

Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Coalition

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February 16, 2011

RE: Agriculture and Food Research Initiative in the FY 11 Spending Bill

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations representing research institutions, scientists, and other agriculture stakeholders, we urge you to restore funding to the *USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture's (NIFA) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI)* competitive grants program to \$262 million for FY 11. Agricultural research, education, and extension supported by AFRI, the premier competitive grants program at USDA, drive American innovation and global competitiveness and would be significantly compromised by the funding reduction proposed in H.R. 1 (a decrease of \$34.6 million from FY 10 enacted levels, reducing funding to \$227 million). Such a cut would hinder advances in agricultural and food science as well as the deployment of new technologies, both of which support energy security, improved health, and economic recovery—the most critical priorities for our nation today.

The United States cannot afford to lose momentum; we need the novel approaches that AFRI delivers to provide options for sustainable bioenergy production, improved human nutrition and a reduction in obesity, as well as more rapid recovery of our nation's rural economies. The funds invested through AFRI have far reaching impact, bolstering work performed by USDA's Agricultural Research Service, Land Grant Universities and Colleges, private colleges and universities, and the private sector. Furthermore, a report by the Economic Research Service (ERS) found "strong and consistent evidence" that investment in agricultural research has yielded "high returns per dollar spent", citing a mean rate of return of 53%ⁱ. **This return means that for every dollar invested by the federal government on agricultural research, an average return of \$.53 per year is accrued as the technology is utilized.** As a result, the American public continues to see the benefits from these investments for several decades.

At \$23 billion in FY 09, the U.S. trade surplus in agriculture is higher than that of all other U.S. product groupings and almost triple the next largest category (transportation)ⁱⁱ. Declining support for agricultural research and education supported by AFRI jeopardizes these markets, which are fundamental to the health of our economy; without continued advances to drive these markets, we risk losing out to global competition. We therefore urge you to support AFRI in the FY 11 spending bill at a flat-funded level of \$262 million (AFRI is authorized at \$700 million in the 2008 Food, Conservation, and Energy Act). Funding AFRI at \$262 million or more is absolutely critical to maintain the nation's competitive agricultural and food research enterprise, which, in turn, ensures the United States' economic vitality.

Thank you for considering our request. If you would like to learn more about AFRI or specific funding per state, please contact us at sciencepolicy@sciencesocieties.org.

Sincerely,

American Dairy Science Association
American Phytopathological Society
American Society for Horticultural Science
American Society for Microbiology
American Society for Nutrition
American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers
American Society of Agronomy
American Society of Animal Science
American Society of Plant Biologists
American Veterinary Medical Association
Aquatic Plant Management Society
Association of American Universities
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Biotechnology Industry Organization
Council on Food, Agricultural, and Resource Economics
Crop Science Society of America
Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology
Federation of Animal Science Societies
Institute of Food Technologists
Iowa State University
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
National Association of Plant Breeders
National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
North Central Weed Science Society
Northeastern Weed Science Society
Poultry Science Association
Society of Nematologists
Soil Science Society of America
Southern Weed Science Society
The Rodale Institute
Union of Concerned Scientists
Weed Science Society of America
Western Society of Weed Science

ⁱ Fuglie, Keith O., and Paul W. Heisey. Economic Returns to Public Agricultural Research. EB-10, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. September 2007. The document can be accessed here: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/eb10/eb10.pdf>.
ⁱⁱ USDA Foreign Agricultural Service. <http://www.fas.usda.gov/gats/default.aspx>