

COLLEGE OF
AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCES
ACADEMICS ▲ RESEARCH ▲ EXTENSION

Media Contacts: Dr. Mary Ann Lila, director, ACES Global Connect, College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign, 217.333.5154 or imagemal@uiuc.edu; Dr. Steve Lommel, interim associate dean for research, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, North Carolina State University, 919.515.2717 or steve.lommel@ncsu.edu

Kannapolis Institute Director Named

An internationally known scientist from the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign will lead a North Carolina State University effort at the North Carolina Research Campus in Kannapolis to develop fruits and vegetables that protect and enhance human health.

Dr. Mary Ann Lila, a professor in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences at the University of Illinois, will direct the N.C. State Fruit and Vegetable Science Institute. Lila, who now directs the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences international program, will assume her new duties Aug. 1.



Dr. Mary Ann Lila

The Research Campus is the vision of David Murdock, a California billionaire who owns the Dole Food Co. Murdock is reshaping Kannapolis into a 21st century research center, where the focus will be vegetable and fruit improvement, food safety and nutrition. Murdock formed a partnership with the University of North Carolina system, and he sees system members such as N.C. State University playing major roles in developing the Research Campus.

N.C. State University is represented on the Research Campus by the Fruit and Vegetable Science Institute. Much of the work of faculty from other universities will focus on nutrition, determining the best nutritional characteristics for various fruits and vegetables. N.C. State faculty will use this nutritional information as a starting point to develop plants that contain bioactive compounds that prevent and treat disease. N.C. State faculty will also work to determine how best to produce these plants commercially.

continued

Kannapolis Institute Director Named – page 2

“We are excited that Mary Ann Lila has agreed to direct the Fruit and Vegetable Science Institute,” said Dr. Steve Lommel, interim associate dean for research in N.C. State’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Lommel is coordinating N.C. State efforts at Kannapolis.

Lommel added, “Dr. Lila's 24 years of research experience with plant chemistry and animal nutritional studies will help ensure that N.C. State and the North Carolina Research Campus succeed in improving the human condition through better nutrition.”

Lila, who has devoted nearly a quarter-century career at the University of Illinois to studying the biologically active properties of plants, said the mission of the FVSI and the Research Campus is “completely in line with my background and philosophy and research.”

Lila’s research focuses on the bioactive compounds found in some foods, particularly fruits, that confer human health benefits when the food is eaten. The benefits of eating foods and beverages rich in these compounds are well-established, according to Lila, but the identity and protective mechanisms of the compounds have not been defined.

Lila’s research is aimed at identifying bioactive compounds and understanding how they work. She is particularly interested in compounds that appear to help counteract chronic disease and promote endurance.

She predicted that the Institute will bring together “a unique blend of talents that will be able to do transdisciplinary research, come at problems from different angles” and “produce fruits and vegetables that have properties beyond what we have normally bred plants for. We’ll be looking at plants from a whole different perspective.”

Many of the plants with which Lila has worked are found in some of the most inhospitable parts of the world, and as a result of her efforts to locate and study these plants, her research has taken on an international flavor. She has large ongoing research projects in Egypt, Central Asia, Oceania, Mexico and subSaharan Africa, and is vice president of the Global Institute for BioExploration (GIBEX). In 1999, Lila won a Fulbright Senior Scholarship to conduct research and outreach in New Zealand. She returns to Australasia at least once a year.

In addition, Lila has served as the U.S. correspondent for the International Association of Plant Biotechnology and as president of the Society for In Vitro Biology. She is also a fellow of the society, and served for four years as associate director of the nationally acclaimed Functional Foods for Health Program.

continued

Kannapolis Institute Director Named – page 3

At the University of Illinois, Lila has been honored with the Paul A. Funk Scholarship Recognition Award (the premier research award in her college), the Spitze Professorial Career Excellence Award, the Faculty Award for Excellence in Research, the University Scholar Award, the Amoco Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Instruction and the Lilly Endowment Teaching Fellowship.

The Fruit and Vegetable Science Institute will share space with the research and development team of the Dole Nutrition Institute in a 100,000 square foot building that is under construction, scheduled for completion this fall. N.C. State envisions the creation of about 60 new jobs within the Institute, including 12 new faculty research positions and a number of North Carolina Cooperative Extension positions and support jobs. The university is in the process of hiring plant breeders, geneticists, phytochemists, a molecular biologist, a plant biochemist and experts in genomics and metabolomics.

Written by:

Dave Caldwell, 919.513.3127 or dave_caldwell@ncsu.edu