

The History of Prairie View A&M University as a Land-Grant University

Mr. Chairman, ranking member and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I am George C. Wright, President of Prairie View A&M University. For those not familiar with Prairie View, please allow me to share a brief bit of our history.

Prairie View A&M University is the second oldest public institution of higher education in Texas. On August 14, 1876, the Texas Legislature established the “Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas for Colored Youths” and placed responsibility for its management with the Board of Directors of the Agricultural and Mechanical College at Bryan (present day Texas A&M University, linking the 1862 and 1890 Land Grant Universities).

The University’s original curriculum was designated by the Texas Legislature to be that of a “Normal School” for the preparation and training of teachers. This curriculum was expanded to include the arts and sciences, home economics, *agriculture*, mechanical arts and nursing after the University was established as a branch of the Agricultural Experiment Station (Hatch Act, 1887) and as a Land Grant College (Morrill Act, 1890). Thus began the tradition of agricultural research and community service, which continues today.

The University’s enrollment now exceeds 8,000 including more than 1,500 graduate students. Students come from regions throughout the United States as well as many foreign countries. During the University’s 139-year history, some 60,000 academic degrees have been awarded.

Prairie View A&M University’s Agriculture Program

Prairie View A&M University’s agricultural program prepares students to enter careers in the human sciences, animal, crop and the environmental sciences, and agricultural and resource economics. The University has a deep sense of responsibility and is committed to using its talents and resources to apply knowledge that will help advance the State of Texas in the global economy. PVAMU faculty are actively engaged in research that includes but not

limited to: increasing the shelf life of dairy products, protecting fruits against sun rays, advancing knowledge in the use of medicinal plants to improve health, removing allergens from peanuts, securing water resources, and developing strategies to enhance watershed functions in a sustainable way. For instance, researchers at PVAMU are developing a set of management tools to enable watershed managers, regulators and other stakeholders to predict various short- and long-term land management scenarios and the impact of extreme weather conditions. Additionally, PVAMU researchers are developing water management strategies to optimize crop water use and minimize excess water losses. Funds allocated to PVAMU have resulted in nine patents being granted over the past 17 years to agricultural researchers in the food and plant sciences. Three of the patents deal with infusing fish-oil-based food emulsions into foods (milk and milk products, apple sauce, tomato sauce, and salad dressings) to increase oxidative stability and consumer acceptability of omega-3 fatty acids that are essential for maintaining human health.

Currently PVAMU extension agents are located in thirty-five counties in Texas with plans in place to expand to sixty additional counties. PVAMU agents work primarily with limited-resource Texans. In 2010, USDA established a StrikeForce Initiative for Rural Growth and Opportunity to address specific challenges associated with rural poverty. There are 96 counties in Texas considered by USDA as StrikeForce counties. PVAMU proposed expansion is directed toward working with citizens of those counties.

Over the last decade, the Community Economic Development Program (CED) has reached 25,000 rural residents, helping to create 800 new jobs, which have in turn infused over \$30 million into Texas' economy. Last year, the CED worked with thirty-eight Texas families to apply for home ownership or rehabilitation funding through USDA and \$2.5 million was approved.

Support from the United States Federal Government

Because of the large population of Texas and with the State having the largest number of farms, Prairie View receives the largest funding portion of any 1890 Institution for its

programs. In total, PVAMU receives about \$11 million annually from USDA. Over the past 10 years, Prairie View received \$42.2 million for agricultural research, \$34.5 million for agricultural extension and \$14.1 million to construct new facilities or renovate existing ones in the College of Agriculture and Human Sciences.

Impact

With its federal financial support, the PVAMU 4-H Youth Development Program since 2012 has, over the last five years, reached more than 181,000 youth in both rural and urban counties across the state through educational programs and activities focused on increasing Science, Technology, Engineering, Agriculture, and Mathematics (STEAM) awareness, civic participation, and healthy living habits. The PVAMU Family and Consumer Sciences Program, along with the 4-H Program, have created a core of 622 youth ambassadors who reached more than 35,000 other youth and family members. Also, the Agriculture and Natural Resources Program conducted workshops and assisted 54 small and limited-resource Texas farmers in submitting applications for loans totaling up to \$7.8 million, and to date \$4.9 million have been approved.

Major Challenge

Securing the total state match continues to be a major challenge for PVAMU to receive the full USDA allocation. Each biennium PVAMU has to work assiduously with the State Legislature to secure the match. Unfortunately over the years the University has not been successful in securing the match and has had to request a waiver from USDA to receive its full allocation.

Concluding Statement

I will conclude by saying that I am honored to have had this opportunity to testify before you today and on behalf of faculty, staff and students associated with the agriculture program at PVAMU thank you for your continuous support.