

# The Ag Center's CHANCELLOR'S McREPORT

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**Joint Senate and House Committee on Agriculture, Forestry, Aquaculture, and Rural Development Meeting**





# The Joint Senate and House Committee on Agriculture, Forestry, Aquaculture, and Rural Development Visits the SU Ag Center

Members of the Louisiana Joint Senate and House Committee on Agriculture, Forestry, Aquaculture, and Rural Development visited the Southern University Ag Center on May 25, 2023.

The visit began at the Valdry Center for Philanthropy where Dr. Katara Williams, Vice Chancellor for Institutional Advancement and External Relations, presided over the program and President-Chancellor Dennis Shields welcomed the legislators.

Dr. Orlando F. McMeans, Chancellor-Dean of the Southern

University Ag Center and College of Agriculture provided opening remarks and was followed by presentations from Drs. Renita Marshall, Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Services in the College of Ag; Jose Toledo, Vice Chancellor for Research; De'Shoin A. York, Vice Chancellor for Extension and Outreach; and Calvin R. Walker, Executive Vice Chancellor on their respective areas.

Dr. McMeans also explained the 1890 Land-Grant designation, mission, and the Ag Center's legislative priorities.

At the conclusion of the program, the legislators boarded a shuttle and toured the Ag Center's facilities and roads making stops at A. O. Williams Hall, the meat lab, and poultry and swine units. The tour ended at the M. A. Edmond Livestock Arena Multi-Purpose Building where faculty, staff, and students from the teaching, research, and extension areas discussed programs and projects with the legislators.

The visit concluded with closing remarks by Dr. McMeans and committee Co-Chairmen Stewart Cathey, Jr.





# The Louisiana Minority Business Development Agency, SU Ag Center, Gulf Partners, LLC & The J.M. Smucker Co. Announce Partnership to Promote Advancement and Minority Business Development



The Louisiana Minority Business Development Agency Business Center (*Louisiana MBDA Business Center*), Southern University Ag Center, Gulf Partners, LLC, and The JM Smucker Co. announced the launch of a cooperative partnership agreement on May 16, 2023 during the SU Ag Center's 18th Annual Business Development and Procurement Conference. The collaborative program will offer workforce training for Southern University students while investigating opportunities for minority business development through Smucker coffee operations, which are consolidated in New Orleans.

“The Southern University Ag Center is pleased to join in this partnership to enhance workforce initiatives to our most important constituents, our students,” said Orlando F. McMeans, chancellor of the Southern University Ag Center and Dean of the College of Agricultural, Family and Consumer Sciences. “This agreement will assist the Ag

Center in continuing to provide students with the necessary skills to secure jobs with leading agencies, along with assisting our minority businesses to excel at even greater levels within our respective communities.”

“This partnership will allow us to identify internship opportunities for Southern University students in areas such as supply chain management and procurement - both areas where there's underrepresentation by the minority community,” said John Pierre, chancellor of the Southern University Law Center.

Smucker's leading coffee brand, Folgers®, has called New Orleans home since 1963. Today Smucker produces and distributes its portfolio of coffee brands, including Dunkin'® and Café Bustelo®, at its three New Orleans locations. In addition to offering workforce training for Southern students, Smucker will also review opportunities to partner with minority businesses to support

heightened recycling efforts.

“Additionally, through this partnership, the Louisiana MBDA Business Center will be able to identify contract opportunities for minority business enterprises in areas such as technology, culinary arts, and real estate,” said Charletta Fortson, executive director of the Louisiana MBDA Business Center. “This type of relationship is just the type of investment in minority communities and ecosystems we're looking for from Fortune 500 companies like The J.M. Smucker Company. We hope other companies will follow suit in creating pathways for minorities and MBEs to work for and do business with their organizations.”

“We are thrilled to have this opportunity to partner with the Louisiana MBDA Business Center and Southern University to bring together our shared passion for the New Orleans community, diverse talent and unique expertise,” said Chris Todaro, Vice President, Coffee Operations, The J.M. Smucker Co. “Through this partnership we have a great opportunity to meaningfully impact an area of need - supporting minority businesses and providing greater opportunities for future leaders from underrepresented communities - while building on our proud heritage of supporting this great community and its bright future.”



## SU Child Development Laboratory Holds Promotion Ceremony, Parade, and Family Day for Students

The staff of the Southern University Child Development Laboratory (SUCDL) held their promotion ceremony for students enrolled at the school on May 18, 2023, in the Royal Cotillion Ballroom of the Smith-Brown Memorial Student Union.

Students in Yolanda Kyser's Pre-K class recited the pledge of alliance and poems, and every class sang a song during the ceremony. At the conclusion of the event, each teacher presented their students with a certificate of completion and an award.

The Child Development Lab continued its celebration on May 19 with its “Moving Up” Parade. Each student who moved to another grade was allowed to participate in the parade, which traveled through the Southern University Baton Rouge campus and ended at the lab.

Following the parade, SUCDL hosted its first Family Day on the Yard which included lunch and activities for the students and their families.

For additional information on the Southern University Child Development Laboratory or to receive enrollment information, contact Keisha Dandridge Ceasar, Director/Instructor - Child Development Laboratory at [Keisha\\_dandridge@subr.edu](mailto:Keisha_dandridge@subr.edu).



## Dietetic Internship Program Holds Closing Program



Pictured from left to right: Mariah Williams-Beckwith, Director Alexis Motley, Latoyia Beard, and L'Asia George.

The College of Agricultural, Family and Consumer Sciences held a closing ceremony for its Dietetic Internship Program on May 26, 2023 at the Valdry Center for Philanthropy.

During the ceremony, Dietetic Interns L'Asia George, Mariah Williams-Beckwith, and Latoyia Beard received certificates for completing the program.

Alexis Motley, MS, RDN, LDN, Director of the Dietetic Internship Program, presided over the ceremony.

The program's former director, Bernestine McGee, Ph.D., was recognized during the event for her years of service to the program along with the program's preceptors.

The nine-month Dietetic Internship Program is a post-baccalaureate supervised practice program in dietetics. Its curriculum is designed to educate students to function as entry-level registered dietitians after successfully passing the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) Exam.

Since the program's inception, it has remained accredited by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND).

Southern University is one of eight historically black colleges and universities that offers a supervised practice program in dietetics.

For additional information on the SU College of Agricultural, Family and Consumer Sciences' Dietetic Internship Program, visit <http://www.subr.edu/page/637> or contact Alexis Motley, at [alexis.motley@sus.edu](mailto:alexis.motley@sus.edu).





# TEACHING TEACHING



## College of Ag Students and Faculty Participate in MANRRS National Conference, U.S. Forest Service Tour, and USDA-NRCS Networking



Southern University College of Ag students, A'Miracle Guidry and Brian Thomas Jr., along with faculty members Drs. LaShunda Anderson Hodges, Associate Research Professor, and Jacqueline McComb, Assistant Professor, engaged in the Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS) National Conference Mobile Tour sponsored by the USDA-Forest Service. The tour was held on Thursday, April 15, 2023, at the U.S. Forest Service Anna Ruby Falls Recreation Area, near Helen, Georgia, in the Chattahoochee National Forest.

During the mountain trail hike to Anna Ruby Falls, A'Miracle and Brian gained valuable knowledge about the role of vegetation to wildlife in forest management and the importance of sustainable forest practices. Their engagement allowed them to make professional networking connections that will benefit them as they progress into their agricultural careers. The students also expressed how great it was to take advantage of this opportunity through MANRRS!

The USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) sponsored students' MANRRS Conference attendance and participation (NRCS Agreement NR223A750025C001) to enhance student workforce and professional development. Students also had an opportunity to meet with NRCS sponsorship administrators during the conference career development fair.

The USDA-NRCS agreement for the Southern University Ag Center is administrated by Drs. Hodges, McComb, and Crystal Vance-Rogers, Assistant Research Professor.





## Department of Environmental Toxicology Student and Faculty Achievements

Several students from the Department of Environmental Toxicology in the College of Agricultural, Family and Consumer Sciences presented oral and poster presentations during national and regional conferences throughout the academic year. Several of the students received awards for presentations. Here is a summary of their achievements:

### The 21st Annual Meeting of the Louisiana Biomedical Research Network (LBRN) was held in Baton Rouge, La. on January 20-21, 2023.

#### *Student Participating in the oral presentations:*

- Shilpa Thota
- Poorna Sai Vaddi
- James Hines

#### *Students Participating in poster presentations:*

- Rizwana Begum
- Shilpa Thota
- Nandini Bidarimath
- Dhruthi Muthyala
- Ranjeeth Kondati

### The 8th Annual Louisiana State University Shreveport (LSUS) Regional Student Scholars Forum was held in Shreveport, La. on February 17, 2023.

#### *Student Participating in the oral presentations:*

- Shilpa Thota
- Rizwana Begum

#### *Students Participating in poster presentations:*

- Nandini Bidarimath
- Dhruthi Muthyala
- Ranjeeth Kondati

### The Society of Toxicology (SOT) 62nd Annual Meeting was held in Nashville, Tennessee on March 19-23, 2023.

#### *Students Participating in poster presentations:*

- Rizwana Begum - Received a travel award and Second Place for the Dr. Harihara Mehendale Graduate Student Best Abstract Award.
- Shilpa Thota - Received a travel award.
- Nandini Bidarimath
- Dhruthi Muthyala
- Ranjeeth Kondati
- Poorna Sai Vaddi
- James Hines
- Garrick Breaux

### The Center of Excellence 2023 Symposium was held in Baton Rouge, La. on March 27-28, 2023.

#### *Students Participating in poster presentations:*

- Poorna Sai Vaddi - Received the Best Graduate Student Poster Award.
- Rizwana Begum - Received Second Place for the Graduate Student Poster Award
- Shilpa Thota
- Nandini Bidarimath
- Dhruthi Muthyala
- Ranjeeth Kondati
- Manisha Thakur

### The 78th Joint Annual Meeting of the Beta Kappa Chi and National Institute of Science was held in Charlotte, North Carolina on March 29, 2023 -April 1, 2023.

#### *Student Participating in the oral presentations:*

- Shilpa Thota - Received first place in the graduate student category.
- Rizwana Begum - Received third place in the graduate student category.

#### *Students Participating in poster presentations:*

- Dhruthi Muthyala - Received third place in the graduate student category.
- Ranjeeth Kondati - Received second place in the graduate student category.
- Manisha Thakur - Received first place in the graduate student category.

### The Southern University Baton Rouge campus 2023 Student Research Symposium was held on April 20, 2023.

#### *Student Participating in the oral presentations:*

- Shilpa Thota
- Rizwana Begum - Received second place for the graduate Student Oral category.
- Nandini Bidarimath
- Dhruthi Muthyala
- Manisha Thakur - Received first place in the graduate student category.

#### *Students Participating in poster presentations:*

- Ranjeeth Kondati - Received first place in the graduate student category.
- Poorna Sai Vaddi

#### *Students who defended their dissertation work in Spring 2023:*

- Shilpa Thota
- Abubakar Abdulkadir
- Rizwana Begum



## \$1M National Science Foundation Grant to Fund Planning for Initiative to Improve Health, Economy in Delta Region

A coalition of organizations in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi will use a \$1 million grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to promote improved and equitable health and economic outcomes in the Mississippi Delta regions of those states, the Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center (SU Ag Center) announced Thursday, May 11.

The Arkansas Center for Health Improvement is the recipient of the planning grant, entitled NSF Engines Development Award: Advancing Equitable Access to Food and Health Technologies in the Delta. ACHI will lead the tri-state effort, partnering with the SU Ag Center and the Arkansas Rural Health Partnership, the Mississippi-based Delta Health Alliance, Mississippi-based HOPE (Hope Enterprise Corporation, Hope Credit Union, and Hope Policy Institute), and the Louisiana Public Health Institute.

“The Mississippi Delta region faces many longstanding challenges, including inadequate food availability, high rates of chronic disease, and limited health care access,” said Dr. De’Shoin A. York, Vice Chancellor for Extension and Outreach at the SU Ag Center. “This is a transformational investment in the region, and we hope this first joint effort of partners in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi will lead to solutions that will improve health and economic outcomes for these communities,” she added.

The coalition intends to spend up to 18 months developing a plan for an initiative that will harness the region’s strengths to address its key disparities. ACHI will then apply for additional NSF funding

to implement the initiative, which the coalition expects to focus on three areas:

1. **Development and testing of new telehealth models and digital tools that can be embedded in the home and across rural clinical and pharmacy sites, taking advantage of modern advances in machine learning, artificial intelligence, and data science. The initiative will also provide the resources and infrastructure to train and increase fluency in virtual care among healthcare professionals, community health workers, and patients.**
2. **Development of more effective methods for the production, distribution, and accessibility of fresh, healthy food, including the development of new business models that integrate food as medicine with existing and emerging healthcare delivery, and advancements in precision agriculture.**
3. **Design, development, and manufacture of over-the-counter or pharmacy-administered diagnostic materials and therapeutics, with a focus on innovations, advancements, and infrastructure that improve health care for underserved populations.**

The grant is part of NSF’s Regional Innovation Engines program. Authorized by the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, the program is designed to reach geographic areas that have not fully benefited from the technology boom of the past decades. More information is available on NSF’s website at [beta.nsf.gov/funding/initiatives/regional-innovation-engines](https://beta.nsf.gov/funding/initiatives/regional-innovation-engines) and on ACHI’s website at [achi.net/nsf](https://achi.net/nsf).

“These NSF Engines Development Awards lay the foundation for emerging hubs of innovation and potential future NSF Engines,” said NSF Director Sethuraman Panchanathan. “These awardees are part of the fabric of NSF’s vision to create opportunities everywhere and enable innovation anywhere. They will build robust regional partnerships rooted in scientific and technological innovation in every part of our nation. Through these planning awards, NSF is seeding the future for in-place innovation in communities and growing their regional economies through research and partnerships. This will unleash ideas, talent, pathways, and resources to create vibrant innovation ecosystems all across our nation.”

Key personnel involved in the effort are:

- De’Shoin A. York, Vice Chancellor of Extension and Outreach for the SU Ag Center
- Joe Thompson, President and CEO of ACHI
- Danielle Taylor, Executive Director of ACHI
- Mellie Boagni Bridewell, President of the Arkansas Rural Health Partnership
- Karen Matthews, president and CEO of the Delta Health Alliance
- Charity Hallman, Senior Vice President of Community and Economic Development for HOPE
- Shelina Davis, CEO of the Louisiana Public Health Institute



## DANGERS OF MENTHOL VIRTUAL PRESENTATION



The Southern University Ag Center's Communities of Color Network (CoC) hosted a virtual presentation, Dangers of Menthol, in partnership with Project ASIRT, a Robert Wood Johnson funded organization on May 17, 2023.

The CoC team's presentation highlighted the addictive and dangerous nature of menthol cigarettes. Menthol is a chemical compound that provides a cooling or numbing sensation in the mouth or throat when inhaled. African Americans have a higher prevalence of smoking menthol cigarettes compared to other racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Menthol cigarettes are more addictive than non-menthol cigarettes, and research has shown that they are more difficult to quit. According to the CDC, nearly 85% of African American smokers use menthol cigarettes. This high prevalence of menthol use has led to higher rates of tobacco-related disease and death in the African American community compared to other groups.



**ATTORNEY  
CHRISTOPHER LEUNG**

The marketing of menthol cigarettes to the Black community has been a major factor contributing to this disparity. Historically, tobacco companies aggressively targeted this community with advertisements featuring popular Black celebrities and public figures, and sponsoring events and concerts in predominantly Black neighborhoods.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has recognized the impact of menthol cigarettes on the African American community and has taken steps to address the issue. In 2021, the agency announced plans to ban menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars. Attorney Christopher Leung was the lead litigator on this remarkable effort. Attorney Leung is a Partner at Pollock Cohen LLP—a New York Law Firm focused on public impact litigation, whistleblower actions, and complex litigation. Attorney Leung joined CoC to speak more about his personal journey with tobacco and his landmark litigation going up against the FDA.

"A very special thanks to our partners from the Southern University Ag Center's Communities of Color Network for putting together such an informative and engaging presentation," Stephanie Kennedy's, ASIRT Project Manager. "And another special thanks to Attorney Christopher Leung for joining CoC to share his journey in going up against the FDA to advocate for the ban of menthol and flavored tobacco products to improve the health and lives of Black communities."



# EXTENSION EXTENSION



comfortably. The event was a testament to the power of community and collaboration in promoting healthy living.

“When it’s your job to help people, you have clear evidence every day that you’re making a difference,” stated Camellia Brown, SU Ag Center Extension Agent for Avoyelles Parish. “Plus, like most people of any age, seniors appreciate and look forward to opportunities for laughter and conversation. Studies also show that seniors participate more in activities where they can socially interact with similar age groups in the same communities. My job allows for me to make that possible along with providing the resources and information needed.”

The All of Us Research Program is part of the broader Precision Medicine initiative that aims to collect data from one million or more people living in the U.S., to help build one of the most diverse health databases in history. Researchers will use data to learn how our biology, lifestyle, and environmental factors affect a person’s health. To learn more about All of Us Research Program, visit: <https://www.joinallofus.org/batonrouge>.



## Mansura’s Community Health Day

Members of the Avoyelles Parish community gathered at the Cochon De Lait Center in Mansura, LA on May 18, 2023 for a community health day focused on senior health. In partnership with the All of Us Research Program, this event hosted many activities, health screenings, and informational tables to promote healthy living among the elderly.

“The Southern University Ag Center strives to link all citizens of Louisiana with opportunities for success, and this is one way we do that,” said Jasmin Mathews, SU Ag Center Public Health Specialist. “With a special focus on our seniors for this Community Health Event, we recognize they are the pillars of all communities around our state. They face unique health concerns, and there can be many barriers that prevent them from addressing those issues. We lessen some of these barriers by meeting them where they are and bringing much need resources and services to the heart of their community.”

With 160 participants, this event was a one-stop shop for seniors to receive vaccines, blood pressure checks, and glucose checks. They were also able to speak with representatives about Medicare, senior housing, and social services. Seniors were able to learn about ways to stay healthy and active and were connected with resources in their community that could help them live independently and







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