Research Mission: Newly proposed and pending research efforts for Family and Consumer Sciences will deal with topics to address the escalating issues surrounding the problem of obesity. This effort will establish a state and national signature initiative for the SAES. It will show that the School is responding to this national health risk and directing positive actions towards its elimination.

It is a well-known fact that the prevalence of overweight and obesity among the population in the U.S. has increased dramatically in recent decades. Among the industrialized countries that have experienced obesity rate increases, the U.S. leads with more than 64 percent of adults being either overweight or obese (The Obesity Society, 2008). The health statistics for children are just as alarming. Today, one in three children are overweight or obese, putting them as well as their adult counterparts at risk for a number of potential health problems. According to research, overweight and obesity have been found to be signifi-
Significantly associated with 1) diabetes; 2) high blood pressure; 3) high cholesterol; 4) asthma; 5) arthritis; and 6) poor health. As such, obesity is the most common and costly nutritional disease in the U.S., and the second leading cause of preventable death. About 300,000 deaths annually have been attributed to poor diet and inactivity. It drains $100 billion from the U.S. economy each year.

Unfortunately, despite all that is known regarding the negative consequences of overweight, obesity, poor/improper nutrition, the situation is not improving, especially among African-Americans (The USDA/1890 Task Force). Since the situation is steadily deteriorating, additional targeted research must be conducted, and new and creative interventions explored to address the problem.

Research Overview: To provide a holistic approach to the study and prevention/treatment of obesity, research in the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences is designed to fulfill a three-pronged purpose to:

1. Critically evaluate and enhance curricula offerings at AAMU to prepare Alabama's educators to proactively address societal obesity issues.

2. Conduct interdisciplinary research to address obesity from a holistic perspective with consideration for physical, social/psychological and genetic factors.

3. Work cooperatively and collaboratively with the Urban and New Non-Traditional Programs of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System at AAMU to implement activities leading to obesity prevention/treatment.

Pure and applied research efforts will be implemented which will focus on subjects of preschool age through adulthood. Efforts will include quasi experimental studies with teaching interventions, surveys, and individual counseling with records of entry and long-term data for comparison/effectiveness purposes.

Student Involvement: The Department of Family and Consumer Sciences operates within the total mission of the University’s land-grant function of teaching, research, and service. More specifically, the main thrust of the Department’s program is preparing professionals to enhance the well-being of individuals, families and communities. Consequently, participation of students will be integral to the success of the program. Students will be involved in the preparation of materials, wellness analysis and counseling, data collection, data analysis, professional presentations and papers, etc.

Community Benefit: Through the activities of the Department in conjunction with Cooperative Extension, the University will be a viable, expense-free resource for individuals and families of the community in the treatment and prevention of obesity. Considering that African-Americans bear a disproportionate burden of obesity and obesity related illnesses and that AAMU is a historically black institution, this holistic approach will provide a unique opportunity to address issues of obesity within the community.

The Future: The results of the initial efforts on the subject of obesity will be used to leverage for funding to develop a comprehensive Center of Excellence for Obesity Education, Outreach and Research, the first center of its kind at an 1890 institution.