May 16, 2011

RE: Agriculture and Food Research Initiative in the FY 12 Spending Bill

Dear Senators and Representatives:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations representing research institutions, scientists, and other agriculture stakeholders, we urge you to support funding of the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture’s (NIFA) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) competitive grants program at least $350 million for FY 12. The premier competitive grants program at USDA NIFA, AFRI is authorized at $700 million in the 2008 Farm Bill; however, it has yet to receive funding at even half of the authorized level. As our economy recovers, the United States cannot afford to lose momentum in areas where it excels internationally. At $23 billion in FY 09, the U.S. trade surplus in agriculture is higher than that of all other U.S. product groupings and almost triple the next largest category—transportation¹. Despite this strength, declining support for agricultural research and education jeopardizes our ability to maintain a competitive advantage in these markets. Without continued advances to drive these markets, we risk losing out to global competition.

Investments in AFRI have far reaching impacts, bolstering work performed by USDA’s Agricultural Research Service, Land Grant Universities and Colleges, other academic institutions, and the private sector. A report by the Economic Research Service (ERS) found “strong and consistent evidence” that investment in agricultural research has yielded “high returns per dollar spent”, citing a mean rate of return of 53%². This return means that for every dollar invested by the federal government in agricultural research, an average return of $0.53 per year is accrued as the technology is utilized. Overall, this return represents $20-$60 generated in the economy from every dollar invested in research, education, and extension. This significant return on investment is partially due to the unique and efficient structure of the U.S. agricultural research and development system.

We therefore urge you to support AFRI in the FY 12 spending bill at $350 million, a level sensitive to and appropriate for today’s fiscal environment.

Thank you for considering our request. If you would like to learn more about AFRI or specific funding per state, please contact us at sciencepolicy@sciencesocieties.org.

Sincerely,

American Dairy Science Association