

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 27, 2015

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing to express our strong support for classical plant and animal breeding and to encourage the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to invest in research to improve genetic resources and public cultivars for the benefit of U.S. producers, seed companies, processors and consumers. This research should focus on breeding improved germplasm and varieties with higher yields, improved disease and pest resistance, and resilience to weather extremes.

Without access to cultivars and breeds that are adapted to climates, soils, and farming systems of each region, farmers do not have the tools ideally suited for their farming needs. It is critical that the federal government work to reinvigorate public plant and animal breeding expertise in all regions of our country, to enhance our productive capacity nationwide while safeguarding our natural resources.

We support the current FY 2016 Senate Agriculture Appropriations report language that urges USDA NIFA to make public cultivar and breed development an increased priority for funding within the AFRI program by creating a separate Request for Applications in Fiscal Year 2016 in this area.

FY16 Senate Agriculture Appropriations report language:

Agriculture and Food Research Initiative.—The Committee recommendation includes \$325,000,000 for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative [AFRI]. Section 7406 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 specifies priority areas with the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative [AFRI], including an emphasis on conventional (classical) plant and animal breeding. The Committee strongly concurs with the intent of this section, and notes the importance of having publicly available cultivars and breeds that are specifically bred to be adapted to the soils, climates, and farming systems of farmers of all regions. Therefore, the Committee strongly urges to make public cultivar and breed development an increased priority for funding within the AFRI program by creating a separate Request for Applications in this area. The Committee further

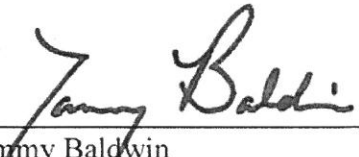
requests a report from the agency as to its plans for implementing this important requirement.

A separate public cultivar and breeds development request area should have a panel and manager composed of plant and animal breeders and others who are engaged in and have expertise and experience in the development of public cultivars and breeds.

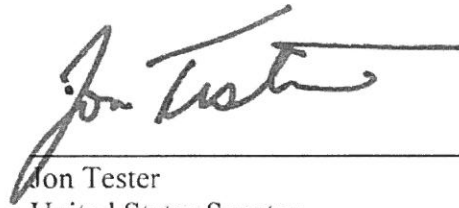
We further urge USDA to allocate adequate resources to this critical area sufficient to address the urgent backlog of demand from across the country for public cultivar and breed development. The amount allocated in this area should reflect a significant increase over funding allocations from the recent past.

We look forward to receiving a report requested by the Committee on your plans for implementing this important requirement in advance of the FY 2017 Appropriations process.

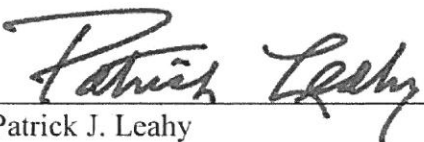
Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



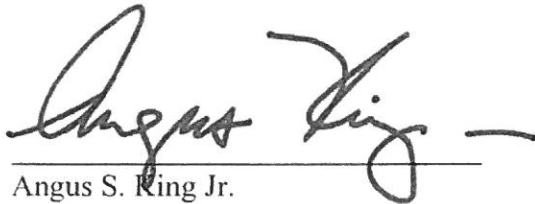
Jon Tester
United States Senator



Patrick J. Leahy
United States Senator



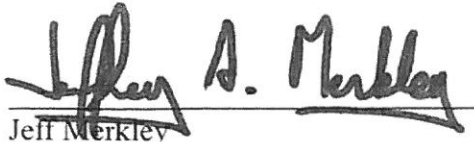
Al Franken
United States Senator



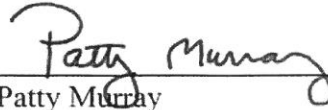
Angus S. King Jr.
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



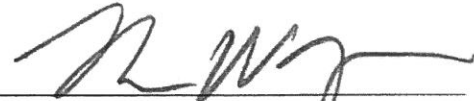
Jeff Merkley
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



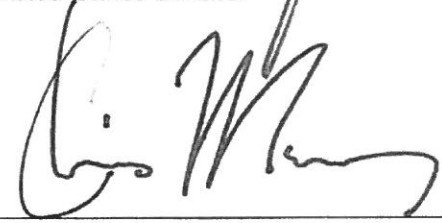
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Sherrrod Brown
United States Senator