Dear Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member Farr:

We appreciate your leadership in providing additional investment in the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) over the last five years. These funding decisions, in the face of tough budgets and political expediency, will result in meaningful contributions to society.

We are writing to ask that you continue this investment in agriculture and food research by providing $450 million for AFRI in fiscal year 2016. This is the level of funding included in the President’s budget request and represents only 64% of the $700 million authorized for the program.

As you well know, agricultural research is critically important for solutions to society’s greatest challenges, including how to produce more food, fiber and fuels using less of Earth’s bounty. In this past year alone, agriculture science has advanced the development of an allergy-free peanut and an Ebola vaccine. These innovative discoveries merit even stronger investment in agricultural science and technology. The simple fact that we will have to feed more people in the next 40 years than we have fed in the last 10,000 years illustrates that more than ever before, agricultural innovation is vital to the advancement of our nation and survival of our world.

Even with recent AFRI-funded successes in research, there is still much ground to cover. Every year, over half of AFRI’s research grant proposals that are rated “highly innovative” go unfunded due to budget constraints within the agency. In December 2012, the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) issued a report urging an additional commitment of $700 million in funding for new agricultural research. The PCAST report concluded that now is the time to move agricultural research ahead by significantly increasing funding for competitive grants. The report noted further that competitively-awarded research funding such as AFRI grants is paramount to addressing a number of challenges including weather risk, depleted water resources, animal diseases and emerging plant pest risks.

For the past six years, China has exceeded the United States in agriculture research funding. As the rapid rate of investment and productivity continues to grow in foreign countries, the United States’ global agricultural leadership is at-risk. A significant investment, like the one in the President’s FY 16 budget proposal, is desperately needed to support the best scientists and innovators working in the crucial fields of agriculture. Ultimately, this investment will ensure US agriculture remains competitive, and it will narrow the gap between current productivity and future anticipated need.

We ask that you give our request careful consideration as you set out to fund the nation’s agricultural policy priorities in fiscal year 2016. We realize the difficulty of your task, and we are confident that increased investment in the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative will prove to
be a wise decision now and for the future. We look forward to continued discussion with you throughout the FY16 appropriations process.

Thank you,

The Founding Members of Supporters of Agricultural Research (SoAR)
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