

WSSA WASHINGTON REPORT

September 15, 2025

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MAHA Report Released September 9. Improvements Made Compared to May Draft.

On September 9, 2025, the Make Our Children Healthy Again (MOCHA) [Strategy Report](#) was published by the [MAHA Commission](#). A follow-up to the first draft published in May 2025, the MOCHA Strategy Report outlines 128 policy recommendations to address the growing incidence of chronic illness among American children. While the MOCHA Strategy Report still identifies chemical exposure as a contributor to childhood chronic illness, the report's tone is tempered regarding any specific chemical threats.

🔍 Shift in Tone on Pesticides

- **May 2025 report:**
 - Singled out glyphosate and atrazine for potential health effects.
 - Relied on disputed or questionable sources for glyphosate claims.
 - Warned about corporate influence and bias in pesticide science.
- **September 2025 report:**
 - No longer singles out glyphosate or atrazine.
 - Does not call for bans or direct restrictions on pesticide use.
 - Promotes **confidence in EPA's "robust" science-based** pesticide review process.
 - Calls for **streamlining approval processes** to ensure timely access to new pest-management products.
 - Affirms that **key crop protection tools will remain available to farmers.**

🔍 Precision Agriculture & Innovation

- Strongly prioritized in the final report.
- Recommends research and programs to:
 - Optimize pesticide applications.
 - Reduce overall pesticide volumes.
 - Support farmer adoption of precision technologies.
- Encourages **USDA–EPA partnerships** with private industry for technology development and deployment.

🔍 Soil Health & Sustainability

- Expanded emphasis beyond pesticides.
- Promotes soil stewardship through programs like **EQIP** and **CSP**.
- Highlights practices that build **soil organic matter** and enhance soil composition.
- Encourages more **locally driven decision-making** in conservation efforts.

🔍 Public Education & Trust

- Encourages **greater transparency and awareness** of pesticide review processes.
- Positions EPA's regulatory role as rigorous and reliable.
- Shifts away from the earlier narrative of corporate manipulation of science.

📌 Overall Approach

- **May 2025 report:** adversarial tone, pesticide-focused critiques, suspicion of corporate influence.
- **September 2025 report:** tempered, farmer-friendly, focused on **regulatory reform, precision agriculture, and soil stewardship**.
- Implementation and adoption will determine whether these strategies meaningfully improve agricultural practices and public health.

Prior to the release of the MAHA report, which was initially due out August 12, the WSSA joined 31 other national organizations in a letter to Health and Human Services Secretary Kennedy, USDA Secretary Rollins and EPA Administrator Zeldin urging them to seek public comment after the MAHA report was released. The letter and signatories are available [HERE](#).

I would like to give a special thank you to my Science Policy Fellows, Aleah Butler-Jones and Cole Woolard for their in-depth analysis and help with this article.

Regenerative Farming Pilot Program Proposed

The MAHA report also includes a proposal to launch a regenerative farming pilot program. The term “regenerative farming” is not specifically mentioned, but instead falls under the guise of “**Soil Health and Stewardship of the Land**”. The initiative aims to provide farmers with tools and support to improve soil health, enhance sustainability, and increase the adoption of practices like prescribed grazing, soil health systems, and water management. It remains to be seen how USDA will define and implement this pilot program. Many different definitions and concepts exist for regenerative farming, but I believe weed research and management, such as cover crops and no-till, will be at the core of this. WSSA will continue to work with USDA as they move forward with this program.

USDA Announces Major Reorganization Plan

On July 24, 2025, USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins announced a multi-year agency reorganization plan that will relocate more than half of its Washington, DC-based workforce to five regional hubs—Raleigh NC, Kansas City MO, Indianapolis IN, Fort Collins CO, and Salt Lake City UT. On August 1, Secretary Rollins announced a 30-day public comment period for stakeholders to provide feedback on the Department’s reorganization plan, as outlined in the [Secretary’s memorandum \(PDF, 2.6 MB\)](#) Please see below for more details.

The plan includes the phased closure of three or four of the 94 USDA ARS research facilities, including the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center and the George Washington Carver Center in Maryland. The U.S. Forest Service conducts research currently in 5 regional stations. Those labs would be consolidated at a single station in Fort Collins, CO risking the loss of regional expertise and long-term forest experiments.

Of the approximately 4,600 USDA employees currently based in the Washington DC region, no more than 2,000 would remain after the reorganization is complete. The rest would be

transferred to regional offices in an effort “to better serve rural communities and reduce operational costs”. While no layoffs are planned, significant staff attrition is expected.

All stakeholders, including USDA employees, members of Congress, and agricultural and nutrition partners, were encouraged to provide feedback to reorganization@usda.gov by August 26, which has been extended to September 30, 2025. The National and Regional Weed Science Societies expressed their opposition to any proposal under the USDA Reorganization Plan that would result in the closure or downsizing of ARS laboratories. Comments are [HERE](#).

Both House and Senate Ag Appropriators Reject President’s “Skinny” Budget

The House Appropriations Committee passed their agriculture spending bill on June 30 by a vote of 35 to 27 and the Senate passed their ag spending bill on July 10 by a 27 to 0 vote. Thankfully, both spending bills rejected most of the Administration's proposed deep cuts to agricultural research.

The biggest area of concern in the President’s Budget Request (PBR) for FY 2026 was for USDA NIFA. The FY 2025 estimated funding for NIFA is \$1.686 billion, while the PBR was \$1.044 billion, a 38% cut. The House Ag Appropriators marked up their bill at \$1.654 billion, which is a 1.9% cut, but the Senate marked up their bill at \$1.69 billion, a 0.3% increase.

Within the NIFA “Research and Education” account, the FY 2026 PBR had eliminated \$265 million in funding for the **Hatch Act**, which funds our agricultural experiment stations. However, thankfully, both the House and Senate Ag Appropriators restored the \$265 million in full.

The **Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI)** was proposed to be cut by \$50 million in the PBR for FY 2026, but the House Ag Appropriators kept the funding at FY 2025 levels at \$445 million, while the Senate bumped it up by \$200 K. The same can be said for the **IR-4 Program** being held level at \$15 million for FY 2026. The sentiment on the Hill this year is that flat funding is considered a victory.

Within the NIFA “Extension” account, the FY 2026 PBR would have cut **Smith Lever 3(b) & 3(c)** extension funding from \$325 million to \$175 million, a 46% cut. However, both the House and Senate Ag Appropriators rejected that cut and kept funding at FY 2025 levels at \$325 million.

Within the NIFA “Integrated” account, the FY 2026 PBR eliminated every program in the account. The NIFA Integrated account requires funded projects to incorporate a 1) research component, 2) an education component, and 3) extension activities to address critical issues in agriculture. However, the House and Senate Ag Appropriators restored funding at FY 2025 levels. This includes the **Crop Protection and Pest Management (CPPM)** program at \$21 million and the Organic Transitions Program at \$7.5 million. The Methyl Bromide Transitions program was reduced from \$2 million to \$1 million in the House, but Senate kept it level at \$2 million.

	FY 2023 Final	FY 2024 Final	FY 2025 Estimate	FY 2026 President	FY 2026 House	FY 2026 Senate
USDA Research Program	----- \$ Millions -----					
USDA- ARS	1,744	1,788	1,788	1,700	1,791	1,827
USDA- NIFA	1,701	1,679	1,687	1,044	1,654	1,692
Hatch Act: Ag Exp. Stations	259	259	265	0	265	265
Smith-Lever 3(b) and 3(c): Extension	325	325	325	175	325	325
AFRI: Ag & Food Research Initiative	455	445	445	405	445	445.2
IR-4 Program: Minor crop use	15	15	15	15	15	15
CPPM: Crop Prot. & Pest Mang't	21	21	21	0	21	21

*Ag research funding for FY 2023, FY 2024, and FY 2025 for select programs. The proposed funding for FY 2026 by the President, House and Senate are in the three columns on the right. The colored numbers indicate **increases (green)** or **decreases (red)** compared to the FY 2025 appropriation.*

Finally, the House Ag Appropriators provided \$1.79 billion for the **Agricultural Research Service (ARS)**, which is \$2.5 million above the FY 2025 enacted program level, and includes increases for high-priority initiatives, addresses emerging pests and diseases, but eliminates funding for climate hubs. The FY 2026 PBR proposed a cut of \$88 million for USDA-ARS. The Senate Ag Appropriators provided an even greater increase to \$1.83 billion.

Some Ag Research Funding included in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA)

Following approval by the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, OBBBA moved through congressional consideration, where the agriculture provisions originally introduced by those committees remained largely intact. On July 1, the Senate voted 51-50, with Vice President J.D. Vance casting the tie-breaking vote, to approve an amended OBBBA. On July 3, the House took

up the Senate-amended version of OBBBA, voting 218-214 to approve the bill. On July 4, 2025, the president signed the OBBBA ([P.L. 119-21](#)) into law. Here are some details of ag research provisions in the OBBBA:

Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research (FFAR): The OBBBA allocates \$37 million for FY 2026 to FFAR to promote public-private innovation partnerships that fund research addressing big food and agriculture challenges.

Specialty Crops Research Initiative (SCRI) The OBBBA significantly increases mandatory funding for the SCRI, scaling up funding from \$80 million in FY 2025 to \$175 million in FY 2026. This increase in funding for SCRI is only for FY 2026, and would revert to \$80 million in FY 2027 without a new farm bill or a second reconciliation package. The SCRI enhances research on pest control, crop breeding and mechanization for high-value crops.

Research Facilities Act. To modernize aging research infrastructure at the 1862, 1890 and 1994 land grant universities, the bill provides \$125 million in mandatory annual funding starting in 2026 and each fiscal year thereafter for grants under the Research Facilities Act. (7 U.S.C. 390d). This program has only been getting about \$1 million per year in discretionary funding, so this a major win for land grant universities.

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP). The OBBBA increases funding for the SCBGP from \$85 million to \$100 million in FY 2026. The SCBGP is a federal program that provides funding to states and territories to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. These crops receive support through locally-led projects. The program aims to boost the industry by funding projects that focus on research, marketing, and education.

Plant Pest and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention (PPDMDP). The OBBBA increases the funding for APHIS's PPDMDP from \$75 million in FY 2025 to \$90 million in FY 2026. APHIS administers this program with a focus on strengthening prevention, detection, and mitigation efforts on invasive plant pests and diseases. Projects are categorized under six goal areas, including enhancing pest/disease analysis and survey, targeting domestic inspections, strengthening pest identification, safeguarding nursery production, conducting outreach, and enhancing mitigation and rapid response.

Urban, Indoor, and Other Emerging Agricultural Production Research, Education, and Extension Initiative. The OBBBA provides \$2 million in mandatory funding for each of fiscal years 2024 through 2031. This program provides competitive grants to support research, education, and extension activities for the purposes of facilitating the development of urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural production, harvesting, transportation, aggregation, packaging, distribution, and markets, including determining and developing the best production management and integrated pest management practices.

Scholarships for Students at 1890 Institutions: The OBBBA will increase mandatory funding from \$40 million to \$60 million to remain available until expended. This program is considered

a “stranded” program in the farm bill and has not been issued any new funding since September 2024.

What’s Next

The policy changes included in the OBBBA are some of the most significant in Farm Bill history because of what’s included *and* what’s left out. For the first time in 50 years (and 10 Farm Bills) the OBBBA separates nutrition assistance from commodity subsidies and risk management insurance. There are questions of how, or even whether, future farm bills might pass Congress.

While a handful of ag research programs were authorized in OBBBA, the vast majority of ag research programs in Title VII still need to be reauthorized before the Sep. 30, 2025 deadline. It remains to be seen whether Congress can pass a “skinny” Farm Bill or Farm Bill 2.0 before then. Otherwise, Congress will have to pass a third extension of the 2018 Farm Bill to get us through 2026.

Appropriations for EPA – Mixed News

The EPA’s enacted budget for FY 2025 budget was \$9.14 billion, but the proposed FY 2026 budget from the President requested only \$4.16 billion, a 54.5% reduction. This cut would significantly impact programs like state grants, water infrastructure funding, and enforcement. The EPA is funded under the Interior & Environment Appropriations Subcommittee in both the House and Senate. The House passed their version of the bill on July 22 by a partisan vote of 33 to 28. The Senate passed their version of the Interior & Environment appropriations bill on July 24 by a vote of 26 to 2. The House version proposes \$7.01 billion for EPA in FY 2026, a 23% reduction. The Senate version proposed a less drastic cut to \$8.64 billion, or a 5% reduction compared to FY 2025.

On the bright side, both the House and Senate bills maintained pesticide licensing, which was one of the few EPA programs spared. The Office of Pesticide Programs (OPP) funding was held level at \$134 million, which is a definite win in this budget environment. Report language in the bill also calls for reducing the backlog and timely completion of a third-party audit as required in PRIA 5.

Congress Pushes Back on Presidents Deep Cuts to Interior

For the Department of the Interior FY 2026 funding, both the House and Senate proposed smaller cuts--and in some cases, increases--compared to the President's budget request.

In the House, considerably less severe funding cuts are proposed for the Bureau of Land Management (-8% vs. -32%), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (-6.5% vs. -32%), the U.S. Geological Survey (-5.6% vs. 39%), and the National Park Service (-6% vs. -37%) compared to the President's request. The USGS Ecosystems Mission Area, slated for termination in the President's proposal, would shrink by only 3% to \$290 million in the House bill.

The Senate has adopted a more generous approach: USGS is looking at a 2.4% increase, with its Ecosystems Mission Area slated for a nearly 3% boost to \$308 million, compared to the

President' proposed elimination of the program. The National Park Service is looking at a 2% cut, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is facing a 1% cut, and the Bureau of Land Management is slated for a nearly 3% cut.

The U.S. Forest Service, targeted for a 75% reduction in the President's proposal, would see nearly level funding in the House (-0.2%) and a 1% increase in the Senate.

Adam Telle is new Assistant Secretary of Army - Civil Works



On August 2, Adam Telle was confirmed by the Senate on a 72-22 vote to be the new Assistant Secretary of Army- Civil Works (ASA (CW)) . Telle is a native of Northport, AL and a graduate of Mississippi State University. He has spent the last 20 years in DC, including 10 of those years working for Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS) who was a strong supporter of the U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC) in Vicksburg, MS. He had strong support from Sen. Bill Haggerty (R-TN), where he has served as his Chief of Staff for the past 4 years.

As ASA(CW) Telle will carry out the administration's priorities relating to ports, waterways, and flood control infrastructure. Specifically, the ASA(CW) establishes policy direction and provides supervision of the Department of the Army for authorized civil functions pertaining to river and harbor, flood and storm damage reduction, shore protection, aquatic ecosystem restoration, and related efforts

Army Corps' Aquatic Plant Control Program at Risk Without Research Funding

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (USACE) Aquatic Plant Control (APC) program — the only federally authorized initiative dedicated to the research and development of science-based strategies to manage invasive aquatic plants — is facing a critical funding shortfall.

Established in 1958 under Section 104 of the River and Harbor Act, the APC program plays a vital role in protecting U.S. waterways from noxious aquatic plants that threaten navigation, flood control, agriculture, fish and wildlife habitat, and public health. For more than six decades, it has led the charge in developing and sharing new technologies to manage aquatic invasive species, such as hydrilla and Eurasian watermilfoil, which now threaten to spread across an additional 5 to 7 million acres if left unchecked.

Despite its proven return on investment and its small footprint in the Corps' \$10 billion budget, the program received no dedicated funding in FY 2025, jeopardizing ongoing research and development critical to ecosystem health and waterway management. From FY 2018 to FY 2024, funding for APC research has hovered between \$5 and \$7 million annually.

The outlook for FY 2026 remains uncertain. While the House Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee included \$3 million for APC research in its July 17 markup, the USACE FY 2026

Work Plan still includes \$0 for the program. Aquatic plant management leaders remain hopeful that the Senate will prioritize APC funding when it reconvenes after the August recess.

Leaders from the Aquatic Plant Management Society (APMS) and its affiliate societies, as well as the Weed Science Society of America (WSSA), Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Foundation (AERF), and North American Lake Management Society (NALMS) have urged appropriators and USACE leadership to recognize the importance of continued investment in APC research. Their joint letter underscores the program's national significance and calls for restored funding to ensure effective, science-driven aquatic invasive species management continues.

[Letter to USACE leadership and congressional appropriators.](#)

PR: [“WSSA and APMS Urge Army Corps for Renewed Aquatic Plant Control Program Funding”](#)

Senate Confirms Brian Nesvik as New Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



On August 1, 2025, the Senate confirmed Brian Nesvik on a 54-43 vote to be the next Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Nesvik is a native of Caspar, WY and spent 30 years with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and served as the agency's director from 2019 until his retirement in 2024. He also served in the Army National Guard for 35 years.

Senator John Barrasso (R-WY), on behalf of the nominee, said “I look forward to working with Brian to restore science to conservation policies.” Some organizations, like the Sierra Club, have opposed Nesvik's nomination to the position, citing his support for removing Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections for grizzly bears. Others, like the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, welcomed his confirmation, citing their longstanding collaboration and expressing optimism about working together to conserve fish and wildlife habitats while enhancing hunting and fishing opportunities.

Regulatory Overhaul Needed to Advance Ag Technology, Lawmakers Told

On July 22, 2025, four panelists representing ag technology interests called on Congress to overhaul federal regulations to speed the approval of new ag technologies. Speaking before the House Agriculture Committee in a hearing titled [“Past Breakthroughs and Future Innovations in Crop Production”](#), they pointed to long delays at the EPA that are stalling innovation in crop protection tools.

Don Cameron, vice president and general manager of Terranova Ranch in California's Central Valley, said EPA staffing shortages are a major factor slowing the registration process. There simply aren't enough EPA staff to keep up with the workload.

Terry Abbott, chairman of the Council of Producers and Distributors of Agrotechnology (CPDA), noted that **more than \$500 million** worth of member-developed products are currently stuck in

the EPA's regulatory backlog. He urged Congress to fully fund the agency's Office of Pesticide Programs (OPP) and to update the Pesticide Registration Improvement Act (PRIA) to strengthen transparency and predictability in the review process.

Comment Period Opens for Proposed New Rule on Drone Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS)

On August 5, 2025, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) released a [new proposed rule](#) that would eliminate the requirement for operators to view drones in their visual line of sight. By eliminating these requirements, the Department of Transportation (DOT) believes the proposal will significantly expand the use of drones in farming. For more information about the proposed rule, see the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAAs) Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) [fact sheet](#). The comment period for the [new proposed rule](#) closes on **October 6, 2025**.

PERC Releases Unmanned Aerial System Task Force Recommendations for Pesticide Applicator Training Materials

On August 6, 2025, the [Pesticide Educational Resources Collaborative \(PERC\)](#) announced the release of the [Unmanned Aerial Systems \(UAS\) Task Force Recommendations Report](#), a comprehensive set of training content considerations designed to support states, tribes, and territories in the certification of pesticide applicators using UAS.

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Meetings of the National and Regional Weed Science Societies

Dec 15-18, 2025 North Central Weed Science Society (NCWSS), Grand Rapids, MI www.ncwss.org
Jan. 5 - 8, 2026 Northeastern Weed Science Society (NEWSS), Hershey, PA www.newss.org
Jan. 26 - 29, 2026 Southern Weed Science Society (SWSS), Nashville, TN www.swss.ws
Feb. 9 - 12, 2026 Weed Science Society of America (WSSA), Raleigh, NC www.wssa.net
Mar 2 - 5, 2026 Western Society of Weed Science (WSWS), Tucson, AZ www.wsweedscience.org
Jul. 13 - 16, 2026 Aquatic Plant Management Society (APMS), Phoenix, AZ www.apms.org