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# SEEDS *of* SUCCESS

A Monthly Newsletter of the Southern University Ag Center,  
College of Ag, and Chancellor's Report



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**USDA Launches Nutrition Hub to Combat Diet-Related Diseases in Underserved Communities at the SU Ag Center**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the opening of a pilot Nutrition Hub under the Agricultural Science Center of Excellence for Nutrition and Diet for Better Health (ASCEND for Better Health) initiative on September 28, 2023, during the Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center's (Southern University Ag Center) Annual Small Farmers Conference. The Nutrition Hub is launched in partnership with the Southern University Ag Center, the host of the USDA-funded 1890 Center of Excellence for Nutrition, Health, Wellness and Quality of Life.

The USDA's new Nutrition Hub, which was informed by community conversations, will be an engine for providing science-based, nutrition-related information at the community level, particularly in underserved communities disproportionately impacted by diet-related chronic diseases such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers. Future hubs will concentrate their efforts on additional high-need communities. The USDA is following the successful Climate Hubs model that reaches more than 20,000 people yearly. The regional hub network links USDA research and programs to deliver timely, tailored, and authoritative information and decision-making tools.

The Nutrition Hub supports commitments made during the historic White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health, which outlined a strategy to prioritize the role of nutrition and food security in overall health including disease prevention and management. It also supports President Biden's Cancer Moonshot effort to end cancer as we know it by advancing cancer prevention given that an estimated 30 to 50% of all cancers are preventable through healthy eating and lifestyle changes. Through dedicated outreach and

engagement efforts, the Hub strives to improve health equity by enabling community members to better understand and integrate USDA-funded nutrition research in culturally responsive ways.

The USDA will leverage the Nutrition Hub to increase the impact of its collective human nutrition research programs, develop more precise science-based solutions and resources, and advance the public's understanding of real-world opportunities and challenges around food, nutrition, and diet-related health disparities.

"USDA's Nutrition Hub promotes health equity for underserved communities powered by more precise nutrition research," said Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young, USDA Chief Scientist and Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics. "Through this new Hub, we are changing the food landscape by being intentional and thoughtful about ensuring communities have equitable access to the resources they need to enjoy a healthy lifestyle."

The USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) are investing \$1 million to hire two full-time Nutrition Hub Co-Directors, one employed by ARS, and one employed by the Southern University Ag Center. This leadership structure enables a close partnership between the USDA and the Southern University Ag Center to plan and carry out Hub activities that leverage the strengths, resources, and relationships of both organizations. The funding will also support a full-time graduate student from Southern University.

"The Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center is extremely excited and honored to be the first university to house a USDA Nutrition Hub," said Dr. Orlando F. McMeans, Chancellor-Dean of the Southern



being, particularly in underserved communities.

The USDA continues to enhance its research focus on precision nutrition science to better understand the needs of underserved communities. This research complements the USDA's efforts to advance food and nutrition security by providing consistent and equitable access to healthy, safe, and affordable foods essential to optimal health and well-being.

As part of its commitment to ensure equitable access to USDA programs and information, the USDA co-hosted four in-person community engagements earlier this year to hear about unique food-related challenges and opportunities in local communities. The USDA partnered with Southern University Ag Center, Texas A&M International University and Texas A&M Institute for Advancing Health Through Agriculture, United Tribes Technical College, and 4-H to hold events focused on food, nutrition, and health in African-American, Hispanic, Native American, and youth-based communities. Feedback from those sessions can inform future research, education, Extension, and program efforts that increase food and nutrition security, health equity, and well-being of all Americans in ways that recognize and leverage the unique aspects of both individuals and communities.

The USDA's ASCEND for Better Health also held a virtual Zoom event following the September 28 announcement. Alexis Motley, Dietetic Internship Director at the SU College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences served as a panelist during the event alongside other food, nutrition, and health experts to discuss how to create healthier communities.

The Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center is the fifth campus of the Southern University and A&M College System. The System is the only historically black university system in America and is also an 1890 land-grant university.

For additional information on the Southern University Ag Center visit, [www.suagcenter.com](http://www.suagcenter.com), to learn more about the USDA visit, [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

University Ag Center and the College of Ag. "This Hub will not only assist in combating diet-related chronic diseases in underserved communities, but it will also provide our students with the experience needed to build a workforce of nutritionists, researchers, and extension agents that will aid in closing the nutrition gap in at-risk communities."

The Nutrition Hub will:

- Develop and share science-based nutrition information and connect communities with food and nutrition security and economic vitality programs.
- Develop relationships and partnerships with organizations that serve African-American communities and clearly define community needs and opportunities around food and nutrition.
- Foster research and training opportunities in human nutrition research, particularly in underserved and underrepresented communities.
- Build current and future workforce capacity to enhance collaborations between research and those working on the front lines of community nutrition and health.

Diet-related chronic diseases are prevalent among Americans and pose a major public health problem. Today, 6 in 10 people have at least one chronic disease, and 4 in 10 people have two or more chronic diseases. These diseases significantly reduce the quality and quantity of life, but many are largely preventable through proper nutrition and healthy living. The primary goal of the Nutrition Hub is to translate nutrition research into impactful solutions that improve public health and well-



## SU Ag Center and the College of Ag Received a \$9.5 Million Grant From the USDA's Forest Service

The Southern University College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences Department of Urban Forestry, Environment and Natural Resources has received a \$9.5 million grant from the United States Department of Agriculture's Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program.

The announcement was made on Sept. 21 during an Investing in America event on the Southern University campus.

The grant, Generating Resources for Environmental Excellence Network toward Leadership and Advancement Building (GREEN LAB), will support the engagement of multiple community and faith-based organizations in planning and the completion of community projects that enhance equitable access to tree canopy, parks, and nature, and improve workforce and leadership capacity in disadvantaged communities.

"We're in a great position to help the community be aware of what green space is and promoting tree canopy cover and how important it is," said Dr. Zhu Ning, Chair of the Department of Urban Forestry.

Additional awardees announced during the event were the Walls Project who received \$6 million, the City of New Orleans, who received \$8 million, and the City of Lake Charles received \$ 866,078.





“To focus on disadvantaged communities, communities that have been distressed to not only bring trees back to the community but also it’s an opportunity to create jobs and to bring an educational aspect,” said Randy Moore, U.S. Forest Service Chief and SU alum.

The event ended with a tree planting on Scott's Bluff to commemorate

this historic investment in Louisiana communities.

Funding for the grants was backed by the Biden administration’s Inflation Reduction Act. The USDA announced on Sept. 14 that it is awarding more than \$1 billion in competitive grants to plant and maintain trees, combat extreme heat and climate change, and improve access to nature in cities, towns, and suburbs where more than 84 percent of

Americans live, work, and play. Communities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and several U.S. Territories and Tribal Nations received funding, covered by the Justice40 Initiative.

*Read the USDA’s full announcement at, [https://www.fs.usda.gov/news/releases/usda-invests-1-billion-nearly-400-projects-expand-access-trees-and-green-spaces?utm\\_source=substack&utm\\_medium=email](https://www.fs.usda.gov/news/releases/usda-invests-1-billion-nearly-400-projects-expand-access-trees-and-green-spaces?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email).*





# TEACHING



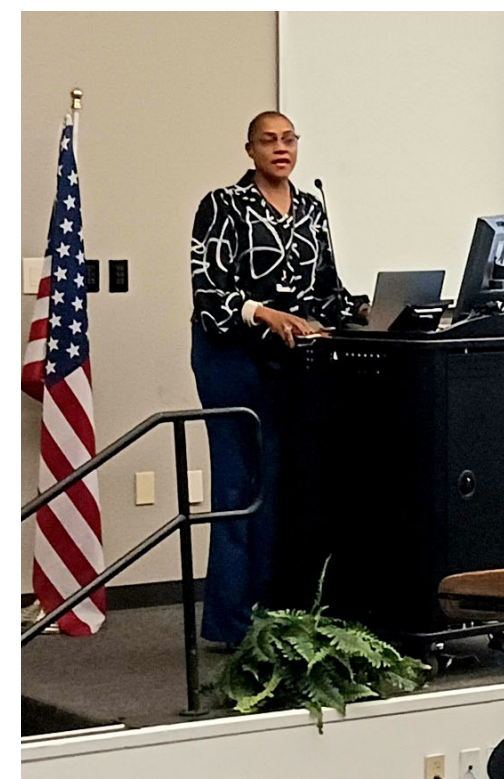
## SU College of Ag Holds Student Convocation

The Southern University College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences, formally known as the College of Agricultural, Family and Consumer Sciences, held a student convocation on August 31, 2023 in the auditorium of T.T. Allain Hall.

The standing-room-only crowd of Agricultural students was welcomed by Saturn Douglas, Director of Recruitment and Retention, and Dr. Renita Marshall, Vice Chancellor for Academics and Student Support-Associate Dean, shared updates from the College. The students also received information on services available for mental wellness, from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the USDA 1890 Scholars Program, and clubs and organizations that are open to Ag students.

Dr. Orlando F. McMeans, Chancellor-Dean of the SU Ag Center and the College of Ag provided his vision for the College and shared closing remarks. He encouraged the students to become active in the Ag student clubs, especially MANRRS.

As the students exited the auditorium, they were gifted with a pair of GrowJags socks and a care packet to help them stay healthy during the fall semester.





# TEACHING

## Southern University College of Ag Changes Name to Reflect New Program Offerings

The Southern University College of Agricultural, Family and Consumer Sciences has been renamed as the College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences. The name change was approved by the Southern University Board of Supervisors on August 18, 2023 during the board's regularly scheduled meeting.

The name change comes after more than three years of evaluations, academic program assessments, rebranding, revamping curriculums, and acquiring the Environmental Toxicology Ph.D. program from the College of Sciences and Engineering.

After a careful review of the College and its programs by its administrative team, including Department Chairs, Program Leaders, and faculty the names of several departments were changed as well.

The name of the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences was changed to the Department of Human Sciences. This change enhances the Department's ability to focus on issues relevant to today's individuals, families, and skills critical to successfully living and working in the 21st century. The change will also enhance recruitment efforts and prepare graduates for employment opportunities in the areas of health and wellness, apparel and design, human development, and family relationships.

Additionally, the names of the Apparel Merchandising and Textiles and Child Development and Family Life program areas have been changed to the Fashion Merchandising and Design and Child and Family Studies Programs, respectfully. These changes were made to attract students with diverse interests and to provide clarity to the substance and validity of course offers.

The Department of Urban Forestry and Natural Resources is now the Department of Urban Forestry, Environment and Natural Resources, which coincides with the recent establishment of concentrations in Environmental Studies, Geospatial Technologies, and Natural Resources Sustainability.

The Department of Agricultural Sciences is now the Department of Agricultural Sciences and Technology. This change fulfills the Postsecondary Education Agriculture Technology Study Commission's recommendations for opportunities related to the creation of Agriculture Technology Training Programs and Agriculture Technology Education Programs.

The College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences name more accurately reflects the departments, courses of study, and concentrations offered to students studying in the field of Agriculture. With these name changes the Southern University College of Ag will continue to prepare our students for the workforce and Grow Jags!





# TEACHING

## SU College of Ag Holds a Mini Farm Day on Campus

Dr. Jodi Morton, Assistant Professor of Agricultural Sciences and Technology, hosted a Mini Farm Day on the front lawn of Pinkie Thrift Hall on Sept. 27, 2023. Students from the College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences (CAHES) and the SU Child Development Lab were enthusiastic seeing and learning about the rabbits, pigs, sheep, and more that are an integral part of the SU Ag Center's programs. The event showcased the commitment of Southern University to agricultural research and hands-on learning experiences.



## Alpha Zeta Louisiana Delta Colony Holds First Southern University Initiation

Six students and one faculty member from the College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences were initiated into the Alpha Zeta Louisiana Delta Colony on September 26, 2023. After a year, the colony will apply to become a chapter on the Southern University campus. Southern is the only HBCU with an active colony/chapter in Alpha Zeta. Advisors for Alpha Zeta are Drs. Jodi Morton and Crystal Vance.

Alpha Zeta is a professional, service, and honorary fraternity for men and women in agriculture. With a focus on recognizing scholarship, developing leadership, fostering fellowship, exhibiting character, serving the college and promoting agriculture. The mission of Alpha Zeta unites a diverse community of lifelong leaders to actively promote and serve global food, fiber, and environmental systems.

Members who were initiated were:

- **Dr. Crystal Vance**, Professor of Plant and Soil Sciences was initiated as an associate member.
- **Faith Woods**, a Junior Agriculture Business major.
- **Ian Washington**, a Junior Agriculture Business major.
- **Leah Reeves**, a Junior Plant and Soil Sciences major.
- **Kennedy Orr**, a Junior Agriculture Business major.
- **Tyler Jackson**, a Junior Pre-Veterinary Medicine major
- **Ireyon Buchanna**, a Senior Animal Science major



# EXTENSION

Center



## SU Ag Center Holds 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Louisiana Small Farmers Conference

More than 200 small farmers from throughout Louisiana participated in the SU Ag Center's 12th Annual Louisiana Small Farmers Conference which was held September 27 -29, 2023 at the Randolph Riverfront Center in Alexandria, Louisiana.

The three-day conference themed, "Bring your farm products to the marketplace!" included a farm tour of T. Moise Farms in Sunset, La., an announcement of the launch of the USDA's first Nutrition Hub by the USDA's Chief Scientist and Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics, Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young; and interactive workshops on agriculture, farm funding, livestock, and business. The conference ended with a Shark Tank pitch competition to venture capitalists. This event provided an opportunity for farmers to pitch their ideas and products to a panel for feedback in a Shark Tank atmosphere. The venture capitalists panel consisted of Evan Caselton with Sam's Club, Will Campbell with B1, and Teresa Watson with Minority Professional Truckers Association. Session participants were Trincella Bonet and Terry Shelvin, Brian Thomas, Michael Veal, and Ronald Johnson.



Several small farmers were also presented with the "You Are The Difference" Appreciation Award. "These individuals have adopted this ideology and have become the difference in their community which is a perfect way to provoke change," stated Zanetta Augustine, SU Ag Center's Agriculture Specialist and Program Leader for Agriculture and Natural Resources.

The awardees were:

- Robert Wallace
- Muse 3 Farms
- Harrison John-Lewis
- Morehouse Black Farmers and Landowner Association
- Warner Hall
- Brian Thomas

The conference also included an exhibition hall with 20 exhibits and 11 sponsors including the USDA and

IBM.

Guest speakers included USDA Rural Development State Director, Deidre Deculus Robert; Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry Commissioner Mike Starin; and Louisiana Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser.

The conference has been historically held in Baton Rouge, but organizers felt a need to highlight other regions of the state. This was the first year that the conference traveled to showcase the different farming commodities and techniques from regions throughout the state.

The 2024 Louisiana Small Farmers Conference will be held in Lafayette, La.

For additional information on the Small Farmers Conference, contact Dr. Brian Phillips at [brian\\_phillips@suagcenter.com](mailto:brian_phillips@suagcenter.com).





# EXTENSION

## SU Ag Center Receives Disaster Education Initiative Grant

The Southern University Ag Center is one of five recipients of a \$20,000 Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) and Purdue University grant. The project, Cultivating an Efficient and Productive Intersection between Research and Extension: An 1890 Collaborative-Research Based Curriculum Development Initiative, is a collaborative project integrating research into Cooperative Extension. The SU Ag Center is leading a team of 1890 institutions (PVAMU, NCA&T, FAMU, Central State University, Kentucky State University, and Tennessee State University) to develop an emergency preparedness, mitigation, and recovery curriculum.

This curriculum will serve as a central guide for extension professionals engaged in emergency management programs and instruction; while also providing structure, organization, and validity to the programs we are currently engaged in.

This project is important to stakeholders because it reduces the losses that accompany disasters (death, recovery dollars, etc.) but preparedness also helps reduce fear and anxiety by helping individuals better respond and cope.

“Receiving this funding is monumental for the JAGriculture program; because it allows us to serve as a nationwide leader in the preparation and dissemination of research-based information that will be utilized nationwide for many years to come; it will also operate as a guide for Extension Professionals to engage in meaningful preparedness work to really impact their communities in the “long-term”, said Dr. Krystle Allen, Program Leader of Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) and Community and Economic Development (CED) Specialist at the SU Ag Center.

Funding for the grant was provided by the Advancing Disaster Education Initiatives in Rural America RFP.

Additional awardees are the Montana State Extension Service, Mississippi State University, University of Florida, and the University of Minnesota Extension RSDP.

For additional information, contact Dr. Allen at [krystle\\_washington@suagcenter.com](mailto:krystle_washington@suagcenter.com).



## SNAP-Ed Nutrition Program Hosts Food Demonstrations for The SU Ag Center's Ag Week “Field to Fork” Tailgate

As part of the annual “Ag Week” celebrations, the Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center hosted a “Field to Fork” tailgate to kick off the Southern University vs. AAMU football game.

Along with live performances from local Louisiana artists and the SU Gold’n’ Bluez Dancers, the SNAP-Ed Nutrition Education program hosted two live food demonstrations during the tailgate. Nutrition Educators for East Baton Rouge and East Feliciana Parish, Chrishana-Littlejohn Thomas, and Evan Egana prepared healthy tailgate treats such as red onion pasta salad and fruit with granola drizzled with honey and chocolate for tailgaters to sample.

The educators’ goal was to incorporate MyPlate’s food groups into the tailgate. They achieved this by substituting regular pasta for whole-grain noodles, adding various vegetables, and using different fruits and grains in the fruit granola. In addition to the food demonstrations, the nutrition educators offered healthy cooking tips as well as the nutritional benefits of eating more fruits, vegetables, protein, dairy, and grains daily.





# EXTENSION

this initiative underscores the institution's commitment to the well-being of its farming community. It showcases how land-grant universities are not only hubs for agricultural research but also essential pillars of support for the mental and emotional health of the very individuals who feed our nation. Harrison's work exemplifies the profound impact that interdisciplinary efforts can have in addressing the mental health crisis in the farming industry and offers hope for a brighter future for Louisiana's farmers.

For additional information on the resource database or the Southern University Ag Center's mental health services, contact Ashlyn Harrison at [ashlyn\\_harrison@suagcenter.com](mailto:ashlyn_harrison@suagcenter.com).

*This article appeared on [AglsAmerica.org](https://aglsamerica.org) on September 22, 2023.*



## SU Ag Center Works to Develop an Interactive Mental Health Resource Database Tailored to Assist Farmers

Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center's (SU Ag Center) mental health specialist, Ashlyn Harrison, LPC, NCC, is making significant strides in addressing the mental health challenges faced by farmers in Louisiana. Recognizing the unique stressors and hardships that agricultural workers endure, Harrison has taken a proactive approach to bridge the gap between mental health support and the farming community. Her project involves the development of an interactive mental health database tailored to the specific needs of farmers in the region.

Farmers in Louisiana, like their counterparts across the nation, face a multitude of stressors, from unpredictable weather conditions to economic uncertainties. The mental health database being crafted by Harrison aims to offer a lifeline to these individuals by providing easy access to resources, coping strategies, and professional guidance. As a part of Southern University's land-grant university programs,





# RESEARCH

## Dr. LaShunda Hodges Earns Drone Disaster Certification

Dr. LaShunda Hodges, Associate Professor of Soil and Plant Sciences in the College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences and Industrial Hemp Researcher has completed a Drone Disaster Training with Nine-Ten Drone.

During the training, which was held May 31-June 3, 2023 in Holly Springs, north Carolina, Dr. Hodges learned rapid launch and recovery/ site assessment, autonomous flight operations, manual flight operations, drone environmental awareness, and flight data evaluation for emergency situations.

To qualify for the training, Dr. Hodges had to be an FAA Part 107 certified drone pilot with over 100 flight hours.

“The training certifies me in drone operations disaster risk mitigation,” said Dr. Hodges. “This certification is important to my career because it can be applied to the mitigation of risk during agricultural and natural disaster response,” she added.

Nine-Ten Drones, LLC, is overseen by a Federal Aviation Administration Certified Basic Ground Instructor experienced in piloting both manned and unmanned aircraft flight operations.

Dr. Hodges trained under Nine-Ten Drones owner and founder, Paul Rossi.

For additional information on how the SU Ag Center and the College of Ag are using drones to assist small farmers and provide experiential learning to our students, contact Dr. Hodges at [lashunda\\_hodges@suagcenter.com](mailto:lashunda_hodges@suagcenter.com).





# COMMUNICATIONS



The SU Ag Center has launched a Podcast to highlight agricultural news from experts within the Ag Center and the College of Ag.

The latest edition of the show features information on planting vegetables, fruit trees, or even shrubs for the fall season.

Tune in to the monthly shows here or by visiting [www.suagcenter.com](http://www.suagcenter.com) and click on "Podcast."

## SU AG PODCAST

"Everyday we use some form of agriculture,  
from the time we wake up, until we go to bed.  
From clothing, gasoline, food, and bed linens  
— agriculture is all around us!"

Join us as we interview your Ag favorites,  
and bring you agriculture news.

Hosted by:

Dexter "Dex" Newman



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