agInnovation Budget and Legislative Committee (BLC): http://escop.info/committee/blc/
Tuesday, October 27, at 4 pm ET
Call Notes

Committee Members:

Chair: Shibu Jose (agInnovation NC) **Past Chair:** Steve Lommel (agInnovation South) **Incoming Chair:** TBD **Members:** Alton Thompson (ARD) Ulises Toledo (ARD) Rod Johnson (agInnovation NC) Ron Turco (agInnovation NC) Chris Smart (agInnovation NE) Anton Bekkerman (agInnovation NE) Scott Senseman (agInnovation South) Sreekala Bajwa (agInnovation West) Shawn Donkin (agInnovation West) BLC page with previous meeting notes	**Liaisons:** Lisa Townson (Extension)* Bob Mattive (CARET) Doug Steele (APLU FANR) Bridget Krieger (Lewis-Burke, Advocacy) Kate Owens (Lewis-Burke, Advocacy) Gary Mayo (NIFA) Kevin Cain (BVM) Laura Jolly (BHHS) Matt Hammons (CGA, UNL) **Executive Vice-Chair** Jeanette Thurston (agInnovation North Central, ED) Chris Hamilton (agInnovation North Central, AD) *Bill Hoffman provides support for Lisa Townson

Meeting Agenda:

1. Welcome and introductions, 5 min – Shibu Jose, BLC Chair
2. agInnovation FY2028 NIFA Budget Request and BAC Discussion – Steve Lommel
3. Updates from DC – Bridget Krieger, Kate Owens, Matt Hammons
4. Other Business, as needed

Call Attendees: Matt Hammons, Bill Hoffman, Bob Mattive, Steve Lommel, Bridget Krieger, Kate Owens, Jenn Horton, Bret Hess, Shibu Jose, Shawn Donkin, Sreekala Bajwa, Ron Turco, Rod Johnson, Chris Smart, Jeanette Thurston, Chris Hamilton

Meeting Notes (Fathom AI, reviewed by Chris H.); VIEW RECORDING - 51 mins (No highlights)

- **Welcome and Introductions:** Shibu welcomed everyone to the call and indicated that Rod Johnson will take over as BLC chair once he leaves to start his new role as dean at UMN. Bridget indicated that she needed to leave the call early, so we had the DC updates first. After DC updates, Shibu then led introductions around the Zoom room. Steve Lommel thanked everyone for a good time while he was BLC chair. Steve will stay on as past chair, even though he's happily retired.

- **DC Updates:**
    - **Midterm Elections (Next Week):**

        - **House:** Expected to flip to Democratic control; the key unknown is the margin and the resulting coalition (moderates vs. progressives).
        - **Senate:** Control is a toss-up; results may be delayed by recounts and legal challenges.

    - **Lame-Duck Session (Starts Nov 9):**
        - **Must-Do Items:** Appropriations, Farm Bill, NDAA, surface transportation reauthorization, healthcare extenders.
        - **Wish List:** Reconciliation, debt limit, college athletics bill.
        - The legislative appetite for these items will be clearer after the APLU annual meeting.

    - **FY28 Appropriations:**
        - **Goal:** Pass FY28 bills in the lame-duck session to avoid starting the new Congress with old business.
        - **Timeline:** The current CR expires Dec 11. A short-term CR (est. 2 weeks) is likely to buy time for a minibus package (Ag, MilCon, VA, Leg Branch) and/or a full-year CR for other bills.
        - **Risk:** Appropriators may include blocking language against the OMB uniform guidance.

    - **USDA Reorganization:**
        - A federal court temporarily blocked USDA from using appropriated funds for certain activities (office closures, employee relocations).
        - Secretary Rollins confirmed the reorganization will proceed, but the ruling prevents office closures.
        - **Impact:** USDA is exploring alternatives like local reassignments and regional hiring instead of relocating staff. The court order expires in December unless extended by Congress.

    - **Farm Bill Update**
        - **APLU Priorities:**
            - **Advancing:** Most priorities, including merging international programs, increasing authorization levels, and reauthorizing RFA.
            - **Unlikely:** Flexibility for capacity funds (student tuition, retirement).
                - **Rationale:** Staff view this as diverting funds from core capacity needs.
                - **Context:** This is a broader issue, as 1994s are also requesting flexibility for facilities.
        - **Overall Outlook:**
            - Momentum has slowed; staff are preparing the bill for a potential attachment to a larger legislative package.
            - The bill's fate hinges on resolving the SNAP cost-share problem, which is a major political hurdle.
            - **Strategic Incentive:** Passing the Farm Bill in the lame-duck session would allow the new Congress to start fresh, avoiding a difficult negotiation under divided government.

- **FY28 agInnovation NIFA Budget Request**

    - **Strategy:** The BLC is joining a unified land-grant push for robust but reasonable capacity fund increases.
    - **Hatch Act Request: $375M**
        - **Rationale:** A **$110M (41%) increase** to restore purchasing power lost to inflation (est. $92M over 10 years) and close the research investment gap with peer countries.
        - **Impact:** Each $1 of Hatch funding generates $10 in other research funding.
    - **AFRI Request: $500M**
        - **Rationale:** A **$65M (15%) increase** to boost low funding rates for competitive grants.
        - **Impact:** 70% of AFRI funds go to land-grants, supporting critical innovation.
    - **Approval Process:**

        1. BLC finalizes request → presented to BAC.
        2. BAC approves → presented to APLU Board of Directors.
        3. APLU Board approves → becomes the official request for Lewis-Burke advocacy.

    - **Future Strategy:** The BLC will develop a 3–5 year plan to build a compelling narrative and engagement strategy for core NIFA funding, a new role for the committee.

- **Other Business:**
    - **World Ag Prize:** George Dubkovsky will be honored as the 2026 World Ag Prize Laureate for his collaborative work in wheat breeding.

Call adjourned at 3:45 pm CT.