UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. – “Happy 2019!” The start of a new year is time for New Year’s Resolutions, and mine have been seriously influenced by the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

In 2015, the United States joined more than 190 other nations in signing onto the SDGs, with an agreement to achieve them by 2030. The goals are ambitious (like so many of my personal resolutions!); but only because they have to be. What they recognize is that a sustainable future will be possible only if we address human welfare, social justice, economic development, and environmental systems simultaneously.

The goals include things like eliminating hunger and poverty; improving health, wellbeing and education; reducing gender and economic inequalities; providing good jobs, infrastructure, and livable cities; achieving sustainable production and consumption; protecting clean water; and developing renewable energy, among others. These are things we all want—for all of us—with no one left behind.
There are only 11 years left until 2030; so, we need to ask: where do we as Pennsylvanians stand? Unfortunately, the answer is not good. A new “Sustainable Development Report of the US 2018” that came out at the end of last year, ranking each state’s performance on the SDGs, placed us 30th out of 50 states. Moreover, we are currently not on track to achieve A SINGLE ONE of the 17 goals by 2030 (one of only 20 states to be that far behind)!

We can do better, and Penn State has a critical role to play in helping our state—with its many wonderful resources—achieve these goals. The Sustainability Institute is helping Penn State anchor its approach to sustainability around the SDGs, using them to direct the incorporation of sustainability into Penn State’s curriculum, research, operations, and outreach. But all of us have a role to play in learning about the SDGs and thinking about how they connect the work we’re already doing in our fields and units to a broader sustainability mission, which benefits not just the campus but the entire Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and, indeed, the world.

In 2019, the Sustainability Institute is resolving to renew our focus on using the SDGs to achieve a sustainable future for all of us. We invite you to resolve to do the same in your own work at Penn State. Together, we can make this one New Year’s resolution we all actually keep.