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Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology

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Testimony of

William T. Talman, M.D., President

Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology

Tel: 301-634-7090 Fax: 301-634-7651 Email: william-talman@uiowa.edu

Address: 9650 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20814

On

FY 2012 Appropriations for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative

Submitted to the

Senate Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

Senator Herb Kohl, Chair

Senator Roy Blunt, Ranking Member

April 1, 2011

On behalf of the **Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB)**, I **respectfully request a fiscal year 2012 appropriation of \$500 million for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI)** within the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. This funding level would keep AFRI on a path to its authorized level of \$700 million in the 2008 Food, Conservation, and Energy Act.

As a Federation of 23 scientific societies, FASEB represents more than 100,000 life scientists and engineers, making it the largest coalition of biomedical research associations in the United States. FASEB's mission is to advance health and welfare by promoting progress and education in biological and biomedical sciences, including the research funded by AFRI, through service to its member societies and collaborative advocacy. FASEB enhances the ability of scientists and engineers to improve—through their research—the health, well-being, and productivity of all people.

As the Department of Agriculture's principal extramural competitive grants program, AFRI funds agricultural research, education, and extension activities critical to improving the nation's health and prosperity. In order to optimize the effectiveness of its resources, the AFRI program facilitates collaborative, interdisciplinary research that addresses broad societal challenges while expanding the fundamental understanding of all life sciences. In addition, AFRI encourages young scientists to undertake agricultural research by providing grant opportunities for pre- and postdoctoral scholars. Currently, our federal investment in competitive agricultural research is only \$262 million. This is woefully inadequate to ensure viability of a vital industry whose contribution to the economy is more than \$300 billion annually. A report by the Economic Research Service found "strong and consistent evidence" that investment in agricultural research has yielded "high returns per dollar spent," citing mean annual rates of return of 53 percent. Our investment in agricultural research directly benefits all sectors of society and every geographic region of the country.

AFRI creates the necessary resources and infrastructure to efficiently translate scientific discoveries into a broad range of applications. For example, a team of scientists has identified the genes that determine why some varieties of wheat are more tolerant to freezing temperatures than others, enabling

researchers to use plant breeding techniques to accelerate the selection of hardier wheat plants. By reducing the effect of cold winters on wheat production, the U.S. can continue to meet the demands of a growing global population and remain the world's leading exporter of wheat. AFRI research also makes critical contributions to improving human health; scientists studying a bacterial type that commonly causes food poisoning have determined the mechanism by which it withstands food safety precautions, such as heating, refrigeration, and chemical preservatives. Other AFRI-funded researchers have found evidence that a naturally secreted chemical plays a key role in controlling the accumulation of fat in humans and animals, a discovery with important implications for the prevention of obesity-related human diseases and the agricultural production of leaner, healthier livestock. Strong funding for AFRI projects like these is also an effective way to attract outstanding scientists to careers in agricultural research. The ability of the U.S. to meet the need for better nutrition, new biofuels, more efficient agriculture, and a safer food supply will depend on investment in the agricultural sciences as well as development and retention of a robust and scientifically diverse agricultural research workforce. Furthermore, because of the collaborative work of science agencies and the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of scientific research, support for the federal research and development portfolio has never been more important to the future of the U.S. The solutions to our nation's most pressing challenges depend on advances in the agricultural sciences.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer FASEB's support for AFRI.

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