

February 11, 2022

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington DC, 20523



Dear Administrator Power,

On behalf of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), thank you for the opportunity to submit comment to the Feed the Future Interagency Working Group on Research's draft outline for the Global Food Security Research Strategy (GFSRS).

APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities. Annually, APLU's 201 U.S. member campuses enroll 4.2 million undergraduates and 1.2 million graduate students, award 1.2 million degrees, employ 1.1 million faculty and staff, and conduct \$46.8 billion in university-based research.

Currently, 21 USAID Feed the Future Innovation Labs are led by 14 U.S. universities in partnership with over 60 other U.S. colleges and universities, including 14 Minority Serving Institutions. Through this program, scientists at U.S. universities work with USAID missions and developing-country research institutions in areas that depend on agriculture to address disruptions to the global food supply, including post-harvest losses, food safety and quality, and pest and disease management.

We applaud the Workgroup's efforts in outlining key features of a global food security research strategy to solve the problems of hunger and poverty using science-based solutions and agriculture-led economic growth. In addition to maintaining traditional investments that address agricultural production, pest/disease, and breeding/livestock issues, we also encourage USAID to consider expanding investment in research and development (R&D) in agricultural and nutrition policy, economics, off-farm, and community components of the supply chain. Additionally, we are supportive of expanding the public university partners involved in the GFSRS.

Public universities deliver innovation development through deployment/adoption. It is a model that continues to be beneficial for addressing critical challenges related to childhood nutrition, food access, and adaptation/mitigation to climate change. APLU provides suggestions about how to incorporate the lessons of this model into the GRSRS below.

Innovation Labs Support Agricultural-led Economic Growth to Alleviate Poverty

APLU members have a forty-four year history of leadership in international agricultural and food R&D through USAID programs to address global hunger, poverty, and the root causes of food insecurity. Public universities, specifically colleges of agriculture, have been most involved in the Cooperative Research Support Program, or CRSP, administered from 1978 to 2012 and its successor since 2012, the USAID Feed the Future Innovations Labs. Evidence shows U.S. government investments closely track with international economic growth. Partial estimates of

return demonstrate at least \$4 in developing-country economic growth for every dollar invested through the USAID Feed the Future Innovation Labs (ILs)/CRSP. This impact justifies the R&D investment to achieve “agriculture-led economic growth” and alleviate poverty. However, the current outline omits explicit mention of this connection or aim, missing significant productivity opportunities related to climate change, nutrition, and hunger. Therefore, we request USAID robustly incorporate the connection between R&D and “agriculture-led economic growth” in any future version of the GFSRS.

R&D Can Solve Climate Change Challenges to Agricultural, Food, and Resource Systems

Climate change presents a myriad of challenges for developing agricultural economies, including water scarcity, increased pests and diseases, post-harvest loss, and supply chain disruptions. In addition to the production and supply challenges that arise from a changing climate, food nutrition and quality as well as food safety can be impacted. APLU requests USAID to outline key areas of work related to climate change so that research teams that include the private sector and partner institutions can address the focus areas. These key areas of work would include a crosscut of research themes such as those listed in the current outline, as well as agricultural management and supply/value chain strategies for science-based solutions. APLU requests USAID add management and market/economic policy to the research plan outline.

APLU Supports Increased Investment for Expanded Public University Partnerships

APLU is supportive of the work of USAID to be more inclusive by inviting diverse public university partnerships. USAID’s efforts align with APLU’s goal of attracting more underrepresented students—women, members of minority racial and ethnic groups, persons with disabilities, and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds—into STEM college programs, to assist them to stay in these programs, and to help them graduate and succeed in a modern STEM workforce. APLU has an organizational commitment to improving diversity, equity, and inclusion through our membership that includes a wide variety of institutions, we can offer opportunities to convene, engage, and share information with a diverse number of leaders and institutions to support aligned efforts.

Application of Science Innovations Should be Prioritized to Solve Global Challenges

Prioritization of research investment should focus on the features listed—e.g. likelihood of success, adoption, impact, as well as the public good R&D attributes. APLU further recommends that USAID consider the unique capabilities of basic science innovations like AI, genetic modification, biofortification, behavioral approaches, and nascent technologies to solve global challenges. Further partnership between the U.S. and developing economies in these areas of science connect our public institutions to those in partner countries and further development of global agricultural science talent supporting self-reliance.

Cultivating the Next Generation of Global Scientists and Leaders

Mentoring and training the next generation of technical experts in developing countries helps ensure stability of supply chains as well as soft-power connections. It is concerning that many low and middle-income countries, especially in Central America and Central Africa, employ fewer than 20 PhDs, weakening the capability of the developing economy to craft a robust agricultural sector that is informed by modern safeties, policies, and protocols. Two-thirds of PhD-qualified agricultural researchers at related national agricultural research institutes are over

50 years old. U.S. trained leaders provide important contacts for the U.S. government and private sector actors. In 2019 alone, the ILs supported 529 students, primarily at the graduate level from 39 nations. By mentoring and training the next generation of science-experts, the U.S. is positioning itself for long-term influence in building global agricultural economies. Leadership development is a much-needed area of emphasis for the next plan.

Short and Medium-Term R&D Impacts Should be Monitored and Reported

As the Feed the Future Interagency Working Group considers future strategy for related R&D, APLU encourages the development of clear goals and milestones that are measurable in a short, medium, and long-term development context. Research shows that R&D-stimulated productivity growth takes time and the impacts are cumulative. Yet, short and medium-term milestones can be communicated more effectively and precisely. APLU requests that USAID report on these impacts more regularly by collecting and reporting impact narratives for key areas of work. Reporting should be efficient and effective to limit the respondent burden while tracking success in terms of poverty reduction, child stunting, and “agricultural-led economic growth” as well as the overall movement towards greater diversity and participation in USAID programs.

Thank you again for providing APLU with the opportunity to comment on this important part of the Global Food Security Research Plan.

Sincerely,



Peter McPherson
President
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities