

National Institute for Food and Agriculture

Guiding Principles

Background

The Food, Conservation, Energy Act of 2008 directs the Secretary of Agriculture to establish an agency within the Department to be known as the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (the National Institute), and to transfer all Authorities of the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service into the new agency no later than October 1, 2009. The National Institute is intended to be a scientific agency that will raise the profile of Agricultural Research, Education and Extension. The National Institute will provide national leadership through the administration of Federal support for extramural research, education and extension in coordination with other REE agencies that focus primarily on intramural research and data collection.

Advance Knowledge and Science of Food, Agriculture, Human Health and Well-Being, the Environment, and Communities

1. The National Institute will advance knowledge for food, agriculture, human health and well-being, the environment, and communities. In so doing, it will:

- Forge linkages among and across programs, disciplines, levels of government, universities, and other organizations;
- Utilize multi-functional approaches built upon education, research, and extension; and
- Take full advantage of existing outside resources as leverage to enhance and enlarge the body of knowledge that is discovered and disseminated.

Assure Relevancy and Responsiveness

2. The National Institute will be relevant through continuous assessment of stakeholder needs, so that it will:

- Seek input on its programs from a broad array of interests, including individuals, scientific and professional associations, universities and colleges, research foundations, industries, other government agencies, the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board, and other stakeholders and beneficiaries;
- Use the continuous assessment of stakeholder input as a key component of agency planning, using input from the users of agricultural science and education to identify high priority issues and input from the science and education community to assess how best to address these issues;
- Respond to regional and national needs;
- Respond rapidly to naturally occurring and introduced threats to the safety and security of the food and agricultural system, including the environment;
- Provide for program flexibility and efficiency;

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- Link to the strategic and operational needs of the agencies and customers of USDA; and
- Be forward-looking in anticipating future challenges for food and agriculture, the environment, and the public and ensuring the National Institute's research programs are designed to meet those challenges.

Promote Understanding and Appreciation of Science in the Public Sector

3. The National Institute will address the public good and:

- Assure knowledge is available in the public sector to sustain food, agricultural and natural resource systems;
- Contribute to nutrition, diet and health of citizens; and
- Link food and agriculture research, education and extension systems, here and internationally.

Utilize Protocols that Promote the Best Science

4. The National Institute is designed to assure the Federal investment in the food and agricultural science and education are of highest quality and directed to the best purposes, with scientific quality assured through peer and merit review processes that lead to:

- Enhanced discovery fundamental to advancing food and agricultural science;
- Science-based problem solving in food and agriculture, the environment, and individual health and well-being;
- Attracting high quality researchers, educators, and extension professionals, and students, to participate in food and agricultural science; and
- Innovation within fields of science and across disciplines, institutions, and agencies.

Provide Accessibility

5. The National Institute will provide program access to all customers and assure civil rights and equal opportunity to staff, partners, and beneficiaries of the work. In doing these things, the National Institute shall:

- Assure consistency and equity in opportunities across programs;
- Assure compliance with USDA non-discrimination policies; and
- Advance opportunities for program participation among individuals and organizations with varying experiences, perspective, and clientele.

Ensure Transparency, Accountability, Effectiveness, and Efficient Use of Resources

6. The National Institute will have processes that are transparent and accountable, and promote effectiveness and efficiency. The National Institute shall:

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- Employ thoughtful programmatic planning that emphasizes stakeholder input and coordinates science and education funding and leadership across appropriated programs and funding mechanisms;
- Make the most effective and efficient use of available resources in design and execution of its programs;
- Assess programs and management functions to ensure they are meeting desired goals and the funds are well spent;
- Use diverse groups of scientists and educators from outside the agency to conduct peer reviews of funding proposals; and
- Use multiple avenues to promote, advertise, and disseminate announcements of funding opportunities.

Enhance the Stature of Food and Agricultural Science

7. The National Institute will serve the nation's food and agricultural needs by supporting exemplary research, education and extension programs. The quality of the National Institute's programs will promote agricultural education, extension, and research to a level that is commensurate with their importance to the well-being of the nation.