Analysis of Early Stage Agrifood Nanotechnology Research and Development

Methodology

Dr. Jennifer Kuzma
Associate Director, Center for Science, Technology, and Public Policy (CSTPP), University of Minnesota

Peter VerHage
Research Assistant, CSTPP, University of Minnesota

1) Categories for Entries

***Type of Research*:**

Development—specific product cited, largely experiments or studies to optimize product

Applied—specific application noted, but may also lead to better understanding

Basic—fundamental understanding is goal, specific application not stated (although there could be one in the future)

Time to Commercialization:

0-5 years –applied/development projects which directly address regulatory or product optimization issues. The applications of the work appear to be very near- term with minimal regulatory concerns, or they are already in the marketplace and properties are being studied or optimized.

5-10 years –applied/development research that is based upon proven technology and for which there are not serious safety concerns

10-15 years—applied research that is in the early stages of concept or development

15-20 years—applied/basic research for which applications are not specified, but they can be envisioned.

20-50 years—basic research for which few, if any, applications are envisioned, but for which fundamental knowledge will eventually lead to some.

Techniques:

More than one technique might be utilized in a given project (multiple boxes might be checked):

Transport processes—nanomaterials as agents for transporting chemicals, molecules, etc.

Bio-selective surfaces—nanomaterials with enhanced or reduced ability to bind or hold specific molecules and/or organisms.

Bio-separation—nano-materials or -processes with ability to separate molecules, biomolecules, or organisms.

Microfluidics/MEMs—liquid streams used to separate, control, or analyze at the nanoscale. They might have special flow properties at this scale. Microelectromechanical systems (MEMs) are also included here. They are devices with channels and wells, electrodes for detection, connectors, and fluidic input/output ports.

Nano-bioprocessing—use of nanoscale technology and/or biological processes to create a desired compound or material from a defined stock. The product itself may be bulk or nanoscale.

Nucleic acid bioengineering—use of DNA as building blocks to form nano-particles or use of nano-particles for genetic engineering.

Drug delivery—use of nanoparticles or nanomethods to deliver drugs to animals.

Modeling—use of nanotechnology to build models of systems, or the modeling of nanoparticles in systems.

Topics:

The project might fit more than one topic (multiple boxes might be checked):

Biosensors—use of nanotechnology for sensors based upon biological processes or biological molecules, or for detection of biological molecules, processes, or organisms.

Environmental processing—use of nanotechnology for studying environmental phenomena, removing contaminants in the environment, or remediating/reducing waste. Study of nanomaterials in the environment too.

Sustainable agriculture—use of nanotechnology for reducing agricultural inputs or outputs that can harm the environment or human health (e.g. pesticides) or are in short supply (e.g. water); or for making products from agriculture in a sustainable way.

Pathogen detection—use of nanotechnology to detect pathogens in surroundings, organisms or food.

Plant/Animal Production—use of nanotechnology to improve the cultivation of plants or animals, including via transgenics or cloning.

Veterinary medicine[1]—use of nanotechnology to improve animal health and/or the safety of animal derived foods.

Bioprocessing for food—use of nanotechnology for better food processing or quality.

Nano-bioindustrial products—use of nanotechnology for developing industrial products from agriculture or its by-products.

USDA Research Areas:

The project might fit more than one topic (multiple boxes might be checked), involving nanotechnology in the following ways:

Pathogen and Contaminant Detection—pathogen or contaminant detection in agriculture, food, or the environment.

Identity Preservation and Tracking—systems that provide producers, processors, and customers with information about the practices and activities used to produce a particular crop or agricultural product. Also, provide information on the origin and movement of crops, animals, or products.

Smart Treatment Delivery Systems—delivery of molecules in agricultural production or processing in time-controlled, spatially targeted, regulated, responsive, or other precise ways. Also, systems could have the ability to monitor effects of delivery.

Smart System Integration for Agriculture and Food Processing—integration of a working system with sensing, reporting, localization, and control. System could be used anywhere along farm to table continuum, or at multiple points.

Nanodevices for Molecular and Cell Biology—devices based on or applied to molecular and cellular biology that separate, identify, study, modify, or sense.

Nanoscale Materials Science and Engineering—development of novel materials through materials science and engineering. Work to better understand the behavior and properties of nanomaterials.

Environmental Issues and Agricultural Waste—study of nanoparticles in the environment, such as in the transport and bioavailability of nutrients and pollutants. Understand transport and toxicity of nanoparticles in agricultural pollutants. Nanotechnology applied to environmental or waste issues.

Educating the Public and Future Workforce—education about nanotechnology and nanoproducts; studies on ethical and social issues (cited in USDA report, although not

[1] This category was added by the investigators. Not in USDA Nanoscale Science and Engineering 2003 Report.

reflected in USDA's short title of this research area); infrastructure support; technology transfer support; public understanding of risks and benefits.

Sectors:

The work or research could be applied to more than one sector (multiple areas might be listed in the database):

Agroecosystems—application for or research on agricultural systems, and/or on surrounding natural systems.

Pre-harvest—application or research on the farm or in the forest, during agricultural production.

Transportation—application or research dealing with transporting agricultural or forest raw commodities or products from the farm to the processor or retailer.

Post-harvest—research or application after harvest, at the stage of processing the commodity or product

Retail—research or application dealing with storage, display, etc. at the place where the product is sold.

Consumer—research or application dealing with the consumer end, such as storage and use of agricultural products in the home. Also, this category is used for research which primarily improves the quality of the end product (e.g. better taste).

Post-consumption—research or applications for after the product is consumed. For example, for food safety illness detection.

Exposure Endpoints:

Boxes are checked if there is exposure to the following (multiple boxes might be checked):

Lab workers—most nanomaterial or particles are made or studied in the lab at some point. In most cases, lab workers will be exposed. The study of naturally-occurring nanoparticles would be a case in which this box would not be checked.

Farmers—farmers are exposed if the nanomaterial, particle, or method is being used on the farm.

Ecosystems—ecosystems are exposed if the nanomaterial is used 1) on the farm (animals and plants on the farm, or the farm agroecosystem) or 2) for wide environmental applications, or 3) if it is not disposed of properly. We assume that material used in

manufacturing or the lab is disposed of properly. So, if this box is checked, it is because the material is intended at some point for environmental release.

Industry Workers—industry workers will be exposed during production, manufacture, transport, processing, or at the retail/distribution stage.

Consumers—if consumers will likely come in contact with the material, this box is checked. The applications are either intended for consumer products or are left in the material as a result of production or processing.

Others—in some cases, there might be sub-populations that are specifically exposed as a result of the application or research.

Unknown—this box is checked when the description of the project is too vague, or the applications are too broad to determine who will be exposed.

Known Toxicity Records:

No—we could not easily (via quick web search for articles) find toxicology studies on the nanoparticles or nanomaterials cited in the project description. Or the particular particles or materials are not specified in the project description.

Yes, benign—we found studies which indicate low toxicity, or hypothesize that the particles are generally non-toxic (e.g. DNA). However, please note that toxicity is still dependent on the system tested in those studies (*in vivo, in vitro,* acellular endpoints), the form of the particle, and the amounts.

Yes, toxic—we found studies which indicate that the nanoparticles or materials are harmful to health and/or the environment, or the class of compounds is generally known to be toxic.

Environmental/Ecological Risks or Health Risks

This is just a first pass, qualitative ranking. More information is needed on virtually all of these projects for better qualitative or quantitative risk assessment.

Low
If exposure to humans, animals or the environment is minimal and the particles are generally non-toxic, we categorize the risk as low.

Medium
If exposure to humans, animals or the environment is minimal OR the particles are generally not-toxic we categorize risk as medium. In this category, there are relatively benign particles that are widely used in food and agriculture. Likewise, a toxic particle that is meant to stay in the lab or processing plant could also be in this category. In the cases of nanotechnology applied to biobased products, “medium” was used for

environmental or ecological risks with the question of whether harvesting and processing are done in a sustainable way (i.e. life cycle issues).

High
Exposure to humans, animals or the environment is widespread and particles show toxicity or are expected to be toxic.

Environmental/Ecological or Health Benefits

This is just a first pass, qualitative ranking. More information is needed on virtually all of these projects for benefits assessment.

Low
Application or research not meant to improve human or animal health, or the environment.

Medium
Application or research might improve health, or the environment, but not explicitly developed for that purpose or for addressing a great societal problem.

High
Application or research specifically developed to address an important societal need for improving health or the environment.

Does this fit nanotech?[2]

After reading the project abstract, objectives, and additional information, we are using the three criteria of the NNI definition to determine whether the project fits the definition of nanotechnology. If so, the box is checked. In some cases, there is not enough information to determine, and we note this in the comment box.

Does this fit agrifood?

Nanotechnology should be applied to or used to study agriculture, food, forestry, or agroecosystems for this box to be checked. Sometimes the project description is vague, or the work is broad to determine whether it fits. This is noted in the comment box.

[2] The National Nanotechnology Initiative lists the following three criteria for defining nanotechnology: 1) research and technology development at the atomic, molecular or macromolecular levels, in the length scale of approximately 1 - 100 nanometer range, 2)creating and using structures, devices and systems that have novel properties and functions because of their small and/or intermediate size, and 3) ability to control or manipulate on the atomic scale.

2) Search Process

USDA CRIS Database:
We searched the USDA CRIS database using the following keywords: nano + food, or nano + agriculture. Projects were limited to those active after 2000. The search was completed on August 15, 2005. The text of each project was then searched for the words nano and food or agriculture to exclude false leads as artifacts of the search terms. Initial results included many projects that did not fit agrifood nanotechnology, such as those containing the terms NaNO (sodium nitrite) or the use of measurements at the nanoscale (nanometers, nanoliters, etc.). To be included in the survey, the project must have utilized or created materials on the nano-scale. The project must also have pertained to either food or agriculture production, or agroecosystems. Once a project was deemed relevant, the project information was placed into the database. There were a total of 90 projects included from the CRIS database search. Although forestry projects arose, this was not used as a search term, so other projects funded by the USDA in this area may exist.

Patent and Trademark Office:
To search the PTO database of patent applications, we used the same keywords as in the case of the CRIS database search, as well as similar criteria for selecting appropriate projects. The key words used in the search were nano + (food or agriculture), and a cut-off date of December 1, 1999 for filed patents was used. Over 600 projects contained the search terms. About 40 of them fit our definition of nanotechnology and agrifood. When there was question as to whether a project fits, we erred on the side of including it. Due to differences in how the data is presented in each patent application and the length of the patent applications, the description given in the application was paraphrased and placed in the "objective" or "additional information" sections of the database. The search was concluded on October 14, 2005.

NSF:
The NSF website "Awards" page was searched using the following terms: "nano food" (35 projects) or "nano agriculture" (15 projects). When "nano agricultural" was substituted for "nano agriculture" the same 15 projects appeared. The search was conducted on 11/11/05. Projects were then scrutinized for their fit to our definition of nanotechnology and agriculture and food.

EPA:
The National Center for Environmental Research's webpage was searched http://es.epa.gov/ncer/ru/index.html) using the keyword "nano." Thirteen projects were found and each abstract was read to see if the work is applicable to agriculture and food. None contained the keywords "agriculture" or "food". However, one had "soil" as a keyword, and this was included in the database. The Science Inventory (SI), a searchable database of EPA science activities and scientific/technical work products, was searched using the term "nanotechnology." (http://cfpub.epa.gov/si/). All "Record Type" boxes were selected for the search, so the projects resulted from Archived and full EIMS searches. The SI provides information about current or recently completed activities, providing a snapshot of EPA science being conducted in its research laboratories and

centers, program and regional offices, and through grants and other assistance agreements to universities and other institutions. Four entries arose from the search. One contained the keyword "soil" and this was included in the database. When the search term "nano" was used, 21 entries arose. None were found to be directly related to agriculture or food. Drinking water projects that were found were not included in the database. Searches were conducted in December 2005.

NIH:

The NIH website was searched for "nanotechnology" and the page NIH Nanotechnology and Nanoscience Information (http://www.becon2.nih.gov/nano.htm) came up. Each of the links on this page was scanned for NIH funded research in agrifood nanotechnology. The Nanomedicine funded research site, http://nihroadmap.nih.gov/nanomedicine/fundedresearch.asp, was searched and no projects mentioning food or agriculture were found (although the basic science might be applicable to food and agriculture in several projects).

The Summary of Funded NIH Bioengineering Nanotechnology Initiative (SBIR) Grants for FY 2000 to 2004 were searched for the keywords food or agriculture. Each FY was searched for "food" or "agriculture". Five projects were found to contain these keywords and they were added to the database. Searches were conducted in December 2005.

DOE:

The Department of Energy's Office site was searched for nanotechnology. The Department of Energy's Office of Science supports nanotechnology through its Materials Sciences subprogram. The Materials Sciences subprogram was searched under "Research Programs." (http://www.science.doe.gov/bes/dms/Research_Programs/research_program.htm) Summaries of research in the National DOE labs were listed on this page. Each summary was searched for "food" or "agriculture" or "agri." No projects with these search terms were found. The DOE Basic Energy Sciences site was searched, which led to the DOE Nanoscale Science Research Centers page http://www.science.doe.gov/Sub/Newsroom/News_Releases/DOE-SC/2006/nano/index.htm. When possible, center websites were searched for "food" or "agri." Most centers did not have searchable features on their sites. The document "Nanoscale Science, Engineering, and Technology in the DOE" http://www.sc.doe.gov/bes/brochures/files/NSRC_brochure.pdf was also searched. In this case, "agriculture" was found, but only in the general statement in the document that nanoscale applications could have benefits to agriculture. Searches were conducted in December 2005. No projects from DOE were added to the database.

DHS:

Department of Homeland Security website was searched for "nano." Two items were retrieved. Neither mentioned specific research projects in agriculture or food nanotechnology. The National Plan for R&D in Support of Critical Infrastructure Protection mentioned nanotechnology, and food/agricultural safety and security were mentioned separately in the document. Searches were conducted in December 2005. No projects from DHS were added to the database.

DOD:
Nanotechnology research awards at DOD were searched http://www.defenselink.mil/releases/2001/b02232001_bt079-01.html. None contained the keywords "food" or "agri" in the title. The naval nanotechnology site http://www.nanosra.nrl.navy.mil/, was also searched for "food" and "agri". No specific research projects on agrifood nanotechnology were found. Searches were conducted in December 2005.

FDA:
FDA's website was searched using the term "nanotechnology," which led to the page http://www.fda.gov/nanotechnology/ When the site was searched for "nanotechnology research," several powerpoint presentations came up indicating that FDA does research in this area through its centers. The content of these presentations was reviewed. Research projects at FDA seem to focus on biological effects of nanomaterials and nanoparticles. No specific projects were found which focused on research and development in agrifood nanotechnology. Some of the general toxicity research will apply to agrifood nanotechnology products, however. Searches were conducted in December 2005.

3) PI Review and Validation of the Entries

The majority of primary investigators (n=121, those for whom we could find contact information) were sent entries for their projects and the definitions of the categories (Section 1 of this Methods Section). They were asked to review the classification of their research and make additions or corrections. We received seventeen responses (14% response rate), and of these, 11 completely agreed with the categorization. Others asked for minor adjustments to their entries. In one case, the time to commercialization was decreased from 10-15 years to 3-5 years. In 3 cases, additional categories of techniques, topics, or research areas were added (however, none were removed). In one case, the PI supplied additional information on the nature of the nanomaterials that allowed for a more appropriate classification of the risks and benefits. In another case, the PI indicated that the majority of her work is not in the area of nanotechnology, although the project in the database states that nanoparticles will be made in the laboratory. Changes suggested by PIs were incorporated into the database.