

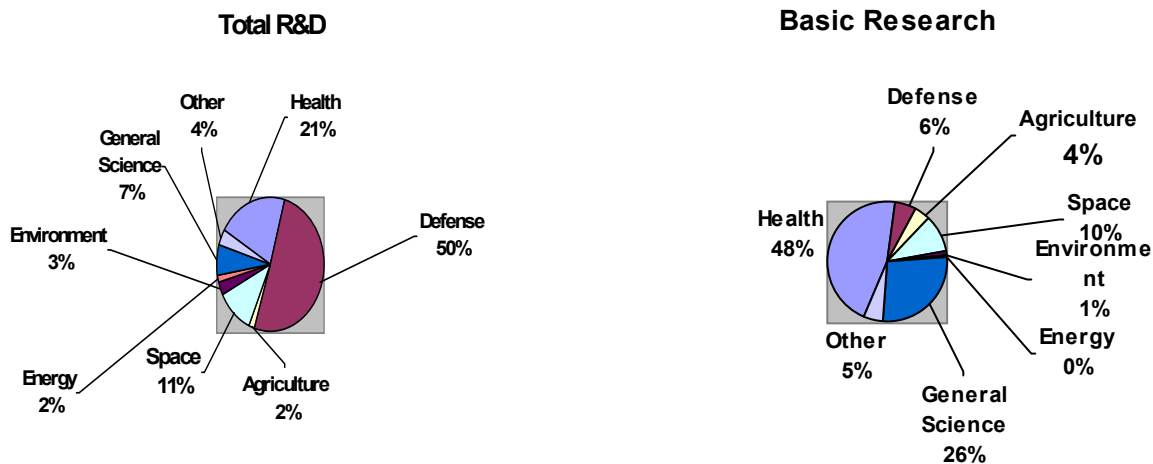
Funding Agriculture Research

Agricultural Research: A Critical Foundation for a Healthy Economy

A robust economy requires constant public investment in a food, fiber and natural resource base that continues to be the admiration of the world. Today's agricultural sector is strongly affected by challenges such as competitiveness, trade, food safety, consumer interests, bio- and info- technology, and structural changes in agriculture, risk management, and environmental concerns.

America's agriculture sector is highly productive and thrives from past investments. The food on our tables, the trees in our parks, the grass on our lawns and public places are the result of the long history of public investment in infrastructure and agricultural research and development. Continued public investment is needed to maintain and sustain growth. Regardless of our focus of research, public investment in agricultural research is a 'best buy' as evaluated by numerous analyses¹.

USDA's research budget, however, has not grown commensurate with its record of achievement and broad and unique responsibilities to support science and technology in agriculture. According to the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Division of Science Resources Studies, agricultural research made up only 4 percent of all public funds devoted to basic research and only 2 percent of total R&D expenditures for FY 2000. If the lowest cost food for the nation's consumers and agricultural exports are to continue to be successful policy for the United States, then it must be understood that continued, sustained federal investment in agricultural research is necessary.



SOURCE: National Science Foundation, Division of Science Resources Studies, NSF 00-303

¹ National Research Initiative: A Vital Competitive Grants Program in Food, Fiber, and Natural Resources Research. National Research Council, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C. 2000.

The Coalition on Funding Agricultural Research Missions (CoFARM)

is a broadly based coalition united by a commitment to advance and sustain investment in our nation's fundamental and applied agricultural research. CoFARM was formed in 1990 to better advocate the benefits of food and agricultural research. Since then, public investment in agricultural research has become erratic and may be inadequate to meet the challenges of the next century. CoFARM's 21 member societies represent individual investigators from scientific and professional organizations.

American Dairy Science Association
www.adsa.org

American Institute of Biological Sciences
www.aibs.org

American Phytopathological Society
www.apsnet.org

American Society of Agricultural Engineers
www.asae.org

American Society of Agronomy
www.agronomy.org

American Society of Animal Science
www.asas.org

American Society for Horticultural Science
www.ashs.org

American Society for Microbiology
www.asmtusa.org

American Society for Nutritional Sciences
www.nutrition.org

American Society of Plant Biologists
www.aspb.org

Council on Food, Agriculture & Resource Economics
www.cfare.org

Crop Science Society of America
www.crops.org

Entomological Society of America
www.entsoc.org

Federation of Animal Science Society
www.fass.org

Genetics Society of America
<http://www.faseb.org/genetics/gsa/>

Institute of Food Technologists
www.ift.org

Poultry Science Association
www.psa.org

Rural Sociological Society
www.lapop.lsu.edu/rss/

Society of Nematologists
www.ianr.unl.edu/son/

Soil Science Society of America
www.soils.org

Weed Science Society of America
www.wssa.net

Why the Federal Government Should Increase Support for Agricultural Research

The agricultural science community recommends that the current budget for agricultural research be significantly increased. A significant increase in research funding is required to help ensure a continued supply of affordable, safe, wholesome food produced in an environmentally responsible manner. Long-term research must be encouraged in order to provide a balanced portfolio that includes increases in competitive, peer-reviewed grants as well as formula funds that address broader public issues. The National Research Initiative (NRI), specifically, has a unique mission within the USDA to fund, in a competitive, peer-reviewed fashion, investigator-initiated, fundamental research related to agriculture. A major concern raised in a recent National Research Council (NRC, 2000) report, and shared by the agricultural research community, is that the NRI has been long been significantly under funded. The limitation in funding has resulted in no funding for insightful proposals that would fill voids in knowledge in agriculture and that projects that are funded are limited in size and duration. Thus, the NRC concludes that the best scientists are not applying for grants in agriculture.

Increased funding will also address important issues outside the realm of pure research, such as, bioterrorism and renewable bioenergy, environmental issues, recycling waste into food and fiber, and working with other agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the NSF to better understand and use the power of genomics. Genomics and bioinformatics promise to revolutionize the research of beneficial and harmful microbes, plants and animals that are important to the health and well-being of the U.S. and its inhabitants. Without dramatically increased funding, these much needed scientific and technological advances will be diminished or not occur at all.

For these reasons we recommend increased funding across USDA's entire research portfolio as an investment in research that will lead to a more healthy and secure nation. The Administration's FY 2003 request to fund the NRI at \$240 million is an excellent start. Additionally, any increase should not come at the expense of existing agricultural research programs.

