



**Written Statement on FY 2020 Requests  
Submitted to Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA, & Related Agencies  
United States House of Representatives – April 5, 2019**

Alyssa Charney, NSAC Senior Policy Specialist ([acharney@sustainableagriculture.net](mailto:acharney@sustainableagriculture.net))

Thank you for the opportunity to present our FY 2020 funding requests and thank you for your work on the FY19 minibus, which addressed many of our priorities for FY19. On behalf of our member organizations from around the country, we submit the following requests for the Department of Agriculture, in the order they appear in the appropriations bill:

**OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY**

**Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach.** We urge you to provide **\$10 million in discretionary funding** for the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach (FOTO) program (7 U.S.C. 2279), split equally between the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) (7 U.S.C. 2279(d)), and the Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged Program (2501 Program) (7 U.S.C. 2279(c)). Section 12301 of the 2018 Farm Bill created FOTO in order to strengthen USDA's efforts to train and assist beginning, veteran, tribal and other underserved farmers. FOTO combines two of USDA's flagship training and technical assistance programs – BRRDP and 2501. The 2501 Program levels the playing field for our nation's military veterans and minority farmers by providing the tools they need to thrive and compete in the agricultural economy; however, additional investments must be made to help meet demand, which far exceeds available dollars. We urge you to provide **\$10 million in additional discretionary funding for FOTO**, split equally between 2501 and BFRDP to restore the programs to their previous funding levels and help meet demand.

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**

**Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE).** We urge you to provide **\$45 million** for this competitive grants research program, which has helped turn farmer-driven research, education, and extension into profitable practices for nearly three decades. The program consistently yields practical farm innovations, but due to increased demand and limited funding, USDA has been able to fund only 10 percent of SARE pre-proposals in recent years. Increasing funding to \$45 million is critical to help expand research on soil health, drought resilience, cover cropping, and rotational grazing, and increased research to support beginning farmers. The increase would also expand SARE's graduate student research program, which is instrumental in creating the next generation of agricultural scientists.

**Organic Transitions Integrated Research Program.** We request **\$8 million** for innovative research to assist farmers transitioning to organic. This funding level will build upon

the \$6 million provided in FY 2019, in order to keep the organic sector from falling further behind in efforts to obtain a fair share of the research budget.

**Food Safety Outreach Program (FSOP).** We urge you to provide **\$10 million** to help small and mid-size farms and processors come into compliance with new food safety requirements under the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). We commend you for providing \$8 million for FSOP in FY 2019; however, the new FSMA regulations are bringing many farmers and small processors under FDA's regulatory purview for the first time, and additional funding is still needed. With approximately 100,000 farmers impacted by FSMA and seeking support in complying with these new regulations, the need for targeted outreach, education, and technical assistance for our nation's farmers has never been greater.

**Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network.** We urge you to provide **\$10 million** for the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN). Farming is a high-stress occupation, and financial risk, volatile markets, unpredictable weather, heavy workloads, and the prolonged downturn in the farm economy all place a significant strain on a farmer or rancher's mental and emotional well-being. Farmers have a much higher rate of suicide than any other occupation, and this is exacerbated by mental health professional shortages in rural areas. The 2008 Farm Bill established FRSAN to provide grants to extension services and nonprofit organizations that offer stress assistance programs to farmers, ranchers and others engaged in agriculture-related occupations. The 2018 Farm Bill reauthorized FRSAN, and authorized appropriations up to \$10 million per year, and we urge you to fully fund the program in FY 2020.

**Beginning Farmer and Rancher and Development Program.** As requested above, we urge you to provide **\$10 million in discretionary funding** for the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach (FOTO) program (7 U.S.C. 2279), split equally between the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) (7 U.S.C. 2279(d)), and the Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged Program (2501 Program) (7 U.S.C. 2279(c)). Training for new farmers is essential to ensure they have the technical and business skills to start a successful farm operation, and BFRDP is the only federal program exclusively dedicated to training the next generation of farmers and ranchers. BFRDP provides competitively awarded grants to academic institutions, state extension services, producer groups, and community organizations to support and train new farmers and ranchers across the country. In FY 2020, BRDP will have \$15 million in mandatory funding, which is \$5 below its previous funding level. We urge you to provide **\$10 million in additional discretionary funding for FOTO**, split equally between BFRDP and 2501, to restore the programs to their previous funding levels and help meet demand.

#### **AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE**

**Local Agriculture Market Program (Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program).** The 2018 Farm Bill created the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) (7 U.S.C. 1621 et seq), which combines two long-standing programs, the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) and the Value-Added Producers Grant Program (VAPG), to strengthen, streamline and better coordinate USDA efforts to support the growth and expansion of domestic markets for local/regional food and value-added agriculture. FMLFPP is

a competitive grants program that funds direct-to-consumer marketing strategies as well as local and regional food business enterprises that act as intermediaries between producers and consumers by aggregating, storing, processing, and/or distributing locally or regionally produced food products to meet market demand. We urge you to provide **\$20 million in additional discretionary funding for LAMP**, split equally between VAPG and FMLFPP, to restore the programs to their previous funding levels and help meet demand.

### **FARM SERVICE AGENCY**

**Direct and Guaranteed Farm Ownership and Operating Loans and Individual Development Accounts.** Direct and Guaranteed Farm Service Agency (FSA) loans provide crucial capital for beginning farmers and others not adequately served by commercial lenders. The 2018 Farm Bill increased maximum loan limits for both direct and guaranteed loans, which will inherently trigger increased demand for loan funding. If appropriations do not reflect this increased demand, the result will be fewer but larger loans – shutting out small and beginning farmers and leaving them few other financing options to cover their annual operating expenses. Any shortfall in FSA loan funding will almost certainly send a devastating ripple effect throughout the farm community. **As Congress looks towards FY 2020, we urge you to work with the Administration to ensure they have the funding levels necessary to meet anticipated loan demand across their direct and guaranteed portfolios given recent increases to loan caps.**

### **NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE**

**Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA).** CTA, a subset of Conservation Operations, is the backbone of USDA's conservation programs. Through CTA, NRCS field staff work with farmers to develop and implement conservation plans to conserve resources on their farms, to assess conservation practices and systems, and to collect, analyze, and disseminate data on the condition of the nation's natural resources. We support level funding for CTA by providing **at least \$790.9 million in FY20**. This request includes NRCS's contribution to the Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) Business Center, and we urge appropriators to ensure that NRCS continues to receive the support it needs for CTA within Conservation Operations, even under the centralization of functions within FPAC.

### **RURAL BUSINESS - COOPERATIVE SERVICE**

**Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA).** For nearly 30 years, the ATTRA program has provided practical, cutting edge information to farmers, extension agents, and others. In 2017, over 770,000 users accessed information from the ATTRA website, and ATTRA helped clients over 38,000 times with technical assistance materials. For FY 2019, we urge you to again provide **\$3.75 million** in funding for ATTRA. This will support the continued operation of ATTRA's *Armed to Farm* program, which trains returning military veterans to farm.

**Local Agriculture Market Program (Value-Added Producer Grants).** The 2018 Farm Bill created the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) (7 U.S.C. 1621 et seq), which combines two long-standing programs, the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) and the Value-Added Producers Grant Program (VAPG), to strengthen, streamline and

better coordinate USDA efforts to support the growth and expansion of domestic markets for local/regional food and value-added agriculture. VAPG offers competitive grants to farmers and ranchers to fund business and marketing plans, feasibility studies, or working capital to operate a value-added business. VAPG recipients have higher survivability rates when compared with small businesses in general. Despite its proven success as a driver of rural economic growth, without future discretionary funding, annual VAPG investments will shrink, as farmers are struggling and need to generate additional income on their farms. We urge you to provide **\$20 million in additional discretionary funding for LAMP**, split equally between VAPG and FMLFPP, to restore the programs to their previous funding levels and help meet demand.

**Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program.** Very small businesses are the lifeblood of rural America, yet small entrepreneurs often struggle to access credit and business training. Fortunately, USDA operates a rural development program — the Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program (RMAP) — aimed at addressing this gap. RMAP provides loan capital and grants to non-profit organizations, community-based financial institutions, and local economic development councils, which in turn provide technical assistance services and microloans to rural owner-operated small businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs in their states and local communities. Unfortunately, the 2018 Farm Bill did not provide renewed mandatory funding for RMAP, but we thank appropriators for providing \$3 million in discretionary funding in FY19. We urge you to maintain level funding at **\$3 million for RMAP in FY20**.

#### GENERAL PROVISIONS

**No Changes in Mandatory Spending for Conservation Programs.** A suite of distinct but interrelated farm bill programs, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), work together to give farmers the tools they need to protect and rebuild soil, provide clean water, and enhance wildlife habitat. We commend you for leaving farm bill conservation program funding fully intact in FY 2018 and 2019, and we urge you to do the same in FY 2020. Cuts to farm bill conservation programs would severely limit the number of qualified farmers able to access the programs, leading to more pollution as well as less productive and profitable farmlands.

**Prohibit the relocation and reorganization of the Economic Research Service and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture.** Last year, USDA announced the proposed relocation of the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), as well as the realignment of ERS out of the research mission area of USDA. The proposed relocation is already having serious implications for staff capacity, and a loss of the most skilled and senior staff. Additionally, moving ERS under the Office of the Secretary would compromise and politicize the very federal agency responsible for impartial food and agricultural economic analysis. We urge you to withhold appropriations for such a move outside of the National Capital Region, and to prohibit the realignment of ERS. We thank you for including report language in FY19 directing USDA to delay indefinitely the realignment of ERS within the Office of the Chief Economist and to provide a detailed analysis of cost estimates of the proposed move of both agencies. While an important signal to the Administration, we urge you to include stronger, binding language in FY 20 to ensure that both agencies remain in the National Capital Region and within USDA's Research Mission Area.