



# SEEDS OF SUccess!

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

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**Orlando F. McMeans, Ph.D.**  
Chancellor-Dean & Interim President of the  
Southern University System



**C. Reuben Walker, Ph.D.**  
Executive Vice Chancellor/Director of  
Development: SU Agricultural, Research  
and Extension Center Special Projects



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Vice Chancellor, Research



**Tiffany W. Franklin, Ph.D.**  
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**Brunetta Gamble-Dillard, MBA**  
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**Renita W. Marshall, D.V.M.**  
Vice Chancellor, Academics & Student  
Support Services/Associate Dean



**Katara A. Williams, Ph.D.**  
Vice Chancellor, Institutional Advancement  
and External Relations

Executive Leadership



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# *Dr. Orlando F. McMeans Appointed Interim President of the Southern University System*



Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center and College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences (CAHES) Chancellor-Dean, Dr. Orlando F. McMeans, has been appointed the interim president of the Southern University System.

The announcement was made during the Southern University System's Board of Supervisors meeting on Dec. 18, 2025.

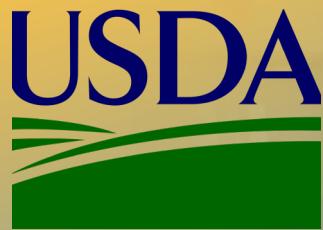
Dr. McMeans has been the Chancellor-Dean of the SU Ag Center and the CAHES since September 1, 2019. He's first day as the interim president was January 1, 2026.

Prior to coming to the SU Ag Center, Dr. McMeans served as the vice president for research and public service at West Virginia State University (WVSU), director of the Department of Land-Grant Programs, executive director of the WVSU Research and Development Corporation, and dean and director of the WVSU Gus R. Douglass Land-Grant Institute. He is also a full tenured research professor of biology.

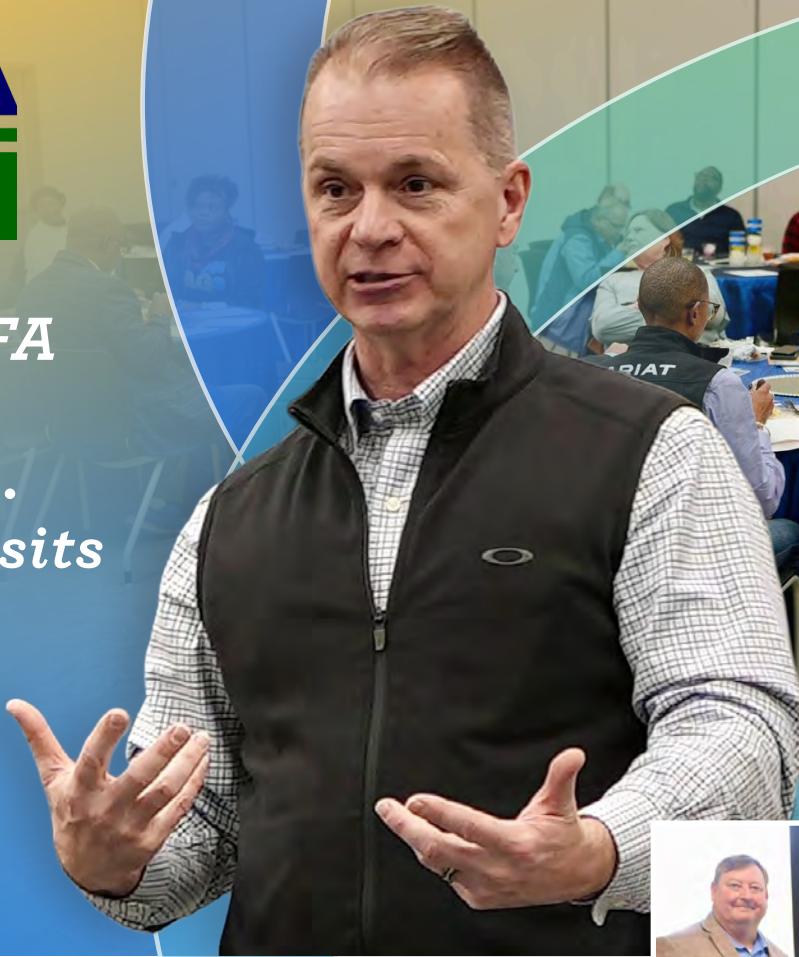
He is actively involved in numerous national, regional, and local organizations, holding leadership positions and memberships that reflect his commitment to agricultural advancement. Notably, he served on the Board of Directors of the Association of Public Land-Grant Universities (APLU) and chaired the APLU's Board on Agriculture Assembly (BAA) Policy Board of Directors. He is also engaged in various committees and steering roles within organizations such as the Association of Research Directors (ARD) and the Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy.

In April, he was one of three 2025 University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) Career Achievement Award recipients.

Dr. McMeans earned a Bachelor of Science from Alabama A&M University and both his master's and Ph.D. in horticulture from ACES.



# **USDA-NIFA Director Dr. Jaye L. Hamby Visits the SU Ag Center**



Dr. Jaye L. Hamby, Director of the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) visited the Southern University Ag Center on Dec. 16, 2025.

During his visit, Dr. Hamby toured facilities and met with leadership, faculty, and staff to learn more about the Ag Center's research, extension, and teaching programs and to discuss opportunities to strengthen partnerships and expand the impact of ongoing agricultural initiatives.

Attendees also enjoyed a special luncheon featuring the Ag Center's Southern University Natural (SUN) Beef.

The day concluded with comments by Drs. Hamby and McMeans.

Before joining NIFA, Dr. Hamby led and directed proprietary research efforts, specializing in concept testing, product marketing, value driver analysis, and farm demographic trends. The Tennessee native has also assisted with the launch of numerous crop protection products and authored field sales and competitive positioning manuals.

NIFA is the extramural funding agency for the USDA's Research, Education, and Economics Mission Area.

Dr. Hamby has served as NIFA's director since March 20, 2025.





# *Faculty and Staff of the SU and LSU Ag Centers and Colleges of Ag Participated in the 2025 Louisiana Land-Grant Agricultural Summit*



Faculty and staff of the Southern University and LSU Ag Centers and Colleges of Agriculture participated in the 2025 Louisiana Land-Grant Agriculture Summit on the campus of LSU from December 15-16, 2025.

The two-day summit included an Administrative Lunch with USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Director Dr. Jaye L. Hamby. NIFA is the extramural funding agency for the USDA's Research, Education and Economics Mission Area. Hamby has served as NIFA's director since March 20, 2025.

The summit's general session was held in the LSU Union Theatre. Drs. Renita Marshall and Tara Smith served as the MCs for the session.

Dr. Orlando F. McMeans, Chancellor-Dean of the SU Ag Center and the College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences (CAHES), also provided comments during the session and highlighted several SU Ag Center and CAHES programs and initiatives.

"This is very unique to have individuals from the two land-grant systems to come together," said Dr. McMeans. "It's an opportunity for us to not only come together but to share information, network, and to talk about how we can be better at fulfilling our land-grant mission. Which I call a mission mandate, and that is to serve individuals and the communities for the betterment, collectively, in Louisiana via the three-prong mission of education, extension, and research," he added.

LSU Ag Center Vice President for Agriculture and Dean of the College of Agriculture, Matt Lee also spoke during the session.

Dr. Hamby served as the keynote speaker.

An awards ceremony recognizing outstanding faculty and staff from both campuses was held during the session. The following individuals from the Southern University Ag Center received awards:



### Outstanding Academics Award:

**Crystal Vance-Rogers, Ph.D.**, Program Leader of Plant Science and Urban Forestry and Assistant Professor of Agricultural Sciences in the College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences

### Outstanding Extension Award:

**Joshua B. McDonald**, Program Director of EFNEP and Nutrition Education Program (NEP) Coordinator

### Outstanding Research Award:

**LaShunda Hodges, Ph.D.**, Research Professor for Soil & Plant Sciences and Industrial Hemp Researcher

### Facilities Award:

**Michelle Briscoe-Long**, Special Assistant to the Executive Vice Chancellor

### Communication, Technology and Advancement Award:

**Devender Rapolu, Ph.D.**, Network Database Admin and Web Specialist

### Compliance Companion Award:

**Lauryn Jackson**, Electronic Content Development/Communications Specialist

### Administrative Assistant Award:

**Ashton Burkhalter**, Program Assistant for the College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences' Department of Agricultural Science and Technology

The summit concluded on December 16 with breakout sessions. Several SU Ag Center and College of Ag faculty and staff presented on research and extension topics throughout the day.

The bi-annual Louisiana Land-Grant Agriculture Summit provides an opportunity for the faculty and staff of the SU and LSU Ag Centers and Colleges of Agriculture to network and continue to collaborate in the areas of research, teaching, and extension.

## Forty-two Ag Students Receive Degrees During Fall 2025 Commencement



Forty-two students in the College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences (CAHES) received their degrees during the Southern University and A&M College's commencement ceremonies for the graduating class of fall 2025. Graduate students obtained their degrees on December 18, 2025 and undergraduate students obtained theirs on December 19, 2025. Both ceremonies were held in the F.G. Clark Activity Center along with more than 500 graduates from the university.

Melva K. Wallace, president-CEO of Huston-Tillotson University, served as the keynote speaker for the graduate commencement. Felica Coney, global tech executive, was the keynote speaker for the undergraduate commencement.

Below is a list of the students who received degrees from the College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences:

- **Destiny Dean** from Baton Rouge, LA earned a B.S. in Human Sciences (Child and Family Studies)
- **KhaNiya Tucker** from Saginaw, TX earned a B.S. in Human Sciences (Child and Family Studies)
- **Samiya Knoten** from Los Angeles, CA earned a B.S. in Human Sciences (Child and Family Studies)
- **Jerkyra McDaniels** from LaPlace, LA earned a B.S. in Human Sciences (Child and Family Studies)
- **Taylor White** from Baton Rouge, LA earned a B.S. in Human Sciences (Child and Family Studies)
- **Destinee Sims** from Baton Rouge, LA earned a B.S. in Human Sciences (Child and Family Studies)
- **Ursilla Chatman** from Baton Rouge, LA earned a B.S. in Human Sciences (Child and Family Studies)
- **Arianna Odds** from Baker, LA earned a B.S. in Human Sciences (Fashion Merchandising, Design, and Textiles)
- **Kennedy Phillips** from New Orleans, LA earned a B.S. in Human Sciences (Fashion Merchandising, Design, and Textiles)



- **Naomi Ward** from Laurel, MD earned a B.S. in Human Sciences (Fashion Merchandising, Design, and Textiles)
- **William Jones** from Houma, LA earned a B.S. in Human Sciences (Nutrition, Health, and Wellness)
- **Jhimere Wilson Stevenson** from Baton Rouge, LA earned an M.S. in Dietetic Internship
- **Mohammed Abusabe** from Baton Rouge, LA earned an M.S. in Dietetic Internship
- **Keyunna McDonald** from Baton Rouge, LA earned a B.S. in Urban Forestry and Natural Resources (Environmental Studies)
- **Oscar Paul** from Baton Rouge, LA earned a B.S. in Urban Forestry and Natural Resources (Natural Resources Sustainability)
- **Destyne Howard** from Houston, TX earned an M.S. in Urban Forestry and Natural Resources
- **Raymond Antwi** from Accra, Ghana earned a Ph.D. in Urban Forestry and Natural Resources
- **Amber Lastie** from Opelousas, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Animal Science)
- **Bacari Long** from Independence, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Agribusiness)
- **Bennie Loyd, III** from Chicago, IL earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Plant & Soil)
- **Carlisha Williams** from Gonzales, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Pre-Veterinary)
- **Daisia Robertson** from Zachary, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Animal Science)
- **De'Aree Harris** from Memphis, TN earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Plant & Soil)
- **De'kevion Ford** from Opelousas, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Animal Science)
- **Desiree James** from Baton Rouge, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Plant & Soil)
- **Jasman Ellis** from Baton Rouge, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Agribusiness)

- **J'Me Bryant** from Houma, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Pre-Veterinary)
- **Kabren Williams** from Franklinton, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Plant & Soil)
- **Kaelyn Hill** from Port Allen, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Animal Science)
- **Kashi Roberts** from North Lauderdale, FL earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Animal Science)
- **Kendyl Gipson** from Baton Rouge, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Plant & Soil)
- **Kennedy Hughes** from Chicago, IL earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Pre-Veterinary)
- **Morgan Abraham** from Baker, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Agribusiness)
- **Myles Sam** from Opelousas, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Animal Science)
- **Na'Kia Okotcha** from Baton Rouge, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Animal Science)
- **Nyla Wilson** from Clinton, MD earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Agribusiness)
- **Rushane Miller** from Baton Rouge, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Pre-Veterinary)
- **Sa'Rya Travis** from Walker, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Animal Science)
- **Ta'Cardrick Alexander** from Haughton, LA earned B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Pre-Veterinary)
- **Taniya Nichols** from Monroe, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Animal Science)
- **Tayler Jackson** from Ovilla, TX earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Agribusiness)
- **Tia Parson** from New Orleans, LA earned a B.S. in Agricultural Sciences & Technology (Animal Science)

# *SU Ag Center Partners with Baton Rouge Juvenile Detention Center to Grow Skills and a Fall Garden*



On an early fall morning, Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center staff members Stephanie M. Elwood, Kiyana Kelly, Cornelious Jackson, Evan Egana, and Joshua McDonald arrived at the Baton Rouge Juvenile Detention Center (BRJDC) to transition the spring garden into a flourishing fall landscape.

BRJDC staff escorted a group of young men to the outdoor garden area, where four large metal tubs—carefully filled with soil, compost, and summer plantings awaited their next season. Students and center staff had tended the garden faithfully throughout the summer, and now it was time to usher in the new. “Just as nature clears away plants that won’t thrive in the coming season, we too must release what no longer serves us to make room for growth,” stated Elwood as she carried in fall seedlings.

The students took the statement to heart. Fully engaged, they harvested eggplants, okra, bell peppers, and squash which was grown in the garden under the leadership of Director Dr. Wade, and made its way to the cafeteria for the students to enjoy themselves.

The therapeutic value of gardening—planting, tending, and harvesting—cannot be overstated. It was evident in the students’ focus, pride, and quiet determination as they worked.

Programs like the SU Ag Center’s Out the Mud horticulture outreach initiative meet participants where they are, equipping them with lifelong horticultural skills while providing meaningful, hands-on therapeutic experiences right on their own campus.

For addition information on the Out of the Mud initiative contact, Stephanie M. Elwood at [stephanie\\_elwood@suagcenter.com](mailto:stephanie_elwood@suagcenter.com)

## *Gentilly Artbots: SU Ag Center introduces STEM to students at Audubon Schools*

On November 4, 2025, students at Audubon Schools had the opportunity to blend creativity with STEM by merging robotics and art. Youth Development Agent, Aralynn Davis, introduced small DC motors powered by batteries and conductive wiring.

During the hands-on activity, students constructed simple robots and observed how the vibration of the motor created movement. The “legs” of the robots—colorful markers—left trails of circles, lines, and patterns across paper as the robots danced and spun.

The young scholars were thrilled to watch real engineering principles come to life through art. After seeing how electricity, motors, and motion worked together, students expressed excitement about exploring even more STEM-based projects with the Southern University Ag Center.

For additional information on the SU Ag Center’s Youth Development Program, contact Dr. Raquel Square Ayles, at [raquel\\_ayles@suagcenter.com](mailto:raquel_ayles@suagcenter.com).



## ***‘Smart Ranching’: Southern Ag Uses Deep Health Data for Better Calf Nutrition, Tastier Beef***



*The following article appeared in The Advocate Newspaper on November 30, 2025 and was written by its staff writer Haley Miller.*

In the Information Age, even cows aren't safe from data collection.

Researchers at the Southern University Agricultural Research Station monitor calves using a hard plastic pill containing sensors, which sits in the animal's stomach, tracking heart rate, temperature and the amount of time it takes for the bovine to regurgitate and reswallow its food.

The work is part of the Ag Center's "smart ranching" approach to raising what it calls Southern University Natural Beef, or SUN Beef. Researchers track the cattle's health with key data points, paying special attention to nutrition in the first 60 days of life, to produce beef for the Southern campus that they say is free from hormones and growth implants.

"If you want to own cows, you're not there every day," Dr. Mallory Tate, a veterinarian with the Ag Center, said about the goal of the project. "You can manage it from your laptop."

The researchers are experimenting with artificial intelligence and health monitoring technology to improve calf nutrition and empower consumers to know more about their food. So far, SUN Beef provides steaks, roasts and ground beef for the university cafeteria, with plans to eventually sell beef products locally.

Students get involved in the project by helping raise the cattle. Clyde Bagley, the Ag Center's vice chancellor of research, said he also would like to start processing the beef at Southern's meat plant when renovations are complete.

"You eat our beef in the Southern University cafeteria, that's the farthest it's ever been from its mama," Bagley said.

In addition to medical information gleaned from the sensor placed in the cows' stomachs, the scientists track the cattle's locations with a geotag and employ AI to analyze different camera angles and estimate their weight.

About 80 animals are considered SUN Beef cows, Bagley said.

"The No. 1 factor that's related to beef tenderness is age," Bagley said. "Because we do such a good job raising them, these calves are being harvested at 14 months of age."

The data collected also gives researchers a window into stress factors, Bagley said. A calf that runs fast out of the chute indicates distress, which translates to lower weight and less tender meat.

"We know when to look for those kind of things and try to reduce those stress factors," Bagley said.

Critical to SUN Beef is the all-natural label, which means the cows are locally raised and are hormone- and antibiotic-free, Bagley said. He envisions shoppers scanning a QR code at the grocery store to learn about the source of their beef, down to the health data for a specific cow.

"Everybody wants to know more about where their things are coming from," Bagley said. "The nice thing about it is if you know that I was a producer, it makes me more sensitive, because I only want to produce good stuff if you're going to know my name and where my farm is. There's a lot of good parts to all of this."



## Cooking for a Cause



The 1890 Center of Excellence (COE) for Nutrition, Health, Wellness, and Quality of Life collaborated with Dr. Melissa Johnson's CAHES Human Nutrition and Essentials of Nutrition and Wellness classes to host a mini "Chopped" style cooking challenge on December 2, 2025.

Students were given ingredients and asked to create their own unique vegetable soups. After cooking, they completed a worksheet identifying each ingredient and explaining its health benefits, putting the concept of "Food as Medicine" into practice.

To raise the stakes, Big Buddy also joined in, preparing their own vegetable soup, which was donated as well.

In total, 107 bowls of soup were made and donated to Red Shoes' community fridge, helping address limited access to nutritious, affordable food in our community. Together, they stocked the fridge and warmed hearts with kindness and nourishment.





# SUAG 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!”*

Hosted by:

*Dexter Newman*



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P.O. Box 10010  
Baton Rouge, LA 70813



(225) 771-2242



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