

OPENING STATEMENT

**Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)**

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology  
Subcommittee on Research and Technology

*“Putting Food on the Table: A Review of the Importance of Agricultural Research”*

November 2, 2017

Thank you Chairwoman Comstock and Ranking Member Lipinski for holding this hearing, and thank you to the expert witnesses for being here this morning. It has been many years since this committee has examined the state of agricultural research supported by our federal agencies. Many people may assume that only the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) supports agricultural research. Of course, USDA is a leader in agricultural research, and for more than 100 years has played a central role in connecting the resulting science and technology to farmers through the Extension offices and land grant institutions across our nation. However, a few other agencies also play key roles in advancing agricultural science and contributing to food security.

The National Science Foundation supports most of the basic plant biology research that underpins advances in agricultural technology. In the late 1990’s, NSF took the lead in an interagency effort to sequence economically relevant plant genomes. NSF continues that program today as the Plant Genome Research Program. NSF research also advances our understanding of the agricultural impacts of a changing climate. In 2016, NSF launched a program called Innovations at the Nexus of Food, Energy, and Water Systems to study how society can best integrate across the natural and built environments to provide for a growing demand for food, water and energy in sustainable ways. And NSF has long supported important research into the societal aspects of agriculture, such as public perception of genetically modified foods. Due to the potential for biofuels to replace some of our fossil fuel consumption, the Department of Energy has also funded basic and applied research on plants and the processes by which plants may be transformed into clean-burning biofuels. Advances in plant biology supported by DOE will likely have applications to food security as well.

Finally, the Department of Homeland Security, through its Science and Technology Directorate, supports critical research that will help us protect our food supply, our health, and our associated economic security from both naturally occurring diseases and intentional attacks. In that regard, we will hear from several witnesses today about the essential research planned for the National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility under construction in Kansas. This Committee has sole or shared jurisdiction over all of these programs. In addition, it is our responsibility to look holistically across the federal portfolio of agricultural research, including the important research carried out by USDA.

Many of us hail from urban areas. And that leads some of us to pay less attention to what’s happening on our nation’s farms. However, we all depend on the productivity and security of our agricultural sector. It is incumbent on all of us policymakers to understand the evolving challenges to national and global food security, and how that should drive a forward-looking research agenda across the relevant federal agencies, in partnership with farmers and with the private sector. I look forward to today’s testimony and discussion, and I yield back.