

**Welcome from UConn College of Agriculture, Health and
Natural Resources**

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Good Morning.

On behalf of the University of Connecticut, the College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources, and UConn Extension I'd like to welcome you to the 7th biennial conference on invasive plants.

I understand that the conference is completely sold out – And so at least until basketball season gets underway, this is the hardest ticket in town!

Why invasive species? Billion dollar impact every year – lost productivity, compromised ecosystems. Impacts to our natural ecosystems, agriculture, communities, and homes and landscapes.

The University of Connecticut is embarking on a bold, new academic vision. I believe that your work on invasive plants is an excellent example of putting that vision into action.

There is a need for very basic science such as understanding the genetics of what makes a plant “weedy”. But there’s also a very practical need to implement tools, technologies, and practices to control or eliminate invasive plants. And while the focus is on plants, there are clear linkages to economics and cultural considerations and impacts.

We also need to understand how our actions on the landscape are creating new opportunities for invasive plants to expand their locations.

Whether invasive plants arrive accidentally or intentionally, there’s no question that they are impacting our more natural forest, stream, lake, and river ecosystems. But it’s very clear that invasive plants are having a tremendous impact on our cultivated lands and many of our community green spaces.

So, the science you are undertaking has tremendous implications to our food systems, our economy, and our culture.

To make matters more complicated, we must now investigate invasive species through the lens of a highly variable and changing climate. Again, we must direct our science at understanding how variability in the climate is creating opportunities for invasive plants to expand their range and disrupt existing systems.

But your work goes beyond just understanding the science. This is a conference about solving a major societal problem. We can't simply learn about invasive species - it is equally important to carry forward the message about invasive species.

We have a responsibility to educate our citizens about this problem. But we have a great opportunity to engage them in helping us solve this problem. How can we work more effectively with citizens and producers to co-create the knowledge we need to stem the tide of expanding invasive species?

What can we do to help cities and towns address invasive species in their transportation planning, along waterways, and in the built environment?

I also encourage you to involve students and young people in seeking solutions for this problem. Whether it's our traditional 4-H youth groups, FFA, or service-oriented groups like Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts - Challenge their creativity, intellect, and enthusiasm to help identify solutions. We must fully engage students in the classroom and in the field so that they see - understand, and experience - the problem from multiple perspectives.

I'd like to leave you with three challenges:

First – Find a new collaboration. Stretch your boundaries to embrace a new perspective.

Second – integrate your work across disciplines. Find ways to connect the biology to culture and economics.

Finally – Engage. Bring citizens into your science. Give students the experience they desire (and expect) in their coursework.

And engage our youth in helping find solutions to this extremely challenging problem.

Thank you, and enjoy your conference.