

Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Coalition

April 4, 2019

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 – comprised of organizations representing research institutions, scientific societies, and other agricultural stakeholders that advocate for robust food and agriculture research funding – appreciates your commitment to continued investment in the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). As USDA’s premier competitive grants program, AFRI complements other USDA research programs by funding cutting-edge science to meet 21st century challenges in public health, food production, national security, and global competitiveness.

The Coalition is grateful for the \$415 million provided for AFRI in FY 2019. **For FY 2020, the AFRI Coalition respectfully recommends an appropriation of at least \$445 million.** We believe this level of funding is needed to solve pressing challenges facing agriculture, attract and retain the next generation of scientists, and advance innovations benefiting all Americans. Food and agricultural research is also a sound investment, with a \$20 return on every \$1 spent.

The Coalition commends USDA for including \$500 million for AFRI in its FY20 budget request. We remain committed to our longstanding goal of reaching the \$700 million authorized funding level. However, we are concerned that the budget request comes at the expense of other vital research, education and extension programs.

Despite sustained increases in AFRI funding, nearly 80 percent of AFRI proposals that are deemed worthy by expert review panels have to be rejected simply because there is not adequate funding to support them. Increased funding for publically funded agricultural research, will help to spur new research innovations that fuel our economy, safeguard our food security, and conserve our nation’s resources. This next generation of technologies and knowledge will enable our farmers and ranchers to succeed in the global marketplace.

Global competition, unprecedented demand, resource constraints, emerging pests and pathogens, and volatile weather are posing new challenges for farmers and ranchers. However, America is no longer the global leader in agriculture research investment. China’s public agricultural research spending surpassed the U.S.’s in 2009. Today, the U.S is outspent nearly 2:1 by China.

Again, 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 supporting a \$445 million appropriation for AFRI.

Sincerely,

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Agricultural and Applied Economics Association
American Institute of Biological Sciences
American Phytopathological Society
American Society for Horticultural Science
American Society for Microbiology
American Society for Nutrition
American Society of Agronomy
American Society of Animal Science
American Veterinary Medical Association
Association of American Universities
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges
Crop Science Society of America
Ecological Society of America
Entomological Society of America
National Association for the Advancement of Animal Science
National Association of Plant Breeders
National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Soil Science Society of America
Union of Concerned Scientists
Weed Science Society of America