

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 23, 2023

The Honorable Andy Harris, M.D.
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr.
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Harris and Ranking Member Bishop,

I appreciate the opportunity to share my priorities and concerns as representative of Washington state's 8th congressional district. I write to respectfully request consideration of the following priorities in the Fiscal Year 2024 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

First, I ask for your support to fund agriculture research infrastructure. Along with my colleague from Kansas, Rep. Tracey Mann, and a strong group of bipartisan members, I sent a letter to the Committee urging **\$500 million in investments for agricultural research infrastructure as authorized through the Research Facilities Act (RFA) in Section 7503** of the 2018 Farm Bill. I sincerely appreciated the Committee's efforts to include \$2 million in initial funding within the FY23 Omnibus bill and request further consideration to help address our deferred research maintenance backlog.

Within NIFA, RFA funding will support competitive grants to land-grant universities and non-land-grant colleges of agriculture for facility construction, alteration, acquisition, modernization, renovation, or remodeling. Without specific investment in research facilities, many from the 1950s and 1960s, the U.S. risks its competitiveness and ability to properly recruit and train the next generation of world-class researchers. This investment will reposition the United States for long-term success, competitiveness, and leadership in global agricultural and food research.

Modern agricultural research and education facilities serve as the backbone of our nation's cutting-edge agricultural and food research enterprise. But 69 percent of research facilities at U.S. colleges are at the end of their useful life. Our research facilities not only generate solutions, but also aid in recruiting a new generation of diverse scientists, innovators, and agricultural leaders.

Second, I want to thank the Committee for its past inclusion of Community Project Funding requests (CPFs). Support for these projects is crucial to bolstering our food system and the

economic success of rural America. I urge the Committee to give full consideration of all CPFs for FY24.

Next, I want to touch on the importance of funding federal nutrition assistance programs. Recent data show that around 34 million people, including 9 million children, in our country are reporting food insecurity. Rates are highest in households with children, in rural areas, and among communities of color. Clearly, these programs are more important than ever.

As a pediatrician, I cannot overstate the importance of ensuring our children not only have access to food - clearly priority number 1 - but also that foods are nutritious. Poor nutrition is linked to chronic diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease. I ask the Committee to provide the necessary funding to ensure kids have access to nutritious food, including support for **WIC, SNAP, TEFAP**, and more.

This year, I want to call special attention to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, or WIC. **I urge the Committee to honor the longstanding bipartisan commitment to fund this program at a level that can serve projected caseload.** Falling short of these commitments could result in local agencies imposing waiting lists for the first time in 25 years, which would mean that babies and young children fall through the cracks and would have limited access to the nutrient-dense foods they need to grow and thrive. In Washington State, we saw a 4% increase in WIC participation in FY22, meaning that more pregnant women and children are getting the nutrition support they need to build healthier eating patterns. Sustaining the increased issuance for fruits and vegetables is particularly critical for boosting consumption of healthy foods and curbing childhood obesity.

Within the TEFAP program, I also want to emphasize the importance of **Emergency Food Program Infrastructure Grants**, which Congress established in 2008 specifically to help emergency feeding organizations with capital, infrastructure, and operating costs associated with the collection, storage, distribution, and transportation of perishable food. Feeding America estimates that the unfunded critical capacity needs across the nation's network of 200 food banks and 60,000 partner agencies could be well over \$500 million. To begin closing this gap, I request that the committee provide \$15 million to fully fund the Emergency Food Program Infrastructure Grant program.

Third, the **Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) and Specialty Crop Block Grant Program** fund research that supports hundreds of specialty crops in Washington State. Past funding for projects in Washington have supported efforts to combat fungicide resistance in wine grapes, precision irrigation for fruit growers, and pest prevention in onions.

In the past several years, I have worked very hard to make sure specialty crop researchers have access to the resources they need and was pleased that my fix to allow waiver authority for SCRI was included in the FY 2020, 2021, and 2022 appropriations bills. Until a permanent fix is enacted, the FY 2020 language restoring the waiver authority must be included in annual appropriations bills. I urge the committee to continue to support specialty crop research by providing full funding for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative and Block Grant in FY 2023.

Within agriculture research, I also want to call attention the continued threat that **Little Cherry Disease (LCD)** poses to cherry growers in my district. It has become apparent over the past few years that Pacific Northwest cherry growers are facing a substantial threat from LCD, a condition caused by three viruses that are transmitted by insects like leafhoppers and mealybugs, as well as through the root systems of an orchard. Once detected, the only option is to remove the tree entirely. Little Cherry Disease has reached epidemic proportions in Washington state, and growers are scrambling to obtain new tools to improve detection and control the spread of this serious disease. I appreciate the more than \$2 million in dedicated LCD funding the Committee has provided to the Agricultural Research Service last year, which is supporting ongoing collaborative research efforts with Washington State University (WSU). Continued support for this funding is requested.

Lastly, I ask that you fund **school kitchen equipment grants at a level of at least \$45 million** to enable schools to serve healthier, more nutritious meals by modernizing their kitchens and updating the essential equipment needed to prepare foods that our children will enjoy. I further request you include report language lowering the minimum limit for school equipment from \$5,000 to \$1,000 to allow schools the flexibility to procure equipment needed the most.

Since 2009, Congress has made funding available to schools for the purchase of updated school kitchen equipment through the USDA School Kitchen Equipment Grant program. This support is vital, as nearly 90% of schools need at least one piece of updated kitchen equipment and many school administrators lack the funds needed to make these investments. Many school kitchens were built decades ago and designed with little capacity beyond reheating and holding food for dining service. Without the right tools, school districts rely on expensive, unsustainable workarounds. This is especially important at a time when we are focusing on improving school nutrition and setting the stage for a lifetime of healthy eating. It doesn't matter how healthy foods are if our children won't eat them. Let's give our schools the tools they need to make healthy food taste great. I can think of no better way to support local educators, school food service, and students.

Thank you for your leadership during this process and for your consideration of the needs of my District.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kim Schrier". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and "S".

Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress