

RE: FY10 Agriculture Appropriations

September 14, 2009

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
2262 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro,

We, the undersigned organizations applaud the House Appropriation bill's increase in funding for USDA research, education, and extension competitive grant programs including the Organic Transitions Program and thank you for your leadership on these issues. We support increases for competitive grants in general, including competitive grants programs for sustainable and organic agriculture as well as for Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). As the FY 2010 Agriculture Appropriations Bill moves to conference, we write seeking increased support for the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) competitive grants program as well as retention of the House level for the Organic Transitions competitive grants program.

As you know, the Senate bill increased AFRI funding by \$93.7 million to \$295.2 million, increased SARE funding by \$238,000 to \$19.2 million, and held Organic Transitions level at \$1.84 million. The House bill, by contrast, increased AFRI by \$8.5 million to \$210 million, held SARE level at \$18.97 million, and increased Organic Transitions \$3.16 million to \$5 million.

The undersigned groups support substantially increased funding for AFRI along the lines of the Senate bill but we urge you to adopt a conference position of raising competitive grants programs equitably, including \$25 million for SARE and \$5 million for Organic Transitions.

SARE is a truly unique program within the USDA REE competitive grant program portfolio. It is the *only* competitive grants program that requires the active involvement of farmers in every project funded. Farmer involvement and SARE's regional structure ensures that SARE research is useful and relevant to farmers in each SARE region. As a result, farmer support for the work of SARE is unparalleled among USDA research programs.

SARE is the *only* research competitive grant program willing to make and administer small on-farm research grants that can pay huge dividends and provide on-the-ground results that farmers can immediately use to improve their farming operations. SARE is the *only* competitive grants program to focus entirely on triple bottom line sustainability. SARE supported on-farm trials on everything from farmstead cheese, community supported agriculture, on-farm bio-diesel production, grass based livestock production, organic agriculture and many other practices have brought these ideas and practices from the fringe into the mainstream.

SARE plays a unique role in ushering in each new generation of on-farm innovation and sustainable agriculture researchers. It is at the cutting edge of methods to improve the profitability of farms in ways that solve environmental and community economic development problems. The SARE grants of today are likely to be the focus of AFRI grants tomorrow, helping to transition the whole agricultural system toward greater sustainability.

On the ground, SARE funding has made possible more than 1,160 research projects in the Northeast that emphasize the viability of local food systems, value added processing, energy conservation as well as new crop varieties and livestock production systems. Recent SARE projects in the Northeast have focused on model food safety procedures in farmstead sheep cheese production; preparing small and mid-size growers of fruits and vegetables for on farm food safety certification; farmer led trials of wheat breeding techniques and non-hybrid seed varieties suitable to the climates and soils of the Northeast; and evaluating the use of used vegetable oil to power a small scale maple sugaring operation. Each year, one quarter of total SARE funds goes to the Northeast, a much higher allocation than the vast majority of research and extension programs.

In conference, we urge you to increase SARE research and education funding to at least \$20 million and SARE extension funding to at least \$5 million, for a total of \$25 million.

We congratulate the House for including an increase in funding for Organic Transitions. In conference, we urge you to retain the \$5 million for Organic Transitions.

This competitive grants program is currently focused on multi-year integrated projects examining the effects of organic systems on water quality. Increasing the appropriation will allow the organic program to cooperate with natural resource programs to provide environmental solutions in an integrated program with strong farmer delivery mechanisms built in. The increase will also help bring total USDA support for organic research and extension closer to a share of the overall research budget more closely reflecting the organic share of the market, though even with the increase it would still lag behind real world trends in agriculture.

Sincerely,