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Testimony of Paul A. Jones

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for

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Testimony to the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture regarding H.R. 6020, *Funding for Student Scholarships for the 1890s Land-Grant African American Colleges and Universities Act* before the Committee on December 7, 2016.

Chairman Conoway, Ranking Member Peterson and members of the House Committee on Agriculture, I am Paul Jones and I have the privilege of serving as the tenth president of Fort Valley State University located in the heart of Middle Georgia.

I am honored to be here along with my colleagues to testify in support of H.R. 6020, funding for scholarships for young men and women who aspire to serve our great nation by pursuing careers in the food and agricultural sciences including agri-business, food production and food distribution.

As the only 1890 Land-Grant institution in the State of Georgia, Fort Valley State University has, since 1895, contributed greatly to the advancement of agriculture and agricultural research in the State and beyond. Those contributions started modestly by simply planting gardens to feed students. Today, the university is an international leader in many aspects of agricultural research and leads a worldwide consortium research involving small ruminant animals like goats. Because of the support you have provided through the Department of Agriculture and other agencies, Fort Valley State University has forged collaborations with other universities, including the University of Georgia and Oklahoma State University to research and develop sustainable bioenergy systems. Our university has partnered with the United States

Department of Rural Development and the Forestry service to provide technical assistance to farmers and citizens in 35 rural counties in Georgia. The university's outreach in those counties has been particularly focused on supporting beginning farmers, ranchers and military veterans. Fort Valley State is engaged in developing cost-effective strategies to address food safety issues like controlling pathogens in animals and teaching those strategies to farmers and meat processors. As part of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Extension Program, the university is helping parents learn how to make healthy choices to feed their children and thereby addressing the increasing problem of childhood obesity.

Fort Valley State University has been able to make such amazing contributions in agriculture because of the support you and your predecessors on this Committee have historically provided. This Committee understands the importance of agriculture to every person in every state and around the world. This Committee intimately understands the seriousness of issues like obesity, hunger and the increasing challenges associated with an increasing population. In particular, while the human population is increasing, the number of farmers is decreasing. I am thankful that your consideration of H.R. 6020, provides the opportunity to highlight the importance of having a consistent and sufficient number of educated, trained individuals eager to face our agricultural challenges and carry forward the critical work of feeding, clothing and providing energy for a global society.

I'm elated to share with you that 1890 Land-Grant universities are ready to meet the noted challenges by using our excess capacity to educate a greater number of students in Agricultural disciplines. However, affordability remains a huge impediment for those wanting to earn a college degree. The majority of students at Fort Valley State University, and I am sure it is the same at other 1890 Land-Grant institutions, qualify for need-based financial aid.

Sometimes, a few hundred dollars may be the only thing standing between a student who can and cannot enroll in college. The funding requested in H.R. 6020 would provide opportunities not only for students to pursue a college degree, but also to work in a career field that is critical for the prosperity and health of our nation. The USDA projected in its *United States, 2015-2020 Employment Opportunities for College Graduates in Food, Agriculture, Renewable Natural Resources and the Environment* report that there will be 57,900 annual job openings for graduates with bachelor's degrees or higher in those areas. The report also states that only an annual average of 35,400 graduates with those degrees will be available to fill the 57,900 openings.

The Characteristics of Graduates, in that same USDA report reflects that the percentage of ethnic minorities with degrees in Agriculture, Life Sciences and Veterinary Medicine has continued to increase since 2013. 1890 Land-Grant colleges and universities have played a major role in fueling that continuing increase. In fact, according to the publication *Diverse Issues in Education*, Fort Valley State University ranks sixth in the nation in Agricultural degrees earned by African Americans. Enrollment in our Agricultural programs increased 28% from Fall 2014 to Fall 2015. However, overall, there is a huge opportunity to increase African American participation in agriculture careers. Fort Valley State University has strong programs and the capacity to assist in making that increase.

All of the university's agriculture programs are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Four of the eight undergraduate agriculture programs have additional professional accreditations. Our program and research areas include small ruminants, bioenergy, medicinal plant biotechnology, horticulture and agronomy, food product technology and safety, and agricultural economics. Our students regularly excel in national and international

research competitions. We have multiple faculty members who have received recognition from United States Presidents. Current faculty members Sarwan Dhir and Isaac Crumbly, and retired faculty member Clinton Dixon each have received the *President's Award for Excellence in Math Science and Engineering Mentoring*. Professor Young Park is world renowned for his research in dairy technology. His books and publications have been translated into several languages. The Dean of our College of Agriculture, Dr. Govind Kannan, serves on the National Agriculture Research , Extension, Education and Economic Advisory Board to the United States Secretary of Agriculture and was recognized at the White House as a Champion of Change for Global Food Security.

The university is located in the middle of the state, in the heart of peach and pecan country. Students in rural Georgia see agriculture through the windows of their Blue Bird school buses but may not recognize the tremendous career opportunities available in agriculture. The university is surrounded by high schools with large and active Future Farmers of America chapters of students with a passion for agriculture. H.R. 6020 funding will enable us to more successfully recruit and educate students that already have an interest in agriculture as well as those whose vision of farming is a mule and a plow.

Fort Valley State University graduates go on to make outstanding contributions in their career fields. Some graduates, like Romanda Phelps, go to work for the USDA or other government agencies. Some graduates go to work in the private sector like Dexter Johnson, an employee of Weyerhaeuser. Others choose to pursue an advanced education degree like Betsy Ampofo who is about to earn a Ph.D. at Cornell.

Funding requested in H.R. 6020 will help 1890 Land-Grants continue to contribute to the much needed supply of Agriculture and Ag-related graduates. In addition, the funding

requested in H.R. 6020 will assist 1890 Land Grant institution's efforts to successfully recruit non-traditional students, including returning veterans, to our universities and into careers in Agriculture. 1890 Land-Grant institutions are doing great things in Agriculture and most have the capacity to do more if given the opportunity and the resources. H.R. 6020 will provide the funds necessary to allow us to use our capacity do even more.

I am grateful for this opportunity to address the Committee. I especially want to thank you, Congressman Scott for your unceasing efforts to support public education in general and 1890 Land-Grant institutions in particular.