Public funding for agricultural research may be stagnant, but corn growers in southern U.S. and their respective state land grant universities haven’t let that stop them from continuing the fight against aflatoxin contamination in corn.

Aflatoxin is such a problem in southern corn-growing states that corn checkoff boards and land grant universities in seven states including Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and North Carolina have banded together to form the Aflatoxin Mitigation Center of Excellence (AMCOE) to pool resources in an organized effort to support aflatoxin research in the face of declining funding.

With aflatoxin being more of a regional issue specific to the South, David Gibson, director of the Texas Corn Producers board, says having an organization focused specifically on dealing with aflatoxin on a regional basis makes sense.

Each year, corn growers across the South face the threat of significant financial losses to aflatoxin—a mycotoxin produced by the *Aspergillus flavus* fungus. Heat and drought stress are the most common causes for aflatoxin contamination in corn, rendering it toxic to humans and livestock. Aflatoxin is also a known carcinogen.

The USFDA has set the allowable limit of contamination for human and dairy cow consumption at a scant 20 ppb, 100 ppb for breeding livestock and mature poultry, 200 ppb for finishing swine, and up to 300 ppb for finishing cattle. According to USFDA's guidelines, corn above 20 ppb will be rejected by grain elevators and is not allowed for interstate commerce.

“Within our seven states, we’ve got around 3 to 4 million acres annually that are very prone to aflatoxin,” says Gibson, who on behalf of the Texas Corn Producers Board helped organize AMCOE in 2008. “That’s not saying that many acres would totally be lost, but have the really high potential to have action levels of 20 parts per billion.”