

## MEETING MINUTES

January 19, 2021

The third meeting of the Commission on Agriculture was held at 2:00 pm CST on Tuesday, January 19, 2021 via Zoom.

The following Commission members were present:

- Dr. Charlie Hatcher, Commissioner of Agriculture
- Sen. Steve Southerland, Chair, Senate Energy, Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee.
- President Randy Boyd, President, UT
- Dr. Tim Cross, Senior Vice President/Senior Vice Chancellor, UT Institute of Agriculture (UTIA)
- Dr. Keith Carver, Chancellor, UT Martin (UTM)
- Mr. Reggie Marshall, President, Fruit and Vegetable Association
- Mr. Jim Bledsoe, Tennessee Poultry Association and President, Tennessee Association of Conservation Districts
- Ms. Jennifer Houston, Past President, National Cattlemen's Beef Association
- Mr. David Fugate, Chair, UTIA Eastern Region Advisory Council
- Mr. Joe Huffine, Chair, UTIA Middle Region Advisory Council
- Mr. John Charles Wilson, Chair, UTIA Western Region Advisory Council
- Mr. Tom Skaggs, Director of Underwriting, Outdoor Underwriters

Also in attendance:

- Ms. Rhedona Rose, Executive Vice President, Tennessee Farm Bureau
- Mr. Keith Harrison, Assistant Commissioner for Business Development, Tennessee Department of Agriculture
- Dr. Christopher Stripling, UTIA Interim Department Head, Agriculture Leadership, Education and Communications
- Dr. Todd Winters, Dean, UTM College of Agriculture and Applied Science
- Dr. Caula Beyl, Dean, Herbert College of Agriculture, UTIA
- Ms. Carey Whitworth, Vice President of Government Relations and Advocacy, UT

Commission Chair Cross welcomed newly-appointed member Mr. Tom Skaggs to the committee.

### **I. President's Remarks**

President Randy Boyd thanked the members of the Commission for their service and support for Tennessee agriculture. Boyd provided an update on the Advocacy campaign for the property transfer in Milan, Tennessee from the Milan Army Ammunition Plant and thanked the government relations team for their work.

Boyd provided an update on his completed Extension Office visits and said he is hopeful to receive additional support in the Governor's budget for Extension agents. Boyd said his goal for 2021 is visiting all of the UT Research Centers.

## **II. Employment Outlook for College Graduates in Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources**

Chairman Cross introduced an update from a recent United States Department of Agriculture report, including an employment update for students pursuing a career in agriculture. Dr. Christopher Stripling led the discussion.

Stripling provided an update on the outlook of employment opportunities in specialized areas in agriculture such as science and engineering, business, communication, among others. Dr. Stripling also explored opportunities for partnerships across the system for different concentrations to meet industry needs.

The discussion centered around course offerings, recruiting more students, providing additional support for students that do not hold a background in agriculture but are interested in an agriculture-related career, and the importance of students gaining practical experience such as internships. A need for hands-on training for farm equipment operators was identified by Commission members as a follow-up to previous Commission meeting discussions.

## **III. Discussion, Local Meat Processing Opportunities**

Tennessee Agriculture Commissioner Charlie Hatcher provided an update regarding how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Tennessee agriculture. Hatcher said there was a disruption in the supply chain which has created opportunities related to meat processing as the state experienced problems with lack of capacity. Hatcher discussed how the Department leveraged COVID-19 funding from the CARES Act.

Mr. Keith Harrison provided an update about the Coronavirus Agriculture and Forestry (CAFB) Fund. Harrison provided a funding breakdown for the Commission which includes 60 percent for business relief, 20 percent for increasing meat processing capacity, and 20 percent for forestry. As of January 19, 2021, \$19.7M of the \$55M has been paid out and the Department continues to allocate funds. The CARES Act funding program was extended through the end of 2021. UTIA and UTIA are considering how to address the needs of the meats industry through workforce development training in food science. The two campuses are discussing collaborative approaches to meat science education and research.

## **IV. Advocacy Update**

Vice President of Government Relations Carey Whitworth provided an agriculture advocacy update. Whitworth updated the Commission about the progress of transferring leased property from the U.S. Army Ammunition Plant to the University, which comprises over 60 percent of UT's footprint in Milan, Tennessee. Whitworth thanked the efforts of the Commission, former UT Vice President Anthony Haynes, U.S. Sen. Marsha Blackburn, and U.S. Rep. David Kustoff for

their combined efforts in ensuring the inclusion of authorization language in the National Defense Authorization Act.

Whitworth also provided an update of agriculture legislative priorities. One priority is seeking increased funding to support UTIA non-formula units, including securing funding to provide 32 new extension agents in rural and distressed counties. Another priority is passing legislation that would allow students to be counted present at school when participating in 4-H activities, a measure passed by the House 99-0 in the 2020 session but did not advance in the Senate due to limitations of passing only COVID-19 related legislation in March. Whitworth also provided an update for the Tennessee Higher Education Commission Capital Project funding priorities which includes UT Martin's Innovation and Product Realization Facility. This project would be a joint effort between three higher education institutions to expand workforce and economic development in rural Northwest Tennessee.

Chancellor Keith Carver and Dean Todd Winters noted this facility will have a major agriculture role and provides opportunities for companies such as Tyson to collaborate. Winters also noted the need for a meat processing plant in the West Tennessee region and the possibility of building a facility on the UT Martin campus. Cross also noted that UT Martin and UT Institute of Agriculture are now working to re-mobilize and meet workforce demands in the meat processing industry.

#### **V. Next Steps**

Chairman Cross discussed the need to further research farming equipment operator training. The next meeting will occur during Summer 2021.

#### **VI. Adjournment**

With no further business to come before the Commission, Chairman Cross adjourned the meeting.