

Louisiana (Louisiana State University and A&M College, Southern University and A&M College Combined)

Plan of Work for 2023-2027

Status: Final (Approved 9/29/2022)

Executive Summary Overview

The FY 2023 Plan of Work (POW) for the Agricultural Research and Extension Capacity Funds submitted by Louisiana State University AgCenter (LSU AgCenter) and Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center (SU Ag Center) covers the period October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2023. This POW consists of one consolidated and integrated plan for both the research and extension programs at Southern University and Louisiana

State University. The mission of the LSU AgCenter and the SU Ag Center is to enhance the quality of life for the people of Louisiana through basic and applied research and educational programs that address scientific, technological, social, economic and cultural needs.

In order to address the urgent needs of Louisiana citizens emphasis will be placed on the following critical areas during the period:

1. Family & Community Development focusing on issues affecting individuals, families community development; disaster, epidemic and pandemic preparedness, mitigation and recovery; risk awareness; sustainable housing; agrosecurity; and agritourism;
2. Food Security & Systems focusing on increasing the sustainability and profitability of Louisiana's animal, aquaculture and plant systems and food accessibility, affordability, policy; food safety, to include seafood, raw produce, and processed commodity - safety, certification programs, farm financing and succession planning issues;
3. Natural Resources & Environmental Sustainability focusing on conservation and preservation of natural resources, state's forestry industry, wildlife, wetland plants, water, waste management, landscapes, feedstocks, alternative biofuels, biomass processing and their effects on the environment;
4. Obesity, Health & Wellness focusing on increased consumption of health foods - fruits and vegetables; increasing time in physical activity; complete physical; mental and social well-being; policy, system, and environment change; and related nutrition/health/wellness issues to include epidemic and pandemic prevention; and
5. Youth Development focusing on providing Louisiana youth with positive development opportunities and activities to build great leaders and healthy citizens.

At both institutions, the problem of limited resources continued to present challenges for sustaining vital projects and programs. Issues created by eight continuous years (2008-2016) of funding reductions/constraints followed by several years of level funding are being addressed by the present State Governor and the Legislature. State funding constraints resulted in the retirement /resignation of various categories of experienced employees. This limitation in funding necessitated constant review of programs to ensure that adequate manpower is allocated to address critical issues. In addition, COVID-19 pandemic caused several restrictions that are being slowly lifted. SU and LSU will work to ensure that available resources are appropriately allocated and utilized to ensure maximum return on investment and high program impact. To meet the ever-changing needs of our stakeholders in the agriculture and natural resource communities as well as the youth and families served by our institutions, new approaches to conducting business have become the norm. Increased reliance on new technologies and tools such as social media; increased external funding and funding from local entities; increased collaboration, and trained volunteers will continue to be important as we attempt to deliver high quality programs to Louisiana residents.

Consistent with Louisiana State University System (LSU System) on August 1, 2022, Dr. Matt Lee, was named the Interim Vice President of the LSU Agricultural Center (research and cooperative extension components) and Interim Dean of the LSU College of Agriculture (with academic component). At Southern University, Dr. Orlando McMeans, Chancellor-Dean, remains as Director of the Land-grant mission, supported by its Vice Chancellors for research and extension, Drs. Jose U. Toledo and De'Shoyn York, respectively.

Merit and Scientific Peer Review Processes

During the plan period, thorough reviews of all programs will be critical as both the 1862 and 1890 land grant institutions continue to make every effort to ensure business is being conducted in the most effective and efficient way possible. Strategies for conducting program reviews on a scheduled basis are being identified and evaluated. Peer reviews for proposed research activities of scientists will continue according to NIFA guidelines. Program reviews will be solicited from peer scientists and state extension specialists. The comments and a synthesis of recommendations will be provided to the originating scientists or team of faculty by the administration in an effort to strengthen their programs.

Stakeholder advisory groups are key representatives that assist in identifying the programing needs and audiences, including disadvantaged, underserved, limited resource and target populations and designing programs to address those needs. A major component of that process is having individuals from a range of audiences, including representatives of the low income, under-served and under-represented populations, as members of the advisory councils to actively participate in identifying specific needs. State-level commodity groups meet at least annually, and research and extension faculty will continue to make presentations and receive comments/suggestions regarding future research and educational programming needs from these key groups.

External extension advisory councils will continue to validate outreach programs. Internal groups made up of multidisciplinary faculty will provide review and focusing of statewide research and extension efforts. Both Southern University and Louisiana State University will conduct program reviews to assess program effectiveness and establish program priorities.

Stakeholder input: Action Taken to Seek Stakeholder Input

To ensure greater participation, multiple methods are used to seek input from all stakeholders in a fair and impartial manner to allow equal voice. Input is sought from both traditional and nontraditional audiences and the advisory committee and commodity groups; which are the major vehicles from which stakeholder input derives. While some individuals are specifically selected to provide input because of their role in the related program community, others

participate via listening sessions; while others are recruited using a variety of strategies. To broaden our understanding of local needs, quantitative needs assessments (via paper or electronic means) are also used. This provides greater input from non-traditional audiences and from traditional audiences who cannot or do not normally participate in face to face meetings.

Results of the quantitative needs assessments are shared with advisory groups so that better discussion and identification of priority needs can be facilitated.

Public meetings are announced using media channels such as email, newspaper, radio, websites, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and blogs. Stakeholders are encouraged to attend them as they are able. Accommodations are provided for individuals with special needs. Surveys are conducted at every planned workshop or training session to determine the extent to which program activities addressed the needs of participants. As an alternative, surveys are conducted to gather input from individuals not attending meetings. Stakeholders are engaged in the planning, implementation and evaluation of program efforts.

Stakeholder input: Methods to Identify Individuals and Groups

Input in identifying critical needs and the programming process is collected through a variety of methods. One-on-one contact is an often-used method by which extension and research identify individuals and groups which have interest in guiding programming. Advisory committee members as well as internal and external focus groups are a great help in identifying other stakeholders and providing crucial information on needs. The key is ensuring that individual stakeholders represent a common subset of the total target population so that the needs of all can be identified and considered. A concerted effort allows various individuals to participate in the process by rotating advisory committee members while maintaining equal representation of the target audience on stakeholder committees. Listening sessions and needs assessments also provide open forum to identify groups and individuals from whom to collect input.

Stakeholder input: Methods for Collecting Stakeholder Input

Extension agents and program area specialists play important roles in collecting stakeholder input by holding meetings regularly with various stakeholder groups to get their feedback regarding programs and activities. Meetings with nontraditional groups and individuals, such as community leaders, parish officials, and other agency officials, to seek input are also carried out both at the local and state levels. Formal and informal meetings are held. Research and extension faculty and staff participate in community activities where they can meet and interact with both traditional and non-traditional groups and individuals throughout the state. Established relations with federal and state agencies, community

groups, leaders, the faith community and individuals allow both research and extension personnel to utilize available resources at their disposal to interact and obtain important inputs.

Input is collected from stakeholder groups and individuals through the advisory committee process for all key programs, through external focus groups on various issues and by using various needs assessments and surveys. Advisory committee meetings with traditional and non-traditional stakeholder groups continue to be used most frequently. Surveys of both traditional and non-traditional stakeholder groups are used to gather such input. In recent years, the LSU AgCenter Listens and the SU Ag Center Listening Session initiatives provided an open community-type forum to gather input from stakeholders. It is anticipated that similar processes will continue to occur in order to provide necessary data to update the strategic plans of both LSU and SU Ag Centers. Utilizing Web-based survey tools have become the method-of-choice to collect input from stakeholders who cannot always participate in meetings. Occasionally focus group meetings and contact with key individuals in a community are used. The nominal group technique or some modified version thereof is often used to identify and prioritize issues in advisory committee meetings. This technique is also used during our joint research/extension planning meetings to develop priority issues and develop viable solutions.

Stakeholder input: A Statement of How the Input Will Be Considered

One main means of utilizing stakeholder input is to assist research and extension faculty, staff and administrators in identifying emerging issues and in evaluating ongoing programs. Stakeholder advisory groups help to redirect extension programs and research projects when necessary. Prioritization of issues needing attention is a major role of advisory committees. Input from the parish (county) level is often directed to one or more state level specialist/faculty for their consideration. Also, state-level advisory groups provide input directly to state specialists, and this information then goes back to the parish groups for their consideration. In the current economic climate, stakeholder input is also being used to redirect program resources from programs having less impact to those with greater impact or potential impact. Stakeholder input into administrative and field specialist positions is becoming much more common. Stakeholders are involved in an advisory capacity, frequently participate in the interview process and provide input to the position selection committees. Legislative and regulatory actions affecting the future of our stakeholders are important variables in the process of planning for future program focus and prioritization of faculty and staff positions. SU Ag Center and the College of Agriculture, Family, and Consumer Sciences (CAFCS) have also recently collected stakeholders' input through an external contractor (Gallup). The input is being currently compiled and will be reviewed and considered in strengthening academic, research, and extension programming

Critical Issues

Family and Community Development

Initiated on: Nov 26, 2019

State: Louisiana

Term Length: Long-term (>5 years)

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 American Community Survey, poverty rate in Louisiana is over six percent higher than the national average (18.61 compared to 12.8 percent), and rural poverty in Louisiana continues to be more severe than urban (24.2 compared to 18.1 percent). Thirty eight

percent of rural parishes are considered “persistent poverty” parishes. Many Louisiana families are experiencing social and emotional crises because of recurrent natural disasters, COVID-19 pandemic, and economic crisis. Therefore a critical activity of this plan is to promote economic development and address issues affecting individuals, families, community development, business development and expansion, disaster, epidemic and pandemic preparedness, mitigation and recovery; risk awareness, sustainable housing, agrosecurity, and agritourism.

Science Emphasis Area

Education and Multicultural Alliances, Environmental Systems, Family & Consumer Sciences

Food Security and Systems

Initiated on: Nov 26, 2019

State: Louisiana

Term Length: Long-term (>5 years)

The highest food insecurity rate in the nation is in East Carroll Parish, Louisiana, where 40% of children struggle with hunger (<https://www.savethechildren.org/>). According to USDA/Economic Research Service, household food insecurity remained unchanged at 10.5 percent from 2019 to 2020. Although the prevalence of food insecurity and very low food security for all households remained unchanged from 2019, some subgroups experienced an increase in food insecurity and very low food security. For example, among children, food insecurity and very low food security increased significantly from 2019. Children and adults were food insecure in 7.6 percent of U.S. households with children in 2020 (up from 6.5 percent in 2019); very low food security among children was 0.8 percent (up from 0.6 percent in 2019). In 2020, the typical food-secure household spent 18 percent more on food than the typical food-insecure household of the same size and household composition (Household Food Security in the United States in 2020, ERR-298 USDA/Economic Research Service). Louisiana's food insecurity rate is approximately 4 percent higher than the national average for 2020. CDC estimates that each year 48 million people get sick from a foodborne illness, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die.

This plan will focus on promoting rural prosperity by increasing production, sustainability and profitability of Louisiana's animal, aquaculture, and plant systems; as well as food accessibility, food affordability, food safety, and policy improvement; and will also include seafood, raw produce, and processed commodity - safety, certification programs; farm financing and succession planning issues.

Science Emphasis Area

Food Safety, Human Nutrition

Natural Resources & Environmental Sustainability

Initiated on: Nov 26, 2019

State: Louisiana

Term Length: Long-term (>5 years)

Louisiana has eclectic ecosystems, natural resources, soils, and forest environments ranging from massive pine and oak forests to cypress swamps. Between the Gulf of Mexico and numerous streams and rivers, the state has over 15,000 miles of coastland creating vast wetland areas. The state's forestry industry, with 14 million acres and 150,000 landowners, contributes over \$3 billion in value to the

state's economy. According to the USGS, the state has the highest coastal erosion rate in the continental U.S., about 17 square miles per year. We will focus on conservation & preservation of natural resources, state's forestry industry, wildlife, wetlands, water, waste management, feedstocks, alternative biofuels, biomass processing and their effects on the environment.

Science Emphasis Areas: Agro-climate Science, Climate-Smart Agriculture Systems, Bioeconomy, Bioenergy, and Bioproducts, Environmental Systems

Science Emphasis Area

Agroclimate Science, Bioeconomy, Bioenergy, and Bioproducts, Environmental Systems

Obesity, Health and wellness

Initiated on: Nov 26, 2019

State: Louisiana

Term Length: Long-term (>5 years)

Obesity and overweight are the leading causes of preventable death in the U.S. Heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and stroke are all linked to this widespread problem. According to the 2021 State and Well-Being Rankings (Gallup-Sharecare Well-Being Index), Louisiana was number 44 out of the 50 states. Louisiana has held steady at 5th quintile along with other poverty stricken states. To address this critical area, Southern University and Louisiana State University Agricultural Centers will continue delivering and providing research-based educational programming to families, communities, organizations, and individuals, and supply information on increased consumption of health foods - fruits and vegetables, increasing time in physical activity, complete physical, mental, financial, recreational, and social well-being, policy, system, and environment changes, and related issues.

Science Emphasis Area

Education and Multicultural Alliances, Family & Consumer Sciences, Human Nutrition

Youth Development

Initiated on: Nov 26, 2019

State: Louisiana

Term Length: Long-term (>5 years)

An increasing proportion of American children are at substantially **higher risks for undernourishment, child abuse, neglect, poor health, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, violence and academic underachievement, due to conditions beyond their control.**

To address this critical area, we will target Louisiana youth and provide educational information on three areas: **Citizenship/Leadership, Healthy Living and Science and Technology.** We will emphasize four essential elements in youth--belonging, independence, mastery and generosity. We will implement positive youth development programs strengthen young people's sense of identity, belief in the future, self-regulation, and self-efficacy as well as their social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral competence.(CDC.gov)

Science Emphasis Area

Education and Multicultural Alliances, Youth Development