

## WSSA WASHINGTON REPORT

March 16, 2026

Lee Van Wychen

### House Ag Committee Passes Farm Bill



The House Agriculture Committee has approved a new five-year farm bill that includes several provisions affecting federal agricultural research programs and priorities. The measure, titled the Food, Farm and National Security Act (H.R. 7567), passed the committee on March 5 by a 34-17 vote with support from all Republicans and seven Democrats. The bill now moves forward in Congress, with the Senate expected to develop its own version.

### ***House Ag Committee Chair G.T. Thompson (R-PA) and Ranking Member Angie Craig (D-MN)***

Much of the debate around the Farm Bill centered on pesticide regulations, nutrition programs, and renewable energy policy. A provision in the House Farm Bill (Sec. 10205) would clarify that EPA has final authority over health-related pesticide labeling under FIFRA. The provision would prevent courts from imposing requirements or liability for any requirements beyond EPA's labeling or packaging requirements (FIFRA 24(b)).

The issue was a major point of debate during the markup with Democrats raising questions about preempting states' rights to regulate pesticide use. Republicans pushed back that EPA approval is a rigorous process and pesticide companies shouldn't face the risk of being required to have potentially 50 different labels around the country. An amendment from Chellie Pingree (D-ME) to remove the provision failed.

The bill would expand support for specialty crop research by allowing USDA to waive matching fund requirements for certain grants and by encouraging research focused on mechanization and automation. Other provisions emphasize environmental and climate-related research, including studies on soil health, drought and flooding impacts on agriculture, and the potential use of biochar to improve soil productivity while storing carbon. The proposal also calls for the creation of a national biochar research network to "understand how to use biochar productively to contribute to climate mitigation, crop production, resilience to extreme weather events, ecosystem and soil health, natural resource conservation, and farm profitability."

The bill would establish an Office of Biotechnology Policy at USDA to coordinate the department's efforts to advance biotechnology through research, development, regulations, labeling, commercialization, and trade.

Additional research priorities include studying the effects of wildfire smoke on crops, improving long-term health of white oak trees used in products such as whiskey barrels, and advancing precision agriculture technologies that use satellite imagery and data analytics to optimize farm inputs.

Despite bipartisan support for several research provisions, the broader bill faces an uncertain path forward amid disputes over pesticide liability protections, renewable energy policies, and changes to nutrition assistance programs. The Senate Agriculture Committee has not yet released its own proposal, and negotiations between the chambers are expected before a final bill can be enacted.

### **Executive Order Declaring Glyphosate a National Defense Priority**

The president issued an executive order on February 18 prioritizing U.S. production of glyphosate, saying the herbicide is critical to the nation's security. The executive order provides limited immunity to domestic companies that make glyphosate and phosphorus, declaring both essential to the nation's military and farmers. Using the 1950 Defense Production Act, Trump said elemental phosphorus is critical to military technologies such as radar, solar cells and sensors, and to agriculture as a "precursor element" in producing glyphosate-based herbicides.

The president also used the Defense Production Act during his first term, ordering U.S. meatpacking plants to remain open during the global pandemic as thousands of workers became ill from COVID-19 and nearly 300 died.

According to Trump's order, glyphosate allows U.S. "farmers to efficiently and cost-effectively produce food and livestock feed." The order further states that the U.S. has "only a single domestic producer of elemental phosphorus and glyphosate-based herbicides, and this producer does not meet our annual needs for those inputs," requiring roughly 6 million kilograms of elemental phosphorus to be imported annually.

Trump ordered U.S. Agriculture Secretary Brook Rollins, in consultation with the U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, to ensure no orders, rules or regulations place "the corporate viability of any domestic producer of elemental phosphorus or glyphosate-based herbicides at risk."

### **Lina Quesada-Ocampo Named Executive Director of the IR-4 Project**

Dr. Quesada-Ocampo succeeds Jerry Baron as Executive Director of IR-4. Jerry retired in January 2026 after a distinguished 40-year career.



Quesada-Ocampo brings over 15 years of experience in applied pest management research and Extension work to her new role. Most recently, she served as a William Neal Reynolds Distinguished Professor and Extension specialist for vegetable pathology at NC State, where she led the Quesada Lab and secured over \$55 million in career funding — including a \$700,000 endowment set up by growers to support her work.

***Lina Quesada-Ocampo, a vegetable pathologist and Extension specialist at NC State University, will lead the IR-4 Project as its next executive director, effective March 9.***

As executive director, Quesada-Ocampo is committed to advancing IR-4’s mission while safeguarding its focus and staying responsive to the needs of growers. Her vision includes strengthening collaborations, accelerating regulatory timelines, and ensuring that specialty crop growers have timely access to innovative and safe pest management tools.

The Quesada Lab has developed improved disease management strategies for crops like cucurbits and sweetpotatoes in North Carolina and beyond. Researchers have generated data that the EPA required for pivotal product registrations, notably helping sweetpotato growers secure new tools to manage black rot following a devastating outbreak in 2015. Quesada-Ocampo also spearheaded efforts to resolve international trade barriers for growers looking to export sweetpotatoes, including securing a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Foreign Agricultural Service to help preserve sweetpotato exports.

### **USDA Reorganization Proposal Moves Forward**

Last August, USDA issued a [memorandum](#) on a reorganization proposal. Specifically, it “authorizes and directs the actions necessary to effectuate the consolidation, unification, and optimization of functions within the USDA to achieve improved effectiveness and accountability, enhanced services, reduced bureaucracy and cost savings for the American people.” At the heart of the proposal is relocating USDA employees out of the national Capitol region to five regional hubs. These are **Raleigh, NC; Indianapolis, IN; Kansas City, MO; Fort Collins, CO; and Salt Lake City, UT**. USDA received over 14,000 comments on the proposal and approximately 80 percent of those were negative.

The national and regional weed science societies expressed opposition to any proposal that would result in the closure or downsizing of any USDA-ARS labs. [Read the letter here](#). One major concern is the proposed closure of USDA-ARS Beltsville, which they said would occur over several years. However, its fate is uncertain. In mid-January 2026, USDA said the movement of some of its employees to the five regional hubs will take place between the end of this school year and the beginning of the next. Right after the holiday break, USDA signed memorandums

authorizing entry into leases for facilities at the regional hubs. USDA stated that the facilities are already government owned or government leased and that they just happen to be unoccupied or underused.

### **USDA Launches Regenerative Ag Pilot Program**

One of the recommendations of the [MAHA Report](#), released in Sep. 2025 was for USDA and EPA to “promote and incentivize farming solutions in partnership with the private sector that focus on soil health and stewardship of the land”. In December, USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins, Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz announced a [\\$700 million Regenerative Pilot Program](#) that aims “to help American farmers adopt practices that improve soil health, enhance water quality, and boost long-term productivity, all while strengthening America’s food and fiber supply.” For FY 2026, USDA is dedicating \$400 million through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and \$300 million through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) to fund the first year of regenerative agriculture projects.

[In a press release](#) following the announcement, WSSA supported the program, but stressed the importance of why weed science research and management will be needed for the success of the pilot program. While individuals have not yet been named to the pilot program’s 15-member advisory council, I stated that at least one member should have weed science expertise. I also stated that we’d like to see a clear definition of agricultural regeneration for this program, based on science.

### **US Army Corp of Engineers Aquatic Plant Control Funding- Great News!**

On January 15, Congress passed the Energy and Water appropriations bill for FY 2026. It was great news for the Aquatic Plant Management Society. Compared to **zero funding** for the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) aquatic plant control program in FY 2025, the following appropriations were made for FY 2026:

- Up to \$3,000,000 shall be for activities related to monitoring, surveying, and control of hydrilla verticillata and flowering rush;
- Up to \$7,500,000 shall be to address infestations of hydrilla in Lake Champlain and the Connecticut River Basins;
- Up to \$2,500,000 shall be for nationwide research and development to address aquatic invasive plants, within which the Corps is encouraged to support cost-shared aquatic plant management programs.
- Within available funds, the Corps is encouraged to partner with the Bureau of Reclamation in developing effective removal methods for water stargrass (a native weed that has exploded in population growth in recent years) in the Yakima Basin. The Corps is encouraged to enter into a cost-share agreement with the state of Washington and local partners to manage and treat infestations of hydrilla broadly in the region.
- The agreement provides \$1,000,000 for the Corps to establish a pilot program to remove invasive plant species in riparian areas that contribute to drought conditions in the Lower Colorado River Basin, the Rio Grande River Basin, the Texas Gulf Coast Basin, and the Arkansas-White-Red Basin, per section 8305 of WRDA 2022.

## **National and Regional Weed Science Societies Support Ag Research Funding**

On March 9, The six National and Regional Weed Science Societies joined coalition letters to the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Agriculture supporting continued funding for key USDA research programs, including the [Agricultural and Food Research Initiative](#) and the [Agricultural Research Service](#). These programs support critical research, extension, and education that strengthen U.S. agriculture, including weed research and management.

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## **Meetings of the National and Regional Weed Science Societies**

Jul. 13 - 16, 2026 Aquatic Plant Management Society (APMS), Phoenix, AZ [www.apms.org](http://www.apms.org)  
Dec. 7 - 10, 2026 North Central Weed Science Society (NCWSS), Columbus, OH [www.ncwss.org](http://www.ncwss.org)  
Dec. 7 - 10, 2026 Northeastern Weed Science Society (NEWSS), Columbus, OH [www.newss.org](http://www.newss.org)  
Jan. 25 - 28, 2027 Southern Weed Science Society (SWSS), Corpus Christi, TX [www.swss.ws](http://www.swss.ws)  
Feb. 8 - 11, 2027 Weed Science Society of America (WSSA), Denver, CO [www.wssa.net](http://www.wssa.net)  
Mar. 8 - 11, 2027 Western Society of Weed Science (WSWS), Irvine, CA [www.wsweedscience.org](http://www.wsweedscience.org)