

April 20, 2020

TO: House Speaker, House Minority Leader, Senate Majority Leader, and the Senate Minority Leader

RE: Support for COVID-19 Relief and Recovery via Agriculture Research, Education, and Extension

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader McCarthy, and Minority Leader Schumer:

Thank you for your extraordinary work in passing the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The legislation provides critical support to Americans as we continue to combat this global pandemic. From the perspective of the food, fuel, fiber, and feed system, this crisis underscores the importance of the agricultural sector. Our nation's ongoing commitment—at federal, state, and local levels—to a robust, safe, affordable, and accessible food supply is paramount.

**As Congress considers the next supplemental appropriations package, we urge you to provide the necessary resources to our agricultural research, education, and extension system and specifically ask for \$380 million for the USDA *National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)*.** This request reflects a commitment to agriculture, families, businesses, and communities. It includes **\$300 million of job-saving support for capacity and competitive research**<sup>1</sup> and is consistent with the research community's broader recommendations<sup>2</sup> across the science agencies. These funds will ensure research crucial to our agriculture and food systems is not lost due to pandemic-related delays and disruptions in data collection. We find the synergy between research and extension to be essential. The request also supports an **\$80 million request for the Cooperative Extension System** to meet the direct needs of the public related to spread of and recovery from COVID-19. Finally, dramatic disruptions to our research talent pipeline, including the facilities and equipment that support it, will require additional support. We are working to identify research, infrastructure, and workforce areas of national importance and share them with Congress.

#### **Supporting Job-saving Supplemental Funding for Research Capacity**

***Regarding research capacity and competitive programs, we ask that Congress provide at least \$300 million of job-saving supplemental funding for 1) ramp-down and ramp-up costs to close and restart research activities; 2) salaries, benefits, and other costs associated with retaining research, technical, and work-study personnel; 3) research specific to COVID-19; and 4) core facilities supporting NIFA research.*** The COVID-19 pandemic is disrupting lab and field-based research activities. In some cases, this stoppage will create a year or more of delay in critical agricultural research, disrupting the talent pipeline for agri-business and food supply chains.

Supplemental funding will support capacity and competitive grant activities for up to 12 months for existing grantees and institutions managing programs in the Research and Education, Integrated Activities, and Farm Bill Mandatory Accounts. These programs fund high-caliber research through State Agricultural Experiment Stations, Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), and other critical research accounts across the United States' agriculture, food, and natural resource sectors.

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<sup>1</sup> Hatch and Evans Allen research capacity funding, Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), McIntire-Stennis forestry research, Tribal Colleges Research Grants Program (TCRGP) as well as other critical accounts. We recommend

<sup>2</sup> AAU, APLU, AAMC, and ACE COVID-19 Research [Recommendations](#)

Supplemental funding is needed to sustain our research and innovative capabilities. These capabilities underpin a highly responsive agriculture enterprise that allows the U.S. to pivot to address emerging threats to the global and domestic food supply, public health, and rural economic development.

### **Accelerating the United States' Cooperative Extension System Service and Response**

The Cooperative Extension System (CES) is part of the 112 land-grant institutions located throughout the nation. Cooperative Extension System educators and agents have built long-lasting and trusted partnerships with individuals, community organizations, and local businesses. There is an increased need to reach people in their homes, thus it is imperative that Cooperative Extension increase its capability to virtually provide essential programming and engagement services in ways that can effectively reach clientele who have varying degrees of access to adequate broadband.

**We request \$80 million for the Cooperative Extension System to meet the direct needs of the public related to spread of and recovery from COVID-19.** The funding would be allocated through Smith Lever and 1890s Institution Extension capacity programs, as well as through an ongoing contract for the NIFA New Technologies for Ag Extension (NTAE). The NTAE provides technical assistance to Extension agents and educators for effective delivery of virtual extension programs including educational and meeting platforms, training on new meeting formats, and customized support for scaling programs. NTAE will provide Tribal colleges with financial support and assistance.

This supplemental funding will enable CES educators and agents to: collaborate with emergency responders; develop innovative educational materials; assist business owners with loans and supply chain options; connect families to information on telemedicine, food, financial health and methods of socialization; support farmers and businesses; provide seniors with support; and work with clientele to be successful during the upcoming recovery period. With enhanced virtual learning capabilities, Cooperative Extension can strengthen its service as an educational and community backbone for individuals, families, farms, businesses, and communities in the coming months and year.

### **Building Food System Resilience in a Post-Pandemic America**

The rapid-moving COVID-19 crisis requires new state agricultural research infrastructure, facilities, and equipment to assist the country in understanding the short- and long-term impacts of the virus on our health, economy, and way of life. Federal investments to stimulate the agricultural research enterprise will be key to accelerate innovation and discovery across our science and economic supply chains and address current challenges while preparing for those yet to come.

Thank you in advance for considering our request.

Sincerely,

#### **ADDITIONAL UNDERSIGNED ORGANIZATIONS**

Association of Public and Land-grant Universities  
Association of American Universities  
Supporters of Agricultural Research  
Soil Science Society of America  
Crop Science Society of America  
American Society of Agronomy

CC: Members of the House Agriculture Committee Members; Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry; House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies; Senate Appropriation Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies; House and Senate Whips