

Southern Administrative Heads Updates and Highlights

Summer Meeting, July 25, 2026

INDEX

Alabama A & M University -----	1
Clemson University -----	2
Lincoln University -----	4
LSU Ag Center -----	6
Mississippi State University-----	7
North Carolina State University-----	9
Oklahoma State University -----	10
South Carolina State University -----	11
Southern University -----	13
University of Arkansas -----	15
University of Georgia -----	18
University of Kentucky -----	19
University of Puerto Rico -----	21
University of Tennessee -----	27
University of the Virgin Islands -----	29
Virginia State University -----	31
Virginia Tech -----	33



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & STAFFING

- Under the leadership of Interim Dean Dr. Douglas LaVergne, CALNS continues advancing Alabama A&M University's 1890 Land-Grant mission through excellence in teaching, research, Extension, and community engagement. Strategic priorities remain focused on student success, workforce development, agricultural innovation, research growth, and strengthened partnerships supporting Alabama's agricultural and natural resource sectors. Morgan Tipton joined the college as Public & Media Relations Coordinator/Technical Editor.

RESEARCH & INNOVATION

- Alabama A&M University received a \$600,000 USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) grant to launch the Integrated Data Science in Agricultural and Bio-environmental Sciences (IDSAB) initiative. Led by Dr. Yong Wang, the project will establish a new data science specialization within graduate programs, expand undergraduate and graduate research opportunities, and provide training in artificial intelligence, bioinformatics, GIS, remote sensing, and advanced analytics.
- The Food Product Innovation Center continued expanding support for entrepreneurs and food manufacturers through food quality testing, nutritional labeling, shelf-life determination, food safety testing, FDA readiness assistance, and resources for small-scale food businesses. Facility enhancements and renovations are underway to further expand the Center's impact.
- Community and Regional Planning faculty produced two peer-reviewed journal publications, delivered five national and international conference presentations, and served as reviewers for USDA and NSF grant programs.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT & SUCCESS

- Nutrition and Dietetics students achieved a 91% pass rate on the Registered Dietitian Examination, surpassing both the national average (63%) and the ACEND benchmark (80%).
- A CALNS student became the first known student from an HBCU to publish an article in APA City Planning Magazine, highlighting research on urban heat mapping, green infrastructure, and community resilience.
- Students delivered three presentations at national conferences, while six students secured paid internships across the United States.
- A CALNS-sponsored student team earned First Place in the national 1890 Land-Grant Hack-A-Thon competition.
- Students engaged in workforce development and career exploration opportunities through partnerships with Toyota, Deloitte, MITRE, CDW, Boeing, PwC, and the Defense Acquisition University (DAU).
- 60 Family and Consumer Sciences scholarships were awarded during Fall 2025.
- Through the Diversity and Excellence in Food, Environment and Natural-resource Disciplines (DEFEND) Program, 19 freshmen and 7 transfer students received scholarships valued at up to \$10,000 annually.

ADVANCING THE 1890 LAND-GRANT MISSION

- CALNS participated in national and campus-wide observances commemorating the 135th Anniversary of the Second Morrill Act of 1890, including representation at the national celebration in Washington, D.C., and educational programming highlighting Alabama A&M University's Land-Grant legacy.

Clemson University College of Agriculture, Forestry & Life Sciences

APLU Southern Administrative Heads Section Meeting

Update — February 2026 to July 2026

Leadership

- Following a national search, Dr. Benjamin C. Ayers, senior vice president for academic affairs and provost at the University of Georgia, was named Clemson's 16th president; he begins his tenure August 1.
- Dr. Carlyle Brewster was appointed Interim Dean for Research and Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station, and Dr. James Faust was appointed Interim Chair of the Department of Plant and Environmental Sciences; national searches for both permanent roles are underway.
- Dr. Kyle Barrett was named permanent chair of the Department of Forestry and Environmental Conservation, and Dr. Ramesh Jeganathan began his term as permanent chair of the Department of Food, Nutrition, and Packaging Sciences. A national search for the next chair of the Department of Animal and Veterinary Sciences is underway.
- Dr. Charles Privette was named Interim Director of the SC Water Resources Center.

Strategic Initiatives

- SC Horizons, a multi-institutional initiative spanning Food for Health, Precision Agroforestry, and Resilient Production Systems, held its founding coalition dinner on June 1, bringing together Maastricht University/Brightlands Campus Greenport Venlo, the Dutch Consul General, the SC Commissioner of Agriculture, and state legislative leadership.
- The college is developing a formal proposal for the Clemson University Center for Invasive Species (CU-CIS), built in collaboration with the Invasive Species Collaborative at Virginia Tech and presented to USDA-NIFA leadership as a candidate for federal investment.
- Clemson is a participating partner in the newly funded NSF BRIDGES Engine (Biobased Rural Innovation for Domestic Growth and Economic Security), a Regional Innovation Engine led by the HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology to build a biobased manufacturing economy from perennial feedstocks across the Southeast; the award carries an initial \$15M with potential for up to \$160M over ten years. Clemson was also named a founding partner in the separately funded NSF Grid Modernization Engine in the Carolinas, led by UNC Charlotte.

Research & Recognition

- Dr. Christopher Saski (Plant and Environmental Sciences) received an \$11M Bezos Earth Fund award for sustainable cotton research combining gene editing and synthetic biology — the largest single philanthropic research award in recent CAFLS history.
- Dr. Jeffrey Adelberg (horticulture) received a \$1.2M Gates Foundation award, in partnership with the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, to develop hydroponic propagation systems for banana crops in sub-Saharan Africa, with technology adaptable to strawberries and sweet potatoes in South Carolina.
- Drs. Prakash Khedun and James Sternberg each earned NSF CAREER Awards this cycle, with Sternberg concurrently securing a \$4.75M USDA Sustainable Packaging Innovation Lab award; Dr. Kyle Barrett led an \$18.6M U.S. Forest Service award to assess and restore ecological damage from Tropical Storm Helene across North Carolina's national forests.
- The Sandhills Research and Education Center in Columbia, SC will celebrate its Centennial anniversary this fall.

Philanthropy

- CAFLS closed FY2026 with a record \$18.5M in philanthropic gifts and commitments.
- The Boone and Crockett Wildlife Conservation Program reached its \$5M endowment goal in June on the strength of a major gift, culminating in its renaming as the John P. Evans '75 Boone and Crockett Wildlife Conservation Program.

Facilities

- The new Forestry and Environmental Conservation building will hold its grand opening on September 11.
- The Edisto Research and Education Center's new analytical lab is scheduled to open this fall.
- The college continues to advance its new poultry research facility, including a federal ask to add a clean space for poultry vaccine research.

International Partnerships

- The college is developing a substantive partnership with Maastricht University and the Brightlands Campus Greenport Venlo (Netherlands), and has signed MOUs with Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Sapir College, and the Senegal Agricultural Research Institute (ISRA).

Lincoln University

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

- The College of Agriculture, Environmental and Human Sciences appointed Dr. John Kessell to serve as associate extension administrator of the Lincoln University Cooperative Extension. Dr. Kessell most recently served at West Virginia State University Extension as the agriculture and natural resources program leader and holds a Doctor of Education in agricultural education degree from Texas Tech University.

FACILITIES

- Lincoln University broke ground on a new meat processing facility on April 22, 2026, at James N. Freeman Farm. The Small Ruminant and Meat Processing Facility will primarily be used to advance the university's Research, Cooperative Extension, support student education, and cultivate partnerships with local producers.
- A \$1.3 million renovation of 22 research ponds is currently underway.
- A \$400,000 renovation of three research labs in Foster Hall is nearing completion.
- A \$100,000 renovation of the Caruthersville Extension site was completed in Fall 2026.
- The following projects are in the design phase: construction of a livestock handling facility, an addition to the aquaculture facility, and renovation of the Schweich Hall basement, which will add a teaching lab and multiple office spaces to the academic area.

INSTITUTIONAL MILESTONE

- Lincoln University of Missouri marks 160 years of educational excellence across the 2025–2026 academic year.

EXTENSION

- The Native and Specialty Crops Program held the Native Plant Academy in partnership with Missouri Department of Conservation. The academy taught attendees how to use native plants for food, pollinators, wildlife, crafts, and landscaping.
- The Innovative Small Farmers Outreach Program launched a redesigned Jesup Wagon 2.0 to take practical tools, new technology and agricultural education to stakeholders around the state of Missouri.

- The 42nd annual Sheep Shearing School was hosted in March at George Washington Carver Farm for another sold out class.
- Lincoln University representatives attended the 2026 CARET/BAA Washington Conference, held Feb. 22-25 in Washington, D.C. Webster Davis, Lincoln University CARET Delegate, Anitha Chitturi assistant professor and state extension specialist in integrated pest management (IPM), and Marquan Martin, special assistant of operations to the dean in the College of Agriculture, Environmental and Human Sciences at LU participated in advocacy efforts, shared expertise and networked.
- LU's seventh international symposium on emerging plant and animal diseases organized by Jessica Epple-Farmer, LU assistant professor of animal science, brought together participants from the United States, Mexico, Guatemala, and Colombia. The event is supported by the Center of Excellence for Global Food Security and Defense.
- Judith Mutamba, an assistant professor and state extension specialist for human nutrition and health, represented Lincoln at the 2026 National EFNEP Coordinators' Conference in Kansas City. She presented how to integrate underutilized, nutritious crops into diets.
- The Cooperative Extension Program celebrated Dr. George Washington Carver's contributions to agriculture on February 23-25. Dr. Antoine Alston, associate dean for academic programs at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University served as the keynote speaker.

RESEARCH

- Lincoln University (LU) faculty and students showcased their work in March at the 2026 Association of 1890 Research Directors (ARD) Research Symposium in New Orleans, LA. Freshman Alyssa Brown placed second in the animal health category for her poster presentation and the LU Hackathon team placed third out of 10.
- LU Aquaculture Researchers are partnering with NuTerra Farms in Dexter, MO for field research into soybean-based fish feed studies for largemouth bass.
- Lincoln University of Missouri's (LU) Safiullah Pathan served as a keynote speaker at the 2026 International Conference on Nutrition and Food Science in Singapore. His presentation, "Nutrients and Bioactive Compounds of Non-Traditional Green Leafy Vegetables: A Natural Path to Better Health," focused on dietary diversity, disease prevention and the value of non-traditional leafy greens, including quinoa leaves.



LSU Agriculture

LSUAgCenter.com

Leadership Changes:

Dr. Brenda Tubana has been appointed as the new head of the School of Plant, Environment and Soil Sciences (SPSS). An accomplished scholar, mentor and teacher, Professor Tubana is a highly respected and long-serving member of LSU Agriculture. Her expertise is in soil fertility and nutrient management of major Louisiana row crops.

Dr. Al Orgeron, has been appointed the new Southeast Region Director. He also serves as the Resident Coordinator of the Sugar Research Station in St. Gabriel and is the Benjamin L. Legendre, Sr. Sugar Heritage ASSCT Professor. Weed management is his area of expertise.

National Titles:

Louisiana 4-H is the **2026 National Shooting Sports Team Champions**. This is their sixth national championship in the past seven years.

LSU | College of Agriculture

Spring 2026 Statistics:

- **293 degrees** conferred at the Spring Commencement.
- **262 bachelor's, 22 master's, and 9 doctoral** degree recipients.
- The graduating class includes students from 24 states and 14 countries, with more than half from Louisiana.

Highlights:

- **2,000 graduates** over the past 5 years.
- **34.7% increase** in applications.
- **17.5% increase** in admitted students.
- **8.4% increase** in undergraduate enrollment over the past 4 years.
- **9.4% increase** in degree production.

**LOUISIANA
SOLUTIONS
GLOBAL IMPACT**



#12
**AG SCIENCES
RESEARCH**
BASED ON FY24 NSF HERD
SURVEY DATA

\$123 MILLION
Ag Sciences Research
Expenditures
30.7% INCREASE
FROM FY23 TO FY24

Compare the **TOP 25 SCHOOLS** in Ag Sciences and scale by the size of the states' Ag Enterprise
WE RANK ...

#5 in Ag Sciences Research Expenditures **PER ACRE**

#1 in Ag Sciences Research Expenditures **PER FARM**

#1 in Ag Sciences Research Expenditures **PER PRODUCER**

EXTENSION
STATEWIDE IMPACT

1.4M
IN-PERSON
PROGRAMMATIC
CONTACTS IN 2025



YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

169K **58%**
4-H MEMBERS & PARTICIPANTS INCREASE FROM 2024 TO 2025
13K FFA MEMBERS IN LOUISIANA

6,000+ IBCs
Industry-Based
Certifications
earned through school-based ag education (SBAE) last year
71% Increase

Strengthening Invasive Species Response:

APHIS funded a \$691,000 Grand Challenge Grant to Dr. Honglin Feng & Dr. Kristen Healy (LSU AgCenter Entomology) to develop tools that bolster preparedness and response -- Engineering symbiont-mediated RNAi for **New World Screwworm** control - an innovative method for delivering **double-stranded RNA (dsRNA)** to insects using their **culturable gut symbiotic bacteria** as a vector.

Commodity Boards Research Grants

Rice \$1.35 Million

Soybean and Grain \$1.32 Million

Sugarcane \$1.66 Million



Southern Administrative Heads Update, July 2026

DIVISION LEADERSHIP

No changes since winter 2026 meeting.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

- Ranked No. 14 nationally in National Science Foundation Higher Education Research and Development expenditures in Agriculture and Natural Resources and Conservation.
- Mississippi State received a \$3 million National Science Foundation Research Traineeship grant establishing the Smart Agriculture Energy Innovation Network, a cross-disciplinary initiative to prepare the workforce needed for resilient rural energy infrastructure.
- The Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Design was selected as one of only eight institutions nationwide to receive the inaugural Envision Resilience National Design Studio Grant, supporting community-based design education focused on climate resilience.
- The Forest and Wildlife Research Center released FORVAL-XL, an updated version of the nationally recognized Forest Valuation and Investment Analysis software. Originally developed at Mississippi State, the decision-support tool is widely used by foresters and land managers to evaluate forest investments and management alternatives.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AND STUDENT SUCCESS

- The College of Veterinary Medicine launched new One Health graduate education opportunities, including a Master of Science with two concentration options and a graduate certificate program developed in collaboration with the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the College of Forest Resources.
- The College of Veterinary Medicine opened the Shelter Medicine Primary Care Clinic, expanding hands-on clinical training while providing veterinary care for shelter and rescue animals throughout Mississippi.
- Two members of MSU's Pre-Veterinary Club were elected to national leadership positions with the American Pre-Veterinary Medical Association for 2026–27.
- Spring 2026 graduates
 - College of Agriculture and Life Sciences – 347
 - College of Forest Resources – 105
 - College of Veterinary Medicine – 153

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- Vision 2030 continues to advance through expanded steering committee membership and ongoing stakeholder engagement.
- The Food and Agriculture as Competitive Statecraft Collaboratory launched its inaugural study abroad program in March, giving students firsthand experience exploring the intersection of agriculture, food security and international affairs.



FACULTY RECOGNITION

Faculty received numerous national and international honors including:

- Fulbright U.S. Scholar
- Society of Toxicology Founders Award
- USDA/APLU Excellence in College and University Teaching Award for Food and Agricultural Sciences
- Farm Foundation Round Table Fellow
- National Cotton Council awards recognizing excellence in cotton research and Extension
- Extension Forester of the Year
- Mississippi Veterinary Medical Association Veterinarian of the Year
- agInnovation South Agricultural Research Innovation Award of Excellence (Early Career Researcher)
- Distinguished Service Award from the International Nondestructive Testing and Evaluation of Wood Symposium

FACILITIES AND CONSTRUCTION

- Broke ground on a new Poultry Feed Mill that will strengthen teaching, research and industry collaboration.
- Opened the new Livestock Evaluation Laboratory, enhancing livestock teaching, research and Extension.
- Construction continues on the Nancy Fair Link Laminitis Center, where inaugural director Dr. François-René Bertin is assembling a world-class research team focused on equine hoof disease.
- The Mississippi Legislature appropriated \$32 million for major renovations to the College of Veterinary Medicine's equine and small animal hospitals.

VISITORS

- Hosted leaders from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations during the International Institute's 15th anniversary celebration.
- Welcomed USDA Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Dudley Hoskins to highlight Mississippi State research supporting the state's agricultural industry.

ADDITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

- Ballew Hall received the America 250 Heritage Award recognizing the preservation and adaptive reuse of the historic facility.
- Mississippi State wildlife researcher Holley Muraco served as a scientific consultant for Pixar Animation Studios' film Hoppers, sharing expertise on North American beaver behavior.
- The MAFES Sales Store introduced Mississippi Blueberry ice cream, developed through student research using Mississippi's state fruit.

NC State's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences continues to strengthen its partnerships, expand workforce development initiatives and align research, Extension and academic programs to meet the evolving needs of North Carolina citizens and beyond.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

- Record enrollment, 2025 (4,471 students)
 - AGI students: 334
 - Undergraduate students: 3,249
 - Graduate students: 888
- Spring Dean's List: 1,402

EXTENSION

- New Associate Dean and Director Dr. David Monks installed
- Extension experts (campus & counties): 1,200+
- Local Extension Centers: 101
- Extension educational programs provided statewide: 27,000+
- Extension's economic impact on North Carolina: \$2.1 Billion

PHILANTHROPY

- \$43M + in total donations for FY25-26
- 1087 Scholarships awarded in academic year 2025-2026
- \$381,059,136 Total Endowment Value as of 3/31/2026

RESEARCH

- \$105M+ Grants Awarded across 603 grants
- Novo Nordisk Foundation- \$35M grant with \$8M to CALS (cutting-edge nitrogen use efficiency research for global crop production)
- Schmidt Sciences Foundation- \$6M grant (Resource Engineering Framework for Responsible, Augmented Modeling and Engagement (REFRAME))
- Three CALS faculty named as AAAS Fellows in 2026 (Rob Dunn, Sung Woo Kim, Heike Sederoff)
- CALS Faculty member (Mike Roe) named to the National Academy of Inventors
- CALS Faculty member (Jose Alonso Bellver) named to National Academy of Sciences
- CALS research translated into 53 intellectual property disclosures, 76 new commercialization agreements, 24 patents issued, 16 plant varieties released, and 2 new start-ups launched.
- Total Royalties \$3.76M
- Total Plant Royalties: \$2.76M

OPENING DOORS: WOLFPACK CONNECT

Wolfpack Connect expands access to CALS by creating a guaranteed transfer pathway for eligible North Carolina community college students. The program strengthens the college's land-grant mission by opening new opportunities for students to pursue degrees and careers in agriculture and life sciences.

EXPANDING CALS RURAL WORKS!

Through Rural Works, CALS is strengthening its commitment to rural North Carolina by connecting students with communities, employers and experiential learning opportunities. The initiative helps prepare graduates to lead, live and work in the communities that drive the state's agricultural economy.

The Code Calls – \$2B OSU Campaign:

OSU's historic fundraising campaign, The Code Calls, has surpassed the midway point of its \$2B goal, raising \$1B. Through donor-funded, renewable scholarships and targeted student experience initiatives, the campaign will expand access to higher education, ensuring talented students have the resources they need to earn a degree and develop career-ready skills.

Agronomy Discovery Center:

Planning continues for the Agronomy Discovery Center, which will elevate our research capacity and provide new opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration. We are thankful to the state legislature for the \$40M investment in creating new agronomy facilities in Stillwater. The agronomy headquarters site has been selected, and architectural plans are nearing completion. Private fundraising continues in support of this historic upgrade.

Beef Center of Excellence:

We are creating the Beef Center of Excellence, strengthening OSU's long-standing leadership in the beef industry and expanding our ability to serve producers across the state. We are presently recruiting our inaugural director for the Beef Center of Excellence. Fundraising continues in support of this important multi-disciplinary initiative.

Robert M. Kerr Food and Agricultural Products Center:

The Robert M. Kerr Food and Agricultural Products Center is undergoing a major modernization effort to ensure we remain a leader in food innovation, safety and value-added processing. One of the most significant additions is a high-pressure processing unit, which brings hyperbaric cold pasteurization to Oklahoma for the first time.

Centralization / Integration:

OSU announced plans to centralize IT, Finance, HR and Communications/Marketing. On July 1, our agriculture communications and marketing staff began reporting directly to OSU Brand Management. Agriculture finance now has dotted line reporting to OSU Central Finance, and HR will soon follow in a similar manner. No changes have been made yet for our agriculture IT team.

Oklahoma Wildfires:

Wildfires had a devastating impact in Oklahoma in the first half of 2026, particularly in the western part of the state, burning more than 300,000 acres in Oklahoma. OSU Extension is actively engaged in response and recovery efforts, led by our Disaster Assistance Response Team. From wildfire evacuation checklists to mental health resources, our team is providing the information producers need to support themselves and connect families with available assistance programs.

Dean's Dialogue:

Special guests join the Dean's Dialogue each semester in a series to address relevant issues in agriculture. We welcomed Donnie Smith, former CEO of Tyson Foods, in April, and David Newman, CEO of the National Pork Board, joined us in May.



U.S. Farm Report College Roadshow:

We welcomed the U.S. Farm Report College Roadshow to the OSU campus on April 30, an exciting opportunity to showcase our students, faculty and programs on a national stage.



- Dr. Louis D. Whitesides, vice president for South Carolina State University Public Service & Agriculture and executive director of 1890 Research & Extension, was selected for the prestigious Association of Governing Boards Institute for Leadership & Governance in Higher Education Class of 2026-27. The nationally recognized institute brings together senior higher education leaders from across the country to explore effective governance, strategic planning, presidential leadership and the evolving challenges facing colleges and universities.
- Sydney Keith, Education Innovation & Support state program leader, was named a MANRRS 40 Under 40 honoree. The recognition honors leaders who exemplify vision, resilience and a commitment to creating lasting change across agriculture, STEM and natural resources. Keith leads college and career readiness initiatives at SC State PSA, oversees the Agriculture Innovation Scholars Program and advises the SC State MANRRS chapter.
- Dr. Michael Williams, educational initiatives national program manager for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, met with SC State PSA senior leadership to learn more about the division's innovative programs, services and impact. Williams also served as guest speaker for the end-of-year banquet honoring graduates and students who achieved exceptional academic success.
- Dr. Rhea Bentley, Family Health & Nutrition state program leader at SC State Public Service & Agriculture, received the Excellence Award from the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences South Carolina Affiliate. The award recognizes her decades of leadership, innovation and impact in improving health outcomes across South Carolina.
- Dr. Hemanth Dakshinamurthy, a researcher with SC State 1890 Research & Extension, received a \$499,000 capacity-building grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. The grant will support the development of low-cost aquatic drones to strengthen water quality monitoring in some of the state's most vulnerable estuaries. His research will address challenges affecting coastal communities, including declining water quality and shellfish harvesting closures, while helping protect the cultural and economic legacy of the Gullah Geechee community.
- Nearly 60 SC State University students were employed through the 2026 Summer Internship Program. Students served as camp counselors, student researchers, student Extension agents and employees within PSA support departments.
- SC State Public Service & Agriculture supported 60 Agriculture Innovation Scholars and five USDA 1890 National Scholars during the 2025-26 academic year. Sixteen scholars earned degrees in spring 2026, the largest graduating cohort in the program's four-year history. Scholars achieved an average cumulative GPA of 3.6.
- The Center for Food Safety and Health at SC State PSA hosted a Good Agricultural Practices Certification Workshop at Camp Harry E. Daniels. The workshop helped small, new and beginning South Carolina growers develop food safety programs and prepare for GAP certification. Participants who completed the training received a \$250 stipend to support food safety improvements on their farms.
- SC State 1890 Research & Extension partnered with Orangeburg County School District to celebrate a new collaboration supporting agricultural education, innovation and STEM learning through Edisto Elementary School's AgTech Magnet Academy. SC State PSA donated gardening supplies, materials and other resources, along with a drone and sensors, to support hands-on learning at the school.



- The newly formed SC State Collegiate Farm Bureau chapter attended the Young Farmers and Ranchers Conference in Charleston, South Carolina. This year's theme, "Planted with Purpose," focused on cultivating purpose in agriculture and leadership. Members Eli Moore and Avery Franklin represented SC State in the Collegiate Discussion Meet.
- SC State PSA hosted its second annual Hack-A-Thon, where six student teams developed solutions to support young, beginning and small farmers. This year's challenge focused on creating a platform to help farmers identify grants and loans to grow and sustain their operations. Sponsors included AgFirst, Amazon Web Services, Presidio and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- Agriculture Innovation and USDA 1890 National Scholars volunteered with Edisto Habitat for Humanity to help construct the organization's 100th home. SC State PSA also participated in the key presentation ceremony, which brought together the mayor of Orangeburg, other elected officials, City Council representatives and members of the Orangeburg County Chamber of Commerce. During the ceremony, the scholars presented the new homeowner and her family with a basket of cleaning supplies.
- The Sustainable Agriculture & Natural Resources program delivered workshops for small-scale farmers and producers across the state. Topics included beef cattle pasture management, marketing and sustainability; pond management for Lowcountry producers; risk management through digital marketing and diversified production systems; soil health management in Southern soils; spring vegetable production; strawberry production; and leafy greens.
- More than 200 farmers and ranchers gathered at SC State University for an Advancing Markets for Producers program meeting. AMP helps producers enter new markets, adopt conservation practices and access incentives that strengthen the long-term sustainability of their operations. SC State Public Service & Agriculture and Clemson Cooperative Extension are collaborating through the program to support producers and strengthen farming communities across South Carolina.
- Thirteen SC State University Agriculture Innovation and USDA 1890 National Scholars traveled to The Gambia for a week of global learning, cultural exchange and exploration. The scholars toured Illiasa, engaged with faculty and students at the University of The Gambia, learned about agricultural innovation at the National Agricultural Research Institute and visited the U.S. Embassy.

The visit continued work that began during a 2024 field mission, when an 11-member delegation celebrated the installation of a solar-powered well and pump system. The system delivers water to 49 reservoirs with a combined capacity of 30,000 liters, directly supporting hundreds of families in Illiasa. The project received support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the 1890 Universities Foundation Center of Excellence for Global Food Security and Defense.

- Zy'Kiera Aaron, an SC State 1890 4-H member from the Pee Dee region, received the national 4-H Lead to Change Round Three Sustainability Grant for S.P.E.A.K., a project that helps young people build confidence in public speaking. Aaron presented the initiative during the 4-H Ignite conference.
- The \$5,000 sustainability grant supports projects that are prepared to expand beyond their initial funding through long-term planning, sustainability strategies and increased community impact. With this award, Aaron has secured \$10,000 in total to advance the project.
- SC State University students presented research on urban agriculture, chickpea production, artificial intelligence and other topics during the biennial Association of Research Directors Symposium in New Orleans.

Tuhina Sambhus, a junior nuclear engineering major, earned first place in the undergraduate competitive oral presentations for outstanding achievement in agricultural systems and technology. Her project, the Smart Weed Classifier app, allows farmers to photograph a weed, identify its species and determine an appropriate herbicide treatment. Designed to work offline, the app provides rural farmers with accessible, real-time information in the field.

Sambhus conducted the research through the Center for AI for Sustainable Agriculture, led by Dr. Joe Mari Maja, senior research scientist and center director.

Southern University Agricultural Research & Extension Center (SU Ag Center) Updates and Highlights

Personnel

- Dr. Orlando F. McMeans has been named Interim President of the Southern University System and will continue to serve as Chancellor of the Southern University Ag Center.
- Dr. C. P. Bagley retired as Vice Chancellor of Research on June 30, 2026.
- Dr. Devaiah Kambiranda has been appointed Interim Vice Chancellor of Research, and Dr. Janana Snowden has been named Interim Associate Vice Chancellor for Research, effective July 1, 2026.
- Two new Assistant Professors were hired in Food Science and Ornamental Horticulture

Research Update

- The Ag Center is working with legal counsel to develop patents for: 1) SMART Ranching technologies including ruminal boluses, dermal patches, and ear tags; 2) A new technology to prevent “fruit rot.”
- The SU Ag Center has completed a three-year on-farm study on carbon sequestration in grazing lands. This study is the first of its kind in the United States.
- The Viticulture and Enology Program has developed a new grapevine population with increased disease resistance for wine production.
- Completed the USDA-NRCS/SU Ag Center FAA Drone Certification Preparation Course.
- Dr. Kit Chin leads a team of research scientists focused on improving the production of roselle hibiscus, a niche market crop with strong consumer demand.
- Researchers are continuing to evaluate honeybee health in urban and rural areas in Louisiana in collaboration with USDA-ARS Bee lab.

Research Facilities Update

- While A.O. Williams Hall is under reconstruction, the State of Louisiana is providing \$5.5 million for the construction of two temporary research laboratory buildings and one office building.
- Four (4) research facilities are almost complete regarding the Ag Center’s poultry unit, with (1) main poultry building, (2) rabbitry building, (3) broiler house, and (4) layer house.
- The University’s Meat Lab Facility is under renovation for \$2.13 million.

International Activities

- The SU Ag Center hosted a delegation from the Ivory Coast (Ambassador to the US, Ivory Coast Minister of Agriculture, and U. N. Diplomat from Ivory Coast) in developing a “livestock academy,” as well as trade development with the U.S. shipping rice, poultry, beef cattle, and oysters to the Ivory Coast and in return, the Ivory Coast shipping coffee, chocolate, cashews, and bananas to the U.S.

Cooperative Extension and Outreach

- The Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development Institute (SARDI), a satellite campus of the Southern University Ag Center, partnered with the Ag Center’s Research Unit to establish a Viticulture Extension Program that provides research-based education to stakeholders while introducing K–12 students to agricultural science careers.

- To expand outreach despite funding constraints, Extension adopted a borderless service model with regional positions, increasing statewide programming, nutrition education, and client engagement across its four core program areas.
- The SU Ag Center's 4-H Youth Development Program partnered with a Fulbright Distinguished Teacher to expand STREAM education through hands-on experiences in sustainable gardening, food systems, robotics, drone technology, and artificial intelligence.

Southern Administrative Heads Update

University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture – Summer 2026

New Department Heads:

- o *Craig Bacon*, [Food Science](#)
- o *Norman Hord*, [Human and Environmental Sciences](#)

UADA EXTENSION

AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

- New Faculty:
 - o *Ramiro Oliveria* - Animal Science and Southwest Research and Extension Center, Beef Cattle Reproduction
 - o *Lynhe Demesyeux* - Plant Pathology and Southwest Research and Extension Center, Nematodes
 - o *Amy Wilber* - Horticulture, Turf and Forage Weed Science
 - o *Kate Turner* – Entomology & Plant Pathology, Rice Pathologist (Rice Research and Extension Center, Stuttgart)
- Employees conducted 23 row crop meetings last spring addressing production management and farm economics in light of rising input costs and depressed markets.
- Animal and Poultry Science, Entomology, Ag Econ, and Communications are working on a communication pipeline for New World Screwworm including web resources, media pieces, and webinars. CES and AES entomologists are prepared to support NWS identification, and county agents are being trained on surveillance procedures and pest identification.

FAMILY & CONSUMER SCIENCES

- FCS specialists have produced an FCS resource guide to assist in training new county agents on all subject matter within the FCS program area, addressing a pressing need for new agent training.

4-H AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

- 4-H Youth Development sent students on two study tours this summer: An Agriculture Career Exploration (ACE) group did a study tour in Greece and the Careers for Arkansas Livestock Leaders did a career exploration tour to Kansas and Missouri.

COMMUNITY, PROFESSIONAL & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Community Development team is currently preparing an Arkansas Voter Guide for 2026 to provide voters in the state with unbiased information on the four ballot initiatives and one bond issue that will appear on the statewide ballot in November.
- Dr. Seo in the CPED department just prepared an IMPLAN analysis on the economic impact of data centers in the state to assist state/local governments in evaluating proposals for these facilities.

UADA RESEARCH

LEADERSHIP

- **Larry Gallikan** was named [director of the Vegetable Research Station](#).
- **Dr. Flint Harrelson** was named [director of the Livestock and Forestry Research Station](#).

RESEARCH

- Two UADA faculty, **Dongyi Wang** and **Ali Ubeyitogullari** received NSF Career Awards <https://aaes.uada.edu/news/nsf-career-award-aerogel/>; <https://aaes.uada.edu/news/dongyi-wang-nsf-career-award/>
- A national team of horticulture scientists has discovered evidence pointing to the single genetic region that controls primocane-fruited in blackberries. <https://aaes.uada.edu/news/primocane-blackberry-genetics/>
- **Ali Ubeyitogullari**, an assistant professor of food engineering, was presented with the society's Health and Nutrition Division New Investigator Research Award by AOCS. <https://aaes.uada.edu/news/ali-ubeyitogullari-aocs-award/>
- Despite the challenging landscape for federal funding, UADA Research posted record research expenditures for FY 25 with \$95.2M, an increase of \$28M since FY21.

FACILITIES

- The new 63,000 sq-ft **Center of Excellence for Food Science and Innovation** received \$35M in federal and state funding. <https://aaes.uada.edu/news/state-funds-for-food-science/>; <https://aaes.uada.edu/news/new-food-science-center/>

ACADEMICS

Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences

- A record 482 students from the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences participated in our 2026 spring commencement ceremony.
- Bumpers College offers more than \$1.4 million for around 700 scholarships annually. More than 70 percent of students who complete the application process are awarded at least one scholarship, and the average amount of each scholarship is around \$1,900.
- The college's first-year retention rate is 90 percent, higher than the university rate of 86 percent; the six-year graduation rate is 75 percent (U of A 71%); our first-generation student population improved from 21 to 23 percent (U of A 22%); our transfer student percentage is 20 (U of A 16%); and our job placement/continuing education rate improved from 90 to 96 percent.
- The college's student services team in the Waldrip Student Center won the U of A Outstanding Staff Team of the Year award, presented annually by the U of A Staff Senate.
- The college has transitioned to a comprehensive advising model beginning in 2026-27 and has hired two additional advisors. The new professional advising structure is focused on maintaining high-quality, personalized advising while ensuring the model is sustainable as enrollment grows.
- Christopher Estepp, professor of agricultural education, received the Excellence in College and University Teaching in Food and Agricultural Sciences Award from APLU and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. He was one of four recipients nationally.
- Tyson Foods made a \$100,000 gift to support students pursuing a poultry science degree through the college's 3+1 Poultry Science Transfer Program. The 3+1 Poultry Science Transfer Program is for students who complete coursework in animal science at partner institutions before transferring to the U of A for their final year of degree requirements in poultry science. Current partner institutions include Arkansas State University, the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff and Missouri State University.



**UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA**
College of Agricultural &
Environmental Sciences

Academic Affairs

- Fall 2025 enrollment totaled 2,294 students (1,537 undergraduate; 757 graduate).
- Spring 2026 graduates included 414 bachelor's, 72 master's, and 53 doctoral degrees.
- Fall 2026 enrollment includes 455 new undergraduate students and 148 new graduate students.
- CAES awarded \$728,750 in student scholarships during CY2026.
- Credit hour production continued to grow, increasing from 56,731 (FY24) to 61,175 (FY26).
- Fastest-growing majors include Regenerative Bioscience (+161%) and Animal Biosciences (+16.5%), while continuing to increase recruitment for traditional agriculture majors.

Research

- CAES research expenditures reached a record \$75 million, including \$66 million in federal funding.
- Advanced agricultural innovation through the second year of research at UGA Grand Farm in Perry.
- Completed a \$1.5 million Controlled Environment Agriculture greenhouse and four commercial-scale container farms on the Griffin campus.
- Continued development of a synthetic biology research initiative through a planned four-faculty cluster hire and the proposed Institute for Crop Design.

UGA Extension

- Expanded science-based outreach through 10 Extension podcasts covering agriculture, natural resources, family and consumer sciences, and horticulture.
- Responded to devastating south Georgia wildfires by coordinating emergency assistance, volunteer support, temporary housing, and animal care resources.
- Opened the Green Stormwater Infrastructure Demonstration Site at the Griffin campus to provide hands-on education in urban water management.
- Improved statewide program evaluation through a new data dashboard that captures participant outcomes and aligns reporting with strategic priorities.

Development, Alumni, and Communications

- CAES raised \$13.9 million, reaching 116% of the FY26 fundraising goal, while establishing 17 new endowments and program funds.
- Georgia 4-H raised \$5 million, reaching 143% of its fundraising goal.
- Secured \$9.63 million in major gifts, exceeding fundraising, donor meeting, and solicitation goals.
- Expanded donor stewardship, alumni engagement, and career networking through signature events and mentoring initiatives.
- Office of Marketing and Communications earned national recognition from ACE, NAADA, and PRSA while advancing strategic communications through the Georgia Ag Impact Report, State of Solutions Annual Impact Report, Field Report, the CAES Brand Anthem video, Cultivating Curiosity podcast, and integrated campaigns supporting research, recruitment, and workforce development.

INSTITUTIONAL UPDATES

LEADERSHIP CHANGE

- » **Dr. Kendriana Price** was named Assistant Dean for Land-grant Engagement.
- » **Dr. Dennis Hancock** was named Executive Director of the UK Research and Education Center and Grain and Forage Center of Excellence in Princeton, effective Jan. 1, 2027.
- » **Dr. Gary Munkvold** was named Chair of the Department of Plant Pathology.
- » **Dr. Steven Price** was named Chair of the Department of Forestry and Natural Resources.
- » **Dr. Michael Wall** was named Director of The Arboretum, State Botanical Garden of Kentucky.
- » **Dr. Heather Norman-Burgdolf** was named Assistant Extension Director for Family and Consumer Sciences.
- » **Dr. Anna Kate Shoveller** was named Director of the Higgins-Neyland Companion Animal Program.

RESEARCH

- » Secured \$45.7 million in external research funding during FY26.
- » Faculty produced more than 400 peer-reviewed publications.
- » Construction continues on the \$280 million, 263,000-square-foot Agricultural Research Building, with completion expected in December 2026.
- » Additional investments in research infrastructure include a major renovation of the Entomology Research and Education Building, a new surgery suite at the swine research unit and a new Equine Sports Medicine facility, further strengthening the college's research capabilities across Kentucky.
- » Continued reconstruction and expansion of Experiment Station facilities across Kentucky, including the 32,000-square-foot Meats and Foods Industry Advancement Center, expected to be completed by the end of the year.

EXTENSION

- » More than 208,000 young people participated in Kentucky 4-H programs, helping build the next generation of leaders. In the 25-26 program year, nearly 12,000 youth improved their job interview skills, more than 3,000 developed a resume and more than 10,000 served in leadership roles.
- » More than 24,000 participants increased their livestock management knowledge, nearly 8,000 adopted best practices for animal health and more than 4,000 beef producers improved genetics through crossbreeding programs.
- » Across the Commonwealth, Extension helps improve quality of life by supporting healthy families and stronger communities. More than 12,000 individuals increased their knowledge of nutrition and healthy food access, more than 4,000 completed financial management and/or career readiness programs, and more than 2,000 volunteers worked to address community needs through local engagement and leadership.

STUDENT SUCCESS

- » Fall 2026 enrollment is on track to be the highest in four years.
- » Opened the 66,000-square-foot Martin-Gatton Agricultural Sciences Building and the renovated 92,000-square-foot Scovell Hall for Fall 2026 classes.
- » More than \$1.5 million in scholarships will be awarded during the 2026-27 academic year.
- » Continued the college's dual-support student success model, pairing every student with both an academic advisor and a career and professional development mentor.
- » 26.9% of students are first-generation (26.3% undergraduate; 34.6% graduate).

FACILITIES AND CAPITAL INVESTMENTS

The college has recently completed or is constructing eight facilities representing a historic investment in the future of Kentucky agriculture and communities. Together, these projects strengthen the college's teaching, research and Extension missions.

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH BUILDING

The 263,000-square-foot Agricultural Research Building will serve as the college's flagship research facility, supporting interdisciplinary research while advancing its teaching and Extension missions.

MARTIN-GATTON AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES BUILDING

The 66,000-square-foot Martin-Gatton Agricultural Sciences Building serves as the college's primary teaching facility and student success center.

SCOVELL HALL

Originally constructed in 1903 as the home of the Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station, the renovated 92,000-square-foot Scovell Hall now serves as the administrative center for the Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment while preserving one of the university's most historic landmarks.

GRAY DESIGN BUILDING

Landscape Architecture students now learn in a collaborative environment alongside architecture, interiors, historic preservation and product design students, creating new opportunities for interdisciplinary education.

MEATS AND FOODS INDUSTRY ADVANCEMENT CENTER

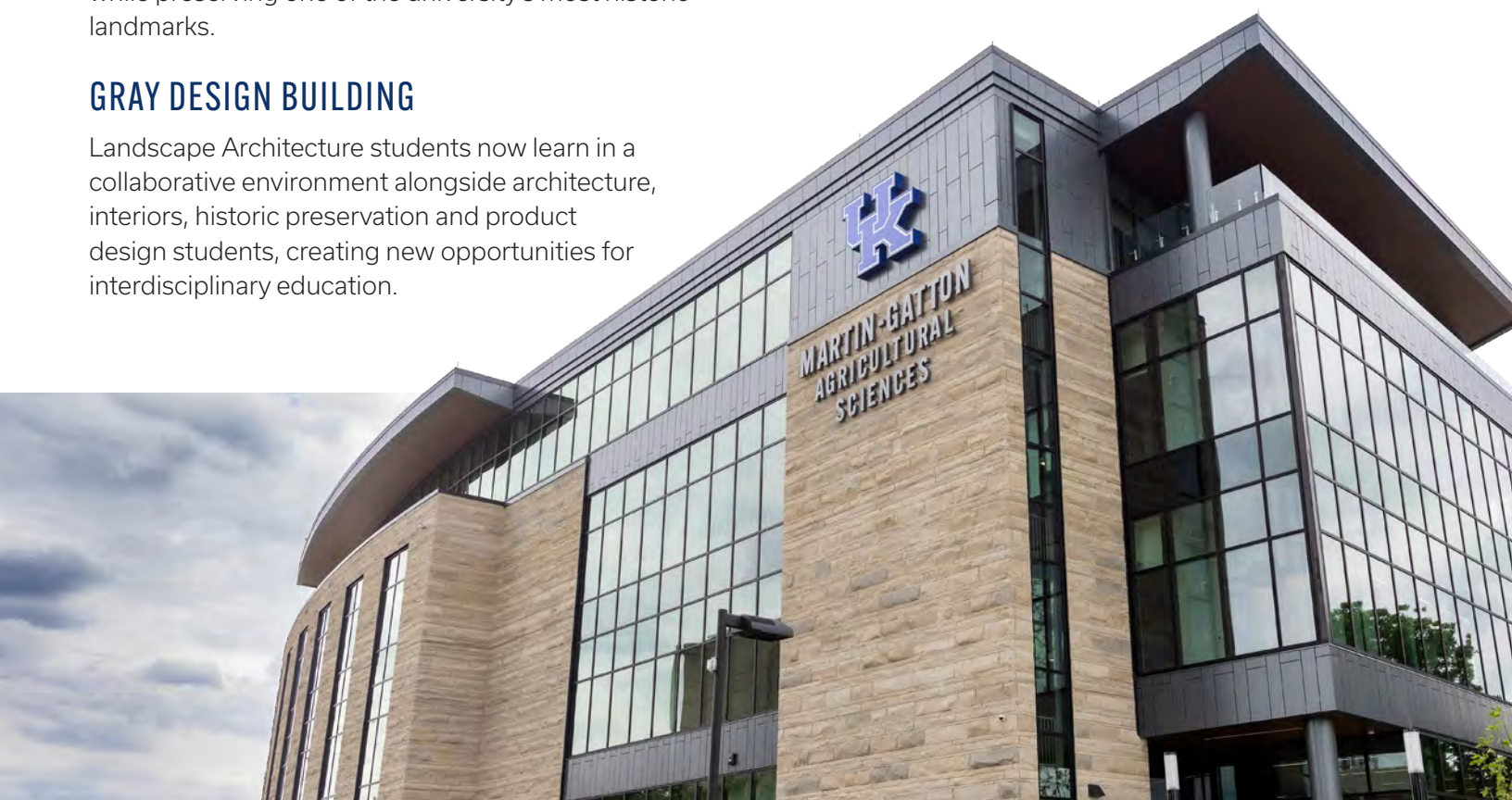
Located at the C. Oran Little Research Center in Versailles, the 27,385-square-foot Meats and Foods Industry Advancement Center is designed as a one-stop facility supporting Kentucky's multibillion-dollar animal agriculture industry through education, research, value-added production, food safety and workforce development.

ROBINSON CENTER

After sustaining significant flood damage in July 2022, the Robinson Center in Quicksand has been rebuilt, allowing faculty and staff to continue serving eastern Kentucky with modern facilities while expanding research and Extension programs.

UK RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CENTER AT PRINCETON

After devastating tornadoes destroyed or damaged 39 buildings in December 2021, the UK Research and Education Center at Princeton has been rebuilt, restoring and modernizing facilities while allowing research and Extension programs to continue serving western Kentucky throughout the recovery.





University of Puerto Rico COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES
Dr. Lynette E. Orellana Feliciano, Interim Dean and Director
Highlights from January to June 2026

AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION RESEARCH PROGRAM

Accomplishments

- The IR-4 Project continues to lead pesticide residue evaluations and labeling for tropical and subtropical crops expanding pest management options for growers.
- On June 30, 2026, the AES-UPR Plant Pest and Disease Diagnostic Clinic received accreditation from the National Plant Diagnostic Network (NPDN) through June 2030.
- A group of farmers from across Puerto Rico has organized to support the research, conservation, and promotion of locally developed beef cattle breeds (Criollo) adapted to high-temperature environments. AES is supporting this initiative by providing infrastructure, technical expertise, and research assistance.
- A first report was submitted to the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources on the evaluation of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), an emerging class of environmental contaminants, in reservoirs and streams across the island. This study represents one of the first assessments of PFAS contamination in tropical aquatic ecosystems worldwide.
- A second cohort of newly admitted Ph.D. students in the Tropical Agriculture Graduate Program began their research projects at AES facilities, contributing to the development of the next generation of agricultural scientists and professionals.
- The AES is currently managing a project aimed at enhancing student training and fostering research development. During this semester, the project has supported 18 student scholarships, 6 Master's-level research assistantships, and 3 doctoral research assistantships. Furthermore, during the summer term, 25 students are participating in funded internships at federal and insular agencies, on 16 states, including Puerto Rico.
- Two research projects have sponsored by the Department of Agriculture of Puerto Rico for the establishment of an Arracacia xanthorrhiza production and propagation program in Puerto Rico through grower engagement, soil assessment, input distribution, laboratory capacity development, and implementation of tissue-culture protocols, with ten participating farmers.

Challenges

- Continued budget reductions across the University of Puerto Rico system, including AES, resulting from fiscal measures imposed by the Financial Oversight and Management Board under the PROMESA Act. These cuts continue to limit opportunities to hire faculty, researchers, and technical personnel.

- Reduced financial support from local industries for agricultural research, innovation, and technology transfer activities.
- Climatologists have forecasted a severe El Niño event that could significantly alter rainfall patterns across Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. Expected impacts include prolonged drought conditions, increased wildfire risk, reduced agricultural productivity, and potential adverse effects on public health and natural ecosystems.

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE

Outstanding achievements of Extension Educational Programs

- The Program Evaluation and Reporting System (PEARS) was fully implemented at PRAES, enhancing the unit's capacity to document outcomes, evaluate impacts, and support data-driven decision-making. The system currently manages 388 active Individual Action Plans aligned with State Action Plans, implemented by 127 Extension Agents and Specialists.
- PRAES published twelve impact statements in the National Impact Database, documenting the outcomes and public value of Extension programs that address critical needs and generate measurable benefits for farmers, families, youth, and communities throughout Puerto Rico.
- In 2026, PRAES conducted 38 Stakeholder Merit Review sessions involving 326 youth, community leaders, and agricultural producers. These participatory assessments identified priority issues and emerging needs, strengthening the relevance and responsiveness of future Extension programming.
- The PRAES Positive Youth Development Program, primarily delivered through 4-H Club initiatives, provided 505 experiential educational activities that engaged 13,690 participants and promoted leadership, life skills, workforce readiness, and civic engagement.
- The Consumer and Family Sciences Program conducted 575 educational activities, reaching 10,542 participants with research-based education designed to enhance health, financial literacy, decision-making, and family well-being.
- The Agriculture, Marketing, and Natural Resources Program served 13,627 participants through 815 educational activities that provided technical assistance, strengthened agricultural productivity and market competitiveness, promoted sustainable resource management, and enhanced the resilience of Puerto Rico's agricultural sector.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Undergraduate Programs

Program	Enrollment
Animal Science (BCA)	526
Agronomy (BCA)	95
General Agriculture (BCA)	70
Agricultural & Environmental Systems (BCA)	51
Horticulture (BCA)	47
Pre-Veterinary Program	38
Agricultural Education (BCA)	34
Agribusiness (BCA)	19
Food Science (BS)	18
Crop Protection (BCA)	10
Agricultural Economics (BCA)	10
Agricultural Extension (BCA)	10
Soil Science (BCA)	7

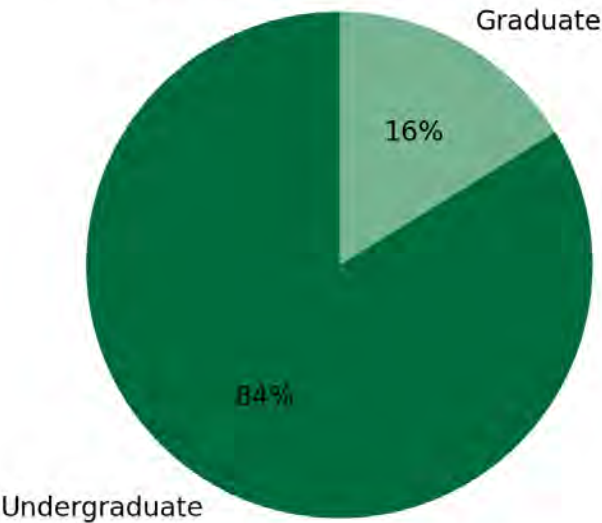
Graduate Programs

Program	Enrollment
Food Science & Technology (MS)	31
Animal Science (MS)	27
Soil Science (MS)	19
Horticulture (MS)	17
Crop Protection (MS)	17
Agricultural Extension (MS)	17
Tropical Agriculture (PhD)	16
Online Agricultural Economics (MS)	14
Agricultural Economics (MS)	10
Agronomy (MS)	9
Agricultural Education (MS)	9
Food Science (MP)	3

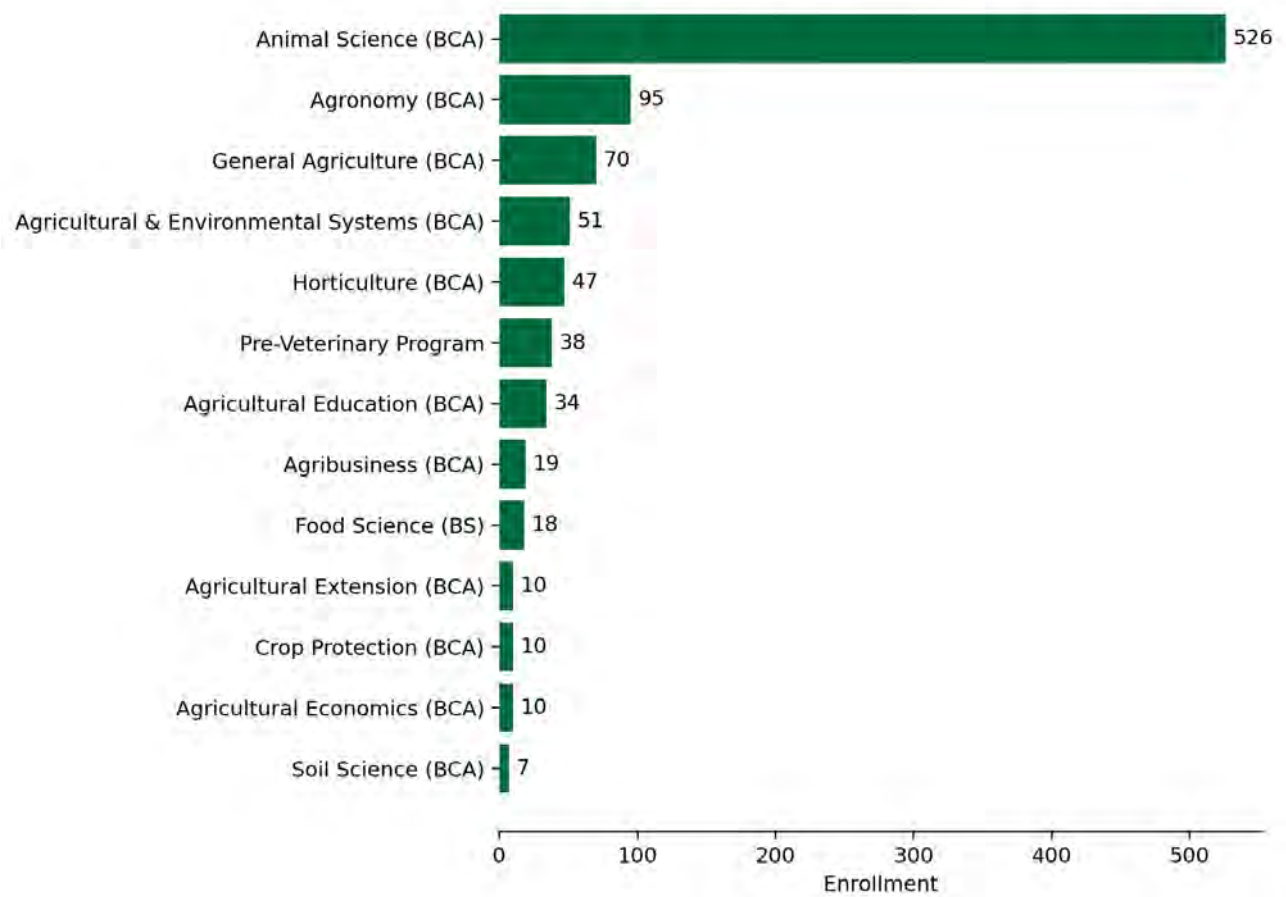
Spring 2026 Enrollment Summary
College of Agricultural Sciences

1,119	930	180
Total Enrollment	Undergraduate Enrollment	Graduate Enrollment

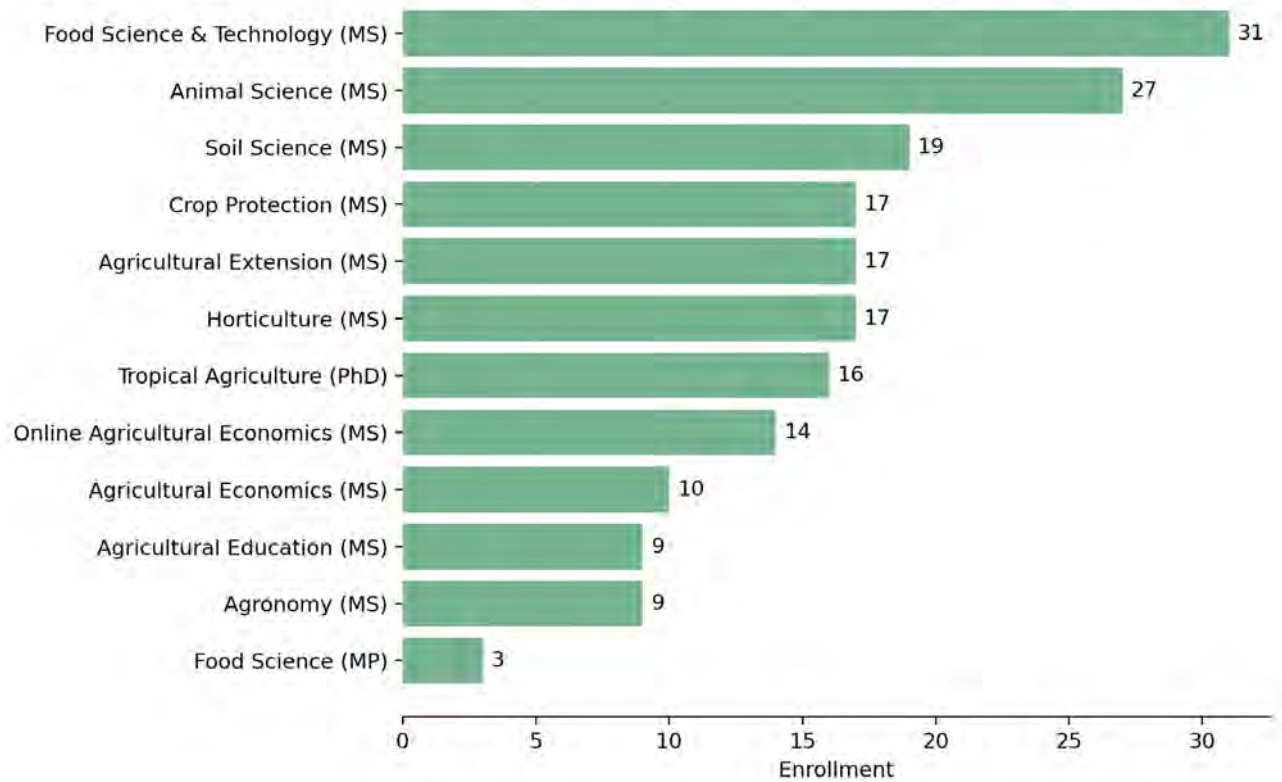
Enrollment Distribution



Undergraduate Enrollment by Program



Graduate Enrollment by Program



University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture Highlights

Southern Region Administrative Heads Section (AHS) Meeting — July 2026

Global Impact and Recognitions

- UTIA's world-renowned turfgrass program, led by Distinguished Professor **John Sorochoan** in the Department of Plant Sciences, is earning national and international headlines ahead of and during FIFA World Cup 26, as journalists and fans turn their attention to the science and research behind safe, high-performance playing surfaces. See <https://news.utk.edu/2026/06/11/turfgrass-research-making-headlines-around-the-world/> for more details.
- Two of UTIA scientists – **Jennifer DeBruyn** and **Jie (Joe) Zhuang** are among the four 2025 AAAS Fellows awarded to the University of Tennessee. **DeBruyn** is a professor of environmental microbiology in UT's Department of Biosystems Engineering and Soil Science (BESS), studying how microbial communities break down organic materials from agricultural plastics to animal and human remains. **Zhuang** is also a professor in BESS, specializing in understanding how water, nutrients and contaminants move through soil in hopes to improve soil health for agriculture, clean water and resilient ecosystems.

Updates and New Initiatives

- As an integral part of growing the UT's strategic program in Circular Bioeconomy Systems (**CBS**), internationally recognized materials scientist **Orlando Rojas**, a Canada Excellence Research Chair at the University of British Columbia, has been named the UT-ORNL **Governor's Chair** for Circular Biomaterials. **Rojas** will hold a joint appointment between UTIA (School of Natural Resources and Center for Renewable Carbon) and the Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL), focusing on transforming biological resources into high-value sustainable materials. **Rojas's** appointment marks the inaugural full-time **Governor's Chair** in UTIA.
- The National Science Foundation (NSF) has awarded the **BRIDGES** (Biobased Rural Innovation for Domestic Growth and Economic Security) proposal for the NSF Regional Innovation Engines Program. **BRIDGES** is an initiative led jointly by the HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology, The University of Tennessee, Auburn University, AGgrow Tech LLC and long-standing UT partner Volkswagen Group of America. It will receive up to \$160 million over 10 years to strengthen the circular bioeconomy in the southeastern United States and drive innovation-based economic growth in the region.
- The Herbert College of Agriculture established the inaugural **Faculty Teaching Fellows Program**, an annual college-wide initiative to advance teaching excellence through faculty development in instructional design, innovative pedagogy, and student-centered learning, further strengthening the college's commitment to providing a best-in-class educational experience.
- The Herbert College of Agriculture launched the inaugural **Tennessee Leadership Summit** in partnership with the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation, welcoming more than 90 high school students from across Tennessee for an immersive leadership experience that combined hands-on agricultural learning, faculty and industry engagement, and career exploration while inspiring the next generation of agricultural leaders.
- The Herbert College of Agriculture launched Tennessee's first undergraduate **Bachelor of Science in Bioinformatics**, equipping students with interdisciplinary skills in biology, computer science, and data analytics to develop data-driven solutions for real-world challenges in agriculture, animal science, environmental sustainability, and Tennessee's growing agricultural economy.

Leadership Additions/Changes

- Following a national search, **Shawn Hawkins** was named head of the Department of Biosystems Engineering and Soil Science, effective February 1, 2026. Hawkins has served in the BESS faculty since 2007.
- **Joy Rumble** has been named head of the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications, effective August 1, 2026. Rumble currently serves as the interim chair of the Division of Plant Science and Engineering Technology at The Ohio State University Agricultural Technical Institute as well as the Director of Graduate Studies for the Department of Agricultural Communication, Education, and Leadership at Ohio State.
- **Adam Ahlers**, an ecologist and wildlife biologist from Kansas State University, has been named the director of the School of Natural Resources at the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, effective August 1, 2026.
- **Dereck Corbin** has been named interim director of the UT Plateau Research & Education Center as longtime director **Walt Hitch** prepares to retire after more than two decades of service. A Crossville native with 14 years at the center, Corbin brings deep experience to this next chapter.
- UT Extension strengthened the senior leadership structure of Tennessee 4-H through the appointment of **Ryan Hensley** as Executive Director of 4-H Youth Development and **Jamie Harris** as State Program Leader for 4-H Youth Development. Together, these roles are designed to enhance Tennessee 4-H's statewide leadership capacity, build on the organization's historic strengths, and position the program for even greater prominence and impact in the years ahead.



Highlights **February 2026**

Academic Programs and Partnership

- The first cohort of two students from the School of Agriculture graduated with Bachelor of Science degrees in Horticulture during the Spring 2026 Commencement. Two additional students are on track to graduate during the summer term.
- A delegation from the School of Agriculture consisting of the Dean and Director; Assistant Director of Communication, Technology, Distance/Online Learning; and faculty of Animal Science visited Dominica to explore and discuss areas of collaborations with Dominica State College and the Ministry of Agriculture. The visit took place from April 12-16, 2026. On April 13, we met with the Ministry of Agriculture officials and discussed training needs for their extension staff, visited the National 4-H Coordinator and Agriculture Education Officer, and visited crops and livestock farms. On April 14, we met with agriculture science students and Department of Agriculture faculty and staff and discuss agriculture programs and curricular. On April 15, we pay a courtesy visit to the President and Registrar and met with the Dean of Agriculture and faculty for continuing discussion on programs and the next step on partnership opportunities including a 2+2 academic program articulation, faculty and student exchange, and agriculture research.

Professional Leadership Achievements/Recognitions

- **Dr. David Hensley** was elected Member, Board of Governors, St. George Village Botanical Garden.
- **Dr. Awika Henry** was reappointed to the Global South Committee on Open Science for another 1 year, representing the Caribbean region. Current membership is drawn from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, South and Central America (including the Caribbean).
- **Dr. David Hensley** was nominated by Auburn University Crop, Soil & Environmental Science Department for the Outstanding PhD Award 2025.
- **Dr. Carolyn Boykins-Winrow**, Associate Professor of Animal and **Dr. Larken Roots**, Assistant Professor of Aquaculture were selected to participate in the first Provost faculty institute for the 2026/2027 academic year.

Students Achievements

- **Febres E. III and Rios A.** (2026). "Climate Season Impact on Litter Size, Birth, and Weaning Weight on St. Croix Purebred Sheep in the Caribbean." ARD Symposium, New Orleans, LA.
- **John-Baptiste S., and Hensley D** (2026). "What Plantation Agriculture Left Behind: An Invasive Shrub Threatens Water and Farming in St. Croix, Virgin Islands." International Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Tourism Conference 2026, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.
- **Hodge I., Richards Jr. D. A., Charles I. R., and Zimmerman T. W.** (2026). *Influence of Floral Pruning and Trellising on Pachyrhizus erosus Tuber Yield.* 22nd Research Symposium of the Association of 1890 Research Directors, Inc. (ARD) New Orleans, LA.

Community Engagement

- Two Basic Computer Courses were conducted in April 2026. The UVI SOA Cooperative Extension Service Computer Training Course is designed to increase farmers' knowledge and usage of computers. Participants learned the basic operations of a computer, how to create and edit documents in Microsoft Word, and how to send emails. This course introduces the world of computing and aims to bridge the digital divide.
- One Usefulness of the Internet workshop was conducted in April 2026. This workshop helps participants get the most out of the internet by teaching them how to find information, shop online, communicate using various platforms, complete job applications, and pay bills online.
- **Dreves, Amy J.** (February-April 2026) seven all-day Pesticide Safety and Integrated Pest Management trainings on subjects including CORE Pesticide Safety Education, Institutional Industrial Structural Health Pests, Ornamental and Turf Pests, Public Health Pests, Right-of-Way Weed Management, Agricultural Pest Control-Plants, Recertification for expiring Certified Pesticide Applicator license were presented to the community. Examinations were offered to clients interested in obtaining a 4-year USVI Certified Pesticide Applicator license.
- **Dr. Hensley** conducted a St. Croix ENVIROTHON seminar in soil and water sciences for three middle-school and high-school-age students participating in an intensive environmental and agricultural education program.
- A group of five undergraduate students from Puerto Rico and three undergraduate students from UVI worked under Dr. Rios' supervision with three small-ruminant farmers in the USVI. Over three days, the students impacted more than 280 animals through hoof trimming, deworming, identification, and recordkeeping.
- Sustaining Our Agricultural Resources (SOAR) Symposium engagement brought together 17 extension and agricultural education experts from three U.S. land-grant universities to discuss strategies and grant opportunities in insular areas.
- Agricultural Experiment Station hosted 12 visiting students (and their professor) from the University of Tennessee for engagement and learning on research projects.

2025–2026 Outcomes Brief

The Virginia State University College of Agriculture continues to strengthen its national leadership as an 1890 land-grant institution by advancing excellence in **teaching, research, and Extension**. Guided by the College's **Rooted & Rising** strategic vision, the College is preparing future agricultural leaders, expanding research innovation, and delivering measurable benefits to Virginia's communities, producers, and food systems.

Teaching

The College remains focused on student success through innovative academic programs, experiential learning, and workforce preparation. During 2025–2026, enrollment reached **379 students** with a **79% retention rate**, **49 graduates**, and **59 scholarships totaling more than \$719,000**. The Hospitality Management Program earned full ACPHA accreditation reaffirmation, while students distinguished themselves through undergraduate research, AgTech competitions, internships, and leadership experiences that expanded career readiness and graduate school opportunities.

Research

Research competitiveness and innovation continued to accelerate through interdisciplinary collaboration and strategic partnerships. Faculty and students presented **54 research projects** at the 50th ARD Biennial Research Symposium while submitting **16 external proposals**, including **6 Evans-Allen** and **10 competitive proposals** to USDA, NSF, AFRI, VDACS, and SARE. Investments in the College's integrated research systems (**Animal-HERRDS, I-CARES, ENHANCE-FI, and STARS**) along with new partnerships with Canon USA, Dominion Energy, and Virginia Agricultural Research and Extension Centers, expanded research capacity in precision agriculture, food innovation, livestock systems, and sustainable agriculture.

Extension & Community Impact

Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Small Farm Outreach Program delivered significant statewide impact through education, technical assistance, and community engagement. During the year, Extension conducted **79 new workshops and training courses**, reaching more than **3,500 participants**, while the Small Farm Outreach Program provided **1,026 educational activities** serving **11,392 participants**. Randolph Farm welcomed **52 visitors** through educational tours, AgFest engaged **1,302 attendees**, and the VSU Farmers Market generated approximately **\$28,000** in sales for small farmers while engaging students in service learning. Community outreach also included packaging **more than 50,000 meals**

through the MLK Day AgriMeals for Change initiative, demonstrating the College's commitment to food security and community well-being.

Looking Ahead

Building on this momentum, the College will continue advancing its strategic priorities in **Food as Health, Precision Agriculture, Animal and Plant Bio-innovation, Community and Food Systems Transformation, and Student Innovation and Workforce Development**. Together, these efforts position Virginia State University as a national model for integrating teaching, research, and Extension to strengthen agriculture, improve health, expand economic opportunity, and serve communities across the Commonwealth and beyond.



COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES VIRGINIA TECH

JULY 2026

ADMINISTRATIVE

- Michelle Heck appointed Director of School of Plant and Environmental Sciences
- Matthew Taylor appointed Head of the Department of Food Science and Technology

Leadership Searches

- Head, Department of Entomology

CALS RESEARCH

- **FY26 research expenditures increased to \$94M+** – a 7% increase from FY25 and 20% of Virginia Tech's total sponsored research expenditures.
- FY26 CALS Integrated Seed Grants expanded to focus on two priority Research Investment Areas:
 - **Infectious Disease** – led by CALS ORI and CeZAP in partnership with Engineering, Science, VMRCVM, VCE, and the Sanghani Center for AI & Data Analytics.
 - **Data Science, AI, and Decision Support Systems** – in partnership with Engineering, VCE, and the Sanghani Center.
- Seed funding is designed to build interdisciplinary teams and improve competitiveness for large-scale extramural awards (>\$3M).
- CALS Graduate Research Programs developed a **college-wide graduate handbook template** to standardize policies, procedures, and student resources.
- **Research communications expanded to**

include coordinated internal and external outreach, highlighting faculty impact and priority research areas.

Research Facilities

- **Five-year review of the AREC system underway**, with completion expected October 2026, assessing operations, stakeholder engagement, facilities, communication, and alignment with Ag Tech and partnerships.
- Eastern Shore AREC planning completed; legislative request submitted to support **\$27M renovation and expansion** to meet modern research and Extension needs.
- **Hampton Roads AREC greenhouse (USDA-funded) under construction**; expected completion in 2026.
- Shenandoah Valley AREC planning completed for a **mass timber facility** to support outreach, education, and operations; next-phase funding proposal in development.
- **Strategic facility transitions underway**, including relocation of SPES and Entomology programs to support modernization and future research capacity.

CALS GLOBAL

- **Released the 2025 Global Agricultural Productivity (GAP) Report** during international events in Chicago and Rome, advancing CALS' global visibility.
- Continued **implementation of the \$80M Alliance to Advance Climate-Smart Agriculture** under USDA's Advancing Markets

for Producers initiative – the largest grant in Virginia Tech history.

- The initiative now includes **more than 2,500 producers** across four states, covering 507,300 acres, with approximately \$39M distributed to producers to implement conservation practices.



CALS ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

2026 Admissions first time students

- 4,330 applications (5.2% increase from previous cycle)
- 861 new students enrolled for Fall 2026
- Includes 42 associate, 116 transfer bachelor's, and 703 FTIC bachelor's students
- Soil Judging team took first place overall in the national championship.
- Virginia Tech Intercollegiate Dressage Team won national title at the 2026 Intercollegiate Dressage Association National Championships.
- Hosted Virginia Summer Residential Governor's School of Agriculture for rising juniors and seniors in the Commonwealth.
- Successful faculty initiatives have focused on artificial intelligence embedded in curriculum and enhancing student success through a partnership with the office of services for students with disabilities.
- Hosting joint career fair with College of Natural Resources and Environment in October 2026.
- Starting new major in life science communication in fall 2026.

EXTENSION

- Phase two of our changes to field leadership: Unit Extension Director (UED) positions posted and applications are being screened for 14 new UED leadership positions.
- Drought: Extension agents across central and western Virginia are helping producers assess damage, mitigate impacts, and develop emergency solutions for the 72 Virginia counties and cities approved for Secretarial Disaster Declarations due to drought and many drought-affected areas.
- Youth from across the commonwealth gathered on the Virginia Tech campus for the 100th Virginia FFA State Convention and Virginia 4-H Congress.
- Dr Mario Ortiz will be starting his new role as Extension specialist and assistant professor for farm business management this summer.
- Moving forward with a new registration system for Extension events that will streamline our data collection process and provide an improved user experience for clients.
- Through partnership with Brunswick-area community organizations, Virginia Cooperative Extension's health and well-being team participated in a Remote Area Medical (RAM) clinic event in Emporia focused on diabetes screening and education. The event registered 378 patients and provided \$247,323 in healthcare services. Patients diagnosed with diabetes or pre-diabetes were invited to participate in Extension's suite of diabetes management and prevention programs.

ADVANCEMENT

- FY26 Record Fundraising Year, New Gifts & Commitments - \$22M+
- FY26 engagement events connected with 700+ alumni and constituents leading to 50+ donations.