

What Would Lincoln Do?

Over a 45-day period during the darkest days in the summer of 1862, President Abraham Lincoln and members of the 37th Congress saw beyond the grim immediacy of the Civil War and came together to enact four pieces of legislation that would forever shape the future of the nation:

- The act establishing the U.S. Department of Agriculture. (May 15, 1862)
- The Homestead Act, granting 160 acres of public land to anyone who would improve and occupy it. (May 20, 1862)
- The Pacific Railway Act, facilitating construction of the transcontinental railroad. (July 1, 1862)
- And, the first Morrill Act, which established the land-grant university system by authorizing federal land-grants to endow, support, and maintain within each state a college of agriculture and mechanical arts. (July 2, 1862)

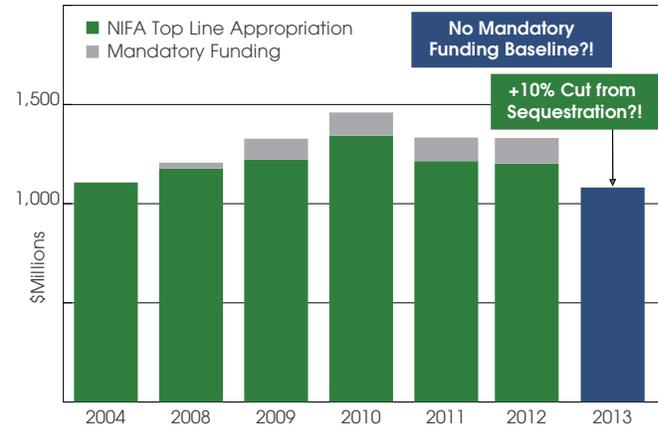
It is irrefutable that these four laws contributed directly to America's rise to global preeminence, and indeed it can be argued that the Morrill Act—which nurtured and sustained the fledgling idea of the public university—made the greatest contribution of all.

And yet, on the eve of the Morrill Act's sesquicentennial, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)—the agency that provides base agricultural research, extension, and educational funding for land-grant universities and related institutions—faces budget cuts of up to 20 percent. (See Fig 1.)

A·P·L·U, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, strongly urges members of the House and Senate to attack two critical problems that will converge in FY 2013:

- Failure of the congressional “super committee” to reach agreement last fall on how to reduce spending over the next ten years means that up to \$1.2 trillion in automatic spending cuts (a process referred to as “sequestration”) will occur on Jan. 1, 2013, unless Congress and the President agree otherwise. **Under sequestration, the NIFA topline could be cut by 8–10 percent or more!**
- The 2008 Farm Bill provided mandatory funding for four NIFA programs from FY 2008 to FY 2012: (1) Organic Agriculture Research and Extension; (2) Specialty Crops Research Initiative; (3) Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development; and (4) Biomass R&D. These four programs had \$129 million in mandatory funding in FY 2012, **but there is no budgetary “baseline” in FY 2013 or beyond.**

Fig. 1. NIFA Worst Case FY 2013 Scenario?



To address these two problems:

- The Appropriations Committees should maintain the NIFA topline appropriation of \$1.202 billion and, if at all possible, protect NIFA programs from sequestration.
- When the 2012 Farm Bill is developed, the Agriculture Committees should provide mandatory funding for the four NIFA programs outlined above.

We make these requests not from some sense of entitlement, but from the certain knowledge that further large cuts in NIFA funding—on the heels of the \$141 million cut in the last two years—would reduce the global competitiveness of U.S. food producers, slow the growth in farm productivity, damage ongoing research and outreach efforts to combat the twin epidemics of obesity and diabetes, and harm Americans in many other ways.

We all agree that addressing the federal budget deficit is necessary to ensure the country's long-term financial stability. But, as every farmer knows, as hungry as we may be right now for budgetary “fixes,” we simply cannot afford to eat our “seed corn.” Yet that is exactly what would happen if funding for America's land-grant universities, provided by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, were to be cut by 20 percent or more.

In this year, when we commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Morrill Act, members of the House and Senate should pause for a moment and ponder this question: What would Lincoln do?

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