

Written Testimony for the Record

James McCarthy
President & CEO, North American Millers' Association

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

Subject: Support for USDA Agricultural Research Service Funding

April 13, 2018

Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member Bishop, and members of the subcommittee, we appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony today on the importance of the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS). The North American Millers' Association (NAMA) appreciate your commitment to agriculture research and the increase in funding provided in the FY2018 omnibus spending package. We encourage the subcommittee to maintain current funding levels for ARS in FY2019 and reject proposals to close ARS facilities as the research provided is critical to the cereal and small grains industries. We applaud the support of the subcommittee as you have provided funding levels above recent administration budget requests.

NAMA represents millers of wheat, corn, oats and rye in the US and Canada. Our members take the raw grain and, through grinding and crushing, create flour and other products that are used to make such favorite foods as bread, pasta, cookies, cakes, and snack foods.

All of the grains milled by NAMA members benefit from the research supported across the country by ARS. From research on mycotoxins and wheat scab, to efforts to understand oat rust, the work and support provided by ARS is critical to keeping the U.S. small grain supply chain on the cutting edge of a highly competitive global market place.

While NAMA and industry leaders also contribute to the research initiatives and believe in strong public-private partnerships, the success of U.S. agriculture is due in large part to the sustained federal investment in agriculture research. These investments have assisted U.S. producers in being the most productive in the world and a leader in the growing global demand for food.

Wheat Research

Wheat is an important component of the diet as it contains significant amounts of protein, insoluble and soluble fibers, vitamin and minerals. While global wheat consumption continues to expand, the U.S. wheat sector has faced many challenges over the past decade, including a weak domestic market for wheat products. According to USDA ERS, U.S. wheat harvested area has dropped more than 30 million acres, or more than one-third, from its height in 1981.

ARS resources that support such activities as wheat genotyping, quality, genetics, breeding, pest and disease research are critical to improving the wheat breeds and technologies necessary to provide economical solutions to producers and quality food products to consumers. The genetic complexity of wheat and minimal investments in research due to competition for funds from row crops, increases the importance of work being done by ARS.

Oat Research

Oat production in the U.S. has been on a continual decline. As a result, nearly all the oats consumed in the U.S are imported. Despite this steady decline in U.S. oat production, the food use of oats has been growing due to the unique nutritional benefits provided by oat products.

Oats are an essential grain, both for human consumption and animal feed. Oat products are heart-healthy, safe, whole-grain, and beneficial in dietary and nutritional function. Oats are also valuable in environmentally sustainable crop rotation systems, helping to ensure sound cropping and soil conservation practices.

Continued investment by ARS and the Federal Government in strong oat research programs is critical to keeping the U.S. at the forefront in the development and implementation of new technologies to improve oat productivity and quality.

Basic genetic research, including new molecular techniques, plant breeding, research on disease resistance, germplasm enhancement, and research on new and value-added uses will enhance the value of oats and provide benefit to the producer, processor, end-user and consumer. In addition, oats play an important role in sustainable grain production in the U.S. and provide producers with another crop option. To remain a viable crop, progress in oat improvement must be sustained. The support provided by ARS for oat research is essential to this progress.

Corn Research

Milled corn is found in a wide variety of food including corn meal, grits, corn flour, corn flakes and breakfast cereals. In addition to being rich in antioxidants, milled corn foods are delicious, making it easy to get essential nutrients such as carotenoids into one's diet.

Advances in corn genetics and technologies have been significant in recent decades. However, work remains to be done to limit mycotoxin contamination, control foodborne diseases, and improve crop production. The support of ARS facilities across the country ensures this important research continues.

Conclusion

In closing, we appreciate the budgetary challenges the subcommittee will be facing in FY2019 and encourage you to maintain current funding levels for ARS. The research supported by ARS is critical to continued productivity and profitability of the entire small grain supply chains.