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Testimony of

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Farm Bill 2023: Research Programs

Introduction

Thank you, Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman and members of the Committee for inviting me to participate in today's hearing. I am Felecia M. Nave, and I have the privilege of serving as the 20th and the first woman President of Alcorn State University, which is located in Lorman, Mississippi. I also serve on the Executive Committee of the 1890 Council of Presidents, and I am honored to speak to you today representing the 1890 University community.

On behalf of the 1890 Council, which is comprised of the 19 presidents and chancellors, I thank you for your past support and for your future commitment to the growth and expansion of the 1890 land-grant system, a commitment that furthers the educational attainment, economic prosperity and health of the families, businesses and communities that our institutions serve. The impacts are significant and the positive outcomes for the communities we serve, and the nation, are even greater.

Founded in 1871, Alcorn State University traces its heritage back to both the 1862 and 1890 Morrill Acts. Alcorn is unique among the 1890 institutions because it is the only HBCU founded with a land-grant purpose after the first Morrill Act, making it America's oldest public historically black land-grant institution. Alcorn is also Mississippi's second oldest state-supported university.

For 151 years, Alcorn has demonstrated its resilience and commitment to providing affordable and equitable educational opportunities to students and underserved communities that have limited access to education, healthcare, and economic mobility. It is because of the long

tradition of success of 1890s, such as Alcorn, that we continue to provide the talented diverse agriculture workforce that the nation needs now and in the future.

HBCUs were founded on principles of access, opportunity, inclusive excellence and persistence. 1890s are unique because our mission extends teaching beyond the campus to the communities we serve—especially to minorities and the socio-economically disadvantaged—so that these communities can also prosper and grow. As such, the future of agriculture is intrinsically intertwined with the future of the 1890 land-grant institutions.

The 2023 Farm Bill presents an excellent opportunity to build on key gains for the 1890s that were included in the 2018 Farm Bill. It is also an opportunity to increase the financial support in critical growth areas, scale initiatives that have proven to be effective and successful and address other areas of significance to the 1890 community, like the impacts of climate change and its impact on communities of color. Through the collaborative efforts of the *19 Strong*, utilizing a “systems-approach” has proven to be key to addressing the challenges that so many of our communities face in food insecurity, health disparities, and technology deserts. Research is being conducted on our campuses that quantify the needs of our community, provides technical assistance to socially disadvantaged ranchers and farmers, as well as informs and drives public policy decision-making.

The Work of the Policy Research Center and Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers

Through the leadership of members of this Committee and your colleagues in the House, specifically U.S. Representative Bennie Thompson, Alcorn State University serves as the lead institution for the federally funded *Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Policy Research Center*, which was authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill. The Center collaborates with other 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities as well as private, non-governmental organizations on research proposals, policy development, and funding to implement actionable items for the success of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

With recent funding from USDA, our impact in rural and underserved communities has been immediate and far-reaching. Recently, we collaborated with Centers at the University of Arkansas and Mississippi State University to identify best practices and then worked to develop training materials for land-grant extension staff and other agriculture professionals to use when

providing technical assistance to minority farmers related to asset preservation and to help clear title and to prevent the loss of additional heirs' property. The pilot train-the-trainer programs were attended by over 100 university agricultural professionals.

Our heirs' property research identified from a conservative estimate that there are 579,000 heirs' properties with a combined total acreage of 6.8 million, valued at \$47.3 billion, across 14 southern states. Texas and Mississippi report the greatest number of acres while the highest total market value can be found in North Carolina and Virginia.

Over the past 100 years, discrimination against Black farmers, in particular discrimination by the USDA in federal farm assistance and lending, has caused Black farmers to lose millions of acres of land, robbing these farmers and their families of billions of dollars of generational wealth. In 1920, there were nearly 1 million Black farmers in the United States. Today, due to this history of discrimination, it is estimated that there are less than 50,000 remaining Black farmers. Without some intervention, Black farmers will become extinct. We provided recommendations to USDA on implementing important provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act earlier this year to help address this problem and our universities look forward to working with Congress and the Administration on next steps.

Additionally, the Policy Research Center co-hosted a strategy meeting between USDA and 1890 land-grant universities leadership to discuss how the 1890 universities could support USDA's priorities and to identify resources needed to provide that support. All nineteen 1890 universities were represented, and participants heard from key leaders, including U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and USDA Deputy Secretary Jewel Bronaugh.

We have collected input from over 5,000 socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers across the country to understand their challenges and concerns and developed policy recommendations for the 2023 Farm Bill to address those concerns. We plan to share policy recommendations within the next month with the Committee and stakeholders. Your continued support ensures that the great work of the Policy Research Center is continued.

Successes from the 2018 Farm Bill and next steps.

The 1890s are very grateful for the funding provided to support scholarships for students interested in pursuing careers in agriculture and agriculture-related fields that was included in the

2018 Farm Bill. For example, Alcorn State University has received approximately \$750,000 annually for the program. This scholarship program supports 75 high-achieving scholars, including a 2020 Gates Scholar. My colleagues at the other 18 Universities have also implemented their scholarship programs and even with the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic presented, they were able to successfully attract hundreds of new and future agriculture and food scientists to their programs. This new funding helps address access barriers that many of our students face in attending college. We share best practice strategies that support the recruitment, retention, and development of well-rounded scholars among the 19 institutions. Your continued support for and the permanent expansion of the scholarship program will have a significant impact for our students, their families and for the long-term benefit of the country.

Additionally, the funding that was provided in the 2018 Farm Bill to establish the six Centers of Excellence, of which Alcorn partners in two of the Centers, supports innovative research and programming at our institutions. Again, COVID-19 presented challenges with standing up these Centers but I am pleased to report that all six Centers in: (1) Student Success and Workforce Development; (2) Health Wellness and Quality of Life; (3) Farming System Rural Prosperity and Economic Sustainability; (4) Global Food Security & Defense; (5) Natural Resources, Energy and Environment and (6) Emerging Internet of Things (IOT) Technologies for Smart Agriculture are up and running and researchers across our 19 Universities are partnering to further our work. One institution is the lead on each Center, and it is our hope to increase the total number of Centers of Excellences in the 2023 Farm Bill and that at some point, have each of the 19 Universities lead a Center of Excellence.

Congress also included in the 2018 Farm Bill a reporting requirement that states share with USDA the one-to-one match requirement they are supposed to meet. Unfortunately, several states are still falling short of this requirement and the resulting underfunding continues to undermine the federal investments that Congress is making available to our universities. In FY 2020, the 1890 Universities were not matched by states by approximately \$10 million. In FY 2019, the gap was approximately \$8.5 million. And, in FY 2018, it was roughly \$8.7 million. So, that is close to \$30 million in underfunding from the states in just those 3 fiscal years.

We would like to work with the Committee to strengthen the reporting requirement and perhaps have the states, not the Universities, apply to USDA for a non-matching waiver request

and have the state certify why they are unable to meet the one-to-one matching requirement. Additionally, the requirement could also have the state attest whether they are able to make any other matching requirement for federal funding for any state supported universities.

Our Extension Efforts, Rural Development and Infrastructure Needs

There is a great need for increased investment to grow the footprint and outreach of the extension agents at the 1890s. These agents are embedded in our communities and serve as boots on the ground. With more resources, our agents would be able to serve more communities. Alcorn State University's Extension Program is working to improve the quality of life for Mississippi's small and limited resource farmers, ranchers, rural communities, and underserved audiences through education and extension outreach during an unparalleled health crisis and economic distress. Now, more than ever, the Extension Program is needed to translate research into action and provide innovative solutions from research laboratories to local rural communities. We must develop much-needed pipeline programs and projects, which will be useful in ensuring that the work of 1890 land-grant institutions remain viable.

As you know, our 19 Universities are mainly in the rural areas of our states and the country. We train our students for jobs and careers and many of them have to leave our communities to find them. As we look to the 2023 farm bill, the 1890 Universities would like to work with Congress and this committee to find ways, through the USDA Rural Development Agency, to bring economic development opportunities to the surrounding areas of our schools. The goal would be to create meaningful job prospects for our students to consider working and living in the communities we serve.

Similarly, on our main campuses and at our extension facilities, we need resources to upgrade and repair our facilities. In October, I joined over 80 of my fellow HBCU Presidents and Chancellors in sending a letter to House and Senate leadership asking them to prioritize Senator Chris Coons' and Senator Tim Scott's IGNITE infrastructure legislation. For many decades, the infrastructure at our universities has been underfunded by billions of dollars. This bipartisan and bicameral bill would help provide students with state-of-the-art research laboratories, reliable high-speed internet access, and adequate housing. We are pleased that infrastructure investments at our universities were included in the President's fiscal year 2023 budget request and hope that Congress will find a way to complement the work that this Committee will do with the Farm Bill

on infrastructure. These much-needed investments in our agriculture, and other, facilities and in expanding our capacity equips our faculty and staff with the necessary tools to attract new students as well as to expand our outreach and educational programming to effectively train the current and future generations of agricultural leaders. The added resources also support in attracting faculty, staff, and researchers who contribute to innovation and the advancement of agriculture science. The funding is particularly critical for smaller land-grant institutions charged with the unique mission of addressing the needs of underrepresented communities, as well as of producers and landowners with limited access to technology and resources.

Additionally, strengthening our facilities, technical, and research capabilities also positions our programs to leverage and secure more industry partners. For example, several of our universities have been able to leverage the new funding that was provided in the 2018 Farm Bill to attract funding from major corporations to help further our work. There is much more to be done in expanding public-private partnerships, but better infrastructure investments are a key component.

Lastly, artificial intelligence, drone technology and vertical farming are a few of the emerging fields in sustainable agriculture that 1890 students and researchers are capable and prepared to contribute to the advancement of science in strengthening the nation's agricultural landscape. However, for our institutions to remain competitive in these emerging areas, increased funding is required in order to support the modernization and expansion of our research and technology infrastructure and to build capacity. Congress has realized this critical importance with the recent passage of the CHIPS Act. We want to be a partner in those efforts and the work of this Committee, and the resources provided in the Farm Bill can help make that a reality.

Conclusion

I am grateful for this opportunity to address the Committee. On behalf of the dedicated faculty, staff, and students at Alcorn State University and throughout the 1890 University system, I thank you for your continuous support of our institutions and agriculture. I look forward to answering any questions you may have for me today. Thank you.