March 2, 2021

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr., Chair
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related
Agencies

The Honorable Kay Granger, Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Granger, Chairman Bishop, and Ranking Member Fortenberry,

We write to thank you for the Appropriations Committee’s commitment to plant protein research in FY20 and FY21 and ask that you support public funding for research on alternative proteins produced from plants, from cultivated cells, or via fermentation (“alternative proteins”) in FY22.

Specifically, we request that you direct the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to spend $50 million of existing funds on research that advances the development of alternative proteins for human consumption. The proposed report language builds on the Committee’s strong support of USDA’s Agriculture and Food Research Initiative in this area. It would allocate specific funds for these projects and prioritize 1890 land-grant institutions to accelerate the growth of the alternative protein industry and increase diversity in the science, technology, engineering, and agriculture professions.

The United States is home to the top plant-based, cultivated (also known as cell-based or cultured), and precision fermentation companies in the world, but we will fall behind if the U.S. government does not support these game-changing industries with funding for open-access research and development. Other countries are actively supporting the development of plant-based and cultivated meat and seafood. For example, the European Union includes alternative proteins as a key research area in Horizon Europe’s $12 billion research and innovation program1, and Singapore is investing $144 million into a variety of next-generation technologies

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intended to bolster their bioeconomies, including cultivated meat. Canada, the Netherlands, India, Israel, and Japan are making similar investments.

Although private investment in alternative proteins is growing, open-access public research is crucial to accelerate growth. Public research will have a significantly broader impact on innovation and the economy by creating jobs and generating new opportunities to feed Americans and the world, rather than primarily benefiting specific companies. For example, USDA-funded research at the University of Missouri was the basis of the technology used in Beyond Meat’s first products and helped form the foundation for the company’s ongoing approach to innovation. Thanks to this foundational public research, Beyond Meat had the best-performing public offering by a major U.S. company in almost two decades in May 2019, and consumers in 80 countries across six continents can now buy Beyond Meat in restaurants and supermarkets.

In 2020, both NSF and USDA awarded alternative protein open-access research grants — $3.55 million to fund cultivated meat research and training at the University of California Davis and nearly $500,000 each to plant-based meat researchers at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and Purdue University. These grants represent the U.S. government’s biggest investments in open-access alternative protein research. However, despite promising growth, alternative proteins currently represent only one percent of the retail meat market, are not available for the full range of proteins, and are typically not price competitive with their conventional counterparts. Significantly more research is necessary to make alternative proteins affordable and accessible to all Americans.

Alternative proteins can provide a market-based solution to several of the world’s most pressing issues by meeting growing demand for meat and seafood with plant-based, cultivated, and fermentation-derived options. Alternative proteins significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promise to alleviate pressure on land, forests, water availability, and fisheries. Alternative proteins provide additional public health benefits, including significantly decreasing the risks of foodborne illness, antibiotic resistance, and zoonotic diseases. Congress should fund research to fully realize these benefits.

Using science and markets to address big problems and help U.S. agriculture to continue to feed the world is a bipartisan endeavor, earning consistent support from both Republicans and Democrats. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack has explained why, noting that “studies have shown that every dollar invested in agricultural research creates $20 in economic activity.” And former Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue and former FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb both insisted that the United States would be an alternative protein leader, with Secretary Perdue specifically noting his desire to keep alternative protein companies in the United States.

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We urge you to make alternative protein research a priority in your FY22 appropriations reports. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica Almy  
Director of Policy  
The Good Food Institute

Lasse Bruun  
CEO  
50by40

Dr. Lisa Dyson  
CEO  
Air Protein

Rachel Roberts  
President  
The American Mushroom Institute

Tim McGreevy  
CEO  
American Pulse Association

Joshua March  
Co-founder & CEO  
Artemys Foods

J. Douglas Hines  
Chairman & Founder  
Atlantic Natural Foods

Dan Northrup  
Director of Special Projects  
Benson Hill

Andrew D. Ive  
Managing General Partner  
Big Idea Ventures

Lou Cooperhouse  
President & CEO  
BlueNalu, Inc.

Dan Blaustein-Rejto  
Director of Food & Agriculture  
The Breakthrough Institute

Mia MacDonald  
Executive Director  
Brighter Green

Dave Ritterbush  
Chief Executive Officer  
Califia Farms, LLC

Stephanie Feldstein  
Population and Sustainability Director  
Center for Biological Diversity

Jason Scorse  
Director  
Center for the Blue Economy

Thomas Greemillion  
Director of Food Policy  
Consumer Federation of America

Brian Ronholm  
Director of Food Policy  
Consumer Reports

John Pattison  
CEO & Co-founder  
Cultured Decadence

David Bronner  
CEO  
Dr. Bronner's Magic Soaps

Rev. Beth Love  
Founder & President  
Eat for the Earth

Janabai Owens  
Senior Director  
Farm Transformation Institute

Thomas King  
CEO  
Food Frontier
Danielle Nierenberg  
President and Founder  
Food Tank

Christine Mei  
CEO  
Gathered Foods Corporation

Mathis Wackernagel  
President  
Global Footprint Network

Dan Curtin  
President  
Greenleaf Foods

Charlie Cray  
Political and Business Strategist  
Greenpeace, Inc.

Emily Broad Leib  
Clinical Professor of Law  
Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic

Sri Artham  
CEO & Founder  
Hooray Foods, Inc.

Jody Boyman  
Co-Founder & Chief Purpose Officer  
Hungry Planet

Tyler Jameson  
VP of Government Relations  
Impossible Foods Inc.

Po Bronson  
Managing Director & General Partner at SOSV  
IndieBio

Michelle Adelman  
CEO  
Infinite Foods

Abigail Blunt  
Head of Global Government Affairs  
Kraft Heinz Company

Eric Schulze, PhD  
VP of Product and Regulation  
Memphis Meats

Lavanya Anandan, PhD  
Head of Partnerships & External Innovation, Strategy & Transformation  
Merck KGaA, Darmstadt, Germany

Parendi Birdie  
Head of Strategic Partnerships  
Mission Barns

Deb Castellana  
Director of Strategic Partnerships  
Mission Blue

Scott May  
VP Innovation and Head of MISTA  
MISTA

Thomas Jonas  
CEO & Co-Founder  
Nature’s Fynd

Brian Spears  
CEO  
New Age Meats

Isha Datar  
Executive Director  
New Harvest Inc.

Mike Woliansky  
Co-founder & CEO  
No Evil Foods

Sabina Vya  
Senior Director, Strategic Initiatives & Communications  
Plant Based Foods Association

Christie D. Lagally  
Founder & CEO  
Seattle Food Tech, Inc DBA Rebellyous Foods

Dr. Miles Woodruff  
CEO  
Sophie’s Kitchen
Lisa Feria  
CEO  
Stray Dog Capital

Jaime Athos, PhD  
President & CEO  
The Tofurky Company

Beth Zotter  
CEO  
Trophic

Jennifer Gannett  
Director, Operations and Development  
True Health Initiative

Joy Dubost, PhD RD  
Head of Nutrition & Health, North America  
Unilever

Akila Ganapathi & Jishuai (Joshua) Jia  
Co-Presidents  
University of California, Berkeley Alt Protein Project

Ted O’Neill  
President  
University of California, Davis Alt Protein Project

Christopher Kerr  
CIO  
Unovis Asset Management

Dr. Jeanette Fielding  
Chief Corporate Affairs Officer  
Upfield Group

Nicole Sopko  
Vice President  
Upton's Naturals

Tim McGreevy  
CEO  
USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council

Kelly Hunter Foster  
Senior Attorney  
Waterkeeper Alliance

Dawn Moncrief  
President  
A Well-Fed World

Aryé Elfenbein & Justin Kolbeck  
Co-founders  
Wildtype

Lana Weidgenant  
Deputy Partnerships Director  
Zero Hour

cc:  
Members of the House Appropriations Committee  
Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi  
House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy
Report Requests from The Good Food Institute

NIFA Alternative Protein Research

Subcommittee: Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
Department: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Agency: National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)
Account: Research and Education Activities
Program: Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI)

Brief description:
This language directs USDA to spend $50 million out of existing funds to support research proposals that advance the development of alternative proteins (produced from plants, from cultivated animal cells, or via microbial fermentation) for human consumption.

This funding level would enhance the competitiveness of U.S. agriculture by enabling the establishment of a research center, potentially at a historically Black land grant institution, and expanding national protein crop production and processing capacity, which would make agricultural markets more resilient to processing disruptions and changing consumer preferences. As other countries invest in alternative protein research, this funding would ensure the United States’ technological competitive advantage and spur innovation needed to maintain U.S. leadership and food security.

This report language also requests that USDA cooperate with the National Science Foundation.

Requested House and Senate report language:
Alternative Protein Research.—The Committee strongly supports the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). The Committee encourages USDA to support research focused on mimicking the characteristics of animal meat using plants, animal cell cultivation, or fermentation (together, “alternative proteins”) for competitive awards in the AFRI program. The Committee further directs USDA to spend $50 million to support alternative protein research (encompassing all stages of the production process, including optimizing ingredient processing techniques and developing new manufacturing methods) and to encourage applications from 1890 Institutions. This research should be done in collaboration with other relevant programs, including but not limited to the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and the National Science Foundation (NSF).

FY21 House Agriculture Appropriations report, page 25
Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI).—The Committee strongly supports the AFRI program. The Committee notes that projects that characterize protein functionality from crops to assess their sustainability for use as alternatives to conventional animal products are eligible for competitive awards in the AFRI program. In addition, the Committee also notes that research into plant-based protein-rich foods for human consumption is also eligible.

FY21 Senate Agriculture Appropriations explanatory statement, page 36
Protein Functionality.—The Committee encourages USDA to support research projects that characterize protein from crop plants such as chickpeas, sorghum, lentils, fava beans, lupin, rice, oats, mushrooms, and water lentils to assess their suitability for use in food products. The Committee is particularly interested in research projects involving plants that can be easily cultivated in the U.S. and that are sustainably grown and produced, such as water usage or fertilizer and pesticide requirements.