



American Society of Agronomy • Crop Science Society of America • Soil Science Society of America

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April 12, 2021

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
Chairman, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, FDA, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development, FDA, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: FY2022 Appropriations—Support for USDA Research, Education, and Economics Mission Area

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Fortenberry:

Thank you for your leadership and support for agriculture research, which touches on many important facets of American life, such as mitigating climate change, maintaining a robust and equitable food system, and keeping farmers productive and sustainable.

The American Society of Agronomy (ASA), Crop Science Society of America (CSSA), and Soil Science Society of America (SSSA) represent more than 8,000 scientists and students, 13,500 Certified Crop Advisers (CCA), and more than 700 Certified Professional Soil Scientist (CPSS). We are the largest coalition of scientists and professionals dedicated to the agronomic, crop, and soil science disciplines in the United States. We are supportive of the President's budget request of \$4 billion for Research, Education, and Economics (REE) at the Department of Agriculture (USDA) in FY 2022, specifically:

\$1.721 billion in top-line funding for the Agricultural Research Service (ARS). ARS is the government's premier agriculture research institution. ARS scientists conduct high-priority research at facilities across the country, and its world-renowned facilities are used to pioneer agricultural advancements. ARS is uniquely suited to conduct research that requires long-term investments with high-impact payoffs while maintaining the capacity and readiness to respond to emerging and pressing challenges.

This level of funding provides a 5% increase, or \$76.35 million, to ARS's national programs and flat funding, \$102.6 million, for the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF) so that it need not tap into funding from ARS's other programs. The remaining \$15 million represents the amount necessary to meet USDA's serious need for a high-speed network, high-performance computing, big data storage, and modern informatics expertise. Without this additional funding, USDA may choose to draw from all other ARS programs with a one percent assessment. This one percent cut to all intra- and extramural programs will not be necessary if the essential \$15 million funding for Big Data is appropriated.

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). We strongly support NIFA's suite of extramural programs that enable colleges and universities to drive innovations, expand outreach, and develop the next generation workforce. Within NIFA, our priorities include:

\$600 million for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). AFRI is USDA's premier competitive grants program, seeking to solve critical challenges in food and agricultural systems. AFRI funded research supports cutting-edge advances in emerging areas such as genomics, microbiomes, sensors, and informatics to help ensure profitable and sustainable farms and a healthy nation. Currently, AFRI supports fewer than a third of the projects review panels recommended for funding.

\$5 million for Research Equipment Grants. The 2018 Farm Bill included a competitive grants program for research equipment at colleges and universities. It is authorized at \$5 million per year and limits individual grants to a maximum of \$500,000. This addresses a critical need identified by our member scientists. Agricultural researchers with innovative and exciting ideas may require large or specialized equipment for their research. However, there is no clear path to obtain equipment funding through existing programs – forcing many scientists to abandon valuable research projects.

\$50 million for the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AgARDA) Pilot program. The world has witnessed a dramatic increase in existential threats to agriculture – disease outbreaks, changing climates, and labor challenges to name a few. Current funding models at USDA tackle these issues, and many others, by funding low-risk proposals with small grants. But these grants, by design, are capable of only incremental progress. It is now clear that slow, incremental gains are not enough – high impact, transformational ideas, which are risky in nature, have become necessary. The 2018 Farm Bill authorized AgARDA to address challenges that threaten the stability and economic viability of agriculture. Modeled after the successful Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), AgARDA can accelerate innovative, high-risk, high-reward research and development in areas where industry is unlikely to invest.

\$280 million for Hatch Act formula funding. Hatch funding supports agricultural experiment stations at our nation's land-grant colleges and universities. This funding addresses high-priority research needs to help farmers through droughts and floods, combat pests and pathogens, and conserve soil and water.

\$340 million for Smith-Lever 3(b) and (c) funding. Smith-Lever funding supports the cooperative extension program, a vital link between land-grant university scientists and agricultural producers, communities, consumers, families, and others who directly benefit from the latest innovations.

America's incredible agricultural productivity and economic prosperity are the result of investments in science and technology. Maintaining the pace of scientific discoveries and innovations is needed to sustainably meet the growing demand for food, fuel, and fiber around the world. Thank you for your consideration. For additional information or to learn more about ASA, CSSA, and SSSA, please contact me at kanderson@sciencesocieties.org or 202-408-5382.

Sincerely,



Karl E. Anderson, Director of Government Relations

Cc: Members of the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA, and Related Agencies