

April 16, 2024

The Honorable Martin Heinrich  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural  
Development, Food and Drug Administration  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural  
Development, Food and Drug Administration  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Andy Harris  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural  
Development, Food and Drug Administration  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural  
Development, Food and Drug Administration  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Heinrich, Ranking Member Hoeven, Chairman Harris, and Ranking Member Bishop,

As organizations committed to an innovative, resilient U.S. agricultural system, we write to urge you to provide robust funding for agricultural research in the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies bill for Fiscal Year 2025. U.S. farmers and ranchers increasingly face economic instability and extreme weather conditions that are compounded with other evolving challenges that threaten their ability to supply food and fiber while maintaining profitable operations. Simultaneously, U.S. federal investments in public agricultural research have stagnated and declined in real terms; a 2022 report by the Economic Research Service found that public agricultural R&D investments have declined by about one-third since peaking in 2002, and concluded that the U.S. is well behind other countries in investment in agricultural R&D. This decline in public funding has curtailed the development and dissemination of cutting-edge, regionally and culturally relevant agricultural practices and technologies that can improve producer resilience to environmental and economic challenges.

As USDA's principal in-house research agency, the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) manages crucial long-term agricultural data and develops new management techniques and technologies to spur agricultural innovation and develop solutions to agriculture's most pressing challenges. For example, the national network of research sites hosted in the Long-Term Agroecosystem Research (LTAR) Network has advanced the sustainable intensification of agricultural production, while the ARS and Forest Service-led Climate Hubs link novel tools and information from USDA science with agriculture producers and professionals. These programs are vital to ensuring U.S. farmers can sustainably feed our population, steward natural resources, and operate thriving businesses.

Strong funding for ARS and agricultural research, in general, will catalyze innovative and promising new frontiers that support farmer profitability *and* resiliency, including in the areas of:

**Soil Health:** Improving soil health helps build carbon stocks, improves water retention and filtration, and boosts nutrition for crops. Prioritized investments in soil health research can empower voluntary, science-based decision-making by producers. Targeted investments can provide the most up-to-date information on best regional practices, bring clarity around measurement of soil carbon sequestration, biodiversity, and other ecosystem services, and deliver cost-benefit analyses of various soil health practices.

**Agroforestry:** Rooted in traditional ecological knowledge, agroforestry – the intentional integration of trees and shrubs into agricultural systems – has gained newfound interest as a solution. Agroforestry systems diversify producer revenue through the incorporation of tree crops, sequester carbon in soil and biomass, and provide myriad conservation benefits. Scaling agroforestry requires dedicated research to address key barriers, including new propagation techniques to strengthen seedling supply chains, and specialized technical assistance delivery on regionally optimal tree species and management techniques.

**Biochar:** Attracting headlines in recent years, biochar is a carbon-rich, charcoal-like substance produced by heating organic plant material. Biochar is a permanent carbon removal solution, and when used as a soil amendment, offers desirable results, including improved water retention. However, targeted research is needed to identify sustainable biomass sourcing and production, as well as best practices for biochar application under various conditions and across regions to enable farmer adoption.

**Organics:** Organic agriculture is one of the fastest growing sectors of American agriculture, and currently supports nearly 28,000 family farms and businesses. Increased investments in organic agriculture research will advance the substantial contributions of the organic sector's efforts to address pressing environmental, climate, and human health concerns. Organic farms, both certified and non-certified, as well as conventional operations throughout the United States will benefit from an increase in organic farming research through the identification of ecologically and economically sound management techniques.

**Agrioltaics:** Agrioltaics systems combine solar panels (i.e., photovoltaic systems) with agricultural production. By adding panels to farmland, producers reap the benefits of producing their own energy without reducing their acres in production. In fact, solar panels can improve the productivity of appropriate crops and reduce water loss while adding an additional on-farm revenue stream. Agrioltaic research will continue to better enable the combined use of agricultural land for both renewable energy and farming—an approach that has wide-ranging benefits for farmers and for energy production.

We thank you for your past support of agricultural research funding and encourage robust investment moving forward, with particular emphasis on high-impact areas like soil health, agroforestry, biochar, organic production, and agrioltaics. Together, we can strengthen our farm and food systems to meet current and future challenges, and ensure farmers and ranchers have access to the tools and resources they

need to unlock innovation, develop and improve sustainable farming systems, and bolster their resilience amidst uncertainty and disruption.

Sincerely,

Agroforestry Partners  
American Institute of Biological Sciences  
American Society of Agronomy  
Appalachian Sustainable Development  
Berkeley Food Institute  
Breadtree Farms  
California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)  
California Climate and Agriculture Network  
Carbon180  
Climate Land Leaders  
Crop Science Society of America  
Earthjustice  
Ecosystem Services Market Consortium (ESMC)  
Farm Aid  
Farm Journal Foundation  
Georgia Organic  
Illinois Stewardship Alliance  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy  
Jóia Food & Fiber Farm  
Maine Farmland Trust  
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute  
Midwest Cover Crops Council  
National Center for Appropriate Technology  
National Organic Coalition  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
National Wildlife Federation  
National Young Farmers Coalition  
Native Forest Nursery, LLC  
Oregon Climate and Agriculture Network  
Oregon Tilth  
Organic Farming Research Foundation  
Organic Seed Alliance  
Pollinator Partnership  
Propagate  
Rural Advancement Foundation International  
Savanna Institute  
Soil Science Society of America  
Sprout NOLA  
Synergistic Hawaii Agriculture Council

The Climate Reality Project- Chicago Metro Chapter

The Climate Source

The Land Institute

Union of Concerned Scientists

Virginia Association for Biological Farming

Windfall Bio

Women, Food and Agriculture Network (WFAN)

Woodwell Climate Research Center

Working Trees

Yard Stick PBC