The Board on Agriculture and Natural Resources (BANR) is the major program unit of the National Academy of Sciences/National Research Council responsible for overseeing activities on issues of agricultural production and matters related to natural resources, including forestry, fisheries, wildlife, and land and water use. Its work is guided by a board of 23 advisors who meet biannually to anticipate emerging issues and concerns at the interface of science and policy.

BANR responds to requests for studies and workshops from Congress, federal and state agencies, foundations, professional associations, and occasionally, private industry. Following discussion with the requesting sponsor(s), BANR staff develops a project proposal and budget. The sponsor(s) provides support for the BANR activity by a contract or grant with the National Research Council (a 501c3 organization). Multiple sponsors may be involved in funding activities of common interest. Occasionally, BANR develops its own proposals for studies or workshops, requesting support from appropriate sponsors.

BANR studies do not generally conduct primary research but instead rely on a committee of knowledgeable expert volunteers to synthesize relevant data and information. The ad hoc study committees appointed by the President of the National Academy of Sciences typically include individuals from the natural and social sciences, engineering, and public health, and often include the world’s most respected leaders in science and technology. Practitioners (farmers and others) are also involved in BANR studies, which are conducted according to a rigorous and time-tested process that ultimately results in an expert, consensus report, public outreach, and follow-on activities.

BANR studies focus on issues that arise from a variety of problems and causes, such as the need to improve the sustainability of agriculture in the face of natural resource constraints. The reports address issues that range from highly technical matters to concerns that sit at the interface of science and policy.

Another of BANR’s strengths is its convening ability, which is implemented through workshops and special symposia that are constructed to provide a neutral forum for elevated debate of difficult issues. Based on its linkages and ability to mobilize experts and reach a range of audiences, the Board serves as a respected entity that can engage a spectrum of views and opinions.

Depending on the topic, the time-frame for a study is 6 months to 2 years, while workshop planning can take place in 8 months or less. The Board releases several consensus reports each year. Recent reports include: Using Science to Improve the Wild Horse and Burro Program; Sustainable Development of Algal Biofuels in the United States; Meeting Critical Laboratory Needs in Animal Agriculture; Evaluation of the Updated Site-Specific Risk Assessment for the National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility in Manhattan, Kansas; Workforce Needs in Veterinary Medicine; Nutrient Requirements of Swine (10th Edition); Evaluation of a Site-Specific Risk Assessment for the Department of Homeland Security’s Planned National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility in Manhattan, Kansas; Potential Economic and Environmental Effects of U.S. Biofuel Policy; Toward Sustainable Agricultural Systems in the 21st Century; and The Impact of Genetically Engineered Crops on Farm Sustainability in the United States.

Free PDFs of most BANR reports are available from the National Academies Press (www.nap.edu).
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