

Statement of Mark O. Lively, Ph.D., President
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on
Solicitation of Input From
Stakeholders Regarding the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative FY 2011
Competitive Grants Program
Before the
National Institute of Food and Agriculture
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The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) is composed of 23 societies with more than 100,000 members, making it the largest coalition of biomedical research associations in the United States. Our community strongly believes that greater investment in basic and applied agricultural research is essential, as the demand for a safer and more nutritious food supply, cutting-edge biofuels, and a solution to global climate change continue to increase. FASEB thanks the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) for the opportunity to provide the following input regarding the development of the Fiscal Year 2011 Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) request for applications.

Guiding Principles:

FASEB supports AFRI's mission to fund research, education, and extension grants that address key problems of National, regional, and multi-state importance in sustaining all components of agriculture. The establishment of AFRI presents an unparalleled opportunity for revitalization and improvement of our agricultural research system. In that spirit, the recommendations below are aimed at maintaining and magnifying the breadth and competitive nature of the agricultural research portfolio to ensure the United States' economic vitality and the well-being of all Americans.

Maintaining Support for Investigator-Initiated Research:

FASEB supports the role of AFRI in funding competitive, peer-reviewed research in agriculture. Because a strong emphasis on individual investigator-initiated research has long been the cornerstone of U.S. leadership in science, we want to ensure investigator-initiated research remains the foundation of the nation's agricultural research enterprise. We understand that a certain percentage of the annual AFRI budget is required to fund research by multidisciplinary teams and integrated programs. Nonetheless, we believe that a significant portion of asset allocation should be directed toward long-term, individual investigator-initiated grants of sufficient duration in support of innovation in agricultural research.

Balancing the Research Portfolio:

Fundamental research in agriculture establishes the scientific foundation required to provide a safe, nutritious food supply in a manner that reduces environmental pollution, promotes sustainable yields, improves human health, and promotes the competitive position of U.S. agriculture in the global marketplace. While it may be tempting to assign greater importance and more resources to outcome-based research focused on specific societal challenges, FASEB is concerned that shifts in asset allocation toward such narrow targeting may result in the exclusion of other vital areas of agricultural research. In determining an appropriate balance between

fundamental and applied research programs, FASEB encourages AFRI to maintain a strong portfolio with an emphasis on foundational research that fosters continuous generation of new knowledge, leading to rapid progress in meeting national needs. Basic agricultural research provides the key discoveries necessary to develop the scientific and technological advances that will benefit our nation's farms and citizens' daily lives. A recent report by the U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee reaffirms that government investment in basic research is required for innovation.¹ Furthermore, fundamental research often leads to unexpected results that have positive impacts on unanticipated areas of science. For example, federally funded basic research led to enhanced traceability of food products which, in turn, has significant implications for food safety and the structure of the competitive agricultural market. Because FASEB recognizes the need to fund both outcome-based and fundamental agricultural research, we support increased funding for AFRI and recommend a funding level of \$500 million for FY 2011.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment. The expertise of FASEB's societies and scientists is at your service. If there is any way in which we may assist as NIFA develops AFRI RFAs for FY 2011, please let us know.

¹ Joint Economic Committee United States Congress. (2010) *The pivotal role of government investment in basic research*. http://jec.senate.gov/public/?a=Files.Serve&File_id=29aac456-fce3-4d69-956f-4add06f111c1