

SU Land-Grant Campus Concludes another Successful La. Small Farmer Conference



Small Farmer Conference attendees speak with a representative from the state's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) during the Soil Health session of the conference.

The Southern University Land-Grant Campus held its 7th Annual Louisiana Small Farmer Conference March 16-18, 2017 at the Southern University Ag Center.

Nearly 200 small farmers from throughout the state attended the three-day event themed, “Innovation and Resilience for Louisiana’s Family Farms.”

This year’s conference kicked off with a grant writing workshop which prepared attendees with

information to conceptualize and develop a competitive grant proposal for the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program. Other sessions included Value Added Marketing, Soil Health, a Modern Technology and Farming Drone Demonstration, Farm Labor Issues, Produce Safety and a panel discussion on Bees and Cut Flowers.

Jay Grymes, Chief Meteorologist at WAFB News Channel 9, also presented a session on Climate Change and Small Scale Agriculture. During this session, Grymes discussed the August 2016 floods, weather trends within the state and how the trends will affect agricultural production.

The Louisiana Living Legends Banquet was held on the evening of March 17 following the conference’s sessions. This banquet honors individuals who have made significant contributions to Southern University in the areas of Agriculture, Family and Consumer Sciences.

The 2017 honorees were Dr. Patricia Meyinsse, professor of Agricultural Economics at the SU College of Agricultural, Family and Consumer Sciences in Baton Rouge; Dr. Donald McDowell, retired professor from the Department of Agribusiness, Applied Economics & Agriscience Education at North Carolina A&T State University; and Lee Hampton, retired Parish Chair of St. Landry Parish and Cooperative Extension Agent.

The three join 21 others who have been honored with this recognition since 2005.

Dr. John Pierre, Chancellor of SU Law Center was the banquet's speaker, and shared the history of the Land-grant System, with the audience. The history dates back to 1862, including the Act developed by Vermont Senator Justin Morrill – the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act, and the birth of the 1890 institutions. He continued to explain how Southern University became one of the 19 universities in the country in the 1890 Land-Grant System.

Dr. Pierre stated that in 1890, Congress passed the Second Morrill Act with the stipulation that African Americans were to be included in the land-grant university system. The first Morrill Act was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862. Each southern state has two land-grant institutions. LSU is the 1862 land-grant institution in Louisiana.

The conference concluded with the graduation ceremony for the 2017 Class of the Louisiana Small Farmer Leadership Institute.

The graduates are Delores Andrews; Elaine Brumfield; Ricky Brumfield; Mahdi Cezar; Craig Coleman; Larry Freeman; Chris Hayes; Lillie Howard; Yolanda Renee Lee; Patricia Richardson; Patrick Richardson and Rosie White.

The overriding goal of the Institute is to promote the sustainability of small family farms through enhanced business management skills and leadership development.

“The leadership institute has taken the majority of the participants from being just small producers through the mindset of becoming great producers with limited acreage, herds or holdings,” said Dr. Dawn Mellion-Patin, Vice Chancellor for Extension and Director of the Small Farmer Leadership Institute.

2017 Louisiana Living Legend honoree Dr. Donald McDowell served as the keynote speaker for the graduation ceremony. In his speech entitled “Agriculture is deeper than dirt,” Dr. McDowell advised the graduates to be good stewards of the land and acquired skills.

“Get your land and farm incorporated, get them protected,” said Dr. McDowell. “As graduates of the Ag Institute, you have an obligation to encourage youth to pursue careers in agricultural sciences; you are change agents and must educate the public especially young people about the importance of agriculture,” he continued.

Leroy Conish, a 2011 Institute graduate also spoke to the graduates about his growth since his completion of the course. He stated that he started growing vegetables to improve his health and ended up making money from it.

“Now, I make money from growing okra, and make my community in St. James Parish sustainable,” said Conish.

The highlight of the program was the rendition of the poem “Hey Black Child” by nine-year-old fifth grader Christina Gary from Gilbert Junior High in Franklin Parish, who plans to attend Southern University and pursue a degree in agricultural economics. The poem, penned by Countee Cullen, portrays the power of black youth with proper guidance.

SU Land-Grant Campus Chancellor-Dean Dr. Bobby R. Phills was so impressed by Gary's performance and prospect that he offered her a four-year college assistantship should she pursue an agricultural science degree at Southern University.

Photos from the Small Farmer Conference, Louisiana Living Legends Banquet and Louisiana Small Farmer Leadership Institute Graduation Ceremony are available [here](#).

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