Bipartisan Policy Center Action

May 1, 2025

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chair
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and
Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Andy Harris
Chair
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and
Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and
Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and
Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairs Hoeven and Harris and Ranking Members Shaheen and Bishop:

On behalf of the Bipartisan Policy Center and its (c)(4) affiliate, Bipartisan Policy Center Action, we are pleased to share our priorities for the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies subcommittees for fiscal year (FY) 2026 appropriations bills. These programs support critical innovation needed to accelerate agricultural innovation, reduce emissions, and maintain global competitiveness.

Rapidly rising debt and interest payments are slowing growth and making it more expensive for Americans to buy cars and homes, attend college, or pay off credit cards. To achieve fiscal sustainability, BPC recommends a continuation of the 2023 discretionary caps, enactment of program integrity reforms, and—outside the appropriations process—legislation to reduce the growth of mandatory program spending and increase federal revenue.

At the same time, BPC believes it is achievable to prudently invest in agencies and programs that expand opportunities for American families and businesses. With these principles in mind, BPC Action respectfully recommends:

Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AgARDA) Funding and Interim Acting Director

AgARDA develops advanced technologies, research tools, and products that address challenges in food and agriculture by undertaking research in early-stage and high-risk areas, providing the opportunity to produce transformative innovations, initiate new ventures, and

create new careers in the agricultural sector. The Department of Agriculture is a global leader in agricultural innovation, driven by agricultural research and development investments across disciplines. Agricultural innovation is the first step in creating tools for farmers and ranchers to address the unprecedented challenges across the food and agriculture sector that increase input costs, reduce yields, and disrupt supply chains. However, the United States has been losing ground to competing agricultural countries. For instance, China has surpassed the United States in federal agricultural research and development investments. AgARDA can address these challenges and maintain global competitiveness to ensure American farmers and ranchers continue to feed and fuel the nation and the world. We request you include the following:

- Funding: $10 million in funding for AgARDA to support projects.
- Requested Report Language:
  Within the Office of the Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics, $10,000,000 is provided for AgARDA to support innovative agriculture research and development projects to maintain global agricultural innovation competitiveness. The Committee directs the Secretary to appoint an Interim Acting Director for AgARDA within 90 days of enactment and award research grants within 360 days of enactment.

  The Committee has determined that for future fiscal years, any budget request for AgARDA shall propose a separate appropriation from other Department accounts, similar to other advanced research project agencies.

Enhanced Rock Weathering (ERW)
ERW is an innovative land management and carbon removal technique that entails the application of finely crushed alkaline rocks, many of which are abundant in the United States, onto fields to enhance soil health and facilitate carbon storage. ERW is currently being deployed on U.S. cropland through several commercial and research sites. ERW increases soil pH, releasing essential minerals for plant growth, and a limited number of initial on-farm studies have suggested that ERW can increase crop yields.

ERW can offer compelling economic opportunities for farmers and local economies. By optimizing soil pH management, ERW can not only increase yields but may reduce farmers' reliance on other costly agricultural inputs, bolstering farm profitability. ERW can also support regional economies by utilizing locally sourced rock materials. Furthermore, ERW deployment builds on the well-established practice of amending soils with rock materials, such as agricultural lime. Farmers have used this practice, also called ag-liming, for decades, applying tens of millions of tons of agricultural lime to U.S. farmland annually. The widespread use of ag-lime has led to the development of infrastructure and supply chains for rock-based soil amendments. ERW leverages this existing system and domestically available rock feedstock sources, allowing for cost-effective deployment.

Beyond its agronomic benefits, ERW has significant carbon sequestration potential. ERW expedites the natural weathering process of alkaline rocks such as basalt or olivine. This

process absorbs atmospheric carbon dioxide, transforming it into stable mineral or ionic forms that are stored over millennia in oceans or new land formations.

As USDA's flagship competitive grants program, the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) is well positioned to scale up research on ERW, helping to determine whether the practice is a viable and cost-effective option for U.S. farmers. Given ERW's potential to boost yields and remove atmospheric carbon dioxide, research on this topic aligns with several of AFRI's priority areas, including plant health and production, bioenergy, natural resources, and environment.

- Requested Report Language
  The Committee notes that projects researching enhanced rock weathering and its agronomic, environmental, and carbon sequestration benefits and impacts are eligible for Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) awards. The Committee directs National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA to prioritize funding for projects aimed at understanding and quantifying soil pH, yield, and other agronomic and environmental impacts of ERW, as well as the monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) of carbon sequestration resulting from ERW deployment.

As you begin the FY26 appropriations process and your work to fund solutions to address the challenges facing America's food and agricultural system, BPC Action urges you to support our funding and report language requests to support farmers and ranchers and next-generation agricultural innovation.

Thank you for your consideration, and if you have any questions, please reach out to Lori Pickford, Senior Energy Advisor for BPC Action, at lpickford@bpcaction.org.

Sincerely,

Michele Stockwell
President, Bipartisan Policy Center Action