An Analysis of the University of California's Agricultural and Natural Resource Programs

LAO

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Executive Summary

The University of California (UC) Operates Two Main Agricultural and Natural Resource Programs. One program—Agricultural Experiment Stations—supports basic and applied research at the Berkeley, Davis, and Riverside campuses. The other program—Cooperative Extension—conducts applied research and provides outreach to stakeholders across the state. Both programs were established by the federal government more than 100 years ago. Over the years, they have broadened their scope to include research and outreach in areas such as drought and wildfire mitigation.

UC Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) Division Administers Programs. A division of the UC Office of the President (located in Oakland), UC ANR is responsible for administering these programs. In practice, UC ANR focuses the bulk of its efforts on Cooperative Extension—overseeing the activities of Cooperative Extension researchers and practitioners working at UC campuses as well as at county-based extension offices and Research and Extension Centers. Campus deans and UC ANR jointly oversee the experiment stations.

State Is a Major Fund Source for Both Programs, but State Now Budgets for Programs Differently. Though receiving funds from several sources, both Agricultural Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension receive more than half of their ongoing operating support from the state General Fund. Historically, UC determined how much state funding from its main budget appropriation to allocate to these programs. In 2018-19, the state began setting the funding amount for UC ANR (specifically, Cooperative Extension) in the annual budget act. In contrast to Cooperative Extension, UC continues to decide how much of its main General Fund appropriation to provide Agricultural Experiment Stations.

Three Concerns With State Oversight of Programs. First, the state has considerably less information, budgetary control, and oversight of Agricultural Experiment Stations than it does of Cooperative Extension despite the two programs being intended to work in concert to address pressing agricultural and natural resource issues. Second, the Legislature lacks sufficient budgetary information from UC to adjust funding for these programs on an annual basis. Third, the state does not receive regular performance reporting on both programs despite comprising the largest source of ongoing funding.

Three Recommendations for Enhancing Legislative Oversight. First, we recommend the Legislature include state General Fund for Agricultural Experiment Stations in the existing UC ANR budget item, thereby budgeting for both programs directly. Second, we recommend the Legislature require UC to submit a budget report in late fall each year providing key information on anticipated operational cost increases. Third, we recommend requiring UC to report periodically to the Legislature on the activities and outcomes of Agricultural Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension. Together, these actions would improve budget transparency, provide the information needed to make informed budget decisions moving forward, and enhance legislative oversight of the programs.

INTRODUCTION

Report Examines University of California's (UC) Agricultural and Natural Resource Programs. UC's agricultural and natural resource programs date back nearly to the university's founding. Historically, the Legislature has granted UC significant flexibility to design and implement these programs, including determining program goals, setting funding levels, and tracking outcomes. In recent years, the state has taken a more proactive role, especially in setting program funding levels. This report aims both to improve the Legislature's understanding of these programs and assist future state budget decisions. The report has three parts. The first part provides background on UC's agricultural and natural resource programs. The second part provides a high-level assessment, and the third part provides recommendations for improving legislative oversight of these programs.

BACKGROUND

In this section, we begin with an overview of university agricultural and natural resource programs, next discuss the structure of UC's programs, and then provide staffing and budget information for UC's programs.

Overview

Federal Government Supports Two Main University Agricultural Programs. The National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA)—a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture—provides funding to universities in each state to implement two programs, described below.

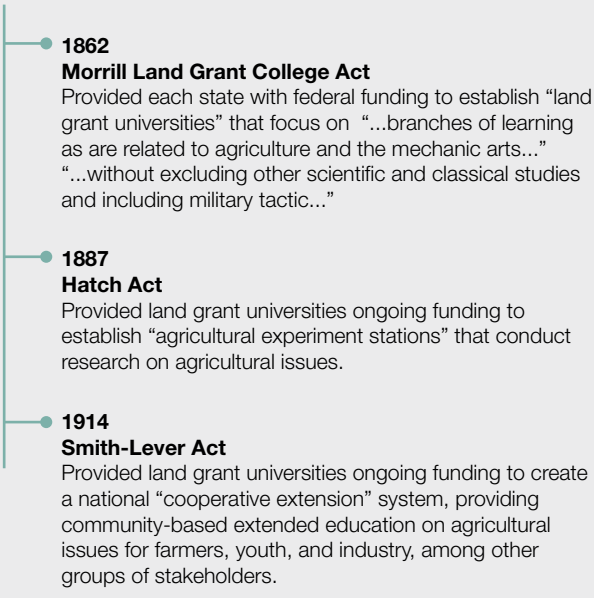
- ***Agricultural Experiment Stations.*** Agricultural Experiment Stations (also referred to as "experiment stations" in this report) are research centers at universities that focus on agriculture and natural resources, among other related topics. These centers primarily support basic research, though some projects focus on applied research. As part of their participation in this program, universities must submit and receive approval from NIFA for their associated research projects.
- ***Cooperative Extension.*** The national Cooperative Extension System supports a network of campus and community-based experts conducting applied research and outreach to farmers, industry, and other stakeholders. The program consists of a partnership between the federal government, public research universities, and local governments.

Land Grant Universities Implement These Programs. As Figure 1 shows, Congress created these programs more than 100 years ago through three key statutes. The first of these statutes—the Morrill Act—granted states land to establish public universities focused on instruction in agriculture and other subjects. Years later, Congress provided ongoing funding to these institutions—now known

Figure 1

UC's Agricultural Programs Trace Roots Back to Three Federal Acts

Summary of Landmark Federal Acts by Year



as "land grant universities"—to implement the Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension programs. According to NIFA, these programs helped secure the nation's food supply and agricultural workforce during the world wars and Great Depression, as well as boosted American agricultural productivity in the postwar years. Today, land grant universities in each state continue to administer federal agricultural research and extension programs. The UC system is California's land grant institution (established using funds from the sale of land granted to the state under the Morrill Act).

Scope of Programs Have Broadened. Over the years, the federal government, states, and land grant universities have expanded the scope and specific activities undertaken by the experiment stations and Cooperative Extension. These changes have been particularly notable for Cooperative Extension, which supports many additional activities compared to when it was first established in the early 20th century. For example, in the 1970s, the federal government established and began funding a new Cooperative Extension nutrition education program. At about the same time, several land grant universities (including UC) created the Cooperative Extension Master Gardener program, and, in California, the state began providing ongoing Cooperative Extension funding for a new pest management program. As a result of these and many other changes, land grant universities today manage large and varied portfolios of research and outreach activities covering many national, state, and local issues.

UC Has Developed Goals for These Programs. Federal statute sets broad policy goals for experiment stations and Cooperative Extension, whereas California state law generally is silent on these programs. Working within these few parameters, NIFA and land grant universities set specific program goals. In its guidance to land grant universities, NIFA identifies several overarching program goals, such as promoting food security, developing rural economies, and promoting American agricultural exports. As a condition of receiving federal funding, universities must align their research and outreach activities with these program goals. As **Figure 2** shows, UC has developed more specific long- and near-term program goals, such as building climate-resilient ecosystems and strengthening research partnerships. According to UC, these goals are periodically reviewed and updated to reflect new developments and emerging issues.

Programs Report a Wide Variety of Outcomes. Each year, UC summarizes program outcomes for the experiment stations and Cooperative Extension, submitting an over 100-page report to the federal government and

Figure 2

UC Has Developed Long- and Near-Term Program Goals

Program Goals as of December 2021

Long-Term Goals

- Promote economic prosperity in California.
- Develop a qualified workforce for California.
- Safeguard abundant and healthy food for all Californians.
- Protect California's natural resources.
- Build climate-resilient communities and ecosystems.
- Promote healthy people and communities.
- Develop an inclusive and equitable society.

Near-Term Goals

- Strengthen research and extension partnerships.
- Increase online tools and outreach.
- Build sustainable economies for working landscapes.
- Scale up innovation and entrepreneurship programs.
- Modernize digital platforms that support programs.
- Improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in UC's programs and work environments.
- Recruit, develop, and retain employees.
- Support volunteerism.
- Generate revenue and optimize resource deployment.
- Increase philanthropic donations.
- Improve efficiency and strengthen infrastructure.
- Strengthen communication and advocacy.

Note: Long-term goals come from UC Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) division's "Public Values Statements." Near-term goals come from UC ANR's *2020-2025 Strategic Plan*. Goals generally apply to both Agricultural Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension.

making an approximately 20-page report available to the general public. In 2019-20, UC reported that the experiment stations and Cooperative Extension together produced 20 new ideas leading to patents, including the invention of new crop varieties. In addition, the programs sponsored a combined 1,150 policy engagement activities, created 2,240 educational materials, provided over 30,000 workshops and meetings, and had 708,400 unique educational interactions with adults and youth. The programs' activities, workshops, and interactions spanned various groups and topics, ranging from workshops for farmers seeking to learn new agricultural techniques to agricultural educational programs for youth.

Structure

UC's Programs Are Overseen by a Central Office. UC's agricultural and natural resource programs have a complex administrative structure. The UC division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC ANR)—a functional unit of the UC Office of the President, located in Oakland—is the core administering body and is overseen by an executive Vice President. Formally, UC ANR oversees both Agricultural Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension. In practice, however, the bulk of the division's oversight and activities is focused on Cooperative Extension.

UC Has Four Experiment Stations. As Figure 3 on the next page shows, these four "stations" are embedded within certain academic departments at the Berkeley, Davis, and Riverside campuses. Specifically, each of these campuses has a college focusing on agriculture and natural resources that supports experiment station research, as does UC Davis's School of Veterinary Medicine. The four deans of these particular colleges oversee their respective experiment stations in partnership with UC ANR. Faculty receiving experiment station funds focus their efforts on federally approved research projects. Faculty within these colleges also conduct other research outside of NIFA-approved projects. This other research is supported by various fund sources, including state General Fund and competitive grants and contracts from other federal and state agencies.

UC Cooperative Extension Operates Out of Numerous Sites. Though some Cooperative Extension program staff also are located on UC campuses, many Cooperative Extension staff work at off-campus sites. UC has Cooperative Extension offices in 57 of the state's 58 counties, with multiple offices in some counties (Figure 3). UC ANR typically leases these offices from county governments. UC ANR also owns and manages nine sites known as "Research and Extension Centers." These centers support specialized applied research and host outreach activities. UC Cooperative Extension experts conduct most of the research at these centers, but they allow other researchers from UC and external institutions also to use the facilities.

Cooperative Extension Also Administers 13 Statewide Programs. As Figure 4 on page 7 shows, these programs span various areas, including gardening, nutrition education, and pest management. These programs vary in geographic footprint, staff, and scope. For example, the UC Master Gardener Program operates in numerous counties, relies heavily on volunteers, and focuses on home horticulture, pest management, and landscaping, among other topics. In contrast, another program—the Nutrition Policy Institute—is a single research institute located on the Berkeley campus that hires only paid research experts who focus almost exclusively on nutrition research and program evaluation for certain nutrition education programs.

Employees

Faculty Conduct Research at the Experiment Stations. At UC, Agricultural Experiment Station researchers are tenured or tenure-track faculty. Unlike most faculty members, who are expected to divide their time between instruction, research, and public service, faculty at the experiment stations are expected to devote their time primarily to their federally approved research projects. Many faculty, however, have joint appointments at the experiment stations and general campuses and thus divide their time between their federally approved projects and their general instruction and other research responsibilities. According to UC, experiment stations employ over 550 researchers conducting over 1,300 research projects annually.

Figure 3

UC's Agricultural and Natural Resource Programs Have Large State Footprint

Specialists and Advisors Are Key Academic Employees at Cooperative Extension. In contrast to faculty at the experiment stations, academic employees at UC Cooperative Extension historically have not held faculty titles. Rather, academic employees at Cooperative Extension generally fall into one of two groups:

- ***Specialists.*** Specialists are located on UC campuses and tend to focus their efforts on statewide or regional issues. Of the 104 full-time equivalent (FTE) specialists employed in 2019-20, a majority (62) were located at UC Davis, followed by UC Berkeley (18) and UC Riverside (17). A handful of specialists are located at three additional campuses (Merced, Santa Barbara, and Santa Cruz), and a small number are located at on- or off-campus sites implementing Cooperative Extension statewide programs. (In recent years, some specialists have had joint appointments as experiment station researchers and/or general campus faculty. These specialists divide their time and responsibilities accordingly.)
- ***Advisors.*** Advisors also are subject matter experts but work off campus in Cooperative Extension county offices or Research and Extension Centers. Advisors are expected to be closely involved in their local communities, tailoring their research and outreach activities to community needs. As **Figure 5** shows, of the 150 FTE advisors employed in 2019-20, Central Valley counties had the most advisors, likely due to the region's disproportionate share of agricultural production in California.

Beyond specialists and advisors, Cooperative Extension employs a handful of academic employees with other job titles, such as research scientists and program coordinators. In 2019-20, 32 FTE employees fell into one of these other categories. Most of these academic experts work in one of Cooperative Extension's statewide institutes or programs.

Nonacademic Staff Help Deliver Cooperative Extension Programs. In addition to academic experts, Cooperative Extension employed 738 nonacademic staff in 2019-20. These staff support various program implementation functions. For example, these staff help implement Master Gardener and 4-H youth development programs at the local level. Nonacademic staff also provide basic administrative services—for example, processing payroll and performing clerical duties. Central leadership and administrative staff at UC ANR also are included in this count.

Figure 4

Cooperative Extension Statewide Programs Cover Many Areas

Programs Operating in 2021

Volunteer-Based Programs
4-H Youth Development
UC Master Gardener Program
UC Master Food Preserver Program
UC California Naturalist

Nutrition Education Programs
Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program
CalFresh Healthy Living

Research Institutes and Programs
Informatics and Geographic Information Systems Program
Agricultural Issues Center
UC Integrated Pest Management
UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program
Nutrition Policy Institute
UC Organic Agriculture Institute
California Institute for Water Resources

Figure 5

Central Valley Counties Have the Most Cooperative Extension Advisors

Full-Time Equivalent Advisors in 2019-20

Central Valley	56
Bay Area	21
Northern California	21
Central Coast	16
Sierra Nevada	9
Los Angeles-Orange	8
San Diego-Imperial	8
Inland Empire	7
Statewide institutes/programs	4
Total	**150**

Budget

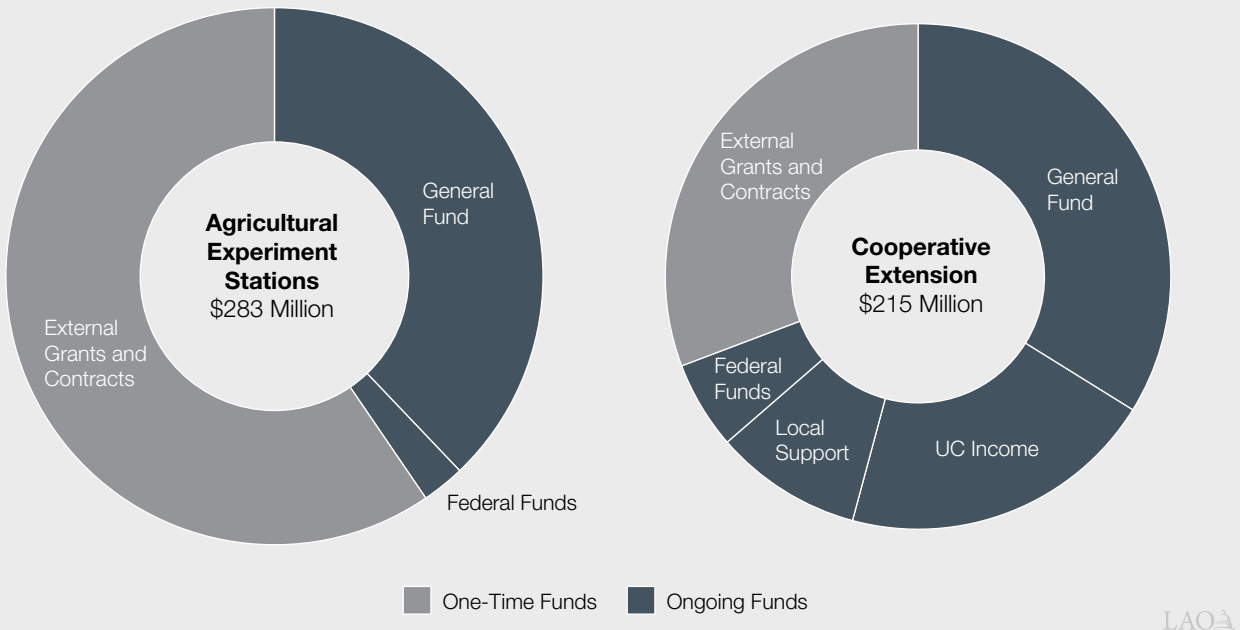
Programs Receive Funding From Several Sources. As Figure 6 shows, the state is by far the largest contributor of ongoing operating funds for both the experiment stations and Cooperative Extension. NIFA also provides ongoing federal support—known as "capacity grants"—to these programs. Federal capacity grant allocations are based primarily on each state's rural and farm population. States are required to match federal capacity grant funding on a dollar-for-dollar basis. As evident from the figure, ongoing state support in California far exceeds the required state match. UC Cooperative Extension also receives ongoing support from UC-generated sources (such as endowment income) and local governments, with a portion of local support reflecting in-kind resources (such as county facilities or equipment). In addition to ongoing funds, researchers and staff in both programs apply for one-time competitive grants to support specific research and outreach projects. These competitive grants come from federal, state, and private sources, but the federal government is the largest source of this funding.

UC ANR Administers Some, Though Not All, Funds. UC ANR primarily oversees federal, state, and university funding for Cooperative Extension. (Local support for Cooperative Extension typically is arranged through local agreements between county extension offices and their constituent county governments.) UC ANR also administers federal capacity grants to the experiment stations. UC ANR, however, does not administer state funding for the experiment stations. Rather, the university allocates these funds directly to the stations, which, in turn, allocate them among their specific research projects. Experiment station faculty also apply directly for competitive grants without direct involvement from UC ANR.

State Recently Began Line-Item Budgeting UC ANR. Historically, the state granted UC significant discretion to determine how much of UC's state funding to provide to the experiment stations and Cooperative Extension. As Figure 7 shows, the state began changing its approach a few years ago, becoming more proactive in setting Cooperative Extension funding levels. As of 2021-22, the state budget contains a line item

Figure 6

General Fund Is Largest Ongoing Fund Source for UC's Agricultural and Natural Resource Programs
2019-20



specifically for UC ANR. This line item provides greater transparency over ANR budgeting and gives the Legislature easier control over making annual Cooperative Extension funding adjustments. The line item solely contains state funding for Cooperative Extension, with state funding for the experiment stations still embedded within UC's main budget appropriation (meaning UC still effectively decides how much to provide for the stations each year).

Historically, Ongoing Funding for Cooperative Extension Has Been Somewhat Flat. Though UC has not officially compiled comprehensive historical budget information (from all fund sources) for the experiment stations and Cooperative Extension, UC ANR staff indicated to our office that its state and federal capacity grant funding in 2019-20 is at about the same level as it was in 2000-01, even before accounting for the effects of inflation. According to UC ANR staff, flat funding combined with rising staff costs has contributed to two notable program effects. First, the number of Cooperative Extension specialists and advisors has declined, dropping from more than 400 in 2000-01 to under 300 in 2019-20. Second, UC ANR indicates specialists and advisors have increasingly relied on external grants and contracts to support their research and outreach projects. (Comparable information is not available for the experiment stations, but state funding for this program likely increased over the same time period. This is because UC provides campuses annual adjustments for this program based on changes in overall UC support, and overall state support has grown notably.)

Cooperative Extension, Unlike Experiment Stations, Experienced Notable State Funding Reduction During Onset of Pandemic. In response to an anticipated budget crisis stemming from the onset of the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, the state enacted a 13 percent reduction to UC ANR and thus to Cooperative Extension in 2020-21. (The state similarly enacted a 13 percent reduction to UC's central administrative services. Campuses received a smaller percent reduction at 7.7 percent.) Despite facing notable reductions, data from the UC Office the President show that the university maintained funding for the experiment stations, with station funding growing by 1 percent in 2020-21.

Cooperative Extension Received Significant Augmentation in 2021-22. The state budget recovered quickly from the initial effects of the pandemic, with the state effectively able to restore previous funding levels moving forward as well as provide significant augmentations in 2021-22. For UC ANR specifically, the state provided $108 million ongoing General Fund in 2021-22, a 70 percent increase over the 2020-21 level. (By comparison, ongoing funding for the university as a whole increased 16 percent.) The budget appropriation was sufficient not only to restore the previous year's reductions but also support around 110 additional specialists and advisors. Moreover, the state provided $3 million one-time funding to UC ANR for limited-term fire advisor positions and one-time

Figure 7

State Has Adjusted UC ANR Funding Approach Over the Years

Through **2016-17**
The state annually adjusted UC's budget, and UC determined level of state funding to provide UC ANR.

2017-18
In the annual budget act, the state specified a certain amount of funding for the UC Office of the President (UCOP), with ANR funding embedded within this amount.

2018-19
In annual budget act, the state retained the UCOP line item and added budget bill language specifying $73 million General Fund for UC ANR.

2019-20
General Fund support for UC ANR remained at $73 million.

2020-21
In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the state reduced General Fund support for UC ANR—providing $63 million, reflecting a $9.2 million (13 percent) reduction.

2021-22
The state eliminated the UCOP line item but created a line item solely for UC ANR. The state provided UC ANR with $108 million ongoing General Fund, reflecting a $45 million (70 percent) increase over the 2020-21 level. This amount fully restored reductions from the previous year and provided an augmentation for operating cost increases and more specialists and advisors.

ANR = Agriculture and Natural Resources and COVID-19 = coronavirus disease 2019.

activities at the Nutrition Policy Institute. UC also is increasing funding for the experiment stations, though the UC Office of the President has not yet publicly indicated exactly how much of an increase it will provide.

Funding Allocations Linked to Program Size. As the top part of Figure 8 shows, UC Davis receives more than half of experiment station funds, reflecting that this campus has two stations. As the bottom part of the figure shows, county offices receive the most funding in Cooperative Extension, reflecting that these offices contain the largest share of academic and nonacademic employees.

Figure 8

UC Davis and County Offices Receive the Most Programmatic Funding

Funding Allocations (In Millions), 2019-20

Agricultural Experiment Stations	
Davis	$157
Riverside	71
Berkeley	55
Total	**$283**
Cooperative Extension	
County offices	$92
Campus-based research and outreach	55
Administration/other	25
Statewide programs and institutes	27
Research and Extension Centers	16
Total	**$215**

ASSESSMENT

State Has Role in Supporting Agricultural and Natural Resource Programs. The state perennially faces agricultural and natural resource challenges that require concerted, sustained effort to address. Often these types of issues involve inherent collective action problems, where individual companies or groups lack incentive to fully address the issues on their own. For example, developing alternative pest-management practices that reduce pesticide use is costly, yet, once developed and implemented, the new practices can accrue statewide benefits to many companies and groups. Also, in some cases, the state is in a better position than companies and local governments to lead and coordinate responses to agricultural and natural resource-related challenges. Moreover, the state can use agricultural and natural resource programs to promote equity—ensuring small farmers, rural communities, and other stakeholders with limited resources have access to accurate and credible information as well as technical assistance and support.

Experiment Station Budget Lacks Transparency. Though we believe the state has a role in supporting these programs, we identified some shortcomings with the ways the programs are currently budgeted and overseen. One shortcoming we encountered was in obtaining basic budget information for the Agricultural Experiment Stations. Budget information for Cooperative Extension was much more readily available. For example, while existing university budget displays show how funds are allocated within Cooperative Extension, the university took several weeks to provide information on how much General Fund is allocated to each experiment station, and UC could not provide a breakdown of spending within each station. The lack of comparably detailed information on experiment station funding likely is a function of UC ANR's more limited role in overseeing and administering funds for that program. Compounding this lack of transparency, the Legislature does not line-item budget the experiment station budget like it does for Cooperative Extension, even though both programs are intended to address key state agricultural and natural resource issues in a coordinated effort.

State Lacks Sufficient Information for Annually Adjusting Program Funding Levels. Another shortcoming with budgeting for the programs is the limited fiscal information currently available to the Legislature. Though UC annually provides some information on past Cooperative Extension spending, it does not provide comparable, past spending information for the experiment stations. Moreover, it does not

provide information on cost pressures and staffing needs for the upcoming budget year for either the experiment stations or Cooperative Extension.

State Lacks Oversight and Accountability Over Programs. Despite having a compelling interest in the programs and being their primary source of ongoing funding, the state lacks two other key avenues for overseeing these programs and holding UC accountable. First, the programs lack clear state goals. Having clearly defined statutory goals enables the Legislature to ensure spending decisions and program activities are aligned with state needs. Second, the Legislature lacks regular reporting on program activities and outcomes. Though UC ANR publicly releases an annual report that highlights notable accomplishments, the report does not provide the Legislature a consistent set of metrics to regularly track. Without this type of performance reporting, the state will continue to have difficulty knowing if program activities are well aligned with its program goals and meeting those goals effectively. Though we heard many anecdotes from stakeholders of experiment station and Cooperative Extension activities with clear statewide and local benefits, the state has not set forth any specific outcomes measures by which it intends to assess the effectiveness of these programs on a regular basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommend More Legislative Oversight. Given the state's significant role in funding these programs and the recent decision to budget for Cooperative Extension directly, we believe more legislative involvement in these programs is warranted. Below, we offer three recommendations to improve budgeting for these programs and enhance legislative oversight.

Identify Funding for Experiment Stations in UC ANR Budget Item. Given the intended nexus between the Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension programs in researching and educating the public, we believe directly budgeting for the experiment stations (in addition to Cooperative Extension) is warranted. Under this approach, the state would have a line item in the annual budget for UC's agricultural and natural resource programs, with separate schedules for the experiment stations and Cooperative Extension. Such an approach would provide more transparency by identifying the amount of state funding being provided to each of the programs, allow for more targeted funding depending on legislative priorities, increase legislative control over annual funding adjustments, and make tracking budget adjustments easier over time.

Require Annual Budget Documentation. To assist the Legislature in budgeting for the experiment stations and Cooperative Extension, we recommend requiring UC to submit a budget report in late fall each year (shortly before the start of the budget process). At a minimum, we recommend the report contain: (1) funding by source for the prior, current, and budget year; (2) spending by function and program for the prior, current, and budget year; and (3) a breakdown of anticipated cost adjustments in the budget year due to salaries, benefits, and other key cost drivers. To the extent the university or the administration wishes to pursue programmatic adjustments (such as expanding the number of specialists or advisors, augmenting a statewide program, or creating a new program), we recommend directing them to provide a description and justification for the proposed change. UC and the administration could follow the standard "budget change proposal" format used by most state agencies when requesting augmentations. This standard documentation contains information on the baseline budget, proposed change and its cost, justification for the change, and alternatives considered.

Also Require Periodic Reporting on Activities and Outcomes. In addition to receiving information to assist with annual budget decisions, we recommend the Legislature direct UC ANR to report on the past activities and performance of the Agricultural Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension programs. We recommend this report, at a minimum, include: (1) a summary of the major

research and outreach efforts undertaken and (2) data on program outcomes. Given the diversity of activities undertaken by the experiment stations and Cooperative Extension, the Legislature likely will want to consider which outcome measures are of greatest interest. For example, the university could report on new research discoveries as well as provide data on the number and type of participants engaged in outreach activities. Having this outcomes-oriented report would provide the Legislature a better basis upon which to assess program effectiveness and alignment with state priorities. This performance report could be submitted in the fall in tandem with the ANR budget report or in late winter, if such timing would allow more performance data to be included in the report. Depending upon legislative interest and its usefulness in aiding budget decisions, the report could be submitted every one, two, or three years.

Weigh Trade-Offs of Setting Program Goals in Statute. Whereas we think the benefits of the above three recommendations are clear, we also note that the Legislature has the further option of providing explicit statutory program goals for the experiment stations and Cooperative Extension. Typically, the Legislature provides this type of statutory guidance for programs that it categorically funds. Providing more guidance allows the state to set its priorities and monitor spending to ensure it is aligned with those priorities. Having statutory goals is arguably especially salient for UC's agricultural and natural resource programs, given their vast scope and many competing priorities. Establishing statutory goals, however, could limit the existing flexibility afforded to UC to set its own program goals. Allowing UC to set program goals enables UC experts to be nimble and draw from their expertise to address statewide issues. Such flexibility could be valuable were California's agricultural and natural resource issues to morph quickly with the effects of climate change and other environmental pressures. Upon weighing these trade-offs, were the Legislature to decide to provide more statutory guidance, we recommend crafting a set of clear, overarching state goals for the experiment stations and Cooperative Extension programs while still allowing for responsiveness and some flexibility at the local level.

LAO PUBLICATIONS

This report was prepared by Jason Constantouros, with research assistance from Christopher Bernedo, and reviewed by Jennifer Pacella and Anthony Simbol. The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) is a nonpartisan office that provides fiscal and policy information and advice to the Legislature.

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