KEY USDA ACTIVITIES ALREADY UNDERWAY
IN RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM
THE USDA ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON BIOTECHNOLOGY AND 21ST CENTURY AGRICULTURE (AC21)

Improvement of crop insurance options for farmers not growing commodity crops. Since 2012, USDA has eliminated the insurance premium surcharge for organic farmers, added price elections for 17 crops, and created the contract price addendum, which is available for 62 crops. The contract price addendum allows producers to use their contract price to establish crop insurance guarantees rather than USDA-established prices. Last year, in its first year of operation, nearly 10 percent of the organic policies utilized the price addendum. Overall, these changes resulted in nearly a ten percent increase in organic acreage covered by crop insurance. There are continuing efforts to increase the number of organic crops with price elections. In addition, as provided for in the latest Farm Bill, USDA can now offer farmers insurance under Whole Farm Revenue Protection, a crop insurance policy that allows producers to ensure every commodity on the farm. This tool offers the potential to provide a safety net for people who have never before had the option of crop insurance. Currently, the Whole Farm program is available in 45 states and there are plans to make it available in additional states in the upcoming year. USDA is continuing to evaluate options for new organic price elections.

Support for the development of an "Organic Seed Finder" database. The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) National Organic Program (NOP) awarded a one-year contract to the Organic Seed Alliance (OSA) and its partner, the Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies (AOSCA), in February 2014. The objective of this contract is to better understand the organic seed market, communicate about the organic seed market and resources – including the Seed Finder database - to certifying agents and organic operations, and identify needs for increased sources of specific types of organic seed. The project should provide USDA with: reports about organic seed needs; educational outreach materials about the organic seed market, seed finder database, and other resources; and specific targeted reports about the types and locations of certain types of organic seeds available to organic producers.

Seeking public input through the Federal Register on how to foster communication and collaboration to strengthen coexistence. On November 4, 2013, USDA published a notice requesting public input for a 60-day comment period, and subsequently extended the comment period for an additional 60 days. There were 4,171 comments received. A summary of these comments will be posted elsewhere on this web page and discussed at the Workshop.

Funding or conducting research relevant to crop stewardship and gene flow risk mitigation. Under USDA's Biotechnology Risk Assessment Research Grants (BRAG) program, starting with the FY 2013 Request for Applications (RFA), relevant topics in these areas (e.g., assessment of the efficacy of existing techniques for mitigating unintended presence on a crop by crop basis and/or in seed production/multiplication systems on a crop by crop basis; and development of novel strategies to mitigate unintended presence of GE traits in non-GE production systems) have been included as priority funding areas. Relevant funded research projects include, among others: three projects studying technologies to inhibit gene flow either by developing male sterility, pollen confinement, or plastid transgene containment; one project investigating the control of seed dormancy for reducing fitness of GE plants in the environment; and one project studying an inexpensive, in-the-field detection method for monitoring GE organisms in the environment. These research projects are ongoing.

Conducting research on landscape-scale gene flow in alfalfa. USDA scientists have an ongoing research project examining the movement of GE traits in feral and roadside alfalfa populations and modeling gene flow in alfalfa in the Pacific Northwest.

Conducting research on the control of corn pollen germination. USDA researchers and land-grant university researchers are collaborating in long-term research that focuses on developing strategies for deploying genes to control pollen germination on receptive corn plants on which the pollen lands. These "gametophytic incompatibility genes" can limit undesired outcrossing among corn market classes. The private sector is also working on this trait, and new corn hybrids that will not accept GE pollen are becoming available for some specialty types in organic systems. Future research may include development of similar systems for other types of specialty corn, as well as genetic studies to look for similar systems that might be found in other crops.

Development of an approach for examining trueness-to-type of holdings in the USDA/ARS National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS). A plan has been developed to prioritize NPGS accessions (samples) for closer examination of their trueness-to-type.. There are roughly 569,000 NPGS accessions of about 14,900 plant species in the NPGS. But only about 20 of these species include genetically-engineered varieties that have been granted non-regulated status by USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). Roughly 5-6% of the total 569,000 accession in the NPGS belong to these 20 species and were either acquired since GE varieties began commercial cultivation in the U. S. or were regenerated in the field since then. These 30,000 or so accessions (90%+ from the three crops soybean, corn, and cotton) are the focus for current re-examination of stewardship procedures and practices. Staff have initiated a small-scale project, in collaboration with seed industry partners, focused on identifying cost-effective means for testing and monitoring genebank samples and breeding stock for the

unintended presence of transgenes in one major crop. Concurrently, ARS is developing more general procedures and best management practices for GE traits in genebank accessions and breeding stocks.

On-going evaluation of the pool of commercially available non-GE and organic seed varieties and identification of market needs for producers serving GE-sensitive markets. USDA reestablished the National Genetic Resources Advisory Council (NGRAC) as a subcommittee of its National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education and Economics Advisory Board. Among the work projects for the NGRAC is to develop a plan for how USDA should work with industry and other stakeholders to accomplish this goal. The Committee several times in 2013 and 2014 and submitted an interim report to the Secretary of Agriculture in August 2014. The NGRAC expects to meet again at the end of March 2015 to complete its final report in response to the AC21 and to deliver it to the Secretary by the third quarter of FY 2015.