



NATIONAL COALITION FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Prepared for the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies; USDA

April 11th, 2025

The Honorable Andy Harris
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture
House Committee on Appropriations
1536 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop Jr.
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture
House Committee on Appropriations
2407 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture
Senate Committee on Appropriations
338 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture
Senate Committee on Appropriations
506 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harris, Chairman Hoeven, Ranking Member Bishop, and Ranking Member Shaheen:

As Congress develops a Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 spending package, we encourage you to increase investments to advance food and agricultural research at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) Mission Area.

Food and agriculture are the third-largest direct contributor to the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) after healthcare and housing.¹ Yet, federal funding for food and agricultural science has been *flat for over two decades*. Recent data from the U.S. Economic Research Service indicates that for every \$1 in public investment, U.S. food and agriculture R&D has returned \$20 to the American economy. However, "U.S. public agricultural R&D spending peaked in 2002, and by 2019 spending had declined to roughly where it was in 1970."²

Our nation's health and wellness, along with our competitiveness and stability in global markets, is at risk, which impacts our national security. To ensure an America-first national policy, we must not give up our leading edge in innovation to other countries. China surpassed the U.S. in public funding in 2009 and realized a 2-to-1 advantage in 2013. In 2015, the U.S. share of global investment in public agricultural research and development was 8.9%; China, India, and Brazil together spent some \$3.16 for every dollar the U.S. invested in public agricultural research and development.³ U.S. public sector funding in research

¹ Abbott, Chuck (March 2017) China Overtakes U.S. as Top Government Funder of Ag Research. Successful Farming. <https://www.agriculture.com/news/business/china-overtakes-us-as-top-government-funder-of-ag-research>.

² Public agricultural R&D spending in the United States has declined in recent years. USDA ERS. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/gallery/chart-detail/?chartId=104030>.

³ <https://kansascityfed.org/documents/7107/the-drivers-of-us-agricultural-productivity-growth.pdf> and <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-economic-history/article/unpacking-the-agricultural-black-box-the-rise->

and development is falling in absolute terms and relative to major competitors, including Brazil, India, and China.⁴

The food and agriculture enterprise faces unprecedented challenges and rising food costs resulting from natural and geopolitical events and adverse health outcomes related to nutrition insecurity. The modern food and agriculture system is a science-based business supported by the important goals of the Farm Bill Research Title. Advancements in biosecurity, productivity, and rural development are but a few examples of the importance of the REE mission. Research investments in technology and modernization are strategic growth issues. Fortunately, the key to addressing many challenges lies in strong federal investments in USDA's broad suite of research, education, economics, and Extension programs. To continue cutting-edge innovation necessary for American competitiveness, investments in REE provide:

- **National Security:** Food security equates to national security. Secure domestic food production and supply chains prevent rapid food price increases and shortages.
- **Human Health:** Healthy food systems bolster nutritional security, health, and economic prosperity. For example, we must invest in research gaps that support robust dietary guidelines.
- **Resiliency:** The U.S. remains resilient to ever-changing landscapes and environments, such as addressing avian influenza and ensuring the safety and affordability of our egg and dairy supply. Another area of focus is on invasive pests, weeds, and terrestrial and aquatic animals, which according to APHIS, costs \$120 billion to American farmers, ranchers, and consumers.⁵
- **America First Expertise:** The partnership between our members and USDA-REE is key to retaining the nation's status as the global leader in agricultural, food, and nutrition innovation. Faculty shortages and capacity research funding declines since 2004 resulted in a 21% reduction in scientist FTEs, 20% reduction in research projects, and 12.37 million fewer annual hours of research, a 32% decline.⁶

We urge you to make the following investments in the FY 2026 spending agreement.

Provide \$1.877 billion for the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) salaries and expenses.

As USDA's principal in-house research agency, ARS advances scientific knowledge through its four national program areas: nutrition, food safety and quality; animal production and protection; natural resources and sustainable agricultural systems; and crop production and protection. As one of the only funding sources available for long-term agricultural research, the ARS labs and research sites foster synergistic research collaborations across scientific disciplines and geographic locations.

National Institute of Food and Agriculture Research (NIFA).

As USDA's extramural funding arm, NIFA programs integrate research, education, economics, and Extension to ensure that groundbreaking scientific discoveries are brought out of the laboratory and into the hands of those who can put them to work.

[and-fall-of-american-farm-productivity-growth/6B12A75BB1FD611628A9FC9C08B90056](https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2020/july/productivity-is-the-major-driver-of-us-farm-sector-s-economic-growth/) and <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2020/july/productivity-is-the-major-driver-of-us-farm-sector-s-economic-growth/>.

⁴ Clancy, Matthew (2017 September) Public sector spending on agricultural research declining in the United States and Western Europe, but rising in China, India, and Brazil. USDA ERS. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/gallery/chart-detail/?chartId=85038>.

⁵ Five Invasive Pests: You Can Help Stop Their Spread. (December 2015) USDA APHIS. <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/blog/five-invasive-pests-you-can-help-stop-their-spread>.

⁶ agInnovation Lynchpin to the National Public. Accessed 14 January 2025. https://escop.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/BLC_FY2026_Research_Funding_Priorities_20241202.pdf#_blank.

Provide increased support for all capacity programs, which are fundamental to the extramural research, education, and the Cooperative Extension system.

NIFA's **capacity programs** provide an innovation network supporting our nation's Experiment Stations, research farms, and Cooperative Extension activities.

- **Requests \$300 million for the Hatch Act account** which supports 1862 land-grant university federal-state partnerships that employ science experts across each state. Experiment Stations respond to critical issues that affect production, profitability, invasive plant/animal species, biosecurity, land and water use, economic analysis, and farm safety. The multistate component of Hatch ensures coordination on key projects that advance [agricultural production](#) and [processing](#), [profitability](#), and [sustainability](#).
- **Requests \$125 million for the Evans-Allen account** to provide capacity funding for food and agricultural research at the 1890 Historically Black land-grant universities and Tuskegee University. The Evans-Allen Program enables research for small farmer challenges, food security and nutrition, rural prosperity and economic sustainability, natural resources and the environment, and workforce development.
- **Requests \$17.8 million for the 1994 Institution Research Program** for research funding that helps protect reservation forests, woodlands, grasslands, and crops, and monitoring of the quality of soil, water, and other environmental factors.
- **Requests \$46 million to support the McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry** research, which studies the development of biobased products, the prevention of forest fires, the identification of biobased-energy sources, and the training of forest and natural resource scientists.
- **Requests \$420 million in Smith-Lever 3(b) and 3(c) funds** to support the Cooperative Extension System (CES), a unique network of on-farm researchers, specialists, agents, and educators who deliver vital, practical information to agricultural producers, small business owners, communities, youth, and families.
- **Requests \$102 million for the Extension Services of 1890s land-grant universities**, which supports the adoption of new farm production and management approaches through informal education via on-site demonstrations.
- **Requests \$17.8 million for Tribal Colleges Extension**, which supports community-based learning on farmer education, youth development, diet and nutrition, and rural entrepreneurship.
- **Requests \$25 million for the IR-4 Project** aiding specialty crop agriculture by developing data needed to facilitate the registration of crop protection products for fruits, vegetables, herbs, spices, ornamental plants, and other horticultural crops.

Provide \$500 million in funding for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI).

AFRI is USDA's premier competitive research program, supporting fundamental and applied research to address key problems of local, regional, national, and global importance in conventional, organic, and urban agricultural systems. This funding level for the program is needed to invest in crucial areas aimed at addressing our nation's most urgent and pressing food, agriculture, and public health challenges.

AFRI-funded research supports food safety and traceability, supply chain resiliency, bioenergy, nutrition and wellness, agricultural technology, rural economic prosperity, and many other important issues. At its current funding level, AFRI can support fewer than a third of the projects recommended for funding. AFRI research programs support the development of new technologies and a workforce that will advance our national security, agricultural productivity, and the health of Americans.

Provide \$500 million in funding for the Research Facilities Act (RFA).

Agricultural and food research solves local issues, such as limiting forest fires, and global issues, such as addressing energy needs. The U.S. is at a hazardous crossroads and is rapidly losing ground as the global leader in agricultural science and advanced technology. A 2021 report determined 70% of research facilities at U.S. public colleges of agriculture are at the end of their useful life with \$11.5 billion in deferred maintenance. RFA funding will allow land-grant universities and non-land-grant colleges of agriculture to construct and modernize their research infrastructure to meet the needs of the 21st century.

Provide \$10 million in funding for the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AgARDA).

Modeled after successful advanced research programs like DARPA and ARPA-E, the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AgARDA) can usher in transformative research power to address agricultural challenges. The power of an advanced research program lies in its unique selection process to identify innovative ideas and technologies, allowing significant achievements to occur more rapidly than in a conventional research setting. By funding AgARDA, Congress can respond to our most pressing challenges: threats from plant and animal pests and diseases; rising costs and limited availability of inputs; and inefficiencies in planting, harvesting, and processing.

AgARDA must have the funds to hire staff and support sufficient projects to show that this research model can produce impactful results. Therefore, we urge the Subcommittee to fund AgARDA at a minimum of \$10 million for FY2025 and strongly urge consideration of fully funding the pilot program. Even as a pilot program, AgARDA must be funded appropriately to support high-impact research that can produce transformative results.

Provide \$98 million for the Economic Research Service (ERS) and \$241 million for the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).

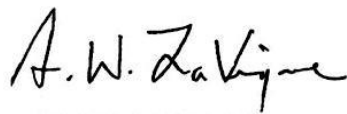
The U.S. food and agriculture sector benefits significantly from ERS and NASS data and modeling. This information helps the industry and academia and guides sound policymaking. Comprehensive data underpins the American economy, and ERS and NASS are at the forefront of providing international and domestic market information.

ERS and NASS received cuts in FY2024. We must not absorb further cuts. For example, datasets can help us better understand the economics of many policy issues critical to our national agenda. Data can help assess the importance of capacity building in rural America. NASS and ERS provide critical estimates for crop and livestock supply and demand. The datasets can better inform factors important to American energy and agricultural dominance and trade relations, particularly on policies pushing America to reduce its trade deficits.

The investments in USDA research, education, economics, and Extension programs made today will be responsible for developing the scientific outcomes and workforce urgently needed to meet identified and unknown future challenges. We urge you to do all you can to support a robust REE portfolio within USDA.

We thank you for your continued support and look forward to working with you on this important effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "A. W. LaVigne". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "A." and last name "LaVigne" clearly legible.

Andrew W. LaVigne
President, NCFAR | President & CEO, American Seed Trade Association