

February 15, 2002

Colien Hefferan, Ph.D.  
Administrator, CSREES  
US Department of Agriculture  
Room 305A Whitten Building  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Dr. Hefferan:

On behalf of the American Phytopathological Society (APS), I am writing to thank you for ensuring that the USDA had \$4 million in funding for the joint USDA-NSF microbial genome sequencing program for this year. As I mentioned when we talked in November, we believe that it is essential for USDA to be an equal partner with the NSF in this program. We hope that in the coming year USDA will be able to fully match NSF funding for microbial genome sequencing.

As you know, the genomes of microorganisms that cause disease in humans, animals and plants hold in their sequences solutions to the most critical problems and threats to our health and welfare. Genomic sequencing has become the cornerstone of future research, opening doors to investigation of functional genomics and proteomics, and setting the stage for a revolution in the way science is done throughout the world.

Last year's USDA-NSF cooperative microbial genome sequencing program recognized the importance of these activities by providing the much needed financial support to begin work on a selected set of high-priority organisms. The funded projects are progressing well, already providing useful genetic information. I am pleased to tell you that participating investigators who are members of the APS are planning a special session at our 2003 Annual Meeting to share their findings and to discuss strategies, problems and future activities.

Currently our national governing bodies are focusing appropriately on efforts to enhance the security of our country's infrastructures, including health and crop security. Critical to our ability to block, monitor, trace, and evaluate microbes that threaten our food, feed and fiber is the availability of key genomic sequence information. Therefore, biosecurity-related funding initiatives may provide an ideal opportunity to channel some of the security-targeted funds to enhance U.S. microbial sequencing programs, bringing USDA's financial resources for sequencing to the level provided by other agencies in FY 2002 and FY 2003.

Please feel free to contact me or other members of APS if we can provide information that would assist you in future efforts in this area. Once again, thank you for your significant efforts to ensure that the joint USDA-NSF program continues. I look forward to working with you on this program and on efforts to ensure that USDA is not left out of biosecurity-related funding for microbial genome sequencing.

Sincerely yours,

Jacqueline Fletcher  
President-Elect  
The American Phytopathological Society