



ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

November 5, 2013

ADDRESS

Dear [Farm Bill Conferee],

As president of the Association of American Universities (AAU) I urge you to support strong funding for NIFA's Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) as you work to complete the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act of 2013. AAU is an association of 60 leading U.S. public and private research universities, many that have successfully competed for AFRI research grants.

As a competitive grants program, AFRI supports the highest quality science to address some of our nation's most pressing challenges: demands for cutting-edge biofuels; the need for a safe, sustainable, and nutritious food supply; global food security; and better understanding of climate-related impacts on agriculture. AFRI is the only competitive federal research program that addresses the unique needs of rural communities, including ways to revitalize rural economies. More than 50 percent of the AFRI budget supports fundamental or basic research, providing the scientific understanding that underpins advances in agricultural and other life sciences. I urge you to include strong and sustained funding authorization levels for AFRI.

I also urge you to modify Section 7128 of H.R. 2642 in the final conference report to extend the exemption for matching grants to all public and non-profit research universities. The bill currently would exempt some universities from the matching grant funds requirement (those entities eligible to receive funds under a capacity and infrastructure program). This creates an unfair disadvantage for all other universities that would be required to provide matching funds. For AFRI to remain a truly competitive program that supports the highest quality research, it is important to maintain equal and nondiscriminatory eligibility requirements for all university grant applicants. I appreciate the desire to make uniform the matching requirements for research funding, yet that aspiration should not come at the expense of marginalizing AFRI as less than a world class research agency. The agency will not achieve that status if the competitive playing field for grants is unfair.

Thank you for your work on the 2013 Farm Bill and for your consideration of these recommendations.

Sincerely,

Hunter R. Rawlings III
President
Association of American Universities

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Brown University
California Institute of Technology
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