

Public Interest Research Agenda

Iowa has prioritized privatized research that benefits the bottom line of corporations rather than have a public interest research agenda that addresses the most pressing problems of our day. For instance, Iowa gives large transnational corporations tax credits for research that corporations do on product development while starving our public research institutions of resources to address the multiple crises that we now face. Those crises include climate change, public health and drinking water shortages and contamination.

In 1998 Jane Lubchenco called for a New Social Contract for Science¹ with these words:

As the magnitude of human impacts on the ecological systems of the planet becomes apparent, there is increased realization of the intimate connections between these systems and human health, the economy, social justice, and national security. The concept of what constitutes “the environment” is changing rapidly. Urgent and unprecedented environmental and social changes challenge scientists to define a new social contract. This contract represents a commitment on the part of all scientists to devote their energies and talents to the most pressing problems of the day, in proportion to their importance, in exchange for public funding. The new and unmet needs of society include more comprehensive information, understanding, and technologies for society to move toward a more sustainable biosphere—one which is ecologically sound, economically feasible, and socially just. New fundamental research, faster and more effective transmission of new and existing knowledge to policy- and decision-makers, and better communication of this knowledge to the public will all be required to meet this challenge.



Photo by USDA Scott Bauer

Key points for a public interest research agenda:

- It isn't all research and development. We need basic science and research into prevention of diseases, pollution etc.
- Look at the technologies needed for the future. Invest in research for energy 2.0. There are problems and challenges with both wind and solar and battery storage. Iowa could be a leader in the next generation of sustainable technologies.
- Set a public interest research agenda and fund it. Eliminating the tax credits for corporations doing private research would provide funding for the public interest research projects.
- We can implement the public interest research in some new ways. An AmeriCorps-equivalent could be created for graduate students who could do research on major questions of public interest.

¹ Jane Lubchenco, “Entering the Century of the Environment: A New Social Contract for Science”, *Science*, January 23, 1998. See <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/279/5350/491.abstract>

- Create a public investment pool that would provide seed funding to develop new vaccines, antibiotics, drought-resistant seeds, etc. and that would make these technologies available to the public and through lower costs to Medicare, etc.
- Develop world class public health science departments to look at prevention and lower the total costs of medical care by preventing diseases in the first place.
- Use the precautionary principle in developing new technologies and products. Set goals, reverse the burden of proof, favor false positives (over false negatives) in evaluating harmful products, and heed early warnings.