



Research and the 2007 Farm Bill

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Policy White Paper
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The agricultural research we invest in today will determine who benefits from the outcomes of that research and what agriculture will look like in the future. The Research Title of the Farm Bill offers an opportunity to help shape the agriculture of the future and to instill principles of fairness and balance into our research agenda. The needs of small and mid-sized family farms and ranches, new generation co-ops, small non-farm businesses are unique and underserved under today's research agenda.

We propose to change that trend to establish a reinvestment in rural areas with the passing of the Research Title of the 2007 Farm Bill. We propose more research focus on increasing the profitability of small and mid-sized farms and ranches, and more research investment in non-farm entrepreneurship and economic development strategies that work for rural areas. We also propose increased investment in public plant and animal breeding—especially for sustainable and organic systems, an underserved area.

The National Research Initiative (NRI) and a program now integrated within NRI (formerly named the Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems—IFAFS) should target an increased share of funding to these areas.

Of most concern to our interests are the NRI program areas relating to development of non-farm microenterprise and other rural development strategies, public plant and animal breeding, farm/ranch profitability, agricultural systems, natural resources, and environmental quality. These areas are now receiving little or no funding under NRI.

The 2007 Research Title of the Farm Bill should focus on the following:

National Research Initiative Funding Investments and Focus

- The NRI should focus 33 percent of its funding on outcome oriented research much like that funded by the former IFAFS to improve future food production, family farm and ranch profitability, environmental performance, and non-farm microenterprise and other rural economic and community development strategies.
- We suggest the **Enhancing the Prosperity of Small Farms & Rural Agricultural Communities 66.0 program** of NRI be increased from \$5 million biennially to \$9 million annually.

In making NRI grants to address "farm efficiency and profitability," including "the viability and competitiveness of small and medium-sized dairy, livestock, crop, and other commodity operations," USDA should solicit proposals benefiting the full range of small and medium-sized operations, not limiting proposals to a small farm focus only, and to solicit proposals related to self employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for new and beginning farmers and ranchers (Note: the quotes are direct quotes from IFAFS statute).

In making grants to address rural economic and community development, USDA should include agriculturally-based development, with particular attention to new markets, locally-owned value-adding enterprises, value chains that allow the passage of value from the consumer to the farmer, and self employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.

- A new program within NRI for Long Term Agro-ecosystems Research should be funded on an annual basis at no less than \$20 million.
- Increase support within the NRI for public plant and animal breeding for sustainable and organic systems. Specifically include provisions for this type of research in the request for applications in the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service's National Research Initiative. These programs should emphasize plant and animal breeding focused on local and regional adaptations for increased environmental benefits, food quality, pest and pathogen resistance, etc.

Recommendations for Reinvigorating Public Plant and Animal Breeding

Primary goals of the U.S. agricultural research and policy programs should include: protecting genetic diversity, developing new plant and animal varieties that meet the needs of tomorrow's agriculture—particularly those of sustainable and organic production systems, and maintain a diverse, independent farming sector.

- Increase financial and personnel support for the collection, preservation and evaluation of germplasm collections and encourage increased public use of the rich sources of genetic diversity in the U.S. germplasm collections.
- Reestablish and implement the National Genetic Resource Program from the 1990 Farm Bill.
- Establish a program area within USDA's Agricultural Research Service for long-term research on plant and animal breeding, including the development of finished varieties.
- Link existing competitive research and extension grants and rural development programs to food and agricultural systems that promote environmental stewardship and small and mid-sized farm profitability, genetic resource preservation, and participatory animal and plant breeding initiatives.
- Increase public funding and other incentives for Land Grant Universities, including the 1890 and 1994 institutions, and for non-governmental organizations to maintain viable training and research programs for undergraduate students in the basics of classical plant and animal breeding. These programs should also be sensitive to the employment potential and needs of both the private and public sector job markets.
- Establish incentive programs for farmers and farmer associations to participate in testing, selection, seed increase, and evaluation of plant varieties in germplasm repositories.
- Increase funding for public breeding projects that include partnerships with non-profit organizations and farmers and ranchers with a goal of increasing publicly available seeds and animal germplasm for sustainable and organic production systems, based on the models developed by the Farmer Cooperative Genome Project, the Public Seed Initiative funded by USDA's Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems, and the Organic Seed Partnership funded by USDA's Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative.

Additional Research and Miscellaneous Title Recommendations

- Support ATTRA at \$5 million annually
- Maintain and increase SARE funding
- Develop language to support sustainable and organic agriculture within the Hatch and Smith Lever Acts if opportunities arise.

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Established in 1973, the Center for Rural Affairs is a private, non-profit organization working to strengthen rural communities through action oriented programs addressing social, economic, and environmental issues.