



Spurring Innovation in Food and Agriculture:: A Review of the USDA Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Program

*Committee on a Review of the USDA Agriculture and Food Research Initiative, Board on Agriculture and
Natural Resources, Division on Earth and Life Studies, National Research Council*

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The United States embarked on bold policies to enhance its food and agricultural system during the last half of the 19th century, investing first in the education of people and soon thereafter in research and discovery programs aimed at acquiring new knowledge needed to address the complex challenges of feeding a growing and hungry nation. Those policies, sustained over 125 years, have produced the most productive and efficient agricultural and food system in history.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is the primary agency responsible for supporting innovations and advances in food and agriculture. USDA funds are allocated to support research through several mechanisms, including the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). In 2008, Congress replaced USDA's National Research Initiative with AFRI, creating USDA's flagship competitive research grants program, and the 2008 Food, Conservation, and Energy Act, known as the Farm Bill, outlined the structure of the new program. *Spurring Innovation in Food and Agriculture* assesses the effectiveness of AFRI in meeting the goals laid out by Congress and its success in advancing innovations and competitiveness in the U.S. food and agriculture system.

Spurring Innovation in Food and Agriculture evaluates the value, relevance, quality, fairness, and flexibility of AFRI. This report also considers funding policies and mechanisms and identifies measures of the effectiveness and efficiency of AFRI's operation. The study examines AFRI's role in advancing science in relation to other research and grant programs inside of USDA as well as how complementary it is to other federal research and development programs. The findings and conclusions of this report will help AFRI improve its functions and effectiveness in meeting its goals and outcomes.

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