U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA)

FOR FY2027, THE U OF I SYSTEM REQUESTS $500 MILLION FOR AFRI; WE ALSO REQUEST $500 MILLION FOR THE RESEARCH FACILITIES ACT.

We also support APLU's requests.

AFRI	
FY2026	= $435M
FY2025	= $445.2M
FY2024	= $445.2M
FY2023	= $455M
FY2022	= $445M

Appropriations Bill: Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

Agency: National Institute of Food and Agriculture

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USDA ALLOCATIONS/AWARDS, FY 2025
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Account	Amount
Hatch Act (Research & Education Programs)	$7.5M
Smith-Lever 3(b)-(c) (Extension Activities)	$10.4M
Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) (Research & Education Programs)	$922,287
USDA Competitive Funding	$7.3M
Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP)	$2.2M

UIUC maintains a robust and dynamic partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) and the Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station are critical components of the state's ag research and educational infrastructure. Hatch Act and related formula funds enhance capacity for applied science in Illinois, supporting advances in crop genetics and new uses for agricultural products; soil and water conservation to strengthen long-term productivity; animal performance to bolster farm profitability and resilience; and research in human health and nutrition. The USDA's Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) provides competitive research programs that drive discovery and innovation in ACES and other campus units.

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) also supports Illinois Extension, whose educator network spans all 102 Illinois counties, delivering evidence-based outreach and engagement programs across eight strategic priorities: community, economy, environment, food, health, partnerships, discovery, and workforce. NIFA provides capacity to Extension through Smith-Lever 3(b) & (c) support.

More than $12M in competitive USDA funding to the College of Veterinary Medicine advances agricultural animal health through basic and applied research into disease prevention and through training programs that help producers and veterinarians improve biosecurity and productivity on farms.

USDA-SUPPORTED PROJECTS AT UIUC

Artificial Intelligence in Agriculture
The $20M USDA-funded Artificial Intelligence for Future Agricultural Resilience, Management, and Sustainability Institute serves as a nexus for multidisciplinary research teams that advance foundational AI and apply these advances to critical challenges facing global agriculture. Recent accomplishments include progress in computer vision — such as adapting technology originally built for human dance analysis to detect livestock movement — and improvements in small-robot navigation

in corn and soybean fields, along with numerous innovations in core AI algorithms. The institute is also expanding transparent, stakeholder-driven tools such as AI Agri Bench, a benchmarking platform designed to build trust in AI agronomy, and CropWizard, an interactive AI assistant that helps growers and advisors explore data and agronomic insights.

Supporting Farmer Mental Health

Agricultural producers in the North Central region experience anxiety, depression, substance use, and death by suicide at disproportionately higher rates than the general population. Leveraging over $14M from USDA-NIFA competitive and Multistate Hatch funding, ACES researchers and Extension specialists formed the North Central Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center to create and expand stress management and mental health resources and services. Since its inception in 2020, the Center has provided professional interventions, received over 20,000 calls on a telephone hotline, and trained and provided resources for 18,000 producers and those who support them.

Farm Networks Increase Long-term Land Productivity

Cover crops improve soil health and water quality, prevent nutrient loss, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but they're only grown on about 5% of U.S. agricultural lands. That's despite billions in annual federal investments, primarily in the form of cost-share and incentive payments to farmers who adopt conservation practices. Recent ACES research, with support from USDA-NIFA Hatch funding, finds that investments in farm demonstration networks may be the key to faster, more widespread adoption. The study links the implementation of a Wisconsin farm demonstration program with a 50% increase in cover crop adoption over baseline levels within just four years.

Animal Health

UIUC's College of Veterinary Medicine has more than $12M in competitive USDA funding to support animal health research. These projects are focused on vaccine development and understanding the pathogenesis and transmission of agricultural animal diseases. For instance:
- Supporting the beef, pork and poultry

industries by developing vaccines to fight important viral diseases, developing new ways to detect and monitor for disease threats, and preparing producers and veterinarians to respond in case of a disease outbreak.
- Fighting global hunger with novel approaches to reduce the impact of key livestock parasites.
- Delivering high-quality online learning focused on animal-disease training and other needs of rural veterinary practitioners and students, so these professionals can partner with producers to ensure on-farm biosecurity and increase productivity and efficiency.

Creating New Products from Waste Streams

Creating useful products from waste streams is key for a more sustainable circular bioeconomy. Researchers in ACES, with over $2.5M in USDA-NIFA funding, are using hydrothermal liquefaction to develop petroleum-like products from food waste and swine manure. These products are being tested as alternatives to the petroleum-derived binders in asphalt, and could one day pave American highways for a cleaner road system. The researchers have also developed fuels suitable for aviation with the same waste products, burning cleaner, creating fewer emissions, and making use of a waste stream that once languished in landfills.

Insights from Space Inform Earthbound Agriculture

ACES researchers are using satellite remote sensing, supercomputers, and AI to transform how we understand and advance agricultural resilience and sustainability across the Midwest. With $8.7M in active USDA funding, their work leverages ground, airborne, and satellite data to map cover crop and tillage practices, monitor soil carbon, reveal the drivers of nutrient loss, detect crop nutrient stress in real time, and more. Using advanced modeling and AI techniques, the team integrates decades of region-wide data to deliver forward-looking, policy-ready insights that reduce nutrient loss, promote healthier soils, support adoption of smarter practices, and thus achieve high productivity with both resilience and sustainability. Together, this research demonstrates how modern sensing and modeling technologies can shape a more sustainable, resilient, and data-driven future for agriculture.

Harnessing Soil Microbes to Make Corn More Profitable

Corn bred with genes from wild relatives can reshape soil microbial communities and reduce nitrogen loss — with no yield reduction — according to new ACES research supported by USDA-NIFA. The advancement marks the first time corn's genetic makeup has been linked with inhibition of nitrifying and denitrifying bacteria, the microbes responsible for turning fertilizer nitrogen into forms that pollute water and contribute to climate change. So far, the researchers have seen reductions in nitrification of up to 50%. With targeted breeding, corn could require less nitrogen fertilizer — becoming more profitable — and contribute less to downstream environmental impacts.

IMPACTS OF ILLINOIS EFNEP INVESTMENTS

Using the $2.2M Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) investment, University of Illinois Extension delivers in-depth nutrition, physical activity, and food buying educational programming to audiences having limited incomes. As a result of the program, 95% of adult participants reported making healthier food choices and 82% of youth improved their knowledge or abilities to eat healthful foods.

INTEGRATING EXTENSION INTO ACES RESEARCH

The Illinois ACES Land Grant Initiative (IALGI) is a competitive funding program investing $2.4M over three years, including $1.2M from Hatch, Multistate Hatch, and Smith-Lever, to better integrate research and Extension and deliver practical, science-based solutions in partnership with Illinois stakeholders. IALGI supports interdisciplinary teams addressing real-world challenges across food systems, agriculture, the economy, environment, communities, and health.

IALGI reflects the founding promise of the land-grant university system — research and education built on behalf of the people and in partnership with them. By intentionally reconnecting research and Extension, this initiative strengthens trust, relevance, and public impact.