AGRICULTURE ADVANCED RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY: NEW PROGRAM SUPPORTS INNOVATION IN AGRICULTURE

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With a nod to the importance of innovation in a healthy, vibrant agriculture and food industry, Congress has created a new program to support cutting-edge agriculture research and development—the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AGARDA).

BACKGROUND

On December 20, 2018, President Trump signed into law the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Farm Bill), which establishes AGARDA as a five-year pilot program, through which Congress aims to support the development of innovative technologies to address food and agriculture challenges of tomorrow, while also providing a new avenue for today's farmers to overcome their most pressing obstacles.

FUNDING

Congress authorized $50 million annually from fiscal years 2019 through 2023 for AGARDA grants and cooperative agreements to be awarded to a broad range of public and private entities. Individuals, corporations, colleges, and universities (land-grant and non-land-grant) as well as local, state, and federal government agencies are among the entities eligible for AGARDA support.

AGARDA R&D OBJECTIVES

AGARDA assistance can be provided for a broad range of research and development projects, including early-stage research for innovations with application to agriculture products; prototype testing; assistance with product approval, licensure, and clearance; and assistance with the manufacturing and commercialization of products. In addition, AGARDA would support R&D for plant pest countermeasures and veterinary countermeasures.

Goals of this new program include developing and deploying technology to prevent, prepare for, and protect against threats to the U.S. food supply; and enhance U.S. agriculture and food export competitiveness,

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environmental sustainability, and resilience to extreme weather. AGARDA is also tasked with undertaking research and development that the U.S. agriculture industry itself would not undertake because of prohibitive cost or technology uncertainty.

NEXT STEPS

To start the new program, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Chief Scientist will appoint an AGARDA director, who will organize teams to develop solicitations. By law, AGARDA is to release a strategic plan 180 days from enactment of the Farm Bill, putting the deadline in mid-June. The plan, which will be developed with input from various agriculture-related committees, offices, and advisory boards, will provide strategic direction for developing solicitations under the new authority.

While the Farm Bill authorized $50 million annually for this program, the Appropriations Committees, specifically the House and Senate Subcommittees on Agriculture, must approve the funding before AGARDA can make awards.

MODELED AFTER OTHER ADVANCED RESEARCH AGENCIES

AGARDA is modeled after other advanced research and development agencies that were authorized at pivotal points in our nation's history. One such agency, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), was formed in response to the Soviet Union's launch of the Sputnik Satellite. DARPA has broad, bipartisan support. It is one of the most well-known advanced R&D agencies because of its contribution to the development of the internet. The Biomedical Advanced R&D Agency (BARDA) was established to accelerate development of countermeasures in the case of widespread medical viruses and other threats. Finally, the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (ARPA-E) was formed to help ensure U.S. leadership in science and technology, particularly in the energy sector.

These advanced research and development authorities support “out of the ballpark” innovations that would—if successful—change the landscape of the security, biomedical, or energy industries in the U.S. Presumably, a similar test would be applied to AGARDA applications, in which case the R&D is intended to overcome long-term, high-risk research challenges in agriculture and food.

The program is authorized through 2023, when the next Farm Bill is due. With a successful pilot, Congress will likely make AGARDA a permanent program, like other advanced research agencies.

CONCLUSION

Following success with advanced research and development authorities in defense, biomedical protection, and

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energy technology, the establishment of AGARDA provides a path forward for the USDA to support cutting-edge discoveries in agriculture.

The K&L Gates policy team regularly works with companies and other organizations to identify relevant federal programs. Please contact Laurie Purpuro with any questions or for additional information.

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