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Dr. Joseph Jen
Undersecretary Research, Education and Economics
United States Department of Agriculture
Room 216-W Whitten Building
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Undersecretary Jen:

The Coalition on Funding Agricultural Research Missions (CoFARM) would like to thank you for emphasizing the importance of and need for agricultural research. Because of your leadership, the Department of Agriculture's FY 2003 budget request recommends a doubling of the National Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program (NRI) to \$240 million. Such a significant increase would allow USDA to fund the most highly qualified research projects that address critical issues in the areas of human nutrition as well as the study of microbial, animal, plants and human genomes, food safety, plant and animal biochemistry and physiology.

CoFARM is also very supportive of your plan to outline why a long-term investment in competitive, peer-reviewed agricultural research is important to "building and replenishing an increasingly depleted reservoir of knowledge." We fully support your efforts to increase appropriations for the NRI using this approach.

A recent report by the National Academy of Sciences concluded that the quality, relevance and impact of research conducted from awards of the NRI have been excellent. There is little doubt that we must work together to increase its level of funding. During the past 10 years, CoFARM has repeatedly and consistently pointed out that the NRI has been woefully underfunded—appropriations for the competitive grants program have yet to exceed \$120 million, far below its annual authorization of \$500 million. This low level of investment has led to a low success rate for grant applications. Consequently, only a small fraction of the high-quality food and agricultural research proposals are funded each year through the NRI.

Moreover, such a low level of support has resulted in projects of smaller scope and shorter duration, which has negatively affected the continuity and expansion of the research enterprise. Our organization and others also recognize the deterrent of indirect cost recovery to institutions and will support having that changed as well

CoFARM joins others in the research community such as the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, the American Institute of Biological Sciences, the Ecological Society of America and others in efforts to overcome the chronic under funding of competitive research programs within the Research, Education and Economics mission area.

CoFARM's 21 member societies represent over 130,000 individual investigators from scientific and professional organizations united by a commitment to advance and sustain investment in our nation's fundamental and applied agricultural research.

American Dairy Science Association
American Institute of Biological Sciences
American Society for Horticultural Science
American Society for Microbiology
American Society for Nutritional Sciences
American Society of Agricultural Engineers
American Society of Agronomy
American Society of Animal Science
American Society of Plant Physiologists
Crop Science Society of America
Council on Food, Agricultural, and Resource Economics
Entomological Society of America
Federation of Animal Science Societies
Genetics Society of America
Institute of Food Technologists
Poultry Science Association
Rural Sociological Society
Society of Nematologists
Soil Science Society of America
Weed Science Society of America