



COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES
**AGRICULTURAL, LEADERSHIP,
AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION**
VIRGINIA TECH.

Agricultural, Leadership, and

Community Education

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NCAC-24 Annual Meeting
Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources Applied Behavioral Sciences
January 5-6, 2026

Virginia Tech, Academic Building One
3625 Potomac Avenue, Room 5150
Alexandria, VA 22305

<https://virginiatech.zoom.us/j/81823842540>

Members in attendance:

Kalynn Baldock, Eastern New Mexico State University; Mark Balschweid, University of Nebraska- Lincoln; Scott Burris, Texas Tech University; Jason Ellis, Kansas State University; Amy Smith, University of Minnesota; Shannon Washburn, Ohio State University; Kang Xia, Michigan State University; Jessica Blythe, West Virginia University; Ben Chapman, North Carolina State University; Leslie Edgar, University of Idaho; Rebecca Lawver, Utah State University; OP McCubbins, Mississippi State University; John Tummons, University of Missouri; Jennifer Waldeck, University of Georgia; Scott Smalley, Iowa State University; Don Edgar, University of Idaho; Tim Murphy, Texas A&M University; Eric Kaufman, Virginia Tech; Shane Robinson, Oklahoma State University; Tracy Rutherford, Virginia Tech

Monday, January 5

2:00 Welcome

1. Introductions
2. Election for Secretary, Vice-Chair
 - Becki Lawver was elected Secretary
 - Ben Chapman was elected Vice Chair
3. Multi-state review teams – review due in NIMSS Feb 17, 2026
 - Jennifer Waldeck (lead), Ben Chapman and Amy Smith will review NC1034 Impact Analyses and Decision Strategies for Agricultural Research
Project Summary: <https://nimss.org/projects/19257>
[Review Form: https://nimss.org/forms/appendix_h.pdf](https://nimss.org/forms/appendix_h.pdf)
 - Jessica Blythe (lead), Jason Ellis, Shannon Washburn will review NC1190: Catalysts for Water Resources Protection and Restoration: Applied Social Science Research
Project Summary: <https://nimss.org/projects/19261>
[Review Form: https://nimss.org/forms/appendix_h.pdf](https://nimss.org/forms/appendix_h.pdf)

4. Open discussion

3:00 Tour of Facilities – Elizabeth Quill & Marci Hyla, Institute for Advanced Computing

4:00 **Brandi Schottel**, Strategic Advisor for Partnerships, [NSF Directorate for Engineering](#)

- **Overview:** Brandi Schottel (NSF ENG) discussed NSF priorities, emphasizing interdisciplinary, translational research and integration of social, behavioral, and economic sciences into large-scale initiatives, especially in agriculture and natural resources.
- **NSF Structure & Funding:** All 8 NSF Directorates will be retained; NSF expected to be least affected by reorganization. Budget clarity expected in June. Continuous grants are being phased out; full funding will be awarded upfront. Indirect cost changes would require Congressional action.
- **Key Opportunities & Guidance:** Researchers “do fit” at NSF if work is framed around fundamental science/technology in natural resources and agriculture. Priority areas include food security, biotech, AI, IoT, workforce development, REUs, and education–research integration. NSF internships and IPA opportunities highlighted; early-career researchers encouraged to serve on panels.

6:00 Welcome Dinner [Founding Farmer’s](#), 461 Swann Ave, Alexandria, VA 22301

Tuesday, January 6

Hotel Lobby pickup 7:30-8:00 am

8:00 Breakfast and conversation

9:00 a.m. **Dr. Rachel Melnick** – Acting Associate Director for Programs, USDA-NIFA
Dr. Rachel Melnick currently serves as NIFA's Acting Associate Director for Programs.

- **Overview:** Dr. Rachel Melnick, Acting Associate Director for Programs at USDA–NIFA, provided an overview of current priorities, funding trends, and administrative updates. NIFA remains organized across four institutes and is experiencing grants management backlogs due to a lapse in appropriations. Approximately 60% of recent awards and nearly 80% of capacity funding continue to go to 1862 Land-Grant Institutions.
- **Key priorities** increased attention to small farms, behavioral and demographic segmentation, and interdisciplinary research teams. SBIR investments support agricultural innovation, education tools, and telehealth, with an emphasis on protecting U.S. agricultural research and framing farm security as national security.
- **Administrative updates** include NIFA’s transition to the eRA system, new USDA research directives and general terms (released Dec. 31), and guidance that proposals must align with current administrative priorities. Upcoming RFAs are expected in early spring. AFRI saw record application numbers, creating reviewer capacity challenges.

10:00 a.m. **Dr. Jessica Agnew**, Associate Director CALS Global, Managing Editor
[GAP report](#) (zoom)

Dr. Jessica Agnew is a global food systems expert dedicated to advancing equitable, resilient agri-food systems and improving access to nutritious foods worldwide. As Managing Editor of the Global Agricultural Productivity (GAP) Report at Virginia Tech and co-lead of the GAP Initiative, she develops and executes strategies to drive investment and action in agricultural productivity growth to meet the world's evolving agricultural needs. In her concurrent role as Associate Director of CALS Global, she leads initiatives to internationalize the talents of faculty and students in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS).

- **Overview:** Dr. Jessica Agnew presented an overview of the **Global Agricultural Productivity (GAP) Initiative** at Virginia Tech, highlighting its role in advancing equitable, resilient global agri-food systems. The presentation underscored the GAP Initiative's focus on data-driven analysis, global partnerships, and investment-oriented strategies to inform policymakers, donors, and development organizations. Dr. Agnew discussed how productivity growth is essential for food security, environmental sustainability, and economic development, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

11:00 a.m. **Dr. Thomas Woodson**, Program Director, NSF, Science of Science programs

Dr. Thomas S. Woodson is an associate professor in the Department of Technology and Society at Stony Brook University. His pioneering research explores the global impacts of technology on societal inequality and delves into the origins and repercussions of inclusive innovation. For his current project, Dr. Woodson is examining the effectiveness of scientific funding in promoting broader societal benefits and devising strategies to foster diversity within STEM fields.

- **Program Overview:** Program supports ~6,500 people across 350 institutions via ~750 awards; ~20% success rate. Participants encouraged to serve on review panels and engage program officers to better understand funding processes.
- **Research Focus:** Emphasis on science of science (SOS) research—science communication, team science, societal value of science, and evidence-based policymaking. Aligns with NSF priorities and promotes collaborative, “spectrum science” approaches that integrate environmental, agricultural, and human systems.
- **Proposal Guidance:** Strong attention needed to NSF Proposal & Award Policies and Procedures Guide. Broader impacts must be explicit, central, and societally meaningful, especially given flat budget outlook. Use institutional and community partnerships to demonstrate clear public value and outcomes.

12:00 Lunch - catered

12:30 p.m. **Wendy Reinhardt Kapsak**, President & CEO, and **Kris Sollid**, Senior Director, Research & Consumer Insights, [International Food Information Council](#)

Wendy Reinhardt Kapsak, MS, RDN is President and CEO of the International Food Information Council (IFIC) where she employs her expertise in food and nutrition communication strategies. Prior to joining IFIC, Wendy served as the President and CEO of the Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH) where she guided the Foundation's efforts with hundreds of public and private partners to advance fruit and vegetable consumption for happier, healthier lives. Earlier in her career, she held multiple leadership positions in the Food, Nutrition & Health Partnerships and Corporate Engagement verticals in Bayer Crop Science. While in these roles, her efforts focused on connecting the food, nutrition, culinary, and agriculture communities for greater understanding, collaboration, and innovation.

Kris Sollid leads the International Food Information Council's (IFIC) research and consumer insights program which includes its signature annual Food & Health Survey and other topic-specific consumer research projects. In this role, he develops creative strategies for conducting IFIC's qualitative and quantitative consumer studies and disseminating insights to a wide variety of food and nutrition professionals via national and global platforms and publications.

- **Program Overview:** Representatives from the International Food Information Council (IFIC) provided an overview of the organization, its mission to deliver science-based information on food, nutrition, and food systems, and its role in translating research into clear, credible communication for the public, health professionals, and policymakers.

1:30 p.m. **Dr. [Scott Hutchins](#)**, Under Secretary, Research, Education & Economics' Chief Scientist, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Dr. Scott Hutchins serves as Under Secretary for the [Research, Education, and Economics \(REE\)](#) Mission Area of USDA. In addition, he is the Chief Scientist for USDA and serves on the USDA Leadership Cabinet.

- **Overview:** updated USDA R&D priorities, emphasizing a shift toward digital and autonomous agriculture, next-generation agriculturalists, and technologies that clearly demonstrate return on investment for farmers and growers. Key themes included establishing rigorous evaluation and deployment protocols, addressing biosecurity and supply chain risks (such as herbicide resistance and foreign dependence), and redirecting research toward sustainable intensification, breeding, and nutrition-focused outcomes. The discussion highlighted the need for clarity, speed, and agility in creating strong value propositions, reducing fear of technology adoption, and developing scientists with social, behavioral, and project management skills. Additional priorities included diversifying research portfolios, strengthening domestic graduate education at land-grant institutions, aligning across USDA mission areas, and reaffirming the unique value and public trust role of higher education in advancing U.S. agriculture.

3:00 p.m. [Wendy Fink](#), APLU, Executive Director - Academic Programs Section, Board on Agriculture Assembly and Associate Vice President, Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources

As Executive Director for the Academic Programs Section, Fink works closely with the executive committee of APS to provide strategic direction for the group. She oversees resource allocation, advocates for APS priorities internally and externally, convenes member meetings and activities, manages communications, and pushes for collaboration among members and with external partners.

Shared 2025-2030 Annual FANRE Job Opening data from Purdue University study; ANR recruitment initiative; AgNGINE report; Graduate Education Summit; and the AgInnovation funding models.

4:00 p.m. Identifying Next Steps
 Next meeting – May 18, 2026, AAAE National Conference
 Plan to develop a white paper on the value propositions of agricultural social sciences – specifically education, communication, leadership building off of the “Baker team paper” on Evaluation from 2023-2024.

5:00 p.m. Adjourn – Safe Travels

NCAC-24 Documents available in Shared Google Drive NCAC-24 Shared Drive(owned by Iowa State)– must be signed in to a google account to access folder:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1_RNA4IGD8GuSg-BIc93JskKuUKzXl0w9?usp=sharing