

WASHINGTON REPORT

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Weed Science Presidents Visit DC

During the first week of April, WSSA President Larry Steckel, NCWSS President Aaron Hager, SWSS President James Holloway, and WSWS Past President Andrew Kniss traveled to Washington DC for science policy visits to Federal agencies and Capitol Hill. Also joining us was weed science grad student John Schramski from Michigan State who is currently serving as my Science Policy Fellow.

On April 2 we attended a USDA-ARS Stakeholder Workshop to review and provide input for their 5-year plan for the Crop Protection and Quarantine Program (NP 304), which covers weeds and insects, systematics and identification, and protection of post-harvest commodities, quarantine, and methyl bromide alternatives. In addition to the presidents and many weed scientists from USDA-ARS, I'd also like to thank Jim Kells, Arlene Cotie and Mark VanGessel for attending and in particular Janis McFarland who chaired the retrospective review panel. Overall, weed science was well represented. Areas of interest we emphasized for inclusion in their 2020-2024 Draft Action Plan included: weed genomics, biology, and ecology; weed seed identification tools; and integration of technologies such as drones, robotics, and artificial intelligence.

On April 3, we had another full day as we headed to Capitol Hill for visits with members of the Congressional delegations from Illinois, Michigan, Tennessee, and Wyoming. We also traveled to USDA where we met with Dr. Scott Hutchins, USDA's Deputy Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics and finally to the EPA where we met with Dan Kenny, EPA's Herbicide Registration Branch Chief, and members of the Biological and Economic Analysis Division team. We covered a wide range of weed science related issues during our meetings including the importance of ag research funding for both competitive and capacity building grant programs, the critical need of the IR-4 program for minor crop pest control, herbicide resistance management, minimizing off-target movement, and glyphosate non-carcinogenicity. Overall it was a very productive few days and we greatly appreciate the time and effort of these leaders to advance our discipline of weed science!

Tranel Presents Capitol Hill Seminar on Weed Gene Drives

On June 10, Patrick Tranel presented a seminar on Capitol Hill titled "*Gene Drives to Combat our Worst Weeds*". The seminar was part of the National Coalition for Food & Agricultural Research (NCFAR) Lunch-n-Learn Seminar Series. Dr. Tranel has been a weed scientist at the

University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign since 1997. He has been at the forefront of using molecular and genomic tools to study weeds, and his research findings have informed how weeds evolve resistance to herbicides and strategies that can be used to mitigate that process. The advent of gene editing tools, such as CRISPR-Cas9, makes such genetic strategies more feasible. Gene drives can be used in weed management approaches to reduce seed dormancy or reverse herbicide resistance in weeds. For genetic control of weeds to become a reality, significant basic research is needed as well as efforts in training future scientists.



Just outside the U.S. Capitol. From left to right: Lee Van Wychen, WSSA Executive Director of Science Policy, Patrick Tranel, University of Illinois, and Jim Kells, WSSA NIFA Fellow.

Kansas City Announced as New Home for USDA NIFA & ERS

On June 13, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced that USDA will relocate the Economic Research Service (ERS) and National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to the Kansas City Region. “Following a rigorous site selection process, the Kansas City Region provides a win win – maximizing our mission function by putting taxpayer savings into programmatic outputs and providing affordability, easy commutes, and extraordinary living for our employees,” said Secretary Perdue. USDA conducted a Cost Benefit Analysis and conservative estimates show a savings of nearly \$300 million nominally over a 15-year lease term on employment costs and rent or about \$20 million per year, which will allow more funding for research of critical needs like rural prosperity and agricultural competitiveness, and for programs and employees to be retained in the long run, even in the face of tightening budgets. On top of that, state and local governments offered generous relocation incentives packages totaling more than \$26 million. You may [click HERE](#) to view USDA’s Cost Benefit Analysis.

As part of the site selection process, USDA narrowed the 136 Expressions of Interest received using a set of established criteria defined by USDA, NIFA, and ERS leadership. The top Expressions of Interest were reviewed in detail, and USDA selected a short list of locations offering existing buildings with sufficient space to meet ERS and NIFA requirements. While 90% of USDA employees are located outside of the D.C. area, ERS and NIFA are the only USDA agencies that don't have representation outside of the national Capital Region (NCR). Upon the relocation announcement, USDA proposed that sufficient staff levels would remain in the NCR to complete mission critical activities that require physical presence in or near Washington, D.C. at the recommendation of customers and stakeholders. In both the cases of ERS and NIFA, leadership reviewed the critical functions and staffing needs within and outside the NCR. Senior ERS and NIFA staff, with input from partner agencies and stakeholders, recommended to Secretary Perdue the critical functions to be retained within the NCR.

Out of NIFA's 315 positions, 294 will relocate while 21 will stay in the NCR. Of the 329 ERS positions, 253 will relocate while 76 will stay in the Washington, D.C. area. As a result of this move, no ERS or NIFA employees will be involuntarily separated. Every employee who wants to continue working will have an opportunity to do so, although that will mean moving to a new location for most. Employees will be offered relocation assistance and will receive the same base pay as before, and the locality pay for the new location.

EPA Seeks Comments on Glyphosate Proposed Interim Registration Review Decision

In the ongoing registration review of glyphosate, EPA issued this proposed interim registration review decision in May so that it can move forward with aspects of the registration review case that are complete and implement interim risk mitigation. Registration review issues that still need to be addressed include its Endangered Species Act assessments and its Endocrine Disruptor Screening Program activities.

In 2017, EPA published comprehensive ecological and human health risk assessments for glyphosate. No human health risks were identified. The agency determined that glyphosate is not carcinogenic to humans. Potential ecological risks were identified for terrestrial and aquatic plants, birds, and mammals, primarily from exposure to spray drift. To ensure pollinators and their habitat are adequately protected from glyphosate, EPA included an evaluation of risk to pollinators and milkweed in the ecological risk assessment. Available data (laboratory and field-based) indicate no risk to pollinators.

In this proposed interim registration review decision for glyphosate, EPA is proposing various spray drift management measures (e.g., release height, droplet size, and wind speed restrictions) to reduce off-site exposure to non-target wildlife. EPA is also proposing weed resistance management labeling (e.g., information on mode of action, scouting instructions, and reporting

instructions for weed resistance) and certain labeling clean-up/consistency efforts to bring all glyphosate labels up to modern standards.

The proposed interim registration review and associated documents are posted in the Federal Register at <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=EPA-HQ-OPP-2009-0361-2340>. Comments are due Sept. 3, 2019.

APHIS Seeks Comments on Proposed Rule Deregulating Some GM Crop Traits

USDA APHIS is seeking comments on their proposed rule titled “Movement of Certainly Genetically Engineered Organisms” that would revise their regulations regarding the importation, interstate movement, and environmental release of certain genetically engineered organisms in response to advances in genetic engineering and their understanding of the plant pest risk posed by them, thereby reducing regulatory burden for developers of organisms that are unlikely to pose plant pest risks. This would mark the first comprehensive revision of the regulations since they were established in 1987. According to APHIS, the proposed rule would provide a clear, predictable, and efficient regulatory pathway for innovators, facilitating the development of new and novel genetically engineered organisms that are unlikely to pose plant pest risks. The proposed rule is posted in the Federal Register at <https://www.regulations.gov/docket?D=APHIS-2018-0034>. Comments are due Aug. 6, 2019.

House Approves Nine FY 2020 Appropriations Bills

On June 25, the House passed a five-bill “minibus” spending package for FY 2020 that includes \$383 million for the Commerce-Justice-Science, Agriculture, Interior-Environment, Transportation and Military Construction-Veterans Affairs spending bills. A week earlier, the House passed a four-bill “minibus” spending package for Labor-Health and Human Services-Education, Defense, State-Foreign Operations, and Energy and Water Development. The Senate has yet to unveil any of its FY 2020 spending bills and, most importantly, both chambers still need reach to a budget agreement before they can pass any final FY 2020 spending plan.

Selected Discretionary Appropriations Accounts

Program	2016 Final	2017 Final	2018 Final	2019 Final	FY 2020 House
	----- Millions of Dollars -----				
USDA- NIFA	1326	1363	1412	1471	1614

Hatch Act (Exp. Stations)	244	244	244	259	265
Smith-Lever 3(b) & (c)	300	300	300	315	325
AFRI competitive grants	350	375	400	415	460
IR-4	11.9	11.9	11.9	11.9	12
Crop Protection & Pest	17.2	20	20	20	20
USDA- ARS	1143	1170	1203	1303	1347
USDA- ERS	85	87	87	87	88
USDA- NASS	168	171	192	175	181
USDA- APHIS	894	946	982	1011	1034
Army Corp of Engineers -					
Aquatic Plant Control	4	4	5	5	0
Flowering Rush Control	n/a	n/a	1	1	0
Watercraft Inspection	4	5	5	6	20
Great Lakes Restoration	300	300	300	300	320
National Sea Grant Program	64	63	65	68	73

Cover Crop Economics

A new USDA-SARE report titled “[Cover Crop Economics](#)” found that farmers are likely to see returns from planting cover crops within three years if the practice is used to deal with herbicide-resistant weeds, to graze livestock or to reverse soil degradation. Based primarily on yield and economic data gathered through five years of national cover crop surveys from about 500 farms, the report addresses the kinds of economic returns that can be expected from cover crops, both under various management scenarios and as cover crops improve soil health over time. The 2017 Census of Agriculture revealed that national cover crop acreage increased by 50% from 2012 to 2017.

2019 Weed Survey Available

The 2019 Survey of the Most Common and Troublesome Weeds is available at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2019weeds>. Please take a moment to list your top 5 most common and top 5 most troublesome weeds in the following broadleaf crops:

1) Alfalfa, 2) Canola, 3) Cotton, 4) Fruits & Nuts, 5) Peanuts, 6) Pulses- field pea, chickpea, lentil, etc., 7) Soybean, 8) Sugarbeet, 9) Vegetables- Cole crops, 10) Vegetables- Cucurbits, 11) Vegetables- Fruiting, 12) Vegetables- Other

Common weeds refer to those weeds you most frequently see, while **troublesome weeds** are those that are most difficult to control (but may not be widespread). The survey has a 3-year

rotation, so next year we will be surveying weeds in grass crops, pasture and turf and the following year will be weeds in aquatic and non-crop/natural areas. This survey will remain open until Labor Day 2019. Thanks!

2019 Weed Survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2019weeds>

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