May 8, 2009 —BY E-mail to agri@appro.senate.gov
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
Senate Appropriations Committee
The Capitol, S-128
Washington, D.C. 20510
Attention: Fitz Elder

RE: FY 2010 Appropriations—Support for Agricultural Research Service; Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service; and Natural Resources Conservation Service

Dear Chairman Kohl, Ranking Member Brownback, and Members of the Subcommittee:

The American Society of Agronomy (ASA), Crop Science Society of America (CSSA), and Soil Science Society of America (SSSA) are pleased to submit the following funding recommendations for FY 2010. ASA, CSSA, and SSSA understand the challenges the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies faces with the tight budget for FY 2010. We also recognize that the Agriculture Appropriations bill has many valuable and necessary components. We applaud the Subcommittee’s efforts to fund mission-oriented, critical research through the USDA-Cooperative State, Research, Education and Extension Service, its intramural research portfolio funded through the Agricultural Research Service as well as the conservation programs through the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

ASA, CSSA, and SSSA are particularly grateful to the Subcommittee for funding the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), the new competitive grants program for research, extension, and education within USDA’s Cooperative State, Research, Education and Extension Service at $201.5 million in the FY 2009 Omnibus Appropriations bill. In FY 2010, at a time when our nation needs to respond rapidly to challenges which threaten our ability to safely produce and distribute food, feed, fuel, and fiber, we find that it is essential that to continue to build our competitive research programs. For this reason, we recommend funding AFRI at $300 million in the FY 2010 agriculture appropriations bill. We believe that funding AFRI at this level would be a strong step in support of these important systems, enabling effective development and distribution of information which will achieve the dual goals of agricultural production and environmental stewardship, maximizing the benefits of agroecosystem processes.
For the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), ASA, CSSA, and SSSA thank Congress for providing ARS with the much-needed investments ($176 million) for buildings and facilities in the ’09 economic stimulus bill (Public Law 111-5). For FY 2010, we recommend a funding level of $1,268 million or a 7% increase over the FY 2009 enacted funding level. The ARS ensures that our nation has a safe, reliable, and adequate supply of high quality food, feed, fiber and fuel.

For the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES), ASA, CSSA, and SSSA recommend a funding level of $1,444 million for FY 2010, roughly an 18% increase over FY 2009.

For FY 2010 of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, ASA, CSSA, and SSSA support a 7% increase over FY 2009 enacted for a funding level of $1,036 million.

With more than 25,000 members and certified professionals, ASA, CSSA, and SSSA are the largest life science professional societies in the United States dedicated to the agronomic, crop and soil sciences. ASA, CSSA, and SSSA play a major role in promoting progress in these sciences through the publication of quality journals and books, convening meetings and workshops, developing educational, training, and public information programs, providing scientific advice to inform public policy, and promoting ethical conduct among practitioners of agronomy and crop and soil sciences.

ASA and SSSA certified professionals—Certified Crop Advisers (CCA), Agronomists (CPAg) and Soil Scientists (CPSS)—are specialists who work in the field with farmers, providing technical advice about the agronomic practices—types and rates of fertilizer application, plant hybrid and variety selection, soil conservation, nutrient management, and integrated pest management—most appropriate to optimize crop yield and minimize environmental impact.

Agricultural Research Service (ARS)
ASA, CSSA, and SSSA applaud the Agricultural Research Services’ (ARS) ability to respond quickly to rapidly changing national needs. With ARS’s 2,100 scientists located at 100 research locations accomplishes scientific discoveries that help solve problems in crop and livestock production and protection human nutrition, and ensure a sustainable interaction of agriculture and the environment. ARS National Programs focus on the importance, impact, and quality of ARS research in 1) Nutrition, Food Safety/Quality, 2) Animal Production and Protections, 3) Natural Resources and Sustainable Agricultural Systems, and 4) Crop Production and Protection. Increasingly, ARS through Cooperative Research and Development Agreements (CRADA) federal laboratories and businesses form partnerships that help move new technologies to the marketplace. These partnerships are especially important to leverage during a time when our nation’s economy remains vulnerable and federal funding is constrained. Such cooperative research helps foster American businesses and enhances the position of the U.S. as a global leader in food, feed, fiber, and fuel production.

ASA, CSSA, and SSSA find that research from ARS programs and technology transfer ensures high-quality, safe food and other agricultural products; assesses the nutritional needs of Americans; helps to sustain a competitive agricultural economy; enhances the natural resource base and the environment; and provides economic opportunities for rural citizens, communities,
and society as a whole. Again, ASA, CSSA, and SSSA recommend an ARS funding level of $1,268 million for FY 2010, a 7% increase above the FY 2009 enacted.

**Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES)**

**Hatch and McIntire-Stennis Formula Funding:** ASA, CSSA, and SSSA find that the need has never been greater to enhance investment in Hatch and McIntire-Stennis formula funding. Therefore, ASA, CSSA, and SSSA recommend that both Hatch and McIntire-Stennis receive a 10% increase over the FY 2009 enacted level of funding, bringing the combined funding level to $258 million for FY 2010. If we are to maintain the research capacity at our nation’s Land Grant Universities and Colleges of Agriculture necessary to keep American agriculture competitive, while recognizing the potential of our managed systems to provide beneficial ecosystem services, we need concerted investment in our institutions.

**Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI):** ASA, CSSA, and SSSA strongly endorse a 49% increase in funding for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative. The AFRI, established in the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (FCEA), is the successor to USDA’s National Research Initiative (NRI) and the Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems (IFAFS). ASA, CSSA, and SSSA find that funding AFRI at $300 million in the FY 2010 agriculture appropriations bill (exclusive of any funding identified for Section 406 programs) will show a strong commitment to America’s farmers and rural entrepreneurs.

**Bioenergy Feedstock Research:** ASA, CSSA, and SSSA support funding of the Agricultural Bioenergy Feedstock and Energy Efficiency Research and Extension Initiative (Section 7207) of the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (FCEA) at $25 million for FY 2010. Section 7207 is a new program which closes the critical research gap between fundamental biological discovery and the reliable expression of new traits in the field. The research and extension projects under Section 7207 are critical to the future of the U.S., and will improve agricultural biomass production using field observations. This is a nearly priceless step in translation of basic research. Furthermore, we applaud Congress for including $118 million in mandatory funding during the life of the FCEA for the Biomass Research and Development Initiative (BRDI). We are excited about the mandatory funding of the USDA portion of BRDI at $28 million for FY 2010 and suggest that an additional $10 million in discretionary funds be placed towards this critical program for FY 2010.

**Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Programs:** ASA, CSSA, and SSSA find the SARE Professional Development Program to be an effective program and support funding for the program at $4.92 million for FY 2010. Additionally, we urge the Subcommittee to consider an increase in SARE funding to bring SARE funding to $15.7 million for FY 2010.

**Higher Education:** ASA, CSSA, and SSSA urge the Subcommittee to fund the Institution Challenge Grants at $6.22 million for FY 2010. We strongly support a FY 2010 level of $4.24 million in funding for the Graduate Fellowships Grants; these grants enable us to train the next generation of scientific innovators.

**Cooperative Extension Service:** Extension forms a critical part of research, education and extension program integration, a feature unique to CSREES. Unfortunately, recently the Smith
**Lever 3(b) and 3(c)** account has been flat-funded (in constant dollars this account has seen a gradual *erosion* in funding). ASA, CSSA, and SSSA support $309 million in appropriations for FY 2010, a $20 million increase over FY 2009 enacted for the continuing education and outreach activities supported by *Smith-Lever Formula 3(b) & (c).*

**New Technologies for Ag Extension (NTAE):** *eXtension* is a national web-based information and education delivery system that provides direct public access to science-based educational resources. ASA, CSSA, and SSSA find that internet-facilitated outreach through *eXtension* and other *New Technologies for Ag Extension (NTAE) programs* provide invaluable consolidation and streamlining of information. These communication technologies help to highlight appropriate management, expediting the voluntary adoption of best practices. ASA, CSSA, and SSSA recommend a 10% increase in appropriation for FY 2010 for this program, bringing funding to $1.65 million.

**Integrated Research, Education, and Extension Competitive Grants Program (Section 406):** *Section 406* was initially authorized in *Section 406 of the Agricultural Research, Extension and Education Reform Act of 1998.* Since its inception this program has proven to be an indispensable part of water and pest management and numerous other issues. ASA, CSSA, and SSSA support a funding increase of 7% for programs under *Section 406*, which would bring total funding to $44.92 million. Furthermore, we strongly suggest that the *International Science and Education (ISE) Grants Program* also receive a 7% increase, bringing *ISE* funding to $3.21 million for FY 2010, and increasing the funding of *total integrated activities* to $60 million for FY 2010.

**Organic Farming Transition Program:** ASA, CSSA, and SSSA urge the Subcommittee to fund the *Organic Farming Transition Program* at $1.97 million in FY 2010, an increase over FY 2009 of 7%.

**Natural Resources Conservation Service**
For FY 2010 of the *Natural Resources Conservation Service*, ASA, CSSA, and SSSA support a 7% increase over FY 2009 enacted for a funding level of $1,036 million.

**Conservation Security Program:** The *Conservation Security Program* provides financial and technical assistance to producers who advance the conservation and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal life, and other conservation purposes on Tribal and private working lands. ASA, CSSA, and SSSA applaud Congress for passing the FCEA which keeps this important working lands conservation program as an uncapped mandatory program.

**Environmental Quality Incentives Program:** The *Environmental Quality Incentives Program* provides technical assistance to eligible farmers and ranchers to address soil, water, air, and related natural resource concerns on their lands in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner. ASA, CSSA, and SSSA support funding of this essential program at $1,337 million for FY 2010.
In Summary
A balance of funding mechanisms, including intramural, competitive and formula funding, is essential to maintain the capacity of the United States to conduct both basic and applied agricultural research to improve crop and livestock quality, and deliver safe and nutritious food products, while protecting and enhancing the nation's environment and natural resource base. In order to address these challenges and maintain our position in an increasingly competitive world, we must continue to support research, education and extension programs funded through the Agricultural Research Service and Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service and conservation programs supported by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Congress must enhance funding for the programs to ensure that Americans have access to a safe and nutritious food supply and to provide for the next generation of research scientists, extension agents and educators. According to the USDA Economic Research Service (Agricultural Economic Report Number 735), publicly funded agricultural research has earned an annual rate of return of 35%. This rate of return suggests that additional allocation of funds to support research in the food and agricultural sciences would be highly beneficial to the U.S. economy. Finally, we must ensure support for CSREES-funded extension programs to guarantee that these important new tools and technologies reach and are utilized by producers and other stakeholders.

As you lead the Congress in deliberation on funding levels for agricultural research, extension, education and conservation programs, please consider American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America as supportive resources. We hope you will call on our membership and scientific expertise whenever the need arises. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our requests. For additional information or to learn more about the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America and Soil Science Society of America (ASA-CSSA-SSSA), please visit www.agronomy.org, www.crops.org or www.soils.org or contact ASA-CSSA-SSSA Director of Science Policy Karl Glasener (kglasener@agronomy.org, kglasener@crops.org, or kglasener@soils.org) or 202-408-5382.