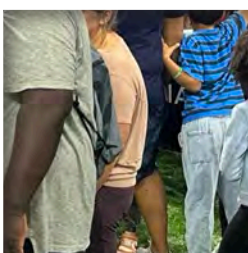
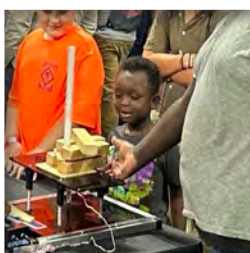
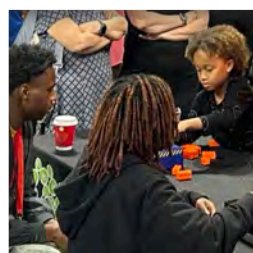
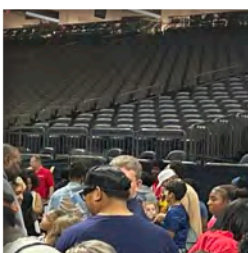
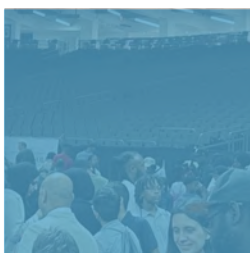
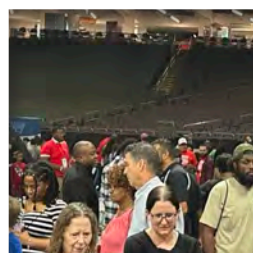
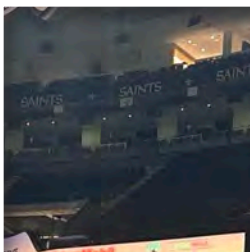


SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY **AG CENTER'S**



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

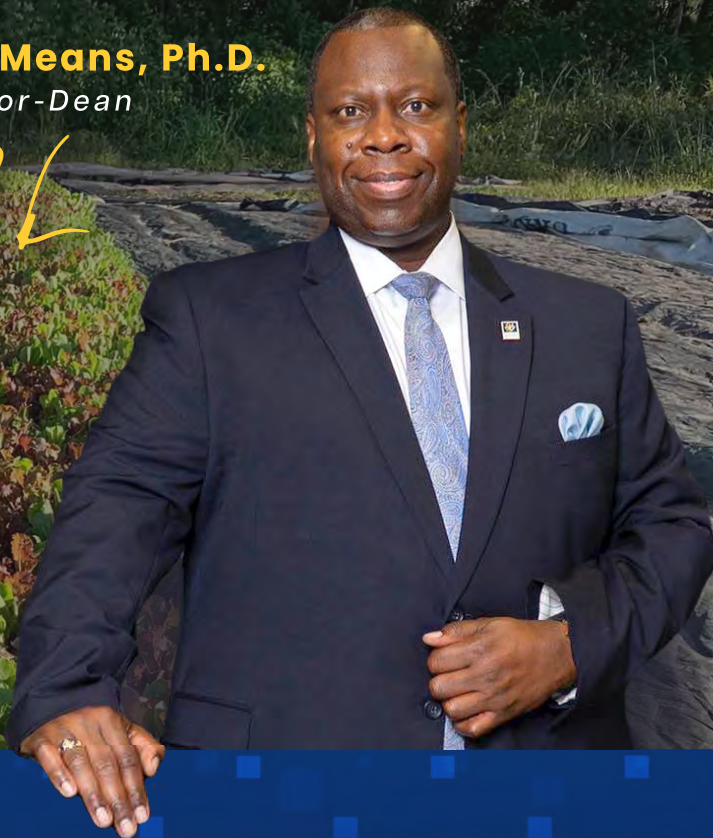
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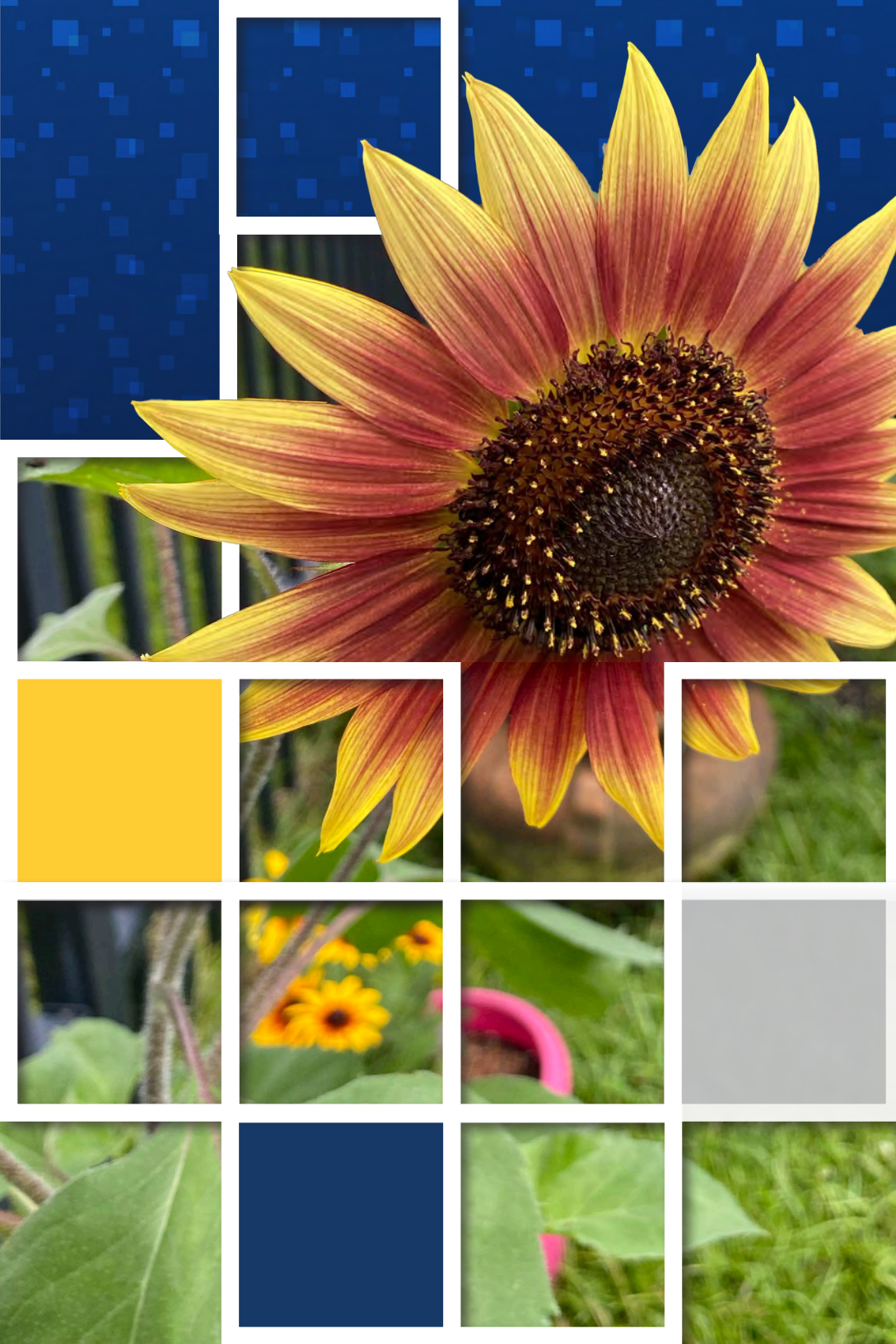


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# Cultivating Capacity, Empowering Futures: An International Summit Led by Southern University's Ag Center and College of Ag



The Southern University Ag Center and the College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences (CAHES) hosted their first Capacity Building Day on November 14, 2025, marking a transformative moment in student development and global partnership. The “Cultivating Capacity, Empowering Futures” International Professional Development Summit welcomed exceptional students from Southern University and A&M College, Southern University at New Orleans and global industry leaders from DRAX, an international sustainable energy company based out of the United Kingdom, to explore the future of sustainable careers.

The Summit, which was held at the Leon R. Tarver II Cultural & Heritage Center, was part of the SU Ag Center’s Capacity Building Series, a high-impact initiative designed to equip students with the tools, knowledge, and connections to lead in the global green economy.

Students arrived in professional attire, ready to network, compete, and learn from experts in renewable energy and agriculture.

The day began with a powerful acknowledgment from Chancellor-Dean Dr. Orlando F. McMeans and Matt White, DRAX Executive Vice President.

Throughout the summit, students engaged in the following interactive sessions designed to prepare them for careers in agriculture, energy, and sustainability:





“Ready, Set, Green!” – Workforce readiness for a sustainable future. This session featured a live demonstrations and conversations about professional attire followed by a resume and LinkedIn workshop led by DRAX.

AgriPitch: Innovation in AgTech – A dynamic case challenge and pitch competition where students tackled real-world agricultural technology problems and presented innovative solutions in a fast-paced format inspired by “Shark Tank.”

The day concluded with an executive roundtable session consisting of executives from DRAX and Southern University to grow the capacity of this new relationship.

Capacity-building is defined as the “process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world.” An essential ingredient in capacity-building is transformation that is generated and sustained over time from within; transformation of this kind goes beyond performing tasks to changing mindsets and attitudes. Universities can serve as centers of capacity-building through research, innovation and data collection and analysis. Institutional Advancement and Career Services developed the Corporate Capacity Building Model for corporations, and the initiative has impacted student development. We were especially grateful to have scholars from the Honore' Center for Undergraduate Student Achievement (HCUSA) that demonstrate professionalism and stewardship for the planet like their namesake, Lt. General Russell Honore'.

DRAX professionals Joya Williams, Business Ethics Partner for North America; Jaidyn Oliver, Internal Communications Business Partner; Vicki Skelton, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Manager; Dr. Naomi Christopher, DEI Manager for North America; Deidra Jackson, SVP of Corporate Affairs for North America; Kelvin Banks, Senior Forester – Landowner Assistance Program; Shelby Kelmell, U.S. Community Fund Officer and Louisiana Liaison; Michelli Martin, U.S. Communications Manager; and Matt White, Executive Vice President.

This event was made possible through the collaboration between the Ag Center, College of Agriculture, and Career Services. Special acknowledgement goes to Dr. Renita Marshall, Robert Easley, Jr., and Tamara Montgomery.

For more information about the Summit or upcoming opportunities, please contact Robert Easley at [robert\\_easley@suagcenter.com](mailto:robert_easley@suagcenter.com) or Dr. Renita Marshall at [renita\\_marshall@suagcenter.com](mailto:renita_marshall@suagcenter.com).

## CAHES Students Participated in an Agricultural Program in Kenya



A select group of students and faculty from the Southern University College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences (CAHES) and the Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center (SU Ag Center) recently traveled to Kenya to participate in the Next Generation Global Agriculture Scholars Experiential Learning Program. The program, which occurred from November 15–24, 2025, was hosted by Kenyatta University in Nairobi and sponsored through the USDA-funded initiative, “Generating and Sustaining the Next Generation of the Food, Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Human Sciences (FANH) Workforce through International Experiential Learning, Outreach, and Engagement.”

The experiential learning program offered students in the College of Ag a unique opportunity to explore international agriculture through academic exchanges, cultural immersion, and hands-on field experiences across Kenya’s agricultural and ecological sectors. Participants engaged directly with Kenyan university students, faculty, and local professionals to learn about sustainable agriculture, food systems, and global food security challenges.

The Southern University delegation included both undergraduate and graduate students from a range of agricultural disciplines, including Agricultural Sciences, Urban Forestry, Human Sciences, and Environmental Toxicology.



### The selected students were:

- **Georrein Dupre** – Graduate Student, Environmental Toxicology
- **Payton Beaner** – Graduate Student, Urban Forestry and Natural Resources
- **Javon Staves** – Undergraduate Student, Agricultural Sciences and Technology
- **Jae'lyn Gordon-Matthews** – Undergraduate Student, Human Sciences
- **Saige Kenner** – Undergraduate Student, Agricultural Sciences and Technology
- **Sydney Marshall** – Undergraduate Student, Agricultural Sciences and Technology
- **Analyse Houston** – Undergraduate Student, Agricultural Sciences and Technology
- **Courbir Crosby** – Undergraduate Student, Agricultural Sciences and Technology
- **Jeffery Floyd, Jr.** – Undergraduate Student, Agricultural Sciences and Technology
- **Zion Singleton** – Undergraduate Student, Agricultural Sciences and Technology

### Faculty and Staff:

- **Dr. Renita Marshall** – Vice Chancellor for Academics and Student Support-Associate Dean College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences
- **Dr. James Obuya** – Research Assistant Professor of Plant & Soil Sciences
- **Keandrys Dalton** – Student Support Coordinator
- **Saturn Douglas** – Director for Recruitment and Retention
- **Clourth Wilson** – Director of Technology Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center

During the trip, students participated in an academic classroom exchange collaboration with Kenyatta University students and faculty, visited farms, factories, and research centers such as the Kiambu Tea Farm, KALRO Coffee Production, and Mama Faith/Kakai Farms, the Nairobi National Park, the Elephant Orphanage, Giraffe Center, and the Bomas of Kenya Cultural Showcase. Students experienced cultural immersion through Swahili language lessons, Kenyan cuisine, music, and dance experiences with the KU Rambolo Dancers.

This experience has enabled the students to develop stronger cross-cultural competence and global citizenship, strengthen academic and professional skills through exposure to international agricultural practices, build professional networks with peers and faculty at Kenyatta University and within Kenya's agricultural sector, expand personal growth through leadership development, adaptability, and empathy.

Ultimately, this international experiential learning experience has contributed insights and experiences among the students, enriching classroom discussions and community engagement at Southern University.



# Summer Internships Are Assisting Students Like Cire Portegies In and Outside of the Classroom



As a junior majoring in Urban Forestry at Southern University's College of Ag, Cire Portegies found the Yale Conservation Scholars – Early Leadership Initiative to be one of the most developmental and rewarding experiences of her academic journey. The program began with the New Horizons in Conservation Convening hosted at Yale School of the Environment, providing an invaluable opportunity to network and engage with both emerging and established leaders across diverse environmental disciplines.

Throughout the summer, Cire strengthened connections with peers and benefited from extensive mentorship through weekly professional development sessions led by the Yale Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Sustainability Initiative.

Her host-site placement with Rock Creek Conservancy (RCC), a nonprofit organization in Washington, D.C., served as the ideal catalyst for gaining professional exposure. Coming from a background rooted in laboratory and research experience, Cire embraced RCC's community-focused, land stewardship mission, which offered hands-on engagement with conservation fieldwork. In addition to organizing community events, she received training in flame weeding, safe pesticide application, and identification of Early Detection Rapid Response species. Leveraging these skills, Cire contributed to invasive plant removals, tree tagging, and water bacteria monitoring at multiple restoration sites. Upon returning to the Bluff, Cire continued to expand her nonprofit experience through an urban forestry internship with Baton Rouge Green. Looking ahead, she plans to pursue a graduate program in urban forestry and ultimately establish a nonprofit dedicated to implementing agroforestry systems in urban environments—enhancing climate resilience and promoting food sovereignty through regenerative agricultural practices.



# Ag Students Jakari Brown and Nyla Reiss Selected As 2025 Cargill Thrive Scholars

MANRRS IS PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THE

## 2025 CARGILL THRIVE Scholars



*Jamarrin Beasley*  
University of Arkansas  
at Pine Bluff



*Jakari Brown*  
South University and  
ABM College



*Madison Doctor*  
Florida Agricultural and  
Mechanical University



*Deshaun Franklin*  
Tuskegee University



*Nery Gonzalez*  
Abraham Baldwin  
Agricultural College



*Marshall Goodrum II*  
North Carolina Agricultural  
& Technical State University



*Ah'Maya Green*  
University of Arkansas  
at Pine Bluff



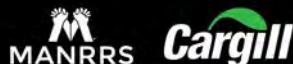
*Nicholas Hall*  
Prairie View A&M  
University



*D'Aneastacia Hutchinson*  
Central State University



*Sydney Love*  
Kansas State University



MANRRS IS PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THE

## 2025 CARGILL THRIVE Scholars



*Paige Martin*  
Alabama A&M University



*Elijah McCray*  
Alabama A&M University



*Kaitlyn Patrick*  
Kansas State University



*Theodora Ramesh*  
Purdue University



*Nyla Reiss*  
Southern University and  
ABM College



*Ivan River*  
Texas Tech University



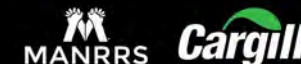
*Sakana Srinivasan*  
Purdue University



*Taylor-Nicole Tate*  
Alabama A&M University



*Jynia Washington*  
Clemson University



SU CAHES students Jakari Brown and Nyla Reiss are among the nineteen 2025 Cargill Thrive Scholars. Brown is a junior, Pre-Veterinary medicine major from Alexandria, Louisiana and Reiss is a senior, Agribusiness major from Mobile, Alabama.

"This achievement not only highlights Jakari and Nyla's exceptional abilities and promise but also reflects positively on our entire university," stated Chianti Primus, SU Ag Center Senior Administrative Assistant and MANRRS co-advisor.

Cargill's "Thrive Scholars" Program, which partners with Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS), provides recipients with financial awards, leadership development opportunities, and a travel grant to attend the MANRRS conference. This includes a VIP Track experience at the conference, which involves Farm Credit VIP meals, leadership development sessions, and networking with industry leaders. The program aims to empower students to thrive academically, personally, and professionally, ultimately preparing them to make a meaningful impact in their communities and beyond.



# SU Ag Center SNAP-Ed Nutrition Education Program



For more than two decades, the Southern University Ag Center's SNAP-Ed Program has been a steady force for health education and community empowerment across Louisiana. Operating throughout 13 parishes, the program has built a legacy of meeting people where they are, breaking down barriers to healthy living, and offering practical tools families can use immediately.

The program's core focus areas reflected its broad commitment to community well-being: Nutrition Education, Food Safety, Healthy Recipes, Physical Activity, Gardening, and Community Involvement. Each area is intentionally designed to address the complex factors that shape health outcomes for Louisiana residents. SNAP-Ed doesn't just teach; it equips, demonstrates, and sustains.

Its impact was unmistakable. Across the state, 85 active community and school gardens served as living classrooms where youth and adults learned to grow food, understand the value of nutrition, and built healthier habits. Every year, 10 summer cooking camps gave young people hands-on experience preparing nutritious meals, reinforcing lifelong skills through creativity and teamwork.

In Fiscal Year 2025 alone, the program reached more than 30,000 participants through direct education. An additional one million individuals were reached through indirect education and social marketing efforts, extending the program's reach far beyond classroom walls. These numbers underscore the program's effectiveness and its ability to adapt to changing community needs while maintaining high engagement.

The Southern University Ag Center's SNAP-Ed Program continues to stand as a model for community-centered health education. Its work proves that when knowledge, access, and empowerment come together, lasting change follows.

## Projects/Interventions:

- ✓ Intervention 1: "Let's Eat for the Health of It" Nutrition Education Project (direct-ed.)
- ✓ Intervention 2: Growing Healthy Gardening Initiative
- ✓ Intervention 3: C.H.E.F. Youth Summer Cooking Camp

## Progress:

- ✓ 85 Active Community/School Gardens
- ✓ 10 Summer Cooking Camps (each year)
- ✓ 30,000+ participants reached with Direct Education FY25
- ✓ 1000,000+ participants reached with Indirect Education and Social Marketing FY25



# SU Ag Center & Park Ridge Achievement Academy Co-hosted Healthy Harvest Community Festival



The Southern University Ag Center, the Park Ridge Achievement Academy, and Devoted Health co-hosted the Healthy Harvest Community Festival on Nov. 19, 2025 at the school in Baker, LA.

The festival brought together students, seniors, and community members to celebrate health, wellness, and connection while addressing key health needs and combating food insecurity by providing access to nutritious foods and valuable wellness resources.

In addition to health screenings, physical activities, free food, and community resources, the festival also provided produce on a first-come, first-served basis, mental health services to support emotional and behavioral well-being, free haircuts, hairstyles and fitness sessions.

For additional information on the Healthy Harvest Community Festival, contact Si-Arah Jones at [siarah\\_mccray@suagcenter.com](mailto:siarah_mccray@suagcenter.com) or Jasmin Mathews at [jasmin\\_plowe@suagcenter.com](mailto:jasmin_plowe@suagcenter.com).



# STEM NOLA- Bayou Classic Edition



Members of the SU Ag Center's Youth Development department participated in the Bayou Classic STEM Fest at the Caesars Superdome on Nov. 24, 2025. The event, which was hosted by the STEM NOLA and Exxon Mobil, kicked off with a lively presentation featuring a jazz band and Zulu characters from Southern University and Grambling University as part of the Bayou Classic kickoff celebration.

Students from across New Orleans explored hands-on activities in lung health, robotics, aeronautics, artificial intelligence, renewable energy, motion, force, and more.

Aralynn Davis, SU Ag Center's Regional Youth Development Agent for Orleans Parish worked directly with students at the robotics and aeronautics stations, helping them build, test, and understand how these technologies work. Dr. Raquel Ayles, SU Ag Center's Associate Vice Chancellor for Extension & Outreach and Youth Development Program Leader, supported several stations and kept students engaged as they discovered new concepts.

"It was an inspiring day filled with learning, creativity, and excitement for the next generation of STEM leaders," said Davis.

To learn more about the SU Ag Center's Youth Development Program visit, <https://southern-ag-center.webflow.io/cooperative-extension/youth-development/about-youth-development>.

# Proper Livestock Management and the Importance of Soil Health



Grazing lands account for 55% of all privately owned lands in the U.S., yet the research focus on these lands related to soil health has been very limited. While crop lands and forested lands have been studied for their impacts on soil health, the Southern University Ag Center conducted one of the first studies in the U.S. focused on grazing lands. The study was conducted over a four-year period at three privately owned farms in the South Louisiana towns of DeRidder, Palmetto and Norwood. To evaluate the impacts of grazing management systems on forage productivity, pastures at each farm were sampled seven times per year for quality, yield, and botanical composition. Three fields at each farm were evaluated annually for "soil health" improvements twice per year (April and October) resulting from rotational grazing and increasing forage species diversity in the pastures. The grant for this project was funded by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) with continuing involvement from that agency. Each year at all three farms "Pasture Walks" were held and open to the public and well attended by local farmers and student groups. Over 300 people attended the Pasture Walks and demonstrations on soil health, forage measurements, and soil health.

A "rotational grazing management system" was employed at each farm and was based on a 30-day rest-rotation schedule. The number of paddocks at each farm were three, five, and 30 paddocks showing the different levels of management. The first farm with three paddocks used each pasture for grazing for about 10 days and then rested it for 20 days while other pastures were grazed. The



final farm would graze a pasture for one day and rest the pasture for 29 days in the rotation. A 30-day grazing cycle allows a pasture to recover from grazing, and this schedule tends to maximize total forage yield in a pasture, with forage this age (30 days) still having very good forage quality attributes.

Forage quality is highest when grass is one-day old, but there are limited amounts. As the forage grows and ages, there is more yield, but quality is less. But good quality is maintained in forages until about day 30, so a 30-day rotational system tends to maximize high forage yield and good forage quality. Rotational grazing in this manner will usually allow an increased stocking rate of about 30% due to optimum forage productivity.

But maybe the most important thing to forages is what happens underground. The amount of root mass is related to the amount of top growth. If pastures are continuously grazed as one pasture, grasses stay relatively short as do roots. But in a graze-rotation system, the forages get taller, and the roots increase in mass and get deeper. More and deeper roots increase soil mass, soil organic matter, water holding capacity, and forage roots can reach farther down into the soil profile to capture necessary nutrients for improved forage growth rates. Those root channels also improve water infiltration rates and these pastures that are rotationally grazed usually have increased drought tolerance.

In this study we measured increasing soil organic matter caused by rotational grazing, which is critical to improved plant nutrition and water holding capacity. This study found large rises in soil organic matter which contributes to nitrogen (N) nutrition in plants. Plant growth rate is largely dependent on N as the enzyme system in plants that drive photosynthesis is driven by N levels in the plant. As N in the soil increases, plants take up more N, and more photosynthesis occurs to make plants grow faster. Each 1% of soil organic matter is about 1,000 pounds per acre of N, but much of that is in an organic form and not available to plants. Every 1% organic matter is equivalent to 20 – 30 lbs. per acre of N that acts like a plant fertilizer. With organic matter levels at 3% for many pastures, that is about 60 – 90 lbs. per acre of N, or about 130 -200 lbs. per acre of fertilizer. For plant growth, organic N must be converted into inorganic N, usually in the form of ammonia (NH<sub>3</sub>). The ammonia goes to the plant to make proteins for photosynthesis, which makes the plants capture more sunlight and grow faster.

As seen in this study, pastures can be easily and cheaply subdivided with inexpensive electric fences. One thing frequently noticed by farmers is that cattle become calmer with electric fences, mostly due to the closer and more frequent human contact they become used to.

Grazing lands are a critical component of the ecosystem in the U.S. Agriculture is the largest industry in the U.S., and beef cattle and calves are the largest agricultural commodity. In fact, of the four largest agronomic crops grown in the U.S., three are primarily grown as livestock feeds: corn, soybeans, and hay. Only wheat (# 2) is primarily grown for human consumption.

The two graduate students who worked on this study became well-versed in forage-livestock agriculture, graduating with M.S. degrees from Southern University. One is now a District Conservationist with the NRCS, the other is working on her Ph.D. at Auburn University in Agronomy.



# Faculty & Staff Spotlight

**CAHES Assistant  
Dean for Academic  
Engagement and  
Student Development  
Dr. Harold Mellieon,  
Has Been Accepted  
Into a National  
Department Chair  
Leadership Institute**



**ACADEMICS**



Dr. Harold Mellieon Jr., Assistant Dean for Academic Engagement and Student Development in the CAHES, has been selected to participate in the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), 2026 Department Chair Leadership Institute.

The Institute is designed for current department chairs who serve at state colleges and universities and aspire to be dynamic, strategic, and empathetic leaders. Participants will gain a national perspective on the importance of department chairs in serving the institutional mission, delivering values, and ensuring student success through in-person and virtual programming.

“Congratulations on being selected from a highly qualified group of applicants to participate in the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) 2026 Department Chair Leadership Institute. This is a remarkable achievement and a testament to your leadership, dedication, and professional excellence,” said Dr. Luria Young, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at Southern University and A&M College. “I am confident that you will represent SUBR with distinction, and I look forward to your future engagement in the SUBR Chairs’ Leadership Institute.”

The Institute will begin in September 2026.

**Dr. Harold  
MELLIEON JR.**



# 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**



**TUNE IN TO THE LATEST EDITION AT:**  
**<https://www.suagcenter.com/podcast>**



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