



**Meeting Minutes
August 8, 2023
Lone Oaks Farm, Middleton, TN**

The following Commission members were present:

Randy Boyd, President, University of Tennessee
Dr. Donde Plowman, Chancellor, UT Knoxville
Dr. Yancy Freeman, Chancellor, UT Martin
Dr. Keith Carver, Interim Senior Vice President/Senior Vice Chancellor, UT Institute of Agriculture
Rep. Chris Todd, Chair, House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Commissioner Charlie Hatcher, TN Department of Agriculture
Phyllis Ferguson, Tennessee Pork Producers Association
Charles Goan, Chair, UTIA Eastern Region Advisory Council
Reggie Marshall, Fruit and Vegetable Association
Stefan Maupin, Executive Director, Tennessee Soybean Promotion Board
Eric Mayberry, President, Tennessee Farm Bureau
Carol Reed, Tennessee Corn Promotion Council

Special guests also present: Dr. Chris Clark, UTIA Executive Dean; Dr. Hongwei Xin, UTIA Dean of Ag Research; Dr. Ashley Stokes, UTIA Dean of Ag Extension; Dr. Jim Thompson, Dean of UTIA College of Veterinary Medicine; Dr. David White, Interim Dean of the Herbert College of Agriculture; and Dr. Todd Winters, Dean, College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences, UT Martin.

President Boyd opened the meeting with welcome remarks and reported on recent UTIA successes and accomplishments, including:

- The Herbert College of Agriculture has experienced an 8 percent growth in student enrollment as compared to its 2022 class.
- UT AgResearch has received a grand total of \$103 million in competitive research funding. Compared to FY22 (\$31M), the FY23 YTD Awards received have increased 233%. Overall, UTIA's FY23 YTD grand total in research funding is \$196 million, up 205% as compared to FY22 (\$68M).
- To bolster efforts in Precision Livestock Farming, UTIA in May added a robotic milking operation and received approval from the State Building Commission to construct a state-of-the-art poultry production research facility at the Middle Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center in Spring Hill.
- 300 youth from 72 TN counties were at UT Knoxville in July for the 100th year of 4H Roundup.

Boyd also shared UT Martin's successful efforts to recruit more youth into ag sciences and produce a future workforce pipeline for critical fields in rural areas. For example, at UT Martin, Veterinary Science & Technology majors are up 21.4% and this spring, 20 UT Martin students – almost all who

applied – were accepted into Veterinary Schools. UTM and UTIA are also partners on a TSU-led \$18.1M USDA grant that is aimed at recruiting underserved students into agricultural careers.

Boyd thanked members of the Commission for their advocacy and grassroots efforts to help secure \$12.5M in state funding to construct a Meats Lab at the Blount Unit AgResearch Center and reported on another state-funded project – the Water Education Training (WET) Center to be located at Lone Oaks Farm. It will be a first-of-its-kind Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) facility providing hands-on training to help agencies, communities, businesses, and private landowners better manage storm water and the damage that can occur from heavy rain events. It will also facilitate new STEM education opportunities for 4H youth and high school partners.

Boyd concluded his remarks by sharing that he and UT Knoxville Chancellor Donde Plowman plan to recommend Dr. Keith Carver be named permanent Senior Vice Chancellor and Senior Vice President of UTIA. A series of townhall meetings will be held to gather feedback on Carver’s permanent appointment, and Boyd asked Commission members to participate.

Carver then launched the UTIA Strategic Plan with a kickoff question around the UTIA Mission Statement, explaining that this effort was refreshed 2.5 years ago but changes in leadership, COVID-19, and the evolving needs of industry, Tennessee’s farming communities, and the state brought about a desire for new focus. The process is anticipated to conclude in January and Carver anticipates updating the UT Board of Trustees later in 2024.

Following discussion of the mission statement, Commission members offered additional ideas to be part of the strategic plan including training more ag extension agents and considering area population as a factor when placing extension agents in Tennessee communities; and prioritizing the emergence of artificial intelligence and other digital technologies and the impact on agriculture.

Next, Commission Members participated in a roundtable discussion of challenges and opportunities in their respective commodity markets and organizations. Among the leading themes to emerge as areas of concern were loss of high value farmland; workforce development to counter a shortage of H-2A temporary agricultural workers; increasing market access for small farmers and producers; and helping farmers navigate various regulatory burdens around land use and ground water rights. Areas of opportunity identified included educating and recruiting more young people about agriculture as a career; and establishing UT as the state’s most trusted source for agriculture data, research and solutions.

Following an update on legislative priorities for 2024 from UT Vice President of Government Relations Carey Whitworth and an Ag Economy Outlook presentation and discussion led by Dr. Aaron Smith, Associate Professor and UT Extension crop marketing specialist, the meeting was adjourned.