

# United States Senate

July 14, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McConnell:

We are writing to ask that as we engage in infrastructure negotiations that you invest no less than \$40 billion in agricultural research, innovation, and infrastructure.

The pandemic shed light on the important role that agriculture plays in our daily lives, providing food, fiber, and feed to Americans all across the country. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS), in 2019 agriculture, food, and related industries made up over 5 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product and accounted for nearly 11 percent of U.S. jobs.<sup>1</sup> Average U.S. household expenditures on food in 2019 averaged 13 percent, falling behind only housing and transportation.

Despite the important role that agriculture plays in our society, it is currently facing a multitude of challenges that threaten both domestic production and international competitiveness. Climate change is facilitating more extreme weather and increasing pest and disease pressure on crops. These evolving growing conditions warrant increased resources for research, development, and innovation. According to the USDA 2017 Census, U.S. farm producers are aging, with an average producer age of 57.5 years.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. needs to heavily invest in educating our next generation of producers and agricultural workforce. Additionally, our agricultural research facilities are suffering from extensive deferred maintenance. These facilities not only house important research that provide science solutions to societal problems, but also recruit and educate students to fill the nearly 60,000 annual agricultural job vacancies that are expected through 2025.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/ag-and-food-sectors-and-the-economy/#:~:text=What%20is%20agriculture's%20share%20of,about%200.6%20percent%20of%20GDP.>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Highlights/2019/2017Census\\_Farm\\_Producers.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Highlights/2019/2017Census_Farm_Producers.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://nifa.usda.gov/press-release/employment-outlook-promising-new-college-graduates-agriculture>

A report was published in 2015 on the state of facilities at U.S. colleges and schools of agriculture.<sup>4</sup> At that time, the deferred maintenance price tag for institutions was estimated to be \$8.5 billion with a total replacement cost of \$29 billion. The report warned that without significant federal investment, the price tag would continue to rise. As expected, when the report was updated and published earlier this year, the deferred maintenance needs had increased to \$11.5 billion with a total replacement cost of \$38.1 billion, stating that 69 percent of buildings are at the end of their useful life.<sup>5</sup>

The infrastructure bill is a once-in-a-century, transformational rebuilding opportunity for federal agricultural investment that would reposition the United States for long-term success and leadership in global agricultural and food research. If robust investments are made to address the deferred maintenance needs at our agriculture schools, it is estimated that over 200,000 jobs would be created by that effort alone. That's in addition to the direct benefits that would come from this investment—updating research facilities to ensure the continuation of cutting edge research and educating a new generation of diverse scientists, innovators, and agricultural and food managers.

The pandemic laid bare some of the gaps and weaknesses in our agricultural and food systems. Allocating \$40 billion of the infrastructure package to agricultural research, innovation, and infrastructure is a worthwhile and necessary investment to strengthen our agriculture sector so that we are prepared for the multitude of future challenges and opportunities.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

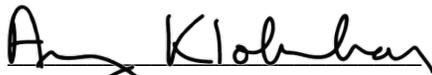
Sincerely,



Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



Reverend Raphael Warnock  
United States Senator

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.aplu.org/library/a-national-study-of-capital-infrastructure--deferred-maintenance-at-schools-of-agriculture/file>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aplu.org/library/a-national-study-of-capital-infrastructure-at-colleges-and-schools-of-agriculture-an-update/file>



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Chairwoman, Senate Agriculture Committee  
The Honorable Bernie Sanders, Chairman, Senate Budget Committee