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EXTENSION ACCOUNTABILITY--AN 1890 PERSPECTIVE

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Plenty of discussion continues about the impact of devolution on programs which the federal government has historically supported. Like other organizations, the 1890 Association of Extension Administrators (1890 AEA) has spent many hours deliberating on this issue. This paper presents some insights from these deliberations in a public policy context. The public policy context points out that, like many of its customers, the 1890 system continues to face difficult choices.

The focus of this paper is on issues believed to be particular to the 1890 system. It begins with a description of the 1890 system. Then, it addresses challenges facing the system and some measures taken to deal with challenges and opportunities.

Background of the 1890 System

The 1890 system consists of 17 historically Black land grant universities established by the second Morrill Act of 1890. These universities were created and/or designated as land grants out of a need to provide similar educational opportunities for Blacks, and under the premise of separate but equal. Though established in 1890, no sustained funds for extension were allocated until 1972. In 1972, Congress established legislation providing direct federal funding of extension programs at 1890 institutions and Tuskegee University which function within the guidelines established by the Food and Agriculture Act of 1977 (P.L. 95-113). These institutions hold in high regard their unique educational outreach ability to address concerns of socially-economically challenged and diverse audiences. In just over 25 years, these institutions have

managed to build a quality infrastructure and excellent credentials for delivering relevant educational programs.

Challenges of Accountability for the 1890 System

The 1990s have been described as an era of reducing “big government” through devolution, privatization and dismantling federal programs. For the 1890 system, the 1990s have been a period of transition.

National Issues. The 1890 system has been required to respond to congressional inquiries concerning programmatic relevancy, similar to the larger land grant system. Though it is a part of the bigger system and enjoys those privileges, it still has its own budget line in the federal budget that must be defended and protected. Based on the types of questions asked, many of these inquiries tend to focus more on relevancy and justification for existence. To a lesser degree, questions dealt with the appropriate structural level (federal, state or local) for effective program delivery.

The Agricultural Research, Extension and Education Reform Act of 1998 (AREERA) (P. L. 105-185) contained two sections that focus specifically on the accountability of the 1890 system:

Section 225. Plan of Work for 1890 Institutions to Address Critical Research and Extension Issues. As a condition of receiving federal funds for research and extension, 1890 institutions are required to submit plans of work that contain the following elements:

description of critical state agricultural issues and programs/activities; a process that describes how users input were obtained; and multi-institutions, multi-state and research and extension cooperation.

Section 226. Matching Funds Requirements for Research and Extension at Eligible Institutions. This provision requires that each 1890 institution submit a plan in FY 1999 detailing the sources and amounts of non-federal funds that will be used to match federal funds. Beginning FY 2000, these institutions are required to provide a 30 percent state-match for federal funds received. The percent increases to 45 percent for FY 2001 and to 50 percent for FY 2002 and subsequent years.

Clientele. The 1890 system defines its clientele as socially-economically challenged and diverse audiences (small part-time and minority farmers, and limited resource families and communities). It is often suggested that working with these audiences constitutes a social program. A constant challenge is to clarify for policy makers and appropriators that working with socially- and economically-challenged audiences require methodologies which make it more difficult to show short-term outcomes. The 1890s believe that education is still the great equalizer to help this clientele move up the social and economic ladder. Survival, measured by level of funding, still depends on institutions' abilities to develop instruments and strategies with which to measure the clientele's progress. Additionally, the 1890s must be able to prove that they are the best at doing the "important work" they do.

State Funding Issues. Though the level of state funds varies by institution, 1890s generally receive limited state funds for research and extension programs.

Most states are under increased pressure to provide additional funds for education, welfare-to-work programs and other required programs resulting from

devolution. Thus, the difficulty is increased for 1890s to secure the additional state funding that is required by Section 226 of AREERA.

Several states are undergoing, or coming out of, legal discussions about desegregation and defining the roles of various types of institutions in higher education.

Measures Taken by the 1890s to Address Increased Pressures for Accountability

The 1890 leadership recognizes that the survival and growth of the system depends, in part, on its ability to develop and carry out quality, relevant educational programs. Listed below are some strategies employed by the 1890 extension system:

- **Current Strategic Planning Efforts.** The system is completing an 18-month strategic planning process that was inclusive of all 1890 employees. The overarching theme of the process was to develop and enhance the system's philosophy—thus enhancing its ability to accomplish the regional and multi-state requirements of AREERA.
- **Increased Collaboration.** There is an increased emphasis on collaboration among 1890, 1862 and other institutions, non-government organizations, and public and private agencies. Some of USDA's new initiatives—such as Funds for Rural America, sustainable agriculture and risk management—require increased collaboration among 1890s, 1862s and others. The belief that this trend will continue has caused the 1890s to increase the number of cooperative agreements associated with program delivery. Their aim is to develop mutually beneficial relations that promote and enhance each partner's

ability to do good work which will be recognized and appreciated by stake holders and clientele.

- **Impact Assessments.** Developing instruments and conducting impact assessments to determine if desired outcomes were achieved is very important as the 1890 system moves forward in an era of devolution. An indicator of success will be a more empowered clientele that can advocate on its own behalf.

Conclusion

It is obvious that the 1890 extension system continues to face many challenges. The 1890 AEA finds the alternative-consequence model to be a useful tool for engaging the system in these deliberations.