



April 18, 2003

The Honorable Robert Bennett
Chairman
Senate Agriculture, Rural Development and Related Agencies
Appropriations Subcommittee
188 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Bennett:

The Coalition on Funding Agricultural Research Missions (CoFARM), representing 130,000 members from scientific and professional organizations, is united by a commitment to advance and sustain investment in our nation's fundamental and applied agricultural research.

We understand that the Agriculture Appropriations bill has many valuable and necessary components, and we applaud the efforts of the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee which resulted in the National Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program (NRI) being funded at \$166 million FY 2003, an increase of nearly 40% over FY 2002! Below we have highlighted funding recommendations for the FY 2004 appropriations cycle.

By priority area our recommendations include:

Recommendation 1 – CoFARM urges you to support the President's FY 2003 proposal of \$240 million for the NRI. A study conducted by USDA's Economic Research Service highlights the annual rate of return to publicly fund agricultural research at 35%. Therefore, increased funding of agriculture research would be beneficial to our U.S. economy. Our research programs should be viewed as an investment in the future, not an expense. Moreover, funding the NRI at \$240 million would support the finding in the recent National Academies report, *Frontiers in Agricultural Research*, that total competitive grants should be substantially increased to and sustained at 20-30% of the total USDA research portfolio.

Recommendation 2 – CoFARM requests that any new monies appropriated for the NRI, as in FY 2003, allow the Secretary the discretion to apply up to 20% towards carrying out integrated research, extension and education competitive grants program under the same conditions and terms as those provided for in the FY 2003 spending bill. Multidisciplinary research efforts continue to have a promising future within all research communities, and agriculture does not differ from this trend.

The NRI is a highly respected competitive grants program that funds the basic research necessary to improve crop and livestock production, and the processes that deliver quality food products from farm to table while protecting and enhancing the nation's environment and natural resources. Recent security threats facing America require new and expanded agricultural research to protect our nation's forests, water supplies, food processing and distribution network, and rural communities and insure the future security, safety and sustainability of America's food and fiber system. In order to address these challenges and maintain our position in an increasingly competitive world, we must maintain and continue to support research programs such as the NRI.

Without ongoing research, our nation will be unable to meet the many current and new challenges facing our food production system from farm to table. Past investment in the NRI has allowed scientists engaged in research on agricultural systems to successfully achieve many breakthroughs which include:

- * NRI researchers have improved feeding standards and management practices for livestock that reduce waste products and improve nutrient management to protect our soil and water resources.
- * The USDA was the lead U.S. agency in the International Rice Genome Sequencing Project, which led to the published initial sequences for two varieties of rice (Science 296:32-35 (2002)).
- * NRI researchers have observed that pre-pregnant overweight or obese women were associated with failure to initiate and sustain lactation. They concluded that a reduction in the prolactin response to suckling represents one biological mechanism that could help to explain the early lactation failure observed in overweight and obese women.
- * An NRI-funded study conducted by agricultural economists at Texas A&M addressed the influence of nutrition knowledge, food beliefs, and dietary restraint on food choices.
- * The development of national disaster response plans by NRI researchers working with the Department of Homeland Security.

The future viability of our nation's production systems will depend on the investment in science we make today. Congress must enhance funding for competitive agricultural research to assure Americans of a safe and affordable food supply and to provide for the next generation of research scientists.

As you lead the Congress in deliberation on funding levels for agricultural research, we urge you to support the President's proposal of \$240 million for the NRI. Please consider CoFARM as a supportive resource in efforts to improve agricultural research capacity. We hope you will call on our membership and scientific expertise.

Sincerely,

CoFARM Member Societies:

<i>American Dairy Science Association</i>	<i>Council on Food, Agricultural and Resource Economics</i>
<i>American Phytopathological Society</i>	<i>Crop Science Society of America</i>
<i>American Society for Horticultural Science</i>	<i>Federation of Animal Science Societies</i>
<i>American Society for Microbiology</i>	<i>Poultry Science Association</i>
<i>American Society for Nutritional Sciences</i>	<i>Rural Sociological Society</i>
<i>American Society of Agronomy</i>	<i>Society of Nematologists</i>
<i>American Society of Animal Science</i>	<i>Soil Science Society of America</i>
<i>American Society of Plant Biologists</i>	

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