

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Regional School Board Organizes to Direct First-of-its Kind Agriscience/Biotech High School

Edenton, N.C. – December 19, 2011 – A pioneering concept in public education took a significant step forward in recent days as a newly organized regional school board held its first set of meetings to begin launch of the Northeast Regional School of Biotechnology and Agriscience. The school, established pursuant to recent action by the North Carolina General Assembly and the state Board of Education, will operate out of space at the Vernon G. James Research and Extension Center in Plymouth, N.C., and intends to enroll its first class of students for the Fall 2012 semester.

“This school has been in the making for five or six years,” said David Peele, chairman of the new board, which is comprised of 12 representatives from education and business across five northeastern North Carolina counties. The governing panel includes school board officials from the participating counties of Beaufort, Martin, Pitt, Tyrrell and Washington; a representative from North Carolina State University, a key partner in the project; the superintendent of education in host Washington County; and three business community members appointed by North Carolina’s Northeast Commission, which has helped usher the high school from idea into reality. “There is collaboration between a lot of different parties,” said Peele, who is president of Avoca Farms near Windsor, N.C. His company, a global producer of botanical extracts from locally grown herbs, is the type of 21st century agribusiness of which regional leaders in the Northeast would like to recruit more. “For that, you’ve got to have a specially trained workforce,” Peele said.

Peele and his fellow directors have begun considering the myriad tasks associated with getting any new school up and running: facilities, staffing, logistics, outreach to potential students and their parents. Their school's regional scope and unique curriculum, however, mean the board must also take up a host of uncharted issues. Until earlier this year, for instance, there was no legislation in North Carolina that allowed for counties to unite in forming a joint school. "It's fairly groundbreaking territory," said Peele. The school will base its course offerings on STEM guidelines (science, technology, engineering and math) established by the North Carolina New Schools Project, an education reform effort introduced in 2003 with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. School leaders, though, are free to develop their own courses in biotech and agriculture, learning experiences that will be complemented by exposure to real-world operations such as those at Avoca and the various Extension stations in the region. The school will operate as an Early College High School, enabling students to graduate with up to two years of college credit. "That's where the association with N.C. State University is so important," explained Peele.

The Northeast Regional School of Biotechnology and Agriscience emerged from the work of the North Carolina JOBS Commission ("Joining Our Businesses and Schools"), a year-long engagement by top leaders from government and business. "We traveled around the state to find out what skills were needed and how we can align them with the surrounding economic development regions," explained Lieutenant Governor Walter Dalton, who chaired the JOBS Commission. "What we found in Northeastern North Carolina is that agriscience and biotechnology skills are the ones needed for 21st century jobs." The partnership among five counties, along with involvement by N.C. State, will yield exciting learning opportunities for students and "change the equation" for the region, he added. "We believe it could become a national model of educational innovation," Dalton said.

State education officials reacted encouragingly to the idea of regional collaboration in public schools. Rural school systems such as those in the Northeast, in particular, have much to gain by coming together. “I’ve always felt we needed to reach out across county lines,” said Jean Woolard, who represents North Carolina’s first district on the State Board of Education. Woolard, a former high school teacher in Plymouth who also holds an *ex officio* appointment to North Carolina’s Northeast Commission, was an early and visible advocate for the regional school. When the JOBS Commission traveled to the Northeast in 2010 to explore promising solutions for linking education reforms and job creation, Woolard saw a chance to push the idea forward. “This was an opportunity to make that happen,” she said. Legislators passed S. 125 earlier this year, a bill authorizing regional schools. Soon thereafter, the SBOE approved the Northeast Regional School’s request to become the state’s fourth STEM Anchor School. The designation opens up funding support pursuant to North Carolina’s \$400 million federal “Race to the Top” grant, sending curricular support, staff development and coaching, equipment funds and other benefits to anchor campuses. In exchange, each agrees to serve as a model for other North Carolina high schools. “The State Board was very supportive of our efforts to get this school up and going,” according to Woolard.

Northeast Commission President Vann Rogerson says the School of Biotechnology and Agriscience is a key component in developing a globally competitive niche in agriculture-based biotechnology, making the region a backdrop for laboratory research that validates newly patented bio-plant ideas and gauges whether yield levels are sufficient for profitability and commercialization. The effort fits neatly with a new certification program for farmers cultivating biotech-related crops in the region. “We see our certified farmers growing new high-value specialty crops,” Rogerson says. “Then, as more and more acres are grown, processing and packaging jobs will follow in what will be a natural fit for our rural region.” The biotechnology and agriscience school also serves as a showcase for how leaders from K-12 school systems, higher education, business, agriculture and

government are working effectively and in sync to build creative responses to regional opportunities, Rogerson adds. “It demonstrates to the rest of the world that in North Carolina’s Northeast Region, innovation and collaboration will result in new wealth and new jobs for future generations.”

**Board of Directors
Northeast Regional School of Biotechnology and Agriscience**

County Board of Education Appointees:

Mac Hodges
Beaufort County

Kenneth Harrell
Martin County

Worth Forbes
Pitt County

Jamie Spencer
Tyrrell County

Lynn West
Washington County

N.C. State University Appointee:

Benjie Forrest
Plymouth, NC

N.C. Northeast Commission Appointees:

Joe Landino
Columbia, NC

David Peele, PhD
Merry Hill, NC

David L. Peoples
Plymouth, NC

Appointed by County School Superintendents:

Michael Dunsmore
Tyrrell County Superintendent

Host County Superintendent:

John Farrelly
Washington County Schools

Parent Representative:
(To Be Determined)

About North Carolina's Northeast Commission

North Carolina's Northeast Commission, established in 1994 by the North Carolina General Assembly, is dedicated to improving the standard of living for residents across its sixteen-county region through tourism promotion, industrial marketing and business development. The 16 counties that comprise the regional Commission are: Beaufort, Bertie, Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Halifax, Hertford, Hyde, Martin, Northampton, Pasquotank, Perquimans, Tyrrell, and Washington. The Commission is governed by an 18-member board of directors appointed by the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Speaker of the N.C. House and President *Pro Tem* of the N.C. Senate. For additional information, visit www.ncnortheast.com.

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