

**Testimony to the House Agriculture Committee
June 16, 2021**

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Introduction

Good morning, Chairman Scott, Vice Chair Adams and Ranking Member Thompson. I am Dr. Heidi M. Anderson, and I am honored to bring you greetings . . . not only as president of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore but also as an Executive Committee member of the Council of 1890 Universities of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU).

About the 1890s

UMES, like the other 1890 land-grant institutions, maintains a steady focus on teaching agriculture, science, and other disciplines that are highly relevant to the nation's workforce needs. In addition, we conduct critical research and provide non-traditional extension education programs to the community.

Today, more than 130 years since the signing of the second Morrill Act of 1890, these universities continue to deliver on the important mission of providing access and opportunities to improve and uplift the lives of those who otherwise would not have received an education.

These universities are highly innovative and generate new knowledge through research and provide solutions to everyday problems through outreach to our communities at a time when the nation is facing serious societal challenges that are affecting the lives of many—especially minorities.

About UMES

Let me tell you a little about UMES. It was founded on September 13, 1886, as the Delaware Conference Academy. With a mission focused on providing educational opportunities for former slaves and freedmen, the fledgling academy housed two educators and nine students.

It's been 135 years since its founding, and UMES relentlessly continues to embrace and advance the land-grant mission as a Carnegie II Doctoral research university offering strong programs in agriculture, health care, and STEM areas. Some of our undergraduate majors include: Agriculture, Agribusiness, Environmental Science and Human Ecology; and graduate programs at the masters and doctorate level in Food and Agricultural Sciences, Food Science and Technology, Marine and Estuarine Sciences, and Natural Resource Sciences.

In addition, the COVID pandemic has brought into sharp focus the critical need to ensure that we tackle the health care disparities and social inequities that impact rural communities. UMES is primed to resolve these challenges operating 8 health profession programs in the areas of pharmacy, physician assistant, physical therapy, kinesiology, rehabilitative counseling, rehabilitative services, rehabilitative psychology, and dietetics. Graduates from these health

programs have entered the local, state and regional workforce and are meeting the critical health care needs of citizens. In fact, 62% of our graduates remain in the Delmarva region, or in the State of Maryland.

It cannot be over emphasized that 1890 universities play a pivotal role in conducting research and delivering solutions, which are relevant to many societal problems; and UMES is poised as a leader in this regard.

Funding Support

Chairman Scott and members of the Committee . . .

None of what we do would be possible without the federal and state funding that we receive. In FY2021, UMES received just over \$4.7 million in federal capacity funds for research, extension, facilities, and forestry.

The support is indispensable, and it ensures that the university can implement effective educational programs in core areas of science and agriculture. The support also allows UMES to deliver innovative research and extension programs that address vexing problems in the agriculture, food, and natural resource areas. Even more, it is critical to the ability of our faculty and students to innovate and help solve major issues such as food security and climate change.

About 2018 Farm Bill and Especially Chairman Scott’s Advocacy for Scholarships

Chairman Scott, to date we have received just over \$1.7 million to support scholarships for our students. I cannot emphasize enough our deep gratitude to you and the committee for supporting the 1890 Scholarship Program. I am also extremely grateful that UMES is the coordinating university for the 1890 Center of Excellence for Global Food Security and Defense, which is one of the Centers of Excellence established in the 2018 Farm Bill. These initiatives are making a tremendous difference to our students and to our ability to exponentially change lives. We implore you to continue supporting these important initiatives.

Allow me to say, that because we launched this program during the COVID pandemic, our efforts were not as robust or as smooth as it otherwise might have been. However, we are undeterred and hopeful for the incoming class of students.

Examples of UMES Meeting its Mission

Please allow me to give a few examples of how UMES is fulfilling its mission as an 1890 land-grant university and to highlight how critical the support provided by Congress is to help us in doing all that we do.

Workforce Development

The nation's social and economic well-being is heavily dependent on the availability of a diverse and highly skilled workforce. UMES strives to educate and train the next generation of educators, researchers, and scientists within the areas of food, agriculture, and related sciences.

As you are aware, UMES and the other 1890 institutions play a major role in providing access and opportunities for many who would otherwise not be able to take advantage of a college education. I am happy to report that UMES is one of the most diverse campuses in the University System of Maryland, as we continue to focus on our core mission, while ensuring access to all. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* also recognized UMES as having the second most diverse faculty (2019) which allows us to lead by example.

Chairman Scott, the investment of resources to provide scholarships to students is a game-changer. Not only do the resources allow us to recruit and retain highly competitive students, but also they ensure that recipients can graduate with minimal or non-existent loan burden.

Under this program, we accepted our first cohort of 15 freshmen in the fall 2020 semester and have since accepted an additional 10 sophomore and junior students who will be funded beginning in the fall semester of 2021. With these groups of students, we have encumbered \$697,805 of the funds allocated in the first year. During the 2021 recruitment season, we increased our outreach efforts and expect to accept a much larger second cohort of students into the program for 2022.

The students accepted into the program join a special community of land-grant scholars who receive intrusive advising, support, and professional development to ensure their success inside the university and beyond. At the end of the first year, only one student was dismissed from the program for non-performance.

Recruitment for the first cohort was a little challenging because it was a new program, and the COVID pandemic was so very disruptive. In response, UMES developed effective strategies, communications, and procedures to ensure greater effectiveness and efficiency in our efforts to reach as many students as feasible. Those efforts included strengthening existing linkages with high schools and community colleges.

I know that the 1890 Scholarship Program will have a tremendous impact on enrollment in relevant majors (Agriculture, Agribusiness Management, Environmental Science, and Human Ecology). For us, the rate of recruitment for students in the agriculture major has been on the rise when with some other programs, that has not been the case.

We thank you for the foresight in establishing the 1890 Scholarship Program. As you are aware, we attract a lot of students with financial need; and therefore, the ability to provide this support is helpful in ensuring we retain, as well as graduate our students, on time and in a way that they leave college with minimal or no debt.

Given the uniqueness and value of the program, we kindly implore you to consider making the program permanent when you develop the next Farm Bill.

Research and Extension

While UMES' research and extension programs address the needs of all Marylanders, the university places a special emphasis on serving diverse and historically underserved populations. To ensure that we remain focused on our work, we deliver programs around four integrated strategic themes:

- agriculture and food, with a focus on food security;
- natural resources and environmental sustainability;
- human health and development; and
- products to market.

I'd like to provide a summary of our research and extension emphasis under each of the four strategic areas:

Agriculture and food with a focus on food security: Agriculture plays an important role in Maryland's economy and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. We conduct targeted research and extension that includes work in the following areas: food safety and food quality; agribusiness and economic development; alternative agriculture; small-scale production; family farms and urban agriculture; specialty crops; honey bees; poultry; small ruminants; and elements of large-scale agriculture, especially in the area of precision agriculture.

Natural resources and environmental sustainability: Maryland's natural resources underpin a range of economic activities such as forestry-based industries, tourism, fisheries, etc., and provide the basis for supporting quality living for citizens. UMES' work in this area focuses on the establishment of a strong and sustainable foundation to guide the use and protection of these resources. Specifically, we conduct research and education activities focusing on water resources and watershed management, with an emphasis on both the Chesapeake Bay and the Maryland Coastal Bays.

Human health and development: The health, social, and economic well-being and the resilience of its communities are important concerns for Maryland. The youth are our future as a nation, and support for the robust development of young people is essential. With this said, UMES' youth development efforts are conducted under the banner of 4-H programming with a special emphasis on the science, technology, engineering, agriculture/arts, and mathematics (STEAM) disciplines.

At the same time, the nation is facing a growing health challenge with a large proportion of the population suffering from obesity or a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or higher. Therefore, UMES' extension programs are focused on developing resilient communities and families in Maryland through educational efforts in nutrition and health, especially for diverse families with limited resources. The goal of these efforts is to empower the communities and families with knowledge and skills in nutrition, meal planning, physical fitness, and food buying to ensure adequate nutrition for healthy living.

Products to market: We strongly believe in harnessing the intellectual property and knowledge of our faculty, students, and staff; and to this end, we place a strong emphasis on creating linkages with industry. Thus, we conduct food processing projects in collaboration with local entrepreneurs and food companies and develop materials such as polymers and nanomaterials for food and non-food use.

I would now like to speak on several important cross-cutting issues that we are addressing at the research and extension level that have direct relevance to agriculture and minority farmers.

COVID Response and Recovery

The challenges we have faced over the past year have been unprecedented. We were required to adapt quickly to be able to continue delivering our programs and services seamlessly. In that regard, UMES has been at the forefront. In the spring of 2020, we had to pivot like everyone else. In the fall of 2020, however, we brought back our students earlier than other state schools in Maryland all while implementing rigorous safety measures. Because of this, we were able to complete the semester safely. We concluded the spring semester with a modified face-to-face commencement. Kudos to our students, faculty, and staff.

At the same time, we adapted our research and extension programming to continue serving our clientele. Our Extension team is linking with national partners to advance community health, education, and economic outcomes. In addition, the team has been active in implementing specific educational efforts to build trust and confidence in the COVID-19 vaccination project. UMES Extension is also an active participant in an 1890-wide project focused on reducing the impact of SARS-CoV-2 and related disruptions on the local food supply chain in minority communities as part of the 1890 Land-Grant Regional Network.

Furthermore, we are proud that as part of our community outreach, our campus serves as a vaccination station for the local Somerset County Health Department. And our health professions students are acting as part of the team, giving these vaccinations to the community at large.

Climate Change

One of the important issues we face as a nation and world are the challenges brought about by climate change. In response, we are implementing several initiatives focused on understanding and mitigating or adapting to the impacts of climate change. We have specific projects focused on the drought response of soil; understanding forest resilience, carbon sequestration, and climate change on Delmarva's upland forests; carbon dioxide sequestration; and understanding the impact of climate change on microbial dynamics, food safety and security, and on farming in the Delmarva region.

For instance, in terrestrial environments, we plan to conduct climate change impact studies to understand critical soil processes and the effects on carbon sequestration and coastal forests. In

aquatic environments, we plan to conduct impact studies to understand the effects on food web dynamics, phenology, life history, and predator-prey relationships, and to model and forecast changes in mean sea level, soil salinity, and coastal vegetation.

Agriculture Infrastructure

The UMES School of Agricultural and Natural Sciences provides a pivotal linkage between research, teaching, and extension. We use research and extension to provide experiential training leading to highly skilled graduates. We also address some of the most pressing challenges in the food and agriculture system. Please know that UMES is a leader in conducting innovative agricultural research and in educating students for the workforce of the future.

The school, however, has an urgent need for funds to support the renovation or replacement of its most outdated research facilities dating back to the 1950s. We are also contemplating the establishment of the second School of Veterinary Medicine at an 1890 university. We remain grateful for the appropriations that are specified to support facilities development at 1890 schools. We support the \$11.5 billion request made by APLU to improve agricultural research infrastructure across the U.S. We see this as an avenue for us to make transformational improvements in our research infrastructure to conduct 21st-century science and to produce the highly trained, diverse workforce that this nation deserves. We also fully support the HBCU IGNITE efforts led by Representatives Alma Adams and French Hill here in the House, and Senators Coons and Scott in the Senate.

Serving Farmers

According to the 2017 Agricultural Census, there are a little over 200 Black or African-American farmers in Maryland. Southern Maryland and the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland contain the highest concentration (about 85%) of minority farmers. The UMES Small Farm Program has provided outreach and educational programs targeting these audiences. Over the past two years, approximately seventy-five (75) minority farmers have participated in the UMES Small Farm Program.

The Program is committed to helping minority farmers diversify their crop offerings to capitalize on regional economic opportunities such as the increasing demand in the metro region for locally grown ethnic crops. Consequently, farmers are provided educational support; on-farm training and demonstrations; ethnic crop production best practices; and harvesting, and marketing as well as planting materials. This year, the UMES Small Farm Program is working with 15 minority farmers who will be working together and diversifying their crop offerings and increasing their production.

The Program is collaborating with Future Harvest (a non-profit organization) to identify farm entrepreneurs and/or agricultural experts 'of color' who are willing to provide consultations to farmers looking for advice on how to strengthen their farm businesses. Future Harvest has received limited grant funds to pay for in-depth, one-on-one consultations for farmers with a consultant of their choosing. The goal, then, is to attract as many participants as possible.

In a related initiative, the UMES Small Farm Program is facilitating an exchange of knowledge between farmers by creating safe spaces where farmers can meet monthly to share their ideas, express their concerns, and get solutions to their problems. Major topics include plans for upcoming growing seasons; establishing new markets; tool and equipment sharing; and crop diversification. So far, 20 minority farmers are participating in this program.

More recently, there has also been a noticeable and increasing interest by first-time minority farmers. The increase has resulted from either younger urban audiences or new retirees who desire to use their land for some form of agricultural production to secure supplementary income. UMES appeals to both audiences throughout the year.

The UMES Small Farm Program is also spearheading a community outreach project focused on “Increasing Awareness and Participation in USDA’s NRCS programs among African-American Landowners and Underserved Farmer Populations.” Special emphasis is being placed on targeting inherited property and absentee rural land owned by African-Americans and socially disadvantaged farmers as defined by the USDA. Over the next year, the program will conduct needs assessments that include listening sessions within communities of color to identify knowledge gaps, challenges, and natural resource concerns among target audiences. The goal is to reach 100+ minority farmers and/or landowners.

Future Outlook

UMES, and indeed all of the 1890 universities, are highly committed to finding more innovative ways to continue delivering on the promise of the land-grant mission. At the campus level, we are bringing interdisciplinary teams together to address pressing issues like food security, climate change, and health equity. Serving the needs of socially disadvantaged minority populations remains at the heart of what we do. I strongly believe that continued and strategic investment in the 1890s will ensure that these universities can continue making meaningful impacts across the nation.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony to you today. Thank you and I look forward to your questions.