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Senator Tom Harkin
Chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20516-6000

Dear Chairman Harkin:

We are writing on behalf of USAIN, the United States Agricultural Information Network, to ask for your support as you and your colleagues in the House and Senate debate the various issues included in the 2007 Farm Bill. We appreciate the efforts you have made in ensuring the success of the previous bill, and your concern about investing in food and agriculture research.

We strongly suggest wording be added to the Farm Bill stating the critical importance of ensuring current information resources are readily available to researchers, educators, agricultural extension agents, and others involved in the agriculture-related sector, as well as members of the general public. Immediate access to complete and current research regarding issues of national importance such as food security, renewable energy, and the health of our natural resources is absolutely vital for the future health and economic well-being of American citizens.

As such, we strongly request that the following wording be added to two sections:

Research Proposal, Subtitle E – Research, Education, and Economics Mission, SEC. 251. Under Secretary of Agriculture for Science, page 17, line 13: "...extension, livestock and crop estimates, statistical and data reporting, **and timely access to agricultural information and decision-making resources.**"

Research Proposal, Subtitle E – Research, Education, and Economics Mission, SEC. 251. Under Secretary of Agriculture for Science, page 18, line 8: "...(ii) research and **“research support activities”** that are not described in clause (1)..."

USAIN is an organization of more than 100 agricultural librarians and information specialists, across five countries on three continents and more than 40 U.S. states. We represent land-grant and other universities, government agencies including the National Agricultural Library, and non-profit organizations.

In a letter about the legislative language of the Farm Bill, the Secretary of Agriculture refers to advancing scientific knowledge, and providing science-based tools. It is precisely the work of USAIN members that makes it possible for researchers to have access to the latest scientific information and communication technologies. Librarians at the National Agricultural Library, land-grant universities, and other related organizations are in the process of designing a digital infrastructure which will support the development of a dynamic, collaborative, and fully integrated electronic agricultural information system. There are dramatically improved foundations for fully integrated and distributed information systems. These will make it easier to access the extensive and broadly-based research and outreach information generated by the land-grant universities, Colleges of Agriculture, and Cooperative Extension units, as well as USDA affiliated entities. The vision of USAIN, the National Agricultural Library, and cooperating institutions is to create such a system which would be comparable to that of the National Library of Medicine. In large part this has not yet been possible due to a lack of adequate funding, the scale of the system, and diversity and scatter of information resources. It is critical for scientists, educators, extension agents and agribusiness leaders that we have sufficient funds to build a coherent and responsive system that will serve all of our communities and provide them with the resources they need to carry out their research and assistance to the public.

Federal support for agricultural research at universities and colleges has been steadily decreasing, and funding for the National Agricultural Library and significant collaborative initiatives such as AgNIC (the Agriculture Network Information Center) has remained flat since 1995. At the same time funding for health research, development, and dissemination has exponentially increased. Ultimately, we would hope that additional funding will be made available to implement an integrated and comprehensive system with one single point of entry similar to the Google model.

We would be happy to address any questions you might have and to provide further input on this issue. We thank you in advance for your consideration.

Respectfully Submitted by the USAIN Executive Council on behalf of the U.S. agricultural information community

Sincerely,

Norma Kobzina, President, USAIN 2007-2008
Librarian, Marian Koshland Bioscience and Natural Resources Library, U.C. Berkeley