

## WELCOME: 16<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CONFERENCE

*Rex Perschbacher\**

Good morning and welcome to the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Environmental Law Conference. Welcome to our very distinguished panelists and guests.

I greet you on behalf of Chancellor Vanderhoef and the entire UC Davis campus, with a special welcome from the members of the Environmental Law Society at King Hall. Our law students, led by our environmental law faculty—its notable founding member Professor Harrison Dunning and joined in recent years by Professor Holly Doremus, named this year as one of only five Chancellor's Fellows—have been directly responsible for the success of this conference, and once again this year their work has made the conference possible.

The title of this year's conference—Agriculture and the Environment: Building a Sustainable and Healthy Future,” and its several panels: the battle for water between agriculture and the environment; agriculture and environmental justice; and water quality and agriculture—is exceptionally well suited to this campus. Agriculture and the environment cannot be separated; and, indeed, the UC Davis campus, long known for its preeminence in the study of agriculture and its related disciplines, has developed equally strong environmental studies as the very title of the College of Agricultural & Environmental Sciences advertises. The attention to environmental concerns should be strengthened with establishment of the new Graduate School of the Environment, which will bring together the 225+ campus faculty who identify the environment as at least part of their teaching and research programs.

But the current combination of agriculture and the environment may be more appropriate. Indeed, agriculture and the environment cannot be separated. The origins of agriculture are the origins of human civilization and culture. As Daniel Webster said, “When tillage begins, other arts follow. The farmers, therefore, are the founders of human civilization.”<sup>1</sup> But as we have learned repeatedly throughout the history of that human civilization, technological development (which for these purposes encompasses agriculture) brings dangers as well as opportunities. The development of agriculture allowed humans to develop villages, towns and cities; to stay in one place; gave them time to think; to experi-

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\* Dean and Professor of Law, University of California, Davis

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Webster, *Remarks on Agriculture*, Boston, 13 Jan., 1840.

ment; to develop culture and agriculture. From the beginning, agriculture altered the environment—plants and animals were selectively bred and developed; land was cleared and tilled; water courses altered; soils enriched (and depleted). Today our agricultural technology transforms and overwhelms our landscapes; its effects are dramatic and pervasive. In California, we bring water to deserts; free-flowing rivers have virtually ceased to exist. The land is unbelievably productive, yet by-products of agriculture pollute the land, air, rivers and even the oceans.

Into this mix comes, of course, the law and lawyers, further enriching (or polluting) the arrangements among the human actors in the landscape. Bringing some order to this complex mix is the challenge and opportunity of this Conference. Agriculture has made this day possible. I look forward to your work in making sense of the many choices we must make in the hope of sustaining agriculture without overwhelming the natural and human environment it both makes possible and threatens. Once again, welcome!