February 13, 2014

Dear 4-H Volunteers, Parents & Youth:

I write to update you on our progress in moving the Escambia County 4-H youth development program forward, especially with regard to the building on Stefani Road and plans for future programs.

I am hopeful about our future and the potential to provide excellent programs for youth across all of Escambia County. We are fortunate to have exceptional volunteer leaders and wonderful young people who want to engage in a variety of programs from agricultural science to robotics, environmental education to public speaking. We are also excited about planning the facilities to compliment the above mentioned programs.

We are also fortunate that 4-H is part of a national network that is sanctioned by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and managed through the land-grant universities in each state through the Extension program. That is why the University of Florida – a land grant institution – is involved with Escambia County 4-H program. It also provides us access to national programming and guidance that helps each local program.

As you know, we have been studying the options put forth to address the needs of the 4-H program in Escambia County. We have had small group listening sessions in the various geographic areas of the county. We also asked youth to participate in a survey asking them about what they wanted their 4-H to look like.

During this process, we learned that in order to acquire the Cottage Hill Property we would need to enter into a use agreement, purchase at appraised value or seek a deed through legislative action. We have felt all along that this property was a great nature study and outdoor education opportunity, but livestock workshops and seminars would not work well on this property because of the topography. During the small group listening sessions, we heard requests for a 4-H dedicated piece of property that could be used to conduct animal science and hands-on learning dealing with agriculture projects as well as the outdoor education and natural resources 4-H project areas. Another piece of property dedicated to the 4-H mission and educational projects could provide one location to hold seminars and outdoor education programs.

It is our desire to purchase acreage where animal and environmental sciences, nature study, and outdoor education could work together in one location. For this reason, I have supported that another site be vetted to address all of these areas. This would be acreage that the Escambia County 4-H Foundation would purchase for 4-H youth to use.

We will work with the Board of County Commissioners over the next several weeks to work out a partnership agreement and hope to have a full report back soon. I would ask that you remain patient and allow UF/IFAS Extension, Escambia County 4-H Foundation and the Board of County
Commissioners to invest the time needed to evaluate the location in Barrineau Park that will result in advancing the local 4-H program.

We applaud Commissioner Steven Barry in his hard work and support as we move along in the process. By working together I am confident that 4-H in Escambia County will be a premier 4-H program. I plan on visiting with the County Commissioners during my visit to the county on February 27th. We appreciate your commitment and support toward advancing the overall 4-H program in Escambia County as we move forward.

Sincerely,

Nick T. Place
Dean for Extension and Director,
Florida Cooperative Extension Service