August 28, 2015

To whom it may concern:

Dr. Phillip M. Brannen, an Extension Specialist in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences at the University of Georgia (UGA), has shown above and beyond service to his clients, the fruit growers of Georgia. With a farm gate value of $13.9 billion and a total economic impact of $76.9 billion, agriculture is the largest sector in Georgia’s economy. Fruit trees (such as peaches and apples) and small fruits (such as blueberries and strawberries) contribute significantly to this industry. For example, in 2014, Georgia produced 96 million pounds of blueberries, advancing to the largest blueberry state in the nation. Dr. Brannen, through his tireless efforts in identifying new and emerging plant diseases and advising fruit growers and county extension agents on the economically and environmentally most effective and efficient pest management tactics in these crops, has contributed significantly to the meteoric rise of the fruit industry in the state. His top-notch outreach efforts to put UGA-generated knowledge to work help keep Georgia’s economic engine running.

As Dr. Brannen’s research counterpart in the Department of Plant Pathology, I witness his service attitude and the impacts of his work every day. But rather than recounting his accomplishments from an academic’s perspective, I will rely on testimonials from his clients, the fruit growers of Georgia and their county extension agents, to illustrate how his work reflects the five attributes of service excellence considered in the Chancellor’s Annual Service Excellence Award: respectful, accessible, informed, supportive, and responsive.

From Mr. Michael D. Bruorton, Director of Agricultural Operations, Superior Berries Co., Fargo, GA:

“I would like to use a few words to describe him. The first is “caring.” If you look at Phil’s accomplishments the list is long and impressive. No matter the challenge in all the fruits on his resume, Phil genuinely cared for the growers he worked with. This trait comes natural for Phil and growers respond and can relate to him. Secondly is “professionalism.” In this fast paced world we live in, we want answers quickly and sometimes hate to wait to get these answers. Phil never wavered on his professionalism in the way he approached his job. It was almost contagious and always appreciated. He patiently approached the most ominous challenges in the small fruits industry and professionally found the answers through hours of tireless research efforts. In Phil’s case, his actions always spoke louder than his words and county agents and growers respected this. Thirdly is “diverse.” I don’t have to look at Phil’s accomplishments to remind me of what he has done for the blueberry industry. Whatever challenge we have faced Phil’s name seemed to be associated with finding the answer. Whether it is finding answers to challenges in grapes, peaches, apples or some other small fruit, the common thread always seems to be Phil Brannen. Finally the last word is “friend.” They say you always save the best for last. Isn’t that what the Extension Service is and should be? A wise County Extension Director told me when I started my career to never lose the ability to touch the flesh of your growers. Phil takes this advice at face value and continues to touch the flesh by impacting the lives of growers he works with through his God given talent of pathological research.”
From Mr. James L. Jacobs, Pierce County Extension Coordinator, Blackshear, GA:

“His role as an educator extends way beyond the classroom. He is well-respected by both agents and growers across the state for his willingness to go the extra mile to provide both current and relevant information. His small fruit web blogs are highly valued and are an integral part of our educational efforts to meet the needs of our fast-paced industries. What’s even more impressive and serves as an example for clients and colleagues, is his willingness to interact one-on-one and in the field, to find solutions to problems regardless of their size or scope. ...

In thinking specifically of the last 5-7 years in working with Dr. Brannen, one of the most important qualities that may sometimes be easily unnoticed given the breadth of his academic work is his leadership ability. The rapid expansion of Georgia’s blueberry industry occurred during the peak of the economic downturn of the state. Also during this time, interest in commercial olive and pomegranate production was being communicated on a daily basis. With a number of county offices having vacant positions and both county agent and specialist positions being supported by retire-rehire faculty, one could easily assume that the needs of a demanding clientele were unanswered. However, this was not the case. Dr. Brannen was instrumental in coordinating the outreach efforts of agents and specialists and ensuring that Extension had a presence during this critical time. His networking with colleagues in other states in regards to olive and pomegranate production became a great resource to me and others in our quest to provide information to clientele.

The upsurge of blueberry acreage across the state was a major educational endeavor requiring a concerted effort among agents and specialists. Dr. Brannen’s professionalism and competence in the field of plant pathology has always been highly valued and respected. In addition, I have learned to appreciate the depth of his knowledge and proficiency on the horticultural and cultural aspects of blueberry production. He is an exceptional specialist with a high-level of technical and interpersonal skills which have made him a role model for both agents and specialists across the state.”

When reviewing the above testimonials, it is important to keep in mind that most of Dr. Brannen’s crops are concentrated either in far south Georgia (e.g. blueberries and blackberries) or far north Georgia (e.g., grapes and apples). As such, considerable travel is associated with serving his clientele at this level of effort, making his service accomplishments even more noteworthy and deserving of the Chancellor’s Annual Service Excellence Award.

Sincerely,

Harald Scherm, PhD
Professor of Plant Pathology
August 28, 2015

The University System of Georgia
RE: Nomination of Dr. Phillip Brannen, Service Excellence Award - Individual

To whom it may concern:

It is my pleasure to support the nomination of Dr. Phillip Brannen for The University System of Georgia Service Excellence Award for an Individual. Dr. Brannen joined the Department of Plant Pathology at the University of Georgia in 2000 with an appointment in service (extension) and instruction. He readily rose to the rank of Professor due to the excellence of the programs he established in service to the many small fruit industries in Georgia.

The farmgate value of the major small fruits grown in Georgia in 2013 exceeded $390 million (in millions $: apple-$11.2; blueberries-$312.8; bunch grape-$4.2; peach-$55.4; strawberry-$9.1). The programs that Dr. Brannen has established address many maladies that impact the productivity and profitability of crops grown by the small fruit industries in Georgia. In blueberries these have included diseases caused by bacteria, viruses, nematodes and root rot fungi. In peaches he has lead programs that addressed development resistances of the brown rot fungus of peaches to fungicides that has saved producers millions of dollars each year by not using ineffectual spray programs. In the continually expanding wine grape industry he established programs that have facilitated management of the bacterial caused Pierce’s disease in grapes.

To make these programs effective, Dr. Brannen has conducted extensive county extension agents, producer, and professional trainings in Georgia and other southeastern states. In these meetings he covers disease management through transfer of information and technology for all major Georgia fruits. Dr. Brannen has served as the liaison to the Georgia Wine Growers Association (since 2001) and the Georgia Wine Council (since 2005). Dr. Brannen has also served as an advisor to the Georgia and South Carolina Peach Growers’ Associations concerning establishment and maintenance of a peach budwood virus testing program (2000-present), for which he developed the memorandum-of-agreement establishing the program, which has been instrumental in reducing viral transmission in peaches throughout the Southeast. In addition, Dr. Brannen has advised the Georgia Peach Council on pathology issues. To facilitate producers have the most current disease management tools available, Dr. Brannen worked with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on fruit diseases in Georgia and the Southeast at large. He has served as a key advisor to EPA and USDA relative the reregistration of several fungicides and bactericides which are critical to fruit production in the Southeast. He has also provided information for the southern region methyl bromide exemption requests for strawberry (instrumental in maintaining this material for use in Georgia
strawberries). He also worked with the Southern Appalachian Integrated Apple Orchard Management Research and Implementation Project as a participant and member of the advisory committee (2000-2002). Most recently, he served on a committee to establish an EPA symposium on resistance management issues (2007-2008) and developed information on the EPA Fumigant REDs for strawberry producers. In 2009, he collaborated with the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) to develop statistics on agricultural chemical usage statistics for management of blueberry and peach in Georgia.

Dr. Brannen coordinated with the Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA) as well as the Georgia blueberry industry to establish blueberry scorch virus regulations (2005) for import/shipment of blueberry plants to Georgia, making our industry less susceptible to this major virus of blueberry. Dr. Brannen has also coordinated with the GDA on exclusion of plum pox virus (PPV) of peach and PPV regulation development (2007).

Dr. Brannen averages more than 20 county visits per year as requested by county agents and fruit producers to facilitate their problem-solving experience and expertise which has great local benefit and financial impact. In addition to extensive communication by phone, email and social media, he gives disease control recommendations on >100 samples per year submitted through the disease clinic, on-farm visits or digital imaging systems.

To support these efforts, Dr. Brannen has generated $1,448,103 in grants and gifts that includes $387,272 in non-competitive federal grants, $686,031 in competitive grants, $374,800 in unrestricted industry or commodity gifts, and donations of chemical fungicides for testing and for branch station support.

Dr. Brannen has been committed to providing excellent service with significant impact to the producers of Georgia. Hence, I hope The University System of Georgia gives full consideration of the nomination of Dr. Phillip Brannen for the Service Excellence Award for an Individual.

Sincerely,

John L. Sherwood
Professor and Head