



Competitive Funding for Agricultural Research: National Research Initiative

April 2005

Citizens of the USA have entrusted our government with the responsibility of promoting and ensuring safe and secure food, fiber and natural resources. Indeed, agriculture in the USA is highly productive and the envy of the world. This position was achieved because past investments into agricultural research led to advances that placed our producers, processors and manufacturers at the cutting edge of agricultural technology. *To ensure continued safety and security of our food, fiber and natural resources, novel solutions to new challenges faced in today's agriculture must be explored and developed. **Investment in agricultural research is needed to achieve these solutions.***

The National Research Initiative (NRI) within the USDA has the unique mission to competitively fund the needed fundamental research to solve current agricultural problems and to anticipate future needs. The NRI has sponsored research projects that have dramatically impacted agricultural science and technology, and the agency is highly respected within the research community because of the very competitive process used to identify projects for funding. This process involves extensive peer-review of creative projects that are initiated by investigators. Although originally authorized at \$500 million in 1990, the actual allocation for NRI has never approached this level; the highest allocation reached was \$179.5 million for FY 2005. ***The agency remains chronically and significantly under funded.*** As a consequence, only a few projects are funded out of many qualified proposals with potential to fundamentally impact agriculture. This situation seriously threatens the long-term health of the US agricultural enterprise, delays progress on important issues such as managing agricultural wastes, alternative energy sources and agricultural genomics and will, unless rectified, reduce international competitiveness.

Solutions:

- ***Increase funding for competitive research.*** Some means to accomplish this are:
 - Support the President's request for 2006 of \$250 million funding for NRI
 - Support the inclusion of funds for agricultural research in current and future disaster relief and defense packages.
- ***Ensure the status of the NRI as the premiere program for competitive agricultural research funding to address our needs and voids in knowledge in agriculture.***
 - Support NRI as the lead agency in critical research initiatives such as plant and microbial genomics, sustainable agriculture, and crop biosecurity.