

March 24, 2020

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey  
Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Lowey, Ranking Member Granger, Chair Shelby, and Ranking Member Leahy:

We are writing to urge your support of the newly-announced goal of the USDA Innovation Agenda--to stimulate innovation to substantially increase production while simultaneously cutting the environmental footprint of U.S. agriculture—by providing the highest possible FY 21 allocation for the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittees. We appreciate the constraints that you are working under to provide an emergency relief package to people and stimulus to the U.S. economy in the face of the coronavirus pandemic and ask that you consider this long-term priority.

Strong funding for the Agriculture bill, including in particular its research, education, extension, and economics programs, is a critical step toward meeting the Innovation Agenda goal and the United States reclaiming its global lead in food and agricultural science and technology. A renewed common commitment to advances in agriculture, food and nutrition, natural resources, and environmental sciences is required to improve national security, competitiveness, sustainability, climate resilience, and public health. We believe securing these interests and reaching this goal cannot be achieved absent a very substantial increase in public funding for food and agricultural research, education, extension, and economics.

With relatively stagnant public funding over many decades, the U.S. fell behind China in public agricultural research in 2009 and is now less than half of Chinese investment.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. also lags behind Western Europe and the Pacific Rim countries.<sup>2</sup> This funding lag in public R&D investment has long-term implications for America's food security, farmers' incomes, economic growth and resilience of the agricultural sector which accounts for 11 percent of total U.S. employment.<sup>3</sup>

We appreciate the constraints you face this second year of a two-year budget agreement but urge you to do as much as possible now to make possible a down payment on the major reinvestment needed in public agricultural research. We then urge you to help lead efforts next year to secure a long-term

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2016/november/us-agricultural-rd-in-an-era-of-falling-public-funding/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2016/november/us-agricultural-rd-in-an-era-of-falling-public-funding/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/ag-and-food-sectors-and-the-economy/>

budget deal that includes a major rededication to this cause of returning the U.S. to its leadership role and positioning food and agricultural science to help solve major societal challenges with respect to economic opportunity, community wellbeing, health, and the environment.

We endorse a balanced portfolio that includes both extramural and intramural research, competitive and capacity funding, extension and outreach, and statistics and economics. While each organization may have its particular research emphases and priorities, we join together in this appeal in appreciation of the urgent need to move forward on multiple fronts to increase public investment in agricultural research.

The federal share of overall R&D spending as a percentage of GDP is now at its lowest point since the 1950s and food and agriculture lags even further behind most other federal R&D areas. The Agriculture bill is the key vehicle for addressing the agricultural research essential to economic growth, food security, and shared prosperity. We urge you and your colleagues to do everything you can to ensure a sufficient 302(b) allocation for Agriculture. Doing so will allow the Agriculture Subcommittees to support the research investments necessary to meet our nation's challenges and opportunities.

Sincerely,

Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation  
Ag Forward  
American Society of Agronomy  
American Statistical Association  
Association of American Universities  
Board on Agriculture Assembly, Association of Public and Land Grant Universities  
Crop Science Society of America  
Institute of Food Technologists  
Farm Journal Foundation  
National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
Soil Science Society of America  
Supporters of Agricultural Research  
The Breakthrough Institute  
Union of Concerned Scientists

To add your group to the list, please contact Cathie Woteki at [cwoteki@iastate.edu](mailto:cwoteki@iastate.edu) or Ferd Hoefner at [fhoefner@sustainableagriculture.net](mailto:fhoefner@sustainableagriculture.net).

cc:

Speaker Pelosi  
Minority Leader McCarthy  
Major Leader McConnell  
Minority Leader Schumer

Chair Bishop  
Ranking Member Fortenberry  
Chair Hoeven  
Ranking Member Merkley