

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE RESEARCH AND
EXTENSION PRIORITIES: HEARING;
FIRST SESSION, MARCH 25, 1993;
SERIAL NO.103-7**

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U.S. Department of Agriculture Rese...

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS
AND NUTRITION
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED THIRD CONGRESS

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION PRIORITIES

THURSDAY, MARCH 25, 1993

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEPARTMENT
OPERATIONS AND NUTRITION,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:15 a.m., in room 1300, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Charles W. Stenholm (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Dooley, English, Volkmer, Holden, Lambert, Smith, Gunderson, Allard, Barrett, Ewing, and Kingston.
Staff present: Glenda L. Temple, clerk; Stan Ray, Joe Dugan, Merv Yetley, and Pete Thomson.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHARLES W. STENHOLM, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF TEXAS

Mr. STENHOLM. This public hearing of the Department Operations and Nutrition Subcommittee will now come to order.

Today we start a series of hearings looking at our Nation's agricultural research capacity. We are truly at a critical point in our Nation's history. Americans have increased concerns about food safety, the environment, and the economy. They are concerned about our production agricultural practices. Today's production system has served Americans well, but the priorities that were driving the system in the past are not necessarily the primary issues confronting producers and consumers today.

On the one hand, we still believe—and I certainly still believe—that we possess in America an agricultural system which is unmatched anywhere in the world. Our food supply continues to be the most wholesome, the most abundant, the safest, and the least expensive in the world. I am continually amazed at the resilience, the ingenuity, the initiative, and the ability to adapt that our farmers have. Commodity prices, though, continue to fall, production costs continue to rise, and yet the American farmer perseveres. This benefits all, as our food supply remains the least expensive in the world.

Yet, on the other hand, we are challenged. We're facing a consuming public which has grown both complacent and overreactive to the greatest food-producing system the world has ever known. The environment, water quality, the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides in the food supply, microbial contamination of meat, and biotechnology are all examples of issues where many consumers are

not just suspicious, but often in outright opposition to what production agriculture practices. It is interesting that while consumers claim to like farmers, they do not like what farmers do.

Compounding these is the rural development crisis brought on by much of the farm debt crunch of the past two decades. How do we develop agriculture that is not just sustainable and environmentally benign, but also profitable? Any discussion about setting research priorities at USDA must include the influence of our Federal budget deficit. Over the last 10 years, no Government Department, no function of our budget has taken more hits than agriculture. We have been asked year after year to bear more than our share of budgetary cuts. The President's budget reduction plan this year was no different and provides for some specific cuts in the research agencies at USDA.

In an era of declining budgets due to the deficit, we're going to have to do better research with less money by doing it more efficiently. This is going to force us to set better agricultural research priorities. How do we get there from here? How do we set research priorities for U.S. agriculture today? How do we include the concerns of both producers and consumers to forge an agenda for the 21st century? The role of technology transfer through extension and teaching is also essential. How do we maintain linkages between research and education programs when USDA's constituency has grown to include so many diverse groups other than production agriculture?

Those of us on the Department Operations and Nutrition Subcommittee are excited. Not only do we have jurisdiction for food safety, pesticides, and nutrition, but we oversee USDA research priorities as well. We plan to hold hearings assessing the needs of agriculture today and then, through research oversight, seek answers for the questions raised earlier.

Included in the hearing record today will be a number of diagrams describing the changes in funding which have occurred since 1985 at the Cooperative States Research Service. The Cooperative States Research Service is the agency at USDA which provides funding for our State and university land-grant colleges and the 1890 colleges and universities. Since 1985, formula funding has decreased from about 65 percent of the CSRS budget to about 45 percent for fiscal year 1993. Formula funds are those dollars which go to land-grant colleges, 1890 colleges, forestry schools, and veterinary medical schools. They are determined by formulas based on rural population and utilization and are matched with State dollars.

Although actual formula dollars have increased slightly during this time, inflation-adjusted real dollars have decreased. Many individuals believe that this decrease has put pressure on universities, making it difficult to maintain their base level of programs. As the level of formula funding has declined, spending for both special research and facilities grants and competitive grants has increased. Spending for special research and facilities grants has increased from about 10 percent of the CSRS budget in 1985 to nearly 30 percent today. Competitive grants have increased from 22 percent to 27 percent of the CSRS budget during this time. The charts will be in the record after my statement.

In the research hearings we hold, we will attempt to determine the proper means of funding at universities. That is, what is the proper combination of formula funding, competitive grants, and special grants to meet the needs? We will also seek to determine what percentage of research budgets should be basic, applied, and mission-linked, and what are the most proactive roles for extension and teaching education programs. Most importantly, we will determine both how priorities are set and what they are. With the budgetary constraints we are now facing, it is essential to refocus our priorities. To maintain the status quo will result in a further erosion of what we are already doing as fewer dollars continue to be spread throughout the system.

We must begin including not just Congress in the process, but, first and foremost, producers and consumers. Since they are the ones the system was built to serve, they should provide major impact about future direction.

Two words will guide us as we move forward: Relevance and accountability. Is the research relevant to consumer and environmental concerns? Is it relevant to helping farmers and ranchers maintain not only sustainability, but also profitability? Or is it only relevant to maintenance of the status quo? And accountability. Are we accountable with our resources? Do we use them in such a way as to bring a return on our research investment? With your assistance, we are excited about moving forward with confidence.

Thank you.

Before I recognize Mr. Allard, I would like to submit the charts for the record along with any prepared statements from the members.

[The charts and prepared statements of Mr. Dooley, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Kingston follow.]