

WSSA WASHINGTON REPORT

July 1, 2025

Lee Van Wychen

Meet the 2025-2026 Science Policy Fellows

Aleah Butler-Jones is a fourth year PhD candidate at Cornell University studying under the



supervision of Dr. Lynn Sosnoskie. Aleah's dissertation research focuses on investigating the impact of electrical weed control (EWC) on weed and soil biological communities in addition to EWC's integration into specialty crop production systems. She received her B.S. in Agricultural Sciences at Cornell University. During this time, she worked as an undergraduate research assistant to Dr. Toni DiTommaso, Dr. Thomas Björkman, and the Cornell Small Farms Program. She was first exposed to weed science through competing at the 2017 Northeastern Weed Science Society (NEWSS) Weed Contest as part of Cornell's team. Aleah earned her M.S. in Horticultural Biology from Cornell University. Her thesis

focused on the confirmation of glyphosate-resistant Palmer amaranth populations in NY and their responses to alternative chemistries and elevated temperatures. Through her work, Aleah strives to develop and assess novel integrated weed management tactics and their impact on the agroecosystem. She is thrilled to be a Science Policy Fellow and looks forward to developing a greater understanding of science policy and its relation to agricultural research. Most of all, Aleah is grateful to the WSSA for the opportunity to contribute to the society's endeavor to provide science-based information to policymakers and the broader public and advocate research, education, and outreach.

Matthew "Cole" Woodard is a second-year Ph.D. student at Texas Tech University under the



advisement of Dr. Peter Dotray. Cole's dissertation research focuses on the utilization of topramezone and L-glufosinate in the Axant™ Flex Cotton System. He received his B.S. in Crop Science and Agriculture Business from the University of Arkansas. While working on his undergraduate degree, Cole was introduced to weed science through an internship with Corteva Agriscience under the direction of Dr. Drew Ellis. Upon completing his B.S. degree, Cole joined Dr. Jason Norsworthy's program to pursue a M.S. degree. In May of 2024, Cole successfully defended his thesis titled "Evaluation of a Diflufenican:Metribuzin:Flufenacet Premixture for Soybean Tolerance and Weed Control." Through his work,

Cole aims to develop weed management strategies to assist producers who adopt the new Axant Flex Cotton System. He is looking forward to learning about and contributing to issues

that concern policy and agriculture. Cole would like to thank the WSSA and the Science Policy Committee for providing students with the opportunity to serve as Science Policy Fellows.

House Agriculture Appropriations Committee Restores Most Cuts to Ag Research

On June 5, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture held a markup to consider the Presidents Budget Request (PBR) for the fiscal year (FY) 2026 agriculture spending bill. Most notably, the bill rejected most of the Administration's proposed deep cuts to agricultural research.

The biggest area of concern in the PBR was for USDA NIFA. The FY2025 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 certainly better than a 38% cut.

Within the NIFA “Research and Education” account, the FY26 PBR had eliminated \$265 million in funding for the **Hatch Act**, which funds our agricultural experiment stations. However, thankfully, House 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. 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 b & c** extension funding from \$325 million to \$175 million, a 46% cut. However, the House 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 supports projects that bring together research, education and extension activities to address critical issues in agriculture. However, once again, the House 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.

Finally, the House Ag Appropriators provided \$1.79 billion for the **Agricultural Research Service (ARS)**, which is \$2.5 million above the FY25 enacted program level, and includes increases for high-priority initiatives, addresses emerging pests and diseases, but eliminates funding for climate hubs. The FY26 PBR proposed a cut of \$88 million for USDA-ARS.

The full House Appropriations Committee approved the bill on June 30 by a vote of 35 to 27. The FY 2026 Ag Appropriations bill now heads to the House Floor for further consideration. In the meantime, the Senate Ag Appropriations Subcommittee is expected to markup their version of the bill on July 10.

Weed Science Society Presidents Advocate for Priorities in Washington DC

During the week of May 5, the National and Regional Weed Science Society Presidents traveled to Washington DC for Congressional and stakeholder visits. We began the week by attending the National Coalition for Food and Agriculture Research (NCFAR) Annual Meeting and fly-in. There were about 40 NCFAR members in attendance representing a broad array of agricultural research stakeholders. We had a good discussion about the many issues facing the USDA Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area. Concerns were raised about splitting up the Farm Bill and how that would impact the smaller titles in the Farm Bill such as the Research Title (7). Could a “skinny” Farm Bill get enough votes to pass Congress without the Commodity Title or Nutrition Title?

We also had a good dialogue with the USDA REE Chief of Staff Ricki Schroeder, followed by Congressional Visits in the afternoon and then an evening reception in the House Ag Committee Hearing room and balcony. Rep. Frank Lucas (R-OK) joined us at the reception and provided remarks on how to move forward in this political environment. Rep. Lucas is currently Chair of the House Science Committee and is the longest serving member of the House Ag Committee where he served as Chair from 2011 to 2015 and oversaw the passage of the 2014 Farm Bill.

Over the next two days, the Weed Science Society Presidents visited their local Senators and Representatives to discuss funding priorities such as the Crop Protection and Pest Management (CPPM) program, the IR-4 Program and capacity programs such as Hatch and Smith-Lever.

This year, we also delivered a [WSSA Policy Priorities one-pager](#) to offices that the President’s developed in preparation for the fly-in. A special thanks to Dawn Refsell, Ian Burke and Hilary Sandler for their time and effort in developing this. The Policy Priorities one-pager focuses on four main areas: 1) Extension and Research funding; 2) Enhancing Integrated Weed Management; 3) Ensuring Crop Productivity & American Resources for Generations; and 4) Workforce Competency. In addition, select Congressional offices received a free Weed Bingo! Game (available at the [WSSA Bookstore](#)). Between the NCFAR Congressional Visits where the Presidents divided up and attended visits with other ag research stakeholders and the more focused weed science visits to our local Congressional offices during the next couple of days, we visited approximately 30 offices.

The Weed Science Society Presidents also met with the American Soybean Association, the American Farm Bureau Federation, and CropLife America for in-depth discussions on their policy priorities and how our organizations can work together for the common good of ensuring a safe, secure, and reliable food and fiber supply.



Above: from Left to Right: Ian Burke - WSSA President-Elect; Dawn Refsell - WSSA Vice President; Hilary Sandler – WSSA President; Thierry Besancon – NEWSS President; Lee Van Wychen – Executive Director of Science Policy; Eric Palmer – SWSS President; and Carl Coburn – WSWS President



Above: from Left to Right: Ian Burke - WSSA President-Elect; Thierry Besancon – NEWSS President; Hilary Sandler – WSSA President; Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA), Senate Agriculture Committee; Dawn Refsell - WSSA Vice President; Carl Coburn – WSWS President; and Eric Palmer – SWSS President.



Above: from Left to Right: Ian Burke - WSSA President-Elect; Dawn Refsell - WSSA Vice President; Hilary Sandler – WSSA President; Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) Sen. Agriculture Committee Ranking Member; Lee Van Wychen – WSSA Executive Director of Science Policy; Thierry Besancon – NEWSS President; and Rebecca Haynie – Director of Science Policy, CroPLife America.



Above: From Left to Right: Hilary Sandler – WSSA President; Rep. Frank Lucas (R-OK) Chair of the House Science Committee; Eric Palmer – SWSS President; Thierry Besancon – NEWSS President; Carl Coburn – WSSS President; and Lee Van Wychen – WSSA Executive Director of Science Policy



Above: From Left to Right: Eric Palmer – SWSS President; Lee Van Wychen – WSSA Executive Director of Science Policy; Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), Chair of the all powerful House Rules Committee; and Thierry Besancon – NEWSS President. (This meeting with Rep. Foxx would not have happened without Eric's local connection to the Congresswoman!). In addition, we came to realize that she and her husband Tom established and ran a successful nursery and

landscaping business in the High Country for more than three decades, which is now operated by their daughter. Rep. Foxx let us know that she was very familiar with glyphosate and how to use it!

A Post-MAHA Report Letter to USDA, EPA and HHS Regarding Science and Transparency

On June 16, the six National and Regional Weed Societies joined over 250 other agricultural organizations in a letter to the heads of USDA, EPA and HHS after the release of the draft Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) report. Our concerns were that many of the studies referenced to support erroneous claims significantly misrepresented their findings or in some cases are entirely nonexistent. In other instances, the report relies on a few select pieces of poor evidence and opinion articles to justify false claims, ignoring vast volumes of scientific evidence to the contrary. Since its inception, the MAHA Commission has operated without meaningful input from food and agricultural stakeholders. [The letter can be read here.](#)

Hamby Appointed as Director of National Institute of Food and Agriculture

Dr. Jaye L. Hamby was appointed to serve as the Director of USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) on March 20, 2025. Prior to joining USDA NIFA, Dr. Hamby led and



directed proprietary research efforts. Over the course of his career, he has directed hundreds of research efforts specializing in concept testing, product marketing, value driver analysis, and following market trends and strategies to support agricultural producers.

Dr. Hamby grew up on his family's cow-calf operation in west Tennessee and developed a deep connection to agriculture through 4-H and FFA, eventually serving as a national FFA officer. He graduated from the University of Tennessee's College of Agriculture with a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Education and earned master's and doctoral degrees in Agricultural Education with a specialization in Agricultural Economics from Oklahoma State University.

Tom Schultz Nominated to Run U.S. Forest Service



On February 27, 2025, Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins named Tom Schultz as the next leader of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). The agency is tasked with overseeing 193 million acres of national forests and public lands, including 36.6 million acres of wilderness. Schultz will be the 21st Chief of the USFS and the first ever to not have worked in any part of the agency prior to becoming chief.

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/leadership/meet-tom-schultz-21st-chief-forest-service>

Schultz previously served as vice president of resources and government affairs at Idaho Forest Group, where he led timber procurement operations and managed relationships with government officials at all levels. A former U.S. Air Force officer, Schultz also served as director of the Idaho Department of Lands, overseeing the management of several million surface acres

of endowment lands and minerals. He held leadership roles in Montana's Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, managing the Trust Lands and Water Resources Divisions.

Schultz holds a bachelor's degree in government from the University of Virginia, a master's degree in political science from the University of Wyoming, and a master's degree in forestry from the University of Montana.

Ricki Schroeder Appointed Chief of Staff for USDA Research, Education, and Economics



Ricki Schroeder now serves as Chief of Staff for USDA's Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area. Ricki previously served as Professional Staff covering ag research and pesticide policy, among other areas, on the House Ag Committee since 2017 until heading over to USDA this spring. Ricki is a 2017 graduate of Oklahoma State University where he studied agricultural sciences and natural resources.

USDA Grantees Must Now Report Gain of Function Research

In response to the May 5, 2025 [Executive Order \(E.O.\) 14292](#) on *Improving the Safety and Security of Biological Research*, USDA-NIFA has posted on its website information for universities and other [grant recipients to report Gain of Function Research](#) in a timely and effective manner. USDA is asking grant recipients to self-identify any USDA-funded projects, inclusive of source(s) or type(s) of funding, including in-kind support, that is believed to meet or has the potential to meet the dangerous gain-of-function definition. [Read more about how, what and when to report this information.](#)

Congress Must Reaffirm EPA Authority Over Pesticide Labeling Laws

The six National and Regional Weed Science Societies, along with 350 plus other agricultural and pesticide stakeholders [sent a letter to House and Senate leaders](#) expressing our growing concerns that some states have begun to regulate pesticides in a manner contradicting decades of scientific guidance from EPA.

The Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) establishes EPA as the authority for making decisions on how pesticides should be labeled and used. While states are permitted to regulate the sale and use of pesticides under FIFRA (sections 24(a) and 24(c)), they are preempted from creating additional labeling requirements or requiring different labels and packaging (FIFRA 24(b)).

A lot of this goes back to California and the decision in 2017 to require warning labels for glyphosate. California listed glyphosate as a known carcinogen despite the EPA (and the rest of major regulatory bodies in the world conclusions that it was not. To that end, we strongly urge Congress to enact the [Agricultural Labeling Uniformity Act](#) (note- this was introduced in the last session of Congress as HR 4288. It has not been re-introduced yet in this Congress).

Thematic Assessment of Invasive Alien Species and their Control

The IPBES Thematic Assessment of Invasive Alien Species and their Control was accepted and its summary for policymakers was approved in 2023. The Thematic Assessment of Invasive Alien Species and their Control is the result of four years of work by 86 experts from 49 countries, and synthesizes information from over 13,000 references into a comprehensive scientific assessment and concise summary document for policy makers. The complete assessment, comprised of six chapters, and its summary for policymakers are at <https://www.ipbes.net/ias>

Website that Lists Noxious Weeds in each US State and Canadian Province Now Available

Mohsen B. Mesgaran and his team at UC-Davis have launched a website that provides lists of noxious weeds for each U.S. state, as well as provinces and states in Canada and Australia: <https://regulatedplants.unu.edu/>

They are planning to expand the database to include other countries and add ecological information, management guidelines, and photos for each weed species in future releases. For the U.S. list, they have also conducted a quantitative analysis of noxious weed sales on Amazon and eBay, which will be out soon. Based on their analysis, over one-third of these noxious weeds are available for sale on Amazon and eBay!

VanGessel Honored with the IR-4 Project SOAR Award

The [SOAR Award](#) honors external partners of the USDA IR-4 Project who exemplify the areas of Service, Outreach, Altruism and Research (SOAR), while supporting specialty crop growers and the mission of The IR-4 Project.



Dr. Mark VanGessel, Professor and Extension Specialist – Weed Science and Crop Management at the University of Delaware is a legendary weed scientist and invaluable IR-4 collaborator who has earned national and international prominence for his excellence in research, and his ability to translate his findings into impactful education and management tactics. The IR-4 community has greatly benefited from VanGessel's commitment to service, outreach, altruism and research.

VanGessel was presented with the 2024 IR-4 SOAR Award by Roger Batts (IR-4 Principal Biologist – Weed Scientist) at the Northeastern Weed Science Society meeting in January 2025 (pictured left).

SERVICE

VanGessel has served specialty crop growers and IR-4 in a multitude of ways—in the field and beyond. He has organized countless twilight tours, field days, and group events to educate growers, researchers, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) employees. As Delaware's liaison with EPA, Mark has continually been involved in IR-4's annual EPA/USDA specialty crop tours. He has also been a mentor to many students and emerging weed scientists.

OUTREACH

VanGessel has developed two websites designed to foster cooperation, communication and education: UD Weed Science and GROW-Integrated Weed Management. He has served as an editor, reviewer and panel member for numerous peer-reviewed journals. His list of Extension publications is extensive. He is also an editor and contributor to the Mid-Atlantic Commercial Vegetable Production Recommendations.

ALTRUISM

VanGessel is described as kind, patient, smart, and always willing to help a colleague or a grower in need. His expertise is vital to the young professionals he mentors, as few weed scientists today are solely focused on specialty crops. He is known for being generous with his guidance—always going above and beyond. Colleagues also note that VanGessel has spent significant time and resources addressing the pest management questions of Delmarva Peninsula specialty crop growers, whether or not he's been funded to explore those questions.

RESEARCH

VanGessel has conducted nearly 50 IR-4 trials, with 14 of those leading to registrations and about 15 more in the pipeline toward registration (and he has additional trials ongoing). Often, VanGessel has enhanced trials with additional treatments and/or crops, always willing to go the extra mile to meet growers' needs. Notably, he has contributed data from trials he conducted independently of IR-4, to help obtain more pest control tools for specialty crop growers.

Specifically, VanGessel was the first to identify glyphosate-resistant horseweed in Delaware, and he developed innovative strategies to manage it. He also tackled other difficult weeds like Palmer amaranth, Texas panicum, tall waterhemp, and common ragweed.

IR-4 celebrates VanGessel's leadership in the weed science field and his vital role in the specialty crop community. His work clearly exemplifies the spirit of the SOAR Award through his service, outreach, altruism and research.

Lee Van Wychen, Ph.D.

Executive Director of Science Policy

Weed Science Society of America

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Meetings of the National and Regional Weed Science Societies

Jul. 14 - 17, 2025 Aquatic Plant Management Society (APMS), Providence, RI www.apms.org

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, 2025 Western Society of Weed Science (WSWS), Tucson, AZ www.wsweedscience.org