

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE AND BEE LAB UPDATE

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The Food, Conservation and Energy Act, otherwise known as the Farm Bill, was passed on June 22, 2008. This legislation has many impacts on the farming community, but it also calls for a reorganization of agricultural research programs that are funded by the Federal government, and these changes were to be enacted at the beginning of this fiscal year, Oct. 1, 2008. I thought that some of these changes might be of interest to the farming community, but of course it will take some time before they can actually be developed and implemented. I am sure that during this stage there will be opportunities for public comment.

The first major change is the establishment of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). The intention was to create an institute for agriculture that was analogous to the National Institute of Health (NIH). NIFA will be directed by a distinguished scientist appointed by the President of the United States for a six year term, but who will report to the Undersecretary of Agriculture. It was through the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) that many of the agricultural research and extension programs for the states and land grant universities were funded (e.g. Hatch Act, Evans-Allen, and McEntire-Stennis funds and competitive grants). CSREES will now be absorbed into NIFA, and funding mechanisms will shift more towards competitive grants, and less to formula funds. For example, the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) has been established to replace earlier granting programs, such as the National Research Initiative. Plans for this new granting mechanism, AFRI, have not been released at the time this is being written, but are expected to be released at the end of Nov 2008. The new grants will become available in Jan. 2009.

The second major change is the establishment of the Research, Education, and Extension Office (REEO). The Pollinating Insects Research Unit, which I represent, is part of the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), which will now fall under the REEO. REEO has been established, as directed in the Farm Bill, to

1. Identify, address, and prioritize current and emerging agricultural research, extension, and education needs, including funding,
2. Ensure that agricultural research, education, and extension programs are effectively coordinated across disciplines, and across involved parties,
3. Promote the collaborative use of agricultural research across all levels of government, including federal, state, tribal, and international needs, and
4. Foster communication among research, education, and extension beneficiaries.

Six Divisions have been established as part of the REEO, and Division Chiefs have already been appointed by the Undersecretary. These divisions are as follows, with the current Division Chiefs in parentheses:

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1. Renewable Energy, Natural Resources and Environment (Mark Walbridge, from ARS)
2. Food Safety, Nutrition, and Health (Mary Gray, from CSREES)
3. Plant Health, Production, and Products (Catherine Parks, from the Forest Service)
4. Animal Health, Production, and Products (Charlotte Kirk Baer, from CSREES)
5. Agricultural Systems and Technology (Jill Auburn, from CSREES)
6. Agricultural Economics and Rural Communities (Robbin Shoemaker, from the Economic Research Service).

These Chiefs will be responsible for developing a road map for agricultural research , extension, and education, as outlined in the new Farm Bill. Part of this mission will, of course, be to determine funding levels, as well. Through all of these changes, the organization of ARS still remains little affected, but we await the details of the REEO road map with regard to program priorities and funding.