**2013 Director of Science Policy Report**

**Western Society of Weed Society: 2013, San Diego, CA**

**Summary of Activities**
1. Generated support for USDA research funding through competitive grants (AFRI) and formula funds (Hatch, Smith-Lever) as well as integrated programs (Regional IPM): met with House and Senate committee staff and wrote coalition letters on behalf of the National and Regional Weed Science Societies. FY 2013 budget is in limbo and a continuing resolution based on FY 2012 may fund the entire FY 2013. The current funding for FY 2013 is funded through March 27, 2013. I’m still deciphering how the sequester will impact federal programs that support weed science research, education and extension.

* 1. President’s Council of Advisors for Science and Technology (PCAST) recommended that the U.S. increase its investment in agricultural research by a total of $700 million per year:
		1. $180 million for new graduate and post-doctoral fellowships;
		2. $235 million for new competitively funded research at USDA AFRI;
		3. $130 million for basic research at NSF; and
		4. $150 million for new public-private institutes.
	2. Top challenges they listed for 21st century agriculture:
		1. Managing new pests, pathogens, and invasive plants.
		2. Increasing the efficiency of water use.
		3. Reducing the environmental footprint of agriculture.
		4. Growing food in a changing climate.
		5. Managing the production of bioenergy.
		6. Producing safe and nutritious food.
		7. Assisting with global food security and maintaining abundant yields.
1. Worked to prevent EPA from finalizing a rule which would allow fuel made from two known noxious weeds, *Arundo donax* (giant reed) and *Pennisetum purpureum* (napier grass or elephant grass), to count toward federally-mandated renewable fuels targets. On February 22, EPA announced that it excluded Arundo and Pennisetum from its final rule, while approving biofuel feedstocks produced from camelina and energy cane. EPA said they would continue to consider determinations on biofuels produced from Arundo donax and Pennisetum purpureum and make a final decision at a later time. I have no doubt that EPA will continue to look at Arundo and Pennisetum going forward. In our meetings with EPA, we have stressed that if EPA approves Arundo donax and similarly high risk feedstocks, we believe that the a federal rule must include – at the very minimum— guidelines or a permit process that requires stringent best management practices to reduce the risk of escape. These guidelines should be written with the guidance of the National Invasive Species Council and relevant federal agencies.
2. Worked with interested coalitions to get support in both the House and Senate for the NPDES legislative fix. Legislation remains blocked by Sen. Boxer (CA). Submitted letters of support on behalf of the National and Regional Weed Science Societies. New legislation was reintroduced in the 113th Congress last week.
3. Generated support for the Pesticide Safety Education Program (PSEP) through a technical paper, and a joint press release with entomology and plant pathology. Currently participating in a national stakeholder group to find more permanent funding mechanisms at the federal and state level for PSEP.
4. Generated support for Army Corps of Engineers Aquatic Plant Control Research Program (APCRP) and sent letters to House and Senate Energy and Water appropriations committee members. FY 2013 funding in limbo again for APCRP. Senate has proposed $4 million, but House and President proposed $0. Senate support from Schumer (NY), Leahy (VT) and Cochran (MS) will be key again. I need to send another letter to House and Senate appropriators this week.
5. Co-organized support for the 2013 National Invasive Species Awareness Week (NISAW) activities. Unfortunately, due the sequester, the Dept. of Interior cancelled any involvement in NISAW activities the VERY LAST day before events began. The WSSA still hosted a presentation on Capitol Hill on Mar. 7 by Jacob Barney regarding invasive plants and biofuels.
6. Supported Public Awareness Committee activities and responded to press inquiries. Recent headlines include six news releases on pesticide stewardship as well as the following:
	1. Three Leading Scientific Societies take an Objective Look at the Issues Associated with “Least Toxic Pesticides” Applied as a “Last Resort”.
	2. Annual Meetings of Weed Science Societies to Highlight Latest Developments in Research and Management of Weeds and Invasive Plants.
	3. Decades Old Weed Seeds Trigger New Outbreak of Devastating Plant Parasite.
7. Continued educating Federal agency and NGO stakeholders on herbicide resistance management. Watched and listened for any legislation that would attempt to regulate herbicide resistance or restrict the interstate movement of herbicides due to resistance issues. Meeting with Certified Crop Advisors next week.
8. Helped plan and coordinate 2012 EPA Herbicide Resistance Education Tour on the Delmarva Peninsula in August. The tour report is on the WSSA website.
9. Participated in Farm Bill stakeholder meetings and advocated for the following provisions where differences existed between the House and Senate:
	1. Support the Senate provision that establishes the Foundation for Food and Agricultural Research (FFAR), a new nonprofit corporation designed to supplement USDA’s basic and applied research activities, and provides total mandatory funding of up to $100 million of matching funds. The foundation will solicit and accept private donations to award grants or enter into agreements for collaborative public/private partnerships with scientists at USDA and in academia, non-profits, and the private sector.
	2. Strongly oppose the House provision that require matching funds for applied research and extension that is commodity or state specific.
	3. Support the Pesticide Registration Improvement Act (PRIA III) in the House bill. PRIA was set to expire on Oct. 1, 2012, but separate legislation was introduced and passed in Sept 2012.
	4. Support reauthorization of the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act through FY2017 in the Senate bill. Increases mandatory funding to $70 million annually (FY2013 - FY2017), which would also raise the minimum grant amount received by each state/territory.
	5. WSSA supports conservation compliance, but only if exemptions are granted for herbicide resistance management.

The DSP and Science Policy Committee were active with many other issues on a continuous basis in 2012. Notable issues that arose during the past year that required support through letters, phone calls, and meetings included:

1. asked USDA NIFA to rethink their “Crop Protection Program” funding line item and explore options on how to maintain equal funding for the six programs involved, especially IR-4, the Regional IPM Centers, and Extension IPM.
2. Supported a letter to Congress asking them to avoid legislation that would place severe restrictions on government employees' abilities to attend meetings and conferences.

**2013 Plan for Committee Activities**

* Discuss weed science priorities with NIFA Director, Sonny Ramaswamy and generate support for USDA to fund a $10 million CAP grant for weed resistance management.
* Investigate the “fine print” of provisions that get incorporated in the 2013 Farm Bill.
* Investigate FY 2014 federal budget proposal for programs affecting weeds and invasive plants
* Support funding for the Aquatic Plant Control Research Program
* Monitor any new Renewable Fuel Standard proposals that try to add invasive plants as biofuels.
* Continue support for an NPDES Fix bill in the 113th Congress.
* Advertize and hire a new EPA Subject Matter Expert (SME) to replace Jill Schroeder.
* Explore the possibility of establishing a similar SME position within USDA
* Engage in formal discussions with USDA-ARS leadership on the importance of refilling John Lydon’s position of National Program Leader for Weed Science.
* Work with new APHIS PPQ leadership to reestablish federal funding for noxious weed control and eradication. The witchweed eradication program is the only funding that has survived.