

# Economics Research and Education Priorities for an Efficient and Sustainable Food System

## One:

### *Identify economic and social consequences of environmental regulation*

Priority initiatives:

1. Assess the benefits and costs of government regulation affecting agricultural production and the environment.
2. Design and evaluate alternative policies and institutions to mitigate negative environmental impacts of production agriculture.
3. Develop more quantitative and qualitative assessment tools of non-market goods.

## Two:

### *Improve farm income and risk management tools*

Priority initiatives:

1. Assess ways to measure and manage risk in a new, globalized, vertically coordinated food system.
2. Analyze specific risk management strategies, instruments, and portfolios - especially new instruments and arrangements.
3. Assist farmers and lenders with the adoption of improved financial accounting and reporting systems.

## Three:

### *Examine the impacts of the changing farm and agribusiness structure*

Priority initiatives:

1. Analyze the forces driving structural change and concentration, and their impacts on the economic performance of vertically coordinated farming and agribusiness.
2. Determine the impacts of vertical coordination on market access, bargaining power, concentration, location of production, financial arrangements, rural communities and the environment.
3. Analyze the relationship between value-added for agricultural commodities and new product development, producer profitability, risk and market access.

## Four:

### *Evaluate trade policies and barriers*

Priority initiatives:

1. Assess the benefits, costs and other implications of trade policies, government regulation, and institutional barriers on international trade.
2. Evaluate the relationships among trade, natural resources, and the environment.
3. Enhance understanding of the economic impacts and consequences of trade.

## Five:

### *Develop effective economic and rural community development programs*

Priority initiatives:

1. Create improved information to assist local governments in cost-effectively meeting demands for public services, financing public programs, providing infrastructure needs and designing incentives for private sector initiatives and involvement.
2. Improve understanding of the roles of human capital, social capital, and life-long learning in rural economic development.
3. Ascertain the impacts of government programs on rural poverty.

## Six:

### *Assess how changes in consumer demand affect health, nutrition and food safety*

Priority initiatives:

1. Assess the benefits and costs of public policies and government regulations affecting health, nutrition, and food safety.
2. Assess consumer preferences and demands, and their implications for production and marketing practices in the food system.
3. Increase multidisciplinary analysis of food science issues.

## Seven:

### *Analyze economic and social impacts of consolidating research and extension programs*

Priority initiatives:

1. Assess opportunities for regionalization of research and extension programs.
2. Change the reward systems for agricultural research to value more highly multidisciplinary and applied work.
3. Achieve greater coordination among research and extension, including involvement by stakeholders in prioritization, planning, and program evaluation.

## Eight:

### *Examine current and emerging information technologies and communication systems*

Priority initiatives:

1. Ascertain the benefits and costs of public versus private information, and the implications for delivery systems for agricultural research and education.
2. Redesign the delivery systems of the Cooperative Extension Service for more effective and timely performance.
3. Evaluate the value and use of precision technology and information in agricultural production.

## Nine:

### *Improve understanding of economic and social impacts of biotechnology*

Priority initiatives:

1. Analyze how biotechnology affects farm size, production efficiency, competitiveness, trade potential, and other elements of economic performance in agriculture.
2. Evaluate the public versus private sector roles in the development of biotechnology.
3. Enhance the public's understanding about the benefits and risks of biotechnology.

## Ten:

### *Invest in human capital development*

Priority initiatives:

1. Place greater emphasis in undergraduate curricula on understanding the global economy.
2. Renew the emphasis on competitiveness as a key economic concept in agriculture and agribusiness curricula.
3. Utilize more "real life" and experiential learning in the classroom.

## *why set priorities?*

Careful research, extension, and education planning is a critical element in maintaining a successful and vibrant food system. A clear statement of priorities and initiatives helps facilitate and support the planning process.

The agricultural economics profession, under the leadership of the Council on Food, Agricultural and Resource Economics (C-FARE), has engaged in a structured priority setting process intended to identify priorities and related initiatives. The priorities directly reflect the currently important socio-economic problems and opportunities, and set the targets toward which limited resources for research and education can be applied.

The priorities outlined in this brochure represent a common voice for C-FARE and others, in communicating within the agricultural economic profession and to external stakeholders the high priority areas to which agricultural economists can make major contributions during the next three to five years.

This set of priorities does not imply that all existing or additional resources should be directed or redirected in some lock-step fashion. However, the information contained here should be useful and helpful in informing decision making - whether related to federal funding decisions such as possible revisions in annual requests for proposals by the National Research Initiative or the Fund for Rural America, or to the individual scientist as he or she contemplates future professional projects and responsibilities.

## *about C-FARE*

The Council on Food, Agricultural and Resource Economics (C-FARE) is a non-profit association of agricultural economists dedicated to strengthening the national presence of the agricultural economics profession. C-FARE is actively working to: 1) identify key economic issues, establish priorities, and seek support for research, extension, and academic instruction; 2) help agricultural economists contribute more effectively to public and private sector decisions; 3) work with other professional organizations to foster support for agricultural research; and 4) publicize agricultural economics contributions to solving important societal issues.

## *other C-FARE publications*

- *Economics Research and Education Priorities for an Efficient and Sustainable Food System.* C-FARE, 1997.
- *Agricultural Research Assessment: A Symposium Summary.* C-FARE, 1996.
- *The Industrialization of Agriculture: Policy, Research and Education Needs: A Symposium Summary.* C-FARE, 1994.

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THE COUNCIL ON FOOD, AGRICULTURAL  
AND RESOURCE ECONOMICS

