



## agInnovation North Central (agNC) Spring Business Meeting

Lodge on the Desert, Tucson, AZ  
 3:15-5 pm MST (no MDT in Tucson, AZ)  
 Tuesday, March 24, 2026 – Palm Room

### agNC Business Meeting Agenda (NOTES below)

Zoom Link: <https://uwmadison.zoom.us/j/2726499338?pwd=llmrhRR1mRsJCsrReG5Q0Xgwkmr18z.1&omn=91883340930>

Meeting ID: 272 649 9338; Passcode: NCRA2023!\$

Time	Item #	Topic	Presenter	Action(s) Needed
3:15 pm	1.0	agNC Business (40 min)	Derek McLean, agNC Chair FFY26	1.1 Discussion and consensus approval vote for FY27 agNC Office Budget
		1.1 <a href="#">agNC Budget Discussion and Approval for FY27</a>		1.2 Consensus approval vote for MRC FFY27 recommendations (renewal proposals, midterm reviews, NC1100's budget/business plan, and agNC Multistate Research Award recommendation for 2026.)
		1.2 <a href="#">Presentation and Approval of MRC FFY27 Recommendations:</a>	Joleen Hadrich, MRC Chair FFY26	1.3 Selection and consensus approval vote for incoming MRC member, to start 10/1/2026
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New/renewal proposals</li> <li>• Midterm Reviews</li> <li>• <a href="#">Excellence in Multistate Research Award</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">NC1100 5-year budget and business plan vote</a></li> </ul>	1.4 Solicit BAA BoD Nominations and approve for agNC	
		1.3 Solicitation/approval of new incoming agNC MRC Member for FFY27		
		1.4 Nominations for BAA Board of Directors		

3:45 pm	2.0	<a href="#">Topic 1: Update from the Facilities Management Subcommittee and Group Discussion</a>	Ron Turco, Joleen Hadrich, Hector Santiago, Jeanette Thurston	For information and discussion
4:25 pm	3.0	Topic 2: Joint NCCEA/agNC Session De-brief – Takeaways and Action Items	Derek, Jeanette, All	Discussion and action items TBD
4:40 pm	4.0	Other Business, as time allows. 4.1 Insights into NIFA Civil Rights Reviews	All	TBD
5:00 pm	<i>Meeting Adjourns</i>			
6:30 pm	For those joining us, please meet at <b>Cielo's Restaurant</b> (at meeting hotel) Joint group dinner with former NCRA/agNC Executive Director, Jeff Jacobsen. This meal is not included in the registration fee, so please bring cash or another method of individual payment.			

#### Future Meetings/Events:

- NC Mini LGU Meeting on hold for 2026.
- Board on Agriculture Assembly (BAA) Leadership Meeting, July 13-15, 2026, Portland, Oregon. More information to come.
- agInnovation National Fall Meeting, September 21–25, Grand Junction, CO. More information to come.
- Annual APLU Meeting, TBA (November 2026)

## agNC Spring Business Meeting Notes

3/24/2026

**Attendees:** Derek McLean (UNL), Tala Awada (UNL), John Blanton (SDSU), George Smith (MSU), Gary Pierzynski (OSU), Shibu Jose (MU), Lingying Zhao (OSU), Rod Johnson (UIUC), Troy Runge (UW Madison), Ulises Toledo (Central State), Jane Schuh (KSU), Kang Xia (MSU), Joleen Hadrich (UMN), Jeanette Thurston (agNC), Chris Hamilton (agNC).

Item #	Topic	Notes	Action(s) Needed/Taken
1.0	agNC Business (40 min)		
1.5	<a href="#">agNC Budget Discussion and Approval for FY27</a>	Derek McLean, agNC Chair FFY26, presented the proposed FY27 budget for the agNC office with a 3% assessment increase and 3% salary increases for Jeanette and Chris. Jeanette and Chris will also investigate with other regions on using NC100 to assist with agNC travel funding.	1.5 Discussion and consensus approval vote for FY27 agNC Office Budget – Approved by agNC directors.
1.6	<a href="#">Presentation and Approval of MRC FFY27 Recommendations:</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New/renewal proposals</li> <li>Midterm Reviews</li> <li><a href="#">Excellence in Multistate Research Award</a></li> <li><a href="#">NC1100 5-year budget and business plan vote</a></li> </ul>	Joleen Hadrich, MRC Chair FFY26, presented the seconded MRC recommendations made during the 3/23 MRC meeting to the group, as presented in the MRC materials below. NC246 will be resubmitted for the 2026 national multistate award and NC1181 (2 <sup>nd</sup> place in 2024) will be our regional winner for 2026.	1.6 Consensus approval vote for MRC FFY27 recommendations (renewal proposals, midterm reviews, NC1100's budget/business plan, and agNC Multistate Research Award recommendation for 2026.) – MRC recommendations approved as presented.
1.7	Solicitation/approval of new incoming agNC MRC Member for	Kang Xia volunteered to join the MRC effective	

	<p>FFY27</p> <p>1.8 Nominations for BAA Board of Directors</p>	<p>10/1/2026.</p> <p>Shibu was nominated to continue as the national agInnovation representative; Jane was nominated to serve as alternate. These nominees will go forward for the national vote.</p>	<p>1.7 Kang approved as a new MRC member effective 10/1/2027.</p> <p>1.8 Shibu and Jane approved as agNC nominees for BAA BoD rep and alternate, respectively.</p>
<p>2.0</p>	<p><u><a href="#">Topic 1: Update from the Facilities Management Subcommittee and Group Discussion</a></u></p>	<p>Joleen Hadrich and Jeanette Thurston were the only presenters in attendance. Jeanette and Joleen will send discussion summary to Ron and Hector.</p> <p>The facilities subcommittee reviewed farm management models and financial challenges across states.</p> <p>Research farms are typically supported by college allocations, commodity sales, and fees. Many states are facing deferred maintenance and infrastructure funding gaps, though.</p> <p>Ownership models vary, including university-owned farms and leased operations with nonprofit farmer cooperatives. Some leased models benefit from outsourced maintenance and operations.</p> <p>Profitable crop operations often support livestock ones.</p>	<p>None taken, discussion only.</p>

		<p>Bulk purchasing of inputs (fuel, feed, chemicals) has generated 20–25% cost savings, often reinvested into facilities.</p> <p>Equipment leasing challenges also discussed, including vendor contract changes and state procurement limitations.</p> <p>Several institutions maintain long-term leases with John Deere and Case IH, though these are changing over time.</p> <p>One AES uses a \$150M foundation fund to purchase equipment and lease internally, allowing for regular 3-year, low-cost upgrades.</p> <p>Regional equipment sharing was raised as a potential strategy to improve utilization and reduce costs, with some logistical constraints mentioned.</p> <p>Partnerships with local dealers also discussed to secure discounts while supporting local communities.</p> <p>Research farms increasingly used as precision and digital agriculture sites, generating geocoded data for AI applications.</p> <p>Some shift toward off-campus farms for crop research, with concerns regarding consistency and fee structures.</p>	
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		Insurance challenges exist especially for livestock operations, due to fewer risk management options than for crops.	
3.0	Topic 2: Joint NCCEA/agNC Session De-brief – Takeaways and Action Items	<p>Derek, Jeanette, All</p> <p>The group agreed that it was a very valuable joint session about topics that matter, with very open sharing and discussion. Big thanks given to all presenters and facilitators (Rod, Joleen, Tala) and Jeanette/Robin for taking notes on the flip charts.</p> <p>Artificial Intelligence (AI) was identified by agNC as top priority joint topic. How do we work with the engineering groups already involved with AI/digital agriculture? Let's dig deeper and find out who is part of these groups as ag smart and other relevant initiatives and reach out from there to collaborate/be involved, etc. Additionally, reach out to NIFA on if/how these non-ag groups are receiving funding. This may come through in the proposal review process with NIFA.</p> <p>Advocacy/education of Land-grant value (AES and EXT work) as another topic? Not lobbying, just education, so it won't conflict with APLU efforts. Adding LGU language in position vacancy listings would also likely go a long way</p>	None taken, discussion only.

		<p>to ensure hires are aware of what we do and what is expected of them.</p> <p>Role of medical schools and Extension.</p> <p>Perhaps we will have a final discussion and vote after the joint session notes have been summarized.</p> <p>Consider aligning our priority goals with those of USDA.</p>	
4.0	<p>Other Business, as time allows.</p> <p>4.1 Insights into NIFA Civil Rights Reviews</p>	<p>Shibu (MU) is going through USDA AES Civil Rights review and is looking for others to share their experiences with the process.</p> <p>Jane: KSU had best results by just calling USDA and asking for clarification directly. Worked with EXT on civil rights training that needed to be updated. Make sure advisory committees match the demographics of the population.</p> <p>John: SDSU set bi-weekly meetings to ask for clarification. Mainly, grad student selection, board member selection, and start up dollars – were these done fairly with new public discrimination notice included. Title 9 coordinator as contact works well. Jane agreed with this suggestion. You'll need to give all the Title 9 details of the AES, FYI. Confirm whether the board receives USDA funding or not, which</p>	None taken, discussion only.

		<p>will determine eligibility to be reviewed. Only provide what they ask for!</p> <p>Ulises: Central State review was started under the Biden admin, but delayed 18 months, into new administration, but they were reviewed under Biden guidelines still. Hiring committees may be included, as well.</p> <p>Troy: Using someone with Civil Rights in their job title to serve as contact also is helpful. UW has an HR person who does this. Don't go long; use the 45 days.</p>	
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*Meeting Adjourned*

## Item 1.1: agNC Budget Discussion and Approval for FY27

agNC FY2026 (7/1/2025 to 6/30/2026) Working Budget with Proposed FY2027 (7/1/2026-6/30/2027)  
For agNC Spring Meeting Vote

### INCOME

	Approved 3/2024						
	FY2025	FY2026	FY2027	FY2028	FY2029		
State Assessments	483,849	506,041	506,041	521,223	547,284	574,648	Proposed 3% assessment increase for FY27 (with 5% placeholder amount for FY28 and 29)
Available Reserves (KSU)	244,011	78,328	83,111	20,932	17,113	15,914	
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$ 727,860</b>	<b>\$ 584,370</b>	<b>\$ 589,152</b>	<b>\$ 542,155</b>	<b>\$ 564,397</b>	<b>\$ 590,562</b>	

### EXPENSE

Description	FY2025	FY2026	FY2027	FY2028	FY2029		
	Final	Budget	YTD	Budget	Budget	Budget	
<b>agNC</b>							Regional awards--plaques and \$1000 award for 3 awardees--Innovation, Early Career, Mid-Career, note that this will go up These funds may or may not be used each year
Regional Initiatives****	132,236	53,802	38,264	4,600	4,600	4,600	
Discretionary Fund		5,000	629	5,000	5,000	5,000	
<b>NCRA Subtotal</b>	<b>\$ 132,236</b>	<b>\$ 58,802</b>	<b>\$ 38,893</b>	<b>\$ 9,600</b>	<b>\$ 9,600</b>	<b>\$ 9,600</b>	

### KANSAS STATE

Executive Director Salary*	225,822	232,514	166,074	239,489	251,464	264,037	<-- FY27 3% Merit Increase (no K-State COLA for FY27)
Fringe**	51,112	55,803	36,060	57,477	60,351	63,369	
Office Operating/Supplies	3,358	1,000	862	500	500	500	
Travel	36,333	25,000	11,916	25,000	25,000	25,000	
Training	8,500	-	-	-	-	-	
KSU Overhead (support staff salary/fringe)	7,769	8,000	5,763	8,000	8,000	8,000	
<b>KSU Subtotal</b>	<b>\$ 332,894</b>	<b>\$ 322,317</b>	<b>\$ 220,675</b>	<b>\$ 330,466</b>	<b>\$ 345,315</b>	<b>\$ 360,906</b>	

### U of WISCONSIN

Assistant Director Salary*	104,153	109,821	66,966	113,115	118,771	124,709	<-- 2% est WI COLA and 1% merit increase (3% total)
Fringe***	45,071	48,321	29,594	47,508	49,884	52,378	
Office Operating/Supplies	1,842	1,500	769	1,500	1,500	1,500	
Travel	6,779	10,000	3,871	10,000	10,000	10,000	
Training	850	750	980	750	750	750	
Meeting Support	-	-	-	-	-	-	
UW Admin Fees (5% CALS, 7% Central UW)	12,999	11,927	6,482	12,101	12,663	13,254	<-- As of FY25 Q2, CALS 5% fee should no longer be charged.
<b>UW Subtotal</b>	<b>\$ 171,695</b>	<b>\$ 182,319</b>	<b>\$ 108,662</b>	<b>\$ 184,975</b>	<b>\$ 193,568</b>	<b>\$ 202,591</b>	

<b>TOTAL EXPENSE</b>	<b>\$ 636,825</b>	<b>\$ 563,438</b>	<b>\$ 368,230</b>	<b>\$ 525,041</b>	<b>\$ 548,483</b>	<b>\$ 573,097</b>
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<b>AVAILABLE RESOURCES</b>	<b>\$ 91,035</b>	<b>\$ 20,932</b>	<b>\$ 220,923</b>	<b>\$ 17,113</b>	<b>\$ 15,914</b>	<b>\$ 17,466</b>
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Estimated Percent carryover (5% of total income was approved by agNC)				3%	3%	3%
SUM of agNC Annual Income and Expenses--are we "living within our means"?						
(carry over not considered)				\$ (3,818)	\$ (1,199)	\$ 1,551

\*Overhead for KSU support staff salary and fringe (no indirects).

\*\*Per Gina, using 24% estimated KSU fringe rate for 2026 and beyond.


\*\*\*UW fringe is actual and includes monthly UW term leave fee. Estimated for budgeting at 44%, effective CY2025.

\*\*\*\*NC Emerging Issues Award \$150,000 was carried forward for the FY23 winner and remainder carried over again into FY25. Starting FY26, this includes also regional awards (\$3600; all but plaque costs are credited to host state assessment invoices.)

**FY2025 and FY2026 agNC Assessments Distribution by State, with proposed 3% increase for FY2027 (7/1/2026-6/30/2027)**

State	60% State Equal Share Assessments	40% Proportional to State's Share of MRF*	FY25 Assessment (Approved)	FY26 Assessment (Approved 5% inc)	Proposed 3% FY27	Estimated 5% FY28	Estimated 5% FY 29
Illinois	\$25,302	9.86% \$19,087	\$43,297	\$45,426	\$46,789	\$49,128	\$51,585
Indiana	\$25,302	8.31% \$16,087	\$40,186	\$42,315	\$43,584	\$45,763	\$48,052
Iowa	\$25,302	10.58% \$20,486	\$44,633	\$46,731	\$48,133	\$50,540	\$53,067
Kansas	\$25,302	7.64% \$14,790	\$38,995	\$40,848	\$42,073	\$44,177	\$46,386
Michigan	\$25,302	8.70% \$16,833	\$41,039	\$42,868	\$44,154	\$46,362	\$48,680
Minnesota	\$25,302	8.72% \$16,880	\$41,088	\$43,031	\$44,322	\$46,539	\$48,865
Missouri	\$25,302	7.79% \$15,080	\$39,286	\$41,151	\$42,386	\$44,505	\$46,730
Nebraska	\$25,302	8.84% \$17,113	\$41,320	\$44,341	\$45,671	\$47,955	\$50,353
North Dakota	\$25,302	5.87% \$11,363	\$35,566	\$37,270	\$38,388	\$40,307	\$42,322
Ohio	\$25,302	9.45% \$18,294	\$42,502	\$44,507	\$45,843	\$48,135	\$50,541
South Dakota	\$25,302	5.92% \$11,460	\$35,663	\$37,371	\$38,492	\$40,416	\$42,437
Wisconsin	\$25,302	8.30% \$16,067	\$40,274	\$42,182	\$43,448	\$45,620	\$47,901
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$303,625</b>	<b>100.00% \$193,540</b>	<b>\$483,849</b>	<b>\$508,041</b>	<b>\$523,283</b>	<b>\$549,447</b>	<b>\$576,919</b>
			100%	105%	103%	105%	105%

\*Proportion of State share of MRF based upon rolling 3-year actual average (FFY23-25) as provided by NIFA. NRSP and NC off-the-top allocations not included.

 agNC%20Working  
%20FY2026%20Work

← Double-click to open full FY27 agNC budget file.

## Item 1.2: MRC Recommendations

### Renewal Proposals (10/1/2026 to 9/30/2031):

1. Chris:
  - a. NCERA13 (NCERA\_temp13), Soil Testing and Plant Analysis – **Approve pending revision**
2. Tala:
  - a. NCERA59 (NCERA\_temp59), Soil Organic Matter: Formation, Function and Management - **Approve**
  - b. NC1193 (NC\_temp1193), Enhancing Nutrition, Health, and Quality of Life for Emerging and Young Adults - **Approve**
  - c. NC1212 (NC\_temp1212), Exploring the Plant Phenome in Controlled and Field Environments – **Approve**
  - d. NCCC170 (NCCC\_temp170), Research Advances in Agricultural Statistics – **Approve**
3. Danny:
  - a. NC1197 (NC\_temp1197), Practical Management of Nematodes on Corn, Soybeans and Other Crops of Regional Importance – **Approve pending revision**
  - b. NC1203 (NC\_temp1203), Lipids In Plants: Improving and Developing Sustainability of Crops ("LIPIDS of Crops") – **Approve**
  - c. NCERA221 (NCERA\_temp221), Turfgrass and the Environment – **Approve pending revision**
4. Jane:
  - a. NC1029 (NC\_temp1029), Applied Animal Behavior and Welfare - **Approve pending revision**
  - b. NC1192 (NC\_temp1192), An integrated approach to control of bovine respiratory diseases - **Approve**
  - c. NCCC212 (NCCC\_temp212), Small Fruit and Viticulture Research - **Approve**
  - d. NCERA219 (NCERA\_temp219), Swine Production Management to Enhance Animal Welfare – **Reject/Disapprove**
5. Jeanette:
  - a. NC1190 (NC\_temp1190), Catalysts for Water Resources Protection and Restoration: Applied Social Science Research – **Approve Pending Revision**
  - b. NC1195 (NC\_temp1195), Enhancing nitrogen utilization in corn-based cropping systems to increase yield, improve profitability and minimize environmental impacts - **Approve Pending Revision**
  - c. NCERA222 (NCERA\_temp222), Optimizing integrated pest management research and education in the North Central United States. - **Approve Pending Revision**
6. Joleen:
  - a. NC1030 (NC\_temp1030), Advancing Rural Economies, Resilient Enterprises, and Thriving Communities through Adaptive and Transformative Practices – **Approve**
  - b. NC1211 (NC\_temp1211), Precision Management of Animals for Improved Care, Health, and Welfare of Livestock and Poultry – **Approve pending revision**
  - c. NCCC65 (NCCC\_temp65), Indicators of Social Change in the Marketplace: Producers, Retailers and Consumers – **Reject/Disapprove**
7. Joleen and Jeanette: **Approve pending revisions**
  - a. NC\_temp1100, A Systems Perspective to Community Resilience: Rural healthcare at the intersection of households and businesses
8. Troy:
  - a. NC1034 (NC\_temp1034), Impact Analyses and Decision Strategies for Agricultural Research - **Approve pending revision**
  - b. NC1194 (NC\_temp1194), Nanotechnology and Biosensors - **Approve pending revision**
  - c. NCERA101 (NCERA\_temp101), Controlled Environment Technology and Use - **Approve**

**Midterm Reviews (Chris will send these to project leadership):**

Proj #	Title	NCRA AA	MRC Recommendations (By Chris and compiled from available NCAC and AA reviews)
NC213	Marketing and Delivery of Quality Grains and BioProcess Coproducts	G. Pierzynski, OH (20)	<p>Continue as-is, meeting expectations. Good NCAC1 Review.</p> <p>All reviewers indicated that this is a productive, collaborative committee. Keep up the good work!</p>
NCCC307	Biochemistry and Genetics of Plant-Fungal Interactions	S. Harris, IA (23)	<p>Continue as-is, meeting expectations.</p> <p>Comments from reviewers for possible improvements moving forward: The NCCC307 committee is highly productive, collaborative, and impactful. The committee is encouraged to maintain interdisciplinary collaborations, finalize joint review manuscripts, and identify and develop a training grant proposal to formalize the graduate student mentorship already occurring within the project. Documentation of downstream impacts could be strengthened, and the committee is encouraged to engage field pathologists and agronomists, potentially in an advisory capacity, to ensure applicability of research outcomes consistent with stated objectives, particularly Objective 4. Keep up the good work!</p>
NC2040	Metabolic Relationships in Supply of Nutrients for Lactating Cows	G. Smith, MI (20)	<p>Continue as-is. Meeting expectations.</p> <p>Comments (NCAC Review) for possible improvements moving forward: While successful overall, there is some concern regarding the number of objectives with no progress reported. If this continues to be an issue, it may be indicative of a lack of focus on objectives generally applicable to multi-state efforts, or those for which outside funding may currently be scarce. There also appeared to be project creep associated with the work described on Lidocaine residues, potentially due to the lack of distinct focus. Consideration should be made to re-evaluate the number and scope of objectives to optimize the structure of the multistate committee as renewal activities commence.</p>
NCCC308	Nutrition and Management of Feedlot Cattle to Optimize Performance, Carcass Value and Environmental Compatibility	S. Loerch, PSU (19)	<p>Continue as-is, meeting expectations.</p> <p>Comments: Reviews were excellent, great job showing linkages and sharing information. Meeting attendance is good. Keep up the good work!</p>
NC1170	Advanced Technologies for the Genetic Improvement of Poultry	S. Lamont, OH (13)	<p>Continue as-is, meeting expectations.</p> <p>Comments: Excellent, long-standing project, making good progress towards stated objectives. One reviewer suggested that perhaps future</p>

			reports could more clearly articulate cross collaborations when reporting on each objective. Overall, great job and keep up the good work!
NC2042	Management Systems to Improve the Economic and Environmental Sustainability of Dairy Enterprises	M. Schutz, MN (21)	Continue as-is, meeting expectations. Comments: Encourage greater participation in meetings and better showcase team linkages on work towards objective in future annual reports. Maybe add a virtual option for meetings if not already available? Please take advantage of the new grant/funding section of the annual report to showcase external funding leveraged by the team. Overall, good job, keep up the good work!
NC2172	Household financial and health decision-making under economic uncertainties	C. Johnson, ND (23)	Continue as-is, meeting expectations. Both reviews are excellent in all areas. Keep doing what you're doing!
NCERA210	Improving the management and effectiveness of cooperatively owned business organizations	A. Featherstone, KS (17)	Continue as-is, meeting expectations.  Comments: This group appears to be very active and prolific with information sharing. For future reports, please design them around accomplishments towards each originally stated objective, to more effectively showcase progress. Otherwise, keep up the good work!
NC3169	EFNEP Related Research, Program Evaluation and Outreach	T. Awada, NE (20)	Continue as-is, meeting expectations.  Comments: Consistently excellent, productive committee since inception, working well towards stated objectives. One reviewer suggested: For future years, it would be encouraged to have a few publications per objective. Efforts to acquire external funding do not seem emphasized in reports or meeting minutes - please utilize the new Grants and Other Funding section in the annual report to showcase this. Otherwise, great job and keep up the good work!

**MRC additional recommendations – Action Needed: agNC consensus vote of approval for all**

1. Excellence in Multistate Research Award – We did not receive any nominations, so there are the suggestions for 2026:
  - a. Advance our 2025 regional winner, NC246, to the national competition using their updated nomination.
  - b. Advance our second-place regional nomination, NC1181, from 2024 to our regional winner for 2026.
2. Approval of NC\_temp1100’s 5-year budget and business plan for the \$25,000 off the top agNC funds. MRC recommendation TBD during 3/23/2026 MRC meeting.

FUNDING REQUESTED NCRA					
Description	FY26-27	FY27-28	FY28-29	FY29-30	FY30-31
Surveys		\$25,000		\$25,000	
Graduate Student	\$25,000		\$25,000		\$25,000

GRANTS/CONTRACT (USDA NCRCRD) LEVERAGING					
Description	FY26-27	FY27-28	FY28-29	FY29-30	FY30-31
Baseline Surveys	\$48,000		\$48,000		
Small Business Surveys		\$14,600		\$14,600	
Graduate Student	\$6,200	\$31,200	\$6,200	\$31,200	\$6,200

**Budget Narrative**

A small business survey will be conducted using a Qualtrics panel of farms and small business owners. The approximate costs are \$33 per complete response. The total sample collected for the small business survey is 1,200 farms and small businesses. The graduate student will assist with survey development, data collection, analysis, and dissemination.

The USDA-funded NCRCRD core budget will support the baseline surveys in 2026 and 2028 and provide the additional funding needed for 1200 small businesses and farms to be surveyed. NCRCRD core budget will also support funding for a graduate student.

3. Approval of incoming MRC member to start on 10/1/2026. TBD during 3/23/2026 MRC meeting also.

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## Item 2.0: Topic 1: Update from the Facilities Management Subcommittee and Group Discussion

### **Discussion Plan – Financial Sustainability of Research Farms and Facilities agNC Spring Meeting, March 24, 2026**

**Subcommittee members:** Ron Turco, Joleen Hadrich, Hector Santiago, Jeanette Thurston

The discussion, led by subcommittee members Joleen Hadrich and Hector Santiago, will focus on the financial sustainability of research farms and facilities. The conversation will be organized around three areas, two of which will highlight strategies and insights directors may be able to take back to their institutions:

1. Strategies that help keep facilities financially sustainable (“in the black”)
2. Financial management challenges that directors cannot easily address alone
3. Ideas for regional collaboration or shared learning

Our goal is not to solve every facilities challenge during this session. Rather, we hope to surface practical strategies that are working, identify common fiscal pressures, and determine whether there are shared approaches we should explore as a region.

#### **Request Prior to Traveling to Tucson**

To help ensure a productive discussion, please come prepared to briefly share:

1. **One strategy that helps your AES maintain financial sustainability** (see Question 1 below)
2. **One financial management challenge that is difficult to solve at the institutional level** (see Question 2 below)
3. **One idea for what we might explore as a region to help address our most pressing challenges** (see Question 3 below)

Responses will be captured during the session to inform follow-up discussions and a brief summary document. The subcommittee will reconvene afterward to consider potential next steps based on insights from the discussion.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

**1) “What strategies are helping you keep research farms and facilities financially sustainable?”**

Some examples to spark ideas:

- Cost recovery models
- Change culture to a team effort across locations
- Fee structures for use
- Partnerships with industry
- Shared staffing across stations
- Crop/livestock revenue models
- Equipment pooling or leasing
- Leasing land vs owning
- Integration with Extension programming
- Institutional subsidy models

## 2) “What are the biggest financial pressures or roadblocks you face in managing farms and research facilities?”

Examples to spark ideas:

- **Aging infrastructure and deferred maintenance** at research farms and facilities
- **Low utilization of farms or stations located far from campus**
- **Independent farm management across locations**, making it difficult to coordinate operations or accommodate new research requests
- **Labor challenges**, including difficulty offering competitive wages or benefits compared to other employers
- **Equipment replacement needs and opportunities for equipment sharing across locations**
- **Institutional expectations that farms be financially self-supporting**
- **Compliance and regulatory requirements** that increase operational costs
- **Weather variability** that impacts crop yields and farm revenue
- **Limited access to capital funding** for infrastructure upgrades and modernization
- **Difficulty establishing realistic user fees** that balance cost recovery with researcher needs

## 3) “Is there anything we should explore in the coming year as a region to help address these issues?”

Possibilities might include:

- Sharing facilities cost-recovery models
- A facilities management peer network
- Regional equipment lease agreements
- Sharing federal funding strategies (e.g., RFAP)

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