

## **DRAFT Org Sign-On Letter with Recommendations to Ag Committee Leadership**

To: Congressional Ag Committee Leadership  
CC: Other members

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

As organizations concerned about the future of food and agricultural research, we thank you for your leadership and for your continued support of research. We are writing with a series of shared policy recommendations designed to strengthen the next Farm Bill Research Title which are the result of extensive discussion among a diverse set of stakeholders.

As you well know, agriculture remains 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, however, is cracking.

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 became nearly double that of the U.S. 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.

The results of this trend are directly translating to farms where growth in agricultural productivity has leveled over the last decade. While research funding has been cut, the threats to our production system are mounting. Whether it be droughts, flooding, or an avian flu epidemic costing producers and consumers millions of dollars, many of the short- and long-term challenges facing agriculture can only be solved through additional research and strengthened collaborations. At stake is our national security, economy, health, and environment. The next Farm Bill represents a crucial opportunity to reverse these trends and reassert our nation's leadership in agricultural research.

Proponents of food and agricultural research have consistently heard from Congress that our community's success has been hamstrung by the lack of a shared stakeholder vision. We have individually pursued advancements in specific programs at times to the detriment of the bigger picture. We have taken this message to heart, engaging in collaborative deliberations over the course of multiple months to develop a series of shared Farm Bill Research Title policy recommendations.

The following policy recommendations are not comprehensive of all participating organizations' priorities and by no means preclude participating organizations from pursuing additional legislative goals. Rather, they reflect the areas where our priorities overlap. Our recommendations are aimed at not just raising overall research funding, but also maximizing each additional dollar through increasing the coordination, oversight, efficiency, competitiveness, and responsiveness of our public research system.

Our shared recommendations are as follows:

- 1) Establish an annual \$6 billion goal (in FY 2019 dollars) for USDA food and agricultural research over FY 2019-2023.
  - a) This figure would be expressed in the Farm Bill as the sum total funding of the following agencies and their respective programs: Agricultural Research Service (ARS); National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA); Economic Research Service (ERS); National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS).
  - b) This goal of \$6 billion for USDA REE would double the baseline of each agency from the 2017 enacted appropriations. Each agency would work with Congress to allocate their respective budgets across their programs/lines using measures of increased efficiency and high impact as guiding principles.
- 2) Renew and make permanent USDA competitive grant programs currently receiving direct mandatory Farm Bill funding.
  - a) Renew the permanently-funded Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) at no less than its current \$80 million annual direct funding level.
  - b) Renew both the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) and the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) with permanent direct funding set at no less than \$50 million annually.
- 3) Renew the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research (FFAR) with direct funding of \$250 million in FY 2019 for the period FY 2019-2023.
- 4) In order to increase the competitiveness and quality of applications, eliminate across the board matching requirements for competitive grants programs within NIFA currently selectively applied on some institutions.
- 5) Continue the current law designation of the REE Under Secretary as the Chief Scientist of the Department.
- 6) Establish a Strategic Investment Fund (SIF) to be under the direction of the REE Under Secretary / Chief Scientist to improve collaboration in addressing emerging opportunities with respect to pressing social challenges, especially those requiring urgent emergency responses, those that may be high risk but with extraordinary potential impact, or those that require interdisciplinary systems approaches that involve more than one agency.
  - a) The SIF shall be funded via a one-half of one percent (0.5%) assessment on all NIFA and ARS funding, with the exception of NIFA capacity funding (including capacity grants for non-land grant colleges of agriculture) and ARS buildings and facilities, repair and maintenance, transfers, trust funds, and the National Agriculture Library, ~~and trust funds~~.
  - b) SIF funding shall start in the first fiscal year in which the total funding increase (relative to FY 2017 enacted levels) for the to-be-assessed funding lines exceeds the dollar amount of the assessment.
- 7) Retain the staff positions authorized by current law for the Office of the Chief Scientist as a means of increasing oversight, efficacy, and avoiding potential research duplication. Clarify that these positions shall be filled through transfer of personnel from the program planning and evaluation

offices and other appropriately trained personnel within the four REE agencies, with a term of service of at least three (3) years, or through advertising and hiring through regular channels.

- 8) Establish enhanced stakeholder engagement opportunities on a no less than annual basis to strengthen the functioning and utility of the National Agricultural Research, Education, Extension, and Economics Advisory Board (NAREEEAB) and reinvigorate engagement of researchers and end users.
  - a) Expanded stakeholder sessions should be held on a rotating basis in different regions of the country, and the recommendations of the stakeholder sessions should be reviewed by the Board, forwarded to the Secretary along with additional recommendations of the Board, and responded to by the Secretary or Deputy Secretary within 60 days of submission as well as in person at the next Board meeting.
  - b) Establish a new Science and Technology Assessment standing committee of the NAREEEAB to undertake the current law duty of the Board. The Science and Technology Assessment Committee should include no fewer than two members of the Board, but also draw additional members from among experts in the field of science and technology assessment.
- 9) Mandate the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) produce a periodic report to identify scientific opportunities in food and agriculture and to institutionalize the long-term strategic planning and priority setting for food and agricultural research.
  - a) This report should be undertaken every ten (10) years and include a midpoint assessment.
  - b) This report should be developed in conjunction with the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board (NAREEEAB) and effectively engaged end-users and other stakeholders.
  - c) NASEM's current *Breakthroughs 2030* study shall be considered the first such ten-year assessment.
- 10) Establish a committee (Agricultural Cyberinfrastructure, Data and Statistics Committee) within the Secretary of Agriculture's office for the purpose of building a national strategic vision for cyberinfrastructure, data, and statistics that enables using the data for the benefit of producers, consumers, and taxpayers. The committee should include USDA leadership, subject matter experts in economics and other sciences, and strategic stakeholders.

The participating organizations also recognize the global nature of agriculture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and fully support U.S. efforts towards greater international collaboration to leverage R&D resources and expertise. We encourage the participation of USDA and U.S. scientists in partnerships with international research institutes where there are mutual benefits for U.S. agriculture and other nations, such as addressing emerging plant and animal diseases or improving crop varieties and animal breeds.

Finally, we recognize the critical need for agricultural research infrastructure improvements and maintenance in the United States. We fully support the efforts of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), the ARS, and others to identify, prioritize, and address these needs, ensuring our nation's research facilities, equipment, and workforce are preeminent and remain globally competitive. The group recommends the inclusion of research infrastructure as part of any broader federal efforts related to improving our national infrastructure.

Attached to this letter are more detailed descriptions and rationales for each respective policy recommendation. We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and your respective staffs to discuss these recommendations further as soon as possible.

Thank you for your consideration and for all of the work you do on behalf of agriculture and agricultural research. We look forward to working with you in developing a Farm Bill Research Title that serves the vital needs our nation and restores our status as the world leader in agricultural research and innovation.

Sincerely,

List of Signing Organizations

NOTE: Consider letterhead designed to include each of the participating signatories

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