

WSSA WASHINGTON REPORT

June 15, 2026

Lee Van Wychen

Presidents Fly-in to DC: April 20-24, 2026

We had 10 weed science society presidents and special representatives fly into Washington for a record number of meetings both on and off Capitol Hill including 50 congressional visits. During some time slots we had four meetings at once but with 10 us, we could divide and conquer.



Left to right: John Byrd- WSSA EPA Liaison, Shawn Askew- SWSS President, Ian Burke- WSSA President, Katelyn Venner- NEWSS President, Dawn Refsell- WSSA President elect, Lee Van Wychen- Executive Director of Science Policy, **Scott Hutchins- USDA REE Under Secretary**, Byron Sleugh- WSSWS President-elect, Brett Miller- NCWSS President, Todd Baughman- WSSA NIFA Fellow, Mark Bernards- NCWSS Past President, **Steven Mirsky- USDA Director of Digital Agriculture**.

Our main objectives for the week included:

1. Support the USDA NIFA IR-4 Project at \$16 million in FY 2027

- The IR-4 Project has been flat-funded at \$15 million since FY 2023, despite rapidly growing demand.
- The IR-4 Project, established by USDA in 1963, generates the residue, efficacy, and crop safety data required to register pest management tools for specialty crops. These crops contribute approximately \$9 billion annually to U.S. GDP and support over 110,000 jobs, representing an estimated 600:1 return on federal investment.
- Demand for IR-4 research far exceeds available resources. Each year, the program receives roughly 200 research requests, but current funding allows support for only about 40. Modest growth to \$16 million would help close this gap and ensure continued access to safe, effective pest management tools for specialty crop growers.

2. Support the USDA NIFA Crop Protection and Pest Management (CPPM) Program at \$22 million in FY 2027

- The President's FY 2027 Budget Request eliminates the CPPM program. CPPM has been flat-funded at \$21 million since FY 2023.
- CPPM addresses real-world weed, insect, and disease challenges through applied, science-based solutions grounded in Integrated Pest Management (IPM). The program supports:
 - Regional and state Extension IPM specialists, and
 - A competitive grants program that delivers practical, field-ready solutions.
- Eliminating CPPM would significantly weaken the nation's IPM infrastructure, reduce grower access to timely pest management guidance, and undermine progress on resistance management and sustainable crop protection.

3. Support Section 10205 – Uniformity of Pesticide Labeling in the House Farm Bill (H.R. 7567)

- Under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conducts a rigorous, science-based review to ensure pesticides meet federal standards for human health and environmental safety before registration.
- FIFRA Section 24 allows states to regulate pesticide use within their borders, but Section 24(b) preserves national uniformity by prohibiting states from imposing labeling or packaging requirements that differ from the EPA-approved label.
- Section 10205 reaffirms this long-standing principle of label uniformity, ensuring that pesticide labels remain:
 - Science-based
 - Nationally consistent
 - Clear and enforceable for growers, applicators, and regulators

4. The Weed Science Societies Support the Following EPA Regulatory Priorities

- A clean, bipartisan PRIA 6 reauthorization
 - Focused on regulatory performance, predictability, and implementation efficiency, without non-germane policy amendments.
- Adequate funding for EPA's Office of Pesticide Programs (OPP)
 - Sufficient resources are needed for staffing, technology upgrades, and process improvements to meet statutory deadlines for both PRIA and non-PRIA actions. CropLife America and the PRIA Coalition have submitted FY 2027 appropriations requests supporting \$166 million for OPP.
- Continued refinement of EPA regulatory processes
 - To ensure timely completion of regulatory actions and elimination of the existing registration and review backlog.

Press release on the week's activities: [WSSA Promotes its Core Priorities in Washington D.C.](#)



Left to right: Mark Bernards- NCWSS Past President, John Byrd- WSSA EPA Liaison, Shawn Askew- SWSS President, Lee Van Wychen- Executive Director of Science Policy, Byron Sleugh- WSSS President-elect, **Senator Joni Ernst- Iowa**, Dawn Refsell- WSSA President elect, Brett Miller- NCWSS President, Katelyn Venner- NEWSS President, Ian Burke- WSSA President, Todd Baughman- WSSA NIFA Fellow.



Left to right front row: John Byrd- WSSA EPA Liaison (BTW, - John's wooden bow ties made of rare tree species were a hit all week), Todd Baughman- WSSA NIFA Fellow, Lee Van Wychen- Executive Director of Science Policy, Mark Bernards- NCWSS Past President, Byron Sleugh- WSWWS President-elect.

Back row: Dawn Refsell- WSSA President elect, Brett Miller- NCWSS President, Shawn Askew- SWSS President, Ian Burke- WSSA President, Katelyn Venner- NEWSS President.



Left to right: Katelyn Venner- NEWSS President, Todd Baughman- WSSA NIFA Fellow, Shawn Askew- SWSS President, Brett Miller- NCWSS President, Byron Sleugh- WSWS President-elect, John Byrd- WSSA EPA Liaison, Mark Bernards- NCWSS Past President. Dawn Refsell- WSSA President-elect, Ian Burke- WSSA President. A serious, but fun loving group ready for the next batch of Congressional visits. Note the tote bags of **weed bingo** with Bernards and Askew. Always a popular hit on Capitol Hill.



Doing the Capitol Hill march- Left to right: Shawn Askew- SWSS President, Brett Miller NCWSS President, Dawn Refsell- WSSA President-elect, Byron Sleugh- WSWS President-elect and Mark Bernards- NCWSS Past President. Note- the Jefferson Library of Congress building is in the background.



Having a little fun at a Washington Nationals game on a Monday night before we got down to business. Thanks to Dawn for organizing that. Ian's Atlanta Braves triumphed. Left to right: Lee Van Wyche, Executive Director of Science Policy; Todd Baughman, WSSA-NIFA Fellow, John Byrd- WSSA EPA Liaison; and **Screech**- the 6'2" bald eagle and official mascot of the Washington Nationals.



A busy meeting at the EPA. Left to right: Ian Burke- WSSA President, Mark Bernards- NCWSS Past President, Byron Sleugh- WWSW President-elect; Kately Venner- NEWSS President; Rebecca Haynie- CropLife America Director of Science Policy; Shawn Askew- SWSS President; Dawn Refsell- WSSA President-Elect; Bill Chism- WSSA Director of Regulatory Policy; Venus Welch- White- Director of Government Relations for CropLife America; **Kyle Kunkler- EPA Deputy Administrator for the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention**; Todd Baughman- WSSA NIFA Fellow; Mark Bernards- NCWSS President; and John Byrd- WSSA EPA Liaison. Missing from photo were **Ed Messina- EPA's Director of the Office of Pesticide Programs** and Stanley Culpepper- WSSA's Chair of the Science Policy Committee.

HHS and EPA to Provide New Money for Innovative Weed Management Technologies

On February 27, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), EPA, and USDA announced funding for plans to increase innovative weed management and regenerative agriculture techniques.

EPA will provide \$30 million for a “Grand prize challenge” for cost-effective alternatives to pre-harvest desiccation use of pesticides, which is a potential contributor to human exposure. This challenge will lead to reduced usage of pesticides while providing new innovative tools for farmers to use. Read more [HERE](#).

Under the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) will provide **\$100 million** “to identify new and innovative and cost-effective technologies that reduce reliance on chemical crop protection tools in order to improve human health, including the health of farmers, such as ***electrothermal and electrical weeding technologies, robotic weeding systems, precision mechanical weed control, thermal weed control, biological and non-toxic herbicides, mulching systems, and integrated systems.***”

Stanley Culpepper and I have had a couple meetings with ARPA-H in past two days and they are on a tight timeline (2 weeks) to generate new technology in the categories mentioned above. They would like a page summary of these ideas and are looking for future deliverables, not policy proposals. This could a great opportunity for weed science to advance new and upcoming technologies. If you are interested in contributing. **Please let Stanley or I know ASAP.**

APMS Fly-in to Washington DC during June 2-4, 2026



Time at the Pentagon with the Army Corps of Engineers. Only three of got to attend the meeting, but Troy, Rob and Gray represented APMS proudly. Left to Right: Gray Turnage- Mississippi State University; Troy Goldsby- Aqua Services, A Jones Lake Management Partner, and Rob Richardson- North Carolina State University.



Getting ready for a meeting with the **head of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Brian Nesvik**. Left to right: Mark Heilman-SePRO, Gray Turnage- Mississippi State University and Troy Goldsby- Aqua Services, A Jones Lake Management Partner.

During June 2-4, the Aquatic Plant Management Society (APMS) held its fly-in into Washington DC. APMS leadership included Mark Heilman with SePRO, Troy Goldsby- Aqua Services, A Jones Lake Management Partner, Gray Turnage with Mississippi State University and Rob Richardson with North Carolina State University. They had meetings with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and members of Congress.



Troy, Rob and Gray met at the Pentagon with senior leadership and key administrators within the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to discuss the continued importance of the Aquatic Plant Control (APC) Research Program. While aquatic plants may not immediately come to mind when considering national infrastructure priorities, invasive aquatic vegetation can have significant impacts on navigation, water supply, hydropower generation, flood control, recreation, fisheries, and ecosystem health throughout the U.S.

Authorized under Section 104 of the River and Harbor Act of 1958, the APC program remains the nation's only federally authorized research and development program

dedicated specifically to invasive aquatic plant management. For nearly seven decades, the program has provided the scientific foundation for developing, evaluating, and implementing effective management strategies for some of the country's most problematic aquatic invasive species.

They also met with Brian Nesvik, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to discuss support for the agency's Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Rapid Response Fund and opportunities to improve collaboration on consultations related to invasive aquatic plant management within critical habitat areas.

The AIS Rapid Response Fund was established as a \$4 million pilot program through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and has already supported successful responses to multiple newly discovered aquatic invasive plant populations.

We also had a half dozen meetings on Capitol Hill or virtually with key staff from the House and Senate discussing appropriations and Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) reauthorization issues.

Among the issues discussed was support for key EPA regulatory activities and programs, including:

- Reauthorization of a clean, bipartisan Pesticide Registration Improvement Act (PRIA 6) focused on maintaining regulatory performance, predictability, and implementation efficiency.
- Sufficient funding for the EPA Office of Pesticide Programs (OPP) to hire staff and implement technology and process improvements necessary to meet statutory deadlines for both PRIA and non-PRIA actions. CropLife America and the broader PRIA Coalition have requested \$166 million in FY27 appropriations to support these efforts.

USDA Announces the Creation of the National Proving Grounds Network

On April 7, USDA's Research, Education, and Economics Under Secretary Dr. Scott Hutchins announced the launch of the USDA National Proving Grounds Network for AgTech (NPG-Ag), a nationwide initiative designed to rigorously evaluate agricultural technologies under real-world U.S. farming and ranching conditions.

The initiative will be spearheaded by USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS), working in coordination with other USDA research agencies. **Dr. Steven Mirsky** will serve as the Director of Digital Agriculture, a position that reports directly to the ARS Administrator Joon Park. Grand Farm, a North Dakota-headquartered AgTech ecosystem and innovation testbed, will serve as the USDA's National Program Manager, alongside land-grant universities across the country that will serve as primary research and testing partners.

As chairman of the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Committee, Sen. Hoeven (R-ND) has secured \$11 million for the cooperative agreement to date, which helped secure Grand Farm's role as USDA's National Program Manager. This includes \$2 million in additional funding that Hoeven provided in FY 2026 to create an ARS work site at Grand Farm, which USDA is utilizing to establish the Program Management Office for the NPG-Ag. [Read more here.](#)

Weed Science Societies Support Letter on Restructuring of USDA REE Mission Area

The six national and regional weed science societies joined 50 other stakeholder organizations in a letter to the House and Senate Agriculture Committees raising concerns about recent changes within USDA's (USDA) Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area.

The letter warns that significant staffing reductions across REE agencies--including the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), Economic Research Service (ERS), and National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)--combined with proposed laboratory closures and reorganization efforts, risk undermining the nation's agricultural research capacity. In addition, the signatories point to delays in distributing congressionally appropriated research funds and inconsistent agency directives as factors disrupting ongoing research projects, slowing grant processing, and affecting university-based agricultural science programs.

The coalition urges Congress to conduct oversight hearings, require detailed accounting of workforce and funding disruptions, and ensure transparent implementation of any restructuring within USDA's REE mission area. [The letter can be found here.](#)

Meet the 2026-2027 Science Policy Fellows

Sally Reed is a second-year Ph.D. student in Plant, Soil, and Environmental Sciences with a concentration in Weed Science at the University of Tennessee under the advisement of Dr. Larry Steckel. Her dissertation research focuses on understanding and overcoming Group 27 herbicide resistance in Palmer amaranth.



Sally earned her B.S. in Crop Sciences from the University of Illinois. Beginning in high school, she spent her summers working for Monsanto and later Bayer, where she gained experience across multiple facets of row crop agriculture, from field research and agronomy to precision agriculture and supply chain operations. These experiences cultivated her interest in weed science and the challenges facing modern crop production. She then earned her M.S. in Plant Sciences from the University of Tennessee, where her thesis, *"Optimizing Corn Production in Tennessee: Enhancing Yield Potential and Nitrogen Use Efficiency,"* provided a systems-level perspective on crop production before she pursued her Ph.D. in Weed Science.

Through her work, Sally aims to develop practical strategies to help producers address herbicide resistance and preserve the long-term effectiveness of herbicides. Her passion lies in bridging the gap between research, policy, and practice to support informed decision-making in agriculture. Sally is excited to serve as a Science Policy Fellow and looks forward to learning from and contributing to discussions surrounding agricultural and pesticide policy and its role in supporting the production of food, fiber, and fuel. She extends her gratitude to the WSSA and the Science Policy Committee for their continued support of student engagement in science policy.

Jacob Felsman is a third-year Ph.D. student at Michigan State University under the supervision



of Dr. Christy Sprague. Jacob's dissertation focuses on the diversification of integrated weed management in Michigan's dry edible bean production. He received his B.S. in Crop Sciences from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. While completing internships in the crop protection sector, he grew an interest in weed science. Upon completion of his B.S., he went on to pursue his M.S. in Agronomy at the University of Wisconsin-Madison under the direction of Dr. Rodrigo Werle. Jacob's goals through his research are to help crop producers diversify their weed management practices to be more resilient agronomically and environmentally,

and to maximize profitability. Through this opportunity, Jacob is looking forward to learning more about the intersection of public policy and the scientific/agricultural sectors. Jacob would like to extend his gratitude to his advisors and mentors, past and present, for their guidance. He also thanks the WSSA for providing experiences like the Science Policy Fellowship that help students grow both personally and professionally.

CropLife America & RISE Regulatory Conference Highlights

The annual CropLife America and RISE Regulatory Conference took place in Arlington, Virginia, from May 13–15, 2026 bringing together stakeholders from industry, academia, government, and regulatory agencies to discuss emerging issues in pesticide policy and regulation. Topics ranged from MAHA initiatives and Endangered Species Act (ESA) implementation to digital labeling, artificial intelligence, fluorinated pesticides, and updates from the EPA's Office of Pesticide Programs.

Throughout the conference, a recurring theme was the importance of collaboration. As agriculture faces increasingly complex scientific and regulatory challenges, discussions emphasized the need for industry, academia, growers, regulators, and government agencies to work together to develop practical solutions. There was also a strong sense that science and regulation should not be viewed as barriers to innovation, but rather as important tools for shaping the future of agriculture.

Many sessions focused on the challenges and opportunities associated with bringing innovative technologies to agriculture while navigating an increasingly complex regulatory landscape. Discussions emphasized the importance of finding solutions that are rooted in sound science while remaining practical and workable for growers. Updates from EPA leadership and the

Office of Pesticide Programs reflected ongoing efforts to modernize regulatory processes, including improvements to submission systems and the exploration of digital labels.

The conference also featured sessions on fluorinated pesticides and PFAS, highlighting the intersection of science, regulation, and public perception. Discussions emphasized the complexity of these topics, including differing definitions, evolving regulatory approaches, and the challenges of communicating nuanced scientific information to a broad audience. As interest in these chemistries continues to grow, effective communication and collaboration among stakeholders will remain essential.

A key takeaway from the conference was that while the agricultural industry has made tremendous advances in science and innovation, it has not always communicated those advances effectively to consumers and other stakeholders. As a result, scientists, regulators, growers, and industry leaders have an important opportunity to engage more proactively and ensure that discussions surrounding agriculture are grounded in clear, accessible, and evidence-based information.

Overall, the conference reinforced that the future of agriculture will depend not only on innovation, but also on collaboration and communication. Addressing the challenges associated with producing food, fiber, and fuel will require continued engagement across disciplines and a shared commitment to science-informed decision making.

USDA Finalizes NEPA Rule

On April 7, Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins announced the USDA has finalized a rule modernizing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations. This final rule adopts the changes introduced in the interim final rule published on July 3, 2025, which consolidated seven agency-specific NEPA regulations into a single, department-wide framework, reducing the overall volume of regulations by 66%.

NEPA requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects and any related social and economic effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions. These actions can include permit applications, federal land management actions and construction of highways and other public facilities.

Since last July, agencies at USDA have shown they can reduce environmental review timelines by up to 80%. Secretary Rollins says these faster, more efficient reviews are saving the department millions in taxpayer dollars. The quicker reviews mean the loans, critical infrastructure and forest health projects that rural communities, farmers, and ranchers depend on can move forward sooner.

House Interior and Environment Appropriations Bill Approved.

The House Appropriations Committee recently approved the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, which would reduce funding for the EPA by roughly 20%, including a 29% cut to its Science and Technology account. However, on the bright side, there is a \$3

million increase for EPA's Office of Pesticide Programs (OPP), which is an area we focused on for our Capitol Hill visits. Several Department of the Interior agencies would also receive modest reductions, including the U.S. Geological Survey (-3.7%), National Park Service (-1%), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (-5%), and Bureau of Land Management (-4.4%). The measure advanced on a 35-27 vote.

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

Jul. 13 - 16, 2026 Aquatic Plant Management Society (APMS), Phoenix, AZ www.apms.org
Dec. 7 - 10, 2026 North Central Weed Science Society (NCWSS), Columbus, OH www.ncwss.org
Dec. 7 - 10, 2026 Northeastern Weed Science Society (NEWSS), Columbus, OH www.newss.org
Jan. 25 - 28, 2027 Southern Weed Science Society (SWSS), Corpus Christi, TX www.swss.ws
Feb. 8 - 11, 2027 Weed Science Society of America (WSSA), Denver, CO www.wssa.net
Mar. 8 - 11, 2027 Western Society of Weed Science (WSWS), Irvine, CA www.wsweedscience.org