Ironically, it was a pet that got her involved. Aleda Roth’s dog Lady got sick because of melamine, an ingredient used in pet food that is imported from China. The solution was to find food without the contaminant, which proved nearly impossible. “This toxic stuff was in almost every brand I checked,” she says. “I thought, ‘What about people food?’ The potential health consequences cannot be ignored.”

Outsourcing: it is an issue many are hesitant to face. But Roth believes that the sourcing of food products and ingredients from countries where oversight is lax can be risky. “Americans assume food safety,” she says. “And yet, for most processed foods you buy in the supermarket, the country of origin for their ingredients is unknown. Many companies are unwilling to disclose this information to consumers, even when queried.”

Roth took on the ambitious goal of moving the direction of corporate America. Her team is compiling data to support the hypothesis that the more international the supply chain for food, the greater the risks and the greater the need for control. The FDA only inspects about 1-2 percent of all imported food — especially alarming when considering about 15-20 percent of the food Americans eat is imported. Farming and sanitation practices are often below standard in emerging market countries.

Moreover, acid rain due to the burning of fossil fuels contributes to the accumulation of mercury in the environment, and untreated waste is sometimes dumped into water that may be used to irrigate crops.

“I am not trying to create hysteria or come across as a total radical. I simply want to get the facts out there. I was surprised to find that even some U.S. food manufacturing executives did not know the country of origin of all their ingredients, even though they were purchased through U.S. distributors. I want people to think about it. If we can explain the science in a way the average person understands, we will begin to see action.”

Aleda Roth is ranked among the top 1 percent of scholars in supply chain management and service operations strategies and was the first woman to be named a Distinguished Fellow of the Manufacturing and Service Operations Management Society and the Production and Operations Management Society. She has also been honored as a fellow of the Texas A&M University Institute for Advanced Study; and with the prestigious Emerald Citations of Excellence Award for her article “Unraveling the food supply chain: strategic insights from China and the 2007 recalls.” She has more than 200 publications to her credit.
The Competition for the Best

Professors such as Aleda Roth are rare — and highly sought after by colleges and universities around the world. So while the competition is stiff, our goal of recruiting and retaining top faculty means that Clemson must stay in the race.

Already, Clemson is fortunate to be home to some of the country's top academics. Out of a pool of 42,000 professors nationwide, five Clemson professors were listed in the 2012 Princeton Review's list of “The Best 300 Professors.” Clemson faculty and staff serve as heads of their professional societies, participate on national boards, are recognized by the White House, capture prestigious grants and are honored by their peers, industry, business and government at an astounding rate.

But the race continues.

At the very core of a great university are these men and women who, in the classroom, in the lab and in the field, inspire, encourage, mentor and build the future leaders of our state — and indeed, our world. Even in the face of technological upheaval in colleges and universities, the students and the universities that serve them will continue to succeed and thrive as long as higher education is able to focus on supporting the work of innovative teachers and great researchers.

The Need for Support

With competition for faculty of the highest caliber intense and coming from every corner of the globe, Clemson needs the support of private donors to recruit and retain these top achievers.

In order to reach — and exceed — the goals of the University, Clemson must

• reward current faculty excellence,
• recruit additional teaching and research talent and
• add endowed chairs and professorships.

The entire Clemson Family, as well as the state of South Carolina benefits from outstanding faculty members who not only conduct research and teach classes, but who contribute to the greater good of society. Funding endowed chairs and professorships will:

• bring together intellectual capital needed to put the University at the pinnacle of academic research,
• bring the world's leading researchers and scholars to South Carolina, enhancing economic opportunities for individuals and industries throughout the state, and
• recruit more of the nation's top students to Clemson.