A National Call to Action: Invest in Food and Agriculture for America's Future

The Problem

Today, the U.S. food system faces many serious threats, from water and labor shortages to extreme weather and shrinking rural communities. While America has past relied on innovation to overcome challenges like these, public funding to advance food and agriculture has dropped by one-third[1] since the early 2000s, even as our competitors continue to invest more.

The result? U.S. agricultural productivity growth is slowing[2] at a time when the stakes could not be higher. Our current funding for R&D will not keep up with the demands of a growing population[3]. Healthcare costs from diet-related diseases are already rising. At the same time, farmers and ranchers are being squeezed by volatile and expensive input costs. If we don't act now, our food supply, health, and economy are on the line.

The Call to Action

It is not too late to change course. With renewed, expanded investment in food and agriculture, we envision a future where:

- Americans can consistently access safe, affordable, and nutritious food and live longer, healthier lives.
- Communities across the nation—rural and urban alike—can thrive through expanded economic opportunities.
- U.S. farmers and ranchers no longer question whether they can profit enough to sustain their livelihoods.
- A skilled workforce is ready for a wide range of in-demand careers across the food and agriculture industries.
- Young people are empowered with the real-world skills they need to succeed in life.

Together, we can ensure that America not only keeps pace but leads the world in developing more resilient crops and livestock, protecting the water supply, improving soil health, building strong local and regional food systems, supporting community health and well-being, and strengthening tomorrow's workforce. We can bolster the more than 24 million jobs[4] supported by the food and agriculture sector. We can invest in our food security, and with it, our national security.

The Opportunity

Land-grant universities, located in every U.S. state and territory, are uniquely prepared to make this future a reality by turning groundbreaking discoveries into real-world solutions. The land-grant system has a proven track record of collaborative research, academic training, Cooperative Extension, and youth

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[1] Investment in U.S. Public Agricultural Research and Development has Fallen by a Third Over Past Two Decades, Lags Major Trade Competitors. https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2022/june/investment-in-u-s-public-agricultural-research-and-development-has-fallen-by-a-third-over-past-two-decades-lags-major-trade-competitors. USDA Economic Research Service.

[2] 2025 Global Agricultural Productivity Report. https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/a459e229-ecf0-44f2-b5ce-3459f72a561a/content

[3] Alston, J.M. et al. (2010) Persistence Pays: U.S. Agricultural Productivity Growth and the Benefits from Public R&D Spending.

[4] 2025 Food and Agriculture Industries Economic Impact Study. https://goodstone.guerrillaeconomics.net/reports/11cda7e5-59ae-4310-a9b3-fcd931281052

development through 4-H. This work provides a strong ROI: every $1 invested in public agricultural research returns about $20 to the economy[5].

With bold public investment in the land-grant university system and its partners, the U.S. can build a strong food system and a healthy, resilient future for our families, agricultural producers, and communities.

[5] Investment in U.S. Public Agricultural Research and Development has Fallen by a Third Over Past Two Decades, Lags Major Trade Competitors. https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2022/june/investment-in-u-s-public-agricultural-research-and-development-has-fallen-by-a-third-over-past-two-decades-lags-major-trade-competitors. USDA Economic Research Service.