February 26, 2020

Secretary Sonny Perdue
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

As president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) and Vice President for Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources, we write to thank you for your announcement last week about the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Agricultural Innovation Agenda. Land-grant universities have long been focused on these issues and we applaud USDA’s commitment to addressing them collaboratively. We welcome the opportunity to meet with you and your leadership team to discuss meaningful engagement and next steps.

APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities. With a membership of over 225 public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories APLU's agenda is built on the three pillars of increasing degree completion and academic success, advancing scientific research and expanding engagement. Annually, our U.S. member campuses enroll 4.3 million undergraduates and 1.2 million graduate students, award 1.2 million degrees, employ 1.1 million faculty and staff and conduct $46.7 billion in university-based research.

APLU institutions have been at the forefront of efforts at the core of USDA’s new Agricultural Innovation Agenda. Public research universities are leading the way to boost crop yields while mitigating the environmental impact of agriculture to ensure long-term sustainability. They are also undertaking pioneering work to address greenhouse gas emissions, limit food loss and waste, and advance renewable energy sources.

In 2017, APLU issued a report, *The Challenge of Change: Harnessing University Discovery, Engagement, and Learning to Achieve Food and Nutrition Security*, to support institutions in this work and create a dialogue around these issues. The report outlined seven challenges public and land-grant universities should address to meet rapidly growing global food demand, including: addressing crop yield plateau, reducing food waste and security, ensuring equitable food systems, and combating obesity and undernutrition that public institutions can successfully address to achieve global food and nutrition security. APLU looks forward to drawing on this critical report and expertise as we work closely with USDA to support efforts to advance agricultural innovation through public-private research collaborations, extension, and academic programming.

APLU appreciates your leadership at USDA in advancing the education, research, and extension missions of land-grant universities. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture is a central player in this agenda because of its role in supporting scientific and emerging technologies, public-private partnerships, and
training the next generation of the global agricultural and food innovation workforce. Supported by federal investment in both capacity and competitive funding through NIFA, land-grant universities, state agricultural experiment stations, and Cooperative Extension systems deliver technology, information, and cultivate a sense of community in all 50 states and U.S. territories. Land-grant universities are essential partners in achieving USDA’s mission to advance agricultural production, private sector vitality, human health, sustainability, and climate adaptation.

Our member universities are hubs of agriculture, food technologies, and economic innovation. APLU strongly agrees that there are many transformational opportunities land-grant universities can undertake to advance our agricultural production and food systems by partnering with the private sector at the local, regional, national and international levels. Our partnership with USDA and other stakeholders will define the next era of agriculture, conservation, global agribusiness, and agri-food entrepreneurship. We look forward to working with USDA in these areas as it builds out and advances the Agricultural Innovation Agenda.

We are eager be a helpful partner. Please do not hesitate to let us know where we can be of assistance. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Peter McPherson
President
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities

Douglas L. Steele
Vice President for Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities