

# Helms' name graces agricultural grants

## Money to go to internship, leadership

BY ERIN FRANCE  
STAFF WRITER

Former U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms was honored Saturday with the establishment of an endowment catering to agricultural students in North Carolina high schools and colleges.

Funds for the Senator Jesse Helms Agricultural Legislative Internship Endowment will be split among a summer leadership program for high school students hosted at Wingate and Campbell universities and a Washington, D.C., internship for students studying agriculture at N.C. State and N.C. Agriculture & Technical universities.

Justin Lowe, a junior double major in horticultural science and agricultural education at N.C. State, is the first recipient of the Washington internship, where he will serve as an aide to Sen. Elizabeth Dole, R-N.C.

"I am elated," Lowe said. "I'm still in that awe moment."

The endowment will provide enough money to send three college students each year, one per semester, to Washington.

A smaller portion of the endowment will be used to send a group

N.C. high school students participating in the 4-H Club or the Future Farmers of America to the Free Enterprise Leadership Conference at Wingate and Campbell, both private colleges in North Carolina.

Courtney Hughes, a 4-H member at Crossnore Academy in Avery County, is the first recipient of the endowment and will attend the conference at Wingate this summer.

John Dodd, president of The Jesse Helms Center, said he hopes more agricultural students will be chosen to attend the summer programs, which usually draw hundreds of high school students.

"We're hoping for 10 to 15 students to attend," Dodd said.

The students are chosen through nominations by 4-H and FFA and will spend their time during the program managing a virtual agricultural business, Dodd said. Other students will manage different sectors of the virtual economy.

Many donors said they hope students will gain experience during the program and become more competitive in the job market.

"Because of the internship experience, they could land jobs very quickly," said Peter Daniel, assis-

tant to the president of the N.C. Farm Bureau.

Other donors said students could inform legislators on agricultural issues.

"One of the best ways to establish a rapport with legislative members is through staff members," said Jim Wilder, executive vice president of the N.C. Soybean Producers Association.

Although agricultural workers only account for 2 percent of the workforce in North Carolina, Wilder said Helms always appreciated the farming community.

"Senator Helms has been a strong advocate for farmers," Wilder said.

Keith Oakley, president of the agricultural foundation at N.C. State, said Helms deserves to be the award's namesake because of his influence on the recent federal tobacco buyout.

"It allowed many farmers in America to stay in agriculture," Oakley said.

No specific events are planned to raise more funding, though Oakley said talks are continuing with the three largest donors, who might share Helms' name on one of the internships.

Contact the State & National Editor at [stntdesk@unc.edu](mailto:stntdesk@unc.edu).

# N.C. emergency response effective, report affirms

## Communication needs some work

BY ASHLEY SIMMONS  
STAFF WRITER

The explosion at Kinston's West Pharmaceutical chemical plant in 2003 that killed six and injured 37 people prompted UNC Hospitals to explore the state's ability to respond to emergencies.

UNC Hospitals admitted 10 patients to its Jaycee Burn Center after the blast, and seven survived their injuries.

The evaluation, which was released Friday, was meant to critique past responses and look for improvements to be made in the future, said Bruce Cairns, associate director of the Jaycee Burn Center.

"The biggest issue is effective communication both at the scene of the accident and among hospitals," he said.

"In these situations, communication lines frequently break down."

During the initial moments of the Kinston explosion — which occurred Jan. 29, 2003, when a combustible dust used by the plant accumulated above a suspended ceiling and ignited — hospitals across the Triangle area, including UNC Hospitals, were mistakenly informed that the incident involved a plane crash, he said.

But even with the erroneous reports, hospitals were able to execute emergency plans effectively, successfully treating most patients.

"We were very pleased with our overall coordination and our decisions during the incident," Cairns said.

He said the conclusions of the report show that North Carolina is well-equipped for responding to catastrophes, but added that there always is room for improvement.

State officials say they have similar goals concerning North Carolina's ability to handle large-scale emergencies.

Kenneth Taylor, director of the N.C. Division of Emergency Management, reported in December that the state has a strong working relationship with hospitals, which should make the road to better communication less painstaking.

"We strive to be a knowledgeable, professional and prepared emergency management team who coordinate and implement preparedness," he stated in the report.

"We exercise programs that will respond and recover from terrorist incidents and other threats."

On the national front, there is a concern with communication during fire disaster situations, but officials hold that tremendous improvements have been made since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist

*"The biggest issue is effective communication ... at the scene and among hospitals."*

BRUCE CAIRNS, JAYCEE BURN CENTER

Courtney McCarron, communications affairs manager of the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials International Inc., said past mishaps — on both the national and state levels — help provide stability for the future.

"We need examples to help us first prevent these disasters when we can," she said.

"And if that's not possible, then they can help us develop better methods."

Cairns also said experience is a major part of North Carolina's ability to handle emergency situations.

"A lot of us at UNC saw the chicken-processing plant incident of '91, Pope Air Force Base plane crash in '94 and then Kinston in '03," he said.

"North Carolina is one of two states said to be the best in emergency management. We just have so many people with vast experience."

Contact the State & National Editor at [stntdesk@unc.edu](mailto:stntdesk@unc.edu).

# Tobacco buyout helps N.C. family

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW BERN — With each spring comes renewed hope for the Hill family.

They're a dwindling breed of family farmers, which means that John; his wife, Theresa; and the two children do the work.

With tobacco as his money crop and the weather always looming as the wild card, he knows each year of farming could be his last. This will be his 17th year.

He'll tend close to 30 acres of tobacco, along with 350 acres of soybeans this year on rented land in the Janeiro Road area southwest of Oriental.

He's had as much as 50 acres of tobacco, before government allotment cuts came along. With allotments now a thing of the past, he has contracted with Phillip Morris USA in recent years.

The workings of a small farm are filled with good and bad times. He was down to 19 acres of tobacco last year, which he says was the bare minimum he and his family could get by on. This year, he'll get about 10 more acres.

Even as he and the family were putting seeds into the greenhouse beds last month, he already knew his price per pound this year would be about 40 cents less. But, on the flip side, with allotments gone, he'll save about \$6,000 in payments to the allotment owner.

For him, the buyout, or Tobacco Transition Payment Program, has been a blessing.

"That is probably the only thing that saved us, because they were talking this year, if they hadn't passed it, they were going to cut tobacco 30 percent," he says. "In other words, we would have had 10 or 11 acres. In other words, we would have been gone."

His hope is that with the buyout and direct company contracts, tobacco will rebound.

"My best years were when I had right at 50 acres. At that time, that was sufficient money for a family," he recalls. "It was good for three or four years and then they started cutting the quotas and we started losing 10 and 15 percent a year. We lost half of our crop in four years. You might as well say you lost half of your income in four years."

John grew up on a tobacco farm, and except for a few years as a traveling musician, he's only known the labor of the land.

His father, Cecil, moved to Pamlico County 42 years ago, the year John was born. It was a different time in many ways: Tobacco was a crop that the state boasted about, a crop that was not under social and economic siege.

But the small family farm principle applied.

"We worked a lot. That was when tobacco wasn't so easy. It was getting up at three o'clock in the morning," he recalls of life for himself, three sisters and a brother.

Those were the days of the tobacco barns and tobacco sticks, mostly now crumbling ruins in local fields.

"With the stick barns, he had 12 to 14 head he hired, because it took a lot of people pulling it by hand, and then it took just as many looping it," he says. "They used to loop it on the sticks the old-fashioned way."

His father had extremely good luck with the weather, he remembers.

There were dry spells, but the needed rain always came. Like the other farmers, he had his strict allotment of how many acres to plant and how many pounds to sell.

"He sold his pounds all 28 years

and that's incredible," John says, adding that his own luck has not been so fortunate.

"I've sold my pounds — out of 16 years — not many years," he admits. "There's something constantly happening with the weather. I've had a bad string of luck with the weather."

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