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USDA Invests in Projects to Strengthen New World Screwworm Preparedness and Response

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Washington, D.C., June 16, 2026 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is announcing funding for 40 breakthrough projects to bolster the nation's defenses against New World screwworm (NWS). These innovative proposals, which will receive a combined total of about $105 million, promise to sharpen detection, accelerate control and eradication tools, and strengthen rapid-response capabilities.

USDA launched the NWS Grand Challenge on January 21, 2026, marking the next milestone for Secretary Rollins' five-pronged plan to support producers' success, protect the nation's food supply, and build long-term resilience against NWS. The Grand Challenge called on innovators from federal and non-federal entities to help in the efforts to prevent the spread of NWS by developing high-impact projects to enhance detection, control, and eradication readiness.

"We launched the Grand Challenge expecting bold, innovative, and science-backed ideas to fight New World screwworm, and the proposals delivered just that," said U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins. "These projects represent the creativity, scientific rigor, and determination we need to reinforce our existing efforts, empower our producers, and safeguard American agriculture and our food supply. We have beaten this pest before, and by leveraging innovative solutions and

advancements in technology we will beat it again in record time.”

USDA reviewed 226 applications, requesting about $664 million in total funding. Projects were selected based on their innovative approaches, scientific gold standards, and their potential to make a significant impact on the prevention and response to NWS.

In addition to the 40 projects announced today, work has already started on two additional USDA-funded projects that are a part of the Grand Challenge. Texas A&M AgriLife Research is assessing the feasibility, efficacy, and operational readiness of electron beam (eBeam) technology as a non-radioactive alternative to cobalt-60 gamma irradiation for sterilizing NWS pupae in sterile insect technique programs, and the University of Florida is evaluating two U.S.-made X-ray irradiators for sterilizing NWS pupae using secondary screwworm as a surrogate.

The Grand Challenge focuses on four core priorities:

- Enhance sterile NWS fly production to improve program efficiency and capacity.
- Develop novel NWS traps and lures to modernize detection and early warning systems.
- Advance NWS therapeutics and treatments to reduce animal health impacts and strengthen response capability.
- Develop tools that bolster preparedness and response, including repellents, ecological modeling, wildlife surveillance, or other innovative approaches.

Using a rigorous, competitive review process, a team of USDA, state, and industry experts evaluated the merits of the proposals and how well they supported the core priorities. USDA will work closely with these awardees to develop work and financial plans that ensure these projects meet these important priorities and protect critical taxpayer resources.

NWS is a serious pest that affects livestock, pets, wildlife, and, less commonly, people and birds. USDA’s ongoing efforts to fight NWS include sterile fly production, surveillance, and cross-border collaboration. The Grand Challenge complements these efforts by fast-tracking next-generation technologies and research that strengthen U.S. preparedness and response capabilities.

For more information about NWS visit screwworm.gov.

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