

[Get the facts about Bingham \(Opinion-Editorial Column\)](#)

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By Bob Lowman

For nearly 40 years, the UNC animal facility located in Bingham Township peacefully co-existed with its neighbors. Called “the Farm,” it was a place where pigs rooted around outside while dogs in outdoor runs barked at the occasional squirrel or deer on the property. The facility looked and sounded much like neighboring farms in rural Orange County, except that researchers were using the pigs to study cardiovascular disease and the dogs to study hemophilia.

In recent years, UNC made plans to expand its large-animal research in Bingham Township. A facility in Carrboro was aging, and a second one in Hillsborough was cramped. The facility at Bingham, with its 57 acres of space, looked like an attractive place to consolidate and develop this research. The researchers and the School of Medicine applied for, and received, a federal economic stimulus grant to expand the facility at Bingham.

This planned expansion turned out to be a bad idea for several reasons, including the fact that the grant would not cover the cost of the supporting infrastructure needed, and so the university took the very unusual step of returning the grant money and canceling the full expansion. However, two buildings had already been added, many trees cut down, an inadequate wastewater treatment system installed and, worst of all, the trust of our neighbors lost, because the expansion was undertaken without consulting or even notifying nearby property owners.

Since that time, for nearly three years, my colleagues and I at UNC have done whatever we can to restore that trust and prove our good intentions going forward. We have replanted trees, restored wetlands and designed a system to place all animals on dry bedding to reduce our water and wastewater treatment needs dramatically. We have removed an aging incinerator, replaced several old propane tanks with two new tanks in a safer location, and exchanged loud chillers for ultra-quiet ones farther from the property line. We have met with neighbors individually and had several public meetings to update the community on our plans, given tours of the site, established regular email communication and posted public documents online.

We have repeatedly addressed questions that have been raised about the facility (and corrected misinformation) directly with individuals, at public meetings and hearings, and in correspondence with the various governmental agencies that regulate the facility. All this information can be found on the website, unc.edu/community/bingham, and I invite anyone who is interested in the Bingham Facility to read the public records there.

It’s important to me that the residents of Bingham Township and Orange County know the facts about the UNC facility there. Our intentions are to restore the trust and good will that we once shared with our neighbors and to be better stewards of our property and protectors of the environment. We can’t completely erase the mistakes of the past, but we are doing our best to correct them and to learn from them.

The last step in that process is the installation of a wastewater treatment system that is better suited to the site and to our needs and that will bring to an end the noisy and smelly pump and haul process that has been worrisome to our closest neighbors. When that is done, we hope we can return to a time when our facility is quietly achieving its research objectives and our activities are seen as unremarkable in the neighborhood, because they do no harm to the environment, have little or no impact on those living nearby, and meet the high standards that the citizens of North Carolina appropriately hold for its flagship public university.

Bob Lowman is the associate vice chancellor for research at UNC.