



**2015 Northeast Joint Summer Session**

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**“Agriculture as an Agent for Sustainable  
Economic Development in the Northeast”**

**NIFA Report**

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## 1. Budget

### a. **FY16 Appropriations:**

- The President sent his 2016 budget to Congress on Feb. 2, 2015.
- On **March 24**, Dr. Ramaswamy testified before the House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee regarding NIFA's proposed FY16 budget. The House Subcommittee markup of the Agriculture spending bill was released June 18, with the Senate Subcommittee mark-up anticipated next month.
- The President's budget for NIFA seeks an **increase of 16.5 percent** above 2015 discretionary levels.
- The 2016 budget proposals demonstrate **strong support for science** and for NIFA programs in particular. While some programs are reduced or eliminated, there continues to be tremendous support for the REE mission area and NIFA programs, as evidenced by the **2015 Congressional** appropriations and the **President's 2016** budget proposals.

These critical resources are necessary to:

- Develop a comprehensive approach to address the agriculture-health nexus,
  - Ensure the health and wellbeing of our nation by supporting cutting-edge research, education, and extension initiatives that further sustainable agricultural production systems and provide for an abundant and quality food supply,
- Enhance the renewable agricultural and forestry enterprises that underpin the bioeconomy, and
- Support resiliency of rural communities, create jobs, and promote economic wellbeing.

### b. **FY17 Budget:**

- We are in the early stages of preparation for the FY17 President's Budget
- The 2017 budget will build on the 2016 priorities of cross-agency Presidential and USDA initiatives, the Research, Education and Economics Mission Area, and providing support for NIFA's mission of advancing agricultural research, education and extension to solve societal challenges.

## 2. Grants Modernization

- NIFA has decided to partner with the USDA and use their grants management system,
  - i. USDA Grants.
- USDA Grants provides a robust financial management component.
- USDA Grants is the de facto grant management system for USDA. NRCS, FAS, FNS, AMS, RD, NIFA and Forest Service will use USDA Grants for grant making.

- USDA Grants is currently testing self-service capabilities for use by applicants. Several land-grant universities are part of the testing team.
- USDA Grants will be fully integrated with Grants.gov and will support the NIFA research and related forms.
- NIFA has just completed an eight month assessment phase of USDA Grants' current capabilities and NIFA's needs. Implementation planning is underway. An implementation schedule will be developed over the summer that will outline when each process will be brought on-line for use by staff and partners. Initial implementation will begin with Capacity Grants commencing in FY 2017.

**3. FY 16 Capacity Awards proposed publishing schedule and due dates:**

- FY 16 Capacity Awards proposed publishing and due dates
- 11 Capacity RFAs plan to be published no later than July 15'
  1. 1890 Extension RFA
  2. 1890 Research RFA
  3. Smith Lever and University of the District of Columbia consolidated RFA
  4. Special Needs RFA
  5. FERS Retirement Contributions RFA
  6. Hatch Regular RFA
  7. Hatch Multi State RFA
  8. McIntire Stennis RFA
  9. Renewable Resources Extension Act RFA
  10. Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program RFA
  11. Animal Health Disease and Research RFA (tentative)
- Two RFAs will now be combined: The District of Columbia Public Postsecondary Education Reorganization Act Program RFA and the Smith Lever Regular RFA
- Animal Health Disease and Research RFA may be held until NIFA receives a budget for the RFA
- The CSRS Retirement Contributions Program RFA published its last RFA in 2015. The program is now phased out. No future CSRS RFAs will be published in FY 2016

**4. Farm Bill Progress**

- a. The 2014 Farm Bill has its first anniversary on **Feb. 7**. The bill provided authority to NIFA to run nearly all its programs and restores **mandatory** funding – approx. \$900 million over five years.
  - The Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research was established last year, and the Board, on which Sonny Ramaswamy serves as an ex-officio member, is making good headway in laying out a strategic direction to invest leveraged resources in support of agricultural research and extension.
    - On June 11, the Foundation named Dr. Sally Rockey as its first executive director. Rockey is currently deputy director for extramural research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). She also served for 19 years with CSREES, NIFA predecessor.
  - NIFA welcomed three new land-grant institutions, including two 1994 institutions: College of the Muscogee Nation (Oklahoma) and Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College (Michigan), and the 1890 Central State University (Ohio).

- The Farm Bill reauthorized the mandatory programs, including the Specialty Crops Research Initiative (SCRI), the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI), the Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Initiative (BFRDP), the Biomass Research and Development Initiative (BRDI), and the Biodiesel Fuel Education Program. As a consequence, \$120 million of funding was reinstated for these critical research and extension projects. Awards data are available for all these programs on request.
  - We also launched a new \$35 million competitive grant program, the **Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program**, which is intended to enhance the purchase and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables by Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program participants. Our first grants were awarded on **April 1** for projects that will be undertaken in 26 states.
- b. **Matching Funds:** The 2014 Farm Bill added a **new requirement for financial matching** of some NIFA competitive grant awards. **No AFRI awards** are impacted by the new matching requirement. The new requirement affected grants made after Oct. 1, 2014. Guidance can be found on the NIFA website.
- c. **Centers of Excellence:** Based on stakeholder feedback and USDA approval, NIFA began issuing implementation guidance for the **Centers of Excellence** in our first RFAs last month.
- d. **Commodity Boards:**
- This is a result of the 2014 Farm Bill, which legislated that NIFA create competitive funding opportunities in partnership with Commodity Promotion Boards. In the very near future, NIFA will be seeking research topics that eligible state/national commodity boards are willing to co-fund. This will be announced via the Federal Register.
5. **NRC Report on AFRI:** The National Research Council's review of AFRI was very helpful in providing us a path forward. We provided both a written response in January as well as participated in a public webinar hosted by NRC. Our comprehensive response is on our website.
6. **AFRI Update**
- FY 2015:**
- AFRI was appropriated \$325 million in FY 2015, an increase of \$9 million over FY 2014. 7 AFRI Requests for Applications were released for new awards in December, 2014, to March, 2015 (ELI, Foundational, 5 Challenge Areas. NIFA did not release an RFA for new award in the Sustainable Bioenergy Challenge Area but is continuing to support the this challenge area through substantial investment in continuation awards made in prior years)
  - New programs initiated in FY 2014 (CARE and Exploratory Research in the Foundational Program, Water for Agriculture Challenge Area) are continued in FY 2015.
  - New program in FY 2015 is the Undergraduate Research and Extension Experiential Learning Fellowships program in the ELI Program RFA.
  - The FY 2015 Omnibus Appropriations Bill increased the set-aside for the Strengthening and Fellowships portion of the FASE program from 10% to 15% of the total appropriation for AFRI.

- At 25% of the FASE set-aside, the funding for graduate and postdoctoral fellowship is increased from 2.5% of AFRI appropriation to 3.75% of AFRI appropriation because of the increase in the FASE set-aside from 10% to 15%.

**FY 2016:**

The President's FY 2016 budget requests \$450 million for AFRI, an increase of \$125 million over FY 2015.

- The proposed budget of AFRI in FY 2016 includes Presidential initiatives of antimicrobial resistance) and pollinator health.
- The FY 2016 budget request for AFRI also includes initiatives for Feedstocks for Biobased Products in the Bioenergy Challenge Area and Plant and Animal Breeding (including phenomics) in the Food Security Challenge Area.

**7. Management Initiatives:** NIFA has made significant progress in our management initiatives to identify best practices and improve processes, including implementation of Continuous Process Improvement across the agency. Recent progress includes:

- 80 percent reduction in overtime costs from 2011
- 80 percent reduction in travel from 2010
- More than 16,000 attendees for 2014 peer panels and webinars
- Transitioning from the CRIS website to REEPort
- Digitizing paper records and space inventory
- Released Capacity Funds RFA before start of FY
- Use of Knowledge Discovery tools to more effectively analyze data and inform decision making.

**8. NIFA "Data Gateway":**

- On May 1, NIFA debuted a new online data tool on our public website that provides our stakeholder and partners, researchers, scientists, academia and interested others data related to NIFA grant funding.
- The Data Gateway incorporates a robust search capability that allows users to find a variety of funding data such as awards, knowledge areas, grantee type, fields of science, subjects of investigation, states, Congressional districts, and appropriation year.
- In addition, with data going back to 2002, users can view trends in grant awards.
- The Data Gateway supports NIFA commitment to increase transparency in its awards program.
- Future Enhancements to the Data Gateway are scheduled for Sept. 30, 2015, and include:
  - Search Projects -More flexibility to narrow search on project level detail such as: Publications, Patents, Progress, Impacts, and Project Participants by FTE's, CIP Codes and Undergraduate and,
  - Congressional District Heat Map - Additional drill down capability to such filters as: State, Congressional district, Organization Level (i.e. University of Florida), Award, Project.

**9. Consolidated Helpdesk Functions**

- NIFA has begun to phase in a tier one helpdesk for all applicant and awardee questions. Currently, the desk is supporting all pre-award and NIFA systems questions. Plans are underway

to expand support for NIFA's Office of Grants and Financial Management (OGFM) services which includes financial management.

#### **10. REEport**

- The new process for reporting on the REEport Financial Report (formerly known as the CRIS AD-419) was released through REEport last fall.
- Also, the new REEport Financial Report must be completed by all new non-Capacity grant projects awarded after October 1, 2014. These will come due on after the anniversary date of the project. Thus, the first ones will be due for FY 2015 grants, during FY 2016. This has been written into all terms and conditions for new awards made beginning October 1, 2014.

#### **11. Planning, Accountability and Reporting Staff update:**

- The Plan of Work Streamlining Panel (held June 16-18 at NIFA) has made some agreed upon preliminary recommendations which each Land-Grant representative will be taking back to their respective regions for further vetting. A final draft set of recommendations will be discussed by members of the panel in a meeting by the end of July. The final recommendation report will be completed and shared with NIFA by September 1.
- NIFA has implemented its new Strategic Plan this fiscal year. A report on its implementation will be included in the 2015 NIFA Annual Report to be published sometime next spring.
- NIFA will be publishing its 2014 NIFA Annual Report in the very near future (August?). It will be the first formal annual report in quite some time. It will include some statistics on awards and such as well as snippets of accomplishments and impacts.

#### **12. Revamped NIFA Website:** Our new public website was launched March 11.

- We've made major improvements to the look, feel, content, navigation, and searchability.
- New features on the web include:
  - A new grants search tool accessible from the homepage.
  - A new "Tools" section that explains the various NIFA web applications and databases,
  - An "Impacts" page that highlights the outcomes our grantees have achieved in finding innovative solutions in key areas such as food security, food safety, climate change, health, and more, and
  - A number of revised sections, including putting the complicated grants process into plain English so users can do exactly what they want—"Search for a Grant" or "Apply for a Grant"—within two clicks.
- The website is compatible with a variety of mobile devices.
- We are continuing to refine that our website and would appreciate your thoughts on how we can improve it.

#### **13. 2014-2018 Strategic Plan/Annual Report**

- Our strategic plan was published last fall. We're making great strides in meeting our objectives.
- Our priorities are clearly linked—in science, nature, and through the multitude of goods and services produced on our nation's working lands.
- We encourage you to provide us your input on how we're doing.

- Later this year, we will publish our first Annual Report for FY 14 that will highlight our progress and accomplishments.

#### **14. Regional Liaisons**

- In May, NIFA named a new slate of regional liaisons to APLU Administrative Groups.
- NIFA's regional liaisons represent the agency in meetings of the regional or administrative group by keeping abreast of issues, opportunities, people and programs in NIFA and presenting information related and responsive to the mission and interests of regional and administrative groups associated with APLU and other partners.
- This list is found on NIFA's website.

#### **15. Staffing Update**

- **Dr. Denise Eblen** joined NIFA April 20 as the Deputy Director of the Institute of Food Safety and Nutrition (IFSN). Previously, Dr. Eblen served as the acting Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Office of Public Health Science in the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS).

#### **16. Education in NIFA**

- In FY 2014, DOCE awarded approximately 300 grants through 20 grant programs with total appropriation of \$191.1 Million. Some of the highlights are:
- **NIFA education programs** directly (fellowships, assistantships) supports about 2,100 students and indirectly supports about 32,000 students annually.
- **The extension programs at Minority Serving Institutions** serve more than 7,000 farmers annually.
- **The 2014 Farm Bill** created a new 1890 institution, Central State University and two new 1994 Land-Grants, College of the Muscogee Nation and Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College.
- **The new competitive grant program** on Undergraduate Experiential Learning received more than 120 applications. Funding decisions are expected to be made in September 2015.
- The **2015-2020 Agricultural Employment Outlook** report, published in early 2015, estimates 57,900 high-skilled job openings annually in the food, agriculture, renewable natural resources, and environmental fields in the United States. However, on average, only 35,400 new graduates with a bachelor's degree or higher are expected; the resulting shortfall of 22,500 jobs are left to be filled by from graduates of allied disciplines, including biological sciences, engineering, health sciences, business, and communication.

