

March 28, 2019

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Hoeven
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

We thank you for starting the process of increasing public investment in agricultural research these past several years. As you well know, federal funding of public food and agriculture research stagnated for a long period of time, falling far behind other government-supported research and calling into question American leadership in the field.

We urge you to accelerate the renewal process you have started by championing a multiyear campaign to raise funding to a level commensurate with solving the major national and global challenges we face in production, natural resources, nutrition, and economic development. While we support the USDA REE mission area across the board and all its component parts, we would focus your attention on the major competitive grants programs at NIFA as one vital element of any growth strategy. Our five-year objective, counting both discretionary funding and farm bill direct funding, is to reach or exceed \$1 billion in competitive grant funding by FY 2024. We encourage you to adopt that as a goal as well.

To jumpstart this longer-term goal, we are urging you to provide \$535 million in FY 2020 funding, a combined increase of \$50 million, for the major competitive grants programs as follows:

- Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) - \$445 million
- Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program - \$5 million
- Crop Protection and Pest Management (IPM) - \$22 million
- Food Safety Outreach Program - \$10 million
- Organic Transition - \$8 million
- Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) - \$45 million

Combined with direct funding for other major competitive grants in the 2018 Farm Bill, these levels would put total NIFA competitive grants at \$665 million for FY 2020, a substantial first step toward reaching \$1 billion or more by FY 2024.

Public investment in food and agricultural science not only helps farmers through droughts, floods, pests and pathogens, it enhances environmental quality, helps provide Americans with safe and affordable food, and brings a 20-fold return to the GDP. For America to remain the global agricultural and economic force it is today, farmers and agriculture researchers need a bold, sustained investment strategy that inspires a future of productivity, innovation, and resilience. We urge you to provide the proposed \$50 million increase as outlined above.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges

American Society of Agronomy

American Society for Horticultural Science

American Society for Nutrition

American Soybean Association

Crop Science Society of America

Entomological Society of America

IPM Voice

National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research

National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

National Turfgrass Federation

National Young Farmers Coalition

Organic Farming Research Foundation

Soil Science Society of America

Supporters of Agricultural Research (SoAR)

Union of Concerned Scientists

cc: Members of the Subcommittee