agInnovation Budget and Legislative Committee (BLC): http://escop.info/committee/blc/
Tuesday, May 27, 2025; 3 pm CT/4 pm ET/2 pm MT/1 pm PT
Call Notes – MEMBERS and LIAISONS

Committee Members:

Chair: Steve Lommel (agInnovation South) **Past Chair:** Anton Bekkerman (agInnovation NE) **Incoming Chair:** Gary Pierzynski (agInnovation NC) **Members:** Alton Thompson (ARD) Ulises Toledo (ARD) Derek McLean (agInnovation NC) Wendie Cohick (agInnovation NE) Scott Senseman (agInnovation South) Sreekala Bajwa (agInnovation West) Shawn Donkin (agInnovation West)	**Liaisons:** Lisa Townson (Extension)* Bob Mattive (CARET) Doug Steele (APLU FANR) Elizabeth Stulberg (Lewis-Burke, Advocacy) Gary Mayo (NIFA) Kevin Cain (BVM) Laura Jolly (BHHS) **Executive Vice-Chair** Jeanette Thurston (agInnovation North Central, ED) Chris Hamilton (agInnovation North Central, AD) *Bill Hoffman provides support for Lisa Townson

Attendees: Steve Lommel, Alton Thompson, Sreekala Bajwa, Anton Bekkerman, Rick Rhodes, Laura Jolly, Bret Hess, Bill Hoffman, Scott Senseman, Jose Toledo, Elizabeth Stulberg, Doug Steele, Lisa Townson, Kevin Cain, Shawn Donkin, Bob Mattive, Gary Pierzynski, Chris Hamilton (recorder)

VIEW RECORDING - 44 mins (No highlights)

Meeting Agenda/Notes:

1. Welcome and Introductions (2 min) – *Steve Lommel*
    - Steve welcomed everyone to the call.
    - No new attendees, so no introductions needed.
2. Capacity Grants Talking Points (5 min) – *Rick Rhodes*
    - Rick introduced talking points document on capacity grants in response to the President's 'skinny budget'.
    - Document provides elevator pitch points and detailed rationales for increased public investment in agricultural R&D.
    - Key messages: capacity funds strengthen national security, improve resilience, enhance food production, stimulate economic growth.
    - Group discussed how to counter budget language claiming formula funds are less effective than competitive funds.
    - Need to emphasize: states match federal dollars minimally 1:1, capacity funds provide rapid response capabilities, projects undergo merit-based review.
    - Agreement to socialize document through regional executive directors, CGA, ECOP and refine messaging accordingly.
3. STC Update: Supporting agInnovation Roadmap Implementation (5 min) – *Bret Hess*

- Bret explained Science and Technology Committee's (STC) plan to implement the agricultural innovation roadmap.
- Focus on aligning with administration priorities: enhancing productivity, advancing nutrition security, rural prosperity, biosecurity.
- Will issue call for scientist nominations to review and expand research opportunities under sustainable food systems pillar.
- Scientists will provide content that a hired firm will then develop into strategic communications.
- Goal is to provide specific research details to answer, 'How will you achieve these goals?' questions.
- Call for expert nominations expected by early July for implementation after BAA leadership meeting. Meetings will be virtual and shouldn't be a heavy lift.

4. BLC's role in developing funding strategies for the areas identified by STC (10 min)—Steve Lommel, group discussion – not specifically discussed.
5. New Administration Impacts Document – *Steve Lommel (*10 min)
    - North Central Region-led effort to track impacts of new administration actions. This is a living internal resource document with referenced executive orders/mandates
    - Refresh/update with new developments; especially referencing to the budget from OMB or the House bill that has just passed.
    - Sections should be pulled out and tailored to specific audiences
    - Useful for informing advisory boards, CARET reps (Gary P recent shared with his and it was favorably received), state legislators (Steve L shared with NC, but as a more targeted, one on one conversation – should probably not be shared to the entire legislature), NC-FAR
    - Probably should not share with USDA; they already know the impacts
    - Must be careful not to come across as a complaint list
    - **Ask Jeanette: Has this been shared with CGA?**
6. LBA Update (10 min) – *Elizabeth Stulberg*
    - Recent 1.5 hour session for experiment station directors well-received, provided detailed chronology and overview of current situation. Plan to schedule similar briefings periodically (~ every 6 weeks) going forward. Next call is set for June 30, 3-4:30 pm ET.
    - How can the BLC support LBA's efforts on behalf of agInnovation and the Land-grant University system? Not discussed specifically.
    - Elizabeth provided an analysis of the Make America Healthy Again report.
        - Report focused on four areas: ultra-processed food, environmental exposures, technology use/mental health, and over-medicalization of children.
        - Fairly moderate on pesticides; acknowledged grocery store foods should be safe.
        - Identified research opportunities in synergistic effects of environmental exposures.
        - Noted concerns about corporate capture of research and possible targeting of industry-funded researchers.
        - Strategy document with implementation details expected in August.
        - Disconnect observed between report rhetoric and actual policy actions (e.g., EPA revoking PFAS water treatment rule).
    - Lack of clear definition for 'ultra-processed foods' remains problematic.
7. Other Business, as needed and as time allows
    - None identified

Call adjourned at 4:02 pm CT.

Capacity Grants: 1862 and 1890 Land-grant Universities

The USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) supports research at land-grant universities through Capacity Grants based on statutory formulas. These grants (including Hatch, Hatch Multistate, and Evans-Allen) are essential for addressing the key challenges faced by agriculture at the local, state, regional, and national levels. The agricultural research performed by the state experiment stations and research labs at our land-grant universities is the science that feeds the world. Here are key facts about this enterprise:

- Federal investment in capacity research strengthens national security and competitiveness; improves resilience and productivity; enhances food and nutrition security; and stimulates economic growth. This investment in food and agricultural research is needed to spur new scientific breakthroughs and keep pace with our global competitors.
- Capacity grants enable the land-grant system to pivot rapidly in response to unexpected events (e.g., avian influenza, severe weather events, wildfires, food safety outbreaks, drought, farm crises, and invasive species).
- The research capacity funds are an essential component of a federal-state partnership, for which every federal dollar is matched minimally, 1:1. This partnership represents the agricultural R&D "long-game" and ensures the role of the United States as a leader in agricultural innovation.
- According to the USDA, every $1 invested in public agricultural R&D generated on average $20 in benefits to the U.S. economy.
- agInnovation, the system of experiment stations and research labs at our land-grant universities, performs approximately 75% of the publicly funded agricultural R&D in the United States.
- The food and agriculture industry contributes more than $1 trillion to the U.S. GDP.

What current conditions underscore the need for increased public investment in agricultural R&D?

- Total U.S. agricultural research funding peaked in 2002 and has declined by 1/3 since, hitting the lowest levels since 1970.
- China's funding of agricultural R&D has grown to more than $10 billion – double what the U.S. invests. (Capacity funds are a key component of the U.S. research investment.)
- The U.S. agricultural trade balance was positive for nearly 60 years until 2019, when it shifted to a deficit. Research is the tool that helps farmers compete in global markets and returns the U.S. to being a net agriculture exporter.
- Research is needed to ensure agricultural productivity rivals other industry sectors and meets America's demand for food, fuel, and fiber.
- Publicly funded research often addresses areas unlikely to attract private investment, despite offering significant social returns. Such research may be considered too risky, or the economic benefits may be too diffuse or difficult for private firms to capture.