Q: What is the compelling and overarching reason to undertake this budget realignment effort?
A: The need to simplify the budget is compelling and should drive the realignment allowing more effective advocacy for our programs, while maintaining program integrity.

There are currently 45 different lines in the discretionary NIFA budget. Each one funds critically important work and thus requires varying degrees of attention from our advocacy teams. Twenty-seven of those lines support programs that receive $5 million or less.

Q: Where did this effort originate?
A: In 2017, then Chair of the BAA Budget and Advocacy Committee, Orlando McMeans, charged the ESCOP and ECOP Budget and Legislative Committees with developing recommendations to strategically realign several lines, simplifying the NIFA budget. Recommendations were due by mid-January; however, this period was too ambitious. The recommendation process continued with the inclusion of AHS, BAC and PBD leadership.

Subsequently, Policy Board Chair Mark Hussey appointed a special committee to undertake this effort with these caveats:
- Protect/maintain program funding including capacity as well as competitive support for important programs and projects;
- Realign budget lines where it makes sense, doing no harm;
- Maintain intent (functional equivalency) of programs, e.g., research, education, Extension, and integrated activities regardless of where the budget lines reside within the USDA/NIFA Budget;
- Expand our ability to integrate research, education and Extension functions of the nation’s Land-Grant Universities in local, state and multistate problem solving;
- Acceptable to those directly affected and supported by the COPs, AHS, BAC and PBD; and
- Acceptable to appropriators and NIFA.

Q: Why take these steps now?
A: Congressional staff has requested simplification of the NIFA budget for decades. Included in the draft House version of the Farm Bill is a provision requiring NIFA to make such recommendations. The BAA and its BAC have endeavored to support the NIFA budget by simplifying “the ask” to six lines and then the One Ask concept.

By realigning budget lines, our advocacy efforts will be more effective in helping to secure needed resources, maintaining program funding and functional integrity allowing our institutions to continue critically important research, education and extension programs. With fewer budget lines and assuring program integrity, we can more effectively advocate for budget
increases because we can garner widespread stakeholder support from commodity groups, professional Societies, SoAR, NC-FAR and other groups.

Q: What is the Committee recommendation?
A: The committee is recommending a single top line budget for NIFA with three major subcategories groups according to major functions of our universities, i.e. Extension-Engagement, Education-Learning and Research-Discovery.

Q: Will program integrity be maintained?
A: Yes, various program lines are specified in the Appropriations Committee Report (See details under Webinar FAQs below). In addition, faculty and those who care about specific lines will make the need for the programs known through the current stakeholder input processes that NIFA employs, and partnering with agricultural, environmental and other relevant organizations.

Q: Is there any history of successful line realignment?
A: Yes, the Higher Education Challenge Grants (HEC), (Multicultural Scholars (MS), Graduate Fellowship and National Needs Fellows (NNF) were combined and Institution Challenge Grants), and the Crop Protection and Pest Management (CPPM) program are examples where in which lines were Realigned. The three education lines (MS, HEC, and NNF) were combined by appropriators in 2012 following a recommendation by the BAA that they should do so. NIFA has maintained the integrity of all three programs. The CPPM line realignment was an example where Bill/Report language guided NIFA’s administration of these lines and where legislative interventions insured functional integrity of programs. In fact, there have been modest increases in the CPPM line. However, given the nature of the annual appropriations process, there is always the possibility of reductions to specific lines.

Q: How is capacity defined?
A: Capacity includes the intellectual and staff capabilities as well as fiscal facilities that LGUs discover solutions to pressing problems, educate future generations, and provide science-based information to communities and stakeholders.

Q: What are Capacity Programs?
A: Capacity programs are those in which the funding is provided by a formula, including Smith Lever, 1890 Extension, Evans-Allen, Hatch and the McIntire-Stennis Programs, etc.

Q: What is the status of the Capacity Programs in the proposal?
A: Capacity Programs, like all other NIFA discretionary programs, are grouped under three lines: Research, Education, and Extension. As mentioned above the Appropriations Committee Reports would specify that funds be distributed, as they currently are (See details in Appropriations 101 Webinar FAQs on page 5).
Q: What are Competitive Programs?
A: Competitive Programs are solicited through an open Request for Applications (RFA) process. Panels review proposals and select the best proposals for funding.

Q: How will AFRI programs be administered?
A: The AFRI programs are open to any institution and not limited to Land Grant Universities, as is currently the case. The NIFA program accepts applications from a broad array of universities and other institutions like the NSF or NIH programs.

Q: How will other competitive lines be administered?
A: There are program lines within the Research area that are currently limited to LGUs. Similar LGU-specific programs exist within the Extension and Education realignments. These limitations would carry forward under the realignment scenario.

Q: How will the internal functions/roles of NIFA change?
A: Stakeholder input sessions will drive the program portfolio are expected. There have been internal discussions about NPLs having a broader content base.

Q: What is the status of “Hill” discussions? Is there support for this concept?
A: There have been very preliminary discussions with key staffers and members. The House version of the 2019 Ag appropriations bill requires NIFA to make such recommendations regarding line consolidation.

Q: How do we reconcile the maintenance of Capacity Programs in the proposal with recent attempts to move these funds to a competitive model?
A: Capacity Programs are a high priority for most, if not all, land-grant universities as they provide critical basal support. The System has made this abundantly clear in recent years. Attempts to remove Capacity Programs by the Administration were rejected by the Congress. Capacity Programs would be specifically mentioned in legislative appropriation’s report and bill language reaffirming their importance.

Q: What changes in legislative authorities are needed to implement the proposal?
A: The BAA’s legislative consultants have reviewed all the associated legislation and have determined that no changes in the underlying legislative authorities are required. Rather, the effort can be achieved via the annual appropriations process, committee report and in working with NIFA on continuation of programmatic integrity.

Q: Would a system wide vote be required? Do we need a vote or can sections approve?
A: No, the Policy Board of Directors charged the Committee with developing recommendations on line consolidation. The proposed consolidation must be acceptable to those directly affected and supported by the COPs, BAC, CLP, and PBD and acceptable to appropriators. PBD would forward the final recommendations to USDA, NIFA and Congress.
Q: Will commodity groups and professional societies be engaged?
A: Those groups affected by these changes will be contacted to address concerns and provide assurance that “their” programs will be maintained; however, they will need to make sure that their needs are heard during future NIFA listening sessions. The BAA will be reaching out to professional societies and others to engage them on this proposal.

Q: Will faculty who have been funded by specific lines be consulted?
A: The Committee has the funding history for each line in the NIFA budget. These data provide information on affected by these changes, program administration, any IDC costs, etc.

Functional integrity of programs will be maintained through the appropriations committee report language. Those affected will be informed of any management changes. However, stakeholder will need to express the continuing need for programs during NIFA listening sessions.

Q: If there is a top line increase in one of the realigned areas e.g. R, E or ED, how will funds be distributed?
A: This committee was not charged with consideration of future increases or decreases in funding lines. That charge remains firmly with the Budget and Advocacy Committee. Further conversations and discussions will need to occur within the system to determine allocation of increases or decreases if this realignment of lines is adopted.
Q: How are funds appropriated?
A: Congress appropriates NIFA funding to three different accounts: Research and Education, Extension and Integrated Activities on a line-by-line basis using the previous year’s spending figures as a baseline. These are annual funding decisions and there are no certainties of increases, guarantees of level funding, or protections against cuts.

Q: What is the difference between Bill language vs Appropriations Committee Report language?
A: Bill language that the President signs into law, dictates how the Department/Agency must comply. The report and accompanying tables specify spending on a line-by-line basis, references to legislative authority and provides additional policy direction to the agency.

Q: What is the Appropriations Committee Report?
A: The Appropriations Committee Report provides instructions to NIFA on how to allocate funds between various lines with specific language. In addition the following proviso is included in the Agriculture Appropriations bill language and provides force of law to the account level detail provided in the report: “Provided further, that of the funds provided herein, not less than the amount appropriated in the preceding fiscal year shall be made available under the same authorities and purposes specified in the National Institute of Food and Agriculture tables “Research and Education Activities”, “Extension Activities” and “Integrated Activities” in the report accompanying that Act.”

Q: Will functional integrity be maintained?
A: Yes, under the Strategic Realignment Committee’s draft proposal the Bill and Report would contain language directing that spending for each line must “not be less than the previous year”.

Q: Can stakeholders advocate for increases in specific lines?
A: Yes, since appropriators provide the funds and ultimately make the decisions on any specific program line increases this will always be possible under any scenario. In other words, the “power of the purse” cannot be infringed upon. However, one of the primary purposes of this discussion is an effort to capture the collective advocacy efforts of the disparate segments of the system and our stakeholders for focus on a smaller number of targets. A rising tide will float all boats.

Q: How would the Bill and Appropriations Report look with combined lines appear?
A: The Bill would have one account combining the three previous accounts with a single appropriated dollar amount. The Report would provide funding tables and associated statutory citations for the three combined lines. (See Webinar for details).