

October 12, 2011

The Honorable Herb Kohl
Chairman, Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration Appropriations Subcommittee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Kohl,

We are writing you to encourage your support for the statistical agencies in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for FY 2012. The Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS) produce information that plays a vital role in feeding the nation, revitalizing rural America, and increasing our competitiveness internationally. We seek your assistance in ensuring that these programs have the funds needed to continue their important work. Specifically, we urge that both agencies be funded at the Senate level as a minimum. Even at the Senate levels, both NASS and ERS would have to make cuts that would especially impact small farm operators and businesses who rely on NASS and ERS information to remain competitive.

The ERS provides economic and other social science information and analysis on agriculture, food, the environment, and rural development. The ERS produces such information and analyses to inform policy and program decisions made across the spectrum of USDA missions, and supplies them in outlets that are accessible to USDA stakeholders and the general public. We encourage you to support the USDA ERS at a strong and sound level. USDA and its customers greatly benefit from their analysis as it informs how programs are designed for cost efficiencies and greater effectiveness.

Examples of the valuable information provided by ERS include analysis of food consumption factors, such as store/restaurant proximity, food prices, food and nutrition assistance programs, and community characteristics. This information provides insights into diet quality and a community's ability to access healthy food. They also have the only source of data on food availability which measures the national food supply. ERS and NASS jointly sponsor the Agriculture Research Management Survey (ARMS) database, which is the only national survey that provides observations of field-level farm practices, the economics of the farm business, and the characteristics of the American farm household. The implications of losing this kind of information could be devastating to future analysis and understanding of how our citizens produce, sell and consume the most fundamental of items, our food.

NASS produces timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture. NASS statistics provide the information necessary to keep agricultural markets stable and

efficient and to help maintain a consistency for all users of agricultural statistics. In addition to other projects, the agency conducts the quinquennial U.S. Census of Agriculture. We urge you to continue the necessary support funding for NASS. NASS provides essential information to many within the agricultural industry, and you may know that information from NASS is also valuable to your work as a legislator. For example, information from the recent Census of Agriculture is available at the State and Congressional District level in online profiles. Other information includes the average value of agricultural products sold per farm in each state, and the percentage increase/decrease of farms in your state. NASS also provides information such as cropland data and crop-specific images for state and national interest. If you have any specific questions with regard to agricultural products in your state, please contact our organizations or NASS and we would be happy to assist.

We understand that these are difficult economic times and that you face complicated decisions as you allocate money for discretionary programs at USDA. However, statistical information is a vital component in assuring that USDA continues to meet our agricultural needs in feeding Americans, revitalizing rural America, and competing abroad. We urge you to support these two statistical agencies as you consider FY 2012 appropriations.

Please direct any questions on this letter to Steve Pierson, Director of Science Policy for the American Statistical Association: pierson@amstat.org; 703.302.1841.

American Society of Agronomy
American Sociological Association
American Statistical Association
Association for University Business and Economic Research
Association of Academic Survey Research Organizations
Association of Public Data Users
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Council for Community and Economic Research
Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
Council on Food, Agricultural, and Resource Economics
Crop Science Society of America
Soil Science Society of America
Southern Agricultural Economics Association