

Science Policy Office

502 C St. NE Washington, DC 20002 | Phone: 202-408-5558 | sciencepolicy@sciencesocieties.org

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Headline: It's time to ask Congress to #SupportAgResearch!

Members of Congress are currently working on their funding requests for fiscal year (FY) 2021. Now is the time for constituents like you to reach out to your members of Congress to help shape their funding priorities. Tell them to prioritize food, agriculture, and natural resources research programs in FY2021.

For the past five years, two members of Congress have stepped forward to champion competitive grants program within USDA-NIFA, the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). Representatives Jimmy Panetta (CA-D), and Rodney Davis (IL-R) are circulating a "Dear Colleague" letter in the U.S. House of Representatives which asks the House Appropriations Committee to provide strong support for AFRI in the FY2021 appropriations process.

They have also put forward a second letter in support of the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AgARDA). Modeled after DARPA, AgARDA is a new a pilot program that targets high-risk, high-reward agriculture R&D projects.

Please contact your Representative today and ask them to support food, agriculture, and natural resources research by signing one or both of these important "Dear Colleague" letter.

The deadline to sign on to the letters is Tuesday, March 10, so we must act now.

You can make a difference. Be a voice for research and contact your Representative today!

Headline: Support Agriculture Research in FY21

As a constituent living in your district, I urge you to support robust funding for agriculture research at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) by cosigning two letters to House Appropriations Chairs and Ranking Members. The first letter requests robust funding for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), the nation's leading competitive grants program for the agricultural sciences. The second letter urges USDA to provide funding for and include report language to support the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AGARDA), a pilot program authorized in the 2018 Farm Bill.

Currently, agricultural research is one of the best investments our government can make, and yet it accounts for a mere 2% of total federal R&D spending. A recent study estimates there is a \$20 return for every one dollar invested in agricultural research through USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), specifically the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI).

Scientific advances that result from AFRI-funded research can enhance the competitiveness of American agriculture, ensure the safety of the nation's food supply, improve the nutrition and health of communities, sustain the environment and natural resources, and bolster the economy. However, due



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to budget constraints, AFRI awards have supported only about a quarter of the science that the program's expert review panels deemed worthy.

Looking ahead, we must not only build on the robust investment in AFRI made in FY2020; we must also look to new avenues to address the growing challenges in the agriculture industry, from changing climates to infectious disease outbreaks to labor shortages. The AGARDA presents a unique opportunity to pursue novel, early-stage innovative agricultural research focused on finding solutions to these challenges.

We believe that the need for competitive agricultural research funding is clear: disease, pests, market volatility, climate variability, labor instability, and water quality are just a handful of challenges which make agriculture an enterprise that relies disproportionately on good science to thrive. Significant investments in AFRI and AGARDA are critically needed to support the best scientists and innovators working in the crucial fields of agriculture.

Therefore, we hope you will join us in signing the below letters to House Appropriations Chairs and Ranking Members requesting robust support. Increased funding for AFRI and AGARDA will ensure that U.S. agriculture remains competitive, and it will narrow the gap between current productivity and future anticipated need.

If you would like to sign either or both letters, contact Riya Mehta with Representative Jimmy Panetta (Riya.Mehta@mail.house.gov) or Janie Costa (Janie.Costa@mail.house.gov) with Representative Rodney Davis by March 10, 2020.

AFRI SUPPORT LETTER:

Dear Chairwoman Lowey, Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Granger and Ranking Member Fortenberry:

Thank you for your continued support for competitive agricultural research at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA). As you meet to consider funding for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, we urge you to sustain this critical effort by supporting research, education and extension programs that help to ensure that the United States can remain globally competitive in food and agriculture.

NIFA's Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) is a vital competitive grants program that focuses on six priority areas outlined by the Farm Bill that include plant and animal health, production and products; food safety, nutrition and health; bioenergy, natural resources and environment; agriculture systems and technology; economics and rural communities. Increased investments in these key areas of



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research will drive the technological change that is critical to maintaining the United States ability to spur innovation for the future.

In Fiscal Years 2012-2016, the USDA-NIFA Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) review process identified \$4.9 billion in grants worthy of funding. However, with a limited annual budget, the program could only award \$1.3 billion—about a quarter of the science that the program’s expert panels deemed worthy. Grants provided by AFRI are important to research institutions of all types, not only providing critical funding to land-grant universities, but also to public non-land-grant universities, private colleges and universities, private research foundations, industry and individuals. Together these entities continue the to achieve the program’s goals of funding research that protects, secures and improves our food and agriculture and natural resources systems to meet our growing agricultural needs and managing efficient food systems.

Agriculture research only accounts for about 2 percent of federal research and development spending, however the rate of return on these public investments in agricultural research range from 20 to 60 percent. In FY2020, the House-passed appropriations bill included \$460 million for AFRI, and ultimately was enacted at \$425 million. Considering the President’s FY2021 budget request of \$600 million for AFRI, an increase of \$175 million above the enacted levels, we respectfully request further robust increases to build on the important work made possible by the Committee's prior support.

Thank you for your leadership in ensuring that the necessary funds to protect animals, crops, and people will continue to be available and that this important research can continue.

Sincerely,

Rodney Davis

Member of Congress

Jimmy Panetta

Member of Congress

Suzan DelBene

Member of Congress

AgARDA SUPPORT LETTER:

Dear Chairwoman Lowey, Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Granger and Ranking Member Fortenberry:



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Thank you for your continued support for competitive agricultural research at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). As you meet to consider funding for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, we urge you to provide funding and include report language to support the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AGARDA), authorized in Section 7132 of the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill).

The domestic agriculture industry faces challenges on several fronts, from changing climates to infectious disease outbreaks to labor shortages. Many of these challenges can be addressed through the targeted acceleration of novel, early stage innovative agricultural research. In several cases, however, this type of research cannot be undertaken by the private sector alone; the federal government must step in to alleviate the technological and financial uncertainties that come with seeking solutions to high-risk, high-reward research questions.

The AGARDA pilot program has the capacity to support a diverse set of research projects, from projects that help automate the harvesting of specialty crops to projects that develop countermeasures to animal and plant diseases. Additionally, the program is allowed special authorities through which USDA can explore creative public-private partnerships and funding avenues to support innovative concepts and potential commercialization.

As Congress strives to support our nation's farmers and ranchers succeed in the twenty-first century, we request robust funding to support the establishment of the AGARDA pilot program. Additionally, we urge you to include report language that requires USDA to quickly establish and fill the position of Director of AGARDA within the Office of the Chief Scientist. We also request report language that strongly encourages USDA to complete the strategic plan for AGARDA, as directed by Section 7132 of the 2018 Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

Jimmy Panetta

Member of Congress

Rodney Davis

Member of Congress

