

1890 Land Grant Institutions: Investing for Agricultural Resiliency, Equity, and Global Impact

Written Testimony

By

Orlando F. McMeans, Ph.D.

Chancellor-Dean

**Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center
College of Agricultural Family and Consumer Sciences**

“Good Morning. To Chairman Scott, Vice Chair Alma Adams, Research Subcommittee Chair Stacey Plaskett, Members of the committee, Council of 1890 Presidents and Chancellors, and the entire 1890 Land-Grant Community, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to testify before you and share my thoughts on the topic *1890 Land Grant Institutions: Investing for Agricultural Resiliency, Equity, and Global Impact*. I am the Chancellor of the Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center and Dean of the College of Agricultural, Family and Consumer Sciences.

To put things in context we have to understand that the Second Morrill Act was one of necessity. That is, the establishment of these historically black land-grant institutions was done so because Black Americans at that time didn't have access to majority institutions of higher education who focused on food, agriculture, the mechanical arts and military tactics. The Morrill Act of 1890 gave rise to these HBCU Land-Grant Universities. They are collectively and commonly referred to as 1890s, named for the year the act was passed and signed into law.

Let me just say, I am a proud product of an 1890 Institution, Alabama A&M University in Normal, Alabama. We commonly refer to it as The Hill. As a horticulture major at Alabama A&M in the College of Agriculture, I gained a solid educational foundation. That degree catapulted me to attain my MS and Ph.D. from the University of Illinois, and a Post Doc at Virginia Tech. I spent 21 years at West Virginia State University, an 1890 Land-Grant University and I am now in my second year as the Chancellor of the Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center and Dean of the Southern University College of Agricultural, Family and Consumer Sciences. I owe all those experiences to A&M. By the way, all five universities that I have been affiliated with are land-grant institutions.

I made the statement about my experiences at the various institutions. It gives me a unique perspective on the topic at hand. First, I had a chance to sit in several seats. Seats you say? One of my favorite books is *Where You Stand is Where You Sit*, by Robert Smith. It simply states the position at a specific phase in your life depicts how you see others and your attitudes towards others in different capacities or seats. The three 1890s I have been affiliated with I have been a student, staff member, faculty, Experiment Station Director, Extension Director, Executive Director, Dean, Vice President, and now a Chancellor. I saw all facets of the 1890 academy and its community. Mainly at all levels, I observed the challenges associated with the 1890s. At the same time, I also observed our resiliency.

As aforementioned, I also attended two 1862 Land-Grant Institutions, the University of Illinois and Virginia Tech. One of the glaring differences I observed was the amount of financial support for academic, research and outreach programs, new and modern facilities and research equipment, technologically advanced classrooms and quality infrastructure. Many of our 1890s cannot boast of these institutional conditions. Let me just say, I want these two institutions to continue to thrive and yield great educational, scientific and public service outcomes. All I'm saying is that we as 1890s are just requesting equity as land-grant institutions.

The 1890s collectively have well documented priorities and in most cases, they stem from issues associated with the inequity of funding and funding disparity relevant to our 1862 counterparts. One major issue is that of inadequate facilities due to insufficient funding and years of not addressing deferred maintenance. Specifically, many of our research facilities are outdated and in disrepair, and thus these institutions are in need of new facilities or at the least renovations to get facilities up to today's technological standards. I want to acknowledge Congresswoman Alma Adams and her colleagues for seeking to address some of these facilities issues on the campuses of Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Also, the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities is proposing an agriculture and food infrastructure grant program to be funded at the level of at least \$11.5 Billion. This number came out of a study on the deferred maintenance of research facilities at land-grant institutions. We are requesting that these funds be administered by the

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). Another vehicle to address this infrastructure/facilities issue is to target the 2023 Farm Bill. Specifically, increase the authorization level for the USDA's 1890 Facilities Program.

The 1890s are unique, in that we have a mission mandate of research, teaching and Extension. In order to continue to develop and implement cutting-edge applied research programs and deliver impactful and intentional cooperative extension programs, we must continue to prioritize 1890 Extension and Evans Allen research funding lines. These capacity funds are the 1890s core and base funding and thus we continue to seek increases in these lines and also reauthorization under the next Farm Bill.

HBCUs have historically developed and implemented research, outreach and educational programs to serve underserved and disadvantaged communities and citizens. What this pandemic has done is elucidate and exacerbate the issues around health disparities, infrastructure, and access plaguing those communities. What that means is that we are more relevant than ever. The 1890s, via its extension services and experiment stations, have developed comprehensive, multidisciplinary educational outreach and research program to address health and infrastructural disparities in underserved communities in the states and regions where 1890s are located. Some of these focuses are in the areas of healthy lifestyles, access to healthy foods, broadband, home and community horticulture/gardens, and access to healthcare, to name a few.

The 1890 Land-Grant Institutions who receive federal formula funds from the USDA have a congressional mandate requiring a 100 percent or 1-to-1 match of state or non-federal funds. Section 1449 of ARRERA specifically defines matching funds as follows, "Matching funds means cash contributions from non-Federal sources made available by the State to the eligible institutions." Unfortunately, many 1890s continue to struggle with this federal match requirement. In fact, less than half actually receive the 1-to-1 match.

The one-to-one matching inequity that is being experienced by 1890 land-grant institutions is not in any way caused by the federal government or the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In fact, Congress established the matching requirement so that all land-grant institutions would receive one-to-one matching funds from their respective states. This inequity in funding to 1890s by states has been well documented since the founding of these institutions, and funding at these schools was very poor and not equitable compared to white institutions. While all states are meeting the one-to-one matching requirement for their 1862 institutions, the majority of states do not meet this obligation for 1890 land-grant universities requiring these institutions to apply for a waiver of the one-to-one match requirement or forfeit their funding.

The plight of Black Farmers has been well documented. Over the last century, many black farmers lost their land by tax sales, eminent domain, and voluntary sales. The USDA has admitted to having discriminated against black farmers. The number of black

farmers in America peaked in 1920, when there were nearly 950,000. Today, of the country's 3.4 million total farmers, only 1.3%, or 45,508, are black, according to new data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture released this month. They own a mere 0.52% of America's farmland. By comparison, 95% of U.S. farmers are white. These farmers and producers live primarily in southeastern and mid-Atlantic states.

As part of President Biden's American Rescue Plan, about \$4 Billion was set aside for Black, Hispanic and Indigenous farmers to address years of systemic racism and provide legal assistance to farmers of color. In preparation of this rollout, on May 24, Cedric Richmond, Senior advisor to President Biden and Director of the Office of Public Engagement and USDA representatives met in St. James, Louisiana to announce the beginning of the debt relief plan associate with the American Rescue Plan. Farmers and representatives from Southern University were also in attendance for this event. While implementation of this debt relief plan has temporarily been halted, the 1890s, as we have historically, will continue to provide technical support and outreach to our socially disadvantaged farmers.

Climate change has the potential to adversely impact agricultural productivity at local and regional scales through alterations in rainfall patterns, more frequent occurrences of climate extremes (including high temperatures or drought), altered patterns of pest pressure, and changes in seasonal and diurnal temperature. Climate change can disrupt food availability, reduce access to food, and affect food quality. For example, projected increases in temperatures, changes in precipitation patterns, changes in

extreme weather events, and reductions in water availability may all result in reduced agricultural productivity.

Science also makes it clear that to avert the worst impacts of climate change, we must address the greenhouse gas emissions from the food and agriculture sectors. This includes capturing and storing carbon in soils, wasting less food, phasing out agricultural chemicals like pesticides and fertilizers, and reducing meat consumption from confined factory farms. With so many crises unfolding on our planet—pandemics, loss of biodiversity, hunger, and poverty—our food system must shift toward practices that increase health, sustainability, equity and resiliency. The 1890s are poised to be players in addressing these issues associated with climate change. Whether that is producing new, stress-resistant and tolerant crops to mitigating the land loss due to erosion and rising waters.

The 1890 community is forever thankful to Congressman David Scott whose vision was to establish scholarships at 1890s for those students wanting to pursue a baccalaureate degree in Food and Agricultural Sciences (FAS) and related fields. Recruiting significant numbers of quality students for the university's academic programs in FAS is our top priority. The USDA/NIFA 1890 Scholarship Program has and will continue to assist us in increasing our undergraduate enrollment, retention, graduation or near graduation of more baccalaureate degrees, and enhance employment in the USDA and strategic partners' workforce. This new scholarship rolled out in the fall of 2022, with each 1890 receiving \$752,632. To date, 797 scholarships, totaling \$11,485,288, have been

awarded. Which represents 80% of the total dollars awarded. We are seeking your support in reauthorizing this vital and essential educational program.

Over 95% of all students enrolled in Southern University and A&M College, Baton Rouge campus, are supported by some type of financial assistance. The 1890 Scholarship provides apprenticeship opportunities for youth enrolled in college FAS scientific experimentation and extension programming. The project's success will give a long-term presence of stimulating research and extension interest in students. The project provides a means to recruit academically talented youth on a more sustainable basis for research and extension careers in FAS. Scholars will be well-trained and equipped to become a part of the USDA and strategic partners' workforce.

As I close, I want to say with confidence the 1890s are an indispensable resource. In fact, it is projected that the world's population will continue to grow and will reach nearly 10 Billion by 2050. The new 1890 scholarship program, is an investment in human capital for the food and agriculture industries. Supporting federal USDA capacity funding is an investment within an investment in addressing COVID-19 related issues, climate change and socially disadvantaged farmers. The 1890s is an investment in not only the food security and sustainability of the U. S., but globally as well.

Again, I would like to thank the House Agriculture Committee, specifically the Research Subcommittee, for the opportunity to testify here today. We look forward to working with you and our colleagues in the university community as we move toward the

reauthorizing of the Farm Bill. We urge you to use this moment, this opportunity, to invest in our 1890 universities. To invest in the future of our communities. And to invest in the people we serve. Thank you.”