

December 15, 2015
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1650 Pennsylvania Avenue NW.
Washington, DC 20504

Submitted via email to: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/webform/request-information-agricultural-innovation>

Re: Request to identify sources of agricultural innovation

The Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) welcomes the opportunity submit comments to the Science and Technology Policy Office to identify sources of agricultural innovation.

The Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) is a national, public-interest organization founded in 1990 to foster the improvement and widespread adoption of organic farming systems. The organization was founded as a response to rising demand for organic agriculture research, extension and education to meet the information needs of a growing community of organic farmers and to educate the public and policy decision makers about organic farming issues.

The essential challenge for all of agriculture is to make rapid advances in resilience despite the pressures of intensification. The most developed (or the least underdeveloped) extant systems integrating economic success with ecological performance and stable productivity are in fact certified organic systems, especially the most advanced/longest established production systems.

This is the case despite the historic underinvestment and nascent success of USDA organic research efforts compared to funding for conventional agriculture. Organic agricultural systems are by far the most easily leveraged platform for the rapid progress that must be made specifically in terms of soil carbon/health, pollinators, water pollution, drought resistance and other biological and climatological imperatives for this century's agriculture.

Government research and policy initiatives often play a key role in the adoption of new farming technologies and systems, which is why research funded by USDA is so important. The recently released survey by USDA shows no measurable increase in organic acreage in the U.S. which is counter to the current goal to increase the number of organic operations and is expanding programs and services for organic producers and handlers.

OFRF would like to respond to the following questions listed in the Federal Register notice.

1. Over the next ten years, what are the most important research gaps that must be addressed to advance agricultural innovation?
2. What resources are fundamental to addressing agricultural research needs?
3. What further training is needed among agricultural professionals to take advantage of advances in agriculture research?

The following research topics which would improve agricultural innovation are based on our surveys and OFRF and USDA/OREI/ORG funding programs, these include the following areas:

- Organic and sustainable farmers need access to germplasm that is unique to their management systems and to our changing climate. Unfortunately, in recent years, there have been fewer resources available for development of cultivars through public institutions. In Section 7406 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, the National Research Initiative was merged with the Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems to become the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). Congress included language within AFRI to make “conventional” plant and animal breeding a priority for AFRI research grants, consistent with the concerns expressed by the Appropriations Committee in preceding appropriations cycles. Unfortunately, USDA has made only modest progress toward addressing the classical breeding Farm Bill and appropriations directives. We ask that a high priority be placed on classical breeding and public cultivar development within their research programs.
- Provide research and educational information and training for new and transitioning farmers/ranchers entering the organic production arena.
- Provide dedicated funding through scholarships and fellowships for undergraduate and graduate students choosing to work in fields related to agriculture and specifically organic agriculture to support future teaching and technical careers.
- Explicatively expand the inclusion of organic agriculture research, education, and extension funding not only in the NIFA ORIE and ORG programs, but throughout the NIFA funded programs.

- Continue to provide information and economic support through other federal agencies, for example NRCS, RMA, FSA and AMS.
- Other critical research areas include: soil quality the biology and microbiology; soil health and nutrient cycling (including carbon), economic performance of organic systems; crop quality; organic food nutrition; weed population dynamics and management; livestock wellness and disease control. OFRF has been devoted to the scientific advancement of organic agriculture since 1990, and been a primary partner and integrator of both USDA and the private sector. We appreciate the opportunity to submit our comments to the Office of Science and Technology and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Brise Tencer
OFRF Executive Director