



NATIONAL COALITION FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

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National C-FAR Position Statement, NIFA

Adopted by National C-FAR Board of Directors, September 23, 2004

NCFAR's mission is to enhance public investment in the entire spectrum of food and agricultural research, extension and education. NCFAR supports the establishment of a National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) as an important step that can enhance public investment in food and agricultural research across the board. We believe that the establishment of NIFA will bring the advances in all realms of modern science more fully to the advantage of our nation through improved understanding of all aspects of agricultural and food production systems. This concept has been elevated to national discussions for many years. NCFAR believes that now is the time to act.

The USDA Research, Economics and Education Task Force was appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture in 2003 at the request of Congress. The task force was charged to review and evaluate the merits of establishing one or more institutes focused on disciplines important to the progress of food and agricultural sciences. The task force report was delivered in July 2004.

The report contains recommendations for the establishment of NIFA within the Department of Agriculture, to be led by a Director appointed by the President of the United States who would report to the Secretary of Agriculture. The institute would be created separately from any existing USDA program and modeled after the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health.

The institute would be established as a granting agency funding extramural research, organized with three offices, which would (1) monitor the effectiveness of NIFA's expenditures and coordinate the research efforts with other public research programs in life sciences; (2) work with scientific experts to assess the adequacy of the numbers and qualifications of scientific personnel in food and agriculture and make recommendations for training programs needed; and (3) match national needs to research advances in order to help facilitate solutions to issues of national interest.

A unique feature proposed for the NIFA is a two-tiered system for funding research grants. One level of the review would be conducted by committees of scientists who would apply rigorous standards of merit based peer-review to all proposals. The Standing Council of Advisers would conduct the second level of review. The Council would assure the relevance and importance of the proposals to be funded. We believe this system is important to ensure that the highest quality of science is funded, and assures that the most important issues regarding national needs will be given adequate consideration.

The recommendations of the task force bring to our attention to the need for new mechanisms of research in food and agricultural systems. We believe that NIFA can provide invaluable benefits to the nation beyond those being realized today, and we encourage its establishment without delay.

Funding for NIFA must be *in addition to* funding for existing USDA research, extension and education programs, such as the NRI and other competitive grant programs administered by CSREES. NCFAR recognizes that many details of NIFA's implementation remain to be debated and resolved to realize the potential of this institute concept, and we look forward to participating in that important process.

Ref. National Institute for Food and Agriculture: A Proposal. July 2004. Report of the REES TF