



Makola M. Abdullah, Ph.D.
President

VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY
VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY, VIRGINIA 23806
P.O. Box 9001
(804) 524-5070
(804) 524-6506 FAX

Testimony of

Makola M. Abdullah, Ph.D.
14th President of Virginia State University And
Chair, Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities'
Council of 1890 Universities

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Committee

The Next Farm Bill: The 1890 Land-Grant System

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Thank you, Chairwoman Stacey Plaskett, Ranking Member Neal Dunn, members of the Committee, my fellow 1890 presidents and other guests appearing here today, for this opportunity to speak about the 1890 land-grant university system and the important role the 1890 universities play in the future of this nation. I am Dr. Makola M. Abdullah, 14th President of Virginia State University and current Chair of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities' Council of 1890 Universities.

The Council is comprised of presidents of the 19 black land-grant institutions. These institutions were born out of a time of racial separatism and exclusion, fueled by segregation and racial intolerance. They were built upon the pillars of access, opportunity, inclusive excellence and persistence.

The 1890s were founded to provide equitable education for all citizens, especially blacks and other minorities, in former slave-holding states. And they are distinguished from other institutions of higher learning not only because of their commitment to teach the practical disciplines of agriculture, engineering, and life sciences and nutrition to minority and under-served populations, but because of the important agricultural research they conduct on behalf of their state, the country and the globe. The 1890s are also unique because of their mission to extend their teaching beyond campus walls to the citizens of their respective states—especially to minorities and the socio-economically disadvantaged—so communities can prosper and grow.

Nearly four months ago, on August 30, 2020, the United States Congress recognized the 130th Anniversary of the signing of the Second Morrill Act, which created these 19 historically black land-grant universities. This was not only a celebration, but also an important reminder of the vital role these 19 universities continue to play today. Indeed,

the unprecedented challenges that 2020 has presented us with are tied to the very foundation of the 1890 land-grant system, and we are perfectly positioned, with your support, to be at the forefront of developing innovative solutions to them.

How, exactly?

To begin with, our 1890 land-grant forefathers held the belief that “men and women of talent and ability, regardless of their socioeconomic condition, can contribute to the common good through hard work and the opportunity to develop and prosper.” Today, important dialogues have reemerged about racial equity and how to ensure all Americans have an equal opportunity to flourish and succeed. Those are precisely the issues 1890 land-grant universities have a 130-year track record of successfully addressing, and we look forward to your continued support in helping us play an important role in the resolution of today’s equity issues.

Additionally, our country’s food supply chain, one of the most important sectors of the economy, was shaken to its foundation this year by COVID-19. While the impacts of the pandemic are still unfolding, it is already clear that necessary improvements need to be made to eliminate bottlenecks in farm labor, processing, transportation and logistics, as well as to address momentous shifts in consumer demand to protect our food and nutrition security. These improvements will require research, technology, and a trained workforce knowledgeable about agriculture, food production and safety, nutrition, and engineering—in other words, exactly what the 1890 land-grant system does best.

Our fragile food system must also be viewed through the lens that 2050 is only 30 years from now. By then, the world must feed two billion more people than it does today. According to the World Economic Forum, that is a 56% increase in the amount of food the world produced just ten years ago. The challenge is straightforward—today’s agriculture cannot deliver enough food to meet that need. How we address this challenge—to feed more people, safely, affordably and responsibly—will again require research, technology, and a trained workforce knowledgeable about agriculture, food production and safety, nutrition, and engineering—in other words, as I stated earlier, exactly what the 1890 land-grant system does best.

I join the other 1890 land-grant university presidents and the millions of Americans who have benefited from our institutions’ services in thanking you for your past support of the direct federal appropriations we receive for our Cooperative Extension and agricultural research programs. These appropriations stem from Sections 1444 and 1445 of the National Agricultural Research, Extension and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA) and constitute our most significant funding source. These appropriations also reflect the federal-state partnership managed by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)—USDA’s extramural science agency. But most importantly—especially to the citizens we serve—these specific appropriations have permitted our institutions to provide the services, solutions and economic successes to our states and our nation as a whole.

I stand before you today to thank you not only for this past support, but also for your future commitment to the growth and expansion of the 1890 land-grant system, as well. A commitment necessary to meet the challenges we've seen unfold this year and for those still to come tomorrow. A commitment that will further the economic prosperity and health of the families, businesses, and communities we serve. And a commitment that is contingent on your support of federal appropriation increases in FY 2021 and beyond.

The impact this commitment would make on our 1890 land-grant system is immense. But the positive impacts it would make on the people we serve—who we all serve—is even greater.

At my own institution, Virginia State University, I can share, for example, that the proposed appropriation increases to our FY 2021 budget and beyond would allow us to make great strides forward in agricultural research, teaching and outreach in the following ways.

Our food and agricultural research program at VSU is funded by the **1890 Evans-Allen Act of 1977**. Those Evans-Allen funds have led to hundreds of scientific breakthroughs in the areas of plant and soil sciences, food science, and small ruminants that include priorities for underserved populations. Those Evans-Allen funds have direct impacts on the citizens and businesses of our state...every day.

Take our beloved Sally Bell's Kitchen, a family-owned Richmond fixture since 1924, known for its box lunches, deviled eggs and, perhaps most famously, its potato salad. Everyone wanted their potato salad. Sally Bell's knew they could grow their business if they could make it available in stores, but their homemade side dish just didn't have the shelf-life to withstand shipping to and selling from stores. They knew the market was there, but they had no way to get to it.

Dr. Chyer Kim, a food scientist at VSU's Agricultural Research Station, researched ways to help this small business reach their goal to extend their product's shelf-life, while maintaining its legendary taste and keeping consumers safe. He landed on modified atmospheric packaging, or MAP, a technology that substitutes the atmospheric air inside a package with a protective gas mix that helps ensure a product will stay fresh for as long as possible. He worked with Sally Bell's Kitchen to transition to this method of packaging, and now, if you're ever in Richmond, I welcome you to stop by any number of grocery stores to pick up a pint.

I am sure three years ago when they were working on this project, Sally Bell's Kitchen had no idea that selling their products outside their restaurant's walls would play an important role in keeping their 96-year-old business afloat during the pandemic. But it has. And Sally Bell's Kitchen is just one of hundreds of stories of how 1890 land-grants like VSU leverage Evans-Allen funds to support the health and economic prosperity of our communities.

Another part of VSU's tripartite 1890s land-grant mission is its **Virginia Cooperative Extension program**. This program brings our university-based research and knowledge to the homes and businesses of Virginia's citizens—especially minorities and the socioeconomically

disadvantaged. This science-based, non-traditional education strengthens our food and agricultural industry, enhances the health of families and businesses, and fosters stable communities for underserved populations. It is this 1890's Cooperative Extension program that allowed U.S. Army veteran and stage-four cancer survivor Rob Davis to transition after 30 years in the military to a successful career as a small, niche-crop farmer in our state. After working with the VSU Small Farm Outreach Program for a few years, Davis learned about soil management, important agri-business strategies, and ways the different USDA agencies could assist him. Davis says he is grateful for the education and connections he has received from VSU's Small Farm Outreach Program. In fact, and I quote Mr. Davis, "I couldn't have done anything without them. It's impacted my whole family." Furthermore, as a result of his experiences with VSU's Extension program, Davis says his three sons have now developed their own interests in agriculture.

Yes, these are just two examples of the statewide impacts we at Virginia State University make every day with your past support. And we've made these strides, despite the 1890 land-grant system receiving only 25.8% of the Evans-Allen Program funds authorized by the federal government. While we're grateful for FY 2020 appropriations of \$67 million for agricultural research, we are reminded that that 25.8% falls significantly short of the 30% of the total Hatch Program funds authorized by the federal government to our 1862 land-grant partners, who also benefit from larger state matches.

Similarly, we are grateful for the FY 2020 budget appropriation of \$57 million to the 1890 land-grant system for its Cooperative Extension program. But we are also reminded that this appropriation represents only 18% of the congressional authorized 20% for 1890 Extension Program funds. Meanwhile, our 1862 land-grant partners enjoy a significantly larger percentage of total funding per their Smith-Lever Act allocation and larger state matches for Cooperative Extension.

Twenty-five-point-eight percent versus 30%. Eighteen percent versus 20%. I stand before you today to testify that on behalf of all of the 1890 land-grant presidents, I fully support a close in the gap of the funding percentage the 1890s receive for agricultural research and Extension compared to our 1862 counterparts. Closing the 4.2 percentage gap for agricultural research will bring our appropriation levels from \$67 million to \$77 million. Closing the 2% gap for 1890 Cooperative Extension programming will bring our appropriation levels from \$57 million to \$63 million.

The 1890 land-grant system was founded to be an equal partner in providing agricultural education, research and Extension to the citizens of our states, and we have repeatedly demonstrated the impacts we make in doing so. We are also perfectly positioned to address the unprecedented challenges our communities are facing today. Therefore, I and my fellow 1890 land-grant university presidents, fully support the proposed close to this funding gap.

Additionally, on behalf of my fellow 1890 land-grant university presidents, I fully support the following budget line item increases.

1. Increase FY 2020 appropriation for the 1890 Capacity Building Grants from \$23,009,800 to \$30 million.
2. Increase FY 2020 appropriation for the 1890s Facilities Grants Program from \$20.5 million to \$30 million.

3. Increase FY 2020 appropriation for the 1890s Facilities Grants Program from \$20.5 million to \$30 million.
4. Increase FY 2020 appropriation for three 1890s Centers of Excellence at \$10 million annually to six centers at \$10 million each for a total of \$60 million.
5. Increase the discretionary appropriation for Scholarships at the 1890 institutions for students who intend to pursue a career in the food and agricultural sciences for funds over FYs 2020 through 2023 to an additional \$40 million in discretionary funds.
6. And additionally, we would like to see a designation for funds for the 1890 institutions to address the healthcare infrastructure COVID-19 has demonstrated we do not have in place to care for our students on campus, as well the digital infrastructure we need to deliver assistance to individuals, families and communities during and after the pandemic.

Increases to these six 1890 budget line items will play a critical role in helping to attract and retain instructional faculty; creative and innovative researchers and extension specialists; and inquisitive food and agri-science scholars. They will also allow the 1890s to make long overdue upgrades to our aged 20th-century infrastructure, enabling us to deliver 21st-century programs and solutions to limited-resource, minority and under-served audiences.

In addition to these budget line increases, I am also asking the House Ag Committee to support the following:

1. Reinstitute the 1890/USDA Task Force, ensure membership of senior decision-making agency representatives, and include statutorily in the 2023 Farm Bill.
2. Increase the opportunity and support for greater access for 1890 institutions to become an integral part of institutions that receive SNAP-Ed funds. This is the largest federal nutrition education program that is targeted to poor and limited resource families. Presently, fewer than five 1890 institutions receive SNAP-Ed funds from respective states. Greater access to these funds will enhance our capacity to serve the underserved, hard-to-reach and underrepresented communities.
3. Examine the formula for distributing funds in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) to insure equitable funding to 1890 institutions.
4. The concepts put forward in the “The Justice for Black Farmers Act” introduced by Senators Booker, Warren and Gillibrand.
5. Remove the “matching” requirement from all USDA competitive programs for all minority institutions.
6. Encourage the states to invest in their 1890 institutions, via at minimum, the support of the required 1:1 match for 1890 federal capacity funds.

7. Establish a Post Doctorial Program for the 1890/Land-grant/HBCU universities with emphasis on Academics, Research and Extension/Community Development. And require each post Doc to specialize in at least two of the three major component areas. This would give students at minority institutions an opportunity to gain hands-on professional experience in two of these three areas, thereby making them more competitive with 1862 and private universities who routinely receive such exposure prior to taking full employment.

8. Reestablish the Workforce Diversity Summer Intern Program for College Students as a viable means for enhancing hands-on professional experience. This program was previously funded by USDA, but now could be funded between federal and state governments and private industries. Students throughout the university could be encourage/required to spend at least one summer with a federal agency and one with private industry. If a student is given the opportunity to spend more than one summer with an employer, then an offer of full employment would be expected.

In closing, I thank you for your continued commitment and support of Virginia State University and to the entire 1890 land-grant system. I assure you that an investment in the 1890s is an investment in our nation's future.