Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Coalition

March 20, 2020

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

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

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

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

² https://nifa.usda.gov/afri-annual-review-archives
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agricultural research spending by 2:1\(^3\), 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

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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