

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 4173

To amend the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 to direct the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a specialty crop mechanization and automation initiative, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JUNE 15, 2023

Mr. LAMALFA (for himself, Mr. CARBAJAL, Mr. MILLER of Ohio, and Ms. SPANBERGER) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Agriculture

A BILL

To amend the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 to direct the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a specialty crop mechanization and automation initiative, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Advancing Automation
5 Research and Development in Agriculture Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. MECHANIZATION AND AUTOMATION FOR SPE-**
2 **CIALTY CROPS.**

3 The Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education
4 Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7601 et seq.) is amended
5 by inserting at the end the following:

6 **“SEC. 412A. MECHANIZATION AND AUTOMATION FOR SPE-**
7 **CIALTY CROPS.**

8 “(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary shall estab-
9 lish within the Department a stand-alone competitive re-
10 search and extension grant program to increase the com-
11 petitiveness of specialty crops in the United States
12 through the advancement and acceleration of the mecha-
13 nization and automation, including—

14 “(1) Projects that create or improve cost-effec-
15 tive technologies to reduce a specialty crop grower’s
16 manual labor requirements and increase the effi-
17 ciency of crop production, resource management,
18 harvesting, processing, post-harvest technologies,
19 and packaging through mechanization, automation,
20 and other innovations and technologies.

21 “(2) Projects that increase adoption of mecha-
22 nization and automation technologies by:

23 “(A) Emphasizing adoption drivers that
24 could include but are not limited to
25 connectivity, autonomy, reliability, durability,
26 in-field validation, and cost-effectiveness.

1 “(B) Investing and developing human cap-
2 ital to increase the specialty crop sector’s capac-
3 ity to work with new technologies, and to man-
4 age a more tech-focused farm workforce.

5 “(3) Projects that accelerate automation and
6 mechanization through prototype development, in-
7 field trial testing, ongoing industry engagement, and
8 rapid commercialization.

9 “(b) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—The Secretary may carry
10 out the section through eligible entities described in sub-
11 section (c).

12 “(c) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES DESCRIBED.—Eligible enti-
13 ties described in this subsection are—

14 “(1) Federal agencies;

15 “(2) national laboratories;

16 “(3) colleges or universities;

17 “(4) research institutions or organizations;

18 “(5) private organizations or corporations;

19 “(6) State agricultural experiment stations;

20 “(7) individuals;

21 “(8) organizations representing specialty crop
22 growers; or

23 “(9) groups consisting of 2 or more entities de-
24 scribed in paragraphs (1) through (8).

1 “(d) REVIEW OF PROPOSALS.—In carrying out this
2 section, the Secretary shall award competitive grants on
3 the basis of—

4 “(1) a scientific peer review conducted by a
5 panel of subject matter experts from Federal agen-
6 cies, non-Federal entities, and the specialty crop in-
7 dustry; and

8 “(2) a review and ranking for merit, relevance,
9 and impact conducted by a panel of specialty crop
10 industry representatives for the specific specialty
11 crop.

12 “(e) CONSULTATION.—Each fiscal year, before con-
13 ducting the scientific peer review described in paragraph
14 (1) of subsection (d) and the merit and relevancy review
15 described in paragraph (2) of such subsection, the Sec-
16 retary shall consult with the specialty crops committee re-
17 garding such reviews. The committee shall provide the
18 Secretary—

19 “(1) in the first fiscal year in which that con-
20 sultation occurs, any recommendations for con-
21 ducting such reviews in such fiscal year; and

22 “(2) in any subsequent fiscal year in which
23 such consultation occurs—

1 “(A) an assessment of the procedures and
2 objectives used by the Secretary for such re-
3 views in the previous fiscal year;

4 “(B) any recommendations for such re-
5 views for the current fiscal year; and

6 “(C) any comments on grants awarded
7 under subsection (d) during the previous fiscal
8 year.

9 “(f) REPORT.—The Secretary shall submit to the
10 Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives
11 and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and For-
12 estry of the Senate a report on—

13 “(1) the results of the consultations with the
14 specialty crops committee conducted under sub-
15 section (e);

16 “(2) the specialty crops committee’s rec-
17 ommendations, if any, provided to the Secretary dur-
18 ing such consultations; and

19 “(3) the specialty crops committee’s review of
20 the grants awarded under subsection (d) in the pre-
21 vious fiscal year.

22 “(g) ADMINISTRATION.—

23 “(1) IN GENERAL.—With respect to grants
24 awarded under this section, the Secretary shall seek
25 and accept proposals for grants.

1 “(2) TERM.—The term of a grant under this
2 section may not exceed 10 years.

3 “(3) MATCHING REQUIREMENT.—

4 “(A) IN GENERAL.—An entity receiving a
5 grant under this section shall provide non-Fed-
6 eral matching funds (including funds from an
7 agricultural commodity promotion, research,
8 and information program) equal to not less
9 than 15 percent of the amount of the grant.

10 “(B) IN-KIND SUPPORT.—Non-Federal
11 matching funds described in subparagraph (A)
12 may include in-kind support.

13 “(C) WAIVER.—The Secretary may waive
14 the matching requirement under subparagraph
15 (A).

16 “(4) OTHER CONDITIONS.—The Secretary may
17 set such other conditions on the award of a grant
18 under the program under subsection (a) as the Sec-
19 retary determines to be appropriate.

20 “(h) PRIORITIES.—In making grants under the pro-
21 gram under subsection (a), the Secretary shall provide a
22 higher priority to projects that—

23 “(1) include proposals that address the training
24 or retraining of farm workers to operate, repair, pro-

1 gram or otherwise maintain resulting automation so-
2 lutions; and

3 “(2) include explicit mechanisms to commu-
4 nicate results to producers and the public.

5 “(i) BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES.—Funds made
6 available under this section shall not be used for the con-
7 struction of a new building or facility or the acquisition,
8 expansion, remodeling, or alteration of an existing build-
9 ing or facility (including site grading and improvement,
10 and architect fees).

11 “(j) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

12 “(1) SPECIALTY CROP.—The term ‘specialty
13 crop’ has the meaning given that term in section 3
14 of the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004
15 (7 U.S.C. 1621 note; Public Law 108–465).

16 “(2) SPECIALTY CROPS COMMITTEE.—The term
17 ‘specialty crops committee’ means the committee es-
18 tablished under section 1408A of the National Agri-
19 cultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy
20 Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3123a).

21 “(3) PROGRAM.—The term ‘program’ means
22 the Specialty Crop Mechanization and Automation
23 Research and Development Program established in
24 subsection (a).

1 “(k) MANDATORY FUNDING.—Of the funds of the
2 Commodity Credit Corporation, the Secretary shall use to
3 carry out this section \$20,000,000 for each of fiscal years
4 2024 and each fiscal year thereafter, and shall remain
5 available until expended.”.

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