

Professional Agricultural Workers Journal

Volume 4
Number 1 *Professional Agricultural Workers
Journal*

Article 3

10-31-2016

Future of the Land Grant Universities: Challenges and Opportunities

L. Washington Lyons
Association of Extension Administrators, lwlyons@ncat.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://tuspubs.tuskegee.edu/pawj>



Part of the [Agriculture Commons](#), and the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lyons, L. Washington (2016) "Future of the Land Grant Universities: Challenges and Opportunities," *Professional Agricultural Workers Journal*: Vol. 4: No. 1, 3.
Available at: <https://tuspubs.tuskegee.edu/pawj/vol4/iss1/3>

This Reflections and Commentaries is brought to you for free and open access by Tuskegee Scholarly Publications. It has been accepted for inclusion in Professional Agricultural Workers Journal by an authorized editor of Tuskegee Scholarly Publications. For more information, please contact kcraig@tuskegee.edu.

PANELIST, PROFESSIONAL AGRICULTURAL WORKERS CONFERENCE, 2015

**FUTURE OF THE LAND GRANT UNIVERSITIES: CHALLENGES
AND OPPORTUNITIES**

***L. Washington Lyons¹**

¹Association of Extension Administrators, Greensboro, NC

Email of author: lwlyons@ncat.edu

I want to thank Dr. Walter Hill for the invitation to be a part of the 73rd Annual Professional Agricultural Workers Conference. It is my pleasure to be with you today and to serve as a member of this panel examining the challenges and opportunities facing the 1890 land-grant university system.

My comments will focus on the panel's topic, share the present situation and offer observations and opportunities for how the 1890 land-grant university system can move forward and ensure its future.

First, this has been a year of opportunities for the 1890 land-grant university system, as we celebrated the 125th Anniversary of the passage of the Second Morrill Act that led to the establishment of the 1890 land-grant system. I say "led to the establishment" of the 1890 system because the original intent of the Second Morrill Act was to expand funding for the 1862 land-grant universities and open them to all people. However, the Southern and border states would not agree to opening their universities to African Americans, so they created separate institutions for them that became known as the 1890 land-grant institutions.

The 125th Anniversary provided a forum for the 1890 land-grant universities to showcase their contributions to, and their ability and wherewithal to address the problems and issues faced at the local, regional, national and global levels. With the support of U.S. Rep. David Scott (D-Georgia), presidents and chancellors from six 1890 land-grant universities had an opportunity to testify before the House Agriculture Committee to share important concerns and issues impacting the 1890s. Issues and concerns raised during their testimonies have resulted in some Congressional members exploring additional solutions to the issues that were voiced.

During the 125th Anniversary Convocation, the Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, announced start-up funding to create two 1890 125th Anniversary Centers of Excellence. One center will focus on small farms, ranches and forest lands, and the other will focus on international engagement and development. Several USDA agencies have come together to provide funding for these two centers including Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Forest Service, Rural Development, Farm Service Agency, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service – International Services, and Foreign Agricultural Service.

The requests for proposals have been released for both centers, with the international proposals due December 15 and the small farm proposals due January 5, 2016. The centers will provide an opportunity for the 1890s to work with clusters of farmers and ranchers to increase the profitability of their operations and to prepare more students for international employment

opportunities. Moreover, this is a chance for the 1890s to acquire additional resources to meet the needs of the clients that are important to both USDA and the 1890 institutions.

But the 125th Anniversary celebration is over, and while it set the 1890s on a course to address the challenges and take advantage of available opportunities, much work remains if they are to continue their 125-year legacy. We must make sure we are staying true to our original roots all the while taking advantage of all available and new opportunities for success.

Priority one is that the 1890 land-grant universities continue to be accessible to a diverse group of students. The universities must competitively compete for the best and brightest students and ensure that there is a place for those students who may need additional academic support. These institutions must become more creative in recruiting more African Americans in the food and agricultural sciences, and other STEM-related areas. If we are going to have a diverse workforce, we must have students from diverse backgrounds graduating from our institutions, and they must graduate ready to offer leadership and contributions in a global society. Also, we must take steps to acquire scholarships, internships, and fellowships to help make a college education more affordable.

Second, in 1998, Congress passed the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act that required the 1890 land-grant universities to match their federal appropriations for research and Cooperative Extension at a 50 percent level by 2002. The 2002 Farm Bill included language that required a 100 percent federal-to-state match by 2007. Many of the 1890s have not been able to meet the one-to-one match requirement, so they have been requesting a waiver up to 50 percent of the match from the secretary of agriculture.

Based on a recent report from the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), in FY 2014, eight of the 19,1890 land-grant institutions received waivers from the secretary of agriculture for failing to meet the state matching for Cooperative Extension funding and 10 for Evans-Allen Research funding. In FY 2015, the waiver requests remained constant at eight for Cooperative Extension and declined from 10 to eight for Evans-Allen Research. The NIFA report further revealed that if the one-to-one match had been provided, the 1890 land-grant universities would have received approximately an additional \$19 million in FY'14 and \$17 million in FY15.

This is a real concern and NIFA is working with the 1890 institutions to clarify and address this matching-funds issue. Additionally, a bill has been introduced in Congress to address these concerns.

But it is not just getting the money that is an issue. To sustain our programs, we must ensure that we are making a difference and our programs have impact. In effect, our programs are helping individuals and communities solve many of the issues they are facing. It is not enough to just conduct the research, but the research should solve a major problem. In Cooperative Extension, conducting meetings that are well attended is not enough. We have to illustrate what action the participants implemented after they left the meeting or educational session. We must effectively communicate our program impact to help legislators understand the contributions we are making

to address critical issues. This makes good sense. State legislators want to know that the money they are spending is doing as it was intended to do, and we want to share that good news.

Equally important is that our program participants must convey to their state elected officials the value of our programs. They can best tell the story of how working with the 1890s changed their lives, increased their income, improved their profitability, focused their children, strengthened their communities and positively changed their health.

In addition to ensuring that we have and are sharing impact, collaborations and partnerships are important to the success and sustainability of the 1890 land-grant institutions. Developing partnerships can be challenging, but they are necessary, and we must take advantage of these opportunities. We must also go into these arrangements making sure that the partnerships are well defined with clearly articulated and understood expectations for all partners involved.

It is also necessary that we have both internal and external partners. Internally, the 1890s must explore genuine opportunities to partner with each other to enhance capacity and add value. As well, these internal partnerships must be mutually beneficial. It is also crucial for the 1890s to develop and strengthen partnerships with federal agencies, private sector businesses, and community-based organizations.

The 1890s must also have strong relationships and partnerships with the 1862 institutions, particularly in the states where they have both institutions. Collaboration is not always easy, but it is necessary to avoid duplication and to take advantage of the capacity of two land-grant universities to successfully address local and regional issues.

To remain viable and relevant, it is imperative that the 1890 land-grant universities take advantage of innovations in meeting client needs. Innovation in this context includes effectively using technology. This means more than just having the technology, but using the technology in such a manner that makes a positive impact on funding, personnel, program development and delivery and other relevant issues.

The 1890s must recognize that we have moved almost completely from formula-based to competitive funding for most agricultural programs. Developing a competitive proposal requires much time, and you are competing with some of the country's largest institutions. In 2015, Congress appropriated \$316 million in the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) to fund research, education, and Cooperative Extension grants to address key problems in agriculture. The 1890s have not been very successful in securing AFRI funding because of the limited number of faculty and the lack of capacity in many of the priority areas. According to NIFA, in 2014 the 1890s submitted 3.43 percent of the applications, were part of the 2.36 percent of the applications funded, which was 1.33 percent of total dollars awarded. The 1890s must consider more opportunities to partner and collaborate so that more applications can be submitted and more funding can be awarded.

With the demands for quality faculty and the reduction in resources to support higher education at all institutions, it is a challenge to recruit and retain quality faculty. The larger institutions are searching for the same caliber faculty as the smaller institutions. On some occasions, 1890

faculty are given fellowships or paid leave to spend time at a large research institution or a national lab to enhance their skills in a particular area. When they return, they are more marketable and are often recruited by those same institutions or labs. This is a challenge for the 1890 institutions because of a lack of resources to compete with the larger institution. However, this cannot discourage the 1890s from taking advantage of the professional development opportunities that are available to help faculty to enhance their skills. These exchanges also build campus capacity, serve as recruitment pipelines and offer student internships and fellowships.

Other opportunities for the 1890s are the SNAP-ED Program and the Foundation for Food and Agricultural Research (FFAR). SNAP-ED, which is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, has an education component to teach program recipients how to buy low-cost, healthy foods and live healthier lives. In 2014, SNAP-ED appropriations reached \$401 million. However, only five 1890s are participating in this program. This is a funding opportunity that the 1890s must take advantage of because many of them have the skills and know-how to reach this particular audience.

In 2014, Agriculture Secretary Vilsack established, and the 2014 Farm Bill authorized FFAR. Congress provided \$200 million for the Foundation that must be matched by non-federal sources. According to the Secretary, the Foundation's research will address issues such as plant and animal health, food safety, nutrition and health, renewable energy, natural resources, the environment, and food safety. The 1890s must be positioned to take advantage of this tremendous resource.

What could be considered a threat to the 1890 system is the great deal of interest by non-land-grant institutions in acquiring land-grant status. This is an enormous challenge for the existing land-grant institutions because the current resources are not increasing. If more institutions are granted land-grant status without additional funding, it will eventually erode the capacity of the existing 1890 land-grant universities to fulfill their land-grant mission.

If the 1890s are going to be successful in the future, they must ensure that the tripartite land-grant mission is embraced - teaching, research, and Cooperative Extension. All three must be viable. If the institution does not have students in the pipeline who are graduating equipped to fulfill the workforce needs, the research that is being conducted is not relevant, and Cooperative Extension programs are not addressing problems and issues impacting individuals, families, producers, communities, and businesses, we will not continue to exist in the future as a viable land-grant university system.

Policy makers and those investing in our programs are interested in a Return on Investment. If the programs are not making a difference, or no impact can be clearly shown, funding will not continue. It is that simple. It is more than just offering a program. This work is about addressing major problems and helping farmers, ranchers, young people, individuals, families and communities to have a healthier, more profitable life. At the end of the day, ladies and gentlemen, it is not about us. It is about the people we serve.

Thank you