

FLORICULTURE and NURSERY RESEARCH INITIATIVE

SAF and AmericanHort continue our partnership to support the Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative (FNRI) through USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS). FNRI is vital to our efforts to respond to pest and diseases challenges, enhance the efficiency of our production practices, develop and promote sustainable growing practices and broaden the message of the positive environmental and social impact of our crops.

Floriculture and nursery products are the third-largest farmgate value crop category in the U.S. (only corn and soybeans rank higher). Our products contribute 15 percent of the value of U.S. crop agriculture, but less than one percent of total USDA research dollars go toward floriculture and nursery.

SAF's "ASK"

Ask your Representative(s) and Senators to include an increase for the Floriculture & Nursery Research Initiative in their requests to the Appropriations Committees to begin to recoup dollars lost to inflation and budget cuts. We are asking for a very modest \$250,000 increase. This will bring the Initiative closer to the \$5.1 million it had prior to being affected by inflation and budget cuts.

WHAT IT IS:

The Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative (FNRI) is a program designed to obtain and guide federal research funding targeted to the needs of the floriculture and nursery industry. FNRI was conceived in the mid 1980s, and it took more than 10 years of education and lobbying before funding was first appropriated by Congress.

The Initiative has successfully generated research dollars because of the dynamic partnership between the floral and nursery industry, the academic community and the federal government. That partnership has been cited by the USDA as a unique and important model to follow for other industries interested in creating a similar program.

Available funds are split equally between universities and ARS facilities and are also split roughly in half between floriculture and nursery projects.

The FNRI is currently funded at \$4.6 million/year. The amount has been eroded by \$500,000 due to inflation and budgets cuts, and it does not meet all our research needs. We need continued growth.

WHERE IT IS:

The Initiative is funded as a part of the USDA's Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS) annual budget.

What are the Initiative's goals?

(In practical terms, how do we justify spending taxpayer dollars on our industry?)

- To help rural and suburban economies across the U.S.
- To make U.S. growers more efficient and therefore more competitive internationally.
- To improve our ability to prevent the spread of pests and diseases in trade.
- To contribute research that will benefit other segments of agriculture.
- To protect the environment and enhance environmental restoration.
- To maintain biodiversity through germplasm preservation.
- To improve Americans' quality of life through better plants and flowers.

See the attached list of Initiative accomplishments.

WHAT TO SAY:

We understand that the new administration is looking to reduce federal funding overall and that a large increase is not possible. The Initiative, designed by industry and the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), currently receives just \$4.6 million. We ask that Congress support an increase of \$250,000 to the ARS baseline budget for the Initiative that brings it to close to the original \$5.1 million funding level. Even this small increase will be helpful.

Research is an investment in the future – not just an expenditure. If we allow our support for researchers, facilities and research programs to decline, our businesses and our society will suffer. The infrastructure, once lost, could be impossible to rebuild.

The scientists supported by our Initiative focus on problems that are most important to our industry. Our researchers are out in their communities, talking to growers. They know what the industry's needs are. Our scientists are nimble enough to respond when we have sudden outbreaks of new pests.

Research, like everything else, gets more expensive each year. Just keeping our existing projects operating costs money. Energy costs continue to rise, and universities must maintain research greenhouses. Costs for maintaining graduate students are also rising each year. Other parts of agriculture are wooing our scientists with more money.

The idea of "green" is part of our American marketplace. Our flowers, plants and trees contribute to the environment, help fight climate change and improve our lives.

Our own, privately funded foundations, like the American Floral Endowment and the Horticultural Research Institute, spend annually over \$1 million to \$3 million per year to support research. That money comes from significant annual contributions by industry members: growers, wholesalers, retailers. The Initiative coordinates with, and leverages this effort far beyond what it could do on its own.

The Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative has changed the face of our industry's research. It represents a new focus on partnerships. The industry depends on it. Continued support is essential to keep ongoing projects alive and to address new challenges.

YOU MIGHT HEAR:

"We are in tight budgetary times. We can't afford to put new money into research for your industry."

- This is not new money. These dollars will only begin to replenish what had been appropriated by Congress. Funding agricultural research is a very high national priority. It will help build a stronger future for our businesses and for our society. We ask that you show your support for even a small increase by including it in your requests to the Appropriations Committee.

"I'll be happy to sign a letter of support if you organize one."

- What we are really asking is that you show your support for the floral and nursery businesses in your district and state by including an increase of \$250,000 for the Initiative in your request to the Appropriations Committees. This will bring the Initiative closer to its funding level of \$5.1 million before inflation and budget cuts.

AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEES

House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee:

- Robert Aderholt (R-AL), Chairman
- Kevin Yoder (R-KS)
- Tom Rooney (R-FL)
- David Valadao (R-CA)
- Andy Harris (R-MD)
- David Young (R-IA)
- Steven Palazzo (R-MS)
- Sanford Bishop (D-GA), Ranking Member
- Rosa DeLauro (D-CT)
- Chellie Pingree (D-ME)
- Mark Pocan (D-WI)

Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee:

- John Hoeven (R-ND), Chairman
- Thad Cochran (R-MS)
- Mitch McConnell (R-KY)
- Susan Collins (R-ME)
- Roy Blunt (R-MO)
- Jerry Moran (R-KS)
- Marco Rubio (R-FL)
- Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Ranking Member
- Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)
- Jon Tester (D-MT)
- Tom Udall (D-NM)
- Patrick Leahy (D-VT)
- Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)

A FEW EXAMPLES OF FLORICULTURE & NURSERY INITIATIVE RESEARCH SUCCESSES

Improved product quality to enhance competitiveness of U.S. producers.

Longer-lasting flowers: Genetic studies of petunias, gladiolus and roses, in research including ARS in California and Maryland, and university partners at the Universities of Florida and California and The Ohio State University are leading to genetic improvements of qualities such as scent, post-harvest life, and longevity, as well as pest and disease resistance.

Helping producers grow plants more economically. ARS is working closely with The Ohio State University and the University of Toledo on efforts to better serve northern Ohio's nursery and greenhouse industry, hard-hit by imports and energy costs over the past several years through efforts such as the "Virtual Grower" software.

Improved crop production tools

Ways to reduce chemicals and use less water are being studied intensively by ARS and the University of California-Davis. This area of research is benefiting U.S. grower, the environment, and our ability to compete in international markets.

New ways of fighting old and new problems. Major projects at Ithaca, NY and at the University of Florida are studying the use of beneficial and biological insects and organisms which will help growers to reduce chemical use. Another project at the University of Florida, with collaboration from ARS scientists, is studying how to combat new invasive insects, often introduced via trade or travel into Florida, California, through major ports in those states.

Helping the industry help itself. A new team made up of ARS and Clemson University, Michigan State University, University of Florida, North Carolina State University, and University of Minnesota scientists is collaborating to focus on propagation, stock plant production, post-harvest handling and energy conservation, helping the floral propagation industry provide better cuttings and young plants to commercial growers and increasing our international competitiveness. They are also funded by the major producers.

Improved protection against pests and diseases

Smart-sprayer technology: USDA-ARS researchers in Wooster, OH, developed new technology to replace traditional pesticide sprayers in nursery production. The sheer diversity of plant material in nursery production creates pesticide application challenges. Smart-sprayer technology senses variations in plant structure and adjusts spray delivery

accordingly. A total annual cost savings of \$140-280 per acre is realized from the following reductions:

- Pesticides use = 47-70%,
- Spray lost on the ground = 68-93%, and
- Airborne drift = up to 87%

The project is now focused on making the technology adaptable to existing equipment and has implications for orchard systems as well.

Helping all of agriculture. Growers across the U.S. were devastated in 2003-2004 by the introduction of *Ralstonia solanacearum*, requiring nurseries to destroy valuable geranium plants during a peak period. Establishment of the disease in the U.S. could severely damage the potato and vegetable industries. The Initiative supports research by internationally recognized experts at the Universities of Wisconsin and Florida, to learn more about the disease and help prevent future losses in all of agriculture.

Helping protect our industry and our environment. Similarly, in 2005 growers across the U.S. suffered millions of dollars of quarantine losses due to the introduction of *P. ramorum* ("sudden oak death"). The Initiative supports research by ARS and Oregon State University scientists on causes and possible treatments for this dangerous and economically devastating disease.

Responding quickly to new pests introduced via trade and travel. A new type of whitefly, probably imported into the U.S. from Europe, could severely damage the U.S. cotton, vegetable and ornamental industries. ARS researchers are joined in a team with the Universities of Florida, California (Riverside), and Texas A&M to find better ways of controlling the new pest and avoiding its spread. In addition, they are collaborating with international colleagues to try to find better approaches to solving this international problem.

Enhanced environmental stewardship and ecological benefits

Finding ways of replacing plastic. A project with collaborative ARS-private industry funding has developed a way of recycling poultry processing waste (chicken feathers) into biodegradable plastics -- to replace petroleum-based plastics used for the floral and nursery industry.

Trees, plants and flowers are good for the environment. The Initiative this year will begin a major project focused on the ecological benefits of trees and landscaping. Trees are a major force in carbon sequestration, helping to counteract global warming. How can the floral and nursery industry improve its efforts in this arena?