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DISCUSSION: TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND EXTENSION PROGRAMS AT PREDOMINANTLY BLACK LAND-GRANT INSTITUTIONS

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Williamson and Williams are to be complimented for their willingness to address this broad and complex subject. The historical and philosophical perspective presented by Williamson provides the framework for focusing on the major issues confronting the Land-Grant System as suggested by Williams in reference to programs at predominantly black land-grant institutions.[1] There is, I believe, general agreement within the Land-Grant System that the focus of the System's teaching, research, and extension programs should continue to be determined by the needs and problems of agriculture, rural people, and society with the intent of improving the total quality of life. The character and growth of these programs in general, however, has been and will continue to be affected by the following two trends:

1. Enrollment in traditional agricultural fields has been declining in recent years as the attractiveness of agricultural careers in the minds of the nation's youth has diminished. While efforts have been and are being made to reverse this enrollment trend, it is not reasonable to expect large enrollment increases in the near term. Therefore, growth in land-grant programs cannot be expected to occur on the basis of increasing enrollment, particularly in the traditional areas, and
2. The funding of teaching, research, and extension programs within the Land-Grant System has become increasingly dependent on state government, with the percent of funds originating from federal sources declining. It can be expected that this trend will continue, placing the Land-Grant System in further competition with other demands for limited state funds. Given the anti-tax attitude that is in evidence across the country, the competition for state funds can be expected to intensify. Consequently, justification for programs and the elimination of program duplication across institutions will continue to be demanded.

Given these general trends affecting the growth and direction of programs in land-grant institutions, let us turn our attention to the papers presented by Williamson and Williams concerning the role and focus of predominately black land-grant institutions.

I question the general implication by Dr. Williams that the Land-Grant System should assume elements of an advocacy role. The System's strength has been related to a great extent to its ability to maintain an objective posture with respect to its teaching, research, and extension programs. Assumption of an advocacy role could very quickly erode the strength that objectivity has brought to the System. The System's role, as described by Dr. Williamson and referred to by Dr. Williams—the objective development of research information and dissemination of that information through its teaching and extension programs—should be continued. The objective posture and problem solving nature of the System's programs will ensure its long-run viability.

In his presentation, Dr. Williams identified several issues that influence the effectiveness of the Land-Grant System and its viability in rural areas. Many of his points were made using the environment faced by the small

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[1]The term predominantly black land-grant institutions used throughout the paper refers to the 1890 Land-Grant Institutions and Tuskegee Institute as identified by Williamson and Williams.

family farm and the consequences of a non-viable small family farm sector in rural areas as a focus. A general thesis was that the Land-Grant System has failed to effectively address the problems of the small farm sector and, in fact, had to some extent been a constraint to the sector's economic viability. Consequently, he concludes that the System must effectively address the concerns of this sector if it is to remain a viable entity in the future.

In general, these specific issues can be categorized as both economic and social in origin. Each issue could form the basis for considerable discussion. However, whether we agree or disagree with the issues identified, I think each of us would agree with Dr. Williams' premise that the Land-Grant System cannot justify its existence solely on the basis of past accomplishments. Predominately black land-grant institutions, as well as all other land-grant institutions must be concerned with the relevance of their programs relative to clientele and societal needs. Institutional success is going to depend upon effective program development coupled with the non-duplication of effort in an environment of fiscal restraint. I would like to confine the remainder of my comments to the issues identified relative to the small farm programs at the predominately black land-grant institutions.

Many of these issues are closely related to several raised during the recent structure of agriculture debate (Day, Paarlberg). Of particular relevance is the issue of the neutrality of teaching, research, and extension programs relative to cultural, social, size, and other user group characteristics. Evidence presented during the structure debate served to further stimulate the argument that the assumption of neutrality may not apply to all aspects of Land-Grant System programs. This argument has particular significance for the research and extension programs that have evolved at the 1890 Institutions and Tuskegee Institute. In general, these programs have been described as small farm oriented. However, as the literature suggests, it is inappropriate to characterize these programs as simply small farm research and extension programs. More appropriately, these programs were designed to address problems faced by and that affect the small farmer and rural areas. As such, these programs have addressed production, economic, social, and cultural problems.

Definitional questions aside, evidence indicates that the *"small farm will continue to be a useful option for families who find such units the best way to use their resources"* (Tweeten). These units are highly heterogeneous with respect to characteristics such as size, capital, off-farm employment, level of management skills, and producer objectives (Carlin and Crecink, Emerson, Humphries, Madden and Tishheim, Thompson). Such evidence and diversity support Williams' contention that the small farm and rural area interface offers many teaching, research, and extension opportunities for land-grant institutions having expertise applicable to these areas.

One of the issues in the small farm rural area interface not addressed by Williams, but inferred by Williamson, deals with the effort to base any expansion or program reorientation on what might be called a doctrine of "non-duplication". Non-neutrality of certain aspects of land-grant programs with respect to size, social, cultural, and other characteristics provides a basis for program delineation. However, duplication must be avoided in those aspects of programs in which results are neutral. Such an approach requires that in the research and extension areas, for example, an awareness of research activities at other institutions exists and that those findings applicable to a given problem be adopted and used by extension personnel. The non-duplication of programs coupled with the traditional problem solving philosophy of the Land-Grant System; i.e., focusing programs on issues determined important by society, will ensure continued and future funding. In his 1979 paper, West quoted Wienberg: *"In a democracy the direction of scientific research must in some degree respond to the will of the people. The scientists, who, after all, spend public money, cannot fairly object to the public setting the 'ends' of scientific research"*. Obviously, this statement could easily be expanded to include teaching and extension programs.

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