March 5, 2020

Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman, Agriculture Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member, Agriculture Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
Chairman, Agriculture Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry
Ranking Member, Agriculture Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Shelby, Hoeven, Lowey and Bishop, and Ranking Members Leahy, Merkley, Granger and Fortenberry:

The undersigned members of the Friends of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Coalition thank you for your support in (FY) 2020. We are very grateful that Congress rejected proposals to cut ARS research programs and eliminate 20 ARS laboratories and facilities and instead maintained funding for the Agency and ARS programs.

As you consider the future needs for programs and facilities within the subcommittee’s jurisdiction, we ask that you increase support for the ARS. The Coalition recommends $1.789 billion in top-line funding for ARS in FY 2021, which represents a $182.9 million increase over FY 2020. This total would provide an increase of $80 million or 5 percent to support all four national program areas and includes $102.6 million in funding dedicated to the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF).

The ARS is USDA’s chief scientific in-house research agency with a mission to conduct research, develop solutions to agricultural problems of the highest national priority, and provide information to the public across four national program areas: nutrition, food safety and quality;
animal production and protection; crop production and protection; and natural resources and sustainable agricultural systems.

ARS laboratories serve as regional engines for research innovation and contribute to a vibrant network of national facilities that advance knowledge and expand capability for the country. The newest addition, NBAF, is the nation’s only bio-safety level (BSL) 4 laboratory focused on livestock health and zoonotic disease, a critical component of the United States’ agro-security infrastructure. For FY 2021, the NBAF funding request includes research program enhancements, as well as partnership and innovation efforts to ensure that NBAF has access to properly trained personnel. As ARS assumes ownership and operational authority of NBAF, it is vitally important that the agency’s account is increased to reflect the expanded responsibility of this $1.25 billion facility without cannibalizing ARS’s four existing national programs. We are grateful for the subcommittee’s support of NBAF to-date and the $102.6 million requested for FY 2020 will continue to support the standup activities underway, including hiring scientific personnel and workforce training. Long-term funding for NBAF’s operational costs and science program is critical to ensuring that the US remains capable of identifying and responding to emerging threats to livestock and discovering new paths to mitigate or eliminate animal diseases.

In addition to countless research contributions, ARS research projects provide more than 8,000 jobs and are directly contributing to local economies. Additionally, ARS workforce enables groundbreaking discoveries that contribute to the stability and security of the American economy and agricultural industry. ARS labs and research facilities support collaboration opportunities that incorporate the broader research community at many of our nation’s universities, allowing ARS to directly and indirectly impact every part of the United States agricultural system.

It is vital that the ARS is funded at $1.789 billion for FY 2021 to extend the nation’s scientific knowledge in the four national program of nutrition, animal production/protection, crop production/protection, and natural resources, while ensuring additional funding is directed to NBAF to ensure that it has adequate resources for operations, maintenance, research and workforce.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

American Association of Mycobacterial Diseases
American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
American Dairy Science Association
American Malting Barley Association
American Phytopathological Society
American Pulse Association
American Seed Trade Association
American Society of Animal Science
American Society for Horticultural Science
American Society for Nutrition
American Society of Agronomy
American Veterinary Medical Association
Crop Science Society of America
Farm Journal Foundation
FASS
Idaho Grain Producers Association
Montana Wheat and Barley Committee
Mycobacterial Diseases of Animals - Multistate Initiative
National Association for the Advancement of Animal Science
National Association of Federal Veterinarians
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
National Barley Growers Association
National Barley Improvement Committee
National Cattlemen’s Beef Association
National Sunflower Association
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
North American Craft Malsters Guild
North Dakota Grain Growers Association
Soil Science Society of America
Tufts University
US Canola Association
US Dairy Forage Research Center Stakeholder Committee
US Dry Bean Council
USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council