

Our keynote speaker today, it is Mrs. Elois Specter who is the executive director at Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Gracious Policy Research Center. And before she starts, we're going to look at a presentation.

Speaker 42: [inaudible 02:55:02].

Speaker 43: 20 years ago, Mr. Jerry Penning of the Federation of Southern Cooperative, wrote the concept paper by developing a policy center to assist black farmers in policy work affecting state, local and federal government policy.

Speaker 44: The policy center was authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill. Congressman Benny Thompson, who is an extreme significant supporter of both the farming community, the 1890 community and Alcorn State University was instrumental in getting authorization for the policy center into the Farm Bill. The 2014 Farm Bill specified that the policy center was to be located at one of the 19 1890 universities. USDA issued a request for proposals and Alcorn State University was the successful grand team. Alcorn established the policy center in 2015 and as they say, "The rest is history."

Speaker 45: We started with four priorities and that was, number one, the impact of current agricultural policy on social disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. Number two was participation in USDA programs. Third is, and we started with access to and use of technology. We have expanded that to access to and use of resources. The fourth is, land loss among African American farmers. We added two additional priorities two years in that's youth programs in the pipeline. The sixth area of priority is community and urban agriculture.

Speaker 43: The powers that be the leaders of USDA are constantly looking for ways to improve the Farm Bill. And the policy center has done really an amazing job, I would say of consolidating a collective position of its customers and presenting that in a fashion that has been beneficial to USDA.

Speaker 46: With a lot of black farmers, we didn't get the same price for our commodities that white farmers got. So my husband and I, when we started working with NRCS, we were able to run a 250 acre, a hundred head calf operation. So we were able to get assistance through NRCS. Frank really took us under his wing and showed us how to set up, how to get training to our farmers, the type of training that they needed.

Speaker 43: Looking to the next Farm Bill, the 2023 Farm Bill. It is being guided through the policy center. We are beginning to shape our issues. What we want to pursue in the next farm bill. It is very important and we do want them, we want us to include that thought that we have offer for small farm and that's very important as we move forward in 2023.

Speaker 47: The great thing is with research, research tells a story and so if you look at the number of black farmers from 1910 and you look at the number of black

farmers now we only have 2%, all farmers are black farmers. Now when you look at Mississippi the South, we're trying to keep something alive that has been happening since the birth of the country. Without this funding, without this research, it might be forgotten about. And then you're talking about people who might be forgotten about. Any farmer, beginning, even generational farmers who still want to farm, they have the right and we want to make sure that they have the resources and they're going to have the data to prove it.

Speaker 48: We wanted a place where the community could come together, the organizations, many of them across the country combine their ideas on policy, formal policy and try to get a consensus of the kinds of policies that would help the most people. And the second thing we wanted was to have a research element. The research element will give enough information before we go to Congress and ask them to do something so they know first what they're doing and know what the impacts are.

Speaker 49: We represent small farmers on this board. This is part of our area that we focus most on is small farmers and ranchers. We all need farmers and ranchers and we are going to be here, hopefully to the end of time. So it's been major changes, major opportunities, the information to do more value added. All of this is a part of what this educational program is about, when you are working with all the organization so you have so many other hands and opportunity to give that information out.

Speaker 50: The long-term plan for this center is that every piece of legislation that comes out in Washington, we will scrutinize that legislation to make sure that black farmers, limited resource farmers are not left out. And if they are then there are 57 members of the Congressional Black Caucus that if we stick together, no piece of legislation can pass.

Speaker 51: Farmers and ranchers can be engaged in the policy process by getting in contact with the policy center via phone or engaging with our website. They can connect with a community-based organization leader. They can contact their local 1890 University and they can also attend meetings that the policy center hosts specifically to engage them in the policy process.

Bill: This is Bill Miller Young. What a great video.

Ms. Spade: Yeah, that was a great video.

Bill: Happy to hear from Ms. Spade about her program that she's running. Thank you.

Ms. Spade: Okay, well thank you for inviting me. So to quickly just recap a couple things. Then the policy center was authorized in the 2014 Farmville and as was stated, it specified that it was to be located in an 1890 University. So Alcorn State University, Mid State University and originally was staffed by four full-time

employees. So in addition to myself, programming assistant, one policy analyst and one research, the majority of the work that we do, it's done through several [inaudible 03:04:34] and subcontracts. We have recently added three additional staff, the patient specialist now on a second position for a second policy analyst. This one to actually be located in Washington DC so that they can spend time pretty much on the hill, on the management, governance, and a program manager there to round out our staff.

Why was it created? To be a voice for social disadvantaged partners in managers? Two primary reason and the second thing is to, when I say the voice, the idea was for us to be able to mention of the video, to get together as the minority community and have a discussion and reach agreement on what we were going to take to conference. Because prior to the policy center they would have various groups. One group would come in and say "This is what we need," one minority group come in, "This is what we need." In addition, another one come in and in some cases [inaudible 03:05:50]. And they're like, "Okay, so what are we supposed to do with that?" So the idea was to facilitate agreement before going to Congress and so they had a clear direction in what was needed. The second was to ensure that the data-driven information that was available then. So not just anecdotal stories. Typically, the questions that I get asked relate to the magnitude of the problem. You say it is an issue and we have the data, the support. [inaudible 03:06:28].

And again, even though we're located at all point, you represent social disadvantaged farmers throughout the entire United States. No, 5:00 AM. Right. So actually, I, as the executive director report to the president of Alcorn State University, a conscious decision was made to make sure that I have the support and resource. I have dotted lines for dean of advocate because it is an agricultural program, but I report to the president. We also have an advisor board and I'm going to talk about that in a minute. But the mission then, right, the policy center is to conduct research, analyze policy and make recommendations seeking to achieve equitable and economic integration of USDA programs, policies for associate disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, communities, and rural land owners. So the part of that mission that I want to underscore is to achieve equitable and economic and why I underscore that, there's a difference between equal and equitable. Because if you start up here and I start down here and you give us equal services, then it will never be equitable there.

So I want to underscore that and we can turn in Thompson talk about the alternate ultimate vision for the center. So I won't go into that, but I will say so. Next question. I did not see you executive. Okay. So as the executive director, I was asked to come down and stand at the policy center, but almost seven years ago now, I went to Mississippi and I stood at the policy center. I've spent most of my professional career in Washington DC. So I retired from USDA, so I know USCA as well, natural resources conservation service. But I spent my summers on a 200 acre farm in North Carolina, my grand family farm, [inaudible 03:09:01] farm outside of Wilson, North Carolina. And that was my first job, by my school

club. The first vehicle that I learned to drive was a tractor. So exactly. So I have a combination of policy, knowing the production in Washington DC and an ag background as well.

So they'll catch up in certain, but it's Evan's family farm in North Carolina. So my grandparents then had six children. Those six children then had 36 grandchildren and most of us spent our summers in North Carolina on my grandparents farm. We were the labor for the farm. Exactly. And they leave a legacy of loving hearts. We'd like to say, 'cause there are a little bit over 600 of us now, but yes, between the different generations, it's still growing. And that's my grandparents there. So at the policy center we have four primary areas of focus, stakeholder engagement, agric research, policy development and strategic outreach. So stakeholder engagement here. So we currently are working with over 70 plus community-based organizations that represent minority farmers. Happy to say, we are now working with a 100% of the 1890 community. There are a number of 1860 universities that we work with.

And typically we are at majority of the small farm conferences to do strategic outreach. Vast, June and Louisiana held an 1890 strategy meeting. And this was a meeting between the presidents, the deans and the directors of research and extension 1890 university and all 19 were represented and USDA leadership. So Secretary Will Sack participated via Zoom. Deputy secretary, Ms. Ashley here with some person and a number of lead administrators [inaudible 03:11:41] was at that meeting. And it was to talk about USDA priorities for the next two years and how the 1890 community support those priorities. And as equally important, what were the resources and support the 1890s needed to be able to provide that support. We also have what we call the technical working that consists of USDA staff as well as attorney and that staff.

And the idea behind that is the insurer, before we go to Congress that our recommendations are technically inaccurate there. So we do our homework first. Also, under stakeholder engagement, we have an advisement board that is shared by the president of Alcorn State University, which is Dr. Isha Henry May. She is the 20th president and first female [inaudible 03:12:47]. And then we have 24 other members. And so Rod Reach, in fact, John Carolyn is one of our board members. Two who did well, to the time former minority advisory committee members on our board. So [inaudible 03:13:09] currently still on our board. And Dr. Dwayne Goldman, transitioning to [inaudible 03:13:16] on our board.

But we also have four other 1890 universities represented in addition to Alcorn. We have a 1890 university representative. We have the 2 1890 executive directors over extension and research. Five, what we call farmers at large because probably represent our large percentage of our medical arts by limited resource farmers. We represent all social Hispanics. So some of the national Black girls, for example, have very large farms there. And so we mention the interest of all minority farmers, two [inaudible 03:14:03], John Deere and [inaudible 03:14:05] Agri Science on our board. We had five community-based

organizations, which I'm sure you guys are familiar with, some of them, federation Selling Cooperatives, Texas Agri Forest, Mississippi Minority Farmers Alliance, and County Self-Help Cooperative, we have three. Oh, that's right.

Speaker 42: I'm sorry.

Ms. Spade: And agricultural leaders. So Lord Wright, Mike SB, former Secretary of Ed, and we have a representative from [inaudible 03:14:47] College. So again, if you look at that engagement, it is very broad and far-reaching. Okay. Partnerships. So we continue to expand those that we partner with. So we have a partnership with the Southern Mismanagement Education Center at the University of Arkansas, the 1890 Universities Foundation, the Southern Rural Development Center at Mississippi State University, and the law center. Number two, I mentioned a technical working group. We worked with Harvard Law School. I was just, last month, in Boston to actually speak to the students at Harvard Law Center about the Boston Center, the Vermont Law Center and Southern University Law Center. They work with us to help us take our results of our research studies and craft it into policy there, that literally can just be given to congressional staffers and insert into the Farm Bill.

We work with the Mississippi Center of Justice, Jackson State University. Their policy, and I'm going to talk a little bit later, just briefly on one of the research studies that they did for us. The attending group, the Minority Farm Alliance, as I mentioned. And then within USDA, we have partnership with the Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement, NRCS. We have a cooperative agreement. We were one of that first group of co-operators that received 6 month fund, have a cooperative agreement Thursday. And then, at [inaudible 03:16:47] we have a partnership with them for leadership development program for elected officials. [inaudible 03:16:55]. I mentioned John Mayor, International [inaudible 03:17:02] Association, and Walmart. We received a grant a little bit over a year ago from Walmart Center for Racial Equity. They had heard about the policy center and reached out to us. And we are specifically doing a research study looking at where black farmers, how do they fund their operations.

Because what we found out that only 80% of black farmers have loans with DA. So that means then that 90% then have to receive their funding elsewhere. And so we're doing a research study to identify that, not USDA, where they're receiving their funding.

So a couple things there. All right. So still on the partners, I mentioned hosting the 1890 diverse strategy meeting at the Policy Center. We're going to have another one probably in July of this year. We've also agreed to cohost a joint NRCS Black employees meeting at a farmer conference April 17th through 22nd in Atlanta, Georgia. And again, this is farmer training as well as professional development for meeting Black employees at NRCS.

So next area is research. So there, six priorities were mentioned on the video. So in the interest of time, I'm not going to go back over those other than to say the

actual research studies that we have going on now include several and related to their property access to credit, food and securities there.

But one of them I want to touch on real quickly, and that was the research study that was done by the Jackson State University Parks, and they looked at the services provided to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers between the 2014 and the 2018 Farm Bills. And when you looked at the numbers in total, services absolutely completely increased socially disadvantaged farms. But when you took it apart, the group that received the greatest amount of services was white [inaudible 03:19:37], including servicing the least amount of services was Black farmers. And like I said, that becomes very relevant largely [inaudible 03:20:03]. But the third priority area then is policy development.

So again, we take both results of our research studies and in focus groups. So I have to travel. I probably spent about 80% of my time traveling around the country. I have been to every state that houses an 1890 University except for two of them, making my way there, including the Virgin Islands and some between, and have talked to over 5,000. So we just manage farmers and ranchers, and there's some focus groups and one-on-ones. And so between the research studies and the focus group in discussion, we have developed policy recommendations for the 2024 Farm Bill. Vetted those recommendations virtually with the farmers. We also vetted them with an 1890 extension staff, and then what we do in our process then is provided to the Congressional Black Caucus then to get their support, and then we provide those recommendations to Senate and House Agricultural Committee.

Okay. So that, and I'm going to talk about the recommendations in a minute. We had several follow-up conversations on the Senate side, especially Senator Booker and Senator Warnock's staff that's specifically related to some of those recommendations.

Speaker 56: Shall we amend [inaudible 03:21:49]?

Speaker 52: Yes, yes, yes. No, I'm on the policy recommendation now currently. So recommendation, the areas that are racial equity, specifically justice for Black farmers, use of the term socially disadvantage farmers and ranchers, and underserved producers. We don't like either term.

Arnetta Cotton: Second again, please.

Speaker 52: Okay. The use of the term, socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. And so, USDA has started to move away from that. They're using underserved communities. The only thing we hate worse than socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers is underserved communities. Okay, and I'm going to tell you why real quickly here.

So first of all, we used socially disadvantaged in our [inaudible 03:22:47] seven years ago when I first started. I heard loud and clear that minority farmers did not like to be called socially disadvantaged. They said, "Okay, why are we socially disadvantaged because someone else is [inaudible 03:23:03]?" And did not like, at that time, I was still getting my [inaudible 03:23:08] back. But I said, "Okay. Got them insured. Got to fight a battle. Pray, change the name. We're going to get you \$50 million."

So that was a minimum in getting the \$50 million of mandatory funding in the Farm Bill and for 2501 farmers there. So that was that, sort of. Now, we're ready to take on the challenge of the name change, and for two primary reasons. Number one, when you look at minority farmers, do not have shared cultural history. The case for action is very different. Black have a history of enslavement and free labor; Indigenous American Union has a history of stolen land, prime land; Hispanics have a history as farm workers. All of the histories are very different, and so we think that one of the reasons the America would need that there, which was a \$5 billion of insured growth, and \$4 billion was for that need. That was stopped in the court by [inaudible 03:24:47]. But the problem, they said... And they probably had a problem, everybody was included in there but white [inaudible 03:24:57]. It was started as justice for Black farmers; by the time they kept adding everybody else in there, everybody was added except for white [inaudible 03:25:07].

So then, the business case was what happened to Black farmers. We didn't change the business case there. And so, the business case did not match the recommended coalitions there. That was a problem. All right, but now fast-forward next term. Underserved producers. And you look at underserved producers, that's roughly 80% of the population. So if you're going target 80% of the population but using the same pot of money, who do you think is going to get left out? Okay. Doesn't take any genius to figure out then that will be the end for Black farmers then.

I'm going to get back now. We still have on our list the [inaudible 03:26:05] FFA County Committee for lemonade. Now, we believe that if they could have been fixed, they would have been fixed by now. And so, we have not taken that off the table. I understand in all the equity commission, but we have left it on the table because, like you said... And we're okay. If you can fix it, by all means fix it. But you can't get rid of it, which means go back from the Brickbat Report, Civil Rights Report, Jack Lewis; the underlying source of a lot of discrimination are those FSA County Committees there.

All right, enough about that. I know I'm running out of time here. Access to capital credit, we mentioned that. Transparency and accountability. Both at USDA and the Farm Credit System; if you're doing the right thing, what is the harm in then being accountable and showing [inaudible 03:27:15] and providing services, too. And that has actually been in the Farm Bill since, what? 2008. That account has not have not done. 1890 priorities are included, and then we have another recommendation related to expanding urban agriculture, and then

using programs for minorities in agriculture. I know that was some of your discussion earlier, and so I won't go into the reason, but certainly [inaudible 03:27:54] not a priority.

And so, the Policy Center at three meetings about policy recommendation as I mentioned with Senator Booker's staff, to talk about the prior recommendation and to understand the data that we have to support the recommendations that we have there.

All right, so real quickly, I want to take us to Black Farmer Priority Bill. So why the focus on Black farmers? Because Black farmer is the only group defined on the video, Karen mentioned in 1920 that nearly one million Black farmers in the United States. Then, there are less than 40,000, which is 1.49% of the 2.8 million farmers and ranchers in the United States. Our concern is without some intervention, Black farmers will become extinct. And so what I have said to the USDA is, how about we start and we fixed the issues for Black farmers. Once you do that, we'll move to the next group. Strategic outreach. Then I want to close here, and we call it strategic outreach because we have a Policy Center, we know for 2501 funds better, so we're not going to be competing with a community-based organization to 1890 Universities for those outreach dollars. Then our pass through the Congress then, so our funding [inaudible 03:29:52].

In the strategic outreach, what we do is primarily educate on the Farm Bill so that minority farmers have an understanding of what is in that Farm Bill and the impact that it will have on them. Because when I first started this same thing about six years ago, we held a meeting in Oklahoma, a summit if you will. And three days in then, that third day... And you know what happens, we make assumptions, meaning I made an assumption that everybody knew about the Farm Bill. Third day in, somebody said, "What is the Farm Bill?" Okay. Right? [inaudible 03:30:38], but I have not made that mistake since. I do not assume. And so I educate any of the groups that I talk to, how critical the Farm Bill is and the impact that it has on the agriculture and farm community.

So one of the things imposing in strategic outreach, we actually have an agreement with FSA related to [inaudible 03:31:11] properties. So one of the things that we were asked to do at [inaudible 03:31:14] was then, if you will, that train to train that workshops, then build the direct outreach. But what we have started doing is then providing training to community-based organizations and to 1890 extension staff, then to an objective of improving the quality of training that is provided across the United States there. And FSA, it has under the Policy Center to do that training, the training bill, and also for minority-serving institutions being [inaudible 03:32:13], and so to actually fund inner property training then for those minority-serving institutions.

All right. So we have started doing podcasts and newsletters at the Policy Center. It's called Policy Center Live, and the first one was an introduction to Policy Center. Second, what is the Farm Bill? And so, what we're trying to do, like I said, is to educate as broadly as we can. We are also working with the

University of Arkansas, I mentioned, on a database of Black farms that would be posted on at the 1890 University Foundation.

All right, I am going to stop there and [inaudible 03:32:51].

Speaker 53: Thank you. I think everybody around this table always knew how important the Policy Research Center was, but I didn't know all of the details, so thank you for bringing that to us. We do appreciate all that you're doing and do understand its importance.

You listed a lot of things. **Do we have access to your policy recommendations?**

Speaker 52: **Yes you can. I can certainly provide them. The RSJI can send RJ a copy over to [inaudible 03:33:39]. Absolutely.**

Speaker 53: And how could best this committee support what you're doing?

Speaker 52: So what I'm going to say, so one of the things, and I mentioned my job. Two months in, as soon as I was back, two weeks after I'm moved to Mississippi, I came to a minority farm [inaudible 03:34:10] support group there, and just set in the back and listened.

And so for me, part of it is staying **connected. That's one of the things. So one of the biggest differences between this committee and the Policy Center is that the advisory board's secretary made the recommendations there.** We make ours to the USDA, but more importantly, **directly to Congress.** Then like I said, if there're legislation that needs to be changed, then they're making the recommendation there. And so what I would say as for communities to engage and to the extent that we have common ground here, a couple of things that they share; and the other thing is, as well, is to advocate as well. So again, whether [inaudible 03:35:13] works in the same thing that I say that farmers who are in agreement, make sure that your representatives are aware from your respective states, so [inaudible 03:35:26] we can decide that there. Yes. And so if they're constantly hearing the same thing, we all stand a better chance of being successful.

Speaker 54: Very good. First comment. I appreciate your presentation. I've been one of the [inaudible 03:35:47] have worked with the past. We loved having the dialogue and it's great information. And also, I think when I first talked to you before, at that time you did not have all 19 [inaudible 03:35:59]. I'm really glad to hear that. Now, as part of your strategy as partner, I know on your board, you want to have four of us represented on this board. Is part of the strategy that needs to get some of the schools involved, whether it's in research, whether they're a member of the board or whether it's any other kind of activity that you all do it to make sure that all students get some kind of engagement with the Policy Center [inaudible 03:36:23].

Speaker 52:

Yes. And that's what I said. So we have 100% [inaudible 03:36:29], and you're right. Now, when we started, we probably only had about 30%, and so the idea was to get 100% engagement, and we are there. Whenever we get ready to fund a research study in that area, we actually send, you know we don't have to, we send an [inaudible 03:36:53] proposals out to the whole 1890 community research that the 1890 communities so that everybody is aware of it and has the same opportunity to receive the grant funds or several more funds to do the research.

We again have started educating the extension staff, working with them. And then the latest, I mentioned that strategy meeting that we had. The first meeting, we spent majority of the time probably listening to leaderships in the USDA. This year, we're going to allow more time for the strategy discussion than go consistent strategies across the 1890 [inaudible 03:37:45].

Speaker 54:

Great. Thank you.