As I reflect on the decades since the Morrill Land-Grant College Act was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862, I have a renewed respect for our nation’s land-grant university system.

When the land-grant colleges opened their doors, they revolutionized higher education in America, making it possible for average citizens to get a practical education that would improve lives and livelihoods — while creating a workforce to help build a great nation. What makes the land-grant system even greater is the collaboration with experiment station research (Hatch Act of 1887) and the connection to the people through cooperative extension (Smith-Lever Act of 1914), which brought education and research to local communities.

In Texas, we take the land-grant system one step further with the addition of our service missions: to protect our forests and animal and human health. When the Texas A&M Forest Service was created in 1915, the state’s vast forest resources came under the protection of the land-grant system. In 1969, with the opening of the Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory, The Texas A&M University System became a partner in the protection of animal health and the prevention and control of zoonotic diseases.

Texas A&M AgriLife has carried out the land-grant university mission of teaching, research, extension, and service for more than a century, moving seamlessly within the land-grant design as our nation’s history unfolded. We have grown with each decade, increasing our educational opportunities and student numbers, expanding our research to new horizons, broadening our outreach at home and around the world, and offering new levels of service to the many who depend on us.

Each day I am inspired to know that the revolutionary creation of the land-grant mission in 1862 is just as relevant now as it was 150 years ago. Today, all of us at Texas A&M AgriLife are protecting our environment, enriching our youth, feeding our world, growing our economy, and improving our health. The methods are more advanced, but the model is the same: education and enlightenment by and for the people.

In 2012, we joined other land-grant colleges and universities throughout the United States in celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Morrill Land-Grant College Act of 1862. The success, innovation, and prosperity chronicled in these pages are both a testament to the wisdom of the land-grant system and a challenge to continue our mission. This book is as much an acknowledgment of the Morrill Act sesquicentennial as it is a salute to the history of Texas A&M AgriLife — and a prelude to its future.

Mark A. Hussey
Vice Chancellor and Dean for Agriculture and Life Sciences
Texas A&M AgriLife
The Texas A&M University System
December 2012

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