

agInnovation Budget and Legislative Committee (BLC): <http://escop.info/committee/blc/>
Tuesday, April 28, 2026, at 4 pm ET
Agenda – MEMBERS only

Committee Members:

<p>Chair: Steve Lommel (agInnovation South) Past Chair: Anton Bekkerman (agInnovation NE) Incoming Chair: Shibu Jose (agInnovation NC)</p> <p>Members: Alton Thompson (ARD) Ulises Toledo (ARD) Derek McLean (agInnovation NC) Shibu Jose (agInnovation NC) Chris Smart (agInnovation NE) Scott Senseman (agInnovation South) Sreekala Bajwa (agInnovation West) Shawn Donkin (agInnovation West)</p> <p>BLC page with previous meeting notes</p>	<p>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) Matt Peterson (CGA, NCSU)</p> <p>Executive Vice-Chair Jeanette Thurston (agInnovation North Central, ED) Chris Hamilton (agInnovation North Central, AD)</p> <p>*Bill Hoffman provides support for Lisa Townson</p>
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Call Attendees: Steve Lommel, Ulises Toledo, Shawn Donkin, Anton Bekkerman, Shibu Jose, Jenn Horton, Sreekala Bajwa, Elizabeth Stulberg, Alton Thompson, Chris Smart, Chris Hamilton

Meeting Agenda (Notes below):

1. Welcome and Call to Order - Steve Lommel, 5 min
2. DC update from Elizabeth and Matt
 - PBR, what to expect from FY2027 appropriations?, T&C, USDA relocation, RFA NOFO?, F&A, etc.
3. Group discussion: Approach for developing the agInnovation FY2028 budget request
 - Given APLU’s focus on capacity programs, how should BLC determine its funding request for Hatch? *Let’s wait and see what the House and Senate put out over the next few weeks. USDA re-org might actually have more of an effect than upcoming elections – how broken it becomes will impact need. What are we losing, what do we need to make up for USDA ARS losses, for instance. Maybe at minimum a cost of living increase? Capacity survey data might also inform the case. Might know more by summer on effects of USDA re-org.*
4. Other Business, as time allows

Zoom Shared Chat Links:

USDA re-org <https://www.usda.gov/ree/reorganization> and <https://www.hoeven.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/hoeven-north-dakota-ag-research-leadership-to-expand-under-usda-reorganization/> (latter has more information than former).

Ag/FDA appropriations document: <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AP/AP00/20260429/119253/HMKP-119-AP00-20260429-SD002.pdf>

Fathom AI Meeting Notes: [VIEW RECORDING - 61 mins \(No highlights\)](#)

Key Takeaways

- **[USDA Reorg Proceeds](#)**: The USDA is moving forward with its reorganization, including decommissioning the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) and recalling all NIFA staff to Kansas City. This is expected to cause significant staff attrition and operational disruption.
- **[House Budget Flatlines Capacity Funding](#)**: The House Ag-FDA appropriations bill proposes flat funding for all core capacity programs (Hatch, Smith-Lever, AFRI, etc.) and cuts to SARE and SUN Grant, while providing a small increase for ARS.
- **[NSF Board Disbanded](#)**: The National Science Board (NSB) was disbanded, removing institutional knowledge and creating a political vacuum. This will halt approvals for large NSF grants and could lead to a politicized reconstitution process.
- **[New Advocacy Strategy](#)**: The group will reframe its 2028 capacity funding ask to "backfill" the research gaps created by the USDA reorganization, positioning universities as essential partners filling a critical federal void.

USDA Reorganization

- **[NIFA Recall](#)**: All NIFA staff are being recalled to Kansas City, a move expected to cause major staff attrition.
 - **[Context](#)**: The 2019 relocation led to ~75% staff loss. While the current Kansas City office has more staff (~40% of total NIFA), another mass exodus could severely strain the remaining team.
- **[BARC Decommissioning](#)**: The Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) in Maryland is being decommissioned.
 - **[Impact](#)**: Research programs are being dismantled and moved to other states, with legislators in receiving states welcoming the new resources.
 - **[Opposition](#)**: The Maryland delegation is the primary opposition, but their efforts lack traction.
- **[ARS Restructuring](#)**: The area director role is being eliminated.
 - **[New Structure](#)**: National Program Leaders will combine science and administrative duties across four major groups:
 - [Animal Science \(Fort Collins\)](#)
 - [Plant Science \(Stoneville\)](#)
 - [Land Use \(Peoria\)](#)
 - [Post-Production \(Albany, CA\)](#)
 - **[Concern](#)**: This structure combines distinct skill sets (science vs. administration), raising concerns about operational effectiveness.
- **[Other Agency Moves](#)**:
 - **[Forest Service](#)**: Moving to Salt Lake City, with ~50 centers closing.
 - **[FSIS](#)**: Moving to Georgia and Iowa (locations outside the previously announced five hubs).
 - **[NASS](#)**: Moving to St. Louis, with 40% staff already lost.

- **Congressional Oversight:**
 - **Issue:** The USDA is ignoring appropriations report language requiring 30-day notice and approval for relocations.
 - **Rationale:** Deputy Secretary Vaden does not consider the report language legally binding.
 - **Outcome:** The House Ag-FDA bill does not include language to block the reorganization, signaling Republican support.

House Ag-FDA Appropriations Bill

- **The House Ag-FDA appropriations bill was released today, proposing a 1.4% total cut to the USDA budget.**
- **Flat Funding:** Core capacity programs (Hatch, Smith-Lever, AFRI, McIntyre-Stennis, WAMS) are all flat-funded.
- **Cuts:** SARE and SUN Grant programs face reductions.
- **ARS Increase:** ARS receives a small budget increase.
- **Senate Outlook:** The Senate is expected to propose a similar top-line number but may restore cuts to programs like SARE.

Farm Bill Status

- **The Farm Bill is stalled in the House Rules Committee.**
- **Key Sticking Points:**
 - **E15:** Year-round ethanol use in gasoline.
 - **Pesticide Preemption:** A clause preventing states from adding labels to EPA-approved pesticides.
 - **SNAP:** Democratic push to restore funding levels.
 - **Prop 12:** California's animal welfare law.
- **Outlook:** A floor vote is unlikely until Speaker Johnson secures enough votes for passage.

NSF National Science Board (NSB) Disbandment

- **Action:** The National Science Board (NSB) was disbanded, with all members fired.
- **Impact:**
 - **Loss of Institutional Knowledge:** The board's staggered, 6-year appointments provided continuity, which is now lost.
 - **Halt on Large Grants:** The NSB's congressionally mandated role in approving major NSF centers and awards is now vacant, halting the process.
 - **Politicization Risk:** With no Senate-confirmed NSF director, the reconstitution process could be driven by political appointees, potentially leading to a less qualified or more partisan board.

2028 Capacity Funding Strategy

- **Context:** The group discussed the 2028 capacity funding ask, noting that flat funding is an effective cut due to inflation and rising salaries.
- **New Advocacy Angle:** The USDA reorganization creates an opportunity to reframe the ask.

- **Rationale:** Position universities as essential partners ready to "backfill" the research and stakeholder services lost due to federal agency disruption.
 - **Action:** Gather specific data on lost federal programs and partnerships to quantify the need.
- **Data Source:** A survey on the value of capacity funds is in progress, with data collection ongoing from ~20 institutions.

Call adjourned at 3:57 pm CT.