

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

Tuesday, June 23, 2026, at 4 pm ET

Call NOTES

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) Rod Johnson (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 Hammons (CGA, UNL)</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, Bill Hoffman, Scott Senseman, Ulises Toledo, Keith Coble, Rod Johnson, Matt Hammons, Kate Owens, Shibu Jose, Bridget Kreiger, Doug LaVergne, Chris Smart, Jeanette Thurston, Chris Hamilton

Meeting Agenda:

1. Welcome and introductions, 5 min - Steve Lommel, BLC Chair
2. FFY2028 USDA Research Appropriations Discussion, 40 min - Christina Laridaen and Kate Owens, LBA; Keith Coble, BAC Chair; Matt Hammons UNL CGA
3. Liaison updates, 10 min
 - Updates from liaison organizations, with a focus on upcoming priorities and where BLC engagement could add value or alignment.
4. Updates from Washington (as time allows), 5 min - Christina Laridaen and Kate Owens, Matt Hammons

Call Notes (Fathom AI, reviewed by C. Hamilton)

[VIEW RECORDING - 62 mins \(No highlights\)](#)

Action Items

- Jeanette:

- Collect state case studies/anecdotes from directors for Portland; integrate into narrative - [WATCH \(5 secs\)](#)
- Reformulate FY28 Hatch narrative; prep 2 scenarios for July 6 - [WATCH \(5 secs\)](#)
- Matt:
 - Form small workgroup w/ agInnovation re: CGA outreach; draft member-champion plan - [WATCH \(5 secs\)](#)
- Bridget/LBA:
 - Schedule huddle w/ Matt, Marcus, Doug re: capacity-line alignment - [WATCH \(5 secs\)](#)
 - Collect intl competitiveness data/articles from directors – **Directors: please send to her;** integrate into narrative - [WATCH \(5 secs\)](#)
 - Review Senate Farm Bill Title VII and provide high-level bulleted summary before CLP call on 6/24; verify auth levels; send CLP highlights - [WATCH \(5 secs\)](#)

Key Takeaways

- **Shift Strategy:** [The FY28 Hatch request will pivot from a flat-budget inflation argument to a compelling narrative of national impact, using state-specific case studies to show what new funds will achieve.](#)
- **Dual Ask:** [A primary FY28 request will be paired with a separate, ambitious multi-year vision \(e.g., a "stair-step" plan\) to secure a significant, sustained increase for all capacity funds.](#)
- **Contingency Planning:** [Two budget scenarios will be prepared for the July 6 meeting: a conservative ask \(~\\$300M\) for a status-quo Congress and an ambitious ask \(~\\$385M\) for a Democratic-majority Congress.](#)
- **Farm Bill Update:** [The Senate's budget-neutral Farm Bill reauthorizes Title VII programs but excludes funding for the FFAR program.](#)

Challenge: Ineffective Appropriations Strategy

- [The current strategy for capacity funds \(Hatch, Smith-Lever, Evans-Allen\) is failing.](#)
- **Problem:** [The inflation-based argument is ineffective with Congress, which requires a clear story of what new money will achieve.](#)
- **Political Reality:** [Hatch is a perennial target for elimination in the President's budget request, making a strong, proactive narrative essential for its defense and growth.](#)

Solution: A New Narrative-Driven Ask

- [The FY28 request will be reframed with a compelling narrative, moving beyond the inflation-based justification.](#)
- **Key Elements:**
 - **Long-Term Vision:** [A 3–5 year plan \(FY28–32\) to show a clear path for sustained investment.](#)
 - **National & Local Impact:** [Connect research to national economic benefits and specific state priorities \(e.g., precision ag, fermentation tech\).](#)
 - **Success Stories:** [Use past capacity-funded breakthroughs \(e.g., GLP-1 drug from lizard venom research\) to demonstrate long-term ROI.](#)
 - **Future Investments:** [Highlight strategic areas for growth \(e.g., digital ag, specialty crops\).](#)

- **Talent Pipeline:** Frame capacity funds as essential for recruiting and retaining domestic talent, building on the success of the RFA facilities program.
- **International Competitiveness:** Use the "getting beat by China" argument to create urgency for investment.

Execution: Dual Ask & Contingency Planning

- **Dual Ask Structure:**
 - **FY28 Request:** A specific number for the upcoming fiscal year.
 - **Capacity Vision:** A separate one-pager outlining the multi-year strategy.
- **Contingency Scenarios:** Two budget requests will be prepared for the July 6 meeting, reflecting different political outcomes:
 - **Conservative:** ~\$300M (status-quo Congress).
 - **Ambitious:** ~\$385M (Democratic-majority Congress).
- **Unified vs. Proportional Ask:**
 - A single, unified ask for all capacity funds was rejected.
 - **Rationale:** It would empower Congress to pick favorites, risking disproportionate funding. A proportional increase across separate line items is preferred.

Context: Farm Bill & RFA Updates

- **Senate Farm Bill (Title VII):**
 - Budget-neutral; reauthorizes dozens of programs.
 - Increases authorization for several 1890s programs.
 - Excludes funding for the FFAR program.
 - Adds mandatory money for specialty crops.
 - Includes new rural development initiatives (telehealth, mental health, hospital loans).
- **RFA Program:**
 - APLU is seeking flexibility on two key rules:
 - **Match Timing:** Allow match funds to be predated from the award date, not post-dated, to align with capital campaigns.
 - **One-at-a-Time Rule:** Allow institutions to apply for a planning grant and a construction grant in consecutive cycles.

Call adjourned at 4:01 pm CT