II

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 4607

To provide for Department of Defense and Department of Agriculture joint research and development activities, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 20, 2026

Mr. BANKS (for himself and Mr. BUDD) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Armed Services

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A BILL

To provide for Department of Defense and Department of Agriculture joint research and development activities, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''DOD and USDA Interagency Research Act''.

SEC. 2. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AND DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE JOINT RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Agriculture (referred to in this Act as the

''Secretaries'') shall carry out collaborative research and development activities focused on the joint advancement of Department of Defense and Department of Agriculture mission requirements and priorities in the areas of agriculture and food defense, as specified in section 221 of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 6922), including requirements and priorities related to national security, agricultural resilience, feedstocks for bioindustrial manufacturing, and natural resource management.

(b) MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING.—The Secretaries shall enter into a memorandum of understanding or another appropriate interagency agreement for the purposes of carrying out and coordinating the research activities under subsection (a). Such memorandum or agreement shall—

(1) formalize coordination between the Department of Defense and the Department of Agriculture on joint project activity in the areas specified in subsection (c);

(2) require the use of a competitive, merit-reviewed process, which considers applications from Federal agencies, National Laboratories, institutions of higher education, nonprofit institutions, industry, and other appropriate entities;

(3) provide a framework for the Secretaries to enter into public-private partnerships under which—

(A) the Secretaries may make grants for the purposes of this Act; and

(B) the Secretaries require the recipient of any such grant to provide an amount of non-Federal matching funds in an amount equal to the amount of the grant involved;

(4) where appropriate, leverage existing bilateral and multilateral agreements with allies and partners;

(5) ensure that activities carried out under subsection (a) focus on the research and development of technologies and tools that are—

(A) characterized by high-payoff potential;

(B) designed to prepare for, prevent, protect against, or mitigate current or projected threats to mission requirements and priorities delineated under subsection (a); and

(C) dependent upon initial Federal investment to incentivize private development and broader market adoption; and

(6) establish a comprehensive risk management approach to gauge national security implications and inform and protect research, including through part-

ner and performer engagement, due diligence processes, continual monitoring, cybersecurity, threat awareness and education, supply chain protection, information sharing, and risk mitigation.

(c) COORDINATION.—In carrying out the activities under subsection (a) and contingent on formally documented and mutually agreed upon research security practices, polices, and procedures, the Secretaries shall—

(1) conduct collaborative research on—

(A) engineering, mechanization, and technological improvements, including to address capacity issues across the agrifood supply chain;

(B) agricultural data architecture, including for applications of artificial intelligence and machine learning to agricultural data to optimize agricultural and defense systems;

(C) biological sciences, such as plant, animal, and microbial genetics, for—

(i) natural disaster and weather resiliency;

(ii) biosecurity;

(iii) biological, toxin, and chemical threat mitigation;

(iv) mitigation of the impacts to farmland contiguous to military bases of De-

partment of Defense chemical releases through activities carried out by the Department of Defense; and

(v) invasive species management;

(D) management strategies for water, energy, soil, forests, and food to reduce scarcity risks to civilian and military operations;

(E) supply chain security, including feedstocks for bioindustrial manufacturing for defense applications, such as propellants, explosives, fuels, and other critical materials and precursors;

(F) agrifood supply chain security to minimize food disruptions, promote and protect agriculture as critical national infrastructure, and enhance defense logistics for military feeding;

(G) innovations applicable to defense objectives and beneficial to rural agricultural economies, including—

(i) precision agriculture technologies;

(ii) drones;

(iii) remote sensing; and

(iv) positioning, navigation, and timing capabilities;

(H) operational resilience to, and preparedness for, natural disasters, biosecurity hazards, and other threats to agricultural systems;

(I) wildfire prediction, prevention, and mitigation, including research on fuel load management, fire behavior modeling, post-fire recovery strategies, and the impact of wildfires on agricultural productivity and military readiness; and

(J) such other topics as the Secretaries may determine relevant to the mission requirements and priorities described in subsection (a);

(2) promote collaboration and secure information sharing with stakeholders that are capable of increasing market-based adoption of technologies developed pursuant to this Act;

(3) provide reliable access to secure data and information for entities that have analysis and intelligence capabilities and expertise relating to the defense of the food and agriculture critical infrastructure sector, including—

(A) Federal, State, local, and Tribal agencies;

(B) relevant authorities at the Department of Defense, Department of Agriculture, and National Laboratories; and

(C) institutions of higher education, nonprofit institutions, and industry partners;

(4) ensure that, where activities utilize Federal data or records from agricultural producers, such data—

(A) is not subject to disclosure under section 552 of title 5, United States Code (commonly known as the ''Freedom of Information Act''); and

(B) is not disclosed pursuant to any other authority or action of the Secretaries;

(5) establish and fund research in areas identified by the Chief Scientist of the Department of Agriculture and the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, including through the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority established under section 1473H of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3319k) and the Department of Defense Office of Research and Engineering, to address mission requirements and priorities delineated under subsection (a);

(6) support research and workforce development as the Secretaries determine necessary to foster innovation in both the agricultural and defense sectors, including sharing of personnel of the Department of Defense and Department of Agriculture through the interagency exchange program established under section 221 of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 6922); and

(7) conduct applied research, development, and demonstration projects to field-test innovations resulting from the collaborative research conducted under paragraph (1), with the purpose of transitioning successful technologies into real-world agricultural and defense operations to improve effectiveness, reduce risks, and strengthen long-term readiness.

(d) AGREEMENTS.—In carrying out the activities under subsection (a), the Secretaries are authorized to—

(1) enter into reimbursable agreements between the Department of Defense, the Department of Agriculture, and other entities to maximize the effectiveness of research and development; and

(2) collaborate with relevant members of the intelligence community and other Federal agencies as appropriate.

(e) AUTHORITY TO USE UNOBLIGATED FUNDS.—In addition to such sums as may be appropriated to carry out this Act, the Secretaries are authorized to carry out this Act using unobligated funds otherwise appropriated for the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority within the Department of Agriculture and for research, development, testing, and evaluation within the Department of Defense.

(f) REPORTING AND OVERSIGHT.—

(1) ANNUAL REPORTS.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter, the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Secretary of Agriculture, shall—

(A) submit to the appropriate congressional committees a report that includes a description of—

(i) interagency coordination between each Federal agency involved in the research and development activities carried out under this section, which shall include a description of the methodology used to

select such activities for the year covered by the report;

(ii) potential opportunities to expand the technical capabilities of the Department of Defense and the Department of Agriculture;

(iii) collaborative research achievements and the impact of such achievements on national defense and agricultural resilience;

(iv) research security practices, policies, and procedures implemented in conjunction with the activities carried out under this Act;

(v) expenditures for research and development activities under this Act; and

(vi) future priorities for joint research; and

(B) make a version of the report available to the public, except that such publicly available version of the report may only contain information that is safe for public release in accordance with the Controlled Unclassified Information Programs at the Department of Defense and Department of Agriculture.

(2) RESEARCH SECURITY.—The activities authorized under this section shall be carried out in a manner consistent with subtitle D of title VI of the Research and Development, Competition, and Innovation Act (division B of Public Law 117–167; 42 U.S.C. 19231 et seq.), to ensure research integrity and security.

(3) GAO REVIEWS.—Not less frequently than once every 5 years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General of the United States shall conduct a review to assess the effectiveness and impact of the joint research initiative established under this Act.

(g) JUDICIAL DEFERENCE.—Notwithstanding section 706 of title 5, United States Code, a court shall defer to the Secretaries' reasonable interpretation of any ambiguous provision of this Act.

(h) DEFINITIONS.—In this Act:

(1) AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DEFENSE.—The term ''agriculture and food defense'' has the meaning giving that term in section 221(a) of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 6922(a)).

(2) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES.—The term ''appropriate congressional committees'' means—

(A) the Committee on Armed Services, the Committee on Agriculture, and the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology of the House of Representatives; and

(B) the Committee on Armed Services, the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate.

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