



Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

Working for public policies that support the social, economic and environmental sustainability of agriculture, natural resources and rural communities.

Research and Extension Policy Options for the 2007 Farm Bill

Why Now?

Agricultural research and extension is drastically underfunded in many critical 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, new farming practices, new business models and cooperatives, and new 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.

What We Need

The 2007 Farm Bill should establish a ***Farm, Food, and Rural Transitions Competitive Grants*** program with new, increased funding for integrated, inter-disciplinary, outcome-based research. A new regional ***Rural Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Facilitation*** program should be authorized and funded by the farm bill. The ***minority farmer outreach and assistance program*** should be more adequately



Photo: Practical Farmers of Iowa/ISU Field Day

funded. ***Organic research programs*** should receive a fair share of USDA resources reflecting the growth and opportunity of the organic sector. Funding to improve ***public plant and animal breeding programs*** should include increases for projects that focus on crops and breeds critical to sustainable and organic systems as well as on the collection, preservation, and evaluation of germplasm collections, the foundation of our food security.

Act Now

Ask your Senators and Member of Congress to pass a new farm bill now, without delay. Urge them to support the research and extension needs of rural communities, beginning and minority farmers, organic and sustainable agriculture, public plant and animal breeding, conservation and renewable energy, and food systems and public health. See other side for specific proposals.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION
Research and Extension Policy Options for the 2007 Farm Bill

SAC supports redirecting significant federal resources to the farm bill Research Title for programs that meet the research, extension, and outreach needs of small and mid-size farmers and ranchers and of rural communities wishing to grow small business and self employment opportunities, while also protecting rural environments and improving public health and nutrition. Funding for research and extension to improve the way we grow and raise our products and improve markets is critical to remaining competitive in domestic and world markets and ensuring the viability of family farms and ranches. Key components of this increased investment should include:

- **Farm, Food, and Rural Transitions Competitive Grants Program:** The 2007 Farm Bill should reinstitute significant mandatory funding for outcome-based integrated, interdisciplinary research, education and extension. 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.
- **Rural Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Facilitation Program:** By creating entrepreneurial networks and partnerships, this new program of regional, competitive grants would create jobs, spur community innovation, and increase the start-up rate and reduce the failure rate of small rural businesses.
- **Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers:** This successful program should receive funding equal to its full authorized level of \$25 million a year and should emphasize outreach through community-based organizations.
- **Organic Research Portfolio:** Organic research programs at USDA should be increased dramatically to at least 3 percent or more of the total research budget at USDA, consistent with the size and growth of the organic sector. 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.
- **Integrated Organic Program:** This competitive grants research and extension program should be expanded to at least \$15 million per year in farm bill funding, including increased emphasis on marketing, policy, economic research, and extension.
- **ARS National Program for Organic Agriculture:** 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.
- **Public Plant and Animal Breeding Research:** The National Genetic Resource Program should be reauthorized. Funding to improve public plant and animal breeding programs within USDA, ARS, Land Grant and other institutions, including non-profit organizations, should include increases for projects, programs and personnel that focus on crops and breeds critical to sustainable and organic systems. Funding for the collection, preservation, and evaluation of germplasm collections, including participatory farmer cooperative projects, should be significantly increased.



Photo Courtesy USDA ARS

For SAC's full Farm Bill Platform and for more information, see www.msawg.org.