



November 12, 2002

**Comments to the Pan-Organizational Summit on the U.S. Science and Engineering Workforce**

**Dr. Karl Glasener, Chair**

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**and**

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**American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, Soil Science Society of America**

The Coalition on Funding Agricultural Research Missions (CoFARM) is grateful for the opportunity to submit comments at the Pan-Organizational Summit on the U.S. Science and Engineering Workforce to the National Academies' Government University Industry Research Roundtable (GUIRR). Formed in 1990, CoFARM is a broadly based coalition of 21 member societies representing over 130,000 individual investigators from scientific and professional organizations. Our coalition is committed to communicating the benefits of the agricultural sciences and advocating for an increased investment in our nation's fundamental and applied agricultural research.

Agricultural research is vital to our nation's ability to maintain a safe, nutritious, affordable, abundant, and secure food supply, produced in an environmentally responsible manner. Agricultural research has the potential to provide the scientific knowledge and technological advances necessary to address many of the greatest challenges to our food, fiber, and natural-resources systems—by developing sustainable food and fiber production processes; enhancing food safety, quality, and nutrition; protecting the environment; and developing alternative energy sources. Furthermore, conduct of agricultural research is integral to cultivating future agricultural and food scientists. **Therefore, CoFARM strongly recommends an increase in federal funding of agricultural research in order to continue educating and training graduate students in the agricultural and food sciences.**

National Research Council Strongly Supports the NRI's Training and Education of Agricultural Scientists

The National Research Council of the National Academies recently reviewed the National Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program (NRI) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA; NRC, 2000). While the NRI is the primary source of competitive federal agricultural research funding, it has seen a 6% decrease in funding in constant dollars from 1992 to 2002. Moreover, since its inception in 1991, NRI has reached barely one-fifth of its \$500 million authorization.

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Three components of the NRI program are directly related to training and education in the broad sense. NRI funds are used to: (1) develop future scientists through the support of graduate students and postdoctoral researchers; (2) strengthen small and medium academic institutions; and (3) enhance public understanding of issues related to the Nation's food, fiber, and natural resources. The training and support of young scientists—specifically, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and principal investigators who are in the initial or early stages of their scientific careers—is a stated goal of the NRI. In the committee's opinion, "training and education of graduate students and postdoctoral researchers attributable to the NRI program are substantial" (NRC, 2000).

Recent Focus Session of National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board on Workforce Development

On Tuesday, October 29, 2002, the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics (NAREEE) Advisory Board met and held a focus session entitled "Workforce Development for the Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources System." Officials within and outside of USDA were invited to speak on issues related to workforce development throughout the pipeline, including youth, Future Farmers of America, undergraduate, graduate, and post-doctoral, with the goal of fostering a broad, strong and vital agricultural workforce for the future. A meeting summary is expected shortly. **CoFARM encourages GUIRR to consider the findings of the NAREEE Advisory Board.**

SUMMARY: Increased Support for Agricultural Research is An Investment in Our Nation's Future

Agricultural research is vital to our Nation's ability to continue to provide a safe, nutritious, affordable and secure food supply produced in an environmentally responsible manner. Furthermore, conduct of agricultural and food research is integral to cultivating future agricultural and food scientists. **Therefore, CoFARM strongly recommends an increase in federal funding of agricultural research in order to continue educating and training graduate students in the agricultural and food sciences.**

Reference

National Research Council, 2000. *National Research Initiative: A Vital Competitive Grants Program in Food, Fiber, and Natural Resources Research*. National Academy Press, Washington, DC.

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**Member Societies**

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