April 2019

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Senate
Washington, DC 20515


Dear Chairman Hoeven and Ranking Member Merkley:

Thank you for your leadership and support of agriculture research in the final fiscal year (FY) 2019 appropriations bill.

The American Society of Agronomy (ASA), Crop Science Society of America (CSSA), and Soil Science Society of America (SSSA), represent over 18,000 scientists in academia, industry and government. We support more than 13,500 Certified Crop Advisers (CCA), and over 700 Certified Professional Soil Scientist (CPSS). Our members and certified professionals are dedicated to meeting the demands of a growing world population through the pursuit of agronomic, crop and soil science knowledge and application.

We support the following areas of the Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission areas in FY2020:

$1.821 billion for the Agricultural Research Service (ARS). ARS is USDA’s intramural, nation-wide research program that solves national agriculture problems of high priority. ARS is uniquely suited to conduct research that requires long-term investments with high-impact payoffs while maintaining the capacity and readiness to respond to emerging and pressing problems.

This level of funding allows ARS’s national programs to continue expanding our knowledge base, while also ensuring adequate funding for activities of the new National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF).

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). We strongly support NIFA’s suite of extramural programs that enable colleges and universities to drive innovations, expand outreach, and develop the next generation workforce. Within NIFA, our priorities include:

$445 million for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). AFRI is the premier competitive grants program that seeks to solve critical challenges in food and agricultural systems. AFRI funded research supports cutting-edge advances in emerging areas such as genomics, microbiomes, sensors and
informatics to help ensure thriving farms and a healthy nation. However, AFRI supports less than a quarter of the projects recommended for funding by review panels.

**$5 million for Research Equipment Grants.** The 2018 Farm Bill included a new competitive grants program for research equipment at colleges and universities. It is authorized at $5 million per year and limits individual grants to a maximum of $500,000.

This addresses a critical need identified by our member scientists. Agricultural researchers with innovative and exciting ideas may require large or specialized equipment for their research. However, there is not a clear path to obtaining equipment funding through existing programs – forcing many scientists to abandon valuable research projects.

**$292 million for Hatch Act formula funding.** Hatch funding supports state agricultural experiment stations at our nation’s land-grant colleges and universities. This funding addresses high-priority research needs to help farmers through droughts and floods, combat pests and pathogens, and conserve soil and water.

**$359 million for Smith-Lever 3(b) and (c) funding.** Smith-Lever funding supports the cooperative extension program, a vital link between land-grant university scientists and agricultural producers, communities, consumers, families, and others who directly benefit from the latest innovations.

**$50 million for the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AGARDA) Pilot program.** The 2018 Farm Bill authorized this new innovative program to address high-risk and long-term challenges that threaten the stability and economic viability of agriculture. AGARDA can accelerate innovative high-risk, high-reward research and development in areas that industry is unlikely to invest.

America’s incredible agricultural productivity and economic prosperity are the direct result of investments in science and technology. Continual scientific discoveries and innovations are needed to sustainably meet the growing demand for food around the world.

Thank you for your consideration. For additional information or to learn more about ASA, CSSA, and SSSA, please contact Karl Anderson, Director of Government Relations, at kanderson@sciencesocieties.org or 202-408-5382.

Sincerely,

Ellen Bergfeld, PhD, CEO

Cc: Members of the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA, and Related Agencies