September 16, 2020

The Honorable Lindsey Graham  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, 
and Related Programs  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, 
and Related Programs  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Graham and Ranking Member Leahy:

As president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) and former administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), I write to follow-up and provide additional context to support APLU’s Fiscal Year 2021 appropriations request for the Feed the Future Innovation Labs. APLU urges a continued strengthening of international agricultural research partnerships by providing the Feed the Future Innovation Labs with an FY21 appropriation of $60 million. We also respectfully request that the appropriation be made in the legislation rather than the committee report as has been the practice in most recent years. This support would allow the Innovation Labs to build upon their foundational role in reinforcing global economic resilience and contributing to recovery from the pandemic.

APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening and advancing the work of public universities. With a membership of 246 public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and affiliated organizations, APLU's agenda is built on the three pillars of increasing degree completion and academic success, advancing scientific research, and expanding engagement.

Currently, the 20 Feed the Future Innovation Labs, led by 13 U.S. universities in partnership with over 40 other U.S. universities, including seven Minority Serving Institutions, work with USAID missions and developing country research institutions on critical issues to advance global food security and contribute to U.S. economic and national security. The Innovation Labs are repositories of global agricultural and food system expertise, with technical skills and resources that provide critical early warnings about pests and diseases, food safety, and market issues.
The pandemic’s disruption of food and agriculture systems is reducing hard-won gains of reduced poverty and food security. The Innovation Labs are helping to reverse and buffer against these setbacks. The economic downturn from COVID-19 is projected to increase the number of food-insecure people by 22 percent to 844.5 million people. The Innovation Lab network of experts is critical for cultivating and distributing reliable, science-based information for global communities during shocks like the current pandemic, in the context of food production, processing, and distribution systems.

USAID and Feed the Future Innovation Lab personnel have worked with governments and development partners to promote a safe and functioning food system throughout the pandemic. The Labs have mobilized their extensive networks at multiple levels and across countries to mitigate pandemic impacts, manage stress in food and health systems, and reduce risk of rapid spread of COVID19. For example:

- Michigan State University developed an inventory of practical and innovative approaches to support a safe food system in global marketplaces.
- The Peanut Innovation Lab at University of Georgia is accelerating work to increase the supply of emergency foods that include peanuts, ready-to-use therapeutic food, ready-to-use-supplemental foods, and various school lunch items.
- The Innovation Lab for Nutrition at Tufts University assembled a brief for global dietitians during the COVID-19 pandemic which provided guidance for country responses related to food supplement needs as well as to identify potential disruptions in the supply chain to offset food insecurity risks.
- As many Nepalese migrants return to food insecure regions, Texas A&M University is applying technologies and analytical methods from the Innovation Lab for Small Scale Irrigation to increase production of food and offset hunger.

The increase in funding would allow Innovation Labs to address COVID-19 related threats by elevating partners’ capacity to engage virtually; supporting partners working in the field and market; and continue support for graduate students in the U.S. and partner countries. COVID-19 related efforts are unplanned activities, resulting in additional costs. These funds would also create opportunities for investment that avert current and emerging threats related to pests and disease through new partnerships.

International competitors continue to seek to displace the United States as the agricultural innovation leader by fostering greater ties with developing nations and in emerging markets. As a result, there has never been a more important time to maintain an international presence and demonstrate U.S. institutional excellence to reinforce alliances that contribute to national security and international well-being. Graduate student training is one way that the Innovation Labs contribute to food security and resilience via development and soft diplomacy. In 2019 alone, they supported 529 students, primarily at the graduate level from 39 nations. These students are future leaders in their respective countries. Funding the Innovation Labs at $60 million in FY2021 will provide support for combatting the COVID19 impacts on food security and nutrition while building capacity and resilience against new threats.
Thank you for your support of U.S. public research universities role in development.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Peter McPherson  
President  
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities