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Testimony prepared for the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies, U.S. Senate

FY2020 Appropriations—U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Agricultural REE Mission

Dear Chairman Hoeven and Ranking Member Merkley:

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 2020 (FY20) through intramural and extramural programs, as follows:

- Agricultural Research Service (ARS), *at least* **\$1,821,000,000**
- Economic Research Service (ERS), *at least* **\$87,000,000**
- National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), *at least* **\$180,000,000**
- National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), *at least* **\$1,601,341,000**
 - Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), *at least* **\$445,000,000**

The \$130 million requested increase over enacted FY19 in the NIFA budget should be provided to NIFA leadership, with suggested allocations of increases to specific programs, including:

- McIntire-Stennis (Research and Extension Programs), *at least* **\$41,000,000**
- 1890 Extension (Extension Activities), *at least* **\$57,000,000**
- Evans-Allen (Research and Education Programs), *at least* **\$67,000,000**
- Hatch Act (Research and Education Programs), *at least* **\$292,000,000**
- Smith-Lever (Extension Activities), *at least* **\$359,000,000**

NCFAR supports at least level funding from FY19 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.

NCFAR urges the Subcommittee to support AFRI at the authorized level of \$700 million as soon as practicable. NCFAR commends USDA for including \$500 million for AFRI in its FY20 budget request. However, USDA's request regrettably also includes major funding reductions in other vital parts the REE mission. NCFAR's strong 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 planned 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.

The top-line FY20 funding request for ARS represents a \$137 million increase over FY19 enacted. This total would provide an increase of \$84 million, or 5 percent to support all four national program areas, plus \$53 million in new funding dedicated to the standup activities of the new National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF).

For FY20, NCFAR supports a \$130 million increase in NIFA funding, including at least \$445 million for AFRI and a proportionate increase in NIFA funding to be distributed at the discretion of NIFA leadership across other NIFA programs.

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 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 CARD report entitled “Measuring Public Agricultural Research and Extension and Estimating their Impacts on Agricultural Productivity: New Insights from US Evidence” (Jin & Huffman, 2016) presents a summary of the most recent returns on investment of agricultural research dollars of approximately 67 percent.

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.

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, and has reportedly declined by about 25 percent in real terms since 2003. At the same time support for other federal research has increased substantially.

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 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.