

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 8, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

Thank you for your leadership and for the work of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to address the ongoing crisis created by the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. In order to aid the nineteen 1890 Land-Grant Universities (1890s) in weathering the dire impacts of COVID-19 on institutions of higher learning, we write to request that the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) work expeditiously to issue Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20) funding to the 1890s, and to provide guidance as soon as possible regarding USDA's implementation of Section 7114 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-334).

We understand that the COVID-19 pandemic has created numerous issues for NIFA. However, we respectfully request that FY20 formula funding be issued to the 1890s as quickly as possible. FY20 funding for these programs was included in H.R.1865, the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, which passed into law on December 19, 2019. More than four months later, and more than seven months into the 2020 Federal Fiscal Year, this critical funding has yet to be issued to the 1890s. Given the enormous financial strain the coronavirus has caused for institutions of higher education across our country, the need for this funding is even more critical.

COVID-19's impact on student enrollment, research funding, and technology infrastructure expenses has already been deeply felt. In a typical year, 1890 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) contribute more than \$4.4 billion to their local economies and provide pathways of opportunity for thousands of Americans. Despite their importance to the communities they serve, 1890s, like all HBCUs, have faced decades of federal and state underfunding. As a result, they are also the universities most at risk for financial collapse during a crisis like COVID-19. Formula dollars for 1890s is typically sent to schools quarterly, such as in March for Q1. Unfortunately, as of today, they have still not received Q1 funding. It is crucial that NIFA issue 1890 formula funding as soon as possible to ensure schools can provide for their university communities during this pandemic.

Additionally, we request information about the implementation of Section 7114 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, including clarity on the issue of the period of performance. Section 7114 creates parity for 1890s by allowing them to carryover one hundred percent of their extension funds from one fiscal year to another for a five-year period, just as 1862 Land-Grant Universities are already able to do.

We understand that initial guidance on Section 7114 was sent to the 1890s on May 24, 2019. However, we have heard there are still unresolved issues with interpretation and implementation of this provision. We request that USDA update the 1890s, as well as all members of the House Committee on Agriculture, as soon as possible regarding its status. More than a year after the passage of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, the need for clarity on this issue only grows more urgent. Further delays in implementation will impact the ability of the 1890s to prepare financially for the continued impacts of COVID-19 on their extension programs.

Thank you for your consideration of these priorities. Issuing FY20 funding to the 1890s as soon as possible and providing clarification regarding the implementation of Section 7114 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 will provide needed certainty for these important institutions. We thank you again for your work and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



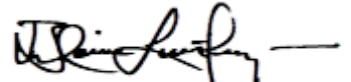
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