Steve L. Brown, Ph.D
Assistant Dean for Extension
111 Conner Hall
Athens, GA 30602

August 20, 2010

Dear Dr. Brown:

On behalf of the Georgia Urban Agriculture Council (UAC) I appreciate the opportunity to offer input from Georgia’s urban agriculture industry professionals regarding the UGA Cooperative Extension Service, the Center for Urban Ag, and the relationship between our industry and these entities.

The Urban Agriculture Council is a nonprofit association created to build a stronger public awareness and understanding of urban agriculture issues and to promote the benefits of urban agriculture in enhancing the environment and our quality of life.

UAC represents one of the largest and most successful industries in Georgia, and at its peak in 2005, realized more than $8 billion in annual sales, 7,000 companies and more than 80,000 employees throughout the state. The industry includes both service and commodity sectors - landscape installation and maintenance businesses, turf grass and sod growers, the nursery and horticulture industry, landscape architects, retail garden centers, floriculturists, irrigation contractors, green wholesalers, florists, arborists, golf courses and their related businesses.

The combination of the recent drought, decline of the construction industry and the national economy has temporarily reduced the output of the industry, but despite the downturn, the industry is strong and thriving. Economic studies published by UGA contain data from 2005-2007, and highlight the detrimental economic results of that period.

However, all demographic forecasts indicate that as the economy improves, the southeast and particularly Georgia will be strongly positioned for an influx of sustained growth and development. The outlook is extremely promising for all sectors of Georgia’s urban agriculture industry – service and commodity - and we are very optimistic that the increase in development and population will create demand for a new level of professionalism within the industry.

Dr. Buchanan’s original vision of the Center was “an efficient and effective integration of extension, research and instruction to address the needs of the growing environmental horticulture, turfgrass and associated industries in Georgia and the Southeast.” This vision
became a reality, and the industry today is very fortunate to have UGA, CES and the Center as a partner providing university based scientific research and education, certification programs and industry/professional support and leadership. As our state and industry recover economically, it is critical that these resources continue and are enhanced to provide additional support to our industry professionals. We have recently discussed commissioning a new economic study for benchmarking as the economy improves, and look forward to using that data to plan the programs/technology needed as we partner with UGA/CES/Center for Urban Ag.

A recent meeting with an industry advisory group and the results of our recent survey reinforce that this partnership is imperative to the industry – UGA/CES/Center for Urban Ag are an invaluable resource, and despite required budget cuts and consolidation, we feel strongly that additional resources should be allocated directly for the urban ag industry’s support, research and education through the Center and Agents. As the economy improves, all sectors of the industry will explode – and the Urban Ag Council is firmly committed to continuing and enhancing this partnership for the mutual benefit of the industry and the University so that we are ready for the growth years ahead.

I have included the advisory group comments and the results of our survey (80 respondents) for your review. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions, or would like additional information.

Sincerely,

Mary Kay Woodworth
President, Georgia Urban Agriculture Council
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June 2010 Summary of Advisory Council Comments:

- Encouraged Cooperative Extension and Center to use technology more efficiently to deliver service to industry.
- New business owners prefer programs delivered via technology. This is more cost effective, convenient and increases impact.
- Requested better coordination of Extension Programming in the metro area and more communication with the industry about program opportunities.
- Strongly supported applied research efforts on urban ag issues.
- Strongly supported a realignment of Extension resources to better serve urban ag industry.
- All present expressed support for Center activities, including the leadership program, certification, position papers and communication efforts.

Technology use:
- More resources (time/money) allocated to technology; support for Willie Chance’s position continuing since he does such an effective job for the industry (example: the Landscape Alert)
- Additional applications such as Turfgrass iPhone app/potential revenue stream.
- New/younger professional business owners prefer technology; do not have time for office visits and night meetings.
- Business is at a new crossroad; consideration should be given to the changing dynamics and getting ahead of the technology curve.

Research information delivery:
- Extension is not delivering research results on key urban issues; (example urban vegetable production) is coming and Extension should be positioned for this.
- All voiced concern for the lack of UGA research results on urban water issues such as how much water is being used on the landscape or where is water used in the industry.
- Research re: employment numbers are needed to be updated annually

Education comments:
- There should be a centralized repository of Extension training information and it has to be distributed in a timely fashion.
- The current county-by-county source of training information is not effective.
- A speakers’ bureau be developed around faculty expertise
- Extension needs an information clearing house
- The Center seems positioned to assist with or manage these efforts.

Legislative issues:
- The entire Council did not feel that either the service or commodity sectors of urban agriculture were receiving attention commensurate with its economic and political significance.
- Most political ag leadership is from rural areas and they are supportive urban ag – industry has worked diligently to raise the profile and we need university support with this.
Certification:
• The group discussed licensing, certification and BMPs as a means to demonstrate professionalism within the industry.
• Industry is very supportive of Center certification programs; public sector work often requires certification and this will increase the demand for certification.

Other comments:
• Extension needs to improve marketing their services; should be more coordination between county agents, Center possibly the catalyst for this action.

“UGA/CES Needs” Survey - August 2010

The Urban Ag Council recently completed a survey of UAC Members (The Metro Atlanta Landscape and Turf Association, The Georgia Turfgrass Association and the Georgia Sod Producers Association).

Please find attached the results and comments of that survey.

“The Cooperative Extension Service provides many benefits to our industry, and your input will help them realign their services and resources to better serve the citizens of Georgia and our industry. Thank you for your taking the time to provide this valuable information.”

Questions (all responses/comments follow):

1. What is your primary business focus?
   Note: other included landscape specialists in seasonal color design, installation, and maintenance, lawn/tree/shrub care, students, supplier to industry, gardening services, outdoor lighting specialist and drainage specialists.

2. What services offered by the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) do you find most beneficial? Note: other included mentoring, contacts, accolades re: CES

3. How often do you contact CES in your county?

4. Do you currently have an Ag Agent in your county?

5. Are you familiar with the UGA Center for Urban Agriculture, located on the Griffin UGA campus?

6. How could CES be more relevant to your business?

7. Please include any additional comments regarding CES or the UGA Center for Urban Ag.