Land grant institution libraries will be particularly interested in the 1990 farm bill, which consolidates and expands the statutory authority of the National Agricultural Library to serve "as the primary agricultural information resource of the United States." In addition to basic library functions, the NAL director is to "cooperate with and coordinate efforts among agricultural college and university libraries, in conjunction with private industry and other agricultural library and information centers, toward the development of a comprehensive agricultural library and information network." The library is also to "coordinate the development of specialized subject information services among the agricultural and library information communities."

The NAL director may "(1) make copies of the bibliographies prepared by the National Agricultural Library; (2) make microforms and other reproductions of books and other library materials in the Department; 3) provide any other library and information products and services; and (4) sell those products and services at such prices (not less than the estimated total cost of disseminating the products and services) as the Secretary may determine appropriate." This rather open-ended authority for fee-based services also allows NAL to collect and retain funds from these transactions, and to enter into agreements to receive funds from non-federal entities.

The library requested the enhanced authority, as well as establishment of a Board of Regents. House-Senate conferees generally followed the Senate NAL language and dropped the Board of Regents, which had been included in the House-passed bill, HR 3950. S. 2830, the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990, was given final approval by Congress in late October and signed into law (PL 101-624) by President Bush on November 28. Section 1606 of PL 101-624 amends the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 3101 et seq.) by adding a new section 1010A, "National Agricultural Library."

Title XXIII of PL 101-624 is Rural Development, and contains several provisions relating to improvement of rural telecommunications, economic development, and information dissemination. A National Rural Information Center Clearinghouse is established at NAL to provide and distribute information and data about programs and services available to rural areas, with $500,000 per year authorized from FY 1991–95. The Clearinghouse is to work cooperatively with the Extension Service in each state, use telecommunications technology to reach rural areas to the extent possible, and develop and make accessible a catalog of rural development programs.

The Rural Electrification Act definition of telephone service is updated to include reception as well as transmission, data as well as voice, and by expanding the conduit to encompass "wire, fiber, radio, light, or other visual or electromagnetic means." The Rural Electrification Administration, in acting as an information clearinghouse for electric and telephone borrowers on rural development, is to use NAL resources to the extent practicable.

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In section 2078, the bill also instructs the congressional Office of Technology Assessment to (in the words of the conference report, H. Rept. 101–916) “analyze the effect of new information technology on rural America, the ability of rural citizens to acquire advanced technology, and recommend ways in which the Library of Congress may connect with rural citizens by computer to share information in the national library.”