



May 5, 2009

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The Honorable Herb Kohl
Chair
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development
Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sam Brownback
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development
Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Kohl and Ranking Member Brownback:

We, as leaders of the nation's public and land-grant colleges, write to urge your support for the nation's agricultural and food systems. More than ever before, our collective well-being is linked to the sustainable and competitive production of food, fiber, and now fuel, on America's lands. The future of this foundational element of our economy and of our way of life depends upon continued investment in discovery, innovation and science-based applications.

Congress, in the 2008 Farm Bill, recognized the urgency of research and education in agriculture by establishing the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and restructuring existing authorities to create a new flagship competitive grants program — the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). **We urge the 111th Congress and the Administration to continue to build upon this progress by significantly increasing investment in AFRI.**

The essential challenge of sustaining our food safety and quality, while protecting our soil and water resources, surely justifies such an investment. Each news cycle brings additional stories that underscore the direct impact of food, nutrition, agriculture, and natural resources on our lives:

- Food price increases have destabilized economies around the globe.
- All too many regions continue to suffer the oppression of food shortages and malnutrition.
- Food safety remains a leading public concern, as microbial and chemical contaminants continue to be detected in common foods such as peanut butter and baby formula.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that 200 million Americans — 67 percent of the population — are now either overweight or obese (a doubling since 1980).
- Farm-produced biofuels are a centerpiece in our energy strategy.
- Agriculture will be critical to our strategies for responding to climate change and resource sustainability.
- The secure future of our nation is directly dependent upon protecting and maintaining the integrity of our food, fiber and fuel systems.
- Food and agriculture remains a key segment of our economy, and can become the foundation for a new, green BioEconomy in the decades ahead.

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For 150 years, American agriculture has met such challenges and excelled on a global level. Our land-grant universities are proud of the role we have played as leaders of the research and education underlying that success.

But our nation's leadership in food and agricultural sciences is in jeopardy.

- For every \$120 for NIH, we invest only \$1 for food and agriculture competitive funding.
- AFRI was one of the few federal science programs to receive no investment in the recent stimulus package.
- Fewer than 22% of qualified research proposals are now funded in USDA's largest competitive grants program.
- Agricultural and food sciences receive only about 1% of total federal R&D.

Enhanced investment is critical to not only American farmers; global economic and environmental sustainability relies upon better knowledge and innovative answers.

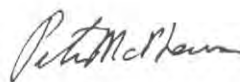
The National Institute of Food and Agriculture provides financial support for many meritorious programs at land-grant and related universities. We remain vigorous champions of these other core programs — which provide the foundation for all that we do for America — but we view AFRI as a “special priority among priorities.” Currently only about \$200 million has been appropriated of the \$700 million authorization. ***We urge you to join us in making a sustained commitment to fund AFRI at the full authorized level by increasing funding for AFRI by \$100 million per year over the next five years.***

Sincerely,



Jack M. Payne
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