

## **Global Harvest Initiative sees value in keeping USDA ERS, NIFA in the National Capital Region**

By Margaret M. Zeigler, Ph.D., Executive Director

The Global Harvest Initiative (GHI) has worked closely for years with the high-caliber staff of USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). These two world-class research and funding institutions provide us with critical, timely and objective data on agricultural productivity and sustainability and ensure that a range of research products and advances in food, agriculture, nutrition and the environment are freely available to policymakers and the private sector as well as to consumers in the United States and around the world.

USDA ERS and NIFA provide objective, impartial agricultural research and analysis that translate into better policies for U.S. farmers, ranchers, food industries and consumers by ensuring that resources spent through the Farm Bill and other legislation are used efficiently and wisely.

The world-class experts at these institutions provide Congress and the Administration with critical insights on policies and investments to improve the productivity and profitability of U.S. farmers, protect our natural resources and ensure the safety and affordability of our food supply. By tracking global agricultural trends, these institutions find new market opportunities for U.S. producers and food companies, identify potential weather or economic crises that threaten global and U.S. food systems and ensure that U.S. foreign assistance investments in food security and agriculture are well spent.

The research performed by ERS and NIFA is a *public good*, with data made available freely to all who need it. This is not function that is performed by the private sector or other academic institutions.

Improving the efficiency, structure and collaboration of these institutions is an important goal, but moving these institutions away from the National Capital Region (NCR) could reduce their effectiveness and impact. We hope that any changes by USDA will consider the need for timely and valuable access that a range of policy institutions, such as the one I work for, as well as policymakers in Congress, find with USDA ERS and NIFA staff. From participation in educational seminars on Capitol Hill, policy events within the NCR, collaboration on data and research products and the valuable interaction between national and global policy organizations, USDA ERS and NIFA provide timely, objective, reliable and high-quality data and reports on topics vital to the national and global interest in food and agriculture.

The highly talented staff of USDA ERS and NIFA are attracted to the NCR for many reasons. These include access to considerable data resources and a range of related government institutions such as the National Science Foundation, the USDA Agricultural Research Service, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, and other branches of USDA.

By being based in the NCR, scientists at ERS and NIFA can harness the research synergies of all these institutions, reducing overlap and eliminating gaps in the important sector of food and agriculture research. In the NCR they can also make a direct policy impact for Congress, consumer organizations, the private-sector, other branches of the federal government, and for the wider farm and food community.