REQUEST FOR NEW PROGRAM AT IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY: BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN AGRICULTURAL COMMUNICATION

**Action Requested**: Consider approval of the request by Iowa State University for a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Communication in the College of Agriculture & Life Sciences.

The Council of Provosts and Board office support approval of this program.

**Description of proposed program.** The profession of agricultural communication has transitioned from the dissemination of information to the agriculture sector to communicating science, policy, technology and their impact on agricultural production and productivity to a variety of audiences. An agricultural communication major at Iowa State University will provide students with critical agricultural and communication knowledge and skills to be effective agricultural communicators. Graduates will communicate about agricultural science with diverse audiences within and outside the agricultural sector locally, nationally and globally using various communication channels and tools. Currently, the program is offered as only an option within the Agricultural Education major. Students who graduated from this program do not obtain a nationally recognized degree in agricultural communication, limiting their competitiveness on the job market.

Iowa State’s current Agricultural & Life Sciences Education--Communication Option has been running successfully since it was established in 1996. Changing the option to a major will not only fully formalize the work the faculty have already established to launch and maintain a successful agricultural communication program, but this transition will also keep Iowa State graduates competitive with those at peer institutions. An agricultural communication major is recognized nationwide.

**Academic objectives.** The academic objectives of the program are twofold. First, the establishment of the major will equip students with knowledge and skills to effectively communicate messages about agricultural issues to diverse audiences using various communication channels. The students will develop a deep understanding of agricultural sciences such as animal science, horticulture, agronomy, agricultural and rural policy studies, global resource systems, food science and human nutrition, and agricultural business. Second, students will develop proficiency in using various communication channels and tools as well as the application of communication strategies for audiences within and outside the agricultural sector. These include identifying and building trust with target audiences; creating strategic written, oral and digital messages; identifying agriculturally related issues and framing agricultural messaging strategically; marketing and promoting agricultural technology and innovation to diverse audiences; and embracing diversity and differences within agriculture.

**Need for program.** Agricultural communication, as a discipline, has gone through several changes. The changes include a shift in focus from print and broad news to science communication with an increased focus on advocacy and public relations instead of the transfer of technology (Irani & Doerfert, 2013). Understanding these changes requires that graduates from these programs are proficient in both technical and strategic communication as well as critical thinking (Morgan & Rucker, 2013).

According to Miller, Large, Rucker, Shoulders & Ruck (2015), there were 48 agricultural communications undergraduate programs offered by universities and community colleges across the U.S. with an average of 69 students per institution in 2014, up from an average of 37 students
in 2000 (Weckman, Witham, & Telg, 2000). This increase in agricultural communications academic programs over the last two decades is a logical result of increased demand for agricultural communications practitioners and an increase in popularity of the discipline among college students and college-bound high school students.

Furthermore, Miller et al. (2015) reported that a large majority of programs experienced growth over the last five years and also predicted growth in the next five years. None of the surveyed programs reported decreases in the last five years or predicted drops in enrollment in the near future. These data have indicated that the academic discipline of agricultural communication is growing, reflecting a growing industry demand for agricultural communicators.

Currently, the agricultural communication program is called “Agricultural and Life Sciences Education - Communications Option.” Students who complete this program earn a degree of Bachelor of Science in Agricultural and Life Sciences Education. Although the agricultural communication program curriculum shares few similarities with the agricultural and life sciences education curriculum, the students graduating from the agricultural communication option receive a degree of agricultural and life sciences education. For years during senior exit interviews, seniors expressed their desire to receive a degree explicitly naming agricultural communication as a full-fledged major.

Relationship to existing programs at the institution. The proposed major does not duplicate any of the existing programs at the university. Currently, no program specifically focuses on training students in agricultural communication. The proposed major should increase course enrollment in agricultural disciplines in the College of Agriculture & Life Sciences (CALS) and in courses elsewhere on campus. Students enrolling in the major will be expected to take courses in the CALS, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, and in many instances College of Human Sciences and Ivy College of Business to meet the curriculum requirements. Requiring a significant number of credits in both agricultural and life sciences as well as professional communication introduces our students to a wide range of curricula. This should increase demand for many classes in the CALS and the aforementioned colleges. Specifically, the department engaged in much discussion and planning with the Greenlee School of Journalism reflects the spirit of collaboration and commitment to continued conversation to avoid duplication over time.

The proposed major has a unique emphasis on the combination of agricultural science disciplines and strategic communication. This emphasis is critical for the success of Iowa’s agricultural prosperity, and none of the existing majors on campus offer it.

Relationship to existing programs at other colleges and universities. There is no other program in agricultural communications in Iowa. Agricultural communication programs are offered at most Land Grant Universities, such as Ohio State University, Purdue University, the University of Georgia, Texas A&M University-College Station, the University of Minnesota and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Resources to establish a high-quality program. Many of the courses in agriculture and communication for the proposed major already exist at ISU and are being taught by highly qualified faculty in CALS, the Department of Communication Studies, the Ivy College of Business, the Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication, and the Department of English.

Currently, the agricultural communication team within the Department of Agricultural Education and Studies has three faculty members with diverse backgrounds, knowledge and skills in agricultural communication. The faculty members are fully committed to teaching courses, conducting research, and providing service in agricultural communication.
In 2014, the Department of Agricultural Education and Studies hired associate teaching professor Virginia Hanson, a career teacher with degrees in English, expertise in teaching writing, and a background in agriculture and extension work. She also serves as the advisor to the Iowa State Chapter of Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow.

In 2017, the department hired Dr. Shuyang Qu, who received a doctoral degree in agricultural communication from the University of Florida and taught media and communication courses in an agricultural context before working at Iowa State.

In 2020, the department hired Dr. Fallys Masambuka-Kanchewa, who received her Ph.D. in agricultural communication from The Ohio State University. Dr. Masambuka-Kanchewa taught courses on issues in agriculture at Ohio State for more than two years before joining the University of Georgia where she taught courses in agricultural communication theories.

The Department of Agricultural Education and Studies is located in the renovated Curtiss Hall historic building. Curtiss Hall is equipped with instructional technology, workspaces for students, and accessible career service and global programs offices. The Department of Agricultural Education and Studies also houses the Harold Crawford Classroom in Curtiss Hall, a departmental teaching classroom that supports student collaboration and utilizes media technology. Additionally, the department has laptop carts with up-to-date Adobe Suite Software for media design and production use, video and digital cameras, wireless Lavalier microphone kits, and LED lighting kits; these resources support many learning objectives within agricultural communication. The agricultural communication faculty also work in an intentionally designed suite arrangement where they are able to facilitate student support easily and store and lend media equipment for student use. Additionally, the major program will access the spaces and resources in the new Student Innovation Center. Faculty will embrace innovative thinking around agricultural communication using the SIC’s offerings.

Student demand. The Agricultural and Life Sciences Education–Communication Option program at Iowa State has proven to be high-performing. In fact, the current option’s enrollment matches or exceeds program enrollments nationally. Student enrollment has grown from 63 in 2014 to 98 in 2019. The Covid pandemic slightly impacted the enrollment, but the agricultural communication program has endured with 89 students in 2020, and 82 in 2021. At present, the program as an option sees interest by students in a number of ways. Although high school students enroll at Iowa State with intentions of pursuing the option program, a significant cohort of students leaves other CALS major programs, such as animal science, to pursue agricultural communication. The agricultural communication faculty routinely meet with these students to inform them of the program and advise them of the transition, should they wish to pursue it.

Students expressed a strong demand for a major in agricultural communication in advising meetings, senior internship reflections and exit interviews. Additionally, the existing courses attract students outside of the option and typically fill to capacity. Some of the demand emanates from secondary education. Since it was first established, the Iowa FFA program has continuously provided high school and college-aged students with opportunities in a particular agricultural area of interest. The Agricultural Communications Career Development Event asks FFA participants to work as a team to create and submit a multifaceted written media plan for judging at the state and national levels. Agricultural communication faculty now serve as judges for these projects, which affords an opportunity to share information about the program.

Iowa FFA Executive Director Scott Johnson reported that “ultimately, communication is critical for all our career development events as it’s embedded in everything we do with the events.” The collaboration between the Iowa FFA program and Iowa State University’s agricultural
communication program has provided an array of success on both ends. Prospective college
students who participate in FFA learn that Iowa State provides the only agricultural
communication program in the state.

To build on a recent departmental rebranding campaign, the agricultural communication program
will engage in a multifaceted recruiting approach that engages prospective students and
showcases communication skills and use of emerging platforms. This approach will include
presentations at high schools and community colleges, strategic social media and updated
promotional materials in both print and digital form. To showcase a commitment to communication
innovation, marketing of the major will reflect the high standards of the program itself.

The target audience for the proposed major is students who interested in making a commitment
to learning and refining communication skills as well as furthering their study of agricultural
science. They are equally interested in communication and agriculture and wish to pursue training
to improve relationships and strategically exchange information.

Agricultural communication may be an attractive major for students who have a more general
interest in agriculture but not particularly in any of the specific agricultural science areas, for those
who seek to pair the proposed major with their other CALS major, or for students who have
determined their career goal is certainly to work in communication and most likely related to food,
agriculture and life sciences. Coursework for the major could be augmented with minors in
agricultural science (animal science, agronomy) or communication-related study (public relations,
event management).

Workforce need/demand. Communicating agriculture to diverse audiences through strategic
platforms is critical to improving the world’s food system and protecting resources. Agricultural
communication students have a skill set that enables them to be versatile in their career choices,
pursuing work in public policy, agricultural extension, agri-business, non-profit sectors, commodity
groups, agricultural cooperatives, education, research, publishing, sales, media and agency work.
Since the 2016-2017 academic year, 100% of students graduating with Agricultural and Life
Sciences Education–Communication Option degrees were placed in employment or graduate
education programs within six months after graduation.

The CALS Career Services program conducts several formal data collection projects regarding
industry demand and job placement of CALS graduates. Additionally, the student club Agricultural
Communicators of Tomorrow (ACT) is directly connected to this program. The ACT club at ISU is
a chapter of the National Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow (NACT), a nationwide
organization that offers pre-professional opportunities and events for university students
interested in careers communicating agricultural issues. Members of the local chapter are actively
involved in the organization’s events and activities and some have won awards and scholarships
from the national organization.

Funding and Cost. There will be no additional new costs associated with this program. Because
the program is currently an option within the department, faculty and staff have already been
installed. Student services and academic advising are integrated into our current programming.
That said, there is a need to maintain a minimum of the three faculty members. If enrollment were
to increase significantly over the initial seven years of the major program, there would be a need
to add more teaching faculty. This could happen through additional college support resulting from
increased student credit hours.
Projected student enrollment.

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Accreditation. There is no programmatic accreditation associated with this program. The Higher Learning Commission has approved the addition of this program at ISU.

Date of implementation. Fall 2023.
March 23, 2023

To the Board of Regents:

The Council of Provosts discussed the Iowa State University proposal for a Bachelor of Agricultural Communication and reviewed associated documentation. There is sufficient evidence for the benefits of this program to Iowa State University and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, as well as workforce benefit in the state of Iowa and throughout the Midwest. The plan indicates due diligence, significant engagement with employers and stakeholders at the University of Iowa and University of Northern Iowa. Based on the evidence and documentation, this program is likely to benefit the state of Iowa.

The Council of Provosts is supportive of the program and wishes Iowa State University the best in its implementation.

Jonathan Wickert  
Sr. Vice President and Provost

Kevin Kregel  
Exec. Vice President and Provost

José Herrera  
Exec. Vice President and Provost
March 7, 2022

Dear CALS Curriculum Committee,

Thank you for considering renaming CAL’s Communication option to a standalone major named "Agricultural Communications.” I am writing you in hearty support of that change.

I graduated from a similar program at Iowa State—then it was called Ag Journalism & Mass Communications (AJMC)—and have been in the profession my entire career, starting in 1974. I now own and publish Agri Marketing magazine and its related digital media whose audience are the managers of corporate agribusinesses (John Deere, Corteva, Zoetis, Sukup, etc.) their ad/PR agencies, agricultural trade associations/checkoffs, the farm media and others.

Currently the top management of many of the farm media, ad/PR agencies, communications managers and other related firms are Iowa State alumni. Most have been providing financial support to the university with many of their legacies attending Iowa State. Attached, please find the types of firms employing Agricultural Communicators.

A few years ago, a group of us Iowa State AJMC alumni met with (then) Dean Wintersteen and made her aware of the opportunities Ag Communications offers its graduates and encouraged her to make it a CALS major once again. We provide financial support, guidance on the skills wanted by employers, introductions of students and faculty at ag communication-oriented conferences and other support activities.

An Ag Communications major at Iowa State is especially needed now as whole new career opportunities are developing— principally in making the general public aware of a strong and modern agricultural industry and its value it brings to the nation (and world’s) health and security.

It is very encouraging to see development of the program, the quality of faculty and the number of students enrolled in it. We take special pride in seeing CALS students earning prestigious nation scholarships. And the program is only beginning!

Again, thank you for your consideration in re-launching the Ag Communications major. Many people will benefit from it including graduates, faculty, employers and parents.

Best wishes,

Lynn Henderson
President Henderson Communications, Publisher Agri Marketing magazine.
Dear CALS Curriculum Committee,

I am writing this letter to express my support for your consideration of renaming CAL's Communication option to a standalone major named "Agricultural Communications."

I am a 1995 graduate of the Iowa State College of Agriculture with a BS degree in Agriculture Education. I have spent my entire career working in the agriculture industry in various sales, marketing and communication roles. The past 14 years I have spent at Pioneer/Corteva Agriscience and am currently the US Leader for Marketing & Digital Communications. I could not be more thankful and appreciative for the career preparation and opportunities that my education and degree from Iowa State has provided me throughout my career in agriculture.

While my current role includes many day-to-day responsibilities, one of my most important tasks is hiring new talent for the various roles across my team. While there are various experiences and leadership skills we look for in our talent pool – I can assure you that a degree in agriculture communications is greatly appealing in our talent evaluation.

I'm encouraged to hear about the development of the program, the quality of faculty and the number of students enrolled in it. As a major US ag company, with a business center located in Johnston, IA – I am excited about the future opportunities that students with a degree from Iowa State in Agricultural Communications would have awaiting them now and in the future for our industry.

And for me, things are about to come full circle as my high school senior daughter, Macy, is enrolled to begin classes in the fall of 2022 at Iowa State. As a parent, I’m excited for the wonderful education, experiences and opportunities that await her when she arrives on campus in Ames.

Thank you for your time.

Douglas Reynolds
Marketing & Digital Communications Leader, US Region
Corteva Agriscience
March 4, 2022

Iowa State University
College of Agriculture & Life Science
Curriculum Committee

c/o: Professor Virginia Hanson

RE: CALS Agriculture Communication Major Degree Consideration

As a founding partner of a Midwest advertising and marketing communications agency working with many national and regional agribusiness companies, I see firsthand the value a science-based, well-rounded ag communications education brings to our agency and to our clients. This is why nearly nine years ago, a core group of ISU ag journalism alumni and I started down this road to re-establishing an ag journalism or communications major at our university.

I want to impress upon you that, after numerous meetings with then-CALS Dean Wintersteen, CALS administrators and professors, and a multitude of other ISU alumni, there is a ground-swell of support for re-establishing the once popular and prestigious ag communications major at this highly respected agricultural land-grant institution. I find it hard to believe that the nation's top ag college doesn't offer a major in ag communications!

As a 1982 ISU ag JIMC graduate, my education in this program was exceptionally thorough and graduates then were highly sought after in the ag publishing, public relations, and corporate communications disciplines. Numerous ag journalism grads in the 1970s, '80s and early '90s - before the major was eliminated - achieved the highest levels of distinction in their respective fields. Many are now presidents/CEOs of major advertising agencies, ag associations, and ag media companies, as well as highly respected journalists and professionals.

As many of us in this profession begin to retire, there will be even greater demand for well-educated, trained and dedicated ag communications graduates to fill our shoes. You are seeing that currently in the high interest and enrollment in ag communications at ISU, as well as their active participation in Ag Communicators of Tomorrow and similar student organizations.

Let me assure you that the need is great. The opportunity is great. And there is no institution in the country better suited and equipped to provide the next generation of agriculture communications graduates and career professionals than Iowa State University. Re-establishing agriculture communications as a major degree program in the College of Agriculture and Life Science, with collaborating resources from the Greenlee School of Journalism and other departments, provides even more students with the deep, well-rounded educational background and career opportunities that so many of us had years ago.

On behalf of hundreds of ISU ag journalism graduates and thousands of CALS alumni over the past five decades, thank you for moving this proposal forward and re-establishing an ag communications major at our beloved alma mater.

Sincerely,

R. Kelly Schwalbe
Founding Partner (semi-retired)