



**Written Statement on FY 2019 Requests  
Submitted to Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA, & Related Agencies  
United States House of Representatives – April 13, 2018**

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Thank you for the opportunity to present our FY 2019 funding requests and thank you for your recently completed work on FY18 Omnibus, which addressed many of our priorities for FY18. On behalf of our 47 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**

**Office of Advocacy and Outreach.** The Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO) coordinates policy and outreach across USDA in four vital areas – small farms, beginning, socially disadvantaged, and veteran farmers. The President’s FY19 Budget Request and the FY 2018 omnibus appropriations bill create a new Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement (OPPE) by consolidating OAO with the Office of Tribal Relations (OTR) and the Office of Military Veteran Liaison (OMVL). We have serious concerns about this consolidation and the elimination of appropriations language referring to OAO. The farm bill directs USDA to retain an OAO, OTR, and OMVL, and we fail to see how this consolidation conforms to that directive. If the consolidation moves forward, we urge strong congressional oversight to ensure that the unique functions, purposes, and characteristics of each office are retained. We urge that **\$4.7 million** be provided for the OPPE, including at least **\$1.2 million** for OAO.

**Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers (2501 Program).** We applaud you for including \$3 million in discretionary funding for the 2501 Program in the FY18 omnibus, and we urge you to build upon that appropriation by providing **\$10 million in discretionary funding for FY19.** 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.

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**

**Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program.** We strongly urge you to provide **\$40 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 8 percent of SARE pre-proposals in recent years. Increasing funding to \$40 million is critical to help expand research on soil health, drought resilience, cover cropping, and rotational grazing, and increase 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 **\$5 million** for innovative research to assist farmers transitioning to organic. This continuation of the FY18 level will keep the organic sector from falling further behind in efforts to obtain a fair share of the research budget. According to USDA's own data, the percentage of AFRI funding dedicated to organic research has averaged about one-tenth of one percent annually from 2011-2015, which makes dedicated funding for organic research all the more necessary.

**Food Safety Outreach Program.** 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 \$7 million for FSOP in FY 2018; 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 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 credit. This is critical in light of current low commodity prices and tightening credit markets. We are pleased that the FY18 omnibus continued robust funding for FSA loan programs, and we urge you to work with USDA to identify the funding needed in FY19. Similarly, the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Individual Development Account (IDA) program, if funded, will enable limited-resource beginning farmers and ranchers to save for asset-building purchases, including equipment and breeding stock and take pressure off of other FSA loan programs. We support fully funding Direct and Guaranteed FSA loans, and \$1.5 million for the IDA program.

#### **NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE**

**Conservation Technical Assistance.** 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 **\$774.4 million for FY 2019**. We are pleased the Congress rejected the President's FY 2018 proposal to significantly limit CTA, and we urge you to once again reject the proposed FY 2019 cuts to CTA.

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

**Overall Statement on Proposed Cuts to RB-CS Programs.** Once again, the Administration has called for the elimination of nearly all funding for Rural Business and Cooperative Service programs. The Administration's proposal would gut USDA's economic development toolbox. These rural business programs have a proven track record of success – both in terms of business survivability rates and in terms of job creation – and the Administration's proposed cuts reflect a lack of understanding of their function and impact.

**Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas.** 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 **\$2.75 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.

**Value-Added Producer Grants.** 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, just as farmers are

struggling and need to generate additional income on their farms. We commend you for providing **\$15 million** in discretionary funding for VAPG in the FY18 omnibus and urge you to maintain that level, and make no changes to mandatory program spending for FY19.

**Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program.** RMAP provides business training and microloans to rural, owner-operated, small businesses with up to ten employees. It targets very small business development, the leading job creator in rural communities, and is the only federal program that finances the capitalization of revolving microloan funds for rural areas. **We request \$5 million in discretionary funding for this program.**

#### **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 we urge you to do the same in FY 2019. 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. It would also infringe upon the ongoing work of the authorizing committees, as they work to write the 2018 Farm Bill. We urge you to refrain from making changes in mandatory program spending to these critical conservation programs in FY 2019.