



## Don't Throw The Baby Out With The Bath Water

In 1605, Guy Fawkes is reputed to have said, "The desperate disease requires a dangerous remedy." As we all face the current challenges with the economy, many of us are somewhat like Mr. Fawkes and have modernized his quote by using the updated version and saying, "Desperate times call for drastic measures." Whichever you use, neither are very comforting if it looks like your "goose is cooked."

All across the state, many higher education administrators are becoming dangerously desperate trying to find ways to trim their bud-

gets. When you are asked by the governor to cut off 9 or 10 million dollars from an already tight financial statement, it is difficult to determine just what must go and what you really can do without when you are trying to educate the state's future taxpayers.

Everyone sees their program as the most important and we all hope that what is cut is someone else's line item and not those we are involved in. However, there is one saying that I would like to interject into this mayhem along with the others I have mentioned, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water." During the late seventies and early eighties during a similar recession to the one we have today, I saw farmers

around this state sell off prime agricultural land just to make it to the next planting and before you knew it they had sold off their assets causing the total demise of their farms.

For some reason, university committees given the task of cutting their school's budgets today, are also looking at getting rid of some important "assets" that could cause the demise of university programs.

In a recent report issued by Middle Tennessee State University's Oversight Steering Committee, which was given the task of reducing the university's budget, they recommended the elimination of farm labs for the school's Agribusiness and Agriscience department.

That may look good on paper to a committee trying to find large amounts of dollars, but to a student who needs to have hands-on ex-

perience to learn his future life's work, it is more of a "death sentence" to a program that needs farm labs to teach.

MTSU is the last university in the state to have an on-campus milk processing facility to teach students in animal science the process of bottling milk. The students have the hands-on experiences from the milking of the cows to the final shipping of the milk to the university's cafeterias. Major dairy processors from around the country seek out graduates from the university to fill positions requiring the training the dairy farm lab gives. Even processors in other industries request students from the school due to the same principals taught in the dairy labs also applying to processing in general of all products.

The success of students finding employment after

graduating from the agricultural studies is second to none. But cutting out farm labs and suggesting to the faculty, as the Oversight Committee suggested in their many reports, to find "more creative" ways of teaching their courses without labs is like telling a swimming team to find creative ways to practice their backstroke without a pool. It can't be done. Removing labs will totally gut a program and place the ag school in a direction of student number loss that it cannot recover from.

Farm labs are just as important as biology and chemistry labs, which I challenge any professor who teaches in those studies to attempt to teach successfully without lab instruction. Today's agriculture faces enough challenges from weather, markets, EPA, and other issues without our universities at-

tempting to remove career hopes and educational advantages from our agricultural students. These students and future students just like them will be the babies lost if we don't check out our higher education's bath water as it is thrown to the wind of today's recession fears.

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