



## Competitive Funding for Agricultural Research in the USA National Research Initiative

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 and unsolved challenges faced in today's agriculture must be explored and developed. Investment in agricultural research is needed to achieve these solutions.*

The agency within the USDA that has the unique mission to fund the needed fundamental research to solve current agricultural problems and to anticipate future needs is the National Research Initiative (NRI). 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 highly 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 \$166 million for FY 2003. *The agency is and has been chronically and significantly under funded.* In addition to the 644 NRI grants awarded in FY2003, 850 proposals totaling \$333 million in needed support were ranked as fundable but were declined due to lack of budget. This proposal-based success rate of 21.5% is substantially lower than that of other federal agencies. This situation seriously threatens the long-term health of the US agricultural enterprise, delays progress on important issues such as 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 2004 of \$200 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.*** The recent elevation of the Chief Scientist to Science Advisor status was a step towards recognizing the function of the NRI as the primary competitive granting agency of USDA.
  - Support NRI as the lead agency in critical research initiatives such as plant and microbial genomics, sustainable agriculture and crop biosecurity.