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Food and agriculture research updates: Farm bill, funding, USDA reorg

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Congress has advanced key agriculture policy actions, including House movement on the farm bill, fiscal year 2027 agriculture appropriations with

modest spending cuts, and budget hearings highlighting cost pressures on farmers, while rejecting most of the administration's proposed reductions to ag research funding. At the same time, USDA announced major restructuring plans for its research agencies, relocating staff and programs nationwide.

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The annual federal funding process is moving full steam ahead with the House and Senate Appropriations Committees holding budget hearings for USDA with Agriculture Secretary Brook Rollins testifying. The hearings primarily focused on the challenges facing American growers, ranchers, and consumers with high costs being the major theme. This week the House Agriculture Appropriations Committee marked up its fiscal year 2027 Agriculture spending bill, providing a modest 3% cut to federal agriculture spending. USDA Agriculture Research Service (ARS) received flat funding while the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) received a 3% cut overall. While the full details will be available next week, it appears that Congress largely rejected the cuts the administration proposed in the president's budget request. The Senate Appropriations Committee has not yet released its markup schedule, but the Agriculture bill will likely be one of the first to move.

In other ag news, the House has taken a major step forward in the farm bill process, announcing that the farm bill will advance to the House Rules Committee on April 27. The bill must first be debated and possibly amended in the Rules Committee before it can come to the House floor for a full chamber vote. More than 300 amendments were

offered, making changes to SNAP, pesticide labeling, animal welfare, land use, and year-round E15. House Agriculture Chair GT Thompson has indicated his desire to pass the farm bill before May 1, but a jam-packaged legislative calendar next week could cause the vote to slip into early May. If the House can pass the bill (and that's still a big "if"), then all eyes will turn to the Senate for action. ASA, CSSA, and SSSA are advocating for additional funding for the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research (FFAR) in the Senate version of the farm bill.

On April 23, USDA announced the next steps in its reorganization plan, with [major changes announced](#) for several programs in the [Research, Education, and Economics mission area](#). The announcement stated that remote employees of the Economic Research Service (ERS) and NIFA will be relocated to Kansas City as was the original intent of the 2019 move. The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) will be relocating its headquarters to St. Louis, MO while still maintaining a field presence. The ARS will begin decommissioning the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) and relocating research programs to facilities across the country. The ARS will be creating four new research offices based on specific topics:

- Animal Science Research Office—Fort Collins, CO
- Plant Science Research Office—Stoneville, MS
- Land Utilization Research Office—Peoria, IL
- Post-Production Research Office—Albany, CA

The stated goal of the restructuring is to improve operational efficiency, create a work environment that better supports the USDA's mission and employees, and bring the department's services closer to the communities it serves. While the announcement emphasizes that the reorganization is not a reduction in force, the 2019 ERS and NIFA relocation resulted in a loss of almost 70% of NIFA employees.

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