



NATIONAL COALITION FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Statement of **Richard Wilkins**

on behalf of the

National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research

before the

Committee on Agriculture

Subcommittee on Biotechnology, Horticulture and Research

U.S. House of Representatives

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Hearing on the Next Farm Bill: Agricultural Research

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee,

My name is Richard Wilkins. I am a farmer from Greenwood, Delaware. I farm 400 acres of soybeans and 400 acres of corn annually and produce 250 acres of wheat, 100 acres of barley, 300 acres of vegetables, and 400 acres of hay. I also raise 120 head of beef cattle.

I am pleased to testify today in my capacity as vice president of the National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research (NCFAR), a nonprofit, nonpartisan, consensus-based and *customer-led* coalition that brings food, agriculture, nutrition, conservation, and natural resource stakeholders together with the food and agriculture research and extension community. NCFAR serves as a forum and a unified voice in support of sustaining and increasing public investment at the national level in food and agricultural science as a top national priority. A membership list is attached. More information about NCFAR is available at <http://www.ncfar.org>.

NCFAR's support encompasses the entire U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) research, extension and education (REE) mission area, including extramural programs in the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)—such as the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), and capacity funds to support Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension—and intramural programs in the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), Economic Research Service (ERS), and National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), as well as the U.S. Forest Service research program. NCFAR urges a balanced portfolio, as the various programs serve important and complementary roles. NCFAR supports mandatory programs in the farm bill that provide funding for research. It is important to include investments in both fundamental and applied

research, as well as translational education. In addition, publicly funded research serves critically important objectives that private sector research cannot fulfill in a number of areas. For example, the results of publicly funded research are available to the public, including policy makers. Companies are often unable to fund fundamental research that lays the foundation for much of our nation's applied research.

With the farm bill reauthorization process in its early stages, NCFAR has several activities underway with the objective of better informing our leadership, other stakeholders, the Congress, and the Administration in laying the groundwork for a strong research title and supporting funding.

One longstanding initiative is our signature 'Lunch~N~Learn' seminar series in which our team works to inform Hill staff and other stakeholders by featuring the publicly funded work of leading-edge scientists on a diverse array of disciplines and timely topics. Over the past decade, we have convened 125 seminars with nearly 8,000 attendees. A document providing highlights of the seminar series is attached. More detail is available at http://www.ncfar.org/Hill_Seminar_Series.asp.

Mr. Chairman, we greatly appreciate the support of your staff as well as staff from other Committee member offices in helping to arrange the Agriculture Committee hearing rooms for these seminars. Thank you.

NCFAR is taking additional action on several fronts to inform the current farm bill reauthorization process and be a more effective voice for a strong research title.

First, NCFAR's Research Outreach Committee has convened a Farm Bill task force, which is in the early stages of developing recommendations on the reauthorization of the farm bill research title for our Board to consider. We are also collaboratively engaging allied groups with the objective of providing timely recommendations to this Subcommittee and the Congress.

Second, I am pleased to announce that NCFAR is involved in planning for a *Summit on Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Priorities to Advance American Agriculture*. The aim of the Summit is to engage stakeholders in developing a vision for what the food and agricultural research, extension and education enterprise should look like to best serve the needs of the food and agricultural system in the 21st century and capitalize on the robust potential of the agricultural, food, and resource sectors to fuel further growth in the United States economy. The summit will focus on four critical areas; fueling growth in the agricultural economy through rapid adoption of innovations; harnessing the power of big Ag data in research and extension; advancing the health of U.S. consumers and environmental quality; and assuring the security of U.S. agriculture and food systems. We will provide additional information in the near future.

Third, NCFAR is actively involved in other collaborative efforts intended to inform and support the reauthorization of a strong farm bill research title, including (1) the unified messaging effort led by the Riley Memorial Foundation, and (2) launch of the *Breakthroughs 2030* study, being managed by the SoAR Foundation in conjunction with the National Academies of Science (NAS), to produce a 10-year agenda for food and agricultural research.

I mentioned earlier that NCFAR is “customer-led.” By “*customer*” I mean my farm business and all other the stakeholders who need and benefit from the scientific outcomes that are produced by our nation’s publicly funded research, extension and education system in our own work.

Research is an important means to critical ends—providing science-based information and tools that help us in the food and agricultural system do our jobs for the ultimate benefit of consumers, the nation’s economy, and the world.

The same holds true for a myriad of other “customers”—such as my fellow farmers and ranchers across the nation; the agricultural input industry; food processors; professionals in the fields of nutrition and health; natural resources and environment; rural communities; and ultimately all consumers of food and natural fiber around the world.

Furthermore, this Subcommittee and other Members of Congress and policy makers at all levels of government are important “customers” of research, extension and education made possible through the research title.

This is indeed an exciting time for me and our family farming operation. The challenges our farm family is experiencing—and indeed across our nation’s food and agricultural system—have brought into fresh focus the need for a robust public investment in research, extension and education.

I am not a researcher, though I do some experimenting in my farming operations. However, I do appreciate the vital role that researchers and extension specialists play in our society. Modern agriculture is a science-based business. I need what research and extension can provide in my operations. I know that I can do what I do better because of advancements made possible by federal investments in food and agricultural research.

The research title of the farm bill represents the nation’s *signature federal investment in the future of the food and agricultural sector*. In fact, the success of every other title in the farm bill and those who are charged with carrying out their respective missions is arguably dependent in significant part on scientific outcomes and tools generated by programs authorized through the research title, and then funded by Congress.

Research is not an end in itself—rather it is a vital means to help achieve many national priorities. The research title is critical in providing advancements in food and agricultural research, extension and education that help provide the tools needed to sustain and strengthen America’s food and agricultural sector, rural communities, and the national economy. Public investment in food and agricultural research, extension and education today and in the future must simultaneously satisfy a range of needs, including food quality and quantity, resource conservation, producer profitability, and food safety and security, and helping to improve health.

At the risk of oversimplification, federal funding is the fuel for USDA’s REE engine and determines how effectively the important goals of the research title are realized. I respectfully submit that we as a nation are not investing enough in in publicly funded research to permit discovery necessary to regain and then maintain our nation’s place as the leader in agricultural

research. That is a major reason I invest a significant amount of my time in NCFAR, the American Soybean Association and other groups to provide input as a stakeholder and leadership in urging increased public investment in food and agricultural research, extension and education.

Investment in food and agricultural science is not only good business, it's good for business. By any measure, publicly funded food and agricultural science represents an outstanding investment. Public and private investments in U.S. agricultural research and practical application of results have paid huge dividends to the United States and the world, especially in the latter part of the 20th century. The CARD report entitled "Measuring Public Agricultural Research and Extension and Estimating their Impacts on Agricultural Productivity: New Insights from US Evidence" (Jin & Huffman, 2016) presents a summary of the most recent returns on investment of agricultural research dollars to have a rate of return of approximately 67 percent.

However, the unparalleled success story in the food and agricultural system is in large part the product of past investments in food and agricultural research and extension. Federal funding for food and agricultural research, extension and education has been essentially *flat for over 20 years* despite much greater demonstrated needs, and has reportedly declined by about 25 percent in real terms since 2003. At the same time support for other federal research has increased substantially. Our nation's competitiveness in global markets is at risk, as investments in food and agricultural science by our global competitors have been growing rapidly.

The 2008 and 2014 farm bills recommitted to an authorized level of \$700 million annually for AFRI. Yet eight years later, for FY16, appropriations were about \$350 million. NCFAR is on record in support of funding AFRI at the fully authorized level as soon as practicable. Increases in AFRI should represent an addition to funding for REE programs and not come at the expense of other REE programs. NCFAR is expressing support for \$375 million in FY17, the same level reported out by both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. We urge the Congress to include that amount in any final budget reconciliation. Our position on FY18 funding for the REE mission, including AFRI, is currently under development.

Increased federal investments in the USDA, REE mission area will lead to advances and breakthroughs in agricultural productivity, improved animal, plant and soil health, and nutrition and lead to healthier citizens, a healthier agricultural economy, and a stronger and more globally competitive America.

Tools provided through publicly funded research, extension and education are needed to help achieve safer, more nutritious, convenient and affordable foods delivered to sustain a well-nourished, healthy population; more efficient and environmentally friendly food, fiber and forest production; improved water quality, land conservation, wildlife and other environmental conditions; less dependence on non-renewable sources of energy; expanded global markets and improved balance of trade; and more jobs and sustainable rural economic development.

Societal demands and expectations placed upon the food and agricultural system are ever-changing and growing. Examples of current and future needs include addressing bio-security; food-linked health costs; development of vaccines and diagnostics, antibiotics, de-wormers, antifungals and parasiticides, antimicrobial use strategies, control and therapy for diseases and

infections, transboundary disease and foreign animal disease; environment and conservation; water quality; farm income and rural revitalization; biofuels and climate change; the increasing world demand for food and fiber and improved diets; and needed advances in biotechnology and genetic resources research. A United Nations report projects that we will need to double food production to feed 9 billion people by 2050, and that 70 percent of the increase must come through research developing new technologies and increased productivity.

We appreciate the longstanding support this Subcommittee, the full Committee and its Members have demonstrated over the years to authorize and oversee implementation of a strong research title that can compete more effectively in the funding process, both within the Administration and in the Congress.

NCFAR looks forward to working as a customer-led coalition with this Subcommittee, the full Committee, Congress, the Administration and other stakeholders to help ensure that the USDA REE mission moves forward as envisioned and receives the resources and funding needed to achieve scientific outcomes that are necessary for the food and agricultural sector to address multiple demands, challenges and expectations.

I appreciate the opportunity to share our views.

Attachments (4):

- Witness Disclosure Form
- Wilkins Biography
- NCFAR Member List
- ‘Lunch~N~Learn’ Hill Seminar Series Highlights