



Agricultural Research Service (ARS)

Funding Request

FY 2022 Request: **\$16 million**

Appropriations: 2021 - \$1 million; 2020 - \$1 million; 2019 - \$1 million; 2018 - \$1 million

Alfalfa is key to sustainable agricultural systems and is an economic engine in rural communities - its value for soil conservation, nitrogen fixation, energy savings, crop rotation, and wildlife habitat is unsurpassed. In terms of value, it is the nation's third most valuable field crop following corn and soybean. It is the ultimate regenerative crop, increasing biodiversity, enriching soils, improving watersheds, and enhancing ecosystems.

However, alfalfa must offer a competitive value for farmers in order to provide these benefits and maintain or expand acreage base. Yields of other major cropping choices have significantly surpassed alfalfa due, in part, to the vast amount of public research dedicated to these other crops.

Appropriations Language

Located in the Senate "Explanatory Statement for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2021:

"Alfalfa Research.—The Committee notes that research into alfalfa seed and alfalfa forage systems holds the potential to increase yields, increase milk production, and improve genetics, and the Committee provides no less than the fiscal year 2020 level to support research focused on alfalfa improvement. Research should focus on using tools to accelerate and enhance existing breeding programs focused on improving yield and quality parameters; developing innovative harvesting and utilization systems; developing new markets for co-products; and quantifying environmental benefits from alfalfa-based systems."



Need for Research Parity

- USDA's research portfolio needs to be better balanced to provide needed research for the nation's 3rd most valuable field crop. The decline in acres can be partially attributed to the lack of public research.
- Much public research funding is devoted to the "big 5" (wheat, corn, soybeans, cotton, and rice). The value of all hay in 2019 was \$20.6 billion; alfalfa alone was \$10.8 billion. This compares to wheat at \$8.8, cotton at \$6.0, and rice at \$2.4 (corn is \$52.9 and soybean is \$31.2).
- 2020 ARS data indicates ARS allocated \$58.5 million (80.8 scientist years) to wheat, \$48.7 million (86.9 scientist years) to corn, \$34.6 million (69.4 scientist years) to soybean, \$44.3 million (77.8 scientist years) to cotton, compared to just \$8 million (14.3 scientist years) to alfalfa.

