



# SEEDS *of* SUCCESS

A Monthly Newsletter of the Southern University Ag Center,  
College of Ag, and Chancellor's Report

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# WELCOME



## XOCHITL TORRES SMALL

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE

DEPUTY SECRETARY

# TO SUBR CAMPUS





## **USDA Deputy Secretary Xochitl Torres Small Visits the SU Ag Center and the SUBR Campus**

Xochitl Torres Small, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Deputy Secretary, visited the Southern University Ag Center and Baton Rouge campus on April 1, 2024.

The visit was Torres Small's first stop on her nationwide tour visiting universities and land-grant institutions to speak with students and administrators about the career opportunities in rural development and all that the USDA has to offer.

Dr. Katara Williams presided over the luncheon and greetings were given by Southern University System President-Chancellor Dennis Shields and SU Ag Center Chancellor-Dean Dr. Orlando F. McMeans.

Torres Small spoke to a group of SU Ag Center and Baton Rouge campus faculty and staff along with USDA administrators and congressional representatives.



Immediately following the luncheon, she spent time in a student roundtable with the university's USDA 1890 scholars discussing why they chose to major in agriculture and their career goals.

Torres Small is the first Latina to hold the position of Deputy Secretary of the USDA. She was confirmed by the United States Senate on July 11, 2023.

Before serving in her current position, she served as the USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development where she oversaw loans and grants to provide infrastructure improvements; business development; affordable housing; community facilities; and high-speed internet access in rural, Tribal, and high-poverty areas.

Prior to joining the USDA, Torres Small was a United States Representative for the fifth-largest district in the country. She is the first woman and first person of color to represent New Mexico's second congressional district.



*Photos by John Oubre, Southern University System*



# TEACHING

## **Southern University Poultry Unit Assists the Scotlandville Middle Pre-Engineering Magnet Academy (SPEMA) in Acquiring Hens**

In February, Dr. Jodi Morton, assistant professor of Animal Science in the SU College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences, worked closely with Nikita Lacour-Dukes, a mathematics, engineering design, and agricultural science teacher at Scotlandville Middle Pre-Engineering Magnet Academy (SPEMA) to acquire hens to help fill their chicken coop.

Under the guidance of Dr. Morton, Lacour-Dukes was able to apply for grants to get the required materials and supplies to raise chickens at SPEMA. Dr. Morton was invited to visit SPEMA, to advise on proper poultry housing setups, and to ensure they obtained the necessary supplies while they prepared for the arrival of the laying hens. Joining Dr. Morton at SPEMA was Southern University senior Animal Science major Makalia Scott.







# The SU College of Ag and the SU Ag Center Celebrated National Ag Day at Southern University Lab School

The SU Ag Center and the College of Ag celebrated National Ag Day at the Southern University Laboratory School on March 26, 2024. Over 300 students learned about plants and horticulture, animals, the USDA, Wellness, the Center of Excellence, Entomology, drones and hydroponics, and rode a smoothie bike with the dietetic interns.

“We are celebrating National Ag Day at the Southern Lab School because it provided us with an opportunity to reach out to a school near the campus and show the students everything that we have to offer about Agriculture,” said Harold Mellieon, Jr., Ph.D., the event’s organizer and Chair of the Department of Agricultural Sciences and Technology in the SU College of Ag.

National Ag Day, which was March 19, is a national celebration that observes the value of agriculture in our daily lives.



# TEACHING

## SU Dietetic Interns Visited the WHO DAT Nation



On March 22, 2024, the Southern University Dietetic Interns received a warm welcome at the New Orleans Saints training facility from Jamie Meeks, a Registered Dietitian. During their visit, the interns acquired valuable knowledge about Sports Nutrition, underscoring the pivotal role of nutrition in athletes' achievements. The Who Dat Nation firmly believes that nutrition serves as the cornerstone of their success.

The 18-month Dietetic Internship program is a post-baccalaureate supervised practice program in dietetics. It incorporates the Academy of Nutrition of Dietetics Standards of Education for students to acquire knowledge, skills, and competencies to function as entry-level registration-eligible dietitians.

For additional information about the Dietetic Internship program contact, Alexis Motley MS, RDN, LDN, Dietetic Internship Director/Instructor at [alexis.motley@sus.edu](mailto:alexis.motley@sus.edu).





*Healthier Food for a Healthier You!*

## FRESH LOOK *at* CAFÉ LACUMBA

Café Lacumba, a student-operated restaurant, opens twice a month and specializes in providing healthier food options to the Southern University community. It serves as a valuable learning environment for interns and nutrition students offering hands-on experience in food service operations. All interns undergo ServSafe training as part of their requirements.

In addition to their training, interns take on various responsibilities such as menu creation, food procurement, front-of-house décor, and more. To enhance visibility and accessibility on campus, Alexis Motley, MS, RDN, LDN, and the dietetic interns undertook a project to give Café Lacumba's windows a fresh look. Thanks to the new window vinyl, Café Lacumba is now easily recognizable to all members of the campus community.

Café Lacumba is located in room 161 of Pinkie Thrift Hall on the Southern University campus.





# EXTENSION

*SU Ag Center*

## Milagro Berhane Speaks on Her Career in Agriculture

Milagro Berhane, or Mila as she is affectionately known, has been employed at the Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center (SU Ag Center) for 32 years. The Senior Research Associate and adjunct professor in the College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences wears many hats and says that her career in agriculture began by accident. In her own words, she explains her love for her work and the field of agriculture.

### ***Why did you select a career in Agriculture?***

I was hired to be a lab manager for Southern University's College of Agriculture and my supervisor was working in Sustainable Agriculture. I started helping and that made me switch completely to agriculture. That happened more than 30 years ago, and I still love it! I still do some lab work related to sustainable Ag. It (working in the field of agriculture) was by choice because I wasn't supposed to do agriculture, but I really liked it and that's why I ended up switching and of course, I'm married to a farmer.



**MILAGRO BERTHANE**

### ***What is one of the proudest contributions that you have made in Agriculture?***

One thing that made me stay longer is teaching students. My students have been getting really good jobs and being successful. Every semester I say this is the best class. That has made me so proud. To see that whatever I'm teaching they are learning and passing it along. Some of them are now extension agents working for the government and in private industry. These are recent students and so many of them are going to graduate school. I think that is something that you can see on a regular basis and, in the past, we did community gardens. Working with the homeless and in the prisons. It just depends on what period in my life. There is something that made me proud. Probably right now it's starting the honeybee program and having the tree orchards is something that has me excited. We have 140-something hives and we are planting fruit trees. So that is something that is going to last for a long time. I hope when I come back in 20 years, they are going to be producing fruit. It depends on what point in my career at Southern University



that has brought me joy. And of course, there is Extension work, every time I meet a person who has come to our workshops, they talk so well about what a great job we do, and not just me. It's a team.

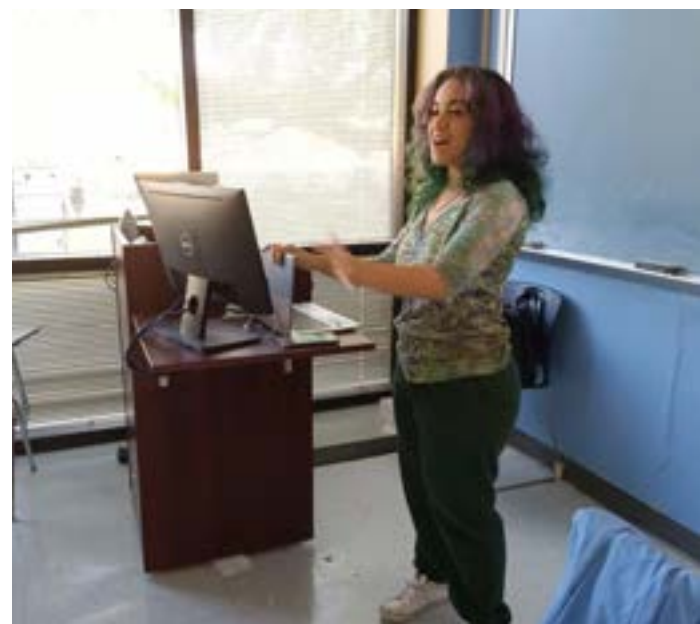
### ***What advice do you have for women who want to have a career in Agriculture?***

It is a good field! When I started working at Southern there were not too many women. It was a male-dominated program. And throughout these years I have seen a big evolution of more women getting involved in agriculture. There is no reason why not to get involved in agriculture. As I said it's a male-dominated field but not only here, but everywhere else women are the ones doing agriculture. There were countries where women were raising the food so why not here? It's good to see that there are so many women right now in agriculture. So go for it! There's no difference. Whatever advice I can give to other females is to don't try to depend on somebody else. Do the job yourself because sometimes we are left alone. We have to learn what we are doing. Anything related to equipment or working in the field or teaching or something. It's a good feeling for me. That's the reason I switched, having the challenge and producing something. There's nothing more rewarding than seeing those vegetables coming up in the field.

## **Cooperative Extension Program Holds STEAM Youth Development Event**



In honor of Women's History Month, we've embarked on a journey to celebrate the remarkable contributions of women in various fields. This March, STEAM/ Youth Development had the privilege of educating 20 female students participating in Big Buddy about the influential artist Alma Thomas and her significant impact on the art world, particularly for black artists. The session empowered our participants to unleash their creativity and produce masterful works of art.



# EXTENSION

*SU Ag Center*



## **SNAP-Ed Nutrition Education Program Celebrates National Nutrition Month with Local Schools**

The SU Ag Center's SNAP-Ed Nutrition Education Program partnered with schools across East Baton Rouge Parish to commemorate National Nutrition Month, an annual initiative established by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics held in March. This campaign aims to promote informed food choices and foster healthy eating and physical activity habits among individuals.

The festivities commenced with Capitol Elementary as the SNAP-Ed Nutrition Education Program partnered with the school in the national reading literacy campaign, "Read Across America." East Baton Rouge Nutrition Educator Chrishana Thomas, along with Content Developer/Public Relations Specialist





for SNAP-Ed and Cooperative Extension, Kandace Moss, engaged in the challenge by reading nutrition-themed books to students in kindergarten through 4th grade.

"Reading literacy is the gateway to knowledge and empowerment for children. Just as nutritious food fuels the body, feeding young minds with books is vital for their growth and development," expressed Thomas. She went on to say that she spearheaded the collaboration between SNAP-Ed and Capitol Elementary to instill nutrition education in young minds while highlighting the importance of reading literacy among elementary students.

Jessica Anderson, Literacy Coach at Capitol Elementary, expressed her enthusiasm for the collaboration, emphasizing the significance of community organizations in enriching students' educational experiences. "Read Across America is not only about promoting and celebrating literacy but also about exposing students to diverse educational opportunities beyond the classroom," stated Anderson.

Continuing its efforts, SNAP-Ed organized a "MyPlate Pledge Day" at Idea Bridge Charter School. During the event, elementary students pledged to incorporate all five food groups from the MyPlate dietary guide into their meals and engage in regular physical activity. As a token of appreciation, the students received MyPlate Champion certificates to commend their commitment to healthy living.



# EXTENSION

*SU Ag Center*

## SU Ag Center Holds an Organic Gardening Workshop

The SU Ag Center held a workshop on organic gardening on March 27, 2024 at the Maurice A. Edmond Arena Multi-Purpose Building.

Audrey Kolde, a Sustainable Ag Specialist with the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), was the guest speaker for the event which covered the topics of qualifications and requirements for organic gardening and self-sustainability practices.

After the workshop, attendees planted their organic vegetables from seeds to help them begin their organic growing journey.

For additional information on this workshop, contact Cornelius Jackson at [cornelius\\_jackson@suagcenter.com](mailto:cornelius_jackson@suagcenter.com).







# RESEARCH

*SU*  
Center

## **Dr. Marlin Ford Discussed Sustainable Agriculture and STEAM Education During the Beta Kappa Chi Scientific Honor Society**

Dr. Marlin Ford, Farm Research Superintendent/Research Assistant Professor and Urban Agricultural Specialist at the Southern University Ag Center discussed sustainable agriculture and Science, Technology, Engineering, Agriculture, and Math (STEAM) during the 79<sup>th</sup> Joint Annual Meeting of the National Institute of Science and Beta Kappa Chi Scientific Honor Society in Montgomery, Alabama from March 27–30, 2024.

This year's theme was Sustainable STEM: Resilience in a Changing Climate and the meeting was hosted by Alabama State University.

Dr. Ford spoke on March 28 during the Beta Kappa Chi Lecture and Memorial Luncheon on the topic, "Promoting Sustainable Integration in STEAM Education, Research, and Outreach at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

The National Institute of Science (NIS) is one of the oldest national scientific membership organizations to serve students and staff from Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

It provides students and educators with a forum to exchange ideas and research, in the disciplines of mathematics and science. The NIS has a mission of continually striving to increase the number of well-trained minority scientists by giving students the necessary academic support, research experience, internship opportunities, and career choices needed to become top working professionals.



**DR. MARLIN FORD**



# *Alumni* HIGHLIGHT

*The Southern University College of Agricultural, Human and Environmental Sciences highlights the accomplishments of alumnus Travis Miller, Louisiana Racing Commissioner for St. Landry Parish.*

Travis Miller, DVM, is a 2013 graduate of the Southern University College of Agriculture with a concentration in Animal Science/Pre-Veterinary Medicine. After completing his education at the Tuskegee University School of Veterinary Medicine, he landed a job at Peterson Smith Equine Hospital + Complete Care.

After completing a year-long hospital internship at Peterson Smith, he came back home to Louisiana to join Acadiana Equine Hospital as an associate veterinarian. He later became a partner in the practice in 2023.

Dr. Miller's dedication to his work and passion for animals has not gone unnoticed. His expertise and advocacy for the field led to an appointment to the Louisiana Racing Commission by Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry.

Born and raised in Lawtell, Louisiana, Miller has always been passionate about the outdoors, particularly sporting activities and horses. His love for his home state and its rich equestrian tradition is apparent in his new role on the racing commission.

With his deep-rooted knowledge of veterinary medicine and his love for horses, Miller is well-equipped to serve on the Louisiana Racing Commission. His appointment is a testament to his hard work and dedication to his profession.

Travis Miller's success and achievements are a source of pride for the SU College of Ag, and he continues to inspire current and future students in the field of animal science and veterinary medicine.

*Travis Miller, DVM*



# COMMUNICATIONS



Tune into the SU Ag Center's latest Podcast which features Evan Egana, a nutrition educator for the SU Ag Center. Evan discusses the benefits of eating healthy foods and how to stay on this path as a lifestyle change. Listen to the monthly show by visiting [www.suagcenter.com](http://www.suagcenter.com) and click on **"Podcast."**



## SU AG PODCAST

*"Everyday we use some form of agriculture, from the time we wake up, until we go to bed. From clothing, gasoline, food, and bed linens — agriculture is all around us!"*

**Join us as we interview your Ag favorites, and bring you agriculture news.**

*Hosted by:*  
**Dexter "Dex" Newman**







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