



SUSTAINABLE AND ORGANIC RESEARCH

Sustainable Agriculture Agenda for the 2007 Farm Bill

Background:

The nation's investments in agricultural research and extension profoundly affect the future of the food and farming system and the viability of rural America. Our vision of that future is a sustainable system that is profitable, environmentally sound, family farm-based and socially just. The 2007 Farm Bill Research Title provides an opportunity to shape agriculture and instill principles of fairness and balance into the research agenda. It is also an opportunity to provide resources to foster sustainable agriculture systems that can help re-establish diversity in a farm and food system that is increasingly concentrated on a narrowing base of crops and livestock breeds.

Current agricultural research and extension is drastically underfunded in many critical mission-linked areas, including sustainable and organic agriculture, public plant and animal breeding, renewable energy and conservation, minority and beginning farmer outreach and development, agricultural and rural entrepreneurship, and food systems and public health. The demand for sustainably-produced agricultural products continues to grow, but sustainable agriculture research funding has been stagnant and even declining. Organic farming's share of federal research dollars is miniscule relative to the size of the organic sector. Publicly funded plant and animal breeding has declined so far that the United States is likely to lose a competitive edge if more public plant and animal breeding programs and personnel are lost. New markets, innovative farming practices, business models and cooperatives, and ideas for revitalizing rural communities offer incredible opportunities for the nation's farm and food system. More research in these areas is needed to take full advantage of these emerging opportunities.

Specific Reform Measures:

- Renew and revamp the ***Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems*** to provide increased funding for integrated, inter-disciplinary and outcome-based research, education and extension. The 2007 Farm Bill should retain the existing significant mandatory funding of \$200 million a year and not redirect its funding to other new research program proposals. The program should specifically address the needs of small and mid-size farm profitability, new and beginning farmers, agricultural and rural entrepreneurship, public plant and animal breeding and genetic conservation, ecosystem services, conservation effectiveness, climate change mitigation, renewable energy, innovative rural development strategies, food system-public health interactions, and local and regional food systems development.
- Increase support for organic farming research and extension so they receive a fair share of USDA resources, one reflecting the growth and opportunities in the organic sector. The ***Organic Farming Research and Extension competitive grants program*** should be increased to at least \$15 million a year. The ***Agricultural Research Service*** should be directed to start a new national program for organic agriculture, overseen by a new National Program Leader for Organic

Agriculture, with start-up funding of no less than \$25 million per year. Also, the ***Organic Production and Marketing Data Initiative*** should be reauthorized, with directives for the regular reporting of organic price information and other pertinent organic sector data.

- Reinvigorate public plant and animal breeding efforts by reauthorizing the ***National Genetic Resource program*** and increasing financial and personnel support for the collection, preservation, evaluation and increased public use of US germplasm collections. In addition, the ***National Research Initiative*** should be directed to add a new national program emphasis on classical plant and animal breeding.
- The successful but under-funded ***Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers*** (Section 2501) program designed to address the needs of minority farmers in developing successful operations and accessing government and other programs should receive funding equal to its full current authorized level of \$25 million a year and should emphasize in particular outreach through community-based organizations.

Talking Points:

- The Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems was created in 1998 to provide competitive grant funds for outcome-oriented research aimed at creating solutions for problems facing small farmers and rural communities. In spite of widespread support for the research conducted under this program, it has faced crippling budget cuts in the past several years. The outcome-based research supported by IFAFS is crucial to the achievement of a safe and sustainable food system, and the future of our rural communities.
- Organic research programs must receive an investment of Farm Bill research dollars consistent with the remarkable growth in this sector. The existing farm bill-funded competitive grants organic research program should be dramatically increased. The federal research arm, the Agricultural Research Service, currently lacks a national program in organic farming, so creating that program is the important first step that the new farm bill should undertake.
- Reinvigorating the federal commitment to public plant and animal breeding research is crucial to securing long-term food security and to ensuring that farmers have the tools necessary to incorporate new production systems tailored to meet emerging value-added and consumer-driven markets. Classic public plant and animal breeding research should become a priority program of the National Research Initiative and IFAFS. The National Genetic Resource Program, established in the 1990 Farm Bill, should be reauthorized to continue the compilation, preservation, and evaluation of germplasm collections.
- It is well-documented that minority participation in farm programs lags far behind that of non-minorities. Lack of access to these programs impedes the ability of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers to modernize their operation and improve profitability. The Outreach and Assistance (Section 2501) program has never been funded at the authorized \$25 million. The new farm bill should take corrective steps to bring this program to full fruition.