

December 13, 2012

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
United States of America

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Senate Majority Leader  
United States Senate

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Minority Leader  
United States Senate

The Honorable John Boehner  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives

To the President and Leadership of the U.S. Congress:

On behalf of the agricultural sciences research community, representing thousands of scientists and researchers in academia, industry, and the non-profit sector, as well as stakeholders who rely on research outcomes, we, as the coalition that supports the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) (the AFRI Coalition), ask you to find a bipartisan compromise that prevents the "fiscal cliff" from occurring. We encourage you to work to find long-term solutions to our nation's fiscal difficulties without jeopardizing the backbone of this nation's economy – research and development (R&D). Although we understand the United States faces fiscal challenges, we worry cuts to agricultural research programs would be a short-term fix that has long-term consequences to the U.S. research investment, which has already declined as a result of cuts to the non-defense discretionary budget.

We are particularly concerned about potential cuts to AFRI, which is USDA's largest competitive grants program for scientists. Sequestration-level cuts to AFRI would be devastating to food, agricultural, and environmental research, all of which have led to new discoveries addressing many of the greatest challenges America and the world face: food safety and security, natural resources management, and clean energy production. The recently released President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology report on Agriculture Preparedness and the Agriculture Research Enterprise recommended significant increases in AFRI funding to address these pressing challenges. AFRI research has produced groundbreaking results, such as:

Researchers have identified the genes that regulate temperature tolerance in wheat in order to develop a hardier winter wheat variety. This discovery is critical in light of the growing need to increase global food production to feed the world's steadily increasing population. Scientists and engineers are working together to develop new equipment to more efficiently harvest grass seed, an important crop in the biofuels industry. To improve the nutritional qualities of rice, researchers are studying the genetic factors that control the transfer of iron and zinc to rice grains. AFRI research has also led to major breakthroughs in animal genomics including the sequencing of the cattle and pig genomes that will have significant implications for human and animal health as well as the economic sustainability of the livestock industry.

Numerous AFRI grants also cover specialty crops impacting half of all annual profits for American agriculture. These grants include tracking *E. coli* bacteria for leafy greens and other vegetables, research methods for mitigating blight disease in tomatoes and potatoes, and controlling other foodborne pathogens impacting produce production and distribution.

If the “fiscal cliff” occurs, cutting-edge research that will help meet the technological challenges of today may be severely delayed or even lost, harming both today’s scientific enterprise and tomorrow’s scientific leaders, who are currently trainees and students.

We urge you to work together to craft a comprehensive deficit reduction plan that recognizes the importance of the agricultural sciences, specifically the key work done by scientists thanks to AFRI.

Sincerely,

American Dairy Science Association  
American Phytopathological Society  
American Society of Agronomy  
American Society of Animal Science  
American Society for Horticultural Science  
American Society for Microbiology  
The American Society for Nutrition  
American Society of Plant Biologists  
American Veterinary Medical Association  
Aquatic Plant Management Society  
Association of American Universities  
Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities  
Crop Science Society of America  
Entomological Society of America  
Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology  
Federation of Animal Science Societies  
Genetics Society of America  
Institute of Food Technologists  
National Association for the Advancement of Animal Science  
National Association of Plant Breeders  
National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
Northeastern Weed Science Society  
North Central Weed Science Society  
Soil Science Society of America  
Southern Weed Science Society  
Weed Science Society of America  
Western Society of Weed Science