

Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Coalition

March 20, 2020

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman
Senate Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
Chairman
House Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry
Ranking Member
House Agriculture Appropriations
Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Hoeven, Ranking Member Merkley, Chairman Bishop, and Ranking Member Fortenberry:

The AFRI Coalition, along with the undersigned organizations, appreciate your commitment to continued investment in the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). The AFRI Coalition is comprised of organizations representing research institutions, scientific societies, and other agricultural stakeholders. Together, we advocate for robust research investments in AFRI, USDA's flagship competitive grants program for fundamental and applied research, extension, and education in support of our nation's food and agricultural systems.

We are grateful for the \$425 million provided for AFRI in FY20. **For FY21, we respectfully request an appropriation of at least \$480 million.** This level of funding is needed to invest in critical research areas aimed at addressing our nation's most pressing agriculture and public health challenges, including bioenergy, nutrition, climate adaptation and resiliency, agricultural technology, economic prosperity in rural communities, and food safety. If we are to meet U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Perdue's goal of increasing the nation's agriculture production by 40 percent and cutting the environmental footprint of U.S. agriculture in half by 2050¹, we must invest in cutting-edge research that improves efficiencies in our systems and rises to the demands of a changing climate.

The Coalition commends USDA for including \$600 million for AFRI in its FY21 budget request. We remain committed to our longstanding goal of reaching the \$700 million authorized funding level while investing in other vital research, education, and extension programs across NIFA. Sustained funding across the agricultural research enterprise is needed to ensure our global competitiveness and national security.

Despite sustained increases in AFRI funding, roughly 70 percent of AFRI proposals that are deemed worthy by expert review panels go unfunded², simply because money is not available. At a time when farmers, ranchers, and our nation's food systems are facing increased global competition, unprecedented demand, resource constraints, emerging pests and pathogens, and volatile weather, we cannot afford to leave high-quality proposals unfunded. China has already outpaced the U.S. in public

¹ <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2020/02/20/secretary-perdue-announces-new-innovation-initiative-usda>

² <https://nifa.usda.gov/afri-annual-review-archives>

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agricultural research spending by 2:1³, marking a significant shift in our nation's global leadership in agricultural R&D.

Robust investment in USDA-supported research is needed not only to support our current agriculture and food systems, but to attract, retain, and develop the next generation of scientists to address increasing pressures on our natural resources and advance innovations benefiting all Americans.

Thank you for your strong support of AFRI and efforts to increase AFRI funding in previous years. We believe now is the time to invest in our country's future by providing *at least* \$480 million for AFRI in FY21.

Sincerely,

The AFRI Coalition

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

American Association of Mycobacterial Diseases

American Dairy Science Association

American Society for Horticultural Science

American Society for Microbiology

American Society for Nutrition

American Society of Agronomy

American Society of Animal Science

American Society of Plant Biologists

American Veterinary Medical Association

Aquatic Plant Management Society

Association of American Universities

Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges

Crop Science Society of America

Ecological Society of America

Entomological Society of America

Entomological Society of America

Farm Aid

³ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2016/november/us-agricultural-rd-in-an-era-of-falling-public-funding/>

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Farm Journal Foundation

FASS

Freed Seed Federation

Land For Good

Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

Mycobacterial Diseases of Animals - Multistate Initiative

National Association for the Advancement of Animal Science

National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research (NCFAR)

National Pork Producers Council

New England Farmers Union

North Central Weed Science Society

Northeastern Weed Science Society

Organic Seed Alliance

Pollinator Partnership

Soil Science Society of America

Southern Weed Science Society

Supporters of Agricultural Research (SoAR) Foundation

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

U.S. Dairy Forage Research Center Stakeholder Committee

Union of Concerned Scientists

University of Iowa

Virginia Association for Biological Farming

Weed Science Society of America

Western Society of Weed Science