Dr. Steven H. Tallant, President
Texas A&M University – Kingsville
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture
"The Next Farm Bill: University Research"
1300 Longworth House Office Building
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Introduction

Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, our Representative, the Honorable Vela of Texas' 34th Congressional District, and fellow members of the House Agriculture Committee thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), the unique opportunities offered by Hispanic-Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities (HSACUs), and ways to streamline and prioritize agricultural research programs as part of the next reauthorization of the Farm Bill.

My name is Steven H. Tallant and I serve as President Texas A&M University – Kingsville (A&M-Kingsville). Prior to joining A&M Kingsville in 2008, I served as provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Before my academic career, I served twenty years in the military with a stint as the Chief of Air Force Family Research based at the Pentagon.

Texas A&M University Kingsville

A&M-Kingsville, chartered in 1917 but not opened until 1925 because of America's entry into World War I, the University is the oldest continuously operating public institution of higher learning in South Texas. After years of growth and expansion, the University became a member of the Texas A&M University System in 1989. Most of A&M-Kingsville's approximately 9,200 students come from South Texas, but there is wide diversity in the population, with students from more than 35 states and more than 43 countries. Seventy-four percent of students are undergraduates. Ethnically, the campus reflects the demographics of the area, with 62 percent of the students Hispanic, 27 percent white, and five percent African American.

With a focus on teaching and research, A&M-Kingsville boasts several renowned research centers that evolved from the natural environment of the region. The Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, Citrus Center, King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management and National Natural Toxins Research Center are well-known throughout the world. In the past six years, new centers such as the Eagle Ford Center for Research, Education and Outreach and the Institute of Architectural Engineering Heritage were created in response to regional needs and are well on their way to achieving widespread recognition.

A&M-Kingsville is a member of The Texas A&M University System, although an independent

campus and not part of Texas A&M University land-grant status. The A&M System is one of the largest systems of higher education in the nation, with a budget of $3.8 billion. Through a statewide network of 11 universities, seven state agencies. The A&M System educates more than 131,000 students and makes more than 22 million additional educational contacts through service and outreach programs each year. Externally funded research expenditures exceed $820 million and help drive the state's economy.

As president of A&M-Kingsville and as a long-standing member of the USDA/Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) Leadership Group, I have had the opportunity to develop a working relationship with the Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Leadership Group is a national body of USDA and HSI leaders appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and the President and CEO of HACU. Its purpose is to recommend policies and programs to strengthen USDA partnerships with HSIs and provide leadership and strategic direction to the USDA Hispanic-Serving Institutions National Program Office.

Hispanic-Serving Institutions

HSIs are defined in Title V, Part A of the Higher Education Act, as amended, as accredited, degree-granting, public or private nonprofit institutions of higher education with 25% or more total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrollment. In addition, over 50% of the students must qualify for federal aid.

A&M-Kingsville is one of 472 HSIs in 19 states and Puerto Rico as of the 2015-2016 academic year. HSIs are 13.8 percent of the total non-profit colleges and universities, yet enroll 23.4 percent of all students and 62.3 percent of all Hispanic students in higher education. The number of HSIs is rapidly growing, from 137 institutions in 1990, to 229 in 2000, 311 in 2010 and 435 in 2014.

The continued growth in the number of HSIs can be projected from the 323 "emerging" HSIs, institutions with enrollments that are 15-24.9 percent Hispanic. This is up from 2014-2015 when 310 institutions met this criteria in 34 states, including Washington, DC. Due to rapid Hispanic population growth and the increasing number of Hispanics in post-secondary education, most of these emerging HSIs are expected to become HSIs within the next decade.

Role of Research in Agriculture and HSIs

For many decades, the United States has been the world leader in the sciences, but it is currently experiencing shortages of scientists, and this has allowed other countries to challenge its economic strength and leadership in science.[1] Hispanic Americans and other minority groups represent an untapped pool of talent that could be used to fill this shortage in science, if adequate

[1] http://ehrweb.aaas.org/mge/Reports/Report1/AGEP/index.htm

funds are applied to train these promising domestic undergraduate and graduate students.

Agricultural research plays an incredibly important part of our food and agricultural economies. The need for research in this area is well documented. The complexity needed to be successful and competitive has also increased. Related socioeconomic research is also critical to the strategic advancement of U.S. agriculture and it plays a key role in the planning and development of new curricula and degree programs, as well as in the strengthening of current ones.

While Hispanics represent more than 18 percent of the U.S. population or over 57 million individuals, Hispanic students make up less than 8 percent of agriculture majors in institutions of higher education.[2] By comparison, Hispanics make up 29 percent of those working in the agriculture industry, where overwhelmingly, those 2.5 million Hispanics labor as farmworkers cultivating and harvesting crops, raising and tending livestock and doing other work that does not require a college degree.

In 2015, only 15.5 percent of Hispanic adults held a bachelor's degree compared to 26.2 of non-Hispanic whites. In 2014, the median household income of Hispanics was $42,491, whereas the median household income of non-Hispanic whites was $60,256. Bearing in mind these educational and income disparities facing the U.S. Hispanic population, and the low percentage of Hispanic agriculture majors, it's likely that very few are occupying executive, management, or research positions within the sector.[3]

The scarcity of Hispanic participation in agriculture-related academic programs and professional ranks within the industry is made worse by the relatively low level of Federal investments and allocation of resources to HSIs. There are over 100 HSIs that awarded at least 15% of their degrees in agriculture-related fields over the two most recent academic years. However, they receive no dedicated funding to promote or sustain the enrollment of Hispanics in agriculture-related academic programs, as well as the development and maintenance of the required research infrastructure. These institutions can earn the designation of HSACUs.

Hispanic-Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities (HSACUs)

The HSACUs cohort was established as part of the 2008 Farm Bill in response to the low number of Hispanics in agriculture related fields. HSACUs are defined as:

1) Colleges or universities that qualify as HSIs;
2) Offer associate, bachelors, or other accredited degree programs in agriculture-related fields; and
3) Hispanic students must receive at least 15 percent of the degrees awarded in

[2] http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/04/19/statistical-portrait-of-hispanics-in-the-united-states-key-charts/

[3] https://dl.sciencesocieties.org/publications/sh/articles/54/3/sh2013-54-3-rc

agriculture-related programs over the two most recent completed academic years.

A&M-Kingsville enrollment has been over 60% Hispanic since the formation of the HSIs and over 50% of our graduates in agriculture are Hispanic. We have had a long history working with our agricultural industries for over 60 years.

To date, 116 HSACUs have been designated by USDA.

The 2008 Farm Bill established five HSACU programs listed below along with their corresponding funding authorization levels:

1) The HSACU Endowment Grant Program ($80 million) – This program is designed to distribute 60 percent of the interest accrued in the fund among HSACUs prorated based on their Hispanic enrollment. The other 40 percent is equally distributed among HSACUs.
2) The HSACU Equity Grants Program ($20 million) – This formula-based grant program is designed to help HSACUs build capacity for faculty training and infrastructure to compete for grant open to 1862, 1890 and 1994 land grant institutions.
3) The HSACU Institutional Capacity-Building Grants Program ($40 million) - The competitive grant program is designed for institutional-capacity (not including alteration, repair, renovation, or construction of buildings) allows HSACUs the flexibility to best determine how to increase their capacity.
4) The HSACU Fundamental and Applied Research Grants Program $40 million) – The grant program funds fundamental and applied research in agriculture, human nutrition, food science, bio-energy and environmental science.
5) The HSACU Extension Grants Program ($40 million) – The program is designed to ensure that HSACUs will have access to two major extension grant programs (406 and AFRI). In addition, HSAUCs without the research and outreach capacity of 1862 and 1994 institutions will have access to funding for cooperative extension work through special competitive grant program.

The reauthorization of the Farm Bill in 2014 kept the HSACU programs mentioned above, and added a new competitive grants program in support of Hispanic agricultural workers and youth. However, as the Committee is aware, none of these HSACU programs originally authorized in 2008 have ever been funded by Congress. Consequently, I believe the Committee's intent has never been realized.

A&M Kingsville, along with several other HSIs raised the funding issue to USDA. As a result, USDA allowed HSACUs to submit a declaration of intent to not be considered an HSACU in order to be eligible for Non-Land Grant College of Agriculture funding (NLGCA). HSACUs who did not make this declaration remain designated as HSACUs until September 2018. The net effect is to have no funding as HSACUs and no eligibility for the NLGCA.

Agriculture Research at A&M - Kingsville

A&M – Kingsville agricultural students consistently win state, regional and national awards in their respective agricultural fields. These awards reflect the commitment of our faculty, the excellence of our academic programs and the diligence of our students to constantly strive for success. We take great pride in providing all our students with the guidance, services and education they need to reach their goals. However, an area of concern to continue to provide this quality opportunity is the aging agricultural research infrastructure at A&M-Kingsville. It has been highlighted as a problem at our universities across the United States doing agricultural research.

A&M-Kingsville has been working with our agriculture community for many years. Our Citrus Research Center started with the support of our local industry in 1948. We have three agriculture centers of expertise: the Citrus Center, Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute and the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management. Our students have gone on to manage multi-million dollar agricultural enterprises and direct federal agencies to help advance agriculture. Today our faculty and students participate in over $12 million in agricultural research. This includes over $5 million from USDA programs. These USDA funds help us leverage our capabilities to attract the additional $7 million in non-federal funding. These research funds have shown to dramatically improve our retention, graduation rates and participation in graduate and other professional degrees. This has helped us increase our student retention from 58 percent to 72 percent just this year. While we are proud of the increases we have made this is not enough. We can do better but it will take resources to do so.

We have actively participated in competitive grant programs. This includes the USDA/NIFA/HSI grant program which resulted in 10 percent of the students participants in these programs have completed their DVM or MS and/or PhD's in agricultural fields. One of our student successes has been Veronica Acuna. She completed her PhD and did Postdoctoral research at University of Illinois. Today Dr. Acuna is a faculty member at our Citrus Center helping the citrus industry adjust to the new era of urban agriculture interface, citrus greening and increased competition for available water.

Recommendations for the Next Farm Bill Reauthorization

This Committee has long supported the value of agricultural research through the development of the land grant system and minority-serving agricultural research programs. They have also recognized in past Farm Bills, the potential value that HSACUs can contribute to agricultural research.

- We need to continue this cooperative approach and ask the Committee to maintain the authorizations and funding levels for the six HSACU programs included in the 2014 Farm Bill. Implementation of these program authorizations are critically important to

advancing Hispanic participation in the agriculture sector. To actually achieve the objectives of the Committee to increase Hispanics in agriculture, we also urge members of this Committee to work with your colleagues, particularly those on the Appropriations Committee, to provide the funding needed to carry out these programs effectively.

- Given the low numbers of Hispanics in agriculture-related careers, the creation of a pipeline of researchers and research at HSACUs at all levels would strengthen the research capacity of these institutions and help meet employer demands.

Conclusion

Hispanic-Serving Institutions are the most important educational pipeline for increasing Hispanic success in higher education and their involvement in research opportunities. HSIs and HSACUs can better serve the nation if the necessary investments are made in their infrastructure, faculty and students. This was the intent of this Committee when HSACUs were initially created in 2008, and I believe this should be a priority in the next reauthorization of the Farm Bill.

Thank you.

Dr. Steven H. Tallant
President, Texas A&M University - Kingsville