

Hearing: To Review Implementation of USDA Farm Bill Research Programs

Last week, the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research met to review implementation of the USDA Farm Bill Research Programs. Democratic Members discussed concerns about the relocation of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and the Economic Research Service (ERS), while Republican Members applauded the cost-savings and closer proximity to the farmers the Agencies support. There was a consensus that assistance for 1890 Land-Grant Universities included in the 2018 Farm Bill was a promising step forward and support for extension programs at Land-Grant Universities are crucial to providing farmers with information and new technologies.

Subcommittee Chairwoman Stacy Plaskett (D-VI) raised concerns about employee vacancies of 65% for ERS and 76% for NIFA and the gap in grant recipient services. Rep. Anthony Brindisi (D-NY) commented on delays in NIFA funding for land-grant universities and Rep. Chellie Pingree (D-ME) questioned the 38 discontinued or delayed reports. Dr. Scott Hutchins, USDA's Deputy Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics, testified that there have been some minor setbacks, but USDA is working diligently to fill any gaps and grow the capabilities of those agencies. Reps. Doug LaMalfa (R-CA) and Vicky Hartzler (R-MO) and Ranking Member Neal Dunn (R-FL) underscored the agency's efforts, and Rep. Hartzler made specific reference to the collaboration with the University of Missouri.

Both Subcommittee Chairwoman Plaskett and Ranking Member Dunn highlighted the importance of the 1890 Land-Grant Universities. The Subcommittee Chairwoman commended the new program to support students at 1890 institutions in the 2018 Farm Bill. The Ranking Member applauded the funding increase for the research title and new programs, such as long deferred maintenance projects and language streamlining some of the onerous reporting requirements. Additionally, he also praised the provisions that provide resources that help create a level playing field for 1890 universities. Ranking Member Dunn also pointed out a discrepancy between 1862 and 1890 universities regarding the amount of time universities can carry over extension funding. Rep. James Comer (R-KY) mentioned the gap in funding availability between land-grant universities and non-land-grant colleges of agriculture, such as Murray State University in Kentucky. Rep. Comer emphasized the cutting-edge research the university is doing, especially on hemp, and felt that "it would be okay reevaluate some of the work of the land-grants and have a little more accountability and see if they are actually providing a good return on the investment."

Rep. Rodney Davis (R-IL) described the cooperative extension service as one of our nation's greatest resources for agriculture. Dr. Hutchins agreed that extension is critical and spoke about the possibilities for further building out the system, specifically the new opportunities for extension in precision agriculture. Rep. Jim Baird (R-IN) also praised the work of cooperative extension and encouraged growing future opportunities. Dr. Hutchins said that increased funding and collaboration across land-grant universities, ARS, NASS, ERS, and NIFA will widen the presence of extension throughout America. Ranking Member Dunn and Rep. TJ Cox (D-CA)

mentioned extension as a part of Citrus Disease Research and Extension Program and noted how critical the program and extension are to the citrus industry.

Rep. Davis focused on the importance of the Specialty Crop Research Initiative and raised concern about the matching requirement. He questioned why it is one of the few programs that does not give the Secretary authority to waive the match requirement, and asked what USDA is doing to fix the issue. Dr. Hutchins thanked the Committee for its work to include language in the continuing resolution to fix the issue and assured that USDA would work to grant the waivers and exceptions so that specialty crop research can continue.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

THE CORNERSTONE TEAM