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News

DSU Nursing Program Receives Largest Donation in History

The Delta State University Foundation received historic news recently with notification from the **Robert E. Smith** Estate of the largest single gift in the history of Delta State University. The **Robert E. Smith** School of Nursing received a $3.1 million bequest from **Smith**'s estate.

Smith's lifetime giving of $4 million has been designated to benefit the **Robert E. Smith** School of Nursing to underscore the desire of the late Cleveland resident to transform healthcare in the Mississippi Delta. His most recent donation represents the largest gift to the ongoing $40 million Campaign for Delta State University.

Smith, a retired rice and soybean farmer who passed away in 2011, is a former member of the Delta State University Foundation Board and native of Cleveland. He now has the distinct honor of making the largest gift by an individual in the history of Delta State University.

Smith

"This is truly transformational in nature. Not only does it serve to attract more quality nursing students and support our great nursing program, it also goes to the heart of **Robert**'s desire to transform healthcare in the Delta," said **LaForge**. "This is a major gift to Delta State and our nursing program, but also to the Delta."

$20 Million for Feral Hog Control

While conservation groups are rightfully focused on the passage of the Farm Bill and the conservation provision within it, the 2014 Omnibus Appropriations Bill passed earlier this month provides $20 million in support to implement a nationwide program to control and eradicate feral swine. The funding and responsibility for this new program will go to the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) who has a long history of abating animal damage on a national level.

Delta Wildlife

Feral hog populations have grown exponentially in recent years. Today, feral hogs account for $1.5 billion in property damage and income loss per year. In the Mississippi Delta, no one has felt these effects more than producers who are farming in close proximity to tracts of forestland. By 2023, feral hogs are expected to inhabit 100% of the State of Mississippi and all but a few extreme northern U.S. States.

"Hogs threaten and create overwhelming challenges for wildlife and forestry management activities, conservation initiatives, production agriculture, flood protection infrastructure, and other private and public property," commented **Randy Sewall**, Delta Wildlife President. "For this reason, Delta Wildlife has begun to focus a significant amount of time and resources on activities that empower its membership to control feral hogs in the Delta."

The U.S. Senate included the hog control provision and appropriation to the Omnibus Bill as requested in the President's Budget. "Delta Council and Delta Wildlife would like to thank Chairman **Pryor** (D-AR), Ranking Member **Blount** (R-MO) Senator **Cochran** (R-MS) and all other members of the Senate Appropriations Committee for advancing this agenda," said **Gibb Steele**, President of Delta Council and Vice-President of Delta Wildlife.

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ally the whole of his career in the Senate. He chaired the committee from 2003 to 2005. During that time, **Cochran** has fought at least three farm bill battles that sought to walk the tight rope between fiscal responsibility on federal nutrition policy and practical policies that gave the nation's farmers a fighting chance to make a profit.

The internal Senate politics on cobbling together a new farm bill were difficult. The process involved a pitched battle to determine whether U.S. farm policy shifted finally away from direct cash payments of commodity crop subsidies and price supports to new forms of subsidized crop insurance.

The new farm bill repeals the direct payment system, but replaces those direct payments with two new commodity programs designed to protect farmers from price and earnings declines while beefing up crop insurance programs.

It was also a sectional fight among farmers. Members of Congress from the Midwest and members from the South have spent the last year fighting over whether this nation's farm policy would favor crops grown primarily in the South over crops that are more prevalent in the Midwest.

Southern farmers who raise rice and peanuts were poised to see if the federal government gives them a smaller, less substantive farm safety net than that being afforded to farmers in the Midwest producing corn and soybeans. Catfish farmers were looking for protection from Asian competitors not subject to the same food safety inspections.

The new farm bill also strikes a reasonable compromise between the need to bring fiscal responsibility to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) - the federal program that my generation knew as "food stamps" - and throwing the neediest of the more than 650,000 Mississippians who utilized a program in Mississippi under the proverbial bus.

Some 1-in-5 Mississippians have utilized the SNAP program in the past. The new bill will save taxpayers some $8 billion, but will strengthen support for food banks and other local private sector charities by $200 million.

The new farm bill **Cochran** helped guide to passage also provides $150 million in water, waste disposal and wastewater facility grants and loans that are vital to rural Mississippi communities.

Without **Cochran**, the farm bill would have looked a lot different not just for Mississippi farmers and timber growers, but for farmers all across the South.