**[Aligning Research Investments to the Global Food Security Strategy: A Three-day AgExchange on Nutrition, Agriculture-Led Economic Growth, and Resilience](https://agrilinks.org/agexchange/aligning-research-investments-global-food-security-strategy-three-day-agexchange)**

**April 18–20, 2017**

This brief sets the stage for the discussion on **criteria for focusing research investments**, which begins at 10am ET on April 18th.

**Criteria for Focusing Research Investments**

**Rationale:** Prioritization of investment is critical to ensure resources are focused on the most important areas of research. As we examine the range of research opportunities to contribute to the goals of the Global Food Security Strategy (GFSS)[[1]](#footnote-1), we are looking into **criteria to inform our investments**.

**Background:** The 2011 Research Strategy[[2]](#footnote-2) for Feed the Future emerged from an extensive analysis of the geographic distribution of child undernutrition and poverty, and farming systems in these areas. Through consultations with multiple stakeholders and literature reviews, we identified biophysical, social, and policy constraints in major agroecosystems that research could address to advance the goals of inclusive and sustainable agriculture-led economic growth and nutrition. We used the following key criteria to guide the selection of research priorities:

* Potential impact (such as value of production, numbers of consumers and producers, income gains, nutrition gains), scalability, and spillover across wide areas
* Relevance to poverty, women and children and reduced vulnerability objectives
* Likelihood of success: Technical merit, clear pathways for deployment/adoption
* Cost/Benefit: Estimated cost to develop technology vs. potential returns in terms of impacts
* Economic sustainability for producers/adopters
* Natural resources sustainability: water, soil, ecosystem and climate change
* Institutional sustainability/impact on capacity: engagement of national and regional partners
* Time Frame: timeline, milestones
* Risks: potential impacts on vulnerable groups, environment or breakdown in key pathways

From this overlay of criteria, constraints and research opportunities together, three general categories of priorities emerged: Advancing the Productivity Frontier, Transforming Key Production Systems, and Enhancing Nutrition and Food Safety.

**Alignment of research strategy to the 2016 Global Food Security Strategy (GFSS):** Under the GFSS, malnutrition is elevated into the goal statement – *to sustainably reduce global hunger, malnutrition, and poverty*. GFSS has three mutually reinforcing and interdependent objectives to achieve this goal:

* **Inclusive and sustainable agriculture-led economic growth**, as growth in the agriculture sector has been shown in some areas to be more effective than growth in other sectors at helping men and women lift themselves out of extreme poverty and hunger. It does this by increasing availability of food, generating income from production, creating employment and entrepreneurship opportunities throughout value chains, and spurring growth in rural and urban economies.
* **Strengthened resilience among people and systems**, as increasingly frequent and intense shocks and stresses threaten the ability of men, women, and families to sustainably emerge from poverty.
* **A well-nourished population, especially among women and children**, as undernutrition, particularly during the 1,000 days from pregnancy to a child’s second birthday, leads to lower levels of educational attainment, productivity, lifetime earnings, and economic growth rates.

The GFSS research strategy should provide a strategic framework to guide decisions at U.S. government agencies and departments. A research portfolio may include a blend of investments at different spatial and temporal scales, for example, investments at the national, regional and global levels, and shorter-term and longer-term periods. Thus, the criteria to be developed will be used at multiple levels as research investments are defined at country, regional, and global scales.

A recent USAID-commissioned literature review (Pray et al. 2017) summarized recent evidence on how public and private sector agricultural research and development in low-income countries reduces poverty, alleviates malnutrition, and builds resilience—through new crop and livestock technologies that increase the quantity and quality of agricultural output per unit of land, labor and other resources. The review recommended that priority-setting processes used by investment managers to reach nutrition and resilience objectives more quickly could involve a sequence of investment criteria such as the following:

1. The extent to which the investment will improve real incomes for those at risk

2. The extent to which the investment will lower and stabilize the real cost of safe and nutritious food

3. The extent to which the investment will improve non-food influences on nutritional outcomes

Given the objectives of GFSS and additional considerations gleaned from recent literature, we invite the global community to provide feedback on the relative importance of the [2011 Feed the Future Research Strategy](https://agrilinks.org/agexchange/agexchange-resource/feed-future-global-food-security-research-strategy-may-2011) criteria, and to propose alternate criteria that may assist us in better aligning our investments to the goals of GFSS.

Guiding Questions:

1. For prioritization within the U.S. Government research portfolio, what is the relative importance of the criteria used in 2011 Feed the Future Research Strategy?
2. What alternate criteria may assist us in better aligning our investments to the goals of GFSS?
3. How might the relevance of a technology (i.e., the likelihood of widespread adoption) be addressed when considering criteria for prioritization?

**New opportunities in science:** In addition to developing criteria to guide decision-making across the entire GFSS research portfolio, we recognize that there are new scientific opportunities that can drive innovation and progress toward the GFSS goals. Recognizing that a number of federal science granting agencies make significant contributions of relevance to the Global Food Security Strategy’s goals, we would like to learn from the global scientific community how the research programs supported under this strategy can leverage the range of technologies, tools and approaches that have been supported by other investment.

Guiding Questions:

1. What research technologies, tools, and approaches can the U.S. Government leverage to accelerate progress towards the three objectives of sustainable and inclusive agriculture-led economic growth, resilience, and improved nutrition?
2. What investments made by science granting agencies outside of USAID should we be aware of that could be leveraged by research programs to enhance the efficiency and quality of our work?
3. What types of investments are needed to help maximize the uptake and impact of agricultural research investments?

1. See U.S. Government Global Food Security Strategy (2016) https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1867/USG-Global-Food-Security-Strategy-2016.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Feed the Future: Global Food Security Research Strategy (2011). https://feedthefuture.gov/resource/feed-future-research-strategy [↑](#footnote-ref-2)