

Draft SAAESD Strategic Roadmap 2021

Working Document 1.9 – April 13, 2021

The varied geographic and climatic features of the Southern region combined with its historic agrarian culture creates unique opportunities for researchers at our State Agricultural Experiment Stations (SAES) to collaboratively address the complex, multifaceted challenges facing agriculture, the environment, and the life sciences. The diverse geography features different climates and soil types, as well as varied animal and crop production systems. Across the Southern region, agriculture is the backbone of local economies providing high quality food and fiber to consumers globally.

Many of our Land-grant universities in the Southern region are located near major urban centers with tremendous opportunities to expand the scope of our research programs. In an increasingly urbanized society, agriculture is viewed by consumers through the lens of health with an expectation that nutritious food be produced by sustainable practices. The Southern region has perhaps the most diverse rural and urban populations in the country. A shared geography with 1890 Land-grant universities offers opportunities to partner in addressing regional challenges.

Strong agricultural and life sciences programs at our Southern Land-grant Universities are meeting the unique challenges facing the region. The region is particularly vulnerable to impacts of climate change altering growing conditions, weather patterns, and sea levels. Southern states have major seaports, international airports, and international borders where invasive species can gain a foothold adversely affecting agriculture. Water quantity and quality issues exist across the region, impacting our abundant coastal areas and tributaries.

Rapid changes occurring across this diverse region requires flexibility as new research challenges and opportunities arise. As part of a nationwide research system, the Southern Association of Agricultural Experiment Station Directors (SAAESD) is dedicated to meeting the regional, national, and global challenges associated with agriculture, food systems, natural resources and human nutrition by offering the best available science. The 2021 SAAESD strategic roadmap is designed as a flexible and adaptable guide for our collaborative activities. With a focus on outcomes, the strategic roadmap serves as a tool to facilitate the design and implementation of strategies and actions that can be adapted and revised as changes occur and as a prioritizing tool to evaluate new ideas or opportunities.

Mission

The SAAESD amplifies the collective strengths of our academic institutions to expand the vision and enhance their research capacity to collaboratively provide innovative approaches to regional, national, and global challenges in the food, agricultural, environmental, and life sciences.

Vision

Transform agricultural, food, natural resources, and human systems throughout the Southern region for a healthier and more sustainable world through consensus and collaborative discovery, translation, application, and adoption.

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Stakeholders

The SAAESD serves a wide variety of stakeholders at the local, regional and national levels, either directly through the association or indirectly at our individual institutions. The services provided to our stakeholders include, but are not limited to, faculty and administrator training, supporting collaborative discovery and serving as advocates for legislation and funding at the local, regional and national level. SAAESD supports open and broad communication to all stakeholders, including the general public, on the value of research and serves as a trusted source of science-based information.

Stakeholder Needs:

1. Active and effective advocacy for the Southern regional research system
2. High priority regional research in food, agriculture, and natural resources
3. Effective coordination with Extension, academics, government, industry and private entities
4. Forum for information exchange, training, and communication

Five Focus Areas

***Collaborative Discovery – Strategic Alliances – Enhancing Reputation –
Effective Advocacy – Creating Impact***

Focus area 1: Collaborative Discovery

Desired Result: Accelerate research and innovation by facilitating collaborative discovery among the Southern land-grant institutions.

Relevance: Collaborative discovery harnesses synergies by integrating science from across disciplines and utilizing specialized, advanced capabilities to address the most challenging and complex issues of our time.

Influences: Food insecurity, climate change, human and community health, biodiversity, rural poverty, agricultural resiliency

Strategies:

1. Establish regional research priorities, promoting the development of complementary research platforms and topics to facilitate collaborative research in areas of regional importance.
2. Leverage the strengths of specialized faculty and facilities from multiple Southern land-grant institutions to address complex problems that are beyond the capacity of a single SAES.
3. Continually assess the Southern Multistate Research projects portfolio to minimize redundancies and identify gaps as opportunities to create new projects.
4. Address emerging issues in the context of the Southern regional priorities through proactive leadership.

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5. Promote convergent, systems-level approaches to broaden the scope of our science, including a social science research element, aligning with the movement of federal sponsors into policy, human dimensions, conflict/dispute resolution, and economics.

Focus area 2: Strategic Alliances

Desired Result: Extend the reach and impact of our research programs through strong linkages among our institutions with Extension and relevant academic, government, industry, and private entities to foster productive alliances.

Relevance: Combined voices reach a broader and more diverse audience to strategically influence, effectively engage, and serve as a resource to amplify the utility and impact of our discoveries.

Influences: National research agendas, public-private partnerships, equity and inclusion, state and national policy, next generation of scientists

Strategies:

1. Coordinate and promote research initiatives that leverages unique or specialized resources among SAAESD member institutions.
2. Utilize the strengths of all components of the land-grant mission by facilitating partnerships with regional land-grant university associations to advance shared priorities, focusing on the Association of Southern Rural Extension Directors (ASRED), the Southern Academic programs section (S-APS), and the Southern Rural Development Center (SRDC).
3. Engage and seek out opportunities for collaborative research and graduate student programs with the 1890 land-grant universities and Association of 1890 Research Directors (ARD).
4. Leverage the assets of our land-grant institutions and missions to engage, inform, and influence the dialog of regional, national, and global governmental agencies, including federal funding agencies.

Focus area 3: Enhancing Reputation

Desired Result: Expand the regional and national reputation of member agricultural experiment stations.

Relevance: Enhancing the reputation of faculty and institutions within the Southern Region results in a strong voice to influence the national research agenda and provides visionary leadership for research excellence.

Influences: Federal research advisory committees, blue ribbon panels, high profile regional centers of excellence, faculty recruitment and retention

Strategies:

1. Increase stature of faculty in the region as reflected by the number of faculty who are recognized by societal honorifics.

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2. Integrate institutional research strengths across the regional to increase competitiveness for research centers of excellence.
3. Encourage active participation in ESCOP and APLU leadership and activities as a mechanism for directors to better understand and influence the national research agenda.
4. Build a culture of award nomination from the SAES and share successful strategies.

Focus area 4: Effective Advocacy

Desired Result: Serve as an active and effective advocate for the Southern regional research system at the regional, national and international levels.

Relevance: Effective advocacy tells the story of our research accomplishments to convey the value of our work and grow the resources that are necessary to deliver innovative approaches to effectively address the complex challenges in agriculture and the life sciences.

Influences: Federal capacity and competitive funding, regional and national reputation, federal and state policy, general public

Strategies:

1. Advocate for research support on behalf of member SAES primarily through active participation in the APLU BAA and engaging other regional associations.
2. Develop a regional communications strategy bridging local and national efforts to effectively convey the impact and value of our research programs within regional and national contexts.

Focus area 5: Creating Impact

Desired Result: Facilitate cutting-edge science that matters, balancing fundamental and applied research that is ultimately or directly translatable to addressing the complex problems in the Southern Region and beyond.

Relevance: Creating impact through long-term intellectual investment combined with training the workforce for the future to address issues facing people today with the tools of tomorrow.

Influences: Farmers and growers, forest owners, environmental agencies, general public, Extension, graduate students, postdoctoral researchers

Strategies:

1. Promote high-quality research that is relevant to end-users to enrich and sustain the forestry, natural resources, agriculture and food systems, and communities of the Southern Region.
2. Identify priorities and mobilize research projects that address immediate and long-term growth opportunities in the Southern region
3. Increase size and diversity (i.e., including and beyond USDA) of our respective research funding portfolios.

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4. Develop leadership necessary to drive research opportunities that are of particular importance to the Southern region, focusing on economic growth, sustainability, and community enrichment.

Four Overarching Goals

1. Increase scope, diversity and relevance of our collective research portfolios

Strengthen our current relationship with USDA-NIFA by continuing to address high priority research aligned with their goals, and forge new relationships with other funding agencies. This requires a commitment to collaboration, identifying high-priority research areas where, as a region, we can build on specialized strengths of individual SAES to make an impact.

2. Strengthen collaborative research that has regional relevance

Broaden the scope of activities we support to elevate and extend beyond Multistate Research projects, promoting science-based decision support to address the complex, multifaceted challenges facing agriculture and life sciences. Building on areas of synergy among SAESs and incentivizing collaborations will make us more competitive for research funding and stimulate the formation of regional centers of excellence. Likewise, strategic investments in Multistate Research projects can provide incentives to engage in competitive grant programs.

3. Support and develop excellent human capital

Create opportunities to enhance the recognition and visibility of our faculty at the regional and national levels. Encourage a diverse and inclusive workforce and support regional initiatives for professional development and regional leadership training of directors and faculty at all career stages. Engage graduate students and postdoctoral researchers by providing regional opportunities to broaden their professional experiences.

4. Showcase member successes, both internally and externally

Increase the clarity, consistency, and scale of messaging coming from our research programs by speaking with a coordinated voice on regional issues that complements, reinforces and elevates messages from our respective universities. The scope of our individual communications can be broadened by engaging communicators from our member institutions to effectively network and provide substantive and regular information to generate impactful products.

Annual Action Plans

A Strategic Roadmap Implementation Team will develop annual action plans to:

- identify and prioritize specific needs based on input from Southern Advisory Committees, key stakeholders, and members
- identify, update, and prioritize emerging opportunities within the five focus areas
- evaluate accomplishments and develop annual action plans to support the goals
- monitor progress, evaluate results, and share recommendations with SAAESD members

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Appendices

A. Strategic Planning Working Group

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Susan Duncan, Virginia Tech

Bob Godfrey, University of the Virgin Islands

Michael Toews, University of Georgia

David White, University of Tennessee

Gary Thompson & Cindy Morley, SAAESD

B. SAAESD Programs and Services

- Serve as an active and effective advocate for the Southern regional research system at the regional, national and international levels.
- Provide a forum to identify high priority research opportunities across member institutions.
- Facilitate the development of and coordinate relevant multistate research activities that address the needs of the Southern Region.
- Establish and maintain strong linkages to Extension and related academic, governmental, industrial and private entities.
- Serves as an internal and external information hub for research activities across the Southern Region

C. Regional Associations:

- Southern Association of State Departments of Agriculture - SASDA <https://www.nasda.org/organizations/southern-association-of-state-departments-of-agriculture>
- Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists – SAAS <https://www.saasinc.org/>
- Southern Legislative Conference – SLC <https://www.slcatlanta.org/#>
- Association of Southern Region Extension Directors (ASRED) <http://asred.msstate.edu/>
- Southern Region Aquaculture Center (SRAC) <http://srac.msstate.edu/>
- Southern Region Program Leadership Network (PLN) <http://srpln.msstate.edu>
- Southern Rural Development Center <http://srdc.msstate.edu>
- Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy (ESCOP) <http://escop.info/>
- National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) <https://nifa.usda.gov/>
- Southern Association of Agricultural Experiment Station Directors (SAAESD) <https://saaesd.org/>