

August 19, 2024

Dear AgBioResearch Associate Director Search Committee,

It is with great enthusiasm that I submit this letter of application for the position of Associate Director of AgBioResearch. The leadership goals outlined by the position description are an exhilarating challenge that align well with my interests and passion to serve and have an impact.

Just a brief background about myself, prior to joining Texas A&M in 2021, I was Distinguished Professor and Tyson Endowed Chair in Food Policy Economics at the University of Arkansas and have been a faculty member at Massey University in New Zealand and Rutgers University. I have been an adjunct Professor at Korea University and Norwegian Institute for Bioeconomy Research, NBER research economist, Fulbright Senior Scholar at Wageningen University, Netherlands, research fellow of the Waseda Institute for Advanced Study in Tokyo and Invited Visiting Professor at University of Verona and University of Trento in Italy. I was also a member of the International Scientific Advisory Board of the Institute for Global Food Security at Queens University Belfast and external faculty member of the University of Trento's (Italy) graduate program in Sustainability.

I was President of the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association (AAEA) in 2023-2024, the flagship professional association of my discipline and currently an editor of the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, the top journal in our discipline. I was selected as AAEA Fellow a few years ago, the highest and most prestigious honor in our discipline. Based on a standardized citation metrics developed by Ioannides (2023, DOI:10.17632/btchxktzyw.6), I am in the top 1% of agricultural economists. According to Google Scholar, my work has been cited more than 20400 times, with an H-index of 79. I have received roughly \$35 million in research grants and contracts and have given more than 450 invited talks and lectures around the world. This year, I was honored with the 2024 Distinguished Achievement Award in Research, which is among the most prestigious awards presented to Texas A&M faculty. I've recently been nominated to become a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

In my current role, I lead one of the largest agricultural economics departments in the country, overseeing about 65 faculty members, 40 staff and research/extension personnel, and over 1500 students. The academic programs in my department have flourished, including the successful implementation of new strategic initiatives that significantly increased the number of faculty, enrollment, endowments, and research stature while fostering inclusivity, and significantly enhancing engagement with alumni and industry partners. Specifically, we hired close to 30 new faculty members, filled/filling five endowed professorships/chairs, and enhanced our research stature, leading to significant jumps in rankings since I became department head. Faculty and research staff in my department work on various topics related to the economics of agriculture, food, health, and environment. As a strong advocate and supporter of multi-disciplinary research, I

help my faculty develop networks and collaborate with scientists/researchers around the college and the university on broad and pathbreaking transdisciplinary research areas.

Since assuming the role of department head, our research and extension portfolio as well as grants saw a substantial increase and undergraduate program growth, retention, and graduation goals were exceeded, with a focus on diversity and new degree offerings. Our graduate programs achieved STEM designation and implemented innovative curriculum changes. We have one of the top Agricultural Economics graduate programs in the country with over 120 students. Our Master of Agribusiness program secured top global rankings, with increased alumni engagement and internships. Notable successes in engaging alumni, industry partners, and donors include celebrating the department's 100th anniversary, increased donations, and scholarship initiatives.

I have also made philanthropy and fundraising a central mission. During my tenure, our department has witnessed a surge in the value of endowments and gifts, with a growth rate of nearly 50%. Additionally, we have seen a substantial uptick in planned gifts from our donors.

I have prioritized nurturing relationships with stakeholders, alumni, and donors. Moreover, we are fostering robust collaborations with industry partners by actively involving them in our academic program activities. I have worked closely with the college marketing-communications team to ensure continuous engagement with former students and clientele. Notably, our department's social media presence has witnessed significant growth, with Instagram interactions soaring by 350% and Facebook engagement increasing by approximately 100% compared to the previous year. We also have diligently cultivated relationships with corporate partners and foundations. Just recently, we secured an endowment from the USAA Educational Foundation to establish an endowed professorship position.

I am proactive in identifying funding opportunities and cultivating collaborations for my faculty, while consistently anticipating future trends. This includes actively seeking out interdisciplinary initiatives to engage my department in and connecting my faculty with teams and working groups across the university landscape. For example, we have forged ties with Texas A&M's Energy Institute, Data Science Institute, Institute for Health through Agriculture, Center for GHG Management in Ag and Forestry, Water Resources Institute, Borlaug Institute, and Cross Border Threat Screening and Supply Chain Defense Center, and McFerrin Entrepreneurship Center, to name just a few. I actively engage in meetings university-wide to foster relationships across campus as well as the research/extension centers around the state and explore potential synergies for collaboration.

I also work closely with my faculty and external federal relations officers within the college to identify and cultivate new federal initiatives and appropriation requests. For instance, we recently submitted a federal appropriations request for the establishment of a stabilization lab aimed at fostering US engagement in agricultural economic development within conflict-affected regions, with support from the Department of Defense. Our

Agricultural and Food Policy Center now gets roughly \$3 million per year from the federal government.

To enhance inclusivity and improve climate within the department, we have actively engaged in initiatives and implemented changes to foster a more inclusive environment, including the formation of a Climate committee to promote a culture of inclusive excellence. I have emphasized the importance of recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty, staff, and students. We have also established an agricultural economics degree offering in McAllen, Texas – a strategic initiative given the growth and demographics (majority Hispanic population) of that region of the state. To help recruit students, we have articulation agreements with select community colleges. In McAllen, we have engaged and collaborated with South Texas College (STC) to launch an “transition” type program designed to enable STC students to integrate our agricultural economics degree requirements. The goal of the program is to identify potential transfer students early in their STC career and let them take courses from our faculty in McAllen. This would tie those students to our department earlier and increase the chance of successful transfers. We are particularly excited about our initiative and program in McAllen since we expect most of our students to be first generation college students.

Thank you for providing me with the chance to apply for this pivotal position, and I sincerely appreciate your thoughtful consideration. I am enthusiastic about embracing a fresh challenge and contributing to the success of AgBioResearch. I am committed to championing the land grant mission and will work closely with the ABR Director and faculty across colleges, Extension colleagues, external stakeholders including commodity groups, industry, government officials, donors and funding agencies to endeavor a shared vision that will make ABR a global leader in agrifood, health, and environmental research.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Rodolfo M. Nayga, Jr.

Email: [Rnayga@tamu.edu](mailto:Rnayga@tamu.edu)

Cell: 479-684-9439