

RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND ECONOMICS
Statement of Dr. Catherine E. Woteki
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Before the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

Chairman Pryor, Ranking Member Blunt, and members of the Subcommittee, my name is Catherine Woteki and I am the Chief Scientist and Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics (REE) at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). I am pleased to appear before you to discuss the President's 2014 budgets for the REE mission area agencies.

My testimony reflects the unwavering commitment of President Barack Obama, Secretary Tom Vilsack, and all those who work at USDA to support our Nation's farmers, producers, and consumers every step of the way from farm to dinner table. USDA has a long history of enhancing rural prosperity while helping to provide an abundant and diverse food supply to urban and rural America. One of the key ways these goals are achieved is through USDA's cutting edge research on genetics and genomics, and natural resources and environmental science, nutrition and food safety, and local and global food security. USDA has also invested in public education and scientific literacy. Our Action Plan is available to you at any time and can be found at <http://ree.usda.gov>.

As you know, this commitment to science is one that USDA made long ago. Last year marked 150 years since President Abraham Lincoln created the Department of Agriculture along with the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Morrill Act—the legislation that created our Nation's network of Land Grant universities. This partnership—which was subsequently expanded in 1890 to include institutions serving the African American community and in 1994 to

include the tribal colleges—is critical in the advancement of agricultural science in the United States today. The internationally-recognized Extension system that is housed in these Land Grant colleges and universities is an important incubator for best practices in agriculture.

The challenges for the next several decades are clear: expanding and delivering safe and nutritious food to a growing population, keeping agricultural production profitable, bolstering agricultural exports, reversing the obesity epidemic, and ensuring that our natural resources remain available and abundant for future generations while responding to the threat of a changing climate.

Scientific research is the cornerstone of agricultural production and food security. Investing in agricultural research is critical to the innovations that keep our agricultural sector productive, offset a shrinking farm safety net, and ensure positive benefits to our economy. Agricultural productivity is a key component of net farm income, which last year was the second highest since 1980. Investments in agricultural science will increase the productivity that is essential for the long-term prosperity of our nation. In fact, for every dollar spent on agricultural research, \$20 is returned to the economy. In tough economic times, investing in agricultural science makes sense.

The challenge to be responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars is one that the REE mission area takes very seriously. While each of our four agencies serves a particular function and constituency, we also coordinate our work to maximize federal agricultural research funding. REE mission area agencies collaborate closely with scientists and researchers across the Federal government, industry, academia, and other stakeholders. These collaborations are particularly important in conducting scientific research that is not cost-effective for farmers or producers to

undertake. Another benefit of collaboration is that it reduces the duplication of research endeavors.

These are some of the key principles that have been brought to bear as the President's FY 2014 budget request for the REE mission area was developed. This budget request reflects the belt-tightening and prioritizing that many Americans have been forced to make in a challenging economic climate. For the REE mission area, the budget requests \$2.8 billion for the four mission area agencies. I would like to spend some time highlighting some of our key proposed investments for 2014 budget.

For the Agricultural Research Service, the President's 2014 budget requests \$1.28 billion. Investing in several aspects of the vast research agenda of ARS—from increases in important scientific topics to responding to emerging priorities and to an aging infrastructure—this budget request demonstrates the Administration's commitment to agricultural science.

For example, the budget request allocates \$4.6 million to centralize information technology (IT) systems in ARS. Ensuring robust systems to capture, track, and compile data will go a long way toward accelerating the pace of discovery and effectively explaining and building upon ARS's scientific achievements. These investments will also help reduce duplication and increase coordination of research investigations by enhancing their transparency.

The 2014 budget request also provides funding for priority initiatives that will improve production efficiencies through sustainable agriculture (\$10 million), help producers adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change (\$10 million), protect crops at high risk of infestation from insects (\$6 million), continue the development of alternative fuels (\$5 million) and build on ongoing research in the earth sciences (\$4 million).

In addition, in 2011 Congress directed ARS to study and prioritize ARS's infrastructure investments. The resulting ARS Capital Investment Strategy identified 21 low-condition facilities that house high-priority programs and that are in need of modernization over the next decade. The President's budget requests \$155 million for the number one priority, a replacement facility for the Southeast Poultry Disease Research Laboratory in Athens, GA. This laboratory is the country's leading facility for research on emerging and exotic poultry diseases, including avian influenza, and the request will enable ARS scientists to advance this critically important area of research.

The National Agricultural Library has renewed purpose in the digital age to facilitate research collaboration on interdisciplinary agricultural problems among government agencies, industry and academia. The 2014 Budget requests a total of \$26 million to continue library and information services, support a government-wide Earth Observation and Environmental Data Activities initiative, and develop and provide unified and accessible data infrastructure capacity.

The above proposals represent investments in USDA's intramural science programs. USDA's extramural science is coordinated by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). The budget proposes a total funding level for NIFA of \$1.29 billion. NIFA funds capacity-building programs—grants programs that support a variety of research, education, and Extension initiatives at Land Grant institutions—as well as competitive grant programs to support scientists, researchers, and educators from across our Nation that are awarded after a rigorous peer-review panel selection process.

For 2014, the President's budget requests \$383 million for NIFA's flagship competitive grant program, the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). AFRI's programs provide

the largest investment in agricultural science across a number of disciplines that touch every aspect of American lives; from plant and animal health and production, to agricultural systems and technologies, to bioenergy and natural resources, to food safety, human nutrition, and health. Responding to producer's concerns about the need for quicker response to emerging problems, the President's Budget includes a new Critical Agricultural Research and Extension (CARE) Competition in the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative. The CARE Competition will permit us to address emerging issues important to agricultural production.

To improve transparency and accountability, the President's budget provides \$7.8 million to consolidate and modernize NIFA's grant management systems. This critical investment will allow NIFA to accurately quantify its research successes and help track research accomplishments as they transfer from the laboratory to our communities and our homes.

As a former dean of agriculture at a Land Grant university, I am a strong proponent of ensuring that the bench is deep from which to draw our next generation of farmers and scientists. The President's budget reorganizes several Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) programs Administration-wide into the Department of Education and the National Science Foundation, thereby transferring NIFA's STEM education programs to those agencies. However, NIFA will continue to support secondary and post-secondary students in other ways. For instance, AFRI grants to university researchers routinely support fellowships to pre- and post-doctoral students working with principal investigators on these grants, representing about \$6 million in FY 2010. Additionally, the President's budget proposes \$9.2 million for Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) Education Partnership Grants Program.

Also, the 2014 budget requests \$22 million for sustainable agriculture, in particular, through the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program. These funds will help SARE grantees continue their important research, education, and extension activities across the Nation. SARE grants focus on keeping American agriculture profitable while ensuring that we can remain responsible stewards of our environment.

In addition to intramural and extramural science, the REE mission area provides a valuable service to not only other USDA mission areas but also to America's agricultural producers, industry, academia, and non-governmental organization (NGOs) through its support of two key USDA research and statistical agencies, the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).

The President's budget requests \$78 million for ERS. ERS anticipates and responds to the needs of decision-makers by applying economic and social science research to address all aspects of the agricultural enterprise, from scientific investments to food access to agricultural trade. For example, the President's budget proposes \$2.5 million for "Research Innovations to Improve Policy Effectiveness" to strengthen behavioral economics research and statistical uses of administrative data. Behavioral economics research is based on the concept that humans do not always make the most rational choices, but instead are influenced by external factors like emotion or social pressure. ERS intends to apply behavioral economics to analyze and better understand food and agricultural programs and policies.

The 2014 budget requests nearly \$160 million for NASS – which is well known across the Nation by farmers, ranchers, and other producers and processors, as well as the commodity markets. For the Census of Agriculture that is conducted every five years, The Budget Request

will fully fund the Census at \$43 million. The 2012 Census is currently underway and close to 1.9 million responses have been received as of early April. The results of the Census will be published in 2014 and will provide data important to the agricultural industry as well as to the administration of Federal programs. Farmers and commodity markets have also come to depend on the impartial forecasts of NASS's agricultural estimates that the agency compiles many times each year.

Mr. Chairman, the President's 2014 budget for USDA's REE mission area builds on critical investments in agricultural science. Under the strong leadership of Secretary Vilsack, we are continuing to leverage our appropriations by streamlining processes and identifying efficiencies throughout the Department. REE mission area agencies collectively have reduced travel spending, on average, by nearly 52 percent below 2010 spending. We have provided retirement options for those who are eligible and have greatly reduced hiring.

Mr. Chairman, these are difficult times. Like you, like the members of this subcommittee, we understand that all too well. But if we, as a Nation, are to maintain our leadership role in the world of agricultural innovation and productivity we have an obligation to support research, education, and Extension activities.

At a time when China and Brazil are ramping up their investment in agricultural research, we cannot afford to let ours be gutted, or worse still, be ignored.

It is too easy to take for granted the healthy, nutritious, and safe foods that are available to us, the clean air we breathe, the fresh water we drink, and even the clothes we wear. These are benefits that have resulted to a large extent from the discoveries made by federal investments in agricultural science.

Scientific endeavors are not the kind of activity that we can put a bookmark in and come back when funding is flush. Research requires ongoing investigation and commitment.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to working with you as we continue to support a world-class level of science at the Department of Agriculture to maintain and increase the strength of U.S. agriculture.

Thank you again for your time and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.