

February 6, 2009

Member Societies

The American Physiological Society
 American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
 American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics
 American Society for Investigative Pathology
 American Society for Nutrition
 The American Association of Immunologists
 American Association of Anatomists
 The Protein Society
 Society for Developmental Biology
 American Peptide Society
 Association of Biomolecular Resource Facilities
 The American Society for Bone and Mineral Research
 American Society for Clinical Investigation
 Society for the Study of Reproduction
 Teratology Society
 The Endocrine Society
 The American Society of Human Genetics
 Society for Gynecologic Investigation
 Environmental Mutagen Society
 International Society for Computational Biology
 American College of Sports Medicine
 Biomedical Engineering Society

Ms. Judy Rude
 United States Department of Agriculture
 800 9th Street SW
 Washington, DC 20024

Re: Solicitation of Stakeholder Input on the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (CSREES-2008-0004)

Dear Ms. Rude:

The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB), comprising 22 scientific societies representing more than 80,000 life science researchers, appreciates the opportunity to provide input on the establishment of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). FASEB strongly believes that greater investment in basic and applied agricultural research is essential for a safer and more nutritious food supply.

Guiding principles: FASEB concurs with the guiding principles published by the USDA relevant to founding NIFA (<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/newsroom/pdfs/Scientists,%20Educators,%20and%20Stakeholders%20Letter.pdf>). The establishment of NIFA 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.

Director of NIFA: Given that one of the guiding principles established for NIFA is to “enhance the status of food and agriculture science,” FASEB is disappointed that the Director of NIFA will not be reporting directly to the Secretary. Having a prominent scientific expert in a strong leadership role has worked tremendously well for other federal science agencies, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Science Foundation (NSF), and FASEB believes implementing a similar structure at NIFA would foster a culture of scientific eminence and innovation in agriculture that will be of great benefit to our nation.

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. Unfortunately, competitive basic research at USDA, now under the purview of the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), has long been neglected, threatening our ability to sustain the vitality of our research portfolio. In determining “an appropriate balance between fundamental and applied research programs,” FASEB encourages the NIFA Director to bring new emphasis to the competitive, fundamental agricultural research that fosters continuous generation of new knowledge, leading to rapid progress in meeting national needs.

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 the USDA moves forward in transforming our agricultural research enterprise through the formation of NIFA, please let us know.

Sincerely,



Richard Marchase, Ph.D.
 FASEB President

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