

April 13, 2020

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
House of Representatives
Chairman, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Hoeven
U.S. Senate
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry
House of Representatives
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
U.S. Senate
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Support for COVID-19 Relief and Recovery via Agriculture Research, Education, and Extension

Dear Chairmen Hoeven and Bishop, and Ranking Members Merkley and Fortenberry:

Thank you for your extraordinary work in passing the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The legislation provides critical support to Americans as we continue to combat this global pandemic. From the perspective of the food, fuel, fiber, and feed system, this crisis underscores the importance of the agricultural sector. Our nation's ongoing commitment—at all levels—to a robust, safe, affordable, and accessible food supply is paramount at this moment.

As Congress considers the next supplemental appropriations package, we urge you to provide the necessary resources to our agricultural research, education, and extension system and specifically ask for \$380 million for the USDA *National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)*.

This investment will:

- Ensure critical research on agricultural production and food delivery systems, animal husbandry, zoonotic and plant diseases, agronomic climate adaptation, food safety and nutrition, and essential pest management can continue.
- Meet the needs of our nation's communities through services delivered by the Cooperative Extension System in all areas in the United States.
- Address the significant gaps in research, extension, and education the pandemic has uncovered that will be essential in the ongoing battle against not only COVID-19 but also future global challenges.

Our request reflects a commitment of service to agriculture, families, businesses, and communities, and includes **\$300 million of job-saving support for research**.¹ We also request support of **\$80 million for the Cooperative Extension System** to meet the direct needs of the public related to spread of and recovery from COVID-19. The synergy between research and extension is essential. Finally, dramatic disruptions to our research talent pipeline, including the facilities/equipment that support it is critical moving forward. In the near future, we will identify research, infrastructure, and workforce areas of national importance and share them with Congress.

¹ Hatch and Evans Allen research capacity funding, Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), McIntire-Stennis forestry research, Tribal Colleges Research Grants Program (TCRGP), as well as other critical accounts.

Supporting Job-saving Supplemental Funding for Research Capacity

Regarding research capacity and competitive programs, we ask that Congress provide at least \$300 million of job-saving supplemental funding for 1) ramp-down and ramp-up costs to close and restart research activities; 2) ramp-up costs for new research related to COVID-19; 3) salaries, benefits, and other costs associated with retaining research, technical, and work-study personnel; and 4) core facilities supporting NIFA research. The COVID-19 pandemic is disrupting lab and field-based research activities. In some cases, this stoppage will create years of delay in critical agricultural research and severely disrupt the talent pipeline for agri-business and food supply chains.

Supplemental funding will support capacity and competitive grant activities for up to 12 months for existing grantees and institutions managing programs in the Research and Education, Integrated Activities, and Farm Bill Mandatory Accounts. These programs fund state agricultural experiment stations and high-caliber research across the United States' agriculture, food, and natural resource sectors. Supplemental funding is needed to sustain our research capacity that is the underpinning of a highly responsive agriculture enterprise and allows the U.S. to pivot to address emerging threats to the global and domestic food supply, public health, and rural economic development.

Accelerating the United States' Cooperative Extension System Service and Response

The Cooperative Extension System (CES) is part of the 112 land-grant institutions located throughout the nation. Cooperative Extension System educators and agents have built long-lasting and trusted partnerships with individuals, community organizations, and local businesses. Due to the increased need to reach people in their homes and the fact that nearly all educators and agents are themselves working from home, it is imperative that Cooperative Extension increase its capability to virtually provide essential programming and engagement services in ways that can effectively reach clientele who have varying degrees of access to adequate broadband.

We request \$80 million for the Cooperative Extension System to meet the direct needs of the public related to spread of and recovery from COVID-19. The funding would be allocated via current Smith Lever and 1890s Institution Extension formulas, as well as through an ongoing contract for the NIFA New Technologies for Ag Extension (NTAE). The NTAE provides technical assistance to Extension agents and educators for effective delivery of virtual extension programs including educational and meeting platforms, training on new meeting formats, and customized support for scaling programs. NTAE will provide Tribal colleges with financial support and assistance.

This supplemental funding will enable CES educators and agents to: collaborate with emergency responders; develop innovative educational materials; assist business owners with loans and supply chain options; connect families to information on telemedicine, food, financial health and methods of socialization; support farmers and businesses; provide seniors with support; and work with clientele to be successful during the upcoming recovery period. With enhanced virtual learning capabilities, Cooperative Extension can strengthen its service as an educational and community backbone for individuals, families, farms, businesses, and communities in the coming months and year.

Building Food System Resilience in Post COVID America

The rapid-moving COVID-19 crisis requires new agricultural research infrastructure, facilities, and equipment to assist the country in understanding the short- and long-term impacts of the virus on our health, economy, and way of life. Innovation across our science and economic supply chains will fuel our

ability to address the current challenges and prepare for those yet to come. This will be an impactful area for investment related to stimulus funding.

Thank you in advance for considering our request.

Sincerely,

APLU
Others

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