April 1, 2025

The Honorable Andy Harris
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture
House Committee on Appropriations
1536 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture
Senate Committee on Appropriations
338 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture
House Committee on Appropriations
2407 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture
Senate Committee on Appropriations
506 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harris, Chairman Hoeven, Ranking Member Bishop, and Ranking Member Shaheen:

The undersigned organizations from academia, agriculture, and food stakeholder groups write to thank you for your continued support of the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) in Fiscal Year 2025. As your committees consider Appropriations for the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies for FY2026, we respectfully request $1.877 billion for ARS salaries and expenses, which represents a five percent increase over the FY2025 level. Sustained federal investment in food and agricultural research at ARS provides the foundation for a resilient domestic agricultural supply chain and ensures American farmers remain competitive in global markets.

As USDA's chief intramural research agency, ARS supports research across the full spectrum of food and agriculture at more than 90 research locations across the country. ARS has a proven track record of delivering science-based solutions to critical agricultural challenges facing our Nation and improving the competitiveness, sustainability, and resilience of U.S. agriculture. ARS research is organized into 15 National Programs that address the most pressing needs across our food and agricultural system, from crop and animal production to natural resources, nutrition, and food safety.

Long-term federal investments in agricultural research are essential for addressing complex challenges that require sustained attention and investments. ARS is uniquely positioned to support critical long-term agricultural research across diverse ecosystems and agricultural settings. ARS also plays an invaluable role in partnering with universities and industry to advance science and address emerging issues. More than one-third of ARS locations are co-located at public land-grant universities, fostering collaborations that leverage federal investments and accelerate the delivery of solutions to farmers and consumers. These partnerships are strengthened through ARS extramural support of research at these institutions.

ARS research has repeatedly demonstrated significant return on investment through innovations that lower costs and increase agricultural efficiencies. For example, ARS scientists in Beltsville, Maryland recently developed a new AI-driven technology that efficiently identifies wheat plants resistant to Fusarium head blight, a devastating fungal disease. This innovation speeds up breeding programs and reduces screening costs by approximately 80%, helping farmers access disease-resistant varieties more quickly while saving millions in fungicide applications and crop losses.

In the area of nutrition research, ARS scientists at the Children's Nutrition Research Center in Houston, Texas have developed improved methods for assessing nutrient requirements in children and adolescents. This research has led to more accurate dietary recommendations that optimize children's growth and development while reducing food waste in school meal programs. By precisely identifying nutritional needs, these findings have helped school districts across the country reduce meal program costs by approximately 15% while simultaneously improving nutritional outcomes for millions of children – demonstrating how nutrition research directly benefits both public health and economic efficiency.

Furthermore, ARS develops and maintains numerous agriculturally significant long-term datasets and is home to the National Agricultural Library, the world's largest collection devoted to agriculture. The agency also manages the Germplasm Resources Information Network (GRIN), which safeguards genetic diversity critical for breeding crops and livestock that can withstand emerging pests, diseases, and environmental stresses.

As you work on agriculture appropriations for FY2026, we urge you to provide no less than $1.877 billion for ARS salaries and expenses. This level of funding will ensure that ARS can respond effectively to new plant and animal pests and diseases, weather and environmental stresses, and food safety and nutrition security concerns. The innovative research supported by this funding helps American farmers produce safe, nutritious food while protecting natural resources for future generations.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. Our organizations stand ready to work with you as the process moves forward and answer any questions that you may have.

Sincerely,

2Blades
agInnovation North Central
Agricultural & Applied Economics Association
Agricultural Utilization Research Institute
American Association of Mycobacterial Diseases
American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
American Institute of Biological Sciences
American Malting Barley Association
American Meat Science Association

American Phytopathological Society
American Pulse Association
American Seed Trade Association
American Society for Horticultural Science
American Society for Microbiology
American Society for Nutrition
American Society of Agronomy
American Society of Animal Science
American Society of Plant Biologists
American Soybean Association
Aquatic Plant Management Society
Carbon180
Cereals & Grains Association
ClearPath Action
Crop Science Societies of America
CropLife America
Ecological Society of America
Entomological Society of America
Farm Journal Foundation
Institute of Food Technologists
International Fresh Produce Association
Meat Institute
National Association for Plant Breeding (NAPB)
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Barley Growers Association
National Barley Improvement Committee
National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research
National Corn Growers Association
National Sunflower Association
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Wildlife Federation
North American Millers' Association
North Central Weed Science Society
Northeastern Weed Science Society
Oregon State University College of Agricultural Sciences
Organic Farming Research Foundation
Pet Food Institute
Soil and Water Conservation Society
Soil Science Society of America
Southern Weed Science Society
Spark Climate Solutions
Synergistic Hawaii Agriculture Council
The Breakthrough Institute

The Good Food Institute
The Nature Conservancy
USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council
USDFRC - Stakeholder Advisory Committee
Weed Science Society of America
Western Society of Weed Science
World Coffee Research

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Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harris, Chairman Hoeven, Ranking Member Bishop, and Ranking Member Shaheen:

The undersigned research institutions, scientific societies, and agricultural stakeholders, respectfully request no less than $500 million for the USDA Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) in Fiscal Year 2026. AFRI is USDA's premier competitive grants program supporting fundamental and applied research, extension, and education to address the most pressing challenges in food and agriculture.

Food and agriculture research drives innovation that improves agricultural productivity, enhances economic opportunities in rural communities, and ensures the safety and affordability of the nation's food supply. AFRI-funded research has been instrumental in developing solutions to combat emerging threats such as avian influenza, improving livestock and crop resilience to variable weather conditions, and supporting precision agriculture to increase efficiency and sustainability.

With record-high farm production expenses, fluctuating market conditions, and the increasing threats of pests and diseases, AFRI research empowers American farmers and producers with science-based solutions to enhance productivity, lower operational costs, and maintain global competitiveness. Furthermore, AFRI investments foster innovation that strengthens supply chain resilience, improves nutrition security, and supports the agricultural workforce of the future.

To illustrate the impact of AFRI-funded research, consider a recent project aimed at protecting the health and welfare of agricultural animals. In September 2024, the USDA's National Institute

of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) announced an investment of $17.6 million[1] to advance research in this area, including high-priority studies on highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) and African swine fever (ASF). This investment supports projects that develop strategies to prevent and control diseases affecting livestock, thereby ensuring a safe and adequate food supply. Such initiatives not only safeguard animal health but also enhance agricultural productivity and food security, demonstrating the critical role of AFRI in addressing pressing challenges in the food and agriculture sector.

AFRI-funded nutrition research also keeps our food supply nutritious and safe and ensures the health of American citizens. The greatest return for federal investment in nutrition research takes place when research is put into practice. Approximately 100 million U.S. adults have obesity, with diet-related diseases, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes, accounting for half of the deaths in the US each year. Government spending, including Medicare and Medicaid, to treat cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes accounted for 54% of the $383.6 billion in health care spending, a 30% increase from 2009 to 2018.[2] Slowing or preventing chronic diseases with nutrition and diet-related efforts will provide improved cost-effective outcomes for Americans, as nutrition research is translated into better human health. Nutrition is a modifiable risk factor for numerous chronic diseases, representing a highly viable approach to reduce adverse health outcomes.

At a time when countries such as China, India, and Brazil are significantly increasing their public agricultural research investments, it is imperative that the United States reinforces its global leadership in food and agricultural innovation. We must maintain strong investments in food and agriculture research today if we hope to adequately address the challenges of tomorrow.

We urge you to invest in the future of American agriculture and food security by providing no less than $500 million for AFRI in FY 2026. Thank you for your past support of AFRI and for considering this request to strengthen our nation's food and agricultural enterprise.

Sincerely,

2Blades
agInnovation
agInnovation North Central
agInnovation Northeast
agInnovation South
agInnovation West
Agricultural & Applied Economics Association
American Association of Mycobacterial Diseases
American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges

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[1] https://www.nifa.usda.gov/about-nifa/press-releases/usda-invests-176m-protect-health-welfare-agricultural-animals

[2] Government Accountability Office. 2021. Chronic Health Conditions: Federal Strategy Needed to Coordinate Diet Related Efforts. GAO Publication No. 21-593. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-21-593.pdf.

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American Malting Barley Association
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American Society for Nutrition
American Society of Agronomy
American Society of Animal Science
American Society of Plant Biologists
American Soybean Association
Aquatic Plant Management Society
Association of American Universities
Association of Public & Land-grant Universities
Carbon180
Cereals & Grains Association
Crop Science Societies of America
CropLife America
Ecological Society of America
Entomological Society of America
Farm Aid
Farm Journal Foundation
Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB)
Friends of the Mississippi River
Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities
Institute of Food Technologists
International Fresh Produce Association
Land Core
Maine Farmland Trust
Meat Institute
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
Michigan Food & Farming Systems (MIFFS)
National Association for Plant Breeding (NAPB)
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Barley Improvement Committee
National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research
National Corn Growers Association
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Wildlife Federation
North Central Weed Science Society
Northeast Weed Science Society

Oregon State University College of Agricultural Sciences
Pet Food Institute
Quapaw Canoe Company
Regenerative Agriculture Coalition
Resource Renewal Institute
RI Food Policy Council
Soil and Water Conservation Society
Soil Science Society of America
Southern Weed Science Society
Spark Climate Solutions
Synergistic Hawaii Agriculture Council
The Breakthrough Institute
The Good Food Institute
The Nature Conservancy
Union of Concerned Scientists
University of Florida Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences
USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council
USDFRC Stakeholder Advisory Committee
VA Association for Biological Farming
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Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harris, Chairman Hoeven, Ranking Member Bishop, and Ranking Member Shaheen:

As your Committees prepare the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill and Report for FY2026, the undersigned organizations, companies, and institutions urge you to provide an investment of $10 million for the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AGARDA).

Advanced research agencies have been effectively deployed in defense, energy, and health to tackle the biggest challenges facing these industries in novel and groundbreaking ways. Established in the 2018 Farm Bill and modeled after successful advanced research agencies like the Department of Defense's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), AGARDA will foster research, development, and technology transfer resulting in significant benefits across the U.S. food and agriculture value chain.

The challenges facing agriculture today require bold, forward-thinking solutions. Emerging pest and disease pressures, like Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, and high farm input costs continue to impact producers across the country. Agricultural research can address these challenges, help producers thrive, and ensure consumers have access to affordable food. Research can also better equip American agriculture with the innovations needed to lead as the global population, and food demand, continues to grow. Therefore, we must invest in novel research mechanisms and new technologies that prioritize mission-driven innovation and collaboration across disciplines. By providing AGARDA with sufficient funding, Congress can demonstrate its commitment to supporting agriculture as a cornerstone of our economy and a fundamental component of global food security.

Congress has appropriated less than $4 million to AGARDA to date. While we appreciate this funding, programs such as DARPA, ARPA-E, and ARPA-H received substantial initial

investments and had dedicated leadership to ensure success. Individual projects under ARPA-E's ROOTS and TERRA programs ranged from $3-10 million. A typical DARPA project can be tens of millions of dollars. AGARDA will require similar levels of investment to support high-impact research that can produce transformative results.

While funding AGARDA at its authorized level will give the program the greatest chance at success, we understand the budgetary constraints facing Congress in FY2026. Therefore we urge the Subcommittee to fund AGARDA at a minimum of $10 million for FY2026. It is critical that AGARDA has the necessary funds to appoint leadership, hire staff, and support a sufficient number of agricultural research projects to show that this model can produce impactful results. In doing so, we can unlock the potential for groundbreaking innovations that will not only benefit producers and consumers but also ensure the resilience of our agricultural systems and keep U.S. agriculture globally competitive.

As Congress looks for ways to respond to the challenges facing the U.S. food and agricultural system, we urge you to provide $10 million for AGARDA in FY2026.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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Agricultural & Applied Economics Association
American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
American Conservation Coalition Action
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Farmland Trust
American Feed Industry Association
American Institute of Biological Sciences
American Meat Science Association
American Phytopathological Society
American Society for Horticultural Science
American Society for Microbiology
American Society of Agronomy
American Society of Animal Science
American Soybean Association
Biotechnology Innovation Organization
Bipartisan Policy Center Action
C3 Action

Cereals & Grains Association
ClearPath Action
Crop Science Societies of America
Ecological Society of America
Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative
Enhanced Weathering Alliance
Entomological Society of America
Farm Journal Foundation
Federation of American Scientists
Institute of Food Technologists
International Fresh Produce Association
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
National Barley Improvement Committee
National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research
Natural Resources Defense Council
Pet Food Institute
Soil Science Society of America
Spark Climate Solutions
Synergistic Hawaii Agriculture Council
The Breakthrough Institute
The Good Food Institute
The Nature Conservancy
US Dairy Forage Research Center Stakeholder Advisory Committee