

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Lucas at R&T Subcommittee Hearing on Bioeconomy

Mar 12, 2019

Opening Statement

Thank you, Chairwoman Stevens and Ranking Member Baird for holding this hearing today and thank you to our witnesses.

In both the House Agriculture Committee and the Science Committee, we've held hearings on biotechnology research and regulations for years. But I can't remember a more exciting or challenging time for the field than today.

New gene editing techniques like CRISPR (pronounced crisper) and the advancement of rapid genetic sequencing are driving innovations in agriculture, medicine, energy, and manufacturing.

Since we first began cultivating crops and breeding livestock, humans have been trying to improve plant and animal genetics. But now we are developing the tools to do it with a precision, speed, and scale our ancestors could not have imagined.

In the Capitol there is a statue honoring Dr. Norman Borlaug, the "Father of the Green Revolution." Dr. Borlaug developed new crop strains that saved billions from famine and helped develop the abundant and affordable food supply we enjoy today.

His work set the stage for modern biotechnology, which took off in 1973 when American scientists developed a technique that allowed the production of genetically engineered human insulin. It was the first biotech product approved for sale in the United States in 1982 and has improved the lives of millions of diabetics.

In addition to these improvements in agriculture and medicine, engineering biology could also transform the energy sector.

Scientists are engineering biology to try to address energy challenges such as enhanced oil recovery, environmental remediation, carbon sequestration, and new materials. Several of our panelists are working in this area, and I look forward to hearing more about their work.

The U.S. was a key driver of biology innovation in the 20th Century, but there is increasing global competition. Other countries recognize the benefits of biotechnology and are striving to capture its potential through new investments and friendly regulations.

We must keep pace and set a research and regulatory framework that supports innovation and creates a marketplace for new ideas and products, while setting the safety and ethical standards for the world to follow.

I look forward to working with Chairwoman Johnson to advance legislation that will promote a national research strategy around engineering biology, to ensure the U.S. remains the global leader in biotechnology.

I hope this hearing will help inform our work on legislation and our work on into the future.

Thank you, I yield back.