

**Joint WEDA - WAAESD Meeting**  
**NIFA Update & Responses to COVID-19**  
**APLU Update & Responses to COVID-19**  
*March 25, 2020 • 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. PT*  
*Zoom*

**Attendees:** A00827903, Cody, Sreekala Bajwa, Troy Bauder, Jon Boren, Walter Bowen, Kelly Crane, Chris Davies, Leslie Edgar, David Gang, Natalie Goldberg, Jeff Goodwin, William Hoffman, Glenda Humiston, Gene Kelly, Steve Loring, Mark McGuire, Barbara Petty, Wendy Powers, Chris Pritsos, John Ritten, Lindsey Shirley, Milan Shipka, Doug Steele, Ashley Stokes, John Talbott, Ken White, Lyla Houglum (WEDA Executive Director), Bret Hess (WAAESD Executive Director) and Saige Zespy (WAAESD Recorder)

**Summary:**

WEDA and WAAESD members met together following their individual business meetings for brief updates from NIFA Chief of Staff Bill Hoffman and APLU's Vice President of Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Doug Steele.

**Bill Hoffman - NIFA**

COVID-19 Response

- USDA performed a stress test on their IT system to implement social distancing. With minor wrinkles, it worked. Since that time, the agency has been working remotely.
- Deadline changes
  - Upcoming deadlines were changed for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Program. Deadlines on March 19, March 26, April 2 and April 9 were changed to various dates in April. See [NIFA Deadline Extensions due to COVID-19](#) here.
  - The submission deadline for the 2021 Plan of Work for the ARERA Reports was changed from April 1 to May 1.
- The late application submission to NIFA was made public.
  - This program has been in place for many years to accommodate institutions that had experienced extenuating circumstances (i.e. natural disaster, emergency, etc.) It was not publicized.
  - If a late application is anticipated, contact the agency person identified in the Request for Application to notify them of when the application should be expected.
  - Accommodations can be made, as long as applications are received prior to the panel meeting. Up to a "very reasonable amount of time past the deadline," late applications will be considered.

Funding

- 2020 Appropriation
  - NIFA is operating under the 2020 appropriation, which contained \$1.5 billion in discretionary funding (+\$66 million from FY2019). Total funding for the agency for 2020 is \$1.738 billion (+\$13 million or 1% from FY2019).

- President's Budget for FY2021
  - \$1.6 billion in discretionary funding (+\$2 billion) was recommended for FY2021 in the President's budget. This is a \$64 million increase above the 2020 enacted amount.
  - Very few USDA agencies saw increases in the President's FY 2021 budget.
  - AFRI received \$600 million in the President's budget.
  - APLU distributed priorities to its CARET delegates, and NIFA is optimistic because of the increase in the President's budget.
- FY2019 funds
  - NIFA is finalizing the release of FY2019 annual funds.
  - At the end of 2019, NIFA had funds withheld, pending further administrative review. They are currently down to less than 100 projects to finalize.
- 2018 Farm Bill
  - The bill changed costs for competitive grant programs, implementing an indirect cost limit of 30 percent of total federal funds awarded.
  - Matching requirements that had been included for some programs were waived (in particular, SCRI and the Emergency Citrus Disease Research and Extension program)
    - It was a one-year waiver, with the option for appropriators to waive every year at their discretion
  - A new program provides \$5 million for New Beginning Tribal Students program; the RFA should be published soon.
  - Other new programs
    - \$5 million research equipment grant program
    - \$1 million agriculture genome to phenome initiative
    - Urban agriculture program
  - NIFA funds can be used to do research on industrial hemp, as long as states have submitted production plans to USDA
    - Alternatively, the 2014 Hemp Research Guidelines apply in the absence of a state production plan
    - Find answers to industrial hemp questions at [www.nifa.usda.gov/industrial-hemp](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/industrial-hemp).

#### Contacts at NIFA

- With changing personnel, an [org chart](#) has been released to help universities find a contact related to grant programs
- Call the division director in charge of the program
- Higher-level officials can also be called; they will direct you to the right person

#### **Doug Steele - APLU**

#### NIFA Update

- NIFA has been very helpful and working cooperatively to address challenges and be transparent

## Funding

- APLU appreciates NIFA's efforts to continue the match waiver requirements for SCRI and Citrus Greening in FY 2020.
  - The effort will save institutions over \$120 million in the next year.
  - A long-term solution will be important.
- The President's Budget for FY 2021 was positive for APFI, but it came at an expense to capacity funding.
  - APLU has taken a position advocating for an 8% increase over FY2020 funds for both capacity funds and competitive AFRI funds.
  - APLU has also started to look at FY 2022 funding and the Farm Bill.

## COVID-19 Response

- APLU has moved to total remote work locations (typically work from home). They have access to offices to bring home files, flash drives, laptops, etc.
- They will work from home until April 24 (at a minimum)
- Stimulus package
  - APLU continues to await the agreement from the House and Senate of a COVID-19 stimulus package. At last read, the final package was \$2 trillion.
  - APLU will sort through the bill line by line when it comes out.
  - Currently, there isn't much stimulus for agriculture.
    - Some discussions about targeted price support, dairy industry support and SNAP program support are included.
  - There may be other supplemental programs.
- Moving into the future, Extension should further evaluate how their programming is conducted.
  - Most Extension work is conducted face-to-face.
  - Enhancement of technology use, distance education, distance outreach and further engagement may be options.

## ECOP eExtension Proposal

- ECOP's Executive Committee proposed \$40 million for eExtension that talks about the role of Extension in working with rural communities on prevention and recovery.
  - The goal is to fill a void on information, particularly in rural communities
  - Extension is well-poised to answer this question.
- Doug Steele visited with Dr. Angle on the proposal to avoid catching NIFA by surprise.
- A small working group is pushing the proposal forward for consideration.

## 2015 Sightline Report

- APLU is mobilizing around deferred maintenance and updating numbers in the 2015 Sightline report, to include institutions that did not participate in the original report.
- They are seeking quick feedback to start talking about infrastructure projects and commit resources to rural America and research facilities.

### Value of Capacity Funding

- APLU is also working to establish the value of capacity funds, particularly in light of challenging times (coronavirus pandemic).
- Certainty in the future of research is important to move forward as a system.

### Employment in Pandemic

- Maintaining research labs and employees continues to be important.
- NSF and NIH have both emphasized keeping personnel employed.
- APLU may seek an update webinar from NIFA after some decisions have been made.
  - Details will be released when they are known.
- Extension of current grants/capacity funds may address that question.
  - Currently, each university is looking through their policies to keep graduate students and post docs at work.
- It will be important to avoid large numbers of people going into unemployment or getting other jobs and not returning to school.

## **Question and Answer Period**

### Maintaining employment

- NSF and NIH are providing leeway on grants to allow for students and GRAs to be paid, despite not being in the lab. Is USDA considering a similar approach?
  - Bill Hoffman:
    - Employment is a top priority, and NIFA is working to keep people at work.
      - However, those people not paid on competitive or capacity funds should not be migrated onto competitive or capacity funds.
    - Institutions have broad leeway to use capacity funding.
    - More details will come.
- Is it possible that capacity funds may be extended to provide the best expenditure of those funds, since research may not be as extensive as normal right now?
  - Bill Hoffman:
    - There are conversations about what flexibilities are present for extending capacity funding.
    - More details will come.
- Has NIFA discussed re-directing funding to COVID-19 response and recovery?
  - Some conversations have been broached, but nothing public can be shared about diverting funds for COVID-19 response and recovery.