



Legislative update: Where Is research headed in the 117th Congress?

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One idea that is gaining considerable traction with both private industry and policymakers is that of offering producers payment for carbon sequestration practices. This photo, courtesy of Rajveer Sing, shows a no-tillage planter drilling corn seed with minimal soil disturbance into the previous year's cover crop residue.

There has been a deluge of congressional activity over the past several weeks with multiple bills related to agriculture, research, and climate change moving forward in both the House and Senate. Here's an overview of what's happening, and what it could mean for the agriculture and natural resources community.

National Science Foundation

The "Endless Frontiers Act" (EFA) is a bipartisan bill, spearheaded by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (NY), focusing on innovation, technology, and global competitiveness—specifically with China. The EFA would create a new Technology and Innovation Directorate within the National Science Foundation (NSF) and would authorize \$100 billion in funding over the next five years. There is a companion bill in the House, and between the two chambers, there are dozens of Republican and Democratic co-sponsors. While there is some momentum behind this bill, there are concerns over the scale of investment in technology and questions over the logistics of NSF allocating that much funding in such a short time.

In response to the EFA, the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology has also put forward legislation focusing on NSF. The "National Science Foundation of the Future Act" proposes doubling the NSF budget—from \$8.2 billion to \$18.3 billion by 2026—and creating a new Science and Engineering Solutions Directorate, which would

address “societal challenges.” This bill is smaller in scale than the EFA and has had more engagement from the research community, specifically in striking a balance between funding for the new Directorate and NSF’s core mission areas.

Federal research programs were also a clear priority in President Biden’s first budget proposal. The President proposes a 20% increase to the NSF budget, raising its budget to \$10.2 billion. Though the full details have not yet been released, the request also calls for a new Directorate for Technology, Innovation, and Partnerships within NSF, similar in scope to the Directorate proposed in the EFA.

ASA, CSSA, and SSSA have long advocated for increased NSF funding, both as the three Societies and through broader coalitions. While it’s unclear exactly when and which bill will move forward, it’s exciting to see such broad and bipartisan support for NSF.

Climate and Agriculture

There is growing interest in the connection between agriculture and climate change with more and more policymakers working to develop policies that frame agriculture as a climate solution. One idea that is gaining considerable traction with both private industry and policymakers is that of offering producers payment for carbon sequestration practices.

The “Growing Climate Solutions Act,” initially drafted in 2020, was reintroduced to the Senate in April of this year, this time with considerable backing from Democrats, Republicans, and farm groups. The legislation includes efforts to facilitate participation in carbon markets, provide technical assistance, and reward producers for climate-smart practices. The bill was approved by the Senate Agriculture Committee, and Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow (MI) has indicated that the bill could come to the full Senate floor for a vote soon.

On the research side, Senators Dick Durbin (IL) and Jerry Moran (KS) reintroduced the “America Grows Act,” bipartisan legislation that would increase USDA research funding 5% annually for the next 10 years, nearly doubling the USDA research budget in that time. ASA, CSSA, and SSSA joined more than 100 other science and agriculture groups supporting the bill, and you can ask your senators to co-sponsor the bill here:

<https://p2a.co/ouLvlJB>.

Infrastructure

Climate change was a major theme in President Biden’s \$2 trillion “America Jobs Plan.” In this proposal, Biden aims to tackle some of the nation’s most pressing problems—from crumbling infrastructure to decaying water systems to even climate change. The proposal goes far beyond what is considered traditional infrastructure—roads, bridges, and buildings—including funding for affordable housing, research and development (R&D), rural broadband, and health and elder care.

Within the infrastructure discussion, ASA, CSSA, and SSSA are working on two fronts. The first is an endeavor spearheaded by the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities (APLU) who have identified an \$11.5 billion need for research infrastructure upgrades at the country’s land grant universities. ASA, CSSA, and SSSA joined more than 350 other research and agricultural groups asking Congress to support an investment in agricultural research infrastructure.

ASA, CSSA, and SSSA are also working with agriculture research partners on a proposal to provide a large influx of funding to USDA aimed specifically at addressing climate change R&D. Overall, President Biden’s plan calls for a \$180 billion R&D investment, including research infrastructure. Of this, \$50 billion is earmarked for NSF, but USDA and the Department of Energy will play important roles in accelerating climate

research and innovations.

There are nearly a dozen other bills in both the House and Senate dealing with climate change, agriculture, and research. Check out the Science Policy tab on the Society websites for all the latest legislation news.

Dig Deeper

- Grace E. Chesmore, Rachel L. Starr, Rebecca Van Hoeck, Meredith L. Ward, The Crisis of US Coal Communities: Strategies for a Just Transition to Renewable Energy, *Journal of Science Policy & Governance*, 10.38126/JSPG180202, **18**, 02, (2021).

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