Applications open for 1890 National Scholars .

ARD UPdates

THE ASSOCIATION OF 1890 RESEARCH DIRECTORS

"To advance transformative agricultural research that drives innovation, strengthens regional and national food systems and addresses global challenges in sustainable agriculture and food security."

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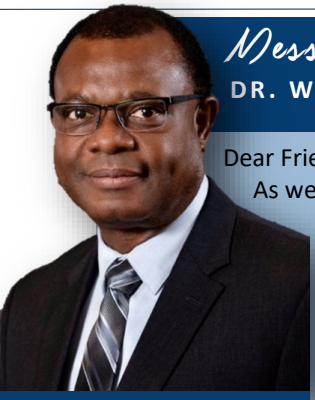

DR. W. WHITTAKER

Message from the Chair

DR. WESLEY WHITTAKER

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

As we enter the second month of 2026, I express my sincere gratitude again for your continued support of ARD and the 1890 community writ large. Despite our challenges, I carry a deep sense of appreciation and renewed optimism for the future.

Your support enables me to begin each day committed to work I care deeply about - serving our community and striving to make a meaningful and lasting difference. I cannot thank you enough for that trust and encouragement.

February is federally recognized as Black History Month and provides an important opportunity to continue celebrating the 135th anniversary of the Second Morrill Act. Black History Month honors the achievements of African Americans and recognizes their central role in shaping the American story. What began as "Negro History Week," led by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, became a nationally recognized observance in 1976, and every U.S. president since has designated February as Black History Month.

As the 1890 community observes Black History Month, we are reminded of the enduring contributions of African Americans—and of the responsibility we share to advance access, equity and opportunity. This commitment guides our advocacy priorities for the upcoming Farm Bill, including:

- Reauthorization of Evans-Allen programs, with an increase in the Hatch share from 30% to 40% and authorization of graduate tuition and fees.
- Reauthorization of the 1890 Extension Program, increasing the Smith-Lever share from 20% to 40%.
- Reauthorization of the 1890 Capacity Building Grants, Facilities Improvement Program, Centers of Excellence and Scholarships for Students at 1890 Institutions.

Since Aug. 30, 1890, the 1890 land-grant universities have made lasting contributions to research, education and Extension, strengthening local, regional,and national food systems.

While we honor this proud legacy, we must not be-

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Sang examines making Southern foods healthy

Traditional southern dishes — hearty, tasty and as comforting as a hug from your favorite grandmother — have been enjoyed by families for generations. But there's a downside to this down-home deliciousness: These long-time favorites are extremely unhealthy.

Food researcher Shengmin Sang, Ph.D., will use a four-year, $1,046,500 USDA award to create a healthier version of the traditional Southern diet. But instead of urging people to give up their long-time favorites, Sang — whose research specializes in a "food as medicine" paradigm — will investigate whether a diet that blends Southern and Mediterranean foods can be feasible, sustainable and ultimately able to prevent chronic diseases.

"It's unlikely that you can completely change people's entire diet. Admittedly, that's the most challenging part of this project," said Sang, the Distinguished Professor of Functional Foods in the North Carolina A&T University College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences. "But the idea is to create a healthier 'Mediterranean

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Dr. Sang in his laboratory.

Congress approved the Evans-Allen Act of 1977 to provide capacity funding for food and agricultural research at the 1890 land-grant universities and Tuskegee University (the 1890 Institutions) similar to that provided to the 1862 universities under the Hatch Act of 1887. Research conducted under the Evans-Allen Program has led to hundreds of scientific breakthroughs of benefit to both the unique stakeholders of the 1890 institutions and the nation as a whole. The Evans-Allen Program has been extremely important in allowing the 1890 institutions to attract top-notch scientists to their campuses, conduct high-quality and innovative research and become more fully integrated within the land-grant system.

This edition, includes impacts from the 1890 research programs submitted by scientists at The University Arkansas at Pine Bluff and Southern University..

UAPB studies using dietary supplements to replace drugs

The overuse of antibiotics and dewormers in animal production has led to food safety concerns and the development of parasite resistance, said Dr. Emmanuel K. Asiamah, associate professor for UAPB's Department of Agriculture. Conventional control programs that rely solely on chemical administration are becoming increasingly ineffective.

To address this challenge, Asiamah has initiated a two-year study to evaluate the effects of natural immunomodulators, namely sericea lespedeza and walnut hull powder, on the innate immunity of sheep. This research aims to improve sheep's overall health by enhancing gastrointestinal function and immune response through dietary supplementation. The project is a collaborative effort between researchers at UAPB and animal scientists with the USDA Agricultural Research Service.

Researchers evaluating sheep that are part of Dr. Asiamah's project at UAPB.

"Our research seeks to identify effective management practices that reduce the reliance on antibiotics and dewormers, contributing to improved animal health and welfare, while also addressing food safety concerns," Asiamah said. "As animals develop resistance to conventional antibiotics and anthelmintics, farmers face diminishing returns on these costly inputs while consumers face increasing health concerns about antibiotic residues in food products. By identifying natural alternatives to chemical treatments, we're providing farmers with cost-effective, sustainable solutions that maintain animal health and productivity while reducing dependence on chemicals that lose effectiveness over time."

For Arkansas's substantial livestock industry, these alternatives could significantly reduce production costs while meeting the growing consumer demand for products raised with fewer chemical interventions, he said.

The natural alternatives Asiamah's team is researching directly contribute to safer food on consumers' tables.

"When livestock producers are able to maintain animal health using fewer antibiotics and chemical treatments, it results in fewer potentially harmful residues in the meat, milk and other animal products consumers rely on," he said. "Our research is designed to support both sides of the food system—helping farmers raise animals more sustainably while ensuring consumers have access to food that is safer and better aligned with the growing demand for naturally raised products. This work serves as a critical link between agricultural production practices and public health outcomes that impact everyone who purchases animal products."

Asiamah added that the research lays the groundwork for farming practices that strike a balance between productivity and sustainability, advancing long-term food security and environmental stewardship.

The natural alternatives being tested directly contribute to safer food on consumers' tables. When livestock producers can maintain animal health with fewer antibiotics and chemical treatments, there are fewer potentially harmful residues in the meat, milk and other animal products consumed by the public.

This research supports both ends of the food system – helping farmers produce animals more sustainably while providing consumers with safer, more naturally raised products. The project paves the way for farming practices that balance productivity with sustainability, supporting food security and environmental stewardship goals. These natural approaches could help U.S. producers remain competitive in markets that increasingly demand products raised with minimal chemical inputs, positioning American farmers at the forefront of sustainable livestock innovation.

For more information, please contact Dr. Emmanuel K. Asiamah, Department of Animal Science, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff at asismahe@uapb.edu or 870-575-8000.

Southern refines its first table wine collection

The Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center released its first wine, the 801 Collection, during the *Vino on the Bluff* scholarship fundraising event in October 2025. This milestone demonstrates the Ag Center's capacity to develop specialty crop production systems adapted to Louisiana's humid subtropical climate while strengthening workforce expertise and institutional infrastructure in grape and wine production.

Viticulture research supporting the 801 Collection focused on selecting regionally adapted grape cultivars, developing disease mitigation strategies and tailoring vineyard management practices to Louisiana growing conditions. Harvest decisions were guided by phenological development and berry chemistry to ensure optimal fruit quality for winemaking. All stages of fermentation, stabilization and quality evaluation were conducted in-house by the viticulture and enology team.

Building on this foundation, the SU Ag Center is expanding vineyard acreage by six acres and developing a dedicated winery facility to support advanced enology research. The expanded vineyard will integrate precision agriculture tools to improve vine performance, disease modeling and fruit quality. Planned enhancements include the use of proximal and remote sensing technologies—such as handheld and canopy-level sensors and UAV-based imagery—to monitor vine vigor, nutrient status, water stress and disease pressure. These data-driven approaches will support long-term evaluation of cultivar adaptability, vine health and yield stability under Louisiana conditions.

In parallel, continued development of winery research capacity will focus on optimizing fermentation strategies, improving wine stability and sensory quality and linking vineyard variability to wine composition. This systems-based approach will strengthen research on fruit quality, postharvest handling and value-added processing while expanding training opportunities for stakeholders in modern viticulture and enology research.

The public release of the 801 Collection enhanced stakeholder engagement, increased the visibility of land-grant research impacts, generated resources to support student scholarships and long-term program sustainability.

For additional information on the SU Ag Center's Vineyard contact Dr. Devaiah Kambiranda Associate Vice Chancellor for Research, at devaiah_kambiranda@suagcenter.com.

AI helps farmers manage ranching operations

The Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center is leading the way in smart ranching innovation through its Southern University Natural (SUN) Beef Program, which now manages the first beef herd in the United States to adopt electronic rumen bolus technology at herd scale.

Phase I has produced strong data demonstrating how continuous internal monitoring can transform livestock production. The e-bolus system tracks internal temperature, rumen activity, hydration, stress levels, calving progression and breeding readiness in real time, allowing earlier veterinary intervention, reduced mortality and improved herd performance. Precision deworming research has further shown that bolus-linked alerts improve treatment timing while reducing drug use and slowing resistance. Ongoing AI modeling work is enhancing early-disease prediction, calving-risk identification and feed-efficiency assessments to support data-driven herd management.

The next phase of Smart Ranching Technology will expand sensor-based livestock intelligence by incorporating AI vision systems for weight estimation, lameness detection and behavior analysis, along with autonomous feeder systems and autonomous vehicles to reduce labor requirements and increase operational efficiency. Additionally, satellite-enabled ear tags with geolocation tracking and real-time mineral-status monitoring will provide continuous insight into grazing patterns, pasture use and nutrient intake.

Together, these innovations form a fully integrated precision-livestock platform that improves food security, enhances animal welfare and strengthens production capacity. This work positions the Southern University Ag Center as a global partner for countries seeking modern, scalable livestock systems that support beef, dairy, small ruminant and mixed-species agriculture across diverse environments.

For additional information on the SU Ag Center's smart ranching research contact Dr. Mallory Tate, Research Assistant Professor and Attending Veterinarian, at mallory_tate@suagcenter.com.

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South' diet, which is based on traditional culture, but modified so individuals are more likely to stick with it."

Sang's latest project is funded by the USDA's AFRI. Sang is one of only two faculty members at N.C. to receive a standard AFRI grant, and he's the only A&T professor to win multiple AFRI awards. Sang will lead this project from his Laboratory for Functional Foods and Human Health at the North Carolina Research Campus in Kannapolis. He will collaborate with two nutrition researchers from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Gillings School of Global Public Health.

Sang's project will attempt to modify the traditional Southern diet, which is rich in saturated fats and sugary foods and a major contributor to rising national rates of obesity and other serious metabolic disorders. The Mediterranean diet, meanwhile, is a generic term for foods common to Italy, Greece and other regions that border the Mediterranean Sea. This plant-forward diet is high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and other minimally processed foods. Extra virgin olive oil is the primary source of healthy fat, while fish and poultry generally replace red meat. Multiple studies have shown that this approach can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

The centerpiece of Sang's project is a four-week clinical trial involving 96 prediabetic participants. Half of the participants will eat their regular diet. The other half will eat a Mediterranean South diet, with healthier ingredients substituted for the high-fat, high-sugar and ultra-processed staples of the traditional Southern diet. Participants will receive ingredients and recipes to help them ease into a familiar, yet different way of eating that could help prevent chronic diseases.

Sang will investigate the potential health benefits of this modified Southern diet. He'll focus especially on whether this modified diet can reduce carbonyl stress, which can result from a buildup of harmful compounds from sugar and lipid metabolism and lead to chronic inflammation, diabetes and other diseases. His project also will identify genetic signatures associated with changes in carbonyl stress and genetic indicators that might indicate increased susceptibility to carbonyl stress among Black participants.

DR. SHENGMIN SANG

Sang's research will travel far beyond his functional foods lab. This project will train students and clinical trial participants to be ambassadors who spread the word about the health benefits of the Mediterranean South diet to their family and friends.

"We're not just providing them with healthy food. We're also training them to select healthier food and prepare it in healthier ways so individuals can cook better for themselves and their families," Sang said. "Then we want them to tell their friends that their health numbers are better and they're feeling better. "

Sang said this project will dig into areas largely unexplored by other researchers. He said that most studies of the Mediterranean diet have used questionnaires and epidemiological studies, not the feeding trial that Sang will conduct. In addition, Sang is one of only a few researchers investigating the mechanisms of carbonyl stress, a relatively new frontier in the research into chronic diseases.

This project also represents a new direction for Sang's research.

"Mostly, I work either on a single food or a specific bioactive compound. This time, I'm working on a dietary pattern that's more translational and more applicable to real life," Sang said. "Here, we're not using a cell line to study something. We're using real people and a real diet, and we're training students and community participants to help us discover nutrition-based strategies to combat metabolic diseases.

"This research also relates to my community, and as a resident of North Carolina and the South, I feel obligated to help. While this project will be really challenging, I'm really excited about it."

Whittaker . . . From Page 1

come complacent. We stand on the shoulders of giants and now carry the torch for the next generation of 1890 leaders and scientists.

In support of this mission, ARD continues its close collaboration with AEA and the Council of 1890 Administrative Heads. Last month, we convened the sixth annual joint business meeting, hosted by Southern University. The meeting fostered a productive dialogue focused on robust discussions of programs, initiatives, budget priorities and the path forward for the 1890 system. Leaders from the 1890 Universities Foundation, NIFA and some private partners were also actively engaged. Thank you all for the spirited discussion, valuable feedback and excellent input. And of course, for your generous contributions in support of our work

Looking ahead, the CARET/BAA Washington Conference is quickly approaching and will officially begin on Sunday, Feb. 22. The theme of this year's conference, "*Sustaining the Land-grant Promise: Deep Roots, Strong Futures,"* is both timely and compelling. It is critical that the 1890 community be fully engaged as we connect with policymakers, share our impact stories and advance advocacy for food and agricultural research.

As we move forward, we remain focused, unified and committed to advancing the 1890 agenda with purpose and resolve.

Upcoming proposal requests, calls for nominations, funding

INRPHA PILOT PROPOSALS

With funding from the National Institute on Aging (NIA), the Interdisciplinary Network on Rural Population Health and Aging (INRPHA) invites investigators to submit proposals for pilot research that enhances understanding of the multilevel and multidimensional drivers of rural health and aging trends and disparities, with emphasis on within-rural heterogeneity. INRPHA seeks proposals that will advance science in this important area and that will lead to fundable NIH grant proposals. Pilot projects will begin as early as July 1, 2026.

Proposals are due Friday, April 10 at 5 p.m, CT. Click for the request for proposal factsheet.

Direct questions to the INRPHA PI, Carrie Henning-Smith, at henn0329@umn.edu.

INRPHA is funded by NIA grant 1R24AG089064 and led by Carrie Henning-Smith (University of Minnesota), Leif Jensen (Penn State), Shannon Monnat (Syracuse University), John Green (Southern Rural Development Center/ Mississippi State University), and Lori Hunter (University of Colorado Boulder.

agINNOVATIONS' NOMINATIONS

Dr. Chandra Reddy, agInnovation Chair, has announced that the 2026 Call for Award Nominations is now available on the ESCOP STC website. Please review the nomination guidelines and consider nominating deserving individuals. Note that the Research Innovation Awards include separate categories recognizing scientists at three different career stages.

Descriptions of each award and corresponding evaluation criteria are hyperlinked as follows:
2026 Excellence in Research Innovation Awards Guidelines
2026 Excellence in Multistate Research Award Guidelines
2026 Excellence in Leadership Award Guidelines

APLU LEADERSHIP NOMINATIONS

APLU Food Systems annually recognizes a leader who has made an extraordinary impact on the food system through leadership and service and who exemplifies the core principles established by the Food Systems Leadership Institute (FSLI), including personal leadership, organizational leadership and food systems leadership. The award also recognizes the leadership, innovation, engagement and service that APLU promotes through its programs.

The APLU Food Systems Leadership Award will be presented at its annual meeting in November. The recipient will be invited to address the current cohort of FSLI Fellows during one of the webinar sessions.

The award's criteria, the directions for submitting it and the nomination form can be found on the FSLI website.

To get a sense of the caliber of the person who would be competitive for this award, you can visit the **FSLI website**.

The deadline for submittal is Feb. 27, 2026. Don't hesitate to contact Dr. Sarah Kotzian, FSLI program manager, with any questions.

LEAD21 NEW COHORT

The LEAD21 program is accepting applications for the next group of leaders. Individuals from land-grant, NARRU institutions and USDA are encouraged to participate.

Program goals are for participants to:

- Enhance the application of skills and knowledge learned in four core leadership development areas (change, conflict, communication and collaboration).
- Develop a peer leadership network to enhance personal leadership practice, collaboration and diversity of perspective.
- Develop and implement an individual leadership development process.

Three on-site sessions will be held - Session I: June 7-12, 2026, Chicago, IL; Session II: Oct. 5-8, 2026, Denver, CO and Session III: Feb. 22-26, 2027 – Atlanta, GA.

For more information and to apply online, the link is here.

USDA 1890 NATIONAL SCHOLARS PROGRAM

USDA is now accepting applications for the 1890 National Scholars Program, which encourages students at 1890 land-grant universities to pursue careers in food, agriculture and natural resource sciences. The application deadline is **March 8**. For more information, click.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD RESEARCH INITIATIVE FUNDING

NIFA is soliciting applications under two Program Area Priorities:

- **Strengthening Agricultural Systems (A9201)**
  - New Uses and Expanding Markets for Agriculture and Forestry Products.
  - Solutions to Pests and Diseases of Plants or Animals.
  - Combating Food and Diet-Related Chronic Diseases.
- **Artificial Intelligence for K-12 Food and Agricultural Sciences (A9231)**

The letter of intent is due Feb. 26, 2026, with applications due on March 26, 2026 (A9201) and April 23, 2026 (A9231).

The Anticipated Program Funding is 140,000,000.

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1890 Land Grant Universities

Alabama A&M University
Alcorn State University
Central State University
Delaware State University
Florida A&M University
Fort Valley State University
Kentucky State University
Langston University
Lincoln University
North Carolina A&T State University
Prairie View A&M University
South Carolina State University
Southern University and A&M College
Tennessee State University
Tuskegee University
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff
University of Maryland Eastern Shore
Virginia State University
West Virginia State University

ARD Updates is published monthly by the Association of Research Directors. To suggest articles, contact Dr. Alton Thompson at athompson1@ncat.edu

ARD 2026 Symposium updates

REGISTRATION **is now CLOSED.**
HOTEL REGISTRATION | The Hyatt Regency room block is **Sold Out**. Please check the ARD Webpage for nearby, walkable hotels.
EXHIBITS | Each 1890 campus is invited to display one university exhibit FREE. Additional exhibits and non-1890 exhibitors must pay the fee of $3,000 by Feb. 6, 2026. All exhibitors, including the 1890s, must submit the Exhibit Registration Form by the deadline. To become an Exhibitor: Attached Form.
MORRISON-EVANS, MAYBERRY HILL, & MAYES AWARDS | The application deadlines for the Morrison-Evans Outstanding Scientist Award and the B.D. Mayberry Young Scientist Award, the Walter Hill Distinguished Service Award and the McKinley Mayes Mentoring Award is Jan. 16, 2026. External reviewers, i.e. NIFA National Program Leaders will evaluate the applications. Access the applications here and criteria information.

For additional information contact: Alton Thompson, ARD Executive director; (336) 285-2955

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY | The College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources | Cooperative Extension. Program Leader for 4-H and Youth Development. The 4-H Program Leader provides statewide leadership, management and supervision to county Extension agents and program specialists to ensure the needs of underrepresented populations are addressed and applies a broad perspective and understanding of subject matter and priority issues impacting families and communities relative to agriculture in accordance to NIFA's

ALCORN STATE UNIVERSITY, School of Agriculture and Applied Sciences, Alcorn State University Employment Opportunities | Chairperson, Human Development and Family Science

SOUTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY, CAFCS, Department of Agriculture, Assistant/Associate Professor in Animal Science, Assistant/Associate Professor in Natural Resource Management.

ALCORN STATE UNIVERSITY, College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences. Associate Director of Extension, **Alcorn State University Employment Opportunities | Associate Director for Extension**

CALENDAR

USDA 102ND ANNUAL AGRICULTURAL OUTLOOK FORUM, Feb. 19-20. Attendees can make online reservations or manage existing reservations using your event's booking website.
Visit booking website

2026 BAA SUMMER MEETING | Portland, OR | July 13-15, Attendees include appointed and elected leadership representing a BAA Section or Member of a BAA Committee. This meeting will be held from July 13th to July 15th in Portland, OR. ECOP and the Budget and Advocacy Committee will be meeting starting at 3 p.m. PST on the 13th. The meeting will begin that night for the rest of the leadership groups at the Joint Opening Reception at 5:30 p.m. PST. The meeting will conclude on the 15th at 11 a.m. PST. Hotel booking information and a full agenda is pending and will be available soon.

Join a free webinar featuring a panel of experts from the **RURAL SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY** as they explore how today's evolving policy landscape is shaping rural well-being and opportunity. We'll explore the impacts of the "big beautiful bill," the recent federal shutdown, and state legislative sessions, highlighting how these developments create both challenges and openings for rural communities across the United States. Register here.

2026 NATIONAL EXTENSION AND RESEARCH ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS CONFERENCE (NERAOC) will be held March 23-26 in Kansas City, MO. Learn more about the conference, hotel and travel information here.

TUSKEGEE UNIVERSITY | 2026 Amazon Web Services–Machine Learning University Research & Teaching Symposium. *Contact: Kawana McGough, Division of Development and Alumni Engagement*