

Wheat Stakeholders to Congress: There's No More to Cut from Ag Research

Wheat farmers, researchers, millers and bakers are in Washington, D.C., Tuesday and Wednesday to deliver a simple message to Members of Congress: there is no more to cut from federal funding for agriculture research.

The 35 wheat industry visitors, including a dozen growers and 10 milling and baking representatives, are spreading that message as part of an annual fly-in focusing on wheat research, sponsored by the National Wheat Improvement Committee, a group of wheat scientists and stakeholders, the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG), the North American Millers' Association and the American Bakers Association.

Key facts they are sharing with policy makers on Capitol Hill key include:

- Funding for USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) will be down 12 percent since the federal government's 2010 fiscal year, assuming modest increases proposed in the Obama Administration's FY2013 budget are adopted.
- In FY2011 alone, \$180 million was cut and not restored due to the elimination of earmarked spending.
- A few weeks ago, university researchers learned that funding they receive from ARS would be cut by 30 percent to help cover costs associated with carrying out Congress' instructions to close 12 labs.
- Despite demonstrated return on investment of up to \$32 to \$1, just 1.6 percent of the \$142 billion annual federal investment in research goes to agriculture research, according to the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).

For wheat industry stakeholders who depend on public funding, this is a disturbing trend. While private companies are investing more money in wheat than ever before, public researchers undertake vital basic science, and more than three-quarters of wheat acres in the United States are planted with varieties produced through the public system. Public programs, particularly those that work in collaboration with land-grant universities, also focus on addressing local or regional problems.

"As a farmer and a seedsman, my message to our leaders in Washington is that a good crop doesn't start when I put it in the ground, it starts 10 years before, in my state wheat breeder's labs and fields," said Bing Von Bergen, a wheat farmer from Moccasin, Mont., and NAWG's first vice president. "Funding for wheat research, and all ag research, is an investment in the future of farming and the future of food."

Fly-in participants are specifically asking Members to support the Obama Administration's requests for \$1.103 billion in funding for ARS and \$325 million in funding for USDA's premier competitive grant programs, the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI).

As Congress prepares to finalize a 2012 Farm Bill, fly-in participants are also asking Members to ensure reauthorization of the AFRI grant program and the U.S. Wheat and Barley Scab Initiative (USWBSI), a collaboration of public, private and federal researchers fighting the disease Fusarium head blight, or scab.

"We've come to Washington, D.C., many times over the years, but this visit is particularly urgent," said Dr. Brett Carver, a wheat breeder at Oklahoma State University and NWIC chair. "Research is a long-term process that needs long-term funding. We are seeing increased investments from private companies and farmers themselves, but federal agencies still play an irreplaceable role in ensuring we can develop the best possible varieties for farmers."

Much more about wheat research needs and the wheat research community is at www.wheatworld.org/research.