June 9, 2026

Under Secretary of Research, Education, and Economics
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Under Secretary Hutchins,

On behalf of the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) and the state associations highlighted below, thank you for your continued leadership in prioritizing research investments at USDA. We were encouraged to see many of our priorities reflected in Secretary Rollins' 2026 Research and Development priorities, particularly the focus on increasing farm profitability for farmers and ranchers and expanding markets that create new uses of U.S. agricultural feedstocks.

We write to emphasize the importance of USDA research investments that support the full value of the corn grain, as a driver of new market opportunities and farm income. NCGA is concerned about the rural economy and is focused on ways that we can drive additional sources of demand. While research into crop residues such as corn stover has received increased attention, it is equally critical that USDA invest in advancing the utilization of corn grain itself, including its core components: protein, oil, starch, and fiber. Critical solutions are needed now, and investing in research for corn grain that diversifies and expands markets generates more demand for our farmers.

Corn farmers are navigating a challenging economic environment marked by high input costs, low commodity prices, and ongoing trade uncertainty. At the same time, they are being asked to meet growing expectations around sustainability, nutrition, and transparency, all while maintaining affordability. Investing in research that expands demand through innovative uses of corn grain is one of the most effective ways to strengthen the rural economy and improve farm profitability.

As the Secretary stated, expanding the utilization of agricultural feedstocks in biobased products and bioenergy (including biofuels) will result in increased demand for farmers. Corn grain is already a highly efficient, abundant, and sustainable feedstock with well-established infrastructure for harvesting, storage, and transport. Its versatility makes it uniquely positioned to meet emerging demand across sectors, including biofuels, industrial products, and biobased chemicals. However, growers are concerned that research investments have not fully kept pace with this opportunity.

Conversations with university researchers and scientists have shown us that they have avoided research focused on increasing the utilization of corn grain in order to achieve project funding and success. Some scientists have reported that if they include the words "corn grain" in their proposal, they will not receive funding.

In contrast, researchers have reported success in securing federal grants to develop a use for corn stover. Their project proposals position stover as a feedstock that can be converted into value-added chemicals or materials while claiming that it is a free waste product that holds little worth to farmers. From the corn grower's perspective, stover is not considered a free waste product and holds a lot of value on the farm. Stover plays a vital role in soil health, erosion control, nutrient cycling, and, in many cases, is used as

livestock feed and bedding. When surveyed, the majority of our farmers had zero interest in selling their stover due to the complications that baling it brings. Harvesting stover presents logistical and economic challenges, including additional labor, equipment needs, and the cost of replacing lost nutrients. These realities should be considered when evaluating research priorities and funding decisions.

The corn kernel is competitively positioned as the commercial feedstock of choice for developing new uses thanks to corn's sustainability, abundance, and affordability. Corn growers are ready to meet the growing demand across a range of consumer needs, whether it is fuel, industrial products, biobased chemicals, or other products derived from the grain. In order to take advantage of this opportunity and be a global leader in the bioeconomy, we need to invest in targeted research that prioritizes scalable, economically viable uses of corn grain. For example, the opportunity to capture a percentage of the global plastics market with bio-based monoethylene glycol (MEG) derived from corn sugar, could lead to increased revenue and demand but more research and investment is needed to make this a viable option. MEG is used to make a range of plastics including soda bottles and accounts for approximately 8% of global plastic production, leaving the opportunity to replace part of the market share with biobased products[1]. Based on projections of the global MEG market value from the *Monoethylene Glycol MEG Market | Global Market Analysis Report – 2035*, replacing just 10% of the projected global MEG market with U.S. feedstocks could produce approximately $5 billion in revenue[2].

We believe USDA is uniquely poised to help shift the narrative by supporting research that unlocks the full potential of corn grain, beyond just stover. Doing so will help diversify demand, create and expand domestic markets, and better align with USDA's stated goals of enhancing profitability, expanding agricultural markets, and promoting long-term soil health.

We appreciate your consideration and look forward to continued collaboration to ensure USDA research investments deliver meaningful value to farmers and rural communities.

Sincerely,

National Corn Growers Association
Georgia Corn Growers Association
Illinois Corn Growers Association
Indiana Corn Growers Association
Iowa Corn Growers Association
Kansas Corn Growers Association
Kentucky Corn Growers Association
Michigan Corn Growers Association
Minnesota Corn Growers Association
Missouri Corn Growers Association
Nebraska Corn Growers Association
North Dakota Corn Growers Association
Ohio Corn & Wheat Growers Association
South Carolina Corn and Soybean Association
Virginia Grain Producers Association
Wisconsin Corn Growers Association

[1]H. Ritchie 2023, updated 2026 https://ourworldindata.org/plastic-pollution
[2]Future Market Insights. (n.d.). *Monoethylene glycol (MEG) market size and share forecast outlook 2025 to 2035*. Future Market Insights. Retrieved May 26, 2026, from https://www.futuremarketinsights.com/reports/monoethylene-glycol-meg-market