

February XX, 2021

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Congratulations on your recent confirmation to be Agriculture Secretary for President Joseph R. Biden.

Thank you for your previous strong support of agricultural research, education, extension, innovation, and science. With the ongoing battle against COVID-19, efforts to strengthen our food system in light of the pandemic, and a re-energized focus to address climate change, we strongly urge you to continue that support for increased public investments in agricultural research and development (R&D) programs.

A recent study found that U.S. public agriculture R&D spending from 1910 to 2007 returned, on average, \$17 in benefits for every \$1 invested.¹ Increased funding of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) research and development programs will invest in our rural communities and give our farmers, ranchers, and producers the tools needed to manage current challenges they are facing, as well as future ones. By providing solutions to help mitigate and adapt to climate change, farmers can be a part of the solution while improving our Nation's food security.

The federal share of overall R&D spending as a percentage of GDP is now at its lowest point since the 1950s, and food and agriculture lags even further behind most other federal R&D areas. Agricultural research funding at the USDA has remained fairly flat over the last fifty years.² In contrast, funding for other Federal research agencies, such as the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation, has increased 10- to 20-fold during the same period. Additionally, other countries, including Brazil, China, and India, are investing heavily in agricultural science (R&D), while the United States is falling behind.³

Recently, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) released an

¹ Baldos, Uris Lantz, Frederi G. Viens, Thomas W. Hertel, and Keith O. Fuglie. R&D Spending, Knowledge Capital, and Agricultural Productivity Growth: A Bayesian Approach. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*. July 2018. 101(1): 291–310; <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajae/aay039>.

² <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/>

³ Jahn, Molly. New solutions for a changing climate: The policy imperative for public investment in agriculture R&D. August 2020. https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/report_new-solutions-for-changing-climate_0.pdf. Page 9.

analysis of the impact of the Budget Control Act on R&D funding. They concluded that the overall rate of R&D growth from 1978-2008 was 5.7%, before the Budget Control Act was signed into law.⁴ The White House Office of Management and Budget's historical data shows that R&D programs at the USDA had an overall funding growth rate of 3.5% over the same time period.⁵ AAAS concludes that the "cumulative "lost" federal funding may amount to \$96 billion for basic and applied research, and \$240 billion for total R&D. In other words, if R&D agencies had simply grown at their historical pace, the R&D budget would today be about \$33 billion or 20% larger."⁶

Increased investment in research, education, extension, and economics programs is a crucial step for the United States to reclaim our global lead in food and agricultural science. We strongly support a balanced portfolio that includes both extramural and intramural research, competitive and capacity funding, extension and outreach, and statistics and economics.

While each of our organizations may have a particular research priority, we join together in this urgent call to substantially increase public investment in food and agricultural research and science.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to working with you to advance science and innovation.

Sincerely,

⁴ <https://www.aaas.org/news/budget-control-act-may-have-cost-over-200-billion-federal-rd>

⁵ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/historical-tables/>

⁶ <https://www.aaas.org/news/budget-control-act-may-have-cost-over-200-billion-federal-rd>