

## Healthy eating: Why doesn't US government spend more on specialty crop research?

As the country seeks solutions to the obesity epidemic, there's been plenty of debate about how to get people to eat better. ... But there's one thing that's often left out of the conversation: technology.

It might seem strange to think about vegetables as a technology, but they are. The average supermarket produce aisle represents decades, if not centuries, of agricultural research and development. But in the United States, big-league commodity crops like corn and soy, as well as meat, gobble up most of the agricultural research investment from both the public and private sectors.

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Specialty crops remain special—just 3 percent of cropland is dedicated to growing them—though they make up roughly a quarter of the value of crops grown in the U.S. because they demand higher prices.

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**SO WHY DOESN'T** the nation spend more on better lettuce? The answer lies partly in the history of the U.S. Department of Agriculture itself. On one hand, the department...is dedicated to promoting and boosting American agriculture as an industry...But the department is also tasked with encouraging healthy eating...and these two major goals can at times be directly at odds.

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The USDA now dedicates some \$400 million to studying specialty crops each year—a big increase, though still a modest fraction of the nearly \$3 billion the government invests in agricultural research each year.

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While much of the new federal boost for produce investment is motivated more by the industry's business needs than any push to combat the nation's crippling obesity epidemic, public health advocates with little political clout are thrilled to see the needle moving, however it happens.

**The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: [The vegetable technology gap](#)**