

## **Remarks**

**Roger Beachy, Director  
National Institute of Food and Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture**

**at the  
APLU Annual Meeting  
Dallas, Texas  
November 15, 2010**

It has been a year since I first met with you in this setting of the APLU in Washington D.C., soon after I assumed the leadership role at NIFA. Because of the role that APLU had in establishing the National Institute of Food and Agriculture you have a right to know about our progress.

A lot has happened during this first year of NIFA, and by October we were given the authority to establish the four Institutes, namely: the Institute of Food Production and Sustainability; Institute of Bioenergy, Climate and Environment; Institute of Food Safety and Nutrition; and Institute of Youth, Family and Community. We have commenced the process of announcing the openings of the Principal Scientists to co-lead the institutes. Your help in identifying and securing successful candidates for the positions is greatly appreciated.

During this past year the NIFA team released RFAs to support research to address the societal challenges via the AFRI competitive grants program, asked for your reports of how capacity funds are used, listened to input from more than 200 stakeholder groups and individuals, and reviewed proposals and announced awards. We increased our discussions and our work with members of the communities that serve the tribal nations, the 1890 colleges, and Hispanic-serving institutions.

I have had the opportunity to visit a number of your institutions this year, where I listened to the concerns of faculty and the concerns of deans and other administrative units; I've listened to concerns of representatives of scientific organizations; of those that represent agriculture – including those that represent beginning farmers and ranchers, organic producers, commodity producers, specialty crops, etc. I even visited several successful recipients of the SBIR grants that are making use of university research to create new ventures that will enrich agriculture and rural communities.

The extensive listening that NIFA staff did this year will be evident in the RFAs that will be released, most of them before the end of the year. We will continue to listen, and to tweak the language of the RFAs to be as clear as possible. We will continue to work diligently to ensure that the review panels comprise the most suitable members for each of the RFAs, and that the panels select the most deserving applicants. Your faculty will recognize that the RFAs are somewhat less restrictive, and that there are broader opportunities in the foundational research programs. We listened and responded.

In my visits to your campuses, I have been very pleased to learn that teams of experimentalists, extension scientists, and education specialists are working in teams in new ways – ways that are leading to greater cooperation between departments, colleges, and universities. And many of the teams will remain engaged even if funding is not awarded in this round of grant applications. We are seeing the evidence of some of the changes discussed at this meeting.

As we move to the second year of NIFA we are receiving strong support from Secretary Vilsack and recently from Under Secretary Woteki as she has joined as leader of the REE team. The Secretary demonstrated his support by increasing the request for funding of AFRI – as well as preserving the line of funding for capacity funds. My discussions with OSTP within the last several months has included a request for support for the AFRI line, and to request that capacity funds remain strong as integral components of successful research and extension activities that support a strong food and agriculture sector. You are well aware of the challenges that face the USDA during the upcoming budget cycle, made more opaque by the outcome of the recent election. Prognosticators are not helpful this time around. Nevertheless, I continue to speak whenever possible about the essentiality that funding for NIFA be a high priority in the U.S. science agenda.

In this last year we have worked hard to raise the visibility of science in the USDA; in units of the White House; with other science agencies; and in organizations and associations that support science in Washington, including the AAAS, the National Academies of Science, and the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. We are making progress. However, future funding for NIFA will rely in part on APLU membership staying the course; continuing to speak as a supportive voice for the course of action that is being taken, that is, in support of AFRI and other competitive grants, as well as for the capacity funds that are essential for the work of many of your enterprises. It is important, too, that your faculty, the many partners in research extension and education that NIFA supports, the farming community, and the greater business community that benefit from NIFA research lend their voices of support for NIFA. Without it, it will be difficult to hold the line or to grow the funding level for NIFA.

A final word, this about recruiting and engaging entering students in the area of food and agriculture. We talk much about this topic and its challenges. I have learned from some of you of the changes that you are making in your individual institutions. The challenges include how to enroll and graduate first-generation college students – i.e., those from homes where parents have not had the opportunity to attend college and for whom the need is not apparent. Second, to develop scientists and food sector workers that are educated, knowledgeable about science and agriculture, in all of its components; and, to encourage, even demand, that they learn and engage in teamship and partnering as students at all levels. This will lead to future employees that know and appreciate the art of communication and teamship, traits that are required for academics as well as for those who work in the private sector. These are traits that are often part of our selection of great leaders in outreach and extension, and should be part of our expectations of all of the leaders in food and agriculture in the future.

Thank you all for being engaged with us in real partnerships, now and into the future.

