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Updated June 15, 2021

1890 Land-Grant Universities: Background and Selected Issues

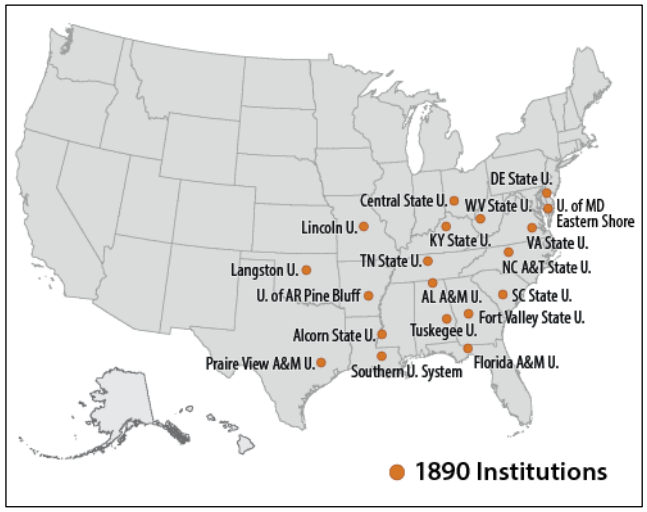
The *1890 Institutions* are the historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) that belong to the U.S. land-grant university (LGU) system. As such, they receive federal funds for agricultural research, education, and *extension* (nonformal education provided via the LGU system) through programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). States and territories provide required nonfederal matching funds for some of these programs. Congress supports the 1890 Institutions and other LGUs though appropriations, legislation, and oversight.

Background

The U.S. LGU system—comprising the *1862 Institutions* (57 original LGUs), *1890 Institutions* (19 HBCU LGUs), and *1994 Institutions* (35 tribal LGUs)—is a federal-state partnership with a threefold mission of teaching, research, and extension. LGUs are present in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and most U.S. territories. They originally focused on agriculture and the mechanical arts and now engage in a variety of academic disciplines.

The Morrill Act of 1890 (26 Stat. 417; 7 U.S.C. §321 et seq.) led to establishment of the 1890 Institutions. It provided funding for LGUs and prohibited racial discrimination in student admissions for recipient institutions. The act considered compliant those states that created separate institutions "of like character" for White and non-White students. The 19 1890 Institutions are in 18 states (**Figure 1**). Each has a college of agriculture and is eligible to receive funds under certain NIFA programs. For funding purposes, Alabama's two 1890 Institutions—Alabama A&M University and Tuskegee University—are treated as though they are located in separate states.

Figure 1. Map of 1890 Institutions



Source: Map created by CRS.

Grant Programs

NIFA administers federal funds for LGUs through two primary grant types. NIFA distributes *capacity grants*, also known as formula funds, among eligible institutions based on statutory formulas. These grants generally require one-to-one nonfederal matching funds (provided by the state or other nonfederal sources). Recipient institutions develop Plans of Work (subject to NIFA's approval) and decide which of their own projects to support. NIFA awards *competitive grants* directly to specific projects proposed by eligible applicants and selected through a national peer-review process. Grants of either type may focus on agricultural research, education, extension, or some combination of the three (*integrated activities*). Certain grant programs are specific to particular LGU types, and others are open to a variety of applicants. The **text box** on the next page provides more information on 1890 Institution programs.

USDA Initiative

In addition to grant programs established through legislation, USDA has managed the USDA/1890 National Scholars Program as a departmental initiative since 1992. USDA partners with the 1890 Institutions to provide students of food, agriculture, and related disciplines with scholarships and temporary USDA employment. USDA agencies provide work experience and pay students' tuition and fees; the universities pay for room and board.

Considerations for Congress

Federal support of the colleges and universities that comprise the LGU system has strengthened agricultural research, education, and extension. Some argue that differences in federal support for the 1862, 1890, and 1994 Institutions constitute inequities that Congress may consider addressing. Others may argue that institutional differences—including the numbers of students served, types of degrees awarded, and focal missions—should factor into federal funding allocations and programmatic decisions affecting the LGU system. NIFA programs primarily support agriculture-related activities, and LGUs derive financial support from other sources (e.g., other federal programs, endowments, student tuition).

Federal Appropriations

The original LGUs receive the greatest proportion of federal capacity funds specific to agricultural research and extension, accounting for 82% of such funding in 2020 (see **Table 1** for details on included programs), followed by the 1890 (18%) and 1994 Institutions (0%). Although the 1862 Institutions are the most numerous and serve the greatest number of students (**Table 1**), some argue that historical funding for agricultural research and extension at the 1890

Institutions has been insufficient. They argue that such funding should be increased.

Table 1. Selected Aggregate Metrics by LGU Type

Metric	1862	1890	1994
Number of Institutions	57	19	35
Total Undergraduate Students	1,534,525	89,544	23,481
Total Graduate Students	446,014	14,734	273
Total Fed. Capacity Funding: Research, Extension Programs	$574M	$124M	—

Sources: 12-month (2019-2020) enrollment data from National Center for Education Statistics, *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System*. Funding totals from enacted FY2020 appropriations (P.L. 116-94) include capacity programs for 1862 Institutions (Hatch, Smith-Lever 3(b) and 3(c)); 1890 Institutions (Evans-Allen, NARETPA §1444); and 1994 Institutions (no comparable programs).
Notes: Student totals do not indicate the subset of students that are engaged in agricultural disciplines, making it difficult to compare overall support levels for these students. Access to funding sources other than NIFA capacity grants may vary by institution type.

Shortly after the 1862 Institutions were established as LGUs, Congress enacted legislation to provide them with annual capacity grants for research (Hatch Act of 1887, 7 U.S.C. §361a et seq.) and capacity grants for extension in 1914 (Smith-Lever Act, 7 U.S.C. §341 et seq.). The 1890 Institutions were not eligible for these grants. Congress first authorized annual capacity grants specifically for research and extension at the 1890 Institutions in the National Agricultural Research, Education, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (NARETPA). NARETPA originally required these appropriations to equal not less than 15% (research) and 4% (extension) of the capacity grant appropriations for 1862 Institutions. The 2008 farm bill (P.L. 110-246) increased these requirements to 30% (research) and 20% (extension). Congress may consider whether allocated appropriations adequately support the needs of 1890 Institutions.

Nonfederal Financial Support for 1890 Institutions

Incomplete state matching of federal capacity grants to 1890 Institutions has been a concern for some observers because it reduces total funding for these institutions. Federal capacity grants for the LGU system generally require one-to-one nonfederal matching funds. These funds typically come from state-level appropriations, but they also can come from the universities themselves or some other nonfederal entity. Current law permits USDA to waive up to 50% of the matching requirements for 1890 Institutions if the state is unlikely to provide sufficient funds. The law does not permit waivers for most 1862 Institutions. Currently, all states meet the matching requirements for their 1862 Institutions. In contrast, in FY2020, nine 1890 Institutions received matching fund waivers for either research or extension capacity grants or both grant types.

Although waivers for matching funds allow for federal funding of 1890 Institutions without complete state funding support, they open funding disparities between 1890 and 1862 Institutions. Section 7116 of the 2018 farm bill (7 U.S.C. §2207d) addresses this issue through a transparency requirement: USDA must report annually on federal capacity funding allocations and nonfederal matching funds by institution and grant program. These reports publicly identify institutions that received waivers for particular capacity grant programs. They do not distinguish between state appropriations and funds provided by other nonfederal sources. Congress may consider whether this transparency requirement is achieving its intended objectives.

USDA Grants for 1890 Institutions

Capacity Grants. NARETPA (P.L. 95-113, Title XIV) authorizes three capacity grants for the 1890 Institutions. Congress provides annual appropriations for these programs. For some, their funding authorization does not expire. For others, the 2018 farm bill (P.L. 115-334) authorizes annual appropriations through FY2023. Enacted FY2021 appropriations (P.L. 116-260) are identified below.

- NARETPA, §1444 (7 U.S.C. §3221) authorizes extension capacity grants. One-to-one matching funds are required, and USDA may grant a waiver of up to 50% of the matching funds. FY2021 appropriations: $62 million.
- The Evans-Allen Act (NARETPA, §1445; 7 U.S.C. §3222) authorizes research capacity grants. One-to-one matching funds are required, and USDA may grant a waiver of up to 50% of the match. FY2021 appropriations: $73 million.
- The 1890 Facilities Grant Program (NARETPA, §1447; 7 U.S.C. §3222b) provides capacity grant funding to acquire and improve agricultural and food science facilities and equipment. The 2018 farm bill (§7118) authorizes annual appropriations of $25 million. Matching funds are not required. FY2021 appropriations: $21.5 million.

Competitive Grants. NARETPA and the 2018 farm bill authorize the following competitive grants:

- The 1890 Institutions Teaching, Research, and Extension Capacity Building Grants (1890 CBG) Program (NARETPA, §1417(b)(4); 7 U.S.C. §3152(b)(4)) provides grants to improve the 1890 Institutions' capacity in food and agricultural sciences. 1890 CBG is one of several NIFA programs deriving authority from 7 U.S.C. §3152, whose broader mandate allows USDA discretion to support particular institution types—in this case, the 1890 Institutions. The 2018 farm bill authorizes annual appropriations of $40 million for all of 7 U.S.C. §3152. FY2021 appropriations for this program: $26 million.
- The Centers of Excellence (COE) at 1890 Institutions provision of the 2018 farm bill (§7213; 7 U.S.C. §5926(d)) calls for USDA to fund at least three COE focused on specified areas related to food and agriculture. This program supports prior COE established through a 2015 USDA initiative commemorating the 125th anniversary of the Morrill Act of 1890. The 2018 farm bill authorizes $10 million in annual appropriations from FY2019 to FY2023. FY2021 appropriations: $10 million.
- The Scholarships for Students at 1890 Institutions provision of the 2018 farm bill (§7117; 7 U.S.C. §3222a) provides support—through competitive grants to 1890 Institutions—for students intending to pursue careers in agriculture and food sciences. The 2018 farm bill authorizes $10 million in annual appropriations for FY2020-FY2023 (FY2021 appropriations: $10 million) and $40 million in mandatory funding available through FY2023.

(This In Focus was authored originally by Genevieve K. Croft, former CRS Specialist in Agricultural Policy.)

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