



OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT —  
AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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Department of Agriculture Agency Review Team  
Office of the President-Elect Joseph R. Biden Jr.  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Members of the Transition Team:

On behalf of the University of California (UC), thank you for meeting with representatives from the University on December 7 to discuss our priorities and recommendations to strengthen the impact of USDA programs under the incoming Biden-Harris Administration. As you continue to develop plans for the new administration, please know that UC stands ready to assist the Agency Review Team in any way we can.

The University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC ANR) connects the power of UC research in agriculture, natural resources, nutrition and youth development with local communities to improve the lives of all Californians. Our statewide network of UC Cooperative Extension academics connect with research faculty to support healthy communities with science-based strategies and technologies. These efforts help to safeguard healthy and affordable food, provide clean drinking water, support the economic vitality of our state, protect natural resources, prevent wildfires, develop future leaders through 4-H, deliver culturally relevant materials and workshops, and develop proactive policies to increase diversity and inclusiveness.

This year has brought many uncertainties and, while the pandemic has significantly curtailed much of our work, UC ANR continues to make an impact. We immediately shifted our work and programming to deliver tools, resources, and information to communities and individuals sheltering-in-place. On the agricultural front, COVID-19 disrupted the food supply, processing, and procurement chain and created challenges to meet the new market demands when schools and restaurants closed. UC worked quickly to connect producers and potential buyers in this new volatile marketplace through a partnership that developed a new online marketplace platform. UC ANR also worked to improve COVID-19 farmworker safety by helping small-scale farmers procure PPE, and researchers are studying the effects of the pandemic on migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families in California, Oregon and Washington.

Following up on our conversation, I would like to re-iterate some of UC's goals, in relation to supporting the new administration's priorities for USDA:

### **Prioritize Research**

- **Funding for research programs.** Include funding to restore research, education and extension programs, in the USDA's FY2022 Budget Request, to provide funding to address COVID-19 research recovery needs and challenges facing the agriculture sector, and to increase funding for agriculture research programs.

- **Grant extensions during the pandemic.** In the short-term, encourage USDA offices to provide cost extensions for research programs and grants; while minimizing administrative burdens for grantees as well as the USDA.
- **Support for early career researchers and post-doc graduate students.** Direct USDA research offices to support early career researchers, many of whom have had their careers disrupted due to the pandemic.
- **Elimination of matching fund requirements for agriculture research.** Ensure that future solicitations for research grants do not include matching fund requirements, which can stifle research; and ensure that the secretary continues to be able to waive matching fund requirements for programs such as the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI).
- **Support for agriculture research infrastructure needs.** Ensure that any infrastructure related proposals put forward by the USDA include provisions to address agriculture research infrastructure needs to preserve agriculture research capacity.

### Climate Change

- **Support for climate change initiatives.** The University is a global leader in climate change research and looks forward to working with the incoming administration to address climate change challenges, including the impact of climate change on the agricultural sector and the role working landscapes can play in reducing emissions.
- **Support for enhanced climate change research opportunities.** UC recommends that the role of the U.S. Global Climate Research Program (USGCRP) should be strengthened, and that the USDA should be included in this research program to enhance climate change research opportunities. The USDA should also consider creating additional climate change related research opportunities.
- **Support for cross agency collaborations.** Create opportunities for cross agency research collaborations to examine climate change impacts. Such cross-agency collaborations could be modeled after the National Science Foundation's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Research Institutes, which include collaborations between agencies such as the USDA.

### Industries of the Future

- **Consider adopting Industries of the Future recommendations.** The USDA should consider adopting Industries of the Future (IotF) plan recommendations offered by the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to support efforts to develop the bioeconomy and other areas.
- **Multi-sector partnerships.** Support the development of multi-sector partnership institutes and Rural Opportunity Zones.
- **Support AI and machine learning.** Look toward creating research opportunities to develop AI and machine learning applications for the benefit of the agricultural sector; including to promote growing foods more economically; and that focus on regional food systems and the development of the bioeconomy.
- **Support for research opportunities.** Create research opportunities to address forest health and wildfire mitigation efforts, and foster the creation of wood-based and biomass products and other support for the bioeconomy.

### ARPA-like model at the USDA

- **Support the creation of an ARPA-like model idea for the USDA.** UC recommends that the USDA consider proposing the creation of an ARPA-like model program within the USDA to focus on transforming the creation of next generation food systems. In creating an ARPA-like program, UC recommends that the organization emulates the core ARPA philosophies and that it should include a focus on: agile high-risk high-reward director driven programs, quick milestone driven cycle times, positioned close to the problem,

outcome based, and most importantly include robust cross-sector collaborations with sector-experts. The recently funded NSF-USDA AI Institute for Next Generation Food Systems, led by UC Davis and including UC Berkeley, UC ANR, and other academic partners, is an important first step towards the development of an ARPA-like organization. UC also recommends that the USDA consider enhancing public-private partnerships such as the Innovation Institute for Food and Health and the Verde Innovation Network for Entrepreneurs (VINE).

#### **National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)**

- **Funding for NIFA agriculture research programs.** The USDA's NIFA research programs are critical to supporting vigorous agricultural research. UC supports increases to funding levels for agriculture research programs, including capacity grant and competitive grant programs.
- **Expand NIFA's presence in Washington, D.C.** UC recommends that the USDA consider expanding NIFA's presence in Washington, D.C. Ideally, the USDA should consider maintaining a strong brain trust of NIFA personnel in Washington, D.C. to foster communications and partnerships in order to address some of the challenges that have arisen as a result of the move of NIFA's headquarters to Kansas City.
- **Develop additional multidisciplinary and multiagency approaches to research.** UC recommends that NIFA consider developing additional multidisciplinary and multiagency approaches to address agriculture research needs.
- **Enhanced communications between USDA and universities.** UC supports the idea of enhancing coordination efforts between universities and NIFA by encouraging NIFA to hold regular calls with the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities (APLU) Experiment Station (ESCOP) and Extension (ECOP) Committees on Organization and Policy, including the regional Executive Directors of ESCOP and ECOP.
- **Support for early career researchers and graduate students.** UC recommends that NIFA provide additional support mechanisms for early career researchers, post-doctoral graduate students, many of whom have been impacted by the pandemic.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you our ideas related to the operations of the USDA under the new administration. If you have any questions about our priorities, please contact me. The University looks forward to working with the new administration on the many important agriculture related issues facing our nation. Please also know that the University of California is happy to be a resource for the new administration.

Sincerely,



Glenda Humiston, Ph.D.  
Vice President  
Agriculture and Natural Resources

cc: Associate Vice President for Federal Governmental Relations, Chris Harrington