



American Society of Agronomy • Crop Science Society of America • Soil Science Society of America

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May 5, 2022

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Agriculture  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
709 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Agriculture  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
338 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

**RE: FY2023 Appropriations—Support for USDA Research, Education, and Economics Mission Area**

Dear Chairwoman Baldwin and Ranking Member Hoeven:

Thank you for your leadership and support for agriculture research, which touches on many important facets of American life, such as mitigating climate change, maintaining a robust and equitable food system, and keeping farmers productive and sustainable.

The American Society of Agronomy (ASA), Crop Science Society of America (CSSA), and Soil Science Society of America (SSSA) represent more than 8,000 scientists and students, 13,500 Certified Crop Advisers (CCA), and more than 700 Certified Professional Soil Scientist (CPSS). We are the largest coalition of scientists and professionals dedicated to the agronomic, crop, and soil science disciplines in the United States. We are supportive of the President's budget request of \$4 billion for Research, Education, and Economics (REE) at the Department of Agriculture (USDA) in FY 2023, specifically:

**\$1.9 billion in top-line funding for the Agricultural Research Service (ARS).** ARS is the government's premier agriculture research institution. ARS scientists conduct high-priority research at more than 90 locations across the country, and its world-renowned facilities are used to pioneer agricultural advancements. ARS is uniquely suited to conduct research that requires long-term investments with high-impact payoffs while maintaining the capacity and readiness to respond to emerging and pressing challenges.

Within our ARS request is \$112 million for research operations and management of National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF) in Manhattan, Kansas. As ARS assumes ownership and operational authority of this new, one-of-a-kind facility, it is vitally important that the agency's account is increased so that this expanded responsibility does not come at the expense of ARS's four existing National Programs. Also included in this request, is \$15 million for a new Big Data Initiative. In order for USDA to meet the critical data needs of a high-speed network, high-performance computing, and big data storage, additional support must be provided.

**National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).** We strongly support NIFA's suite of extramural programs that enable colleges and universities to drive innovations, expand outreach, and develop the next generation workforce. Within NIFA, our priorities include:

**\$700 million for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI).** AFRI is USDA's flagship competitive grants program, supporting research, education, and extension across the food and agriculture value chain. AFRI funding supports foundational and applied research projects in six Farm Bill-directed priority areas: 1) plant health and production, 2) animal health and production, 3) food safety and nutrition, 4) natural resources and the environment, 5) agricultural systems and technology, and 6) agriculture economics and rural communities. This investment is aimed at addressing some of our nation's most urgent challenges: climate change adaptation and mitigation, agricultural supply chain disruptions, rural prosperity, and nutrition insecurity. At its current funding level, AFRI can only support about a third of the projects review panels recommend for funding, leaving invaluable discoveries orphaned on the cutting room floor.

**\$50 million for the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AgARDA).** The world has witnessed a dramatic increase in existential threats to agriculture – disease and pest outbreaks, variable and extreme weather caused by climate change, and supply chain disruptions. Current funding models at USDA address these issues through hypothesis-driven proposals that result in incremental advances over time. However, the current challenges facing our food and agricultural system are such that a new, innovative funding mechanism is needed. The 2018 Farm Bill authorized AgARDA to address challenges that threaten the stability and economic viability of agriculture. Modeled after the successful Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the unique funding model of AgARDA can accelerate innovative, high-risk, high-reward research and development in areas where industry is unlikely to invest.

**\$5 million for Research Equipment Grants.** The 2018 Farm Bill included a competitive grants program for research equipment at colleges and universities. Agricultural researchers with innovative and exciting ideas may require large or specialized equipment for their research. However, there is no clear path to obtain equipment funding through existing programs – forcing many scientists to abandon valuable research projects. The Equipment Grant Program provides a mechanism to increase access to shared-use special purpose equipment that can support research, training, and extension goals at institutions of higher education.

**\$280 million for Hatch Act formula funding.** Hatch funding supports agricultural experiment stations at our nation's land-grant colleges and universities. This funding addresses high-priority research needs to help farmers through droughts and floods, combat pests and pathogens, and conserve soil and water.

**\$340 million for Smith-Lever 3(b) and (c) funding.** Smith-Lever funding supports the cooperative extension program, a vital link between land-grant university scientists and agricultural producers, communities, consumers, families, and others who directly benefit from the latest innovations.

ASA, CSSA, SSSA have made the commitment to enhancing the experiences, opportunities, and safety of all Society members by creating a diverse, inclusive, and equitable environment in our scientific fields of study. The USDA REE mission area can play an invaluable role in addressing the equity challenges facing minority and underrepresented groups within the agricultural research workforce. We know that students and researchers from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to choose a field with unreliable funding. Robust federal funding for the broad suite of USDA research programs can advance a more representative and equitable agricultural research enterprise by bolstering the student pipeline, expanding educational programs and grants - especially for MSIs, expanding resources for early career

researchers, and facilitating collaborations with diverse stakeholders to address existential threats, such as climate change.

The productivity and economic prosperity of American agriculture seen today is built on decades of investments in agricultural research and innovation. To address the current and emerging challenges and to build a resilient and equitable agricultural system for the future, we must, not just maintain, but grow the investment in USDA research. Thank you for your consideration. For additional information or to learn more about ASA, CSSA, and SSSA, please contact Rachel Owen at [rowen@sciencesocieties.org](mailto:rowen@sciencesocieties.org) or 608-268-4965.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luther Smith', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Luther Smith, Interim CEO  
American Society of Agronomy  
Soil Science Society of America  
Crop Science Society of America

Cc: Members of the Senate Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA, and Related Agencies