UT AGRESEARCH
INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE
THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

2025–2030



ENHANCING EXCELLENCE

UT AgResearch Strategic Action Plan

Real. Life. Solutions.™



POWERING RESEARCH, INNOVATION, PEOPLE, AND PARTNERSHIPS

AgResearch Strategic Action Plan, 2025-2030

The five-year strategic plan for the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture outlines a plan to ensure the institute serves our state, nation, and world at the highest level possible. To continue "Growing Greatness," the UTIA strategic plan incorporates five major priorities:

- Developing Skilled, Lifelong Learners and Citizens, and a Resilient Workforce
- Securing a Safe, Nutritious, and Affordable Food System Locally, Nationally, and Globally
- Improving the Health, Safety, and Well-Being of Humans and Animals
- Ensuring the Profitability of Agricultural Producers and the Sustainability of Communities
- Enhancing and Protecting Natural Resources and a Sustainable Environment

This strategic action plan strengthens UT's alignment with Association of American Universities (AAU) priorities by expanding high-impact research, increasing interdisciplinary collaboration, and enhancing the institute's capacity for large-scale, externally funded projects. By investing in people, partnerships, and emerging areas of discovery, the plan contributes to the excellence in research, innovation, and graduate education that characterizes AAU institutions. UT AgResearch is committed to supporting these priorities.

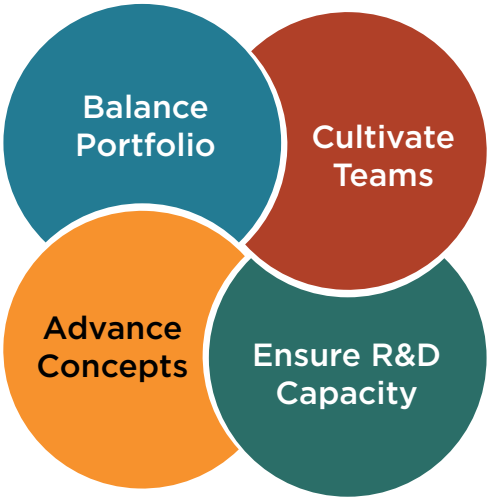
Throughout 2025, a dedicated and engaged committee of faculty and staff representing academic departments, research centers, and educational units worked collaboratively to build upon the institute's 2021–2024 strategic action plan. The result is this five-year strategic action plan for 2025–2030, which will guide our efforts to advance the institute's overarching goals of strengthening workforce development, enhancing nutrition and human health, promoting animal health and well-being, and safeguarding natural resources.The committee outlined four specific objectives that will drive UT AgResearch efforts:

BALANCE PORTFOLIO: Increase impacts with tightly integrated, multidisciplinary research and development programs that contribute solutions to the complex challenges confronting society.

CULTIVATE TEAMS: Enhance the culture of team research that fosters collaboration and creative problem solving.

ENSURE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY: Strengthen our capability to address research problems with targeted investment in instrumentation, equipment, and scientists' skills.

ADVANCE CONCEPTS: Introduce internal processes that encourage advancement of broad innovative research, and development themes with targeted support.



UT AgResearch Strategic Action Framework. *The four integrated objectives–Balance Portfolio, Cultivate Teams, Advance Concepts, and Ensure R&D Capacity–that collectively drive growth, impact, and long-term sustainability in the 2025–2030 AgResearch Strategic Action Plan.*

This plan charts a bold path that empowers discovery, advances innovation, and prepares people and communities to thrive well into the future.

PATH TO SUCCESS

Before we chart our path to success, we must establish our starting point. Updated metrics from the previous plan highlight both areas of strength and opportunities for growth. Over the most recent three-year cycle (2022-2024), UT AgResearch averaged 455 peer-reviewed publications, 1,111 professional presentations, 13 patent applications, and $82 million in Higher Education Research and Development (HERD) Survey research expenditures. The Survey is an annual survey of expenditures collected by the National Science Foundation's National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics. In 2024 alone, UT AgResearch generated over $97 million in HERD Survey research expenditures. The long-term trend reflects both positive progress and areas for improvement. The correlation with AgResearch FTE demonstrates why investing in faculty is imperative for success.

To meet the 2030 UTIA ten-year goals, our target is to increase peer-reviewed publications from 409 in 2020 to 620 in 2030, while also increasing HERD Survey research expenditures to $130 million. Achieving these goals requires strategic investment in faculty, the core resource that drives research and innovation. To improve our impact, we must also increase MS and especially PhD degrees from the Herbert College of Agriculture.

FIVE-YEAR GOALS

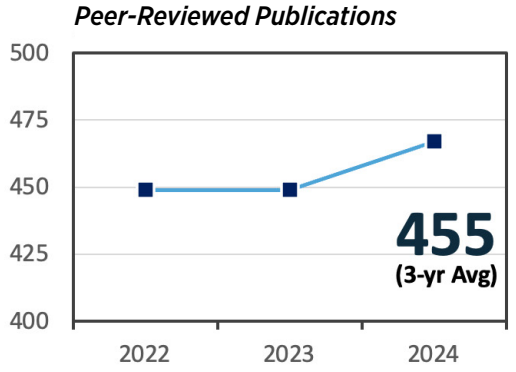
- *Increase peer-reviewed publications to **620 by 2030***
- *Increase HERD Survey research expenditures to **$130M by 2030***
- *Submit at least **four** initiative-driven proposals (approx. $4-10M each)*
- *Increase research publication citations to at least **26,000***
- *Establish **two** new stakeholder convergent research initiatives*
- *Award **five** endowed chairs/professors and one Governor's Chair*
- *Invest **$1M+** in annual research capacity*

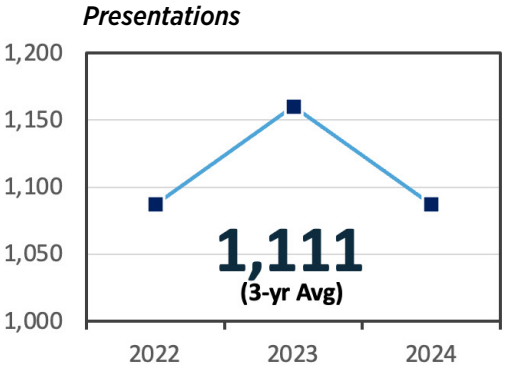
At the same time, emphasis will be placed on diversifying funding portfolios, expanding large-scale proposals, and preparing the next generation of graduate and postdoctoral researchers, ensuring that UT AgResearch continues to deliver high-impact science that matters for Tennessee and beyond.

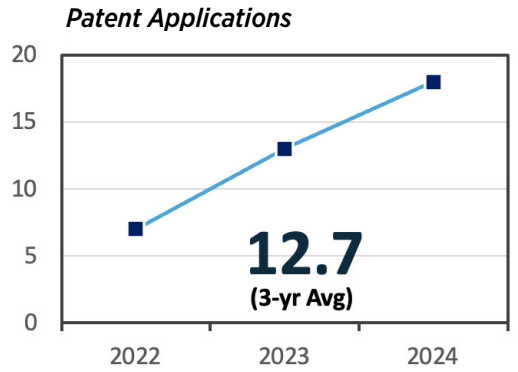
Several objectives have been established to help achieve UTIA's performance goals. UT AgResearch remains committed to providing the capacity and infrastructure needed to support research and discovery at the highest level. We will pursue emerging opportunities and advance promising new concepts through flagship programs such as Strategic Partnership Grants and AgForward Innovation Hubs.

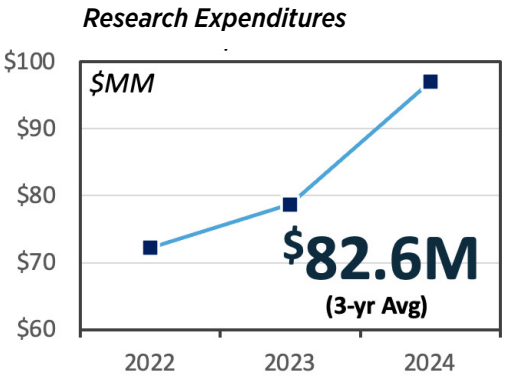
These efforts will empower faculty to build collaborations with partners across UT Knoxville, Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL), Tennessee State University (TSU), USDA-ARS, industry, and beyond while preparing teams to compete successfully for large, multi-disciplinary proposals and novel funding sources. By embedding stakeholder engagement into research design, these programs will strengthen the connection between discovery and application at the state, national, and international levels.

UT AgResearch will continue to support faculty as they pursue a balanced portfolio of funding, including federal, state, industry, and foundation sources, while fostering interdisciplinary teams that share ideas, tools, and technologies. Together, these initiatives will advance UT AgResearch's mission, elevate its competitiveness, and ensure that its science continues to provide meaningful solutions for agriculture, natural resources, and society.







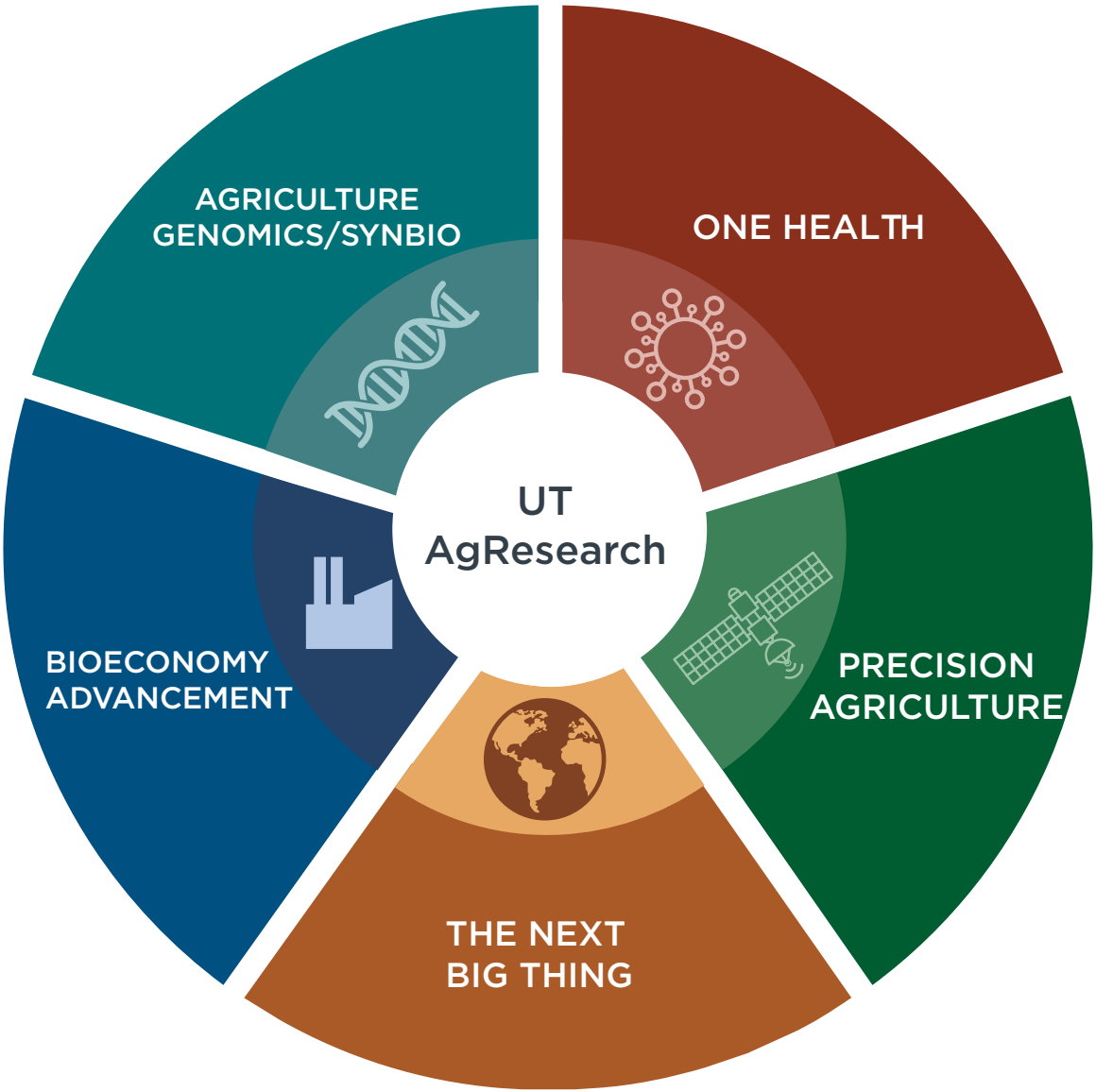




ESTABLISH ROUTES AND NEW DESTINATIONS

The key to advancing our research goals is to continue to focus efforts on topics and initiatives we have already defined among our research strengths: One Health, Precision Agriculture, Agriculture Genomics and Synthetic Biology, and BioEconomy Advancement. UT AgResearch scientists should strive to submit at least four initiative-driven proposals (at an award amount of $4 million+ each).

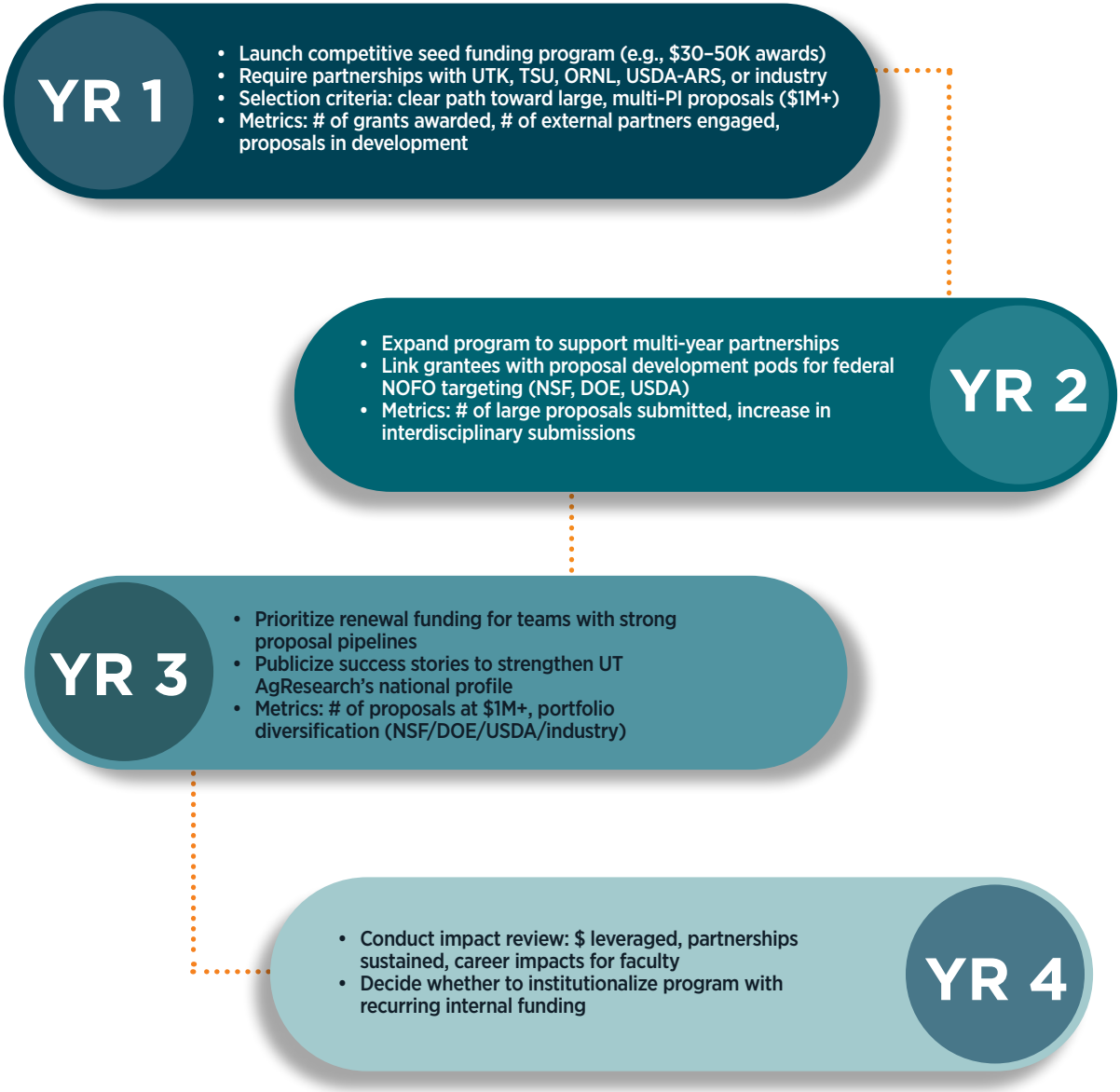
As we advance our established initiatives, we must also look to the future. UT AgResearch is committed to fostering bold, faculty-driven programs that build capacity and strengthen competitiveness in emerging science. There is also value in encouraging our researchers to build new collaborations and strengthen external networks, furthering our reputation for impactful research. The new strategic plan introduces two flagship efforts designed to achieve this: **Strategic Partnership Seed Grants and AgForward Innovation Hubs**.



UT AgResearch Established Routes and New Destinations. *Core research strengths that anchor UT AgResearch's strategic investments: One Health, Precision Agriculture, Agriculture Genomics and Synthetic Biology, Bioeconomy Advancement, and The Next Big Thing.*

Strategic Partnership Seed Grants

Strategic Partnership Seed Grants provide targeted seed funding to catalyze collaborations between UT AgResearch faculty and external partners such as UT Knoxville, TN commodity groups, TSU, ORNL, USDA-ARS, and TN industrial partners. By embedding stakeholders directly into the research process, these grants ensure that projects address pressing agricultural challenges with practical, real-world solutions for novel funding streams. The program not only strengthens relationships with key partners but also creates a clear pathway toward competitive, large-scale, multi-investigator proposals. In doing so, Strategic Partnership Seed Grants enhance the relevance of UT AgResearch's work, expand its impact, and ensure that innovations translate into benefits for producers, communities, and society at large.



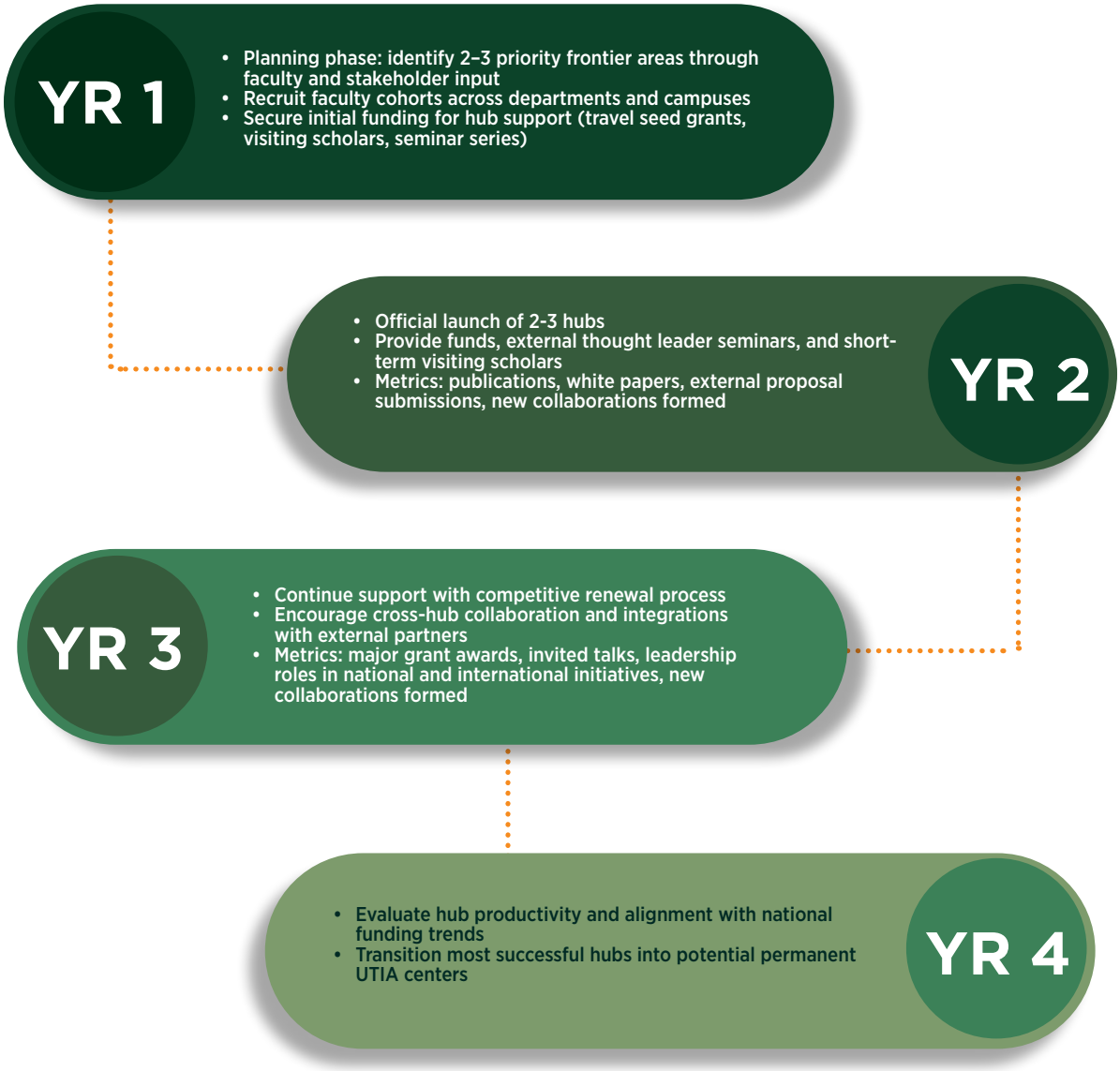

UT
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AgForward Innovation Hubs

AgForward Innovation Hubs support interdisciplinary faculty teams exploring bold, high-risk/high-reward research in emerging scientific domains such as agricultural data and AI, circular bioeconomy, synthetic biology, and next-generation systems. By providing support, visiting scholars, and thought leader engagement, the hubs create an environment where innovative ideas can grow into nationally competitive initiatives.

AgForward Innovation Hubs bring together faculty, stakeholders, industry partners, and thought leaders to identify and develop the next major opportunities in agricultural sciences. These hubs serve as collaborative engines for generating bold ideas, aligning research with emerging needs, and catalyzing large-scale, multi-institutional initiatives. By integrating scientific expertise with real-world insight, the AgForward Innovation Hubs help UT AgResearch anticipate future challenges, enhance faculty visibility in emerging fields, and embed graduate students and postdoctoral researchers in high-impact, cross-disciplinary projects.







MAPPING THE ROUTE

To guide us throughout this strategic action plan, UT AgResearch has established a Faculty Advisory Council that will work in concert with the program coordinator. The council will collect input on priorities from faculty or programs they represent and serve as a "think tank" for the AgResearch Leadership Team by identifying and discussing emerging science/trends as well as perceived gaps in proposed efforts. The council will elect officers, and members will serve limited, staggered terms. Together with the Faculty Advisory Council, the strategic action plan program director will:

- Monitor and summarize progress
- Coordinate reporting
- Track communication activities
- Finalize integrated project plans with an implementation team
- Schedule regular programs with stakeholders (updates to UTIA leadership, department heads, faculty) to highlight progress and receive feedback
- Initiate lunch-and-learn sessions to foster interaction between faculty with competitive grant success and junior faculty
- Explore new methods to foster a culture of "team research" at UTIA

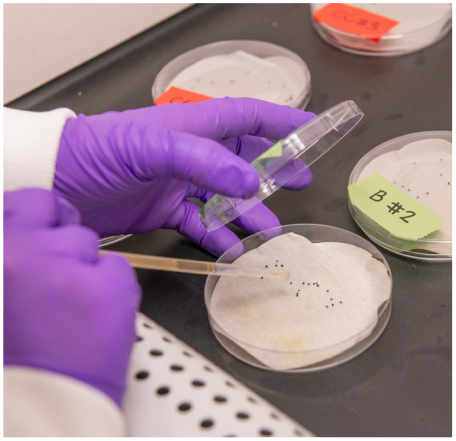
The development of the plan was led by 2025 AgResearch Fellow Phillip Myer, with guidance from Tim Rials, associate dean and chair of the council, and support from Jessica McCord, research associate and Nicolas André, data analytics scientist.










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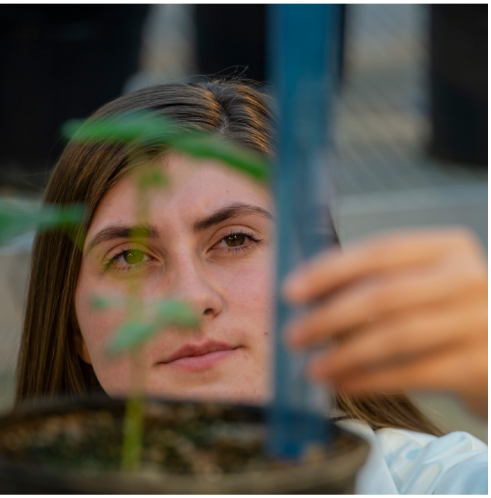









EVERYWHERE
YOU LOOK,









A NOTE OF THANKS

A dedicated group of faculty, staff, and administrators contributed significant time and effort in developing and updating this plan. Their commitment is deeply appreciated, and their work will benefit UT AgResearch and the people of Tennessee and the region for years to come.

For more information visit ***agresearch.tennessee.edu***

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