

**President Machen, Dr. Payne, Dr. Balsler, Members of the Faculty, Ladies and Gentlemen and, of course, graduates,** Thank you all very much for inviting me to speak today. It is an honor to be here and a great pleasure.

**After accepting your generous invitation,** I thought I better do a bit of research on what is expected in a commencement address. There are many views, but most of them say you should have a theme, say something inspirational, offer advice and throw in some congratulations. So, here goes.

**My theme has to be Agriculture and Life Sciences.** What else could it be? Not only because of where we are, but really, what other subjects are as important? When you think about it, agriculture is the only real profession; everything else is a hobby. A hobby is something done in one's free time, and no offense to everybody else who think they are essential, including Ambassadors, but without someone raising food for us, would we have any time free? If farmers didn't produce more than they can eat, what would the rest of us be doing? We would be foraging for food or really hungry. Without farmers, there would be no cities; without farmers, there would be no lawyers, though I expect some of you think we could get along quite well without the lawyers.

**What would doctors do without medicine,** most of which started out as agricultural products? Some farmer grew the orange that molded to become

penicillin, and led to the antibiotics that changed the world. It is only because of the productivity of farmers today, which is the result of the work done in Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences, that people have had the luxury of time to create the world we live in. Someone who is hungry is not going to have the fortitude to design a new cell phone or a new internet site. What would any of us do without the Internet or cell phones? I bet there are some of you in the audience that are already experiencing withdrawal because you haven't read a tweet since the program started.

**So, there really isn't anything as important as producing food.**

**I realize that not all of today's graduates** here are farmers, or even in the production agriculture majors, but all of you were studying some aspect of life. What could be more essential and exciting than Life Sciences? In my career working in development, agricultural and environmental issues were always central to every other aspect of development. If you get food and water right, the rest, if not a piece of cake, is at least the makings of a cake. There has never been any area of study more important than those related to maintaining life -there never will be. So let me stop here and congratulate each and every one of you for choosing an area of study that is so important. Thank you for choosing to study

in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. You should all be proud of yourselves and of each other.

**Now comes the hard part.** How can I presume to say something inspirational when you have just spent years learning from the greatest teachers in the world? With all due respect, I don't mean the faculty here at the University of Florida. I mean the natural world, for there is no greater inspiration than nature itself or, if you would indulge me, Herself. As has been pointed out, what better example of initiative than a turtle, who knows that you have to stick your neck out to move forward? What greater inspiration can there be to start over than a sunrise? It has even been said that there is no greater scripture than nature, for nature is life itself.

**I was inspired,** just reading the list of undergraduate and graduate majors in the College. You study growing plants, the movement of oceans, and the structure of cells; the stuff of life. Having studied what you have, having learned what you know, having seen what you observed, how can you sit still? You make ME want to dance right here and now. You all have wisely chosen to work in areas that will provide you with a lifetime of wonder, proximity to miracles and the possibility of improving people's lives around the world. Well done!

**Now is when I am supposed to give you advice.** I am not really sure what to tell you. I could advise you to work hard, but you wouldn't be here if you didn't. It is often advised to be prepared for inevitable failure, but if anyone actually took that advice they probably wouldn't try. No one should expect failure, if it comes, hang on tight and ride it out. If it doesn't, be grateful. Maybe that really is the best advice I can give you. Be grateful to your families for everything they have done, and not done. Most of you are here today because of them.

**Be grateful to your teachers.** The good ones encouraged you, the bad ones challenge you to do better than they did and the best ones inspired you. And as you go out into the world, never forget that you can never, ever be too grateful; to the people who hire you and to those who don't because they kept you free for the better thing coming down the line. For the mentor who helps you do a better job, the co-worker who makes you laugh, and for all those other people who support you everyday. As much as we all like to think and complain about life's difficulties (too much violence, too little compromise, not enough understanding), we Americans have it darn good. Take it from someone who has spent most of her adult life working in Africa and now in Haiti. If you are not grateful for having the opportunity to sit in those chairs today having attained an education

most of the world only DREAMS about – then shame on you. So let’s just take a second and say right out loud “I AM GRATEFUL”.

**Well, that ends the formal part of my talk.** I hope I covered the required bits well enough. Now I want to speak from the heart for a moment. I want to welcome you to my world. It is a world of public service. I make a good salary; I have job security; I have travelled and lived around the world. In fact that is why I am here today speaking to you. It is because Haitian students are graduating with support from USAID, the United States Agency for International Development, in Haiti where I am currently serving that I am speaking to you. If you would indulge me, I would like to mention those students specifically: Joseph Beneche, Arthur Bonicet, Ronald Cademus, Lidwine Hyppolite, Dakson Sanon, Reginald Toussant, Isnel Saint Pierreval and Pascale St. Martin.

**So my career takes me to great places** like the University of Florida and I get to meet wonderful people like you. BUT I will NEVER be rich, money has never been an inspiration to me. I have spent a lifetime working in development; working with an amazing group of people from around the world to try to make a difference in the lives of the most vulnerable. I have helped girls go to school, women deliver healthy babies and men make a salary at FARMING that is enough to pay for books and medicine and maybe coca cola on special occasions.

It is work that feeds the soul if not the piggybank. I would like to invite you who are graduating today to join me. And remember the Haitian proverb,

Si w plante manyok ou pa ka rekolte patat

(If you planted cassava, you cannot harvest sweet potato, *you reap what you sow*, according to the law of harvest)

I know at least one of you already has joined me. Pascale St. Martin is working in Haiti at the Montrouis Feed The Future West training center as regional project director and I am sure that some of you have made or will be making similar commitments. So whatever your area of study, I would encourage you to work to make the world a better place. I have never regretted my decision to pursue that goal, and I doubt you would either. So congratulations for what you have achieved and I look forward to hearing about what you will be doing next. I am grateful for this invitation and this glorious day.

Thank you.