

March 11, 2016

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Chair, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Support for USDA REE ERS and NASS FY17 Funding

Dear Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Merkley,

The undersigned groups, which include various members of the Friends of Agricultural Statistics and Analysis, strongly support federal investment to advance agricultural statistics and research in the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS) and the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). We support funding for these agencies in fiscal year 2017 (FY17) at levels that are *at least* \$91.3 M for ERS and \$176.6 M for NASS.

USDA produces valuable data that directly informs 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. Additionally, the statistics and analysis made possible by these agencies provides a greater understanding of farm household dynamics, advances evidence-based policy approaches, and gives insight into the health of the farm economy.

The National Agricultural Statistics Service (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 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 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 Economic Research Service (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), which is coordinated with NASS efforts. ERS also works with NASS to develop the content of and covers the cost of more than half of the Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS), NASS's largest farm operator survey. Also, ERS independently conducts its own National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey. Connecting with and working closely with researchers across the U.S., ERS issues cooperative agreements and grant awards and works with land-grant partners on many projects. These essential

collaborations could be threatened if support waivers. Finally, the ERS is a primary source of economic information and research in USDA; the work it does improves the Department's program effectiveness.

USDA's data products and analytical programs provide the U.S. with an important edge against increasingly fierce global agricultural competition. These programs benefit the entire supply chain, starting at the farm gate and enhancing decisions throughout national and international food, feed, fiber, and fuel economies. Public data products and projections serve to improve the accuracy of the expectations of market participants, reducing market pricing errors. The U.S. agricultural data information and analysis system is second to none, worldwide. Today, NASS is experiencing increased demand for its statistical products and reports. Similarly, ERS is experiencing significant requests for its research, data products, and services. To continue to build future trade and finance 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.

We encourage you to support these agencies so that they can continue to provide essential information to farm and agribusiness, government agricultural program, and food policy decision makers. If you have any specific questions with regard to agricultural data products related to your state, please contact (agricultural.statistics@gmail.com).

Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration of this information.

Sincerely,

Agricultural & Applied Economics Association
American Association of Mycobacterial Diseases
American Dairy Science Association
American Society of Agronomy
American Society of Animal Science
American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers
American Statistical Association
American Sugar Alliance
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
Crop Science Society of America
Deere & Company
FASS
Global Cold Chain Alliance
International Association of Refrigerated Warehouses
Mycobacterial Disease of Animals Multistate Initiative
National Association for the Advancement of Animal Science
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
National Coalition for Food and Agriculture Research
National Farmers Union
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
North American Regional Science Council
Poultry Science Association
Restaurant Services, Inc.
Soil Science Society of America
The Fertilizer Institute