

**Draft RMF/BAA letter / March 2, 2018 (with edits)**

March \_\_, 2018

*[List of Congressional leaders....]*

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members,

We — the Board on Agriculture Assembly (BAA) of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) and the Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation (RMF) — believe the next Farm Bill Research Title represents a pivotal moment in the future of the nation’s agricultural research system.

The BAA represents a national system of more than 107 land-grant and nearly 60 non-land-grant universities found in every state. The RMF works to promote a broader, more complete understanding of agriculture, enhance agriculture through increased scientific knowledge and since 2014 has engaged with over 120 organizations to pursue a common message of support for increased federal investment in food, agricultural and natural resources research.

BAA and RMF have mutual interests and goals of increasing federal investments in agricultural research and producing the best possible food and agricultural science to meet some of the greatest challenges of the 21st century.

These challenges facing the productivity and sustainability of our agriculture, natural resources and communities are well-documented. Agriculture is a pillar of the U.S. economy, accounting for nearly \$1 trillion of our GDP, 1 in 10 jobs and a significant contribution to our nation’s trade balance. Underlying the hard work and success of our nation’s producers is a firm foundation of science and innovation. This foundation is in danger. The U.S. has been second to China in total public agricultural research funding since 2008. By 2013, China’s spending on public agricultural R&D nearly doubled that of the United States. Though public funding for other forms of domestic research has risen dramatically, the U.S. agricultural research budget has declined in real dollars since 2003. This is an area of R&D where return on investment is estimated at 20 to 1. Also, the increase in agricultural productivity in the U.S. is falling behind a number of other countries.

One of the most vital assets for addressing these challenges is our public agricultural research infrastructure — the scientific expertise, facilities and linked Cooperative Extension and education programs. Current levels of public support for these critical areas are inadequate to address the mounting challenges.

We join our voices to others calling for strengthening federal research, extension, and educational efforts directed toward food, agriculture and natural resources — essential work that touches every American and contributes to the public good, including economic growth, jobs and quality of life improvements.

We bring to your attention three specific recommendations that we believe deserve to be placed in the Farm Bill to bolster the nation’s scientific foundation for food, agriculture and natural resources:

**1. Establish the goal for annual public expenditures (as a percentage of GDP) for the four agencies in USDA’s Research, Education and Economics (REE) Mission Area to be among the top five G20 nations.**

- a) A commitment to progress toward this aspirational goal — a doubling of investment in the REE mission — would send the strongest possible signal that the United States is committed to sustaining global leadership in addressing our citizens’ needs in a rapidly changing landscape of food, agricultural and natural resources challenges through scientific innovation, Cooperative Extension and education.

- b) The four REE agencies — Agricultural Research Service, Economics Research Service, National Agricultural Statistics Service and National Institute of Food and Agriculture — represent the heart of the nation’s agricultural research portfolio, unmatched by any other nation. Progress towards this funding goal will strengthen the agencies’ long-lasting, highly productive partnership with agricultural research, Cooperative Extension and educational expertise at universities in every state; for example, in NIFA’s support in research, education, Cooperative Extension programs at all supported institutions nationwide, including the 1862s, 1890s, 1994s, Hispanic-serving, non-land grant agricultural colleges and other partners.

**2. Continue mandatory funds for USDA competitive grant programs that meet special needs.**

- a) Renew the permanently funded Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) with annual funding at no less than FY 2017 funding of \$51 million.
- b) Renew the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) with annual funding at no less than FY 2017 funding level of \$18 million.
- c) Renew the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) with annual funding at no less than FY 2017 funding level of \$19 million.

**3. Strengthen the role of the USDA’s Under Secretary of Research, Education and Economics (REE) and Chief Scientist.**

- a) Continue the current law designation of the REE Under Secretary as Chief Scientist of the Department.
- b) Retain and make permanent the staff positions authorized by current law for the Office of the Chief Scientist, a critical step to ensure efficacy and oversight of research programs.
- c) Establish the authority of the REE Under Secretary and Chief Scientist to address emerging opportunities or urgent threats of national importance and to support a fast-response mobilization of crosscutting scientific expertise.

These recommendations are similar to some put forward by stakeholders and partners and we share a common recognition that this a crucial time to lift our voices and to act to strengthen our nation’s investments in food and agricultural research. The fruits of agricultural research impact the lives of everyone in this nation and beyond— safe, nutritious and health-promoting food, clean drinking water, sustainable natural resources, renewable energy and a robust economy.

Thank you for your consideration. We are strongly committed to work with you to renew U.S. investments in competitive and capacity agricultural research, Cooperative Extension, training and educational programs of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. With your continued support, research focused on food, agricultural and natural resources will remain an essential ingredient to the vitality of our national economy and our local communities.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Hussey  
Chair  
Policy Board of Directors  
Board on Agriculture Assembly  
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities

Catherine E. Woteki  
President  
Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation