for new solutions is at its strongest and now is precisely the moment to accelerate our own progress. Our strength in numbers and our cumulative power and our creativity are beyond measure.

I commend you on what you are doing. There was never a time when your work, your energy and your creativity were more needed, indeed sorely needed. One need only pick up a newspaper to know that what you are about is among the most important work that we can be about in this nation at this time. I thank you for letting me be here and I congratulate you on your good work.



IN OCTOBER, 2007, Gordon Gee was appointed president of the Ohio State University, the leading comprehensive teaching and research institution in the state, with campuses in Columbus, Lima, Mansfield, Marion and Newark, the Agricultural Technical Institute and Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center in Wooster, and extension offices in every county. The university comprises close to 60,000 students, approximately 40,000 faculty and staff, and has an annual budget of \$4.3 billion. The main campus in Columbus—the largest in the United States—has nearly 52,000 students.

Dr. Gee also has appointments as Professor of Law and Professor of Education. Previously he was chancellor of Vanderbilt University (2000–2007) and president of Brown University (1998–2000). He served a first term as president of the Ohio State University from 1990 to 1998, having been president of the University of Colorado (1985–1990), president of West Virginia University (1981–1985), and dean and professor at West Virginia University College of Law (1979–1981). At the J. Reuben Clark Law School of Brigham Young University (1975–1979), he served as associate/full professor and assistant/associate dean.

He has a BA from the University of Utah in history, a JD from Columbia University, and an EdD from Teachers College at Columbia.