



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

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March 11, 2020

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
Chairman, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, FDA, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development, FDA, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: FY2021 Appropriations—Support for USDA Research, Education, and Economics Mission Area

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Fortenberry:

Thank you for your leadership and support of agriculture research in the final fiscal year (FY) 2020 appropriations bill.

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 over 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 support the following areas of the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area in FY 2021:

\$1.789 billion in top-line funding for the Agricultural Research Service (ARS). ARS is USDA's intramural, nation-wide research program that solves national agriculture problems of high priority. 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 problems.

This level of funding allows ARS's national programs to continue expanding our knowledge base, while also ensuring adequate funding for activities of the new National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF).

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:

\$480 million for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). AFRI is the premier competitive grants program that seeks to solve critical challenges in food and agricultural systems. AFRI funded research supports cutting-edge advances in emerging areas such as genomics, microbiomes, sensors and

informatics to help ensure thriving farms and a healthy nation. However, AFRI supports less than a quarter of the projects recommended for funding by review panels.

\$5 million for Research Equipment Grants. The 2018 Farm Bill included a new competitive grants program for research equipment at colleges and universities. It is authorized at \$5 million per year and limits individual grants to a maximum of \$500,000.

This addresses a critical need identified by our member scientists. Agricultural researchers with innovative and exciting ideas may require large or specialized equipment for their research. However, there is not a clear path to obtaining equipment funding through existing programs – forcing many scientists to abandon valuable research projects.

\$50 million for the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AGARDA) Pilot program. The 2018 Farm Bill authorized this new innovative program to address high-risk and long-term challenges that threaten the stability and economic viability of agriculture. AGARDA can accelerate innovative high-risk, high-reward research and development in areas where industry is unlikely to invest.

\$280 million for Hatch Act formula funding. Hatch funding supports state 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.

\$341 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.

America's incredible agricultural productivity and economic prosperity are the result of investments in science and technology. Continual scientific discoveries and innovations are needed to sustainably meet the growing demand for food around the world.

Thank you for your consideration. For additional information or to learn more about ASA, CSSA, and SSSA, please contact Karl Anderson, Director of Government Relations, at kanderson@sciencesocieties.org or 202-408-5382.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Goeser', with a stylized, flowing script.

Nicholas J. Goeser, CEO

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