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RE:   FY2021 Appropriations—Support for Funding for Food and Agricultural REE Mission

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Fortenberry:

The National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research (NCFAR) strongly supports increased federal investment in food and agricultural research, extension and education in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission in fiscal year 2021 (FY21) through intramural and extramural programs, as follows:

- Agricultural Research Service (ARS), at least $1,789 million
- Economic Research Service (ERS), at least $87 million
- National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), at least $180 million
- National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), at least $1,721 million

The requested increase for NIFA budget should be provided to NIFA leadership, with suggested allocations of increases to specific programs, including:

- Hatch Act (Research and Education Programs), at least $280 million
- Smith-Lever (Extension Activities), at least $341 million
- Evans-Allen (Research and Education Programs), at least $73 million
- 1890 Extension (Extension Activities), at least $62 million
- McIntyre-Stennis (Research and Extension Programs), at least $39 million
- Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), at least $480 million
- Research Grants for 1994 Institutions, at least $5.8 million
- Extension Services for 1994 Institutions, at least $9 million

NCFAR supports at least level funding from FY20 enacted for other NIFA programs, and encourages proportionate increases where possible.

NCFAR’s support encompasses the entire REE mission area, including extramural programs in NIFA—such AFRI, and capacity funds to support Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension at the 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities—and intramural programs in ARS, ERS, and NASS, as well as the U.S. Forest Service research program. NCFAR supports mandatory programs in the farm bill that provide funding for research.

The need to modernize our nation’s aging food and agricultural science infrastructure, both at USDA labs and universities, is critical. Congress has acknowledged this funding need in the America Grows Act of 2019, which authorizes a five percent increase for REE agencies to ensure the nation’s competitiveness and continued agricultural innovation.

NCFAR urges the Subcommittee to support AFRI at the authorized level of $700 million as soon as practicable. NCFAR commends USDA for including $600 million for AFRI in its
FY21 budget request, with $100 million targeted toward basic and applied research in AI. However, USDA’s request regrettably also includes significant funding reductions in other vital parts the REE mission. NCFAR’s strongly held position is that increases to any programs in the REE mission area should constitute a net increase in REE funding, and not come at the expense of other REE programs.

NCFAR urges the Subcommittee to exercise continued oversight of USDA’s moves and reorganization actions impacting NIFA and ERS, consistent with bipartisan report language included in the enacted FY19 reconciliation legislation.

NCFAR urges a balanced portfolio, as the various programs serve important and complementary roles. It is important to include investments in both fundamental and applied research, as well as translational and transformative education. Publicly funded research and extension serve important objectives that private sector research cannot fulfill. For example, the results of publicly funded research are available to the public, including policy makers. Companies are often unable to fund fundamental research that lays the foundation for applied research.

NCFAR supports funding for the intramural programs at ARS, ERS and NASS:

- ARS intramural research is uniquely suited to conduct research that requires a long-term investment leading to high-impact payoff, while maintaining the capacity and readiness to respond to emerging and pressing problems. ARS also plays a critical role in partnering with the university community and industry to advance science-based solutions and address emerging issues.
- The mission of ERS is to inform and enhance public and private decision making on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural development. ERS manages a comprehensive program of economic research and analysis, including development of economic and statistical indicators that are coordinated with NASS efforts. Connecting with and working closely with researchers across the United States, ERS issues cooperative agreements and grant awards and works with land-grant partners on many projects.
- NASS is committed to providing timely, accurate, and useful statistics to U.S. agriculture. The agency conducts hundreds of surveys every year and prepares reports and information to communicate the survey results. NASS reports the facts on American agriculture, facts needed by people working in, and depending upon, U.S. agriculture.

NCFAR encourages the Subcommittee to enhance funding for functions that assure the translation of science for practical application through Extension education. In addition, capacity funding through Smith-Lever 3(b)-(c) and 1890 Institutions Extension has not kept pace with rising costs. This is a concern for many land-grant institutions and the stakeholders who depend on those programs.

Modern and agriculture is a science-based business. Research is a means to important ends, not an end in itself—providing critical advancements and tools that help those in the food and agricultural system do their jobs for the ultimate benefit of sustainable farm and ranch businesses, consumers, rural communities, the nation’s economy, and the world. At the risk of
oversimplification, federal funding is the fuel for USDA’s REE engine and determines how effectively the important goals of the farm bill research title are realized. NCFAR submits that our nation is not investing enough in publicly funded research to permit the discoveries necessary to regain and then maintain our nation’s place as the leader in agricultural research.

Investment in food and agricultural science is not only good business, it’s good for business. By any measure, publicly funded food and agricultural science represents an outstanding investment. Public and private investments in U.S. agricultural research and practical application of results have paid huge dividends to the United States and the world, especially in the latter part of the 20th century.

The unparalleled success story in the nation’s food and agricultural system is in large part the product of past investments in food and agricultural research and extension. Federal funding for food and agricultural science has been essentially flat for over 20 years despite much greater demonstrated needs. Our nation’s competitiveness in global markets is at risk, as investments in food and agricultural science by our global competitors have been growing rapidly.

Public investment in food and agricultural research, extension and education—today and in the future—must simultaneously satisfy a range of needs, including food quality and quantity, resource conservation, producer profitability, and food safety and security, and helping to improve health. Societal demands and expectations placed upon the food and agricultural system are ever-changing and growing. A United Nations report projects a need to double food production to feed 9 billion people by 2050, and that 70 percent of the increase must come through research developing new technologies and increased productivity.

NCFAR is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, consensus-based and customer-led coalition that brings food, agriculture, nutrition, conservation and natural resource organizations together with the food and agricultural research and extension community, serving as a forum and unified voice in support of sustaining and increasing public investment at the national level in food and agricultural research, extension and education.

“Customers” of the USDA REE enterprise include farmers and ranchers across the nation; the agricultural input industry; food producers and processors; professionals in the fields of nutrition and health, natural resources, and environment; rural communities; and ultimately all consumers of food and natural fiber around the world. Indeed, this Subcommittee and other Members of Congress and policy makers at all levels of government are important “customers” of federally funded research, extension and education.