

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 16, 2019

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Hoeven and Ranking Member Merkley:

As your subcommittee considers its fiscal year (FY) 2020 appropriations bill, we write to request your support for funding the Research Facilities Act which was amended and reauthorized by section 7503 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (aka 2018 farm bill). The Research Facilities Act establishes a competitive grant program to help address the escalating maintenance needs of decaying infrastructure at U.S. schools of agriculture. This important initiative was also recognized in the President's FY 2020 Budget with a proposal to provide \$50 million for Competitive Facility Grants at Land-Grant Universities and we ask that you support that funding request for this urgent infrastructure need.

Addressing our nation's infrastructure needs is a stated priority of this administration and we believe that investing in our U.S. schools of agriculture fits squarely within that objective. The significant maintenance backlog was highlighted in a 2015 study commissioned by the Association of Public Land-grant Universities (APLU) and conducted by Sightlines, LLC. The APLU-supported study, in which 91 colleges and universities from all across the country participated, concluded that the infrastructure needs for over 15,000 facilities total \$8.4 billion in deferred maintenance. The study went on to find that when schools of agriculture were broken up by their typical geographic regions (Western, Southern, North Central, and Northeast), no region was consistently providing sufficient resources to address the deferred maintenance backlog. If investment in maintenance were to continue at or below current levels then deferred maintenance costs will continue to skyrocket over the next decade.

It is imperative that the research infrastructure at U.S. schools of agriculture, much of which was built in the 1950s and 1960s, is maintained to allow for cutting-edge research and education activities. The APLU-supported study found that if investment for infrastructure needs is not increased in the future, then classrooms, scientific research, greenhouses, pilot facilities, animal care, extension and support buildings will suffer from cracked foundations, leaky roofs, failing HVAC/plumbing/electrical systems, nonfunctioning laboratories, etc. The level of cutting-edge research required for the U.S. to remain a global leader in agriculture cannot be conducted in such facilities, and quality facilities are also essential to attracting and training the next generation of agricultural professionals.

U.S. agriculture makes up 5.5 percent of our nation's economy, supports 11 percent of U.S. jobs, and each American home spends an average of 12.9 percent of its household expenditures on food. There is no denying the importance of agricultural production and innovation to our economy and food security both here and abroad, with our agriculture-related exports doubling between 2006 and 2014. With increasing international trade it is important that U.S. colleges and universities maintain the facilities needed to provide 21st century research and education opportunities that will help the U.S. to remain globally competitive.

For these reasons there is a strong federal interest in maintaining these facilities, which are also home to billions of dollars of research funded by USDA. We ask that in your FY2020 Appropriations bill you address this critical need by providing \$50 million for the Research Facilities Act. Funding for this competitive grant program will allow USDA to begin the process of addressing the escalating maintenance needs of decaying infrastructure at U.S. schools of agriculture.

Sincerely,



MAZIE K. HIRONO
United States Senator




JAMES M. INHOFE
United States Senator



GARY C. PETERS
United States Senator



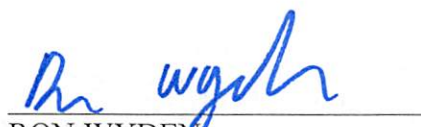
JOE MANCHIN III
United States Senator



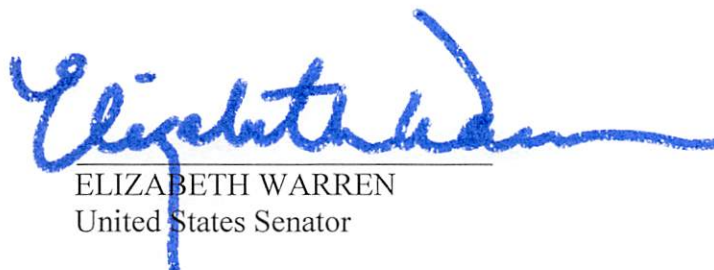
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MARIA CANTWELL
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RON WYDEN
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ELIZABETH WARREN
United States Senator



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator



TAMMY DUCKWORTH
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