

Legislative Action Network

American Society of Agronomy | Crop Science Society of America | Soil Science Society of America

ASA, CSSA, SSSA Legislative Action Network Update: Congress holds third Farm Bill hearing on research

Yesterday, the House Committee on Agriculture held its second hearing on research in preparation for the 2018 Farm Bill rewrite. This follows a Senate Agriculture Committee hearing last week dedicated to research. This is the third research hearing this year; three more than were held during the entire 2014 Farm Bill process.

The hearing focused on university research at land-grant institutions, non-land-grant colleges of agriculture and Hispanic-serving institutions. Witnesses from several different institutions and university groups voiced their support for the current mix of competitive, capacity and extension programs. Programs that are authorized in the Farm Bill, but rely on the annual appropriations process for funding.

Infrastructure needs a top concern of universities

The overriding theme of the hearing was the huge backlog of deferred maintenance at schools of agriculture that threatens to hinder innovative, cutting-edge research. Nearly every witness highlighted the sad state of decaying facilities, labs and greenhouses and called on Congress to help address the funding shortfall.

They pointed to the [recent study commissioned by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities](#) that found nearly \$9 billion in deferred maintenance at land-grant and non-land-grant institutions. A staggering figure that existing federal programs are unable to address. Members of the committee were sympathetic to the infrastructure needs but were cautious in suggesting the Farm Bill would provide any relief. The bottom line – funding is tight and the Farm Bill is unlikely to have the money necessary to tackle a multi-billion dollar deferred maintenance backlog problem.

Growing demand for organic research

Several members of the committee raised the need for additional spending on organic research. Noting Amazon's recent bid to purchase Whole Foods and the rapid increase in consumer demand for organic food, there is concern that the U.S. needs to do more to meet this demand domestically.

Issues that resonated with Committee members:

- American competitiveness at risk - we're being outpaced by China
- Growing importance of public-private partnerships and collaborations across multiple disciplines and institutions
- Applied research is what makes the agricultural research enterprise unique

[Find the full list of witness testimonies and a webcast of the hearing here.](#)