

March 1, 2012

Timothy Eatman
Imagining America
203 Tolley Building
Syracuse, NY 13244

Dear Mr. Eatman:

We are writing to formally invite you to participate in the development of a large-scale, signature initiative at the University of Nebraska by joining us for the ***Rural Futures Conference*** which will be held in Lincoln, Nebraska on May 8-10, 2012.

By way of background, Nebraska and the larger Great Plains Region encompass a large geography dotted with hundreds of small towns and communities. Too often, this region is seen as unimportant and irrelevant in the larger mix of the global economy. We disagree; and we believe higher education has an important role and responsibility in helping the rural communities of the region achieve a positive future.

During the past year, we have been laying the initial groundwork for the creation of a new institute at the University of Nebraska, guided by the following vision:

The Rural Futures Institute (RFI) will provide internationally recognized intellectual leadership through assisting rural Nebraska and the Great Plains in creating a resilient and sustainable future building upon a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. Drawing largely upon private funds and the resources of the University of Nebraska and those of its partners, the RFI will help enable rural people and places around the world find unique paths to their desired futures.

Beyond the vision, considerable thought and discussion have occurred across the four campuses of the University of Nebraska on a range of possibilities related to priority areas, institute structure and other related issues. However, no final decisions have been made, and this conference will help guide how this new Institute should be structured. Visit the website at ruralfutures.nebraska.edu for full conference information.

As mentioned above, we are hosting a working conference in Lincoln on May 8-10, 2012 that is designed to:

- Engage faculty and partners in a way that informs the development of the RFI, including initial focal areas
- Implant the seeds for a new culture of innovation around the role of higher education in supporting positive rural futures
- Excite faculty, staff, students, partners and stakeholders to become involved in the creation and future of the RFI
- Provide a setting for attendees to build robust partnerships across disciplines and institutions to address potential RFI objectives, such as:
 - Increasing population of nonmetropolitan areas
 - Increasing access to technology and resources
 - Increasing quality of life for rural residents
 - Enhancing economic opportunities

Although we anticipate conference participation from a broad range of stakeholders and partners, we have also carefully identified a relatively small group of internationally recognized “thought leaders” in many relevant subject areas whose attendance and participation will be particularly important to the success of the conference, and ultimately to the RFI. This small group includes individuals who are knowledgeable and passionate about creating positive rural futures as well as those who have experience and insights on institutional and organizational change and transformation.


You have been identified as one of these “thought leaders” and we believe you have a special contribution to make as a panelist during one of the plenary sessions the afternoon of May 9. This panel discussion is tentatively titled *Moving from Silos to Synergies within the Academic Culture*. This panel will focus on institutional and cultural changes that are needed in order to break down various “silos” and to create more robust partnerships and collaborations both within institutions of higher education and between the academic community and external stakeholders (e.g., community organizations, units of government, philanthropists, and the private sector). We also want the panel to address the strategies, tactics and action steps that will achieve the institutional and cultural changes needed. More details about the panel format and collateral information will be forwarded later.

We are prepared to cover your expenses associated with attending the conference including travel. We wish our budget were sufficient to fully compensate you for your time and wealth of knowledge and experience. However, your participation will be greatly appreciated and this invitation represents how serious we are about developing the RFI in a way that lives up to its vision of “...*providing internationally recognized intellectual leadership to assist rural Nebraska and the Great Plains.....*”

May we count on your participation? If so, please RSVP to ruralfutures@nebraska.edu before March 10. Your positive response will then lead to additional communications and dialogue with the conference planning team being led by Drs. Sam Cordes and Mark Gustafson.

We sincerely hope you will accept this invitation to be part of this very high priority initiative of the University of Nebraska and look forward to you joining us in Lincoln beginning on May 8th.

Sincerely,



James B. Milliken
President, University of Nebraska



Ronnie D. Green, Ph.D.
Vice President, Agriculture and Natural Resources
University of Nebraska and
Harlan Vice Chancellor, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources
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