

Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Coalition

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March 8, 2011

RE: Agriculture and Food Research Initiative in the FY 11 Spending Bill

Dear Representatives and Senators:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations representing research institutions, scientists, and other agriculture stakeholders, we urge you to support funding of the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture's (NIFA) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) competitive grants program at \$280 million for FY 11. Agricultural research, education, and extension supported by AFRI, the principal competitive grants program at USDA's NIFA, drives innovation and global competitiveness. Advances in agriculture and food science would be compromised by the reduction proposed in the House's H.R. 1—a decrease of \$34.6 million from FY 10 enacted levels, reducing funding to \$227 million. This decrease would reverse the path of AFRI toward its authorized level in the 2008 Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of \$700 million. The Senate substitution of H.R. 1 (Senate Amendment 149) sets a level of support for AFRI at \$280 million, which although far short of the authorized level, is sensitive to and appropriate for today's fiscal environment.

As our economy recovers, the United States cannot afford to lose momentum in areas where it excels internationally. At \$23 billion in FY 09, the U.S. trade surplus in agriculture is higher than that of all other U.S. product groupings and almost triple the next largest category—transportationⁱ. Despite this strength, declining support for agricultural research and education jeopardizes our ability to maintain a competitive advantage in these markets. Without continued advances to drive these markets, we risk losing out to global competition.

Investments in AFRI have far reaching impacts, bolstering work performed by USDA's Agricultural Research Service, Land Grant Universities and Colleges, other academic institutions, and the private sector. A report by the Economic Research Service (ERS) found "strong and consistent evidence" that investment in agricultural research has yielded "high returns per dollar spent", citing a mean rate of return of 53%ⁱⁱ. This return means that for every dollar invested by the federal government in agricultural research, an average return of \$0.53 per year is accrued as the technology is utilized. This significant return on investment is partially due to the unique and efficient structure of the U.S. agricultural research and development system.

We therefore urge you to support AFRI in the FY 11 spending bill at \$280 million as set forth in Senate Amendment 149 to H.R. 1, released on March 4, 2011.

Thank you for considering our request. If you would like to learn more about AFRI or specific funding per state, please contact us at sciencepolicy@sciencesocieties.org.

Sincerely,

American Dairy Science Association
American Phytopathological Society
American Society for Horticultural Science
American Society for Microbiology
American Society for Nutrition
American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers
American Society of Agronomy
American Society of Animal Science
American Society of Plant Biologists
American Veterinary Medical Association
Aquatic Plant Management Society
Association of American Universities
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Biotechnology Industry Organization
Council on Food, Agricultural, and Resource Economics
Crop Science Society of America
Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology
Federation of Animal Science Societies
Institute of Food Technologists
Iowa State University
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
National Association of Plant Breeders
National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
North Central Weed Science Society
Northeastern Weed Science Society
Poultry Science Association
Society of Nematologists
Soil Science Society of America
Southern Weed Science Society
The Rodale Institute
Union of Concerned Scientists
Weed Science Society of America
Western Society of Weed Science

ⁱ USDA Foreign Agricultural Service. <http://www.fas.usda.gov/gats/default.aspx>

ⁱⁱ Fuglie, Keith O., and Paul W. Heisey. Economic Returns to Public Agricultural Research. EB-10, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. September 2007. The document can be accessed here: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/eb10/eb10.pdf>.