

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

May 18, 2021

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr.
Chairman
2362-A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry
Ranking Member
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Fortenberry,

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 as you work to craft the Fiscal Year 2022 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

First, I ask for your support of two USDA energy programs. On a recent site visit DeGoede Farms in my district, I saw a solar installation that was funded by Renewable Energy Development Assistance (or REDA) and Renewable Energy for America Program (REAP). These two programs provide essential technical assistance and funding to farmers and rural businesses who install renewable energy systems like solar panels.

Both programs are popular in my district and in Washington State, but demand for these programs far outstrips available funding. Pierce County Conservation District recently told me that over the last 3-years, they have seen dramatic increases in the number of rural businesses and farmers interested in participating in these programs. So much so that conservation partners in the state don't have enough resources technically or fiscally to support the demand.

Additionally, statewide funding caps mean that fewer than half the farmers who want to participate in this program are able to do so. If caps were increased, we would see a lot more farms and rural businesses installing solar. As we work with the Biden Administration to tackle the Climate Crisis this Congress, we should take every possible opportunity to promote renewable energy systems. Increasing funding for REAP and REDA is directly in line with that priority, and I urge the highest possible funding levels.

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

In the past two 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 and 2021 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 in Fiscal Year 2022

I also want to urge the Committee to provide the necessary funding to support federal agriculture research infrastructure. Modern agricultural research and education facilities serve as the backbone of our nation's cutting-edge agricultural and food research enterprise. But according to a 2021 report by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, 69 percent of research facilities at U.S. colleges are at the end of their useful life. The cost of upgrading deferred maintenance on these buildings is estimated at \$11.5 billion.

That's why I support increasing investments in our federal agricultural research infrastructure. This multi-year investment will reposition the United States for long-term success and leadership in global agricultural and food research. Estimates suggest that strategic federal investment in these facilities at land-grant and non-land-grant schools of agriculture would create 200,000 new jobs nationwide. New facilities will generate research solutions, and also aid in recruiting a new generation of diverse scientists, innovators, and agricultural and food managers. Each dollar invested in research returns \$20 to the economy.

Over the last three decades, federal support for agricultural research, education, and Extension – which drives state and local investment – has been flat. Meanwhile, investments by global competitors are growing exponentially. I urge you to join me in the effort to reposition the United States for success in food and agricultural research.

Next, I want to touch on the importance of funding federal nutrition assistance programs. The number of children not getting enough to eat is now 10 times higher than it was before the pandemic. And research from the University of Washington showed that in my home state, 30% of all households are considered food insecure, 59% of those households include children, and people of color were 1.5 times more likely to be food insecure.

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 am excited that the Biden Administration has identified this as a priority as well, most recently by their announcement that P-EBT will be extended throughout the summer. I ask the committee to provide the necessary funding to ensure kids have access to nutritious food during this difficult time. That should include supporting WIC, SNAP, TEFAP, and P-EBT.

Lastly, I ask that you fund school kitchen equipment grants at a level of at least \$60 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, reading "Kim Schrier". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and a long, sweeping underline.

Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress