

WSSA WASHINGTON REPORT

December 8, 2025

Lee Van Wychen

Shut Down Over, But Lots of Work to Do.

After 43 days, the longest government shutdown in U.S. history is finally over. The Senate voted 60 to 40 on November 10, followed by a 222 to 209 House vote on November 12, to reopen the federal government.

- The agreement includes three full-year (FY) 2026 appropriations bills covering Agriculture, Veterans Affairs, and Legislative Branch operations, also known as a “minibus”.
- All other agencies await their fate in the nine remaining appropriations bills, including EPA, Department of the Interior, NOAA, and the US Army Corp of Engineers. Current discussion on Capitol Hill indicates these nine remaining bills could be packaged in similar “minibuses”.
 - The remaining nine bills are funded under a continuing resolution (CR) through January 30, 2026 at FY 2025 levels.
 - Most of the nine remaining appropriations bills have been marked up by the House and Senate, but there is no conference agreement yet. This has implications for programs like the Army Corps of Engineers Aquatic Plant Control.

The agreement also contains a one-year Farm Bill extension keeping research, conservation, and market programs running through 2026. This is the 3rd extension of the 2018 Farm Bill.

The USDA NIFA RFA submission process has remained open, however, many RFA deadlines were delayed. The new deadline for Pests and Beneficial Species is December 18, 2025.

- Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) charters for both the EPA Pesticide Program Dialogue Committee (PPDC) and the National Invasive Species Committee (NISC) Invasive Species Advisory Committee (ISAC) have lapsed during the shutdown.
 - Those charters will need to be renewed

Ag Research Funding- Mixed Results, But Extension and Integrated Funding Remain Steady

The final FY 2026 appropriations bill for agriculture that funds USDA through September 30, 2026 was generally good news for ag research and extension programs, where level funding is considered a victory in the current budget conditions. USDA-ARS funding increased by \$5 million, while USDA-NIFA funding decreased \$10 million with most of that decrease coming from the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) competitive grants program. The best explanation for these differences between USDA-ARS and NIFA-AFRI is that members of Congress have tended to support ARS labs in their district where they know the money can be “Congressionally directed”. This is compared to NIFA-AFRI competitive grants, which Congress supports in general due to the competitive aspect, but lacks any true champions on the Hill because no one knows where the grants will be awarded until later. Regardless, the NIFA AFRI grants program funding in FY 2010 was \$262 million and grew every year up until FY 2023 when it reached \$455 million. As the largest line item in the NIFA budget, AFRI is an easy target for

appropriators to cut \$10 million from and move it elsewhere in the USDA budget in the current fiscal environment.

	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026
	----- \$ Millions -----			
USDA- ARS	1,744	1,788	1,788	1,793
USDA- NIFA - total	1,701	1,679	1,687	1,677
Research & Education Activities				
Hatch Act: Ag Experiment Stations	259	259	265	265
Ag & Food Research Initiative (AFRI)	455	445	445	435
IR-4: Minor crop use program	15	15	15	15
Extension Activities				
Smith-Lever 3(b) and 3(c): Extension	325	325	325	325
Integrated Activities				
Crop Protection & Pest Management	21	21	21	21

Appropriations for USDA-ARS and USDA-NIFA Research, Extension and Integrated programs for Fiscal Years (FY) 2023 through 2026.

WSSA and NAICC Tour of ESA and IPM Issues in NC & VA on Sept. 23-24

WSSA and the National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants (NAICC) converged in Richmond, VA on September 22 to host a guided tour in VA and NC with special emphasis on the Endangered Species Act (ESA) along IPM practices. This was our second event of this type cohosting with the NAICC. In 2024, WSSA and NAICC cohosted a tour on ESA issues for Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) staff in Wisconsin.

Tour participants included scientists and professionals from EPA, FWS, and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS, pronounced “nymphs”). Representatives from WSSA included President Hilary Sandler; Bill Chism, Regulatory Consultant and ESA Committee Chair; Mark VanGessel, EPA Liaison; Lee Van Wychen, Executive Director of Science Policy; and Science Policy Fellows, Aleah Butler-Jones from Cornell and Cole Woolard from Texas Tech.



From L to R: WSSA Tour Participants: Cole Woolard, Hilary Sandler, Lee Van Wychen, Aleah Butler-Jones, Mark VanGessel, and Bill Chism



Photo Caption: A stop at Tidewater Agronomic Research Farms in Belvedere, NC, managed by Stan and Matt Winslow. We had 32 participants on the tour including nine from EPA, five from USFWS and 3 from NMPS. At each stop we also had various university experts, crop consultants, and/or farmers. Stan Winslow (sunhat and white shirt on top right) discusses crop scouting and the info they provide to growers. We also had Dr. Dominic Resig from NC State discuss field edge

infesting insects like stinkbugs. They tend to be more prevalent along field edges to avoid treatment.



Photo Caption: A hands on lesson sweeping insects at Tidewater Agronomics Research Farm and determining pests vs beneficials.



Photo Caption: A peanut harvest near Jackson, NC on Lassiter Farms. It was the first time for many of us on the tour witnessed a peanut harvest, which is a very dusty affair!



Photo Caption: Stanley Culpepper (far right) and Charlie Cahoon (just out of the picture) addressed weed management and big picture issues in farming that will impact ESA implementation. It was an excellent discussion. This was at Mush Island Farms in Weldon, NC that was managed by Ellis Taylor. He was a top-notch farmer who worked hard to manage both the economics and conservation efforts on his farm. At the other end of this field is the Roanoke River, which is a Pesticide Use Limitation Area (PULA) for the Atlantic Sturgeon, an endangered species listed in 2012.

The tours took place on September 23–24, 2025. On the first day, stops included Cedar Point Farms in Wakefield, VA, Tidewater Agronomics Research Farm in Belvedere, NC, and a peanut harvest on Lassiter Farms near Jackson, NC. After an overnight stay in Roanoke Rapids, NC, we toured Fisher Family Partnership in Whitakers, NC, where we saw tobacco and sweet potatoes and finished the tour at Mush Island Farms in Weldon, NC.

Virginia Tech and North Carolina State University Extension Specialists gave great presentations on a host of weed and pest management challenges. Other stakeholder groups participating in the tour included the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, North Carolina Peanut Growers and the North Carolina Cotton Growers.

As tour participants, we observed cotton, peanut, and tobacco crops along with associated conservation and crop protection practices. Experts discussed the benefits of cover crops, the process of adding them to a farm management program, and the challenges and limitations that they may pose. Speakers also highlighted the role that IPM plays in the ability to reduce pesticide use, improve soil health, reduce water runoff and improve biodiversity.

Despite the challenges ahead, connecting farmers, researchers and federal regulators during the tour was a tremendous benefit. It fostered meaningful individual and group interactions and everyone left with a greater understanding on how we must collaborate to provide food for the world profitably while protecting the environment for future generations. Plans are already

underway to have another tour in 2026, location TBD. A special shoutout to our NAICC colleagues who were instrumental in pulling off the event; they were a fantastic group to work with!

Please Visit the WSSA Endangered Species Act Webpage

<https://wssa.net/endangered-species/>. There is a lot of excellent summaries on EPA's Herbicide Strategy, Insecticide Strategy, Bulletins Live Two, and an Introduction to Pesticide Registration and the Endangered Species Act and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).

EPA Releases Much Improved Version of the PALM App for Determining Runoff and Drift

Mitigations

The EPA has released a mobile-friendly calculator designed to help pesticide applicators determine and document ESA label mitigations. The tool, called the Pesticide App for Label Mitigations (PALM), guides users through the same mitigation "menu" found on EPA labels and bulletins, then generates a field-level summary that can be saved or printed for records.

PALM is intended for use at the field or management-unit level and mirrors EPA's mitigation tables without requiring applicators to manually sort through them. After answering a series of questions, users receive the required spray-drift buffer distance or the number of runoff and erosion mitigation points, along with a list of practices that qualify.

Spray Drift Buffer Calculator

This sequence helps determine whether a buffer is required and what reduction options are available under the label. Users are asked if the product label references the EPA mitigation menu. If so, they enter the product and crop information, application type, boom height, droplet size, drift-reducing agents in the tank mix and whether managed areas exist downwind. The output is the buffer distance and any allowable reductions.

Runoff and Erosion Mitigation Calculator

This sequence calculates how many mitigation points are needed for a field or management unit and which practices can fulfill them. The EPA defines a management unit as a single, contiguous piece of land managed as one unit for a crop, which can be subdivided by crop type or by unique field features.

The runoff and erosion flow begins by identifying the field, product and crop. It screens for cases where mitigation points are not required, such as spot treatments covering fewer than 1,000 square feet or when a qualifying "managed area" exists within 1,000 feet down-gradient.

Examples of managed areas include agricultural fields, pastures, vegetated filter strips, grassed waterways, hedgerows, riparian zones, private forests, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) acres. Contained irrigation water sources, retention ponds and other runoff structures also qualify.

If mitigation is required, PALM walks users through a 12-step process to document label targets. Applicators input county and state information, slope and soil type, tillage and cover crop use, and conservation practices such as terraces, waterways and filter devices. Points are awarded for practices across three categories: in-field, field-adjacent and systems that capture runoff. Additional points are given for using less than the maximum labeled rate of a pesticide. A final summary lists total points and the practices credited.

Both calculators end with a printable summary of answers and results for record keeping. EPA emphasizes that PALM is an aid for planning and documentation, not a substitute for following label directions or state regulations. Applicators are still responsible for meeting all requirements. The tool is available at: www.epa.gov/pesticides/pesticide-app-label-mitigations

Science Policy Fellows Visit DC – Discuss Many Weed Science Issues

On November 12-14, WSSA Science Policy Fellows Aleah Butler-Jones from Cornell and Cole Woolard from Texas Tech visited the nation's Capital to meet with their Senators and Congressmen from their home state. We also had a lengthy discussion with House Agriculture Committee staff on a number of topics including the availability of DJI drones for use in site-specific weed management.

As of December 2025, DJI drones aren't fully banned in the U.S., but a potential ban looms, with a December 23, 2025, deadline for a mandated security audit under the 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that, if missed, triggers an automatic addition to the FCC's "Covered List," blocking new imports and future software/network access due to national security concerns over Chinese ties.

Our main focus points for the state visits were on funding for the Crop Protection and Pest Management (CPPM) program and the IR-4 program, including the capacity funding for Smith



Lever 3(b) and 3(c) and the Hatch Act programs. As noted above in the FY 2026 agriculture appropriations, we were happy to see all of those programs maintain level funding, especially in the current budget conditions.

Our visits also included meeting new science and government affairs staff at CropLife America as well as a meeting with the National Cotton Council of America and Cotton Incorporated. One of the hot button issues we discussed was the support for uniform federal pesticide labeling under **FIFRA Section 24(b)**, which the six national and regional weed science societies support. The [Agricultural](#)

[Labeling Uniformity Act](#) reaffirms that only the EPA can set pesticide labeling and packaging requirements, preventing states from imposing conflicting rules. Recent actions in some states contradict EPA-approved pesticide labels, which creates regulatory inconsistency, disrupts commerce, and undermines public confidence in federal science-based regulation.

At the same time, we support state's rights to regulate pesticides under FIFRA Section 24(a) and 24(c). **FIFRA Section 24(a)** says that states can add their own rules for selling or using pesticides, as long as they don't contradict FIFRA. **FIFRA Section 24(c)** allows states to register a pesticide for a new use or a new product to solve a "special local need" not covered federally, but it requires EPA review and approval and is only for use within that state.

Finally, we met with several staff members from the House Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee, including the new Professional Staff member overseeing funding for the \$10 billion Army Corp of Engineers Civil Works (ACOE-CW) program. We focused specifically on funding for the ACOE-CW Aquatic Plant Control program. The program has received \$5 to \$7 million annually between 2018 to 2024, but did not receive any funding in FY 2025 because Congress did not pass an appropriations bill, nor did the ACOE-CW include it in their budget plan. We highlighted the fact that the ACOE-CW Aquatic Plant Control program is the nation's only federally authorized program for research and development of effective, science-based strategies to manage invasive aquatic weeds and discussed the [letter](#) supported by 11 organizations, including WSSA and APMS, highlighting the importance of the program.

Weed Science Societies Submit Comments on USDA-ARS Draft Biocontrol Roadmap

The draft Biocontrol and Bio-Based Tools Research Roadmap presents a good first step toward the development and adoption of biocontrol and other bio-based strategies in agricultural production under a shared vision for sustainable pest, weed, and disease management. Its long-term impact, however, will depend on how effectively these concepts are translated into coordinated research, practical applications, and measurable outcomes for growers. The document could be improved by clearly articulating how biocontrol and other bio-based strategies could be integrated across different production systems or describing the barriers preventing its integration. USDA-ARS posed five questions for comment. The Weed Science Societies comments can be read [here](#).

Recent U.S. Graduates Exempt from New H-1B Fee

The Trump Administration has [clarified](#) that the new \$100,000 H-1B visa fee will not apply to recent graduates of U.S. institutions transitioning from an F-1 student visa to an H-1B, as this is considered a "change of status." While the guidance from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services allows for exceptions on an individual basis, it appears to rule out a blanket exemption for higher education institutions.

The American Council on Education has [asked](#) the Department of Homeland Security to exempt U.S. colleges and universities from the fee, noting that "faculty, researchers, and staff hired under H-1Bs educate domestic students in areas of national need, such as health care,

engineering, and education fields." Other organizations have also urged broader relief and filed lawsuits challenging the fee's implementation.

Lee Van Wychen, Ph.D.
Executive Director of Science Policy
Weed Science Society of America
5720 Glenmullen Pl, Alexandria, VA 22303
Cell: 202-746-4686

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