

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 12, 2023

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Shalanda Young
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Director Young:

As the President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 budget request is prepared, we request that an increase of at least five percent, plus inflation, above the FY 2024 funding levels proposed by the Senate, be provided across the board for all USDA research activities underway within the Agricultural Research Service, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, the Economic Research Service, and the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

For decades, public and private sector contributions to domestic food and agricultural research in the U.S. remained relatively steady, each contributing roughly half of total expenditures. Between 2008 and 2013, however, public investments in food and agricultural research dropped by 20 percent in inflation-adjusted terms, while the contributions by large private-sector corporations have increased by 64 percent over the same period.

Private research has achieved noteworthy and widespread breakthroughs, but typically entails proprietary protections and provides a more immediate return for the sponsoring enterprise. It is not a substitute for public research. The public sector can pursue research into subjects and specialties that the private sector cannot or will not, while allowing for unrestricted and greater dissemination of shared research and the exploration of multiple applications of that knowledge. Such open-access research helps to increase the pace of discoveries whereby the cost-benefits of the initial investment can have a dramatically expanded payback to society, by some estimates ranging between a 20 to 60 percent rate of return.

While U.S. public agricultural research spending has declined during the past 30 years, China's public agricultural research spending has increased by eight times, surpassing U.S. public investments more than 10 years ago. This is concerning given global population growth, increasing consumer demand for sustainability, changing weather patterns, and greater risks for plant and animal disease transmissions. Trends in life sciences, communications, data management, robotics, and engineering, strongly suggest that American agriculture is on the cusp of yet another sweeping transformation similar to that which emerged after the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl.

We ask your support for food and agricultural research by providing an increase of at least five percent, plus inflation, above the FY 2024 levels proposed by the Senate for USDA research activities for FY 2025. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



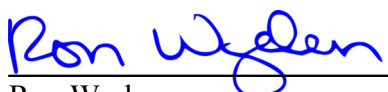
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator