

# WASHINGTON REPORT

## March 2007

Things inside the DC Beltway have never been busier! The Farm Bill reauthorization for 2007 is in full swing... A new Congress has been dealing with a new FY2008 budget... The National and Regional Weed Science Societies have been working to advance their member's objectives and have conducted annual meetings in Milwaukee, Baltimore, Nashville, San Antonio and Portland... We have just completed another successful National Invasive Weed Awareness Week... and I have been very busy working on a number of exciting initiatives that are part of the WSSA's Long Term Strategic Plan.

### **USDA Under Secretary Buchanan Addresses WSSA in San Antonio**

Many of you had a chance to attend the Monday general session during the WSSA annual meeting in San Antonio, TX. We were very fortunate to have Dr. Gale Buchanan, USDA Undersecretary for the Research, Education, and Economics (REE), present the Administration's 2007 Farm Bill proposal. Dr. Buchanan discussed the highlights of the Administration's Farm Bill proposal and provided excellent insight on Title VII of the Farm Bill on how the USDA is working to reorganize and revitalize their research, education, and economics mission and increase investment in high priority areas of research such as specialty crops, bio-energy, and bio-based products. The WSSA greatly appreciates Dr. Buchanan's support and time and is honored that he is a member of the WSSA.

The Administration is recommending several reforms and new initiatives for future agricultural research and the following is a list of the major components of the package.

- Consolidate USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) into a single agency named the Research, Education, and Extension Service (REES), which will coordinate both intramural and extramural research, extension, and education programs.
- Rename the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area the Office of Science.
- Establish an annual \$50 million Agricultural Bio-Energy and Bio-Based Products Research Initiative to advance fundamental scientific knowledge for the improved production of renewable fuels and bio-based products.
- Establish an annual \$100 million Specialty Crop Research Initiative to provide science-based tools for the specialty crop industry.

Please visit [www.usda.gov/documents/07finalfbp.pdf](http://www.usda.gov/documents/07finalfbp.pdf) to view the USDA's full 2007 Farm Bill proposal.

### **WSSA Comments on Agriculture Research Title Proposals in 2007 Farm Bill**

The Administration's 2007 Farm Bill proposal is mentioned above. The other two proposals that have various levels of support among different stakeholder groups are CREATE-21, which stand for Creating Research, Extension, and Teaching Excellence for the 21st Century (CREATE-21) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) proposal. The CREATE-21 proposal calls for the consolidation of elements currently within USDA's Research, Education, and Economics program area (and Forest Service R&D) within a new "National Institutes for Food and Agriculture" in order to enhance the integration, efficiency, and flexibility of programmatic efforts in research, extension, and education. While sustaining existing intramural and university capacity funding, the Institute will also provide substantial new funding for competitively-awarded research, extension, and education grants. Finally, the CREATE-21 proposal includes major elements of the Danforth proposal for the creation of a National Institute of Food and Agriculture to substantially increase fundamental research within USDA. For more information, please visit: [www.create-21.org](http://www.create-21.org)

On March 9, 2007 members of the WSSA Board of Directors, the WSSA Science Policy Committee, and the Regional Weed Science Society Presidents approved the following position statements regarding the various agricultural research title provisions in the 2007 Farm Bill. These position statements will help the National and Regional Weed Science Societies actively support legislation that meets these goals.

- **Reauthorize Strong Research Title.** The full range of research, extension & education (REE) provisions—including intramural (ARS, ERS, FS) and extramural [base funding (Formula Funds); competitive grants (NRI, CAP grants); and high priority/emergency needs]—is vital to meeting the challenges and opportunities that the U.S. food and agricultural sector face in the coming years. The integrated approach of the NRI and similar programs has been especially effective and should be strengthened.
- **Commit to Double Funding in Next 5 Years.** The provision in the current farm bill calling for agricultural research funding to be doubled over the next 5 fiscal years should be retained. The NIFA approach, the USDA farm bill proposal and the CREATE-21 proposals are unified in their call for enhanced public investment in food and agricultural REE.
  - WSSA endorses the stated objective of CREATE-21 to double federal funding for food and agricultural REE, through mandatory spending of \$200 million annually combined with increases in discretionary spending.
  - WSSA applauds the USDA proposal for recommending a significant increase in federal funding in the next research title, through both mandatory and discretionary spending. Targeted increases in biofuels and specialty crops research represent a strong beginning, but other chronically under funded areas remain to be addressed.
- **Authorize NIFA.** WSSA supports establishment of a National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) in USDA. NIFA was recommended by a USDA REE Task Force

to address a significant gap in fundamental research. Funding must be in addition to critical funding for existing USDA REE programs.

- **Increase Funding for Existing Programs.** Chronic under funding in the NRI and other programs remains to be addressed through the authorization and appropriations process.
- **Encourage Interagency Partnerships.** Strengthen current authorities used by USDA to leverage funds by partnering with other agencies to fund critical projects (for example, DOE, NSF, NASA)
- **Strengthen Stakeholder Participation.** WSSA urges expanded public participation in the Administration's REE priority setting and funding decision process.
- **Debate Organizational Reform Proposals.** WSSA believes any consolidation or reorganization must preserve and enhance the level of cooperation among intramural and extramural REE functions of USDA and universities and other partners and retain institutional memory. Proposed reforms in the USDA and CREATE-21 proposals concerning the organization of USDA's research mission will help stimulate serious debate about how to optimize and maximize this critical federal investment in the future of the U.S. food and agriculture system and the public benefits such investments provide.

### **WSSA Biofuels and Invasive Plants white paper**

In response to the major surge in renewable fuels initiatives going on at the Federal and State levels, the WSSA has formulated a white paper that addresses the concerns and issues occurring at the interface of invasive weeds and plants being grown for cellulosic biomass energy production. Special thanks to WSSA members Nelroy Jackson, Jodie Holt, and Joe DiTomaso for drafting these comments on a very short timeline.

#### *Biofuels and Invasive Plant Species*

*A variety of plant species from a range of taxa, including crops and wild plants, are being considered for use as biofuels. It is important to consider not only the economic and social benefits of these species, but the potential risks associated with their introduction and propagation.*

*Biofuel crops can have economic benefits, but in some cases can also have the potential to escape cultivation and become invasive in natural ecosystems. For example, of the many grasses being evaluated or considered as biofuels, most are rhizomatous perennials and a few have already been shown to be extremely invasive in many communities (e.g., giant reed [*Arundo donax*] and reed canarygrass [*Phalaris arundinacea*]). Similarly, woody species under consideration, such as Chinese tallowtree (*Sapium sebiferum*), are also very*

*invasive in many southern states. These species threaten riparian areas and wetlands, alter fire cycles, and have a negative impact on wildlife habitat.*

*Ideally, plants used as an economically efficient source of biofuel should be easily propagated in highly managed agricultural systems, but should not be capable of surviving outside of such cultivation. This is true for nearly all of the major crops currently grown in the US, including rice, wheat, corn, soybean, cotton, tomato and alfalfa. Similar expectations should apply to biofuel crops. Without this expectation, the benefits of crop-based biofuel production may be offset by far greater economic and ecological damage caused by their invasion into sensitive natural ecosystems, as well as drainage and irrigation canals.*

*Although introducing some plant species as biofuel sources may be safe and beneficial to society, the environmental and ecological risks associated with their potential escape and invasion into natural systems must be evaluated along with the agronomic or economic benefits. Similar evaluations and analyses are already mandatory for biological control agents and transgenic plants, and should be in place before decisions are made regarding the use of biofuel plants.*

### **8<sup>th</sup> National Invasive Weeds Awareness Week (NIWAW 8) a Success**

Despite Mother Nature's attempt to thwart us, we had 170 people participate for the 8<sup>th</sup> National Invasive Weed Awareness Week. I would like to personally thank the outstanding efforts by Nelroy Jackson for helping coordinate and plan NIWAW activities. Also, many thanks to Jill Schroeder and Jeff Derr for traveling to Washington DC to participate in the weeks events and helping out with all the planning. Jeff Derr submitted the following comments to the WSSA Board of Directors. I have modified them slightly for the newsletter, but felt they very accurately reflect NIWAW! Thanks Jeff!

*I wanted to update you on our activities in Washington D.C. during the 8th National Invasive Weed Awareness Week (NIWAW). We accomplished a lot during our time there!*

*First of all, the participants: Jill Schroeder and I formally represented the WSSA board during the week. Linda Nelson, John Madsen, Kurt Getsinger, Janet Clark, Mike Chandler, Al Tasker, Jen Vollmer, and George Beck also participated. Nelroy Jackson chaired the Invasive Weed Awareness Coalition (IWAC) that organized NIWAW and Lee Van Wychen organized our visits during the week, as well as helping Nelroy with meeting planning.*

*I would like to thank Nelroy and Lee for all their hard work on NIWAW. They both did a tremendous amount to prepare for the week, as well as ensuring that all events went smoothly. They also made sure that Jill, I, and WSSA were formally recognized during the various events. WSSA was mentioned frequently during the week, which was nice to see.*

*I thought I would let you know about the events in which Jill and I participated. We had an orientation session Sunday evening. Lee, Nelroy and I met with the North American Weed Management Association (NAWMA) board. They, as well as others during the week, expressed keen interest in the new journal.*

*On Monday morning, we heard presentations from the Army Corps of Engineers, the Nature Conservancy, the Council of Environmental Quality, and EPA, among others. What was amazing to me was that the EPA official, Debbie Edwards, specifically mentioned WSSA in her talk. That afternoon, Jill, Lee, John Jachetta, and I met with 12 EPA officials, including Debbie Edwards, Don Stubbs, John Leahy, and Bill Chism, among others, in regards to us providing assistance to them through a liaison, plus other possibilities. We heard about EPA's timeline for herbicide reregistration and registration review assessments. This was a productive meeting and I am sure we will follow up with further dialogue with EPA.*

*On Tuesday morning, we heard presentations from a variety of USDA agencies involved in invasive plant management, including APHIS, ARS, CSREES, and NRCS, among others. We had an opportunity to interact with Del Delfosse and John Lydon, among others. John and I discussed the possibility of ARS having their stakeholder/ARS planning meeting at the 2008 WSSA meeting (I had discussed this with some of you in San Antonio). Tuesday afternoon, Lee, Jill and I met staffers for Senators Domenici, Bingaman, and Webb. We presented 3 position papers (National Parks Service agreements with landowners, Salt Cedar, and Noxious Weed Control bills), along with a white paper on biofuels and invasive plants that was developed by Joe DiTomaso, Jodie Holt, and Nelroy.*

*Wednesday morning we heard reports from various agencies in the Department of the Interior. Jill, Lee and I met with Colien Hefferan, Administrator for CSREES. Rob Hedberg set up this meeting and sat in. She was very interested in our white paper on the biofuels/invasive plant issue. We had hoped to discuss NRI funding but did not have time. Wednesday afternoon we listened to reports from various non-government agencies, including the Nature Conservancy, Wildlife forever, Union of Concerned Scientists, and the State Depts. of Agriculture, among others.*

*Wednesday evening we had a reception at the US Botanic Garden with yours truly as m.c. for the awards presentation (Jill had the honor last year). George Beck was one of the awardees. About 240 people attended the reception, including 3 congressional staffers and members from a range of government agencies. Excellent place for a reception with time for informal discussions.*

*Thursday morning we heard presentations from FICMNEW (Federal Interagency Committee for the Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds), including APHIS, USGS, and DOT/FHWA. For lunch, Nelroy arranged for Jill, Lee, and me to meet with the Garden Club of America board. They are a large group and thus it would be good to partner with them wherever possible. Thursday afternoon*

*included a briefing from the National Invasive Species Council, and there was a debriefing meeting run by Nelroy.*

*I feel we made some excellent contacts during our week in DC. I am sure we will discuss during the summer board meetings some of the ideas we talked about at NIWAW. I feel it was very worthwhile for Jill and I to participate in NIWAW and I think the time Nelroy and Lee devoted to this activity was time well spent.*

*Jeff Derr*

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