

July 27, 2009

The Honorable Rajiv Shah  
Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Under Secretary Shah:

We take this occasion to welcome you to Washington, D.C., and to express our renewed hope in the direction of federal agricultural research under your leadership of the Research, Economics and Education mission area of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Your arrival heralds a new focus on national research priorities when our nation and the world need agriculture to solve immense challenges. We must partner with our planet to grow more using less so that we may feed, clothe and increasingly, power civilization. The required innovation to grow more and healthier food and fiber will come through better research, including improved management and increased funding. Competitive research has proven to achieve the best results for each investment. It is also the area USDA must improve the most.

This year the National Institutes of Health will spend \$170 for every \$1 spent by the USDA on competitive, fundamental research. This lopsided funding is of special concern since the very essence of life science begins with the food we eat. Innovation in life and medical science is needed but restoring agriculture innovation is as critical now as it was at the birth of our nation and in the years preceding our industrial revolution.

Since 1990, annual yield growth rates for corn, wheat, rice and soy have fallen as compared to the prior three decades. During that same time frame, small-acreage crops, like sorghum and barley, dependence on public funds to accomplish their research goals has grown significantly. Animal agriculture confronts encroaching development and myriad disease threats. Land productivity growth rates have also steadily declined. We do not think it is a coincidence that this has occurred over a period when public agricultural research and development (R&D) funding has experienced slower growth. The share of U.S. public agricultural R&D spending globally has also waned, costing us precious advances in a fiercely competitive global economy. Between 1981 and the start of this decade, China doubled its share of public agricultural R&D expenditures. Other developing countries increased their share by 5%. The U.S. increase totaled just 1%.

We offer our full support and commit to working with you to establish the National Institute of Food and Agriculture and increase funding for the primary competitive research program --- the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). We are prepared to partner with you to increase funding, improve management and perhaps most importantly raise the profile of agricultural research within Congress and President Obama's Administration.

Sincerely,

American Farm Bureau Federation  
American Malting Barley Association  
American Soybean Association  
National Association of Wheat Growers  
National Barley Growers Association  
National Barley Improvement Committee  
National Chicken Council  
National Corn Growers Association  
National Cotton Council  
National Farmers Union  
National Pork Producers Council  
National Sorghum Producers  
U.S. Rice Producers Association  
US Canola Association  
USA Rice Federation