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Southern Weed Science Society

Southern Weed Science Society

Note From the President:

Serving as your 2026 President of the Southern Weed Science Society is a profound honor, and I am sincerely grateful to each of you for placing your trust in me. Looking back at the outstanding leaders who have shaped this organization over the years, I am truly humbled by their lasting contributions to weed science and the high standard they have set. I am fully committed to building on that strong foundation by working diligently to support our members, advance our mission, and keep SWSS vibrant and relevant for the future.

I recently returned from an impactful trip to Washington, DC, where our team advocated strongly for agriculture research funding and weed science priorities. We met with staff from over 45 congressional offices, leadership at the EPA's Office of Pesticide Programs, key personnel in the Undersecretary of Agriculture's office, and the head along with all national program leads for USDA NIFA. These conversations underscored the importance of our collective voice in shaping policy and securing support for research and new technologies that serve growers. It was a powerful reminder of how critical it is for our members to engage when opportunities arise to champion sound agricultural policy and adequate funding.

The 2026 annual meeting presented unexpected challenges when an ice storm forced us to reschedule from Nashville. This could easily have become a financial disaster, but thanks to the society's support and the diligent behind-the-scenes negotiating and last-minute adjustments by dedicated volunteers and staff, we not only avoided a shortfall but actually turned a small profit. I am deeply grateful for everyone's flexibility, hard work, and commitment during that difficult time. It truly highlighted the resilience and collaborative spirit of SWSS.

Looking ahead, I am excited to showcase our upcoming 2027 annual meeting, scheduled for January 25–28, 2027, at the Omni Corpus Christi Hotel in Corpus Christi, Texas. The Omni offers excellent waterfront accommodations with modern meeting facilities right in the lively Marina District. Attendees will enjoy convenient access to surrounding attractions, including the Texas State Aquarium, USS Lexington Museum, beautiful beaches, the Art Museum of South Texas, and vibrant downtown spots like the Harbor Playhouse and mural trails, all within walking distance or a short drive. Travel is straightforward, with Corpus Christi International Airport providing easy connections via major carriers from hubs like Dallas and Houston, and the city's central coastal location making it accessible by car from many Southern and Texas locations. This promises to be an outstanding venue for professional development, networking, and enjoyment.

Our membership remains the heart of SWSS and the key to our ongoing success. I encourage all of you, whether long-time contributors or new members, to get involved in whatever capacity fits your schedule. The rewards of service to the society are well worth the investment. I hope you have a productive and enjoyable summer and look forward to seeing many of you in Corpus Christi in 2027!

Shawn Askew

2026 SWSS President

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Are You on a SWSS Committee?

The Southern Weed Science Society is successful due to the many volunteers that help the organization run. Serving the organization is an excellent way to ensure its continued success and interact with fellow members.

To find the current SWSS Committee List for 2026 and for more information about each committee and its role within the organization, please click here: http://www.swss.ws/society-information/commitees/.

If you're interested in volunteering for a committee, please contact the chair of the committee or send an email to communications@swss.ws.

@SouthWeedSciSoc

2026 Graduate Student Paper & Poster Contest

The 2026 SWSS student contest in Nashville, TN was a great contest. We had a total of 91 participants. This years contest consisted of 6 paper sections (3 MS and 3 PhD) and 5 poster sections (3 MS and 2 PhD). Below are the results of the 2026 SWSS annual meeting student contest.

Year	Poster Contest Participants				Oral Paper Contest Participants			Total Participants
	Undergrad	MS	PhD	Total	MS	PhD	Total	
2026	0	28	12	40	20	29	49	91
2025	0	15	13	28	29	22	51	79
2024	1	23	22	46	26	24	50	96
2023	0	14	15	29	29	29	58	87
2022	3	30	13	46	25	24	49	95
2021	0	22	24	46	28	34	62	108
2020	0	13	9	22	29	26	55	77

Student contest award winners included:

Posters		
M.S. Section 1	1st– Walter Jordao Martins	Auburn
	2nd– Hunter Rudolph	University of Arkansas
M.S. Section 2	1st– Cade Holebrook	University of Arkansas
	2nd– Shahreen Mirza	LSU
M.S. Section 3	1st– Venkatesar reddy Yelkur	NC State
	2nd– Aman Jakhar	Virginia Tech
PhD Section 1	1st– Gursewak Singh	Clemson
	2nd– Matthew Woolard	Texas Tech
PhD Section 2	1st– Nisith Nishank Purohit	Auburn
	2nd– Reuben Kudiabor	Texas A&M
Paper		
M.S. Section 1	1st– Noah Chandler	University of Arkansas
	2nd– Haydon Houser	University of Arkansas
M.S. Section 2	1st– Aidan Ross	University of Arkansas
	2nd– Suzannah Hale	Virginia Tech
M.S. Section 3	1st– Gavin Sparks	LSU
	2nd– Caroline Wayhs Back	Texas A&M
PhD Section 1	1st– Kai Goble	NC State
	2nd– Samuel Crawford	Virginia Tech
PhD Section 2	1st– Brock Dean	NC State
	2nd– Dalton Whitt	Mississippi State
PhD Section 3	1st– Megan Singletary	Texas Tech
	2nd– Tanner King	Mississippi State

Thanks to all that served as moderators, committee members, and judges to make this student contest a success!

SAVE THE DATE:
SWSS Annual Meeting
January 25-28, 2027
Corpus Christi, TX

2025 SWSS Award Winners

Outstanding Young Weed Scientist (Academia) - Dr. Nick Basinger

Dr. Nicholas Basinger was born in Charlotte, NC and grew up in Greer, SC surround by peach orchards. He found his love of agriculture while spending time on his grandparents farm in Salisbury, NC. Dr. Basinger Graduated from Furman University with a BS in Health and Exercise Science in 2009 with the hopes of becoming a physical therapist. After completing a thruhike of the Appalachian Trail from Maine to Georgia, he decided not to follow his planned path to physical therapy school. At the suggestion of a friend, Dr. Basinger spent two seasons on small organic and biodynamic farms in western NC, where he rediscovered his love of agriculture. Wanting to explore agriculture at a greater depth, he attended North Carolina State University where he earned his M.S. (2015) and Ph.D. (2018) studying weed interference in perennial and vegetable crops under the guidance of Drs. Katie Jennings and David Monks. Today, Dr. Nicholas Tuschak Basinger is an Associate Professor of Weed Science in the Department of Crop and Soil Sciences at the University of Georgia, where he joined the faculty in 2018. At UGA, Dr. Basinger holds a 55% research, 40% teaching, and 5% service appointment. His research focuses on modifying agroecosystems to reduce weed impact, with an emphasis on Integrated Weed Management (IWM), weed biology, and ecology to limit herbicide resistance development and improve crop productivity in crop and forage systems. He also serves as Director of Graduate Studies for the Master of Plant Protection and Pest Management (MPPPM) degree, a terminal degree designed to prepare students for careers in extension and industry. Dr. Basinger is committed to mentoring graduate students, having chaired or co-chaired 12 committees and served on 22 others. Since 2019, he has coached the UGA Weed Team, guiding students to earn top individual rankings and achieve high scores in the farmer problem category. In his opinion, students are the most important aspect of what he does, because of their endless curiosity, and ability to challenge him to think creatively about weed science issues and their solutions. He currently teaches courses in Weed Science, Integrated Pest Management, and Herbicide Technology. He has published 38 peer-reviewed articles, one book chapter, five popular press articles, and co-authored the textbook Fundamentals of Weed Science (2024) with Robert Zimdahl. His outreach includes numerous field day presentations and contributions to extension media. Dr. Basinger seeks out interdisciplinary projects where he can work as part of a multifaceted team of researchers. This allows him to see the connection between aspects of weed management and approach weed issues from multiple angles. An active member of the Southern Weed Science Society (SWSS) since 2012, Dr. Basinger has chaired the Outstanding Graduate Student Award committee for WSSA and SWSS, judged student contests since 2019, and served as a session moderator. In 2025, He was awarded the SWSS Outstanding Educator Award. He was Associate Editor for Weed Science (2022–2024) and has held leadership roles with the Southern Cover Crops Council and the SWSS Board of Directors. Additionally, he has served on WSSA committees, including Outstanding Educator, Weed Loss, Finance, and Strategic Planning. These experiences have deepened his appreciation for the vital role weed science societies play in advancing agriculture. Dr. Basinger would like to dedicate this award to his wife, Grace B. Tuschak, and his daughter, Eloise T. Basinger, whose encouragement and support have been a guiding light for him. He would also like to dedicate this award to his advisors, mentors, graduate students, and technical support staff, without whom none of these accomplishments would have been possible.

2024 Outstanding Young Weed Scientist (Industry) - Dr. Eric Reasor

Eric originates from a small farming community southwestern Virginia. His interest in agriculture developed from his time on the family dairy farm. Eric went on to obtain a B.S. degree in Crop and Soil Environmental Sciences from Virginia Tech in 2012. Following Virginia Tech, his education continued with a M.S. degree in Plant Sciences from University of Tennessee in 2014 and then a Ph.D. in Plants, Soils, and Insects from Tennessee in 2017. His dissertation research focused on characterizing and managing off-type grasses in ultra dwarf bermudagrass putting greens under the direction of Dr. Jim Brosnan. Eric was then an assistant professor at Mississippi State University prior to joining PBI-Gordon Corporation in 2018. In his current role at PBI-Gordon as the Southeast Research Scientist, he leads the company's herbicide development as well as all research projects in the southern United States. Eric currently lives in Rowlett, TX with his wife, Samantha, and two children, Sidney and Lillian.

Outstanding Graduate Student (M.S.) - Juan Ramon Romero

Juan Romero grew up on his family's coffee farm in Honduras, where he developed an early interest in agriculture and plant systems. Juan holds a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Sciences from the Pan-American Agricultural School (Zamorano), Honduras, and a master's degree in Turfgrass Weed Science from Virginia Tech. His graduate research focused on emerging non-chemical weed control approaches, including lasers, liquid nitrogen, and radiant heat, for turfgrass systems. Juan completed his degree at VT in May 2025 and currently serves as Golf and Turf Pre-Sales Manager at Ecorobotix, supporting the deployment and evaluation of the ALBA ultra-high-precision spraying system for golf courses and managed turf.

Outstanding Graduate Student (PhD) - Dr. Pamela Carvalho-Moore

Dr. Pâmela Carvalho-Moore is a native of Rondônia, one of the states in the Brazilian Amazon. She is the granddaughter of a former cocoa farmer and learned to appreciate agriculture from his example. She is a first-generation student who pursued her major in Agronomy at the Federal University of Pampa in Brazil. While an undergrad, Pâmela received a scholarship from the Brazilian government that allowed her to take classes at the University of Arkansas (UARK). This led to the opportunity to pursue a M.S. degree in Cell and Molecular Biology with an emphasis in Weed Science under the advisement of Dr. Nilda Roma-Burgos. Her thesis focused on the characterization of the resistance level conferred by Palmer amaranth protoporphyrinogen IX oxidase (PPO) mutations. In the spring of 2021, Pâmela began her Ph.D. in Weed Science in the Crop, Soil, and Environmental Sciences Department under the direction of Dr. Jason Norsworthy at the University of Arkansas. Her research focused on understanding the resistance mechanisms to glufosinate in resistant Palmer amaranth from Arkansas, as well as the addition of metabolic disruptors as an approach to improve the efficacy of this important postemergence herbicide. Pâmela has authored/co-authored 21 peer-reviewed manuscripts, 17 extension publication, and 130 scientific abstracts. Pâmela is passionate about the Weed Science discipline as a whole and currently holds active memberships for the Southern Weed Science Society, Weed Science Society of America, Brazilian Weed Science Society, and the International Weed Science Society. (Continued on next page)

She has also served as teaching assistant for the laboratory sections of undergraduate and graduate weed science classes in the USA ("Principles of Weed Control" and "Ecology and Morphology of Weedy and Invasive Plants") and Brazil [Ciência das Plantas Daninhas ("Weed Science")]. She was also a member of the first-place team at the 2023 and the 2021 Southern Weed Contest, earning fourth and sixth place overall individual, respectively. In 2023, she was a member of the team claiming the National Weed Contest title. Pâmela has been recognized for her academic and extracurricular achievements with more than 30 awards throughout her journey. Significant accolades include 1st place for both oral and poster presentations as a master and PhD student at the SWSS conferences, "2024 SWSS Travel Enrichment Experience", "University of Arkansas Doctoral Academy Fellowship", "Ronald & Alice Talbert Endowed Weed Science Scholarship", "Crop, Soil, and Environmental Graduate Student Award for Research Excellence", and the prestigious Scholar Award by the International Chapter of the P.E.O. Additionally, Pâmela has been enthusiastically involved in graduate student organizations (GSO), including the SWSS and WSSA. She has served as the weed resistance & technology committee student chair, university of Arkansas student representative, and endowment committee student representative for the SWSS GSO; as well as secretary, vice-president, and president for the WSSA GSO as well as a member of two WSSA committees. She was also involved in leadership roles for both departmental and university level organizations. Besides her involvement in GSO leadership, Pâmela has proudly mentored a few of her fellow teammates on many aspects of grad school. She has had great mentors that have helped her to succeed academically, mentally, and personally, and she makes sure her grad fellows can count on her for some advice as well. Pâmela graduated in May 2025 and immediately started her career at BASF as a Seed Science Operations Senior Agronomist in Seymour, Illinois, in which she is daily involved in Trait De-

SWSS Fellow Award - Dr. Timothy Grey

Timothy L. Grey is the Assistant Dean and Director of the University of Georgia Tifton Campus, and a professor of weed science, and served as the interim department head, with the Department of Crop and Soil Sciences (CRSS). He grew up and still maintains close ties to the 2000-acre family farm in central Kentucky. During his youth, his family farm focused on production of burley tobacco, row crops, oil seeds, hay and livestock. His undergraduate education was at the University of Kentucky, while attending Auburn University for his Master of Science and Doctor of Philosophy degrees. He continues to be active with his family farm in Kentucky when time allows. With is wife Samantha, they maintain multiple greenhouses, and she manages a plant nursery in Terrell County GA, where they have also established a pecan orchard on her family's 1600-acre farm. Dr. Grey has been with the UGA CRSS Department since 1999, first in Griffin and then in Tifton since 2002. He established himself as a leader in herbicide dissipation in the environment in soil and from polyethylene mulches, herbicide resistant weed control, production of agronomic and alternative crops, and weed control in vegetables and tree nut systems. He has worked with multiple crops including cotton, peanut, corn, soybean, canola, wheat, Vidalia onion, pecan, and many others. His research is conducted in laboratories, greenhouse, and field environments at UGA Research and Education Centers and on farm locations in various regions of the state. His efforts are supported by the agrichemical industry, commodity commissions, and governmental agencies via grants. Recently he started research work in aquatic weed control systems with colleagues from the University of Florida and Army Corp of Engineers. Dr. Grey is active in education in CRSS as a member of the UGA Graduate School Faculty, where his guidance promotes the training of students in proper research, evaluation, and reporting techniques. He has served as the major professor for 18 graduate students, been a member on numerous graduate committees, directed post-doctoral personnel and visiting scientists, and assisted other faculty with their visiting scientists research projects. He has served as a member on the Graduate Admissions Committee for the Crop and Soil Sciences Department, and numerous College of Agricultural & Environmental Sciences and UGA faculty committees. Along with his graduate students, he has presented research with invited talks at regional, national, and international meetings in Australia, Canada, Denmark, South Africa, China, AND Brazil. Dr. Grey is author and co-author of over 170 re-

ferred journal articles in various agronomic and weed science related publications and book chapters. He has served as chairman and as a member on many committees associated with the Weed Science Society of America, the Southern Weed Science Society, the International Weed Science Society, and is a fellow in the American Peanut Research and Education Society. He served as editor for the journal Peanut Science for over 10 years, associate editor for Weed Science, and a reviewer for many journals including Weed Technology, Agronomy Journal, Cotton Science, Nature, Pest Management Science, and the Journal of Food and Agriculture Chemistry.

SWSS Outstanding Educator - Dr. Todd Baughman

Todd Baughman, a native of southwestern Oklahoma, has built a distinguished career in agronomy and weed science. He earned his B.S. and M.S. in Agronomy from Oklahoma State University and his Ph.D. in Weed Science from Mississippi State University Currently, Todd serves as Center Director and Professor of Weed Science at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Lubbock. His prior roles include Professor and Weed Scientist at Oklahoma State University, Professor and State Extension Peanut Specialist at Texas A&M University, and Product Development Representative with Sandoz Agro, Inc. Todd's scholarly contributions are extensive: he has authored or co-authored 50 journal articles, 251 abstracts, 144 technical articles, 110 press releases, and 5 plant material releases. He has chaired or participated on 19 graduate student committees. An active member of the Southern Weed Science Society (SWSS) since 1990, Todd distinguished himself early as a student competitor in paper and poster contests, and as a member of the 1993 Mississippi State University team that won the SWSS Weed Contest. His leadership within SWSS includes service as Member-At-Large (Academia), SecretaryTreasurer, and President (2024–2025). He chaired the Student Program Committee three times across nine years of service and contributed to numerous other committees, including program and local arrangements chair. In recognition of his contributions, he was named SWSS Outstanding Young Weed Scientist in 2006. Beyond SWSS, Todd has served as reviewer and Associate Editor for Weed Science and currently contributes to the Weed Science Society of America (WSSA) through its Finance and Science Policy Committees, as well as serving as WSSA NIFA Fellow. His leadership extends to the American Peanut Research and Education Society (APRES), where he served as President and was honored as a Fellow.

Updates Corner

2026 Weed Contest Info

Dates: August 5-6, 2026
Primary contacts:
Tom Mueller, tmueller@utk.edu
Will Phillips, wphilli3@utk.edu

The purpose of the Southern Weed Contest is to provide an educational experience from which undergraduate and graduate students in Southern Universities can broaden their applied skills in Weed Science. The contest provides an opportunity for Weed Science students to be exposed to weed scientists from other universities and industry, apply what they have learned using a contest to measure their capabilities, as well as to socialize. It is hopeful that the contest will increase the visibility of Weed Science and intensify the interest level of those participating in the discipline of Weed Science. (continued on next page)

Any undergraduate or graduate student currently enrolled and pursuing a B.S., M.S., or Ph.D. degree is eligible to participate. Each graduate team will consist of three or four members, composed of (a) graduate, (b) undergraduate, or (c) a combination of graduate and undergraduate students. An undergraduate student is defined as a student that is not currently enrolled or taking classes in a graduate program or is less than 3 months from graduating with an undergraduate degree. Each school can enter a maximum of two graduate teams and one undergraduate team. If a university does not have sufficient students for a team, up to two students may enter as individuals. Undergraduate students can compete on a graduate team if needed to complete a team. A team may also bring two alternates. Alternate scores will only count toward individual awards. Team scores will be determined from averaging the individual scores from each team member, unless a three-person team is entered. Then the three highest individuals will be averaged. A maximum of two coaches per team can attend the contest. Students will be allowed to participate in the contest five times as a team member or alternate. Undergraduate participation will not count against the five-time rule. All students will compete using the same contest materials.

Names of team members and alternates must be provided by July 4, 2026, to contacts above.

Washington Report

President Delivers Another "Skinny Budget"

The USDA would see its overall discretionary budget drop by 19%. The Agricultural Research Service would receive a 1.6% cut, while the National Institute of Food and Agriculture is slated for a 38% reduction, with its competitive research grants program, the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative, facing a 4% cut. Hatch Act funding ($265 million) for ag experiment stations would be eliminated along with the $21 million for the Crop Protection and Pest Management (CPPM) program. Extension funding through Smith Lever 3(b) and (c) would be cut by 46%.

The president's budget also proposed to eliminate four ARS labs (and combine with other labs). One of these ARS labs includes the Urbana, IL lab that houses

- Integrated Weed Management Systems
- Resistance to Soybean Pathogens and Pests
- Management, Utilization, and Distribution of Maize Genetic Stocks
- Photosynthesis for Agricultural Resiliency and Sustainability
- Genetic Resources in the National Soybean Germplasm Collection

The EPA's budget would be slashed by 52%, with a 32% reduction to its science and technology programs.

NSF would get $4 billion, a cut of 54% from its $8.8 billion budget in FY 2026, with funding concentrated in AI and quantum computing research. All NSF directorates would see a cut. Notably, the Biological Sciences directorate is slated to receive $225 million, a roughly 72% cut compared to FY 2025

The Administration has once again proposed eliminating the $300 million Ecosystems Mission Area within the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), despite Congress rejecting the proposal in FY 2026. The Ecosystems Mission Area includes approximately $50 million for biological threats and invasive species research.

National and Regional Weed Science Societies Support Ag Research Funding

On March 9, The six National and Regional Weed Science Societies joined coalition letters, endorsed by more than 50 ag research stakeholders, that were sent to the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Agriculture supporting continued funding for key USDA research programs, including the Agricultural and Food Research Initiative and the Agricultural Research Service. These programs support critical research, extension, and education that strengthen U.S. agriculture, including weed research and management.

HHS and EPA to Provide New Money for Innovative Weed Management Technologies

On February 27, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), EPA, and USDA announced funding for plans to increase innovative weed management and regenerative agriculture techniques.
Under the HHS, the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) will provide $100 million "to identify new and innovative and cost-effective technologies that reduce reliance on chemical crop protection tools in order to improve human health, including the health of farmers, such as electrothermal and electrical weeding technologies, robotic weeding systems, precision mechanical weed control, thermal weed control, biological and non-toxic herbicides, mulching systems, and integrated systems."

EPA will provide $30 million for a "Grand prize challenge" for cost-effective alternatives to pre-harvest desiccation use of pesticides, which is a potential contributor to human exposure. This challenge will lead to reduced usage of pesticides while providing new innovative tools for farmers to use. Read more HERE.

House Ag Committee Passes Farm Bill

The House Agriculture Committee has approved a new five-year farm bill that includes several provisions affecting federal agricultural research programs and priorities. The measure, titled the Food, Farm and National Security Act (H.R. 7567), passed the committee on March 5 by a 34-17 vote with support from all Republicans and seven Democrats. The bill now moves forward in Congress, with the Senate expected to develop its own version in the "weeks ahead" according to Sen. Ag Committee Chair John Boozman (R-AK).

Much of the debate around the Farm Bill centered on pesticide regulations, nutrition programs, and renewable energy policy. A provision in the House Farm Bill (Sec. 10205) would clarify that EPA has final authority over health-related pesticide labeling under FIFRA. The provision would prevent courts from imposing requirements or liability for any requirements beyond EPA's labeling or packaging requirements (FIFRA 24(b)).

House Ag Committee Chair G.T. Thompson (R-PA) and Ranking Member Angie Craig (D-MN)

The issue was a major point of debate during the markup with Democrats raising questions about preempting states' rights to regulate pesticide use. Republicans pushed back that EPA approval is a rigorous process and pesticide companies shouldn't face the risk of being required to have potentially 50 different labels around the country. An amendment from Chellie Pingree (D-ME) to remove the provision failed.

The bill would expand support for specialty crop research by allowing USDA to waive matching fund requirements for certain grants and by encouraging research focused on mechanization and automation. Other provisions emphasize environmental and climate-related research, including studies on soil health, drought and flooding impacts on agriculture, and the potential use of biochar to improve soil productivity while storing carbon. The proposal also calls for the creation of a national biochar research network to "understand how to use biochar productively to contribute to climate mitigation, crop production, resilience to extreme weather events, ecosystem and soil health, natural resource conservation, and farm profitability."

The bill would establish an Office of Biotechnology Policy at USDA to coordinate the department's efforts to advance biotechnology through research, development, regulations, labeling, commercialization, and trade.

Additional research priorities include studying the effects of wildfire smoke on crops, improving long-term health of white oak trees used in products such as whiskey barrels, and advancing precision agriculture technologies that use satellite imagery and data analytics to optimize farm inputs.

Executive Order Declaring Glyphosate a National Defense Priority

The president issued an executive order on February 18 prioritizing U.S. production of glyphosate, saying the herbicide is critical to the nation's security. The executive order provides limited immunity to domestic com-

panies that make glyphosate and phosphorus, declaring both essential to the nation's military and farmers. Using the 1950 Defense Production Act, Trump said elemental phosphorus is critical to military technologies such as radar, solar cells and sensors, and to agriculture as a "precursor element" in producing glyphosate-based herbicides.
The Executive Order states that the U.S. has "only a single domestic producer of elemental phosphorus and glyphosate-based herbicides, and this producer does not meet our annual needs for those inputs," requiring roughly 6 million kilograms of elemental phosphorus to be imported annually.

Trump ordered U.S. Agriculture Secretary Brook Rollins, in consultation with the U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, to ensure no orders, rules or regulations place "the corporate viability of any domestic producer of elemental phosphorus or glyphosate-based herbicides at risk."

USDA Announces the Creation of the National Proving Grounds Network

On April 7, USDA's Research, Education, and Economics Under Secretary Dr. Scott Hutchins announced the launch of the USDA National Proving Grounds Network for AgTech (NPG-Ag), a nationwide initiative designed to rigorously evaluate agricultural technologies under real-world U.S. farming and ranching conditions.

The initiative will be spearheaded by USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS), working in coordination with other USDA research agencies. **Dr. Steven Mirsky** will serve as the Director of Digital Agriculture, a position that reports directly to the ARS Administrator Joon Park. Grand Farm, a North Dakota-headquartered AgTech ecosystem and innovation testbed, will serve as the USDA's National Program Manager, alongside land-grant universities across the country that will serve as primary research and testing partners.

As chairman of the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Committee, Sen. Hoeven (R-ND) has secured $11 million for the cooperative agreement to date, which helped secure Grand Farm's role as USDA's National Program Manager. This includes $2 million in additional funding that Hoeven provided in FY 2026 to create an ARS work site at Grand Farm, which USDA is utilizing to establish the Program Management Office for the NPG-Ag. Read more here.

Lina Quesada-Ocampo Named Executive Director of the IR-4 Project

Dr. Quesada-Ocampo succeeds Jerry Baron as Executive Director of IR-4. Jerry retired in January 2026 after a distinguished 40-year career.
Quesada-Ocampo brings over 15 years of experience in applied pest management research and Extension work to her new role. Most recently, she served as a William Neal Reynolds Distinguished Professor and Extension specialist for vegetable pathology at NC State, where she led the Quesada Lab and secured over $55 million in career funding — including a $700,000 endowment set up by growers to support her work.

Lina Quesada-Ocampo, a vegetable pathologist and Extension specialist at NC State University, will lead the IR-4 Project as its next executive director, effective March 9.

As executive director, Quesada-Ocampo is committed to advancing IR-4's mission while safeguarding its focus and staying responsive to the needs of growers. Her vision includes strengthening collaborations, accelerating regulatory timelines, and ensuring that specialty crop growers have timely access to innovative and safe pest management tools.

The Quesada Lab at NC State has developed improved disease management strategies for crops like cucurbits and sweetpotatoes in North Carolina and beyond. Researchers have generated data that the EPA required for pivotal product registrations, notably helping sweetpotato growers secure new tools to manage black rot following a devastating outbreak in 2015. Quesada-Ocampo also spearheaded efforts to resolve international trade barriers for growers looking to export sweetpotatoes, including securing a grant from the U.S. Depart-

ment of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service to help preserve sweetpotato exports.

Forest Service to Close Research Stations, Move Headquarters to Utah

A sweeping reorganization of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is raising concern among scientists and conservation groups as the agency moves to relocate its headquarters and significantly scale back its research footprint.

Announced by USDA in early April, the plan will shift the agency's headquarters from Washington, DC, to Salt Lake City, Utah, with about 260 staff relocating by 2027 while some positions remain in Washington. Officials say the move will place leadership closer to the 193 million acres of national forests--largely located in western United States--and improve responsiveness, alongside a transition to a "state-based" operational model and consolidation of research and support functions.

The restructuring will also centralize all research operations in Fort Collins, Colorado, and close 57 of its 77 research facilities in 31 states across the country. These changes would dismantle the agency's current regional research structure and affect long-standing field stations that support studies on wildfire, climate change, forest health, and ecosystem recovery.

The overhaul comes amid significant workforce attrition, with many research staff already departing due to layoffs and early retirements. Additional relocations are expected to drive further losses, raising concerns about diminished scientific capacity and continuity in long-term research programs.

The USDA reorganization was first announced last summer, when agency leaders described the changes as a cost-saving measure that will streamline operations and strengthen field-based decision-making. However, critics warn that the scale of closures and staff disruptions could undermine the scientific foundation that informs forest management and weaken coordination between research and on-the-ground operations.

USDA Finalizes NEPA Rule

On April 7, Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins announced the USDA has finalized a rule modernizing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations. This final rule adopts the changes introduced in the interim final rule published on July 3, 2025, which consolidated seven agency-specific NEPA regulations into a single, department-wide framework, reducing the overall volume of regulations by 66%.

NEPA requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects and any related social and economic effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions. These actions can include permit applications, federal land management actions and construction of highways and other public facilities.

Since last July, agencies at USDA have shown they can reduce environmental review timelines by up to 80%. Secretary Rollins says these faster, more efficient reviews are saving the department millions in taxpayer dollars. The quicker reviews mean the loans, critical infrastructure and forest health projects that rural communities, farmers, and ranchers depend on can move forward sooner.

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Meetings of the National and Regional Weed Science Societies

Jul. 13 - 16, 2026 Aquatic Plant Management Society (APMS), Phoenix, AZ www.apms.org
Dec. 7 - 10, 2026 North Central Weed Science Society (NCWSS), Columbus, OH www.ncwss.org
Dec. 7 - 10, 2026 Northeastern Weed Science Society (NEWSS), Columbus, OH www.newss.org
Jan. 25 - 28, 2027 Southern Weed Science Society (SWSS), Corpus Christi, TX www.swss.ws
Feb. 8 - 11, 2027 Weed Science Society of America (WSSA), Denver, CO www.wssa.net
Mar. 8 - 11, 2027 Western Society of Weed Science (WSWS), Irvine, CA www.wsweedscience.org