March 23, 2018

The Honorable John Hoeven  
U.S. Senate  
338 Russell Senate Office Bldg.  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
U.S. Senate  
313 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Hoeven and Ranking Member Merkley:

We respectfully request $525 million in the FY 2019 budget for the USDA’s Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). This program funds the competitive science that is key to solidifying the foundation for America’s agricultural greatness.

USDA receives less than 4% of the federal non-defense, research and development (R&D) budget. Meanwhile, in real dollars, federal investment in agriculture research has fallen for over a decade. In the case of AFRI, this has translated into support for less than 1 in 5 of the projects recommended by the program’s peer review panels. Yet every day brings renewed calls to grow more food with less, improve nutrition as a form of preventative health care, and preserve critical natural resources.

These calls can only be answered if we commit to meaningful investment in agricultural research. AFRI funds all facets of agricultural research, from cutting edge genomics, to precision agriculture, to innovative conservation practices. Funded projects are already making a difference in our fields and markets. For instance, AFRI funding led to the development of hypo-allergenic peanuts as well as fifteen percent of wheat cultivars planted in the U.S.

The bipartisan budget agreement announced in February presents a unique opportunity to reverse the decline in our research funding. And it’s not a moment too soon. The U.S. has lost its spot as the top global funder of public agricultural R&D, falling behind China in 2009. Today, the U.S. trails Western Europe and is outspent nearly 2:1 by China.

Our best science and researchers should have every opportunity to succeed so that U.S. agriculture can enjoy greatness for generations to come. Funding AFRI with $525 million in FY 2019 will strengthen rural economies, public health, and our national security.

Sincerely,
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Alliance of Crop, Soil and Environmental Science Societies
American Association of Mycobacterial Diseases
American Dairy Science Association
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Feed Industry Association
American Malting Barley Association
American Pulse Association
American Society for Microbiology
American Society for Nutrition
American Society of Agronomy
American Society of Animal Science
American Soybean Association
Brooks Tropicals
Consumer Federation of America
Crop Science Society of America
Entomological Society of America
Farm Journal Foundation
FASS
Global Harvest Initiative
MBG Marketing
Midwest Poultry Consortium
Mycobacterial Diseases of Animals Multistate Initiative
National Alfalfa & Forage Alliance
National Association for the Advancement of Animal Science
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Barley Growers Association
National Barley Improvement Committee
National Cattlemen’s Beef Association
National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research
National Corn Growers Association
National Sunflower Association
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Pesticide Action Network
Pollinator Partnership
Poultry Science Association
Rural & Agriculture Council of America
Society for Range Management
Soil and Water Conservation Society
Soil Science Society of America
Supporters of Agricultural Research Foundation
Union of Concerned Scientists
US Canola Association
US Dairy Forage Research Center Stakeholder Committee
US Dry Bean Council
USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council
Village Farms International
Western Growers Association
Xerces Society