



MEETING MINUTES

July 27, 2022

Jackson, Tennessee

The following Commission members were present:

Randy Boyd, President, University of Tennessee

Dr. Keith Carver, Chancellor, UT Martin

Dr. Donde Plowman, Chancellor, UT Knoxville

Dr. Carrie Castille, Senior Vice Chancellor and Senior Vice President, UT Institute of Agriculture (UTIA)

Rep. Curtis Halford, Chair, House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

Dr. Charlie Hatcher, Tennessee Commissioner of Agriculture

Eric Mayberry, President, Tennessee Farm Bureau

Joe Huffine, UTIA Middle Region Advisory Council

Jim Bledsoe, Tennessee Poultry Association

Reggie Marshall, Fruit and Vegetable Association

John Charles Wilson, Chair, UTIA Western Region Advisory Council

Charles Goan, Chair, UTIA Eastern Region Advisory Council

Stefan Maupin, newly appointed Executive Director of the Tennessee Soybean Promotion Board.

President Boyd opened the meeting, welcoming Commission members and extending a special thank you to retiring Rep. Curtis Halford for his service both in the General Assembly and on the Commission. Boyd welcomed new Commission member Eric Mayberry, as well as Stefan Maupin.

Boyd noted the forward momentum of the University of Tennessee's agriculture programs, and how the Commission has contributed as a driver of that work. A brief update was provided on the following topics:

- **Rankings.** The reunification of UTIA and UT Knoxville has resulted in a significant jump in the National Science Foundation (NSF) Higher Education Research and Development (HERD) Survey rankings for UT Knoxville. UTK was ranked 72 in FY2017, and UTIA was ranked 123. One goal of reunification was to improve this ranking to help Tennessee's agricultural economy. Higher rankings attract top faculty and graduate students—who generally obtain higher levels of external research funding. Boyd reported that NSF has released their FY2020 HERD rankings – with the combined UTK-UTIA ranking coming in at 54th amongst public universities. This exceeded UT's initial goal.
- **Educational Innovation.** Boyd also discussed new efforts to deliver credit-bearing opportunities for Tennessee youth interested in agricultural fields. UT is launching a first of its kind program in the nation

among land grant universities, the “4-H Credit-4-College” program. Students who succeed in completing specific 4-H projects will satisfy requirements for a related course in the College. The first areas will be in animal science, agricultural leadership, and communication. The formal curricular approval process is being followed to enable expansion of this extraordinary opportunity to other disciplines in agriculture and relevant areas of study across the university.

- **Veterinary Medicine.** Finally, Boyd thanked the Commission for their advocacy and discussed a new \$3M recurring state investment in the College of Veterinary Medicine. Boyd thanked the General Assembly, including Commission members and Agriculture Chairmen Halford and Southerland, and Governor Bill Lee for recognizing this critical need.

UT Knoxville Chancellor Donde Plowman discussed the search process for the next UTIA leader and introduced Dr. Carrie Castille as Senior Vice Chancellor/Senior Vice President (SVC/SVP) of Agriculture. Castille began the SVC/SVP role July 1.

Castille addressed the group by sharing her personal background and management philosophy while serving as director of NIFA. She outlined her initial goals for leading UTIA and engaged the Commission in a discussion about current agriculture industry trends, ideas for making agriculture careers more appealing for today’s tech-savvy generation, and ways to create industry-based credentials for high school students and those already employed in agriculture.

A top goal identified by Castille was to double enrollment in the Herbert College of Agriculture in the next 3-5 years, recruiting the best and brightest students to grow the state’s pipeline of agriculture talent. She noted UTIA may need to employ a new approach, and plans are underway to bring in experts to evaluate current courses to assess if curriculum is evolving in alignment with current and future job opportunities.

Castille stated UTIA can modernize and also take a stronger approach in such areas as sustainable agriculture and natural resource conservation. Among Castille’s other initial goals for the Institute are:

- Increase collaboration towards large, multidisciplinary federal grants;
- Utilize Extension offices as gateways to University of Tennessee education and services;
- Operationalize success internally – securing systems and partnerships to be successful; and,
- Work across every campus within the UT System.

Several commission members agreed that existing UTIA resources and programs could be enhanced to address a perceived disconnect between local school systems and viability of agriculture careers. Among the suggestions offered were:

- Directly connect faculty members with farmers and producers;
- Provide more diversity in agriculture courses, including virtual options;
- Leverage the strength of Tennessee’s 4H programs and all 95 county Extension offices; and,
- Partner with the Governor’s Office and state departments to declare “Agriculture Education Day” or “Farm Week” to promote awareness of the diversity of agriculture opportunities in Tennessee.

To conclude the discussion with Castille, commission members suggested utilizing agriculture alumni from all UT campuses to solicit ideas on recruiting and how to better promote “non-traditional” agriculture as a career, and Mr. Stefan Maupin with the Tennessee Soybean Promotion Council offered to partner with UTIA to provide greater experiential opportunities for agriculture faculty.

Tennessee Commissioner of Agriculture Charles Hatcher also provided an update to the Commission. Hatcher commended UTIA for having the best agriculture Extension and 4H programs in the U.S. and reiterated the importance of UT's partnership with the state of Tennessee. He then outlined several issues currently on the State of Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA)'s list of priorities and concerns.

According to American Farmland Trust, in 2020, Tennessee was the 4th worst in the U.S. in terms of high value and forestry land being lost. Hatcher mentioned that the loss of high value agricultural land is concerning when coupled with Tennessee's tremendous growth. Blue Oval City and more people moving to Tennessee are examples of good things happening in our state. Western Tennessee counties previously losing population now have greater opportunity for students graduating from rural high schools.

Hatcher noted the challenge of balancing growth and meeting new demands, such as tremendous increase in demand for TDA services – regulatory, forestry and a 15-30 percent increase in number of new business inspections.

Other areas of priority shared by Hatcher were:

1. Agriculture Education – Six Future Farmers of America (FFA) positions are transitioning to TDA. They will focus on classroom curriculum and Supervised Agricultural Experience programs (work-based learning).
2. A soil conservation and nutrient management initiative, similar to a program underway in West Virginia, where the state conducts free soil, water and manure testing, and develops nutrient management plans with agricultural producers.
3. An agriculture supply chain taskforce completing its work and sending policy recommendations to Governor Lee.
4. Emergency preparedness, especially in times of natural disasters and events like the COVID pandemic, to support agriculture producers and consumers alike.
5. Urban agriculture and forestry recruitment is an increasing priority, because more than half the farmers in the U.S. will reach retirement age in 10 years.

Hatcher also commented on opportunities for the UT Institute of Agriculture to prioritize partnerships with Tennessee State University's College of Agriculture. In closing, he shared plans for a Fusion Center for Food and Agriculture proposed for the Department's Ellington Agricultural campus that would provide community training for produce production and forestry, with a possible complementary center in downtown Nashville.

The formal agenda having been concluded, the Commission meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Carey Whitworth, Secretary