

agInnovation Budget and Legislative Committee (BLC): <http://escop.info/committee/blc/>

Tuesday, September 23, 2025; 3 pm CT/4 pm ET/2 pm MT/1 pm PT

NOTES - **MEMBERS ONLY**

Committee Members:

<p>Chair: Steve Lommel (agInnovation South)</p> <p>Past Chair: Anton Bekkerman (agInnovation NE)</p> <p>Incoming Chair: Derek McLean (agInnovation NC)</p> <p>Members:</p> <p>Alton Thompson (ARD)</p> <p>Ulises (Jose) Toledo (ARD)</p> <p>Derek McLean (agInnovation NC)</p> <p>Gary Pierzynski (agInnovation NC)</p> <p>Vacant (agInnovation NE)</p> <p>Scott Senseman (agInnovation South)</p> <p>Sreekala Bajwa (agInnovation West)</p> <p>Shawn Donkin (agInnovation West)</p> <p>BLC page with previous meeting notes</p>	<p>Liaisons:</p> <p>Lisa Townson (Extension)*</p> <p>Bob Mattive (CARET)</p> <p>Doug Steele (APLU FANR)</p> <p>Elizabeth Stulberg (Lewis-Burke, Advocacy)</p> <p>Gary Mayo (NIFA)</p> <p>Kevin Cain (BVM)</p> <p>Laura Jolly (BHHS)</p> <p>Matt Peterson (CGA, NCSU)</p> <p>Executive Vice-Chair</p> <p>Jeanette Thurston (agInnovation North Central, ED)</p> <p>Chris Hamilton (agInnovation North Central, AD)</p> <p>*Bill Hoffman provides support for Lisa Townson</p>
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Attendees: Steve Lommel, Bret Hess, Kevin Cain, Derek McLean, Gary Pierzynski, Matt Peterson, Jose Toledo, Jeanette Thurston, Elizabeth Stulberg, Scott Senseman, Deirdre Chester, Sreekala Bajwa, Shawn Donkin, Anton Bekkerman, Chris Hamilton (recorder)

Meeting Agenda:

1. Welcome and Chair Updates – Steve Lommel
2. USDA [NAREEE Advisory Board](#) – Deirdra Chester, Sreekala Bajwa
3. BLC USDA Reorganization Plan Input Letter – All
4. LBA Update (10 min) - Elizabeth Stulberg
 - o <https://osp.od.nih.gov/events/strengthening-and-modernizing-biosafety-region-1-listening-session/>
5. Other Business, as time allows

Fathom AI Notes (edited/added to by Chris Hamilton)

VIEW RECORDING - 50 mins (No highlights)

1. **Chair Updates – Steve Lommel**
 - [agInnovation requesting \\$300M for Hatch capacity funding \(same as FY24 request\)](#)
 - [Requesting \\$700M for AFRI competitive grants \(up from \\$500M in FY24\)](#)
 - [Concerns about \\$700M AFRI ask being out of step with other increases](#)

- [BAA will consider request; final amount may revert to \\$500M](#)

2. NAREE Advisory Board Overview - Deirdra Chester, Sreekala Bajwa

- [Established 1977 to advise Secretary of Agriculture and REE mission area](#)
- [15 members representing agricultural stakeholders](#)
- [4 working groups: Specialty Crops, Citrus Disease, Genetic Resources, Pollinators](#)
- [Provides recommendations to the USDA on research priorities and program effectiveness](#)
- The board serves as a conduit between the agricultural community and USDA science agencies.
- [Currently it lacks executive director/assistant due to retirements](#), so Deirdra has been managing it on her own.

3. USDA Reorganization Letter from agInnovation – All

- [Multiple letters already submitted \(BAA, NC, and NE\)](#)
- [agInnovation letter to focus on USDA partnerships and national-scope issues](#)
- [Aiming for constructive tone while highlighting concerns](#)
- [Key points:](#)
 - [Potential disruption and financial burden on universities](#) from ARS and NIFA employee relocations and consolidated operations
 - [Institutional knowledge preservation through proposed mentorship programs pairing departing and incoming staff during transition periods \(mentorship might not be the best term here, though\)](#)
 - "Farmers first" messaging incorporates current administration language to demonstrate policy synchronization
 - [Reinvesting potential savings into U.S. agriculture](#)
- [Letter approved for finalization and submission to agInnovation Chair](#), Dr. Chandra Reddy

4. LBA and CGA Updates – Elizabeth Stulberg, Matt Peterson

- Government shutdown more likely now due to canceled Democratic leadership/President Trump meeting.
- Whichever party is in control of both houses and presidency is historically blamed for the shutdown, but it's uncertain if that will be the case this time.
- Duration of a potential shutdown can only be speculated at this time. Long-term would likely affect agricultural research funding.
- H-1B Visa Recently Proposed Changes by President Trump:
 - Impose \$100,000 fees and 4-year duration limits on new visas.
 - Now (as of 9/23) proposing to prioritize higher-paid and higher-skilled foreign employees if the applications exceed the 85,000 limit.
- Healthcare sector would be greatly affected since 40% of internal medicine residents are currently here on H-1B visa status
- University hiring implications for non-citizens
- Possible alternative to use [O-1A outstanding individual visas](#) that are not capped, but do require somewhat burdensome paperwork.

- Right now, the recommendation is to do nothing, as lawsuits are likely and the new proposals might turn out to be illegal.

Next Steps

- [Jeanette to incorporate meeting feedback and polish letter draft](#)
- [Circulate near-final draft to BLC members for review](#)
- [Submit finalized letter to agInnovation Chair Reddy for approval and submission](#)

Call adjourned at 4:02 pm CT.