



Science Policy News

Entomological Society of America Science Policy News

March 2, 2015

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ESA IN D.C.

ESA Joins 2,100 Organizations on Letter Urging End to Sequestration

On February 18, a group of more than 2,100 national, state, and local organizations, including ESA, sent a letter to Congress and President Obama urging lawmakers to replace sequestration with a balanced approach to deficit reduction. The letter notes that nondefense discretionary (NDD) programs, including science, education, and job training, among others, have been cut too much already as part of efforts to reduce the deficit.

Since 2011, NDD funding has decreased by about 15 percent, adjusted for inflation; without action to stop sequestration in fiscal year (FY) 2016, NDD programs will be just 3.1 percent of GDP, the lowest level in 50 years. The letter argues that cuts hurt the nation's economic

recovery by hindering scientific discovery, eroding the national infrastructure, and weakening public health preparedness and response. The coalition of organizations on the letter urges Congress and the President to work together to end sequestration and ensure that the relief from sequestration is equally balanced between nondefense and defense programs.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The letter is available at <http://www.publichealthfunding.org/uploads/NDDUnited.SignOn.Feb2015.FINALwithSigs.pdf>.
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CONGRESSIONAL UPDATES AND NEWS

Congressional Committees Begin Holding Hearings on FY 2016 Budget

Following the release of the President's fiscal year (FY) 2016 budget request on February 2, congressional committees are beginning to hold hearings to discuss the funding and priorities for federal departments and agencies. The hearings help to inform members of Congress as they begin the budgeting and appropriations process.

On February 25, the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Energy and Power and the Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy held a joint hearing on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) fiscal year (FY) 2016 budget request, which totals \$8.59 billion. EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy testified about the proposed request, which is an increase of \$452 million from FY 2015. Republicans questioned McCarthy about President Obama's Clean Power Plan and whether new carbon regulating rules are within the authority of the agency under the Clean Air Act. Administrator McCarthy defended the plan as legal, and noted that it presents an economic opportunity for all states and the nation. McCarthy indicated the final rule will be released sometime in the spring.

On February 25, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture held a hearing to review the FY 2016 budget request for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Witnesses included Secretary of the Department of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, USDA Chief Economist Dr. Robert Johansson, and USDA Budget Officer Michael Young. On March 5, the same committee will hold a budget hearing focused on the research agencies with USDA.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The archived webcast of the EPA budget hearing is available at <http://energycommerce.house.gov/hearing/fiscal-year-2016-epa-budget>.
 - Information about the February 25 hearing on the USDA budget is available at <http://appropriations.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=394001>.
 - Information about the upcoming March 5 hearing on the USDA research budget is available at <http://appropriations.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=394022>.
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Bipartisan Engineering Biology Legislation Introduced in the House

On January 29, Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), Ranking Member of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology and Representative James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) introduced the *Engineering Biology Research and Development Act of 2015*. The legislation would create a “National Engineering Biology Research and Development Program” to oversee federal research and development in engineering biology. The legislation would develop a framework for coordinating federal investments in engineering biology; develop a national strategy; increase public-private partnerships; bolster education and training efforts for future engineering biology researchers; and “address any potential ethical, legal, environmental, and societal issues associated with engineering biology research.” The bill has been referred to the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology where it has not yet been considered.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The full text of the *Engineering Biology Research and Development Act of 2015* is available at http://democrats.science.house.gov/sites/democrats.science.house.gov/files/documents/Eng_Bio_Introduced_version.pdf.
- A press release announcing the introduction of the bill is available at <http://democrats.science.house.gov/press-release/ranking-member-johnson-and-rep-sensenbrenner-introduce-bipartisan-engineering-biology>.

Members of Congress Introduce Bills to Enable Federal Investment in NIH

On January 28, Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) introduced the American Cures Act, which would enable steady funding growth for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Defense Health Program, and the Veterans Medical and Prosthetics Research Program. Specifically, the bill would allow for an annual increase in appropriations for each agency and program at a rate of GDP-indexed inflation plus five percent. Unlike a previous version of the bill that was introduced by Senator Durbin during the last Congress, the current legislation would support the new investment by adjusting the budget caps mandated in the Budget Control Act.

On January 26, Reps. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), Brian Higgins (D-NY), and Peter King (R-NY) introduced the Accelerating Biomedical Research Act in the House. Similar to Senator Durbin’s legislation in the Senate, this bill would also create a budget cap adjustment for NIH, but it would allow the agency to receive a 10 percent increase in funding for the first two years and a roughly six percent increase each subsequent year through 2021. On February 5, Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Ranking Member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, introduced a companion bill in the Senate.

On January 29, Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) led the introduction of the Medical Innovation Act, joined by Senators Ben Cardin (D-MD), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), and Tammy Baldwin (D-WI). The bill would require pharmaceutical companies that reach settlements with the federal

government to reinvest a percentage of their profits into NIH. Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) subsequently introduced a similar bill in the House.

On February 5, Reps. Kathy Castor (D-FL) and G.K. Butterfield (D-NC) introduced the Permanent Investment in Health Research Act (H.R. 777). The bill would attempt to shield NIH from any future government shutdowns or spending cuts by removing the NIH budget from the annual discretionary appropriations process. Instead, NIH would be funded through automatic, or “mandatory” spending, which is how programs such as Medicare and Medicaid are funded.

While these bills are unlikely to pass, particularly considering the current budget constraints, they illustrate congressional interest in prioritizing support for biomedical research.

Sources and Additional Information:

- *The press releases announcing the introduction of Rep. DeLauro and Sen. Mikulski’s Accelerating Biomedical Research Acts are available at http://delauero.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1802:delauero-higgins-introduce-bipartisan-legislation-to-allow-increased-nih-funding&catid=2&Itemid=21 and <http://www.mikulski.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/mikulski-introduces-legislation-to-increase-americas-investment-in-nih-health-science-and-research-to-find-cures-save-lives-and-save-money>, respectively.*
- *The press releases announcing the introduction of Rep. Van Hollen and Sen. Warren’s Medical Innovation Acts are available at <http://vanhollen.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/van-hollen-warren-to-introduce-medical-innovation-act-to-increase> and http://www.warren.senate.gov/?p=press_release&id=714, respectively.*
- *The press release announcing the introduction of the Permanent Investment in Health Research Act is available at <http://butterfield.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/castor-and-butterfield-introduce-legislation-to-boost-america-s>.*

FEDERAL AGENCY AND ADMINISTRATION UPDATES AND NEWS

President Releases FY 2016 Budget Request

On February 2, the President released his fiscal year (FY) 2016 budget request detailing proposed spending levels for federal research, health, and education programs. While the President has proposed increased funding for core research agencies, whether Congress and the President can come to an agreement and change overall spending caps will have significant implications on how many of the proposed increases Congress can provide in the annual appropriations process. The requested increases for research, assessment, education, and infrastructure reflect areas of emphasis for the remaining two years of the Obama Administration and benchmarks for which congressional champions will advocate throughout the appropriations process.

Proposed agency funding levels of interest to ESA include:

- The **U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)** would be funded at \$1.5 billion. NIFA’s **Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI)** would be funded at \$450 million, which would be a significant increase of 38.5 percent over the FY 2015 enacted level of \$325 million. For the **Agricultural Research Service (ARS)**, the bill would provide \$1.398 billion, an increase of \$221 million (18.8 percent) over the FY 2015 enacted level. The request would provide \$20 million for new Competitive Capacity Award Program focusing on plant and animal breeding advances.
- The President’s FY 2015 budget request proposes \$8.6 billion for the **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**, which is an increase of \$451.8 million or 5.6 percent above the FY 2015 enacted level.
- The **National Science Foundation (NSF)** would receive \$7.724 billion overall, which would be a \$379.3 million (5.2 percent) increase above the FY 2015 enacted level. The President also proposed \$75.0 million in funding for the new Innovations at the Nexus of Food, Energy, and Waters Systems (INFEWS).
- The President’s FY 2016 budget request includes \$31.3 billion for the **National Institutes of Health (NIH)**, which is a \$1 billion or 3.3 percent increase above the FY 2015 level. Within NIH, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) would receive \$4.61 billion in FY 2016, an increase of 4.5 percent.
- The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** would receive \$7.0 billion in FY 2016, an increase of \$110.6 million above the FY 2015 enacted level.
- The Science and Technology (S&T) accounts at the **Department of Defense (DOD)**, comprised of defense basic research (6.1), applied research (6.2), and advanced technology development (6.3) accounts, would receive \$12.27 billion; an increase of 0.7 percent above the FY 2015 enacted level.

Source and Additional Information:

- The President’s FY 2016 Budget Request overview is available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Overview>; more detailed information is available at individual agency websites.

USDA NIFA Releases FY 2015 AFRI RFAs

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) recently announced a series of Requests for Applications (RFA) through the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), including the Food Security Challenge, Childhood Obesity Prevention, Foundational Program, and Water for Agriculture. In December, AFRI announced an RFA for the newly-titled “Food, Agriculture, Natural Resources and Human Sciences Education and Literacy Initiative,” previously the “Fellowship Grants,” which will accept proposals from undergraduate, graduate, and post-doc students. Details for each program RFA

are listed below. Each solicitation contains details about Centers of Excellence criteria, responding to a provision in the 2014 Farm Bill and building off of July 2014 NIFA stakeholder listening sessions.

Food Security

The Food Security program will fund research proposals in plant health, production and products; animal health, production, and products; food safety, nutrition, and health; and agriculture economics and rural communities. In fiscal year (FY) 2015, NIFA intends to award up to \$16.8 million for the Food Security Challenge and is soliciting proposals for the following priority areas: Agricultural Production Systems; Breeding and Genomics of Crops and Livestock; and National Strategy for Sustainable Crop and Livestock Production in the U.S. Details for the funding opportunity are below.

Letters of Intent: Due April 2, 2015.

Application Deadline: Full applications are due on June 4, 2015. Please read the RFA for full details.

Total Funding and Award Size: NIFA anticipates offering approximately \$16.8 million for new program grants.

Cost-sharing: A project that is commodity-specific and not of national scope would be required to match the USDA funds awarded on a dollar-for-dollar basis from non-federal sources.

Eligibility and Limitations: Eligible applicants include public and state institutions of higher education, private colleges and universities, non-profit organizations, for-profit organizations other than small businesses, small businesses, and individuals.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The RFA can be accessed at http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/rfas/pdfs/fy2015_afri_food_secur_fnl.pdf.
- The NIFA website can be found at <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/index.html>.
- More information on AFRI is available at <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/afri/afri.html>.
- The RFA for the Food, Agriculture, Natural Resources and Human Sciences Education and Literacy Initiative is available at http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/rfas/pdfs/15_AFRI%20ELI.pdf.

Childhood Obesity Prevention (COP)

The Obama Administration believes that obesity amongst children and adolescents (ages 2-19 years) is one of the top nutrition challenges facing the United States. Through this particular RFA, AFRI intends to make \$6 million available for research, education, and extension programs that target this issue. As such, the COP RFA seeks to combat the growing obesity challenge and reaffirms the Secretary of Agriculture and NIFA's commitments "to preventive nutrition and physical activity strategies that will reduce obesity and related chronic diseases, and thereby lower healthcare costs." In pursuit of this long-term outcome, projects must seek to contribute to the achievement of the following goals:

- “Generation of new knowledge about behavioral, social, cultural, and environmental factors that influence excessive weight gain by children and adolescents;
- Development of effective behavioral, social, and environmental interventions to increase dietary intakes of fruits and vegetables; increase the variety of vegetables in the diet and decrease dietary intakes of foods high in solid fats and added sugars; increase the number of children who meet guidelines for television viewing and computer use; increase physical activity in children; and ultimately to decrease the proportion of children and adolescents who are overweight or obese...
- Expansion of interventions proven effective and assessment of their impact; and
- An increase in the number of parents, caretakers, educators, practitioners, and researchers who receive the training and effectively model behaviors necessary to address the complex problem of childhood obesity prevention.”

Within this Challenge Area, AFRI will support: multi-function Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Projects; Food and Agricultural Science Enhancement (FASE) Grants; and conferences and/or workshops.” Specified program areas include: “Integrated Approaches to Prevent Childhood Obesity” and “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (SNAP & EFNEP): Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention: Regional Centers of Excellence (RNECE).”

Application Deadline: Applications are due April 23, 2015.

Total Funding and Award Sizes: Approximately \$6 million is expected to be made available for awards under this program. Award sizes and periods vary by project type but must not exceed \$1 million per year for five years.

Eligibility and Limitations: Eligible applicants include institutions of higher education and research organizations and institutions.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The complete RFA is available at http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/rfas/pdfs/fy2015_child_obes.pdf.
- Additional information on AFRI programs can be found at <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/afri/afri.html>.

Foundational Program

In FY 2015, NIFA intends to award up to \$116 million for agricultural production research, education, and extension projects that address several key topics identified by USDA. This solicitation also continues to provide support for two new program areas that were introduced in the 2014 Foundational Program RFA: the Critical Agricultural Research and Extension (CARE) program area and the Exploratory Research program area. CARE primarily supports projects that address major agricultural concerns with results that can be rapidly implemented by the producer. The Exploratory Research program provides proof-of-concept support for high-risk, high-reward research that has potential to lead to great agricultural advancements in the United States.

Letters of Intent: Varies by program area. Please see the full RFA for details.

Application Deadline: Varies by program area. Please see the full RFA for details.

Total Funding and Award Size: NIFA anticipates offering approximately \$116 million for awards under this solicitation. Award amounts vary by program area. Please see the full RFA for details.

Cost-sharing: A project that is commodity-specific and not of national scope would be required to match the USDA funds awarded on a dollar-for-dollar basis from non-federal sources.

Eligibility and Limitations: Eligible applicants include public and state institutions of higher education, private colleges and universities, non-profit organizations, for-profit organizations other than small businesses, small businesses, and individuals. Specific eligibility requirements vary by project type. Please see the full RFA for details.

Sources and Additional Information:

- The RFA can be accessed at http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/rfas/pdfs/fy2015_afri_foundational.pdf.
- Additional information on AFRI programs can be found at <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/afri/afri.html>.

Water for Agriculture

For fiscal year (FY) 2015, NIFA will contribute approximately \$9 million for the Water for Agriculture program. This is the second competition for the program that was originally floated to the scientific community in July 2013 when NIFA held a stakeholder listening session on the topic. This year's competition "focuses on solutions for conserving higher quality water and understanding the human behavior and its influence on decision making for agricultural water use" and supports related challenge area efforts in Agricultural Production, Climate Change, and Sustainable Bioenergy.

Letters of Intent: Letters of Intent are required and are due April 9, 2015.

Application Deadline: Applications are due on August 16, 2015.

Total Funding and Award Size: NIFA is soliciting multi-function Integrated Research, Education, and or/Extension Projects; FASE; and conference grants. Note that conference grants may not exceed \$50,000.

Eligibility and Limitations: Eligible applicants include institutions of higher education and non-profit organizations.

Sources and Additional Background:

- The RFA is available at http://www.nifa.usda.gov/funding/rfas/pdfs/fy2015_afri_water.pdf.

USDA Funds 22 New Projects to Fight Citrus Disease

In early February, Tom Vilsack, the Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), publicized that USDA is supporting 22 new projects addressing citrus greening, also known as *Huanglongbing* (HLB). These 22 projects are solution-oriented and focus on providing short-term or long-term tools and approaches to help citrus growers cope with the effects of citrus greening. In total, USDA will allocate \$30 million to fund the projects.

USDA's HLB Multiagency Coordination Group funded 15 of the short-term projects that focused on practical solutions like thermotherapy, methods to reduce pests, and industry best practices. The Specialty Crop Research Initiative Citrus Disease Research and Education (CDRE) program funded the remaining seven projects. These were long-term, research based projects that investigated topics like the effects of heat on productivity and species not affected by citrus greening.

Sources and Additional Information:

- A press release covering the announcement is available at http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentid=2015/02/0032.xml&navid=NEWS_RELEASE&navtype=RT&parentnav=LATEST_RELEASES&edeployment_action=retrievecontent.

FWS Announces Campaign to Protect Monarch Butterflies

In February, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service announced its new campaign to protect the monarch butterfly. The monarch butterfly population has been steadily decreasing in recent years and this decline is an indicator of the overall health of pollinators in the nation.

The Fish and Wildlife Service's campaign is comprised of several different initiatives, including a partnership with the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), a joint funding opportunity with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), and support for many local conservation projects across the nation. In particular, the Fish and Wildlife Service contributed \$1.2 million to the NFWF Monarch Conservation Fund, which will also be supported by private contributions. In addition, for the local conservation efforts, the Fish and Wildlife Service will allocate a total of \$2 million. This campaign follows the Fish and Wildlife Service's December release of a federal register notice on a petition to list the monarch butterfly under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Overall, the initiative is described as striving to "build a network of diverse conservation partners and stakeholders to protect and restore important monarch habitat, while also reaching out to Americans of all ages who can play a central role." Across all efforts, there is an emphasis on collaboration and a hope that these first steps will spark future partnerships and conversation efforts.

Sources and Additional Information:

- A press release covering the new initiative is available at <http://www.fws.gov/news/ShowNews.cfm?ID=6F984BBC-D85B-FEE8-4C58EF75037F8B59>.
 - More information on the Fish and Wildlife Service's efforts is available at <http://www.fws.gov/savethemonarch>.
 - The federal register notice is available at <http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=FWS-R3-ES-2014-0056-0001>.
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Congressional Research Service Releases Report on the Role of Pesticides in Bee Health

The Congressional Research Service (CRS), a nonpartisan agency within the Library of Congress, released a report on February 17 titled "Bee Health: The Role of Pesticides." The report provides an overview of research on pesticides, particularly on neonicotinoids, and their implications for the health of bees. The report found that the extent of harm pesticides can cause to bees remains unclear. While pesticides can have negative effects on bee health, it is still not possible to ultimately declare whether or not pesticides are the single or most significant cause of the decline in honeybee populations. *Sources and Additional Information:* The CRS report is available at <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43900.pdf>.

EPA Science Advisory Board Agricultural Science Committee Seeks Nominations

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) is soliciting nominations of scientific experts to serve on the new Agricultural Science Committee within the Agency's Science Advisory Board (SAB). Specifically, "the SAB Staff Office is seeking nominations of experts to serve on the SAB Agricultural Science Committee with demonstrated expertise in agriculture-related sciences, including: agricultural economics, including valuation of ecosystem goods and services; agricultural chemistry; agricultural engineering; agronomy, including soil science; aquaculture science; biofuels engineering; biotechnology; crop and animal science; environmental chemistry; forestry; and hydrology." Applications are due March 30 and can be submitted through the SAB website at <http://yosemite.epa.gov/sab/sabpeople.nsf/WebCommittees/BOARD>.

Sources and Additional Information:

- More information, including application details, is available at <https://federalregister.gov/a/2015-01276>.
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US and UK Establish Partnership on Animal Disease Research

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is partnering with the United Kingdom's Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) to support five research projects. These projects will be a part of the US-UK Collaborative Animal Health and Disease and Veterinary Immune Reagents program and investigate “high impact diseases and animal health issues.”

For these projects, NIFA will provide \$2.3 million and BBSRC will provide £2.3 million British pounds. In particular, these five projects will investigate “the development of immune reagents, breeding for genetic resistance to disease, studying the ecology of diseases spread by vector insects, and developing improved vaccines.” These projects offer an opportunity for new international collaborations and innovative discoveries that can help promote animal health.

Sources and Additional Information:

- A press release covering the partnership is available at <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentid=2015/02/0038.xml&contentidonly=true>.
- More information on the BBSRC is available at <http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/about/about-index.aspx>.



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