

The Honorable Robert Aderholt, Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug Administration, and
Related Agencies Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Samuel Farr, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
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March 20, 2015

Dear Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member Farr,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing you to encourage your support for the statistical agencies and those involved with economic research and analysis within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for Fiscal Year 2016 (FY16). **Your support of the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) at \$86 million and the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) at \$180 million, with \$46 million allocated for the Census of Agriculture, will avoid unwanted shocks to the marketplace because of subpar information and data. Moreover, we urge you to continue to support the growth of the research and analysis that is provided by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture's diverse research, education, and extension programs.**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) produces data and information that directly inform decisions by food and agricultural market participants, agricultural input and food businesses, banks and other credit institutions and those who make food, farm, economic development, and trade policy. American agriculture, rural America, food, and resource-based industries depend on the reliable production of timely, accurate, and objective food, agricultural, rural economic, and resource statistics and market information. The undersigned organizations support the maintenance and growth of agriculture, food, and resource statistics and analysis through the USDA Research, Education and Economics Mission Area (USDA REE), and other sources within the USDA portfolio.

Within the USDA REE, the NASS is committed to providing timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture. The agency conducts hundreds of surveys every year and prepares reports and information to communicate the survey results. Production and supplies of food and fiber, prices paid and received by farmers, farm labor and wages, farm finances, chemical use, and changes in the demographics of U.S. producers are only a few examples of the type of information gathered. NASS reports the facts on American agriculture, facts needed by people working in and depending upon U.S. agriculture. A primary concern of the NASS is to 'safeguard the privacy of farmers, ranchers, and other data providers, with a guarantee that confidentiality and data security continue to be our top priorities.'

The mission of the ERS is to inform and enhance public and private decision making on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural development. To accomplish this mission, ERS manages a comprehensive program of economic research and analysis, including development of economic and statistical indicators that are coordinated with NASS efforts. Suspension of agricultural estimates programs at USDA's NASS impacts ERS's ability to publish data products and outlook reports. Connecting with and working closely with researchers across the United States, ERS issues cooperative agreements and grant awards and works with land-grant partners on many projects. The ERS is a primary source of economic information and research in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the work it does improves USDA program effectiveness.

Today, NASS is experiencing increased demand for its statistical products and reports, while ERS is experiencing high demand for its research, data products, and services. Market volatility and related uncertainty significantly increase in the absence of government-managed and produced statistics. These agencies provide the United States (U.S.) an important edge against the increasingly global agricultural competition. Their work keeps the U.S. agricultural data information and analysis system second to none, worldwide. As a result, these programs not only have impact at the farm gate, but throughout national and international food, feed, fiber, and fuel economies. To continue to build future capacity in an increasingly competitive marketplace, the U.S. must invest in and leverage all of its strengths, including the food and agricultural data and information system.

In FY13, the services of both ERS and NASS were cut significantly, leading to suspension, aggregation, and even elimination of data and statistical series critical for understanding or alleviating market risk. Both agencies have since taken a critical look at their products, a reassessment that led to discontinuation of updates for several data series and/or a reduction in the level of geographic detail for other data. As the sequester returns in FY16, we urge you to consider reinforcing and building upon programs that will continue to assist in the recovery of the U.S. economy. Agriculture's contribution to the annual trade surplus, a significant part of our economic recovery, is in part due to the quality of information available in and about the marketplace.

In closing, we encourage you to fund these critical agencies at FY16 request levels in order for them to continue providing essential information to farm and agribusiness, government agricultural program, and food policy decision makers. If you have any specific questions with regard to agricultural products in your state, please contact (agricultural.statistics@gmail.com), ERS or NASS. Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration of this information.

Sincerely,