$2M gift to UK establishes first-ever endowed chair in Extension, honoring Craig Wood

Jennifer Elwell
University of Kentucky
jennifer.elwell@uky.edu

A landmark gift from philanthropist and University of Kentucky alumna Lois Mateus has established the Craig H. Wood Endowed Chair in Cooperative Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources, the first endowed chair dedicated to Extension in the history of the Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment.

The endowment recognizes the enduring importance of Cooperative Extension to Kentucky's rural communities while honoring the career and leadership of Wood, a longtime Extension educator, innovator and administrator.

"This generous gift reflects the very best of our land-grant mission — connecting knowledge to communities and improving lives across our state. Through this endowed chair, we will continue to support the people and programs that translate research into real-world solutions," said UK President Eli Capilouto. "It is an investment not only in our institution, but in the future of Kentucky. We are deeply grateful to Lois Mateus for her vision and generosity, which will strengthen UK Cooperative Extension's ability to serve every corner of our Commonwealth, upholding our more than 160-year promise to the state we were created to advance."

Established in perpetuity, the Craig H. Wood Endowed Chair in Cooperative Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources will support one or more full-time faculty members in Martin-Gatton CAFE who have provided outstanding leadership in education and service and whose work amplifies Extension's impact across the Commonwealth.

The position is designed to reinforce connections between university research and the everyday challenges faced by farmers, landowners and communities.

"This endowed chair represents a transformative investment in the future of Cooperative Extension," said Laura Stephenson, vice president for Land-grant Engagement and dean of Martin-Gatton CAFE. "It strengthens our ability to connect research with real-world application, ensuring that Kentucky's farmers, landowners and communities continue to benefit from innovative, practical solutions. We are deeply grateful to Lois Mateus for her vision and commitment to advancing Extension's impact across the Commonwealth."

For Mateus, the decision to establish the endowment grew from a deep belief in Extension's power to shape lives and strengthen communities.

A native of Mercer County, Mateus grew up on a tobacco and dairy farm, where her family instilled values of hard work, generosity and service. During her youth, she was deeply involved in 4-H and Extension programs, participating in public speaking events, gardening competitions and livestock shows.

"That gave me confidence and led to farm-related friendships across the Commonwealth that I cherish and still nurture," Mateus said.

Mateus went on to build a career in public affairs, community engagement, corporate communications and facility services. Most notably, during her nearly three decades as a senior executive at Brown Forman, she served on the boards of the company's Lenox China and Hartman Luggage subsidiaries and was one of three major shareholders in the development of Woodford Reserve bourbon.

A 1968 graduate, she has remained closely connected to UK through philanthropy and the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues, receiving the University's Lifetime Achievement Award in Communications and Public Relations in 2005.

Following her husband Tim Peters' death in 2020, Mateus donated eight historic buildings the couple had restored in downtown Harrodsburg to Martin-Gatton CAFE, creating the Tallgrass Endowment. Honoring their intention to preserve farmland, she has subsequently bequeathed the university approximately 800 acres that are held in a conservation easement with Tallgrass Farm Foundation.

Mateus, who lives and works on the farm, credits Craig Wood for his time and guidance in multiple ways to maintain and utilize the land, trails and wooded areas as she hosts various 4-H and environmental groups, professors and classes.

"It is gratifying to create the Craig H. Wood Endowed Chair," Mateus said. "Wise in a humble way, Craig is a quintessential servant leader. He helps Extension agents by providing resources, making connections and removing roadblocks. He lives by his goal to inspire others to pursue what inspires them. As a team player, he is accessible, trusted and respected by his peers, the network of Agriculture and Natural Resources agents and specialists, and agricultural leaders across the Commonwealth."

Wood, assistant director of Extension for agriculture, natural resources and horticulture at Martin-Gatton CAFE, said he recognizes the prestige associated with the endowed chair and believes it will have a lasting impact on the future of UK Extension.

Photo by Matt Barton

UK alumna and endowed chair donor Lois Mateus (left) stands with Craig Wood (right) at the entrance of Tallgrass Farm in Mercer County. Mateus is bequeathing her 800-acre farm to the university and creating the Craig H. Wood Endowed Chair in Cooperative Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources to honor Wood's leadership and commitment to using innovative technologies to serve Kentucky's farmers and agribusiness professionals.

Photo by J.E. Elwell

Laura Stephenson, Steve Wilson, Lois Mateus and Craig Wood (pictured left to right) attend a recent Community Farm Alliance farmer celebration dinner at Holly Hill Inn. Wilson and Wood serve on the Tallgrass Farm Foundation with Mateus.

"I'm deeply honored and humbled that Lois would view me as someone worthy of the first endowed chair created in support of Cooperative Extension," Wood said.

Wood joined UK in 1985 as an assistant Extension professor and equine specialist. Over four decades, he has advanced Extension through teaching, technology and leadership.

Wood said his career has been shaped by a willingness to embrace new approaches to education delivery. He was among the college's earliest adopters of distance learning, first using satellite technology to share training materials with county agents and later expanding that approach to teach college agriculture classes nationwide.

By the mid-1990s, his work was earning national recognition and continued to evolve through leadership roles that emphasized collaboration and emerging technologies. Wood's forward-thinking approach later helped support national connectivity among Extension specialists at 74 land-grant universities through what is now known as the Extension Foundation.

Throughout his career, Wood said his focus has remained on reaching people effectively by adapting format and delivery methods to audience needs. He emphasized that those efforts have always been collaborative.

"There was always a team effort in the programs created," Wood said. "I may be the one who is honored, but the teams and people that I work with are the ones who made it all happen."

For Mateus, the endowment represents not only an investment in Extension but also in the people it serves.

"There's a sense of achievement in giving back and seeing income from the success, blessings and luck of my life endow this perpetual chair," Mateus said. "It is my wish that it be a catalyst for fostering continued innovation, while reflecting my personal desire for top-notch students to be inspired to go into Extension. It is also a salute to current hardworking and respected agents and specialists who serve as boots on the ground for UK in Kentucky's 120 counties."

Mercer County drug take-back event April 25

Residents are encouraged to safely dispose of unused or expired medications during the upcoming Mercer County Drug Take-Back event scheduled for Saturday, April 25, 2026.

The event will take place from 8 a.m. to noon at the Mercer County Fiscal Court building, located at 207 W. Lexington Street. Community members can drop off unwanted prescription and over-the-counter medications for proper disposal, helping reduce potential risks to both public health and the environment.

Drug take-back programs are held nationwide to address several critical concerns. Improper disposal of medications can contaminate water supplies and harm the environment. Additionally, unused medications kept in homes or discarded in household trash can be stolen, leading to drug misuse and abuse.

Officials also note a growing number of children being treated in emergency rooms after accessing medications found in homes they live in or visit. Another concern is the sharing of prescription drugs between individuals without proper medical guidance, which can result in serious illness, injury, or even death.

Organizers say the event provides a safe, convenient, and responsible way for residents to dispose of medications while helping to prevent accidental exposure, misuse, and environmental damage.

For more information about the drug take-back event, residents are encouraged to contact local officials or visit the Mercer County Sheriff's office during regular business hours.

Letters to the Editor

Vote Susan Barrington

Dear Editor:

Eric and I are writing to express our strong support for Susan Barrington for District 4 Magistrate.

Susan understands this community because she's part of it. She knows the people and the values that make District 4 what it is. She takes the time to listen, shows up when it matters, and approaches decisions with thoughtfulness and honesty—qualities that are essential in local leadership.

Just as important, Susan has shown she is willing to take a stance on hard decisions, even when they aren't easy. That kind of courage and accountability is exactly what we need in someone representing our district.

We believe Susan will lead with integrity, remain grounded in the community's needs, and be a steady, dependable voice for our family and future generations.

For us, this is personal. We want someone who will continue to put District 4 first and represent it with care and respect. We believe Susan Barrington is that person.

Sincerely,
Kim and Eric Yeast

Dear Editor:

We are writing in support of Susan Barrington for re-election to District 4 Magistrate. There are many aspects to a magistrate, and we trust Susan to handle any and all tasks that arise with honesty and integrity. She has proven to be honest, accessible and responsible in her duties and will continue as we move forward. She is devoted to Mercer County and has been for her entire life. District 4 and all of Mercer County are blessed to have her servant leadership on the Fiscal Court. Please join us in support of Susan Barrington for magistrate in District 4.

Sincerely,
Justin and Lauren Henderson

Dear Editor:

We are proud of Susan Barrington, our magistrate, because she listens to our concerns. She is committed to preserving prime farmland in Mercer County. Susan and her family have been active in the Burgin community and remain active there. She has a historical perspective of the area.

Cast your vote for Susan.

Sincerely,
Larry and Rita Inman

No Data Center Means No Data Center

Dear Editor:

Why are our voices ignored? At the February 18 public meeting, citizens made their concerns known to the Mercer County Planning and Zoning board regarding a hyperscale data center.

With the release of their ordinance on Monday, I couldn't tell that they were listening. Did they think a different location would appease us? No means no. Mercer County citizens want no part in a hyperscale datacenter. Why is this still being pushed? The whole issue is reminiscent of the solar field that was forced down our throats.

Sincerely,
Karen Hughes

Pray Mercer Leaders Are Not Short-Sighted

Dear Editor:

I've been watching *the Herald* for a report on visits by our decision makers regarding data centers to such sites while they are fully active. I'd hoped to read their impression on our state representative, county judge executive and members of our Mercer County Planning and Zoning Committee. I'd hoped these visits would have been unaccompanied by any sales rep of the companies seeking to establish data centers. I'd like to know that our decision makers find in person the environments of these data centers much more amenable to habitation than is indicated by the horror stories we hear and read. Especially on the heels of the legislature's refusing to require the companies instigating establishment of the data centers to pay their own way, I am suspicious. Now we can expect to not only endure any problems they create, but bear their costs to operate. I can't help but remember that Mountain Top removal for coal was considered a benefit by other decision makers who were a bit short-sighted. I pray that is not the case for Mercer County.

Sincerely,
Susannah Jones

Burgin

from 4A

cessions after questions were raised about the legality of the donations.

"I'm struggling to see the public benefit," City Attorney John Wood said.

"I don't think it's appropriate," said Councilwoman Wofford, who seconded Dunn's motion to table the requests until the city had received guidance from the Kentucky League of Cities

Mayor Keebortz said the kids were asking for it.

"I feel this is a horrible field to die on," Keebortz said.

"I hate it," said Councilman Travis Irvin, who voted in support of Dunn's motion, which passed. After the vote, Dunn said he knew someone who wanted to donate the money.

The next regular meeting of the Burgin City Council is scheduled for Tuesday, May 12, at 6:30 p.m. at Burgin City Hall (117 South Maple Street, Burgin).

ADVERTISEMENT TO BID

MERCER COUNTY SANITATION DISTRICT
MERCER COUNTY, KENTUCKY
GWINN ISLAND SANITARY SEWER PROJECT
PROPERTY CONNECTIONS

The Mercer County Sanitation District is requesting Bids for the construction of the following Project:

Gwinn Island Road Sanitary Sewer Project
Property Connections

Sealed Bids will be accepted for the plumbing connections and electrical connections to installed grinder pumps for 20 properties located on Gwinn Island Road in Boyle County, Kentucky until May 14, 2026, at 3:00 p.m. Interested Bidders should contact the Mercer County Sanitation District directly for property details regarding the connections. Plumbing and electrical bids should be prepared separately. Separate Bids for the plumbing and electrical components will only be accepted.

Bidders shall comply with all provisions of the Federal Davis Bacon Act for wage rates.

OWNER reserves the right to reject any or all Bids, to waive any technicality, and to accept any Bid which it deems advantageous. All Bids shall remain subject to acceptance for 60 days after the time set for receiving bids.

Contract award shall be based on the lowest responsive and responsible bidder.

This bid is subject to Kentucky Revised Statutes Section 45A.490 through 45A.494, which in general provides that a "resident bidder" of Kentucky is to be given a bidding preference over a "nonresident bidder" who is registered in a state that gives preference to its in-state resident bidders over a Kentucky resident bidder. The bidding preference is to be the same as that stipulated for the state of the "nonresident bidder." If the state of the "nonresident bidder" provides no specific preference, the "resident" and "nonresident bidders" are to be treated the same when evaluating Bids.

All Bidders must comply with all Federal, State and Local Equal Employment Opportunity laws and regulations which prohibit discrimination in employment regarding race, creed, color, sex, or national origin.

Bidder's attention is called to the fact that any Contract awarded under this Advertisement to Bid is funded in part by funds from the EPA Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grants Program and Cleaner Water Program. All iron and steel products used on the project shall be produced in the United States and comply with the American Iron and Steel requirements. All iron, steel, manufactured products and construction material shall also be produced in the United States and comply with the Build America, Buy America Act requirements. Bidders shall comply with President's Executive Order 11246, Equal Employment Opportunity as amended.

Bidders shall comply with 40 CFR 31.36 which includes but is not limited to the following: (1) the President's Executive Order 11246 as amended, which prohibits discrimination in employment regarding race, creed, color, sex, or national origin, (2) Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, (3) the Anti-Kickback Act, and (4) the Contract Work Hours Standards Act.

All taxes are the responsibility of the successful Bidder.

Sealed Bids shall be submitted to the Mercer County Sanitation District located at 801 Pleasant Hill Drive, Burgin, Kentucky 40310 or P.O. Box 303, Burgin, Kentucky 40310. Questions shall be directed to Mike D. Sanford, Executive Director, at 801 Pleasant Hill Drive, Burgin, Kentucky or by calling (859) 748-9654.

Published by the authority of the
Mercer County Sanitation District
Mike D. Sanford, Executive Director

Dated at Mercer County, Kentucky
April 23, 2026