

# Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Coalition

March 5, 2021

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin (WI), Chair  
Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven (ND), Ranking Member  
Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sanford Bishop (GA-2), Chair  
Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry (NE-1), Ranking Member  
Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Baldwin, Ranking Member Hoeven, Chair Bishop, and Ranking Member Fortenberry:

Congratulations on leading the House and Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittees in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress. The AFRI Coalition, along with the undersigned organizations, look forward to working with all of you in FY 2022 and beyond.

The Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Coalition is comprised of organizations representing research institutions, scientific societies, and other food and agricultural stakeholders. Working together, we advocate for increased investments in AFRI, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) flagship competitive grants program for fundamental and applied research, extension, and education in support of our nation's interconnected food and agricultural systems.

We are grateful for the \$435 million provided for AFRI in FY 2021. **For FY 2022, we respectfully request an appropriation of at least \$600 million for AFRI.** Absent a FY 2022 President's Budget Request, the USDA did propose \$600 million for AFRI in its FY 2021 Budget Request. The coalition finds that this increase should not come at the expense of other competitive and capacity programs. While this level of funding is still short of the \$700 million authorized level, it is much needed to invest in crucial areas aimed at addressing our nation's most pressing food, agriculture, and public health challenges, now and in the future, including COVID-19 recovery, climate change adaptation and resiliency, racial equity in the food system for farmers and farmworkers, bioenergy, nutrition, agricultural technology, rural economic prosperity, and food safety.

USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) administers AFRI, the USDA's largest competitive extramural research grant program. By Congressional design, this program is flexible, allowing NIFA to quickly respond to unforeseen challenges, such as COVID-19. Early in the pandemic (April 2020), NIFA announced that through AFRI, it would invest in research or Cooperative Extension System (Extension) activities that "focus on developing and deploying rapid, reliable, and readily adoptable COVID-19 agricultural strategies across the food and agriculture enterprise," in the following areas: "health and security of livestock; food and food processing; well-being of the farm workforce, food service providers, and rural Americans; and economic security." The deadline for applications was June 2020.<sup>1</sup>

To date, through AFRI's nimbleness, NIFA was able to award almost \$24 million across 25 grant projects<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nifa.usda.gov/press-release/rapid-response-covid-19>

<sup>2</sup> [17 awards in 2020](#) to address pandemic impacts; [8 awards in 2021 to support technical schools, community and junior colleges.](#)

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through AFRI to support agricultural research and education addressing the pandemic.

AFRI not only helps our farmers and food producers to mitigate the impacts of these food, agriculture, and public health challenges, but to also be part of the solution in addressing them. There is no doubt that agriculture will face future challenges as a result of climate change, including increasingly erratic fluctuations in growing seasons, temperature extremes, rainfall patterns, and pest pressures. Yet, agriculture has a role to play in mitigating the climate crisis and research that helps farmers meet these challenges, while achieving productivity goals, is much needed. Despite incremental increases in AFRI funding, roughly 70 percent of AFRI proposals that are deemed worthy by expert review panels go unfunded,<sup>3</sup> simply because of insufficient funding.

Agricultural research funding at the USDA has remained fairly flat over the last fifty years.<sup>4</sup> Recently, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) released an analysis of the impact of the Budget Control Act on R&D funding. They concluded that the overall rate of R&D growth from 1978-2008 was 5.7%, before the Budget Control Act was signed into law.<sup>5</sup> The White House Office of Management and Budget's own historical data shows that R&D programs at the USDA have had an overall funding growth rate of 3.5% over the same time period.<sup>6</sup> AAAS concludes that the "cumulative "lost" federal funding may amount to \$96 billion for basic and applied research, and \$240 billion for total R&D. In other words, if R&D agencies had simply grown at their historical pace, the (annual) R&D budget would today be about \$33 billion or 20% larger."<sup>7</sup>

The AFRI Coalition remains committed to our longstanding goal of achieving the \$700 million authorized funding level for AFRI, while still investing in other vital research, education, and extension programs across NIFA. Sustained funding across the food and agricultural research enterprise is needed to ensure our global competitiveness and national security. Robust investment in USDA-supported research is also needed to attract, retain, and develop the next generation of scientists to address increasing pressures on our natural resources and advance innovations benefiting all Americans.

Thank you for your strong support of AFRI and previous efforts to increase AFRI funding. We believe now is the time to invest in our country's future by providing *at least* \$600 million for AFRI in FY 2022.

Sincerely,

Agricultural & Applied Economics Association  
American Institute of Biological Sciences  
American Society for Horticultural Science  
American Society for Microbiology  
American Society for Nutrition  
American Society for Nutrition  
American Society of Animal Science  
American Society of Plant Biologists  
Aquatic Plant Management Society  
Aquatic Plant Management Society

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<sup>3</sup> <https://nifa.usda.gov/afri-annual-review-archives>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aaas.org/news/budget-control-act-may-have-cost-over-200-billion-federal-rd>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/historical-tables/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.aaas.org/news/budget-control-act-may-have-cost-over-200-billion-federal-rd>

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Association of American Universities  
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges  
Ecological Society of America  
Entomological Society of America  
Institute of Food Technologists  
National Association for the Advancement of Animal Science  
National Association of Plant Breeders  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
North Central Weed Science Society  
Northeastern Weed Science Society  
Southern Weed Science Society  
Supporters of Agricultural Research (SoAR) Foundation  
Union of Concerned Scientists  
Weed Science Society of America  
Weed Science Society of America  
Western Society of Weed Science