

# 11. Research, Education, and Economics

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## ■ Research, Analysis, and Outreach: Meeting Challenges of the Future

Three major challenges face U.S. agriculture in the coming decade: To increase U.S. competitiveness in a rapidly changing global market; to meet the public's continued demand for safe, nutritious food produced under environmentally-friendly conditions; and to respond to the increasing industrialization of American agriculture.

Helping to meet these challenges is USDA's Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area, which includes four USDA agencies: the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), Economic Research Service (ERS), and National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). These four Agencies work together to help ensure an abundant, safe food supply; to sustain a viable and competitive food and agricultural economy; and to maintain our environmental and natural resource base. And working together, the four Agencies provide knowledge and cutting-edge technology to ensure that high-quality food and other agricultural products are available to consumers.

REE does economic and social research that supports other USDA programs and policies, providing data, information, education, and economic and statistical analyses on a variety of topics, including rural development, the environment and natural resources, food safety, food prices, farm labor, farm income, financial conditions, commodity markets, and international trade. U.S. agriculture is continually counted, measured, priced, analyzed, and reported to provide the facts needed by Americans working throughout this vast industry.

REE serves American agriculture and rural communities by providing meaningful, accurate, and objective statistical information. Forecasts and estimates for over 165 different crop and livestock commodities are provided annually to help farmers, ranchers, other agribusinesses, policymakers, Members of Congress, and the public make informed decisions.

USDA research and education help develop new products and new uses, improve farming and processing efficiency, explore profitable marketing strategies, increase food safety, and find resource-saving technologies. For example, USDA scientists are developing biodegradable plastic from corn starch, printers ink based on 100 percent soybean oil, and frozen concentrated milk for people who can't get to the supermarket often.

Studies demonstrate that consumers reap the benefits of investing in agricultural research: Every tax dollar invested in the U.S. agricultural system has paid back at least \$1.35. These returns have been broadly shared through lower prices to American

consumers, increased international competitiveness for farmers, jobs for working families, and increased profitability in agricultural industries.

The U.S. agricultural research system, long pre-eminent in the world and a model for other countries, is retooling for the next century by focusing on outcomes. For example, precision agriculture uses satellite systems and tractor-mounted computers to measure yields and anticipate fertilizer and pesticide needs within 2 to 6 feet of the tractor. This will help farmers increase production while preserving the environment. Such dramatic developments will usher in many more—from new discoveries in bioengineering to pathogen reduction in farm animals—which will help U.S. agriculture meet the challenges of the future. The emphasis in today's agricultural research is on integrated pest management (IPM), which puts nature's own biological agents to work along with state-of-the-art farming practices to beat back crop-destroying pests and reduce our need to apply pesticides and herbicides.

USDA works with land-grant institutions and industry to move know-how and technology from the laboratory to farmers, consumers, and agribusinesses. With an eye toward reaping an abundant harvest of scientific expertise, USDA supports research by young people and seasoned scientists at colleges and universities, including 1890 land-grant colleges, throughout the United States. REE works in partnership with the State agricultural experiment station system based at land-grant universities to carry out a balanced program of fundamental and applied research.

USDA's water quality program is a coordinated effort to protect the Nation's waters from contamination by agricultural chemicals. It offers farmers, ranchers, and other land managers the know-how, technical means, and financial assistance to address environmental concerns and State water quality requirements.

Through its sustainable agriculture research and education program, USDA awards competitive grants to producers for on-farm studies and demonstration projects, ranging from specific production practices (such as mechanical weed control or crop rotations) to studies on the quality of life in rural regions. Benefits of these programs include improved profitability, an enhanced natural resource base, and a reasonable quality of life for producers and their communities.

REE also focuses on practical education that Americans need to deal with critical issues in their lives, by linking scientific research to the needs of people. For example, the expanded food and nutrition education program (EFNEP) reaches limited resource audiences, especially youth and families with young children, to improve family diets and nutritional well-being. Since its inception, EFNEP has directly affected over 19 million adults and 4-H youth in all 50 States and in American Samoa, Guam, Micronesia, the Northern Marianas, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. REE also offers information on issues ranging from community economic development and health care concerns to food safety, water quality, children, youth and families, and sustainable agriculture. Information technology is crucial in the delivery of this knowledge, so REE works with local communities to provide access to information resources via the information superhighway.

REE is also home to the National Agricultural Library (NAL)—a key information resource for agricultural researchers worldwide. Established in 1862, NAL is the largest agricultural library in the world and one of three national libraries of the United States; the other two are the Library of Congress and the National Library of

Medicine. As the Nation's chief resource and service for agricultural information, NAL offers researchers, educators, policymakers, farmers, consumers, and the general public approximately 48 miles of bookshelves in a 14-story building, plus access to the library's two million volumes through its computerized network or electronic bulletin board.

## ■ Agricultural Research Service

**A**RS is the primary in-house research agency in USDA. It conducts a balanced program of fundamental and applied research that concentrates on problems that are national or regional in scope.

The agency maintains a network of geographically dispersed national and overseas laboratories, allowing USDA to:

- Perform long-term, high-risk research,
- Respond to both stable and changing technical goals,
- Ensure research accountability, and
- Form, disband, or coordinate interdisciplinary research teams (often at different sites) from a large, diverse scientific work force.

Areas of research emphasis for ARS correspond to high-priority problems identified by scientists, internal program evaluations, users, new legislation, appropriations, action and regulatory agencies, and executive branch initiatives. Major areas of research are described in the following sections.

### Soil, air, and water

ARS is focusing on the increasing critical issues of environmental degradation.

Currently, the Agency is working on:

- Improved production systems that will protect water quality from the effects of agricultural chemicals and control erosion when crop residues are low,
- Strategies for off-site control of chemical buildup in ground water,
- Methods for assessing the possible effects of global climate change on water and energy fluxes, water resources, and the health and sustainability of agroecosystems,
- Ways to facilitate conservation tillage, and
- Evaluating and optimizing no-till and other conservation tillage and residue management systems—to increase soil organic matter, infiltration, and soil biological activity and to reduce runoff, erosion, evaporation, and drought damage.

### Plant Productivity

ARS focuses on the traditional concern of enhancing plant yields, including such projects as:

- Enhancing plant germplasm by manipulating genomes at the molecular level and improving plant genetic resources to overcome productivity barriers in major crops,

- Technologies for controlling fundamental biological processes relating to productivity, market quality, and production costs,
- Long- and short-term acquisition and preservation of plant germplasm,
- Detection at the molecular level of pathogens in propagative material,
- Methods for nondestructive testing of seed viability and composition and for environmentally safe pest control with acceptable health risk,
- Management systems for sound ecosystem maintenance and water use on important range, pasture, and crop lands,
- Weed and plant disease control,
- Areawide control of high-priority pests,
- Development of a relational database for the national plant germplasm system, and
- Computer simulation models for growth and development of economically important crops and weeds.

### Animal Productivity

ARS projects to increase animal productivity seek ways to:

- Reduce mortality and other losses from disease and parasites,
- Improve genetic resistance to diseases and parasites,
- Use biologically based control of parasites,
- Control zoonotic bacteria and parasites in live animals,
- Increase the genetic capacity of animals for greater production,
- Evaluate behavioral, physiological, and productivity indicators of animal well-being,
- Understand the physiological processes involved in feed intake and metabolism and mechanisms by which chemical and physical composition of feed can limit nutrient availability,
- Make nondestructive repeated measurements of body composition, and
- Use animal wastes and means to reduce waste contamination of surface and ground water.

### Commodity Conversion and Delivery

In efforts to improve the processing of agricultural commodities, ARS is seeking:

- Means to prevent or eliminate foodborne microorganisms in animal products, prevent mycotoxins in food and feed products, eliminate insect and disease trade barriers limiting agricultural exports, meet marketing requirements (including physical, sanitary, performance qualities) for various commodities, and extend shelf life with sensory quality retention,
- Methods for rapid, objective analysis of marketing safety and quality characteristics,
- Technologies for converting agricultural commodities to value-added industrial products; alternative fuels; and new fiber, leather, feed, and food products,
- Process treatments to enhance food safety, minimize residues or additives, and retain quality, and
- Alternative processing methods that are environmentally benign.

## Human Nutrition and Well-Being

Research in this area seeks:

- Methods to determine composition of commonly consumed foods and to change food production and processing systems to improve the nutritional quality of food,
- Better understanding of the role of dietary components in weight maintenance and risk of chronic diseases,
- Identification of adequate and safe ranges of nutrient and calorie intake,
- Explanation of the molecular and cellular basis of human nutrition,
- An ongoing national data bank on the nutrient content of foods, and
- Monitoring the food consumption of the U.S. population.

### ■ **Reaping the Products of Research**

*While much ARS research lays the foundation for long-term development, the ultimate beneficiaries of this research are the Nation's consumers. Each year, dozens of new products and improved varieties of fruits, nuts, and vegetables emerge from ARS laboratories and greenhouses. Here's just a sampling:*

**Potatoes.** *Americans eat an average of more than 100 pounds of potatoes each year, about half from fresh potatoes and half in processed foods. Research has brought forth a slew of new, improved potato varieties for both uses. For example, Atlantic makes potato chips with lower fat content than any other variety, thanks to its low ratio of water to solids. Atlantic is now the Nation's number one chipping potato.*

**Wheat.** *For 50 years, ARS laboratories have worked with all segments of the baking industry to help provide consumers with uniform, flavorful, nutritious bread and other wheat products. Throughout the country, ARS scientists who work with wheat aim to make U.S.-grown grain better all the time. It's not an easy job. Techniques for successfully slipping new genes into crops like tomatoes or petunias typically don't work on wheat. After years of effort, scientists have won many victories.*

*A yardstick for their wheat-breeding success is the popularity of the new varieties they've come up with. One variety alone accounts for most of the soft red winter wheat that's grown in the Eastern United States. Why? Because it stands up to wheat's most destructive disease, leaf rust. Other varieties have amazed even dubious wheat farmers by resisting the Hessian fly and cereal leaf beetle, two costly insect pests.*

**Milk.** *If you're among the many American adults who have trouble digesting lactose, you may already know about the lactose-free dairy products that ARS scientists developed by altering a bacterium*

used to make cheese and yogurt. It produces an enzyme that in turn breaks down the milk's lactose, sparing you an upset stomach.

**Peaches.** A laboratory technique called embryo culture has proven especially helpful in creating new peach varieties. When nurtured in petri dishes, tiny embryos that could not survive in nature are cultivated into plantlets. Tended carefully in the greenhouse, the plantlets can eventually be planted outdoors in the research orchard.

**Turkeys.** Rearing turkeys has become a lot easier for producers, thanks to ARS innovation. The Beltsville Poultry Semen Extender enables poultry producers to set up "turkey stud farms" with only the best males, thus making the most efficient use of artificial insemination.

**Citrus Fruit.** In Florida, ARS has come up with citrus varieties that have higher yields, increased disease resistance, better color, and longer shelf life. For example, juice from cold-hardy Ambersweet is fresh and approved for use in orange juice products. Because it withstands Florida's occasional cold snaps that can ruin most citrus, Ambersweet is being widely planted in the Sunshine State. It took 20 years of patient breeding to develop it, but the payoff is huge.

**Rice.** Rice, a billion-dollar annual crop, is grown in only six States: Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, and Missouri. Long-grain, an American favorite, is raised chiefly in the South, while medium and short-grain rice grows mainly in California. And everywhere that rice is grown, ARS research stands behind the crop.

Much of this work involves breeding better rice. In 1993, a single ARS-developed semidwarf rice variety, Lemont, covered 600,000 acres. That same year, its cousin Gulfmont contributed another 147,000 acres. Together they accounted for nearly 30 percent of the rice in four States. Semidwarf varieties have short, stout stems, so they don't fall over in a strong wind or rain, and their grain-laden heads do not snap off before the rice can be harvested.

**Catfish.** Catfish, long regarded in the South as a down-home delicacy, was hard to find in supermarkets elsewhere until recently. But now, thanks to aquaculture, pond-raised catfish is a popular item in the frozen food case. ARS helped increase fish farming by breeding fish for disease resistance, finding better feed, and eliminating chemicals that contribute to off flavors.

**SuperSlurper.** When ARS scientists married starch to a synthetic chemical, they managed to create a product so thirsty it could absorb hundreds of times its own weight in water. Someone called it SuperSlurper, and the name stuck. After patents were secured in 1976, SuperSlurper started popping up all over the marketplace.

This absorbent compound, which can slurp up to 2,000 times its weight in water, is used as an electrical conductor in batteries; it is

*found in fuel filters, baby powders, and wound dressings; and compounds very much like it are used in disposable diapers and sanitary napkins.*

**Poinsettia.** *Not only is poinsettia the most popular Christmas plant, it is the number-one flowering potted plant in the United States, even though its traditional sales period is just 6 weeks. That was not the case back in 1976, when ARS first began its program to improve the flower's dependability. This meant discovering the exact conditions of light and temperature the plant requires. Researchers also performed breeding experiments that defined how color develops, and they devised precision growing methods that enabled massive cultivation. Last year, the wholesale value of the poinsettia crop reached nearly \$170 million—a jump of more than 400 percent since 1976.*

**Cotton.** *When medics during World War II pleaded for self-clinging elastic bandages, stretch cottons were born. After the war, consumers asked ARS to make stretch cotton available in diapers, socks, and underwear, so ARS chemists invented three different ways to put more stretch into cotton.*

*Next, ARS helped unchain Americans from the ironing board. First, scientists brought forth the first wash-and-wear cotton shirts. Then they improved the process by which durable-press cotton fabric finish was created so it would pose no health risk to textile workers. A new way to cross-link cotton fibers used citric acid to do the trick. The improved process, which has been patented, keeps cotton fabrics wrinkle-free for more than 100 washings.*

## ■ Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service

The Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), which was created in 1994, forms a national and international research and education network. CSREES combines the research and higher education functions of the former Cooperative State Research Service with the education and outreach functions of the former Extension Service.

### Mission

In cooperation with its partners and customers, CSREES focuses on advancing a global system of research, extension, and higher education in the food and agricultural sciences and related environmental and human sciences to benefit people, communities, and the Nation.

CSREES programs increase scientific knowledge and provide access to that knowledge; strengthen the capabilities of land-grant and other institutions in research, extension, and higher education; increase access to and use of improved communication and network systems; and promote informed decisionmaking by producers, families, communities, and other customers.

The Agency's purpose is to improve economic, environmental, and social conditions in the United States and globally. These conditions include improved agricultural and other economic enterprises; safer, cleaner water, food, and air; enhanced stewardship and management of natural resources; healthier, more responsible, and more productive individuals, families, and communities; and a stable, secure, diverse, and affordable national food supply.

### Partners

CSREES works in partnership with the public and private sectors to maximize the effectiveness of limited resources. Partners include:

- Land-grant institutions in each State, territory, and the District of Columbia,
- More than 130 colleges of agriculture,
- 59 agricultural experiment stations,
- 57 cooperative extension services,
- 63 schools of forestry,
- 16 1890 historically black land-grant institutions and Tuskegee University,
- 27 colleges of veterinary medicine,
- 42 schools and colleges of family and consumer sciences,
- 29 1994 Native American land-grant institutions, and
- 127 Hispanic-serving institutions, including 81 members and 45 associate members of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities.

### Programs

CSREES research, extension, and education leadership is provided through programs in plant and animal production, protection, and processing; natural resources and environment; rural economic and social development; families, 4-H, and nutrition; partnerships; competitive research grants and awards management; science and education resource development; and communications, technology, and distance education.

The agency develops research and education programs in cooperation with its partners, using advanced research and educational technologies that empower people and communities to solve problems and improve their lives. The CSREES partnership with the land-grant universities and their representatives is critical to effective and shared planning, delivery, and accountability for research, higher education, and extension programs.

### Advanced Communication Technology

CSREES is a recognized international leader in designing, organizing, and applying advanced communication technologies and in meeting the growing demand for enhanced distance education capabilities. CSREES provides essential community access to research and education knowledge and connects private citizens to other Federal Government information. All State extension system offices and 75 percent

of county offices are interconnected via interactive communication technology. This capability enables CSREES to respond in a timely and credible manner to critical issues and public needs.

### Reaching Diverse Audiences

Rural America is more diverse, both in human and financial resources, than ever before. In response, CSREES is a diverse and multicultural organization that values and is committed to pluralism as a long-term investment in the future.

### CSREES at Work

CSREES is a key to knowledge-based agriculture, for it provides a critical connection between extension educators—who identify and communicate agricultural, environmental, and community problems—and researchers at campuses and experiment stations. The researchers, in turn, generate new knowledge and develop a new generation of scientists. Educators and researchers work together to initiate and stimulate new research that helps solve real world problems.

#### ■ **CSREES Is**

- *Cutting-edge research programs on value-added products, plant and animal genomes, integrated pest management, water quality, human nutrition, food safety, and animal and plant systems*
- *Model education programs on food safety; sustainable agriculture; water quality; children, youth, and families; health; environmental stewardship; and community economic development*
- *5.6 million youth involved in 4-H projects and programs*
- *The National Research Initiative, which supports research to solve key agricultural and environmental problems*
- *Grants to provide educational opportunities in the agricultural and food sciences*
- *Innovative design of interactive distance education activities to reach diverse audiences and sustain access to lifelong learning*
- *Immediate electronic access to flood and disaster safety, recovery, and other vital information*
- *3 million trained volunteers who work with outreach education programs nationwide*
- *Over 9,600 local extension educators working in 3,150 counties*
- *Over 9,500 scientists conducting research at 59 State agricultural experiment stations*
- *International education programs taught by over 200 extension professionals in 17 countries*

## For Further Information

Contact your local county extension office (offices are listed under local government in the telephone directory), a land-grant university, or the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250-0900. Telephone: 202-720-3029; Fax: 202-690-0289; Internet address: csrees@reeusda.gov

### ■ **Did you know?**

- *CSREES information is electronically accessible globally via Internet through Almanac ([almanac@reeusda.gov](mailto:almanac@reeusda.gov)), Gopher ([gopher.reeusda.gov](http://gopher.reeusda.gov) (port 70)), and World Wide Web (<http://www.reeusda.gov>).*
- *CSREES promotes research and development of industrial products that are environmentally friendly and biodegradable and that can be recycled and manufactured from renewable resources grown domestically.*
- *Nearly 100 CSREES extension educators from 29 land-grant universities participated in the USDA Poland/American Project, helping with Poland's transition to a market economy.*
- *The CSREES AgriAbility project provides on-farm assistance to over 2,000 farmers with disabilities and educates agricultural, rehabilitation, and health professionals on safely accommodating disability in agriculture.*
- *Agriculture ranks as one of the three most hazardous U.S. industries. CSREES funding supports farm safety education programs in all 50 states and Puerto Rico.*
- *Hibiscus, also known as kenaf, is a source of industrial fibers for manufactured products such as printing and writing paper, building materials, and containers that combine kenaf with recycled plastic. It is used as an adsorbent material in oil/chemical spill booms, poultry litter, animal bedding, and potting soil. Since 1986, CSREES has led efforts to commercialize kenaf; this plant can produce 6-10 tons of dry fiber per acre.*
- *A CSREES distance learning partnership with the National Association of Counties gave communities nationwide access to interactive discussion of children's issues. This access not only provided a broader range of information for local communities, but it also encouraged their active participation in a continuing learning process.*
- *In 1990-95, jobs in the food and agricultural sciences outpaced graduates by 11 percent. A continuing 5 percent shortfall is projected over the next 5 years.*

- *Women represent more than 38 percent of the baccalaureate enrollment in agriculture, renewable natural resources, and forestry programs at land-grant and State institutions, and their enrollment in academic areas related to agriculture is growing.*
- *58 percent of U.S. forests (358 million acres) is held by 10 million private owners. CSREES has educational programs in all States to help these owners manage their forests with environmentally acceptable methods.*
- *The CSREES pesticide applicator training program trains over half a million people each year on the safe and environmentally sound use of pesticides.*
- *CSREES aquaculture programs assist U.S. farmers, who raise nearly 100 aquatic species for food and recreation with a farm gate value of nearly \$1 billion.*

## ■ Economic Research Service

The Economic Research Service (ERS) provides economic and other social science information and analysis on agriculture, food, natural resources, and rural America. The information produced by ERS is used by farmers and consumers in the decisions they make and by public officials in developing, administering, and evaluating agricultural and rural policies and programs. The wide range of topics that ERS researches, analyzes, and monitors includes:

- Domestic and international agricultural developments and markets,
- Nutrition education and food assistance, food safety regulation, determinants of consumer demand for quality and safety, and food marketing trends and developments,
- Agricultural resource and environmental issues, and
- National rural and agricultural conditions affecting the rural economy, the financial performance of the farm sector, and the implications of changing farm credit and financial market structures.

ERS-produced information is available to the public through research reports, situation and outlook reports, electronic media, magazines (including *Agricultural Outlook*, *FoodReview*, *Rural Conditions and Trends*, and *Rural Development Perspectives*), radio, newspapers, and frequent participation of ERS staff at various public forums.

ERS has four principal functions:

- Research,
- Development of economic and statistical indicators,
- Situation and outlook analysis, and
- Staff analysis.

Research, together with economic and statistical indicators, provides the knowledge and the data base for the situation and outlook and staff analysis functions. The products of the situation and outlook analysis are periodic reports that analyze the current situation and forecast the short-term outlook for major agricultural commodities, agricultural exports, agricultural finance, agricultural resources, and world agriculture. ERS staff also assess issues requiring policy decisions by the Administration and Congress.

All ERS, NASS, and WAOB reports are available through a variety of formats. Printed reports are available through the ERS-NASS order desk at 1-800-999-6779. Most reports are also available electronically through the USDA Computerized Information Delivery System. In addition, selected reports are available through the ERS/NASS electronic bulletin board or through the Internet; call (202) 219-0395 for more information.

## ■ National Agricultural Statistics Services

An orderly production and marketing system depends on an accurate, up-to-the-minute accounting of the many factors that influence agriculture. The mission of the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is to serve the United States, its agriculture, and its rural communities by providing meaningful, timely, accurate, and objective statistical information and services.

NASS headquarters in Washington, DC, and State Statistical Offices (SSO's) cover 120 crops and 45 livestock items annually. Current and historical information is published in approximately 400 reports, which focus on:

- Crop acreage, yield, production, and grain stocks,
- Livestock, dairy, and poultry production and prospects,
- Chemical use in agriculture,
- Labor use and wage rates,
- Farms and land in farms, and
- Prices, costs, and returns.

The information is geared toward producers and can help them plan planting, feeding, breeding, and marketing programs. The data also are used by agricultural organizations, services, and businesses; trade groups; and financial institutions to determine demand for inputs, resources, transportation, and storage-related crop and livestock products. In addition, the data are used to make and carry out agricultural policy concerning farm program legislation, commodity programs, agricultural research, and rural development.

Most estimates are based on information gathered from producers, who are surveyed through personal or telephone interviews or through mailed questionnaires. In addition, for major crops—such as corn, wheat, soybeans, and cotton—in-the-field counts and measurements of plant development are made in the top producing States. Other estimates are based on surveys of grain elevators, hatcheries, and other agribusinesses, as well as on administrative data such as slaughter records.

Data collected from these varied sources are summarized by the NASS SSO serving that State and sent to the Agency's Agricultural Statistics Board in

Washington, DC, which determines and issues the official estimates for the State and the Nation.

#### How To Get More Information

All NASS reports are released at scheduled times, and the information is offered to the public in a variety of formats. Publications and a catalog of products can be ordered by calling 800/999-6779. Electronic sources for information include the Computerized Information Delivery Service (202/720-9045) and Internet (202/219-0012). For additional information about the Agency, its products, or its services, call the information hotline: 800/727-9540.

State Statistical offices often have some additional data breakouts not found in national publications. For information about a particular State, call the State Statistician at any of the following offices:

<b>ALABAMA</b> Montgomery (800)832-4181	<b>GEORGIA</b> Athens (800)253-4419	<b>LOUISIANA</b> Baton Rouge (800)256-4485	<b>NEVADA</b> Reno (702)784-5584
<b>ALASKA</b> Palmer (800)478-6079	<b>HAWAII</b> Honolulu (800)804-9514	<b>MARYLAND</b> Annapolis (410)841-5740	<b>NEW ENGLAND</b> Concord, NH (800)642-9571
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