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United States
Department of
Agriculture

Research,
Education, and
Economics

National Institute
of Food
and Agriculture

1400 Independence
Avenue SW
Washington, DC
20250

Dr. Tuan-hua David Ho, President
American Society of Plant Biologists
15501 Monona Drive
Rockville, MD 20855-2768

Dear Dr. Ho: *David*

Thank you for your letter dated April 27, 2010 regarding the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) program, which is administered by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). We value your interest in AFRI and appreciate your thoughtful comments. The suggestions in your letter, as well as those provided by other stakeholders, will be carefully considered before we begin developing the Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 AFRI requests for applications (RFAs). Stakeholder comments received to date are posted on the www.regulations.gov website and can be accessed under Docket #NIFA-2010-0001.

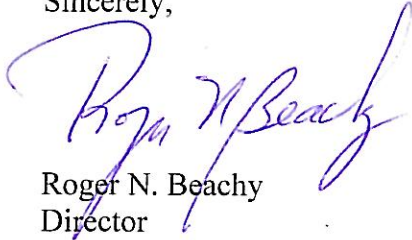
As you know, the AFRI program has been restructured to be more responsive to important national issues, such as those identified in the FY 2010 challenge area RFAs. Despite the focus of the RFAs on the challenge areas, it continues to support single-investigator and/or small team projects. In FY 2010 about 25% of AFRI funding will be used to support discipline-based research through its Foundational Programs. These programs support work that helps to build the foundation of knowledge needed to solve both current and future problems, offering grants of \$500,000 to \$750,000 in total. It is our intent to increase support of Foundational Programs to 30% of AFRI funding in future years, allowing for a greater investment in discipline-based work over time. As the budget for AFRI grows, the amount of funding available for these programs will increase proportionately. Your concerns about the somewhat narrow focus of the Foundational programs were communicated by other stakeholders as well. NIFA will explore ways to modify the Foundational Programs in the future to allow submission of more innovative, investigator initiated work whose outcome may serve the future of U.S. agriculture.

We acknowledge the challenges inherent in reviewing and managing grants of the size offered by the AFRI program this year. Members of AFRI program staff are consulting broadly, both within and outside NIFA, to identify and develop best practices for effective management of these programs. We are excited about the significant outcomes that are expected by these grants and feel confident that NIFA program staff have the experience and creativity needed to address program management challenges as they arise.

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Thank you, again, for your support of the AFRI program and for taking the time to comment on the FY 2010 RFAs. We will give your suggestions full consideration as we move forward. We expect to release the FY 2011 AFRI RFAs before the end of the calendar year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Roger N. Beachy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "B".

Roger N. Beachy
Director