



Nourishing the Nation While Starving: The Underfunding of Black Land-Grant Colleges and Universities

JULY 24, 2023 – DENISE A. SMITH

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This year, the 118th Congress will reauthorize the federal Farm Bill, the primary legislation through which Congress supports the nation’s system of land-grant colleges and universities for teaching, research, and cooperative extension, which supports local agriculture and the agricultural sciences. It’s an opportunity to fix decades of underfunding of HBCU land-grants.

Today, the nineteen HBCU land-grant institutions, located primarily in Southern states, enroll over 117,000 full-time-equivalent students, of whom 75 percent are Black and 57 percent receive Pell Grants. Black land-grant universities provide markedly greater access to underrepresented students than other land-grant institutions and they play a critical role in educating the next generation of Black talent in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, agriculture, and mathematics) fields—workforce areas that tend to be the least diverse. Despite a legacy of limited support, HBCU land-grant institutions are making rich research contributions in STEAM fields and are applying that scientific knowledge to tackle social, health, environmental and other problems in rural, distressed, and high-risk communities in their states. The nineteen institutions contribute \$5.5 billion in economic impact, demonstrating the critical role they play in supporting their local, state, and national economies.

Century Foundation research finds that unlike their white land-grant counterparts established in the Morrill Act of 1862 (1862 institutions), **Black land-grant universities (1890 institutions) have been overlooked, dealt decades of discrimination, and starved for resources**—even after designation as federal land-grant universities in the Second Morrill Act of 1890. While in theory, this Reconstruction Era legislation sought to expand educational opportunities to Black Americans, in practice it fell short. The law required states to establish a “just and equitable” division of monies between the 1862 and 1890 universities, yet ambiguity in the legislative language created a loophole that would position states to provide greater and inequitable shares of appropriations to white land-grant institutions, while starving Black land-grant institutions. Federal policy aided and abetted discriminatory state funding of the Black land-grant universities, also denying just and equitable federal funding to them.

Resource Inequities Facing HBCU Land-Grants

TCF examined data to compare resources available to the 1890 institutions and their counterpart 1862 institutions in the same states and found the following:

This report can be found online at: <https://tcf.org/content/report/student-assignment-and-enrollment-policies-that-advance-school-integration-a-national-perspective-to-support-planning-in-the-district-of-columbia/>

- Research expenditures per full-time equivalent student are nearly **three times greater** at the 1862 institutions than at the 1890 institutions (\$10,774 versus \$3,388)—a funding disparity due to deeply embedded biases, double standards, and scrutiny that 1890 institutions endure when competing for federal and state research dollars.
- Endowments per full-time equivalent student are **six times greater** at the 1862 institutions than at the 1890 institutions (\$77,103 versus \$12,532). At their inception, the 1890 institutions were denied perpetual funding for the “endowment, maintenance and support” provided to the 1862 institutions, resulting in untenable present-day inequities in endowment resources that support current operations and ensure future longevity.
- Through litigation and other means, Black land-grant institutions have had to fight the denial of federal and state support since their inception, and that fight continues. In the 2019–20 academic year, the 1862 institutions operated with **\$2 billion more** in total revenues (federal, state, institutional) than the 1890 institutions. As a result, Black land-grant universities operate on shoestring budgets, with fewer resources for research, technology, academic instruction, student support, and community programs.
- Black land-grant universities were excluded from federal formula payments for research and extension activities for eighty years, while their white land-grant counterparts received routine federal support. Further, federal appropriations for 1890 research and extension have fallen far short of levels promised by Congress—a **\$436 million shortfall** between fiscal years 2008 and 2022.
- States have failed to equitably support 1890 institutions, while 1862 institutions flourished with state resources. Between fiscal years 2011 and 2022 alone, Black land-grant universities **lost nearly \$200 million** in resources because states declined to provide matching funds while they fully funded their white land-grant universities.

Policy Recommendations

In order to achieve equity and justice for 1890 institutions, TCF makes the following recommendations for the 2023 reauthorization of the Farm Bill:

- **Provide \$600 million in new mandatory, equity funding for 1890 institutions.** Mandatory funding of \$600 million (\$120 million a year over five years) will help compensate 1890 institutions for decades of inequitable and lost federal and state support for their land-grant education, research, and extension programs.
- **Incentivize states to eliminate funding inequities by phasing out the waiver for one-to-one state matching of federal research and extension formula funds to 1890 institutions.** Policymakers should increase the minimum percentage of 1890 research and extension funds that states must match (that is, cannot waive) from 50 percent to 80 percent in fiscal year 2024, 90 percent in fiscal year 2025, reaching 100 percent in fiscal year 2026. Over the years, states have not had a problem finding the resources to fully fund the 1862 institutions. It’s past time to end their discrimination against the 1890 institutions.
- **Double the minimum funding percentages for appropriations for 1890 research and extension programs.** Policymakers should increase the minimum funding percentages authorized in the Farm Bill for 1890 research from 30 percent to 60 percent of annual 1862 research appropriations, and for 1890 extension from 20 percent to 40 percent of annual 1862 extension appropriations. Then, the increased 1890 research and extension funding should be appropriated in the annual Department of Agriculture Appropriations Acts.
- **Provide \$100 million to expand student scholarships at 1890 institutions.** Policymakers should adopt [Congressman David Scott’s \(D-GA\) \\$100 million initiative](#) to expand U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) scholarship support for 1890 students studying agricultural sciences. Broadening the participation of

historically marginalized students in STEM fields is needed for national economic growth and vitality.

- **Substantially increase other federal resources for 1890 institutions.** Policymakers should substantially expand federal support to 1890 institutions for such programs as 1890 Research Facilities and 1890 Centers of Excellence administered by the USDA, to help 1890 institutions obtain the top-level Carnegie ranking—R1 (very high research activity)—for a research university, which garners greater access to federal, state, and private research resources.
- **Strengthen USDA reporting to Congress on federal funding, state matching funding and state waivers granted for 1890 education, research, and extension programs.** Although the Farm Bill required USDA to report annually on allocations made to, and matching funds received by, 1890 and 1862 institutions, the USDA has not made this information readily available and transparent to Congress, the 1890 institutions, and the public.

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If you need more information, we're here. Contact TCF Senior Fellow Denise A. Smith at dsmith@tcf.org.

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