

Email from Dean Brian Horgan to CAFES students, faculty and staff - Sept 22, 2026.

CAFES Faculty, Staff and Students,

I want to share an update on the university's ongoing evaluation of the use of all campus land and facilities, including the potential future development of portions of the West Campus and, more specifically, the work we are doing within CAFES as those conversations continue.

I know discussion about the West Campus has increased in recent weeks, and with it, questions and concerns about what potential development in the area south of Highland Drive could mean for agricultural lands and the Learn by Doing programs they support. I also recognize how deeply many within our college community value these lands and the teaching, research and agricultural operations they make possible.

Although the university has not yet made a decision about whether to move forward, I want you to hear directly from me about where my focus has been since stepping into my role last year and what I am working to accomplish on behalf of the college.

My responsibility is to ensure CAFES' academic needs are fully represented in university decision-making and that the teaching, research and Learn by Doing experiences that define our college are protected for the long term. As part of that work, I am actively engaged with university leadership in establishing several important commitments that would need to accompany future development, should the university decide to proceed. These include:

- Ensuring the agricultural land, infrastructure and operational capacity necessary for student learning and faculty research are maintained, with appropriate replacement resources ready for use in the event existing instructional and research uses are displaced.
- Advocating for significant university investment in agricultural infrastructure and learning facilities, including opportunities to strengthen facilities north of Highland Drive that support our interconnected agricultural programs.

- Finalizing an agreement that would address the one-time investments required to protect and relocate agricultural teaching and research capacity and establish an ongoing financial benefit to CAFES from future West Campus development, should it occur, as well as ensure long-term reliability for resources such as water.
- Establishing replacement orchards and transitioning Class I acreage currently used as irrigation/spray fields for our Dairy back to productive agricultural and instructional use through a deliberate, multi-year process. Specifically:
 - Replacement orchards would be established, including citrus, stone fruit, nut and olive trees. This replacement process could be completed in phases, with the process itself providing Learn by Doing opportunities for students.
 - Class I acreage currently used as irrigation fields would be reclaimed following the identification of replacement irrigation acreage on campus. The Class I soil would be rehabilitated, tested and determined to be ready to support student instruction — with that process also creating Learn by Doing opportunities for students. For reference, this land sits across Mt. Bishop from the Center for Wine and Viticulture.
 - Once reclaimed, this Class I soil would be used for teaching and research in commercial agriculture.
- Moving forward with the CAFES Farm Store as an agricultural learning facility within the West Campus area, creating a permanent and visible agricultural presence at this important campus gateway and helping ensure Cal Poly's agricultural heritage remains integral to its future.

There is still significant work to do, and many details remain under discussion, before the university reaches a decision later this fall. My role is to ensure CAFES is well represented in those discussions and that, should development move forward, the college has the land, facilities, infrastructure and resources necessary for agricultural learning to thrive — not just for today's students, but for generations to come.

At the same time, our planning for CAFES' future extends well beyond the West Campus conversation. As I've shared, we are undertaking a broader strategic visioning process for the college, including development of a comprehensive long-term land, facilities and infrastructure plan. This work is about looking ahead: assessing what our programs will need in the coming decades, how our physical resources can best support evolving teaching and research, and where strategic investment can make CAFES even stronger.

I am optimistic about the future of our college. For 125 years, CAFES has evolved to meet the changing needs of agriculture, food and environmental sciences while remaining grounded in Learn by Doing. The work we are doing now — both in the West Campus discussions and through our broader strategic planning — is focused on ensuring we have the resources and opportunities necessary to continue that legacy for the next generation.

I know there are questions, concerns and strong feelings about the potential changes being discussed. I welcome those perspectives, and I am committed to keeping our college community informed as this work progresses. It is important to me that you hear directly from college leadership about what we know, what remains under discussion and what we are doing to represent CAFES' academic needs.

As a reminder, President Armstrong has committed to continuing this conversation with all of you. These meetings are scheduled as follows:

- Faculty and staff: October 9, 10 – 11 a.m. via Zoom
- Students: October 16, 10 – 11 a.m. in Bldg. 08, Rm. 123

Brian

Brian Horgan, Ph.D.

Dean

College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences

Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, CA