

01

PROCESS OF RESEARCH

ARD Updates

ASSOCIATION OF 1890 RESEARCH DIRECTORS

July 2025, Vol. 16, Issue 7

ARD and agInnovation South strengthen relationships

The 1890 Research and agInnovation South directors convened to strengthen coordinated activities and joint initiatives during the Southern Mini Land-Grant Conference (June 9–12), jointly hosted by the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville and the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff.

A conference highlight was the presentation of the “Collaborations that Work” study, commissioned by both associations with support from the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC). Dr. John Green, SRDC Director, shared findings from 18 interviews across eight states. The study focused on:

1. Strengthening 1890–1862 land-grant collaborations.
2. Understanding faculty interaction and communication.
3. Identifying best practices and gaps.

Highlighting barriers and strategies for improvement.

Key Findings included:

Indicators of Success:

- Jointly funded proposals.
- Interdisciplinary research.
- Leveraging institutional strengths.
- Community trust-building.
- Student engagement and shared resources.

Challenges:

- Difficulty identifying research partners.
- Administrative barriers (e.g., sponsored programs, budgeting).
- Distance between campuses and

See Collaboration on Page 7



DR. JOHN GREEN

Message from the Chair / DR. WESLEY WHITTAKER

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Summer is officially here, bringing with it an intense heat wave across much of the United States. Please take precautions to stay safe and cool, however you can. Whether it's a pool, lake, river, the ocean—or even your trusty bathtub—find water and stay refreshed.

As you stay cool and hydrated this season, know that ARD remains active and engaged throughout the summer. Our participation spans several key events, including the Southern Mini Land-Grant Conference (see article above), the Association for Communication Excellence (ACE), the annual summer conference of the Association of Extension Administrators (AEA) and the BAA Summer Leadership Conference.

Meanwhile, we continue to advocate for FY 2026 appropriations and prepare to commemorate the 135th Anniversary of the Second Morrill Act of 1890.

ARD was honored to participate in and serve as a Platinum Sponsor of the 2025 ACE Conference, held June 16–18 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This annual event brought together leaders and professionals committed to advancing excellence in agricultural and Extension communications.

Representatives from 11 of the 1890 land-grant universities—including directors and communications specialists—were actively engaged in this well-organized, timely and content-rich conference. The sessions provided valuable insights on innovative communication strategies, digital engagement, storytelling and the evolving role of communications in supporting land-grant missions.

The conference theme, “Say Cheese,” added an enjoyable and lively flair to the event, with clever cheese puns sprinkled generously throughout the sessions, keeping spirits high and energy strong.

ACE 2024–2025 President ChaNaè Bradley, senior communications specialist at Fort Valley State University, served as an inspiring and dynamic leader. During the conference, she reflected on a year marked by intentional leadership, meaningful

See Whittaker Page 8



DR. W. WHITTAKER



Visit us online at www.umes.edu/ard



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 Langston and Florida A&M universities.

Langston evaluates expanding goat and lamb markets

Although Oklahoma's demand for lamb and goat meat has grown steadily over the past 15 years, they are not widely available in local grocery stores; additionally, most of the meats consumed are imported.

A marginal group of local producers is engaged in production; however, they face challenges connecting with consumers and expanding their market reach. Langston University's research program, which has long been involved in production agriculture, recently added new modules to its

management; hence, they are missing valuable opportunities to equilibrate supply and demand locally. Understanding what consumers desire and how they make purchasing decisions is key to growing the local lamb and goat meat market, supporting rural communities, and boosting domestic trade balances.

Listening to the Consumers through Market Survey: To better understand market conditions, including consumer behavior. Langston's research team conducted a comprehensive survey across all 77 counties in Oklahoma using Qualtrics, an online survey platform, and reached over 500 households representing various demographic groups. Among many questions, Oklahomans were asked about their awareness of goat meat, their willingness to buy, and what factors influence their decisions, such as price, product presentation and safety assurances.

Data were analyzed using quantitative techniques. The results of the research study not only told a powerful story but inspired positive outcomes for producers, marketers and consumers: 73% of respondents indicated that they would purchase goat meat if it were available in their grocery stores; price specials made a big difference in purchasing decisions; food safety matters to consumers and were more likely to purchase goat meat when they knew it had USDA inspections or safety assurances; providing recipes to consumers, tenderness and ease of cooking were top reasons for satisfaction.

College graduates were significantly more likely to consume goat meat, highlighting the need for consumer education across all groups. Interestingly, unlike in past studies, ethnicity was not a significant predictor of goat meat purchases. Dr. Nirodha De Silva, assistant professor and project director, concludes that demand is no longer limited to specific cultural communities but is expanding into the mainstream market—a promising sign for Oklahoma producers.

Market Impact: Producers, Consumers, and Communities: By implementing results from this study with ongoing work in Langston's Product Development Center (directed by Dr. Carlos Alvarado), outreach has been made with local communities to inform them about the opportunities available in the local lamb and goat meat markets.

The Langston University Conference on Sustainable Agriculture, including Goats and Sheep, was used as one of the avenues to expand the knowledge base. Additionally, a Lamb and Goat Meat Festival in Oklahoma City in 2024



Dr. Nirodha De Silva, Assistant Professor & Program Leader, Agribusiness and Applied Economics (right), Dr. Carlos Alvarado, Director of Product Development Development (left) Sherman Lewis School of Agriculture and Applied Sciences

research activities. It bridges the lamb and goat meat producer-consumer gap while enhancing economic opportunities.

Without precise data on production decisions, consumer demand, and buying behaviors, marketers lack infor-

FLORIDA A&M AND MUSCADINE GRAPES RESEARCH

Creating a seedless muscadine

Muscadine grapes (*Vitis rotundifolia*) are widely grown in the Southeastern U.S. for fresh fruit and wine and are known for their unique fruity flavor and health-promoting phytochemical constituents. However, the muscadine grapes have limited acceptance as a table grape because of numerous large seeds. Therefore, developing seedless muscadine grapes is a major goal to increase consumer acceptance and expand the market to sustain the industry.

Parthenocarpic seedlessness, a type of fruit development without fertilization, has been recognized as an important trait for producing seedless grape cultivars. However, the only available parthenocarpic muscadine cultivar is 'Fry Seedless,' which is unfortunately very low-yielding and male sterile, hence cannot be used in a breeding program.

But one source of the seedlessness trait in grapes is certain seedless Bunch grape genotypes. Unfortunately, introgression of this seedlessness trait from Bunch grape to muscadine grape is not feasible through conventional breeding due to their genetic incompatibility (40 vs. 38 chromosomes).

Previous research has had some success in generating a Bunch-Muscadine hybrid using Bunch grapes as the female parent to overcome the pre-fertilization barriers combined with embryo rescue techniques, but this approach failed to yield a seedless muscadine genotype.

Our recent studies showed that reduced expression of the AGAMOUS-LIKE11 (*VvAGL11*) gene is responsible for stenosperrmocarpic seedlessness in Sultanina-derived cultivars. We have identified and characterized the *VvAGL11* orthologous gene in muscadine grapes. We found that the seedlessness-related orthologous gene transcripts were highly expressed in pea-stage berries, while barely detectable in leaves and harvest-ripe berries.

RT-PCR and sequencing of predicted ORFs showed that seedlessness-related transcripts were conservatively spliced. Furthermore, the genes involved in seed coat development, *VroVPE* in muscadines, were significantly expressed

in Noble, but almost none to nominal expression in seedless cultivar Fry Seedless (muscadine).



Control P1 P2 P3 P4

Phenotype of transgenic tomatoes lines: Reduced Expression of *SlyAGL11* Gene - Source of Stenosperrmocarpic Seedlessness

Functional experiments in tomato demonstrated that silencing the *SlyAGL11* gene produces seedless fruits, and that the degree of seed development is proportional to transcript accumulation levels. We provided direct evidence of a direct role of D-class MADS-box genes in seed development in fleshy fruits, tomatoes.

Further investigation is ongoing to discover the mechanisms underlying the role of *AGL11* function in fruit development using CRISPR-Cas9. This will be achieved by delivering the CRISPR-Cas9 system to calli/protoplasts via both *Agrobacterium*-mediated and direct methods to knock-out/knockdown the *VroAGL11* gene.

Findings will pave the way to developing seedless muscadine table grapes, thereby increasing their acceptance and market value in the fresh fruit market and helping expand and sustain the muscadine grape industry.

Research examines nutraceutical potential of muscadine phytochemicals

Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) or heart diseases are prominent causes of mortality across the globe. The World Health Organization reports annual deaths of ~17.9 million, primarily due to CVDs.

Blood pressure is a pivotal parameter of the cardiovascular system, and hypertension is a significant risk factor for cardiovascular diseases. CVDs comprise numerous disorders related to the heart and blood vessels, including peripheral arterial disease, stroke, atherosclerosis, hypertension, HD, cerebrovascular disease and rheumatic cardiac disease.

Cholesterol, along with low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C or bad cholesterol), high-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C or good cholesterol) and serum LDL-C/HDL-C ratio are highly associated with CVDs.

Dietary polyphenols have been reported to convey cardioprotective effects by altering the hepatic cholesterol and lipoprotein metabolism, reducing circulating levels of LDL cholesterol, increasing LDL receptor activity and inhibiting platelet activation and aggregation. Further, numerous epidemiological and human intervention studies have suggested

Langston partners to help Jamaica feed itself

In the heart of the Caribbean, where the land is rich and the culture even richer, a quiet revolution is reshaping the future of farming. For Jamaica, food security is no longer just a policy—it's a promise. A promise to reclaim its agricultural roots, reduce dependence on costly imports and empower its people to feed themselves with pride and purpose.

Over a decade ago, the Jamaican government launched a bold campaign: *"Grow what we eat, eat what we grow."* It was more than a slogan—it was a call to action. Today, that call echoes through the island's hills and valleys, where goats and sheep graze under the tropical sun and where a new generation of farmers is rising.

common feedstuffs, and built a database that reflects the island's unique environment. With this data, LINC has become a tool that is accessible on laptops, tablets, smartphones and even offline via Raspberry Pi servers.

Science alone does not change lives, people do, hence, project participants brought LINC directly to the field. Through hands-on demonstrations, farmers learned how to assess feed quality, monitor animal behavior and adjust rations based on real-world conditions. They discovered how to reduce reliance on expensive imported feed and make the most of what their land provides. Livestock Extension officers from 14 Jamaican parishes were trained. CASE



Jamaican goat producers who participated in the innovations in goat farming workshop hosted by Langston University.

A Partnership Rooted in Purpose: Recognizing the urgency and opportunity, Langston University joined with the 1890 Universities' Centers of Excellence, the Jamaica College of Agriculture, Science and Education (CASE) and the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA). They envisioned a future where science meets tradition, innovation empowers communities and goat farming becomes a cornerstone of national resilience. Their mission: to transform small ruminant production into a model of sustainable, climate-smart agriculture; one that not only feeds families but also fuels economic growth.

Smart Feeding, Stronger Herds: At the center of this transformation is a powerful tool: the Langston Interactive Nutrient Calculator (LINC). Developed by Langston's team of research scientists, LINC helps farmers eliminate the guesswork in feeding their animals. By calculating precise energy and protein needs based on breed, age and production stage, LINC enables farmers to create balanced, cost-effective diets using the very forages that grow around them.

But this is not just about numbers. It is about knowledge. Teams collected and analyzed Jamaica's most common grasses: Guinea, Napier, African Star and other

researchers joined the effort. Many farmers who had never previously used digital tools embraced the technology with enthusiasm and curiosity.

As a result of the training, 13 farms across Jamaica received heat load monitoring equipment, and farmers were trained to collect and interpret the data. When Hurricane Beryl struck in 2024, damaging farms and cutting power, the team adapted, upgrading equipment with solar power, reinforcing and building model shelters to withstand heat and storms. These model shelters now symbolize resilience, blueprints for a climate-smart future.

Science That Serves the People: Beyond training and tools, the project is advancing cutting-edge research. Scientists are exploring natural plant-based supplements to enhance heat tolerance and immunity. Genetic studies at LU are identifying traits that help goats thrive in tropical climates. And new diagnostic methods are making pregnancy detection more accessible and affordable.

Government Engagement and National Support: The project's collaborative approach and tangible results have garnered strong support from Jamaican institutions. In a key meeting with the Honorable Floyd Green, the

See Jamaica on Page 8

Phytochemicals . . . From Page 3

that regular consumption of polyphenols-rich foods reduce the risk of coronary artery disease by preventing the progress of endothelial dysfunction, decreasing the development of atherosclerotic plaque, vascular thrombosis, occlusion, upregulating NO synthase, reducing inflammation by blocking cytokines and may be a potential nutraceutical solution to remedy this disorder.

Grapes have a healthy diet potential because of their >500 nutraceutical components like anthocyanins, flavanols and flavonols, phenolic acids, vitamin E, linoleic acid, flavonoids, procyanidins, tannins, and pycnogenols, which are attributed to their antioxidant, cardioprotective, anti-aging and anticancer activities.

These polyphenols increase nitric oxide bioavailability, improve insulin sensitivity, anti-



Muscadine - Red RReG-



Muscadine - Bronze

oxidant protection, decrease blood viscosity, induce endothelium-dependent relaxation and reduce arterial blood pressure. The cardiovascular benefits of red wine became the hub of research activity after observation of the “French Paradox” because of a low mortality rate from ischemic heart disease among the French despite their high consumption of saturated fats.

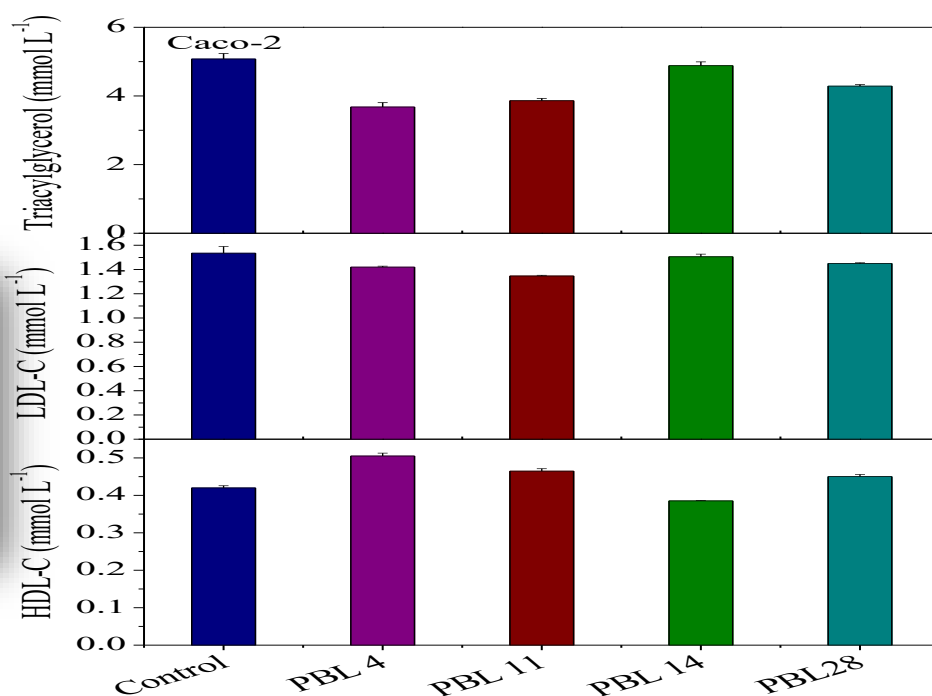
In this light, our research has taken a multidisciplinary approach for precisely evaluating the nutraceutical potential of muscadine grape phytochemicals by employing cutting-edge molecular, cellular and biochemical tools to meet its interdisciplinary needs and learn the molecular and cellular mechanisms that transduce pro-CVD modulating effects of phytochemicals for mitigating cardiac risk factors.

Of the several targets identified to reduce CVD incidences, cholesterol biosynthesis and cardiac health are the crucial components because of their involvement in numerous cellular functions and integrity.

Based on this knowledge, our research has taken the nutrigenomics approach and employed front-line molecular and cellular technologies to document the cardioprotective activity of muscadine grapes by determining their ability to mitigate cholesterol metabolism, transport, reduce cholesterol content, composition and uptake and LDL receptor activity.

In addition, our research is also studying cholesterol me-

tabolism-related genes and defining the makeup of bioactive phytochemicals to ascertain their effectiveness against CVD risk factors. The outcome of this research is to provide information on the interactions between muscadine grape polyphenolics and molecular and cellular responses associated with cholesterol and lipoprotein metabolism, redox enzymes expression and the primary risk factors leading to the incep-



Triglyceride, LDL-C and HDL-cholesterol quantification in Caco2 cell following treatment with four different Muscadine grape genotypes (PBL). Error bars represent SD values (n=4). Note: decreased Triacylglycerol and LDL-C levels and increased HDL levels following the muscadine berry extract treatment.

tion of CVD.

Furthermore, it will reveal the identities of polyphenolics and their effective combinations that are capable of preventing or limiting the known CVD risk factors. Overall, we will document the efficacy of muscadine grape phytochemicals and their dynamic combination to avert the onset of cardiac risk factors by regulating cholesterol synthesis, transport and excretion, LDL-C, HDL-C and triglycerides levels to provide cardiac protective activity. The study's promising results will pave the way for future studies to further explore and validate the health benefits of this grape and develop novel therapeutics to prevent CVD and other ailments.

For more information, please contact Dr. Mehboob B. Sheikh, Professor, Center for Viticulture and Small Farm Research, Florida A&M University, Mehboob.sheikh@famu.edu or (850) 412-5189.

NC A&T takes deep dive into food and environment link

How we eat dramatically impacts our health, yet millions of Americans live in ‘food deserts’ – areas with limited access to fresh, nutritious food. Recent research reveals that solving this crisis requires looking beyond just physical access to food to understand how our entire community environment shapes our dietary choices.

Through a series of pioneering studies, Dr. Terrence Thomas and colleagues at North Carolina A&T State Uni-

versity have been investigating how different aspects of our food environment influence what we put on our plates. Their findings suggest that creating lasting change requires reimagining how communities engage with food at every level.

The full article is available in both [HTML](#) and [PDF format](#).

Deep ag research cuts could threaten U.S. competitiveness

By: Dr. Steve Lommel

This Op-ed was published in the News and Observer, the Charlotte Observer and the Durham Herald Sun.

Deep cuts in funding for agricultural research in the United States threaten our food supply and national security.

Every American family will ultimately feel the effects of cuts to agricultural research, which enables the U.S. to produce food that’s safe, healthy, and affordable, and to support rural communities. To compete in a global marketplace and feed a growing world population, American farmers need continued investment in research and development.

As the U.S. slashes agricultural funding, which has dropped by about a third since 2002, China, the European Union, India and Brazil have done the opposite. China now invests \$10 billion in agricultural research — twice as much as the U.S.

Federal funding from agencies currently facing tens of billions in cuts — the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National Science Foundation and National Institutes of Health — drives agricultural research that supports U.S. food sovereignty: our ability to produce safe, affordable, nutritious and abundant food for our own population. Federally funded research helps scientists develop healthier, higher-yielding crops that are more resistant to diseases, pests and weeds — and more resilient in the face of droughts, flooding and extreme temperatures. In addition, agricultural research develops more efficient and sustainable ways to raise livestock.

More than two-thirds of publicly funded agricultural research and development in the U.S. is federally funded. It supports work done across the nation through a network of experiment stations and research labs in the land-grant university system, with one or more universities in every state. North Carolina’s land-grant universities, N.C. State and N.C. A&T, received the nation’s third-highest level of grant funding from the USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture from 2018 to 2023 — a total of \$456.4 million. This essential funding supports agricultural research, the N.C. Cooperative Extension outreach that connects farmers statewide with science-backed guidance, and the education of the next generation of agricultural researchers.

Agriculture and agribusiness, the largest sector of North Carolina’s economy, generated \$111 billion in economic impact in 2024, and it requires robust research. Food animal production in North Carolina accounts for about two-thirds of agriculture’s economic impact, with the remaining third coming from over 90 different crops.

Many crops grown in North Carolina are specialty crops like peanuts, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, strawberries, Christmas trees, ornamentals, turf, and many more. Varieties optimized for North Carolina are developed by our land-grant universities, not the private sector.

Without federal funding, along with state matching funds that support crop breeding programs, many of these commodities



Two North Carolina apple orchards rank among the nation’s best.
Natalie Grainger via Unsplash

would fail and producers would go out of business. The historical return on investment from federal funding of agricultural research is clear: Every \$1 spent has returned \$20 for the U.S. economy.

For more than a century, a coalition of land-grant universities, government agencies, farmers and private companies have worked together to maintain U.S. leadership in agricultural innovation. Dismantling this system has long-term consequences. Once we lose our competitive edge and market share, it’s doubtful that we can ever regain lost ground.

Private industry cannot fill the federal funding gap in U.S. agricultural research; it requires a quicker return on investment and marketable results. Agricultural research takes time and stable investment over generations of crops or animals, which grow at their own pace.

If the U.S. steps back, China and other countries will shape the future through plant breeding that fits their climates, conditions and needs. Their food will become more affordable and nutritious, capturing U.S. export markets.

To remain competitive and feed our citizens with American-grown food, we must continue to invest in agricultural research — for our nation and North Carolina’s farmers, rural communities and families.

Dr. Steve Lommel is chair of AgInnovation, the system of experiment stations and research labs at U.S. land-grant universities. He is the director of the North Carolina Agricultural Research Service and associate dean for research at North Carolina State University’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Lommel is a William Neal Reynolds Distinguished Professor and is recognized internationally for his research contributions to plant virus pathogenesis.

Collaboration . . . From Page 1

faculty workloads.

- Concerns over grant continuity.

Recommendations:

- Formal MOUs to structure partnerships.
- Regular cross-institutional meetings.
- Cultural shift toward collaborative thinking.
- Stronger support from the compliance and sponsored programs offices.
- Tenure policies that reward collaboration.

In a lively discussion following the presentation, agInnovation South Chair Scott Senseman and ARD Chair Wesley Whittaker led the group in identifying concrete action steps. Dr. Green emphasized a multidimensional, participatory approach to establishing a sustainable collaboration framework. Both associations committed to ongoing efforts and regular joint meetings, with a written report forthcoming.

Also featured were visionary presentations by Steve Lommel (agInnovation chair) and Moses Kairo (ARD past chair), emphasizing bottom-up, director-driven multi-state projects. Successful case examples included:

- N.C. State and N.C. A&T collaborative initiatives.
- Clemson and SC State's biennial extension conference.
- LSU and Southern's complementary programs in nutrition, local food systems, food safety, beef cattle production and forestry.
- Oklahoma's shared services model between Langston and Oklahoma State.

These examples and our joint sessions clearly demonstrate the power and potential of grassroots collaboration in advancing shared goals between ARD and agInnovation South. They highlight how locally driven, director-inspired partnerships can lead to meaningful, sustainable impact across research and education.

Directors from both groups say they are genuinely energized about the future of our collaborative efforts and see tremendous promise not only in the innovative projects emerging from our institutions in our two associations, but also in the collective impact they will have on the communities we serve, our stakeholders and the broader land-grant



Dr. John Green, director the Southern Rural Development Center, shared the results from the Collaborations that Work study.

system. We are building a model of cooperation that honors our unique strengths while aligning our resources to deliver greater public value.

Marketing . . . From Page 2

[and scheduled for fall 2025], attracted over 300 attendees who sampled goat meat dishes.

Local and professional chefs demonstrated various recipes, making the product approachable for new audiences. They also learned about the goat meat's health and cultural benefits. Many small goat producers attended and gained a greater understanding of market opportunities.

Meanwhile, the Langston's Product Development Center "Leg of Lamb Initiative" also provided local consumers with processed lamb and goat meat packages with easy recipes and QR-coded surveys to track consumer feedback.

With these initiatives, local lamb and goat producers in Oklahoma have been rapidly learning new marketing techniques and expanding their consumer network.

With the support of Langston University's Evans-Allen-funded projects on production, agribusiness marketing

and product development, the market impact of lamb and goat meat has been enhanced. Fresh, locally produced lamb and goat meat are now more accessible to local consumers, reducing reliance on imports and supporting domestic agriculture. Producers benefit from gaining market access and premium prices for their products. Consumers have gained access to locally grown and a new category of healthy protein. Through these efforts, Oklahoma's lamb and goat meat market is poised for continued growth.

For more information, contact: **Dr. Nirodha De Silva:** ni-rodha.de_silva@langston.edu (405-466-6163) or **Dr. Carlos Alvarado:** carlos.alvarado@langston.edu (405-466-6168). The Evans-Allen program of the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) supports the lamb and goat meat production, marketing, and consumption projects at Langston University, Oklahoma.

Jamaica . . . From Page 4

Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Mining, project leaders and partners from Langston University, RADA and CASE shared updates on progress and discussed strategies to enhance the sustainability and productivity of small farms.

Minister Green emphasized that engagement reinforces Jamaica's commitment to strengthening small ruminant production as a pillar of climate resilience and economic development. It stands as a model for what's possible when communities, scientists and institutions unite with a shared vision: to feed the future, one goat at a time. As one Extension officer put it: "This project is not just about feeding goats, it's about feeding a nation and preserving a way of

life."

For more information, contact: Dr. Ryszard Puchala, research scientist: puchala@langston.edu (405.466.6135), Sherman Lewis School of Agriculture and Applied Sciences. The project is supported by the 1890 Centers of Excellence (i.e., Center of Excellence for Global addressing food insecurity and Defense) and USDA Capacity Building Research program at Langston University.



Dr. Puchala, right, and Jamaica Minister of Agriculture, Hon. Floyd Green

Whittaker . . . From Page 1

progress and the successful fulfillment of her presidential goals. Her heartfelt remarks underscored her deep commitment to the ACE mission and its members.

President Bradley's leadership not only strengthened the organization over the past year but also laid a strong foundation for incoming President Stacey Stearns from the University of Connecticut. As ACE looks to the future, the organization is well-positioned to continue its strategic growth—expanding membership, deepening partnerships with the 1994 land-grant institutions and exploring new funding opportunities.

The conference featured three dynamic keynote speakers—Saul Flores, philanthropist and photojournalist; Edwin Remsberg, a national award-winning photographer; and Brad Haire, executive editor at *Farm Progress*—each sharing powerful stories and communication insights.

Over two days, participants engaged in an action-packed agenda that included networking, collaboration and a wide array of professional development sessions. Notably, several breakout sessions were led by talented 1890 communicators, including Latasha Ford and Rebecca Miller (FVSU), Wendi Williams (AAMU) and Sonya Moore-Davis (Langston University).

ARD's sponsorship not only underscored our commitment to effective communication across the 1890 system but also highlighted the vital role communicators play in amplifying the impact of our teaching, research and Extension work. We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute and collaborate with professionals who are helping to shape the future of land-grant communication.

Bound by a shared mission within the 1890 land-grant system—to serve, uplift, and empower communities in our regions and beyond—ARD participated in a special joint session focused on advancing collaboration across key initiatives at the AEA Summer Meeting.

This session highlighted several ongoing and future efforts that exemplify the strength of cross-institutional partnerships. Among the topics discussed were the multistate ecological resilience survey, the development of the 1890 AI Blueprint, the continued refinement of the 1890 Strategic Roadmap and the planning of two major upcoming events: the 2025 agInnovation-CES/NEDA Joint Meeting and the 2026 ARD Research Symposi-

um.

The AEA Summer Meeting was thoughtfully planned and skillfully executed, offering a robust agenda that addressed both current challenges and future opportunities in Extension. Key sessions included an update on the Washington legislative outlook, strategies for aligning Extension programs with evolving societal needs and the shifting political landscape and insights on leveraging partnerships and resources for greater impact. Attendees also explored the emerging role of artificial intelligence in delivering responsive, need-based programming.

The meeting featured multiple breakout sessions tailored for Extension specialists and an inspiring and informative tour of South Carolina State University's Charleston Extension Urban Program—a model of community-focused innovation.

ARD's participation in this meeting underscores our shared commitment to strategic alignment, innovation and impactful engagement throughout the 1890 land-grant system.

At the upcoming BAA Summer Leadership Conference (July 14–16), the 1890 research directors will join leaders from the administrative heads, academic programs, agInnovation, Cooperative Extension, international agriculture programs, the communications and marketing mommittee and CARET for a joint meeting at the Royal Sonesta Washington, D.C., Dupont Circle. This important gathering will serve as a vital platform to align sectional priorities and explore strategic opportunities to enhance the collective impact of the Board on Agriculture Assembly (BAA).

This year's meeting will strongly emphasize advocacy priorities related to major initiatives, including the capacity initiative and the Roadmap developed by agInnovation and Extension. Discussions will focus on shaping a comprehensive strategy for FY 2027, influencing future Farm Bills and creating a long-term plan to increase federal funding in support of food, agriculture and natural resource research and extension.

Happy belated Fourth of July! Last week, we celebrated the enduring spirit of freedom, unity, and resilience that shapes our nation. I hope your Independence Day was filled with pride, gratitude, and joy as we reflected on the values that make America strong.

ARD OFFICERS

Wesley L. Whittaker
(Chair)

Langston University

Email: wesley.whittaker@langston.edu

Gregory Goins
(Chair-Elect)

Email: ggoins@ncat.edu

Ami M. Smith
(Secretary)

West Virginia State University

Email: smitham@wvstateu.edu

Jose Ulises Toledo (Treasurer)

Central State University

Email: jtoledo@centralstate.edu

Olga Bolden-Tiller
(Member-at-Large)

Tuskegee University

Email: oboldentiller@tuskegee.edu

Louis Whitesides
(Immediate Past Chair)

South Carolina State University

Email: lwhitesides@scsu.edu

Chandra Reddy
(agInnovation Chair-elect)

Email: creddy@tnstate.edu

Non-Elected

Alton Thompson (Exec. Director)

Email: athompson1@ncat.edu

Lisa Williamson (Exec. Asst.)

Email: lmwilliamson1@ncat.edu

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

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

JOB

LINCOLN UNIVERSITY, School Of Agriculture, Environmental and Human Sciences, [Associate Director for Cooperative Research](#)

SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM, Department of Agricultural Sciences and Technology, [Assistant/Associate Professor of Agricultural Economics](#).

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE, School of Agricultural and Natural Sciences, Department of Agriculture, Food and Resource Sciences, [Associate Professor of Agricultural Economics and Associate/Assistant Professor of Agricultural Economics](#).

LINCOLN UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI, [Director of Agricultural Communications](#). Contact the Search Committee Chair, [Dr. Douglas LaVergne](#) with questions.

PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY, College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, [Director, Center for Sustainable Farms and Urban Agriculture](#).

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE, School of Veterinary Medicine, [Associate Dean for Research](#), School of Veterinary Medicine, [Associate Dean for Academic and Faculty Affairs](#).

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

CALENDAR



You are invited to attend the 2025 BAA Leadership Meeting, July 14 - 16, in Washington, DC. This year's meeting will be held at The Royal Sonesta Washington, DC Dupont Circle. Attendees will discuss sectional business, provide program and partnership updates, set advocacy priorities and identify BAA strategic opportunities. The meeting will also emphasize advocacy priorities around key initiatives, including the capacity initiative and the Roadmap developed by agInnovation and Extension. Discussions will focus on drafting a comprehensive strategy for FY2027, future Farm Bills and a long-term approach to increasing federal funding. [Click to register](#).

2025 BAA LEADERSHIP MEETING AND NEW ADMINISTRATORS ORIENTATION

July 14-16, 2025 | Washington, DC



SAVE THE DATE

2025 Joint agInnovation/CES-NEDA Meeting | Theme: "Empowering Land-Grant Universities in Navigating the Future" | Sept. 15 – 18, 2025 |



NOVEMBER 9–11, 2025
Philadelphia, PA



[Register today](#) for the **2025 APLU Annual Meeting**, taking place Nov. 9–11 at the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown. APLU's Annual Meeting convenes senior public university leaders for three days of substantive discussions, collaborative workshops, and strategic networking opportunities focused on advancing public and land-grant universities' education, research, and engagement mission.

Public universities today face unprecedented challenges as well as opportunities, making it more important than ever for leaders to come together to share strategies, advocate for higher education's vital role, and chart a course for the future.

With more than 100 sessions planned, the Annual Meeting offers a robust and wide-ranging program designed to deliver practical insights, foster new collaborations, and inspire leadership across the public higher education sector.

