



10 March 2008

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chairwoman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,  
Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies  
2262 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

**Re: Support for the USDA National Agricultural Library (NAL) in the  
Proposed Fiscal Year 2009 Budget**

Dear Madam Chairwoman:

We are writing on behalf of USAIN, the United States Agricultural Information Network, to ask for your support as you and your colleagues begin the hearings on the proposed Fiscal Year 2009 appropriations for the U.S. Agricultural Research Services (ARS) and the Department of Agriculture. We appreciate the efforts you have made in ensuring that the USDA and related agencies are able to meet the priorities of the new Farm Bill and to provide funding for research, safety for consumers, and resources for the farming and rural communities.

USAIN is an organization of more than 100 agricultural librarians and information specialists, with members from five countries on three continents and more than 40 U.S. states. We work at land-grant and other universities, government agencies including the National Agricultural Library, and non-profit organizations. It is the work of USAIN members in their state and regional institutions (land-grant colleges and universities), Cooperative Extension units, as well as the National Agricultural Library, to facilitate access to key historical data and reports as well as to the latest scientific information upon which agricultural research is based.

We are concerned that continued cuts in the budget, and the re-distribution of funding, will make it more difficult than ever to make sure that 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 and of American citizens.

**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. The President's FY 2009 Budget Estimate includes \$18 million for the USDA National Agricultural Library, a \$4 million reduction from the FY 2008 Budget estimate, and \$6 million less than the FY 2007 actual budget for the Library.**

Significant changes proposed by ARS include redirecting \$993,000 in AWIC funds to support NAL participation in a new digital portal for veterinary medicine; eliminating funding for the National Agricultural Law Center, the nation's leading source for agricultural and food law research and information, which complements and works with NAL, which does not cover these areas; and most importantly, reducing funding for non-digital content/document delivery/Special Collections by \$3,000,000.

As a national library, the print collection is core to researchers and the agricultural history of the nation. It is this reduction of \$3,000,000 for the print collections that is of immediate concern. In FY 2007, NAL document delivery services filled 29,000 requests from the NAL collection for materials which were available in print-only--not available electronically. In FY 2009, such requests for print-only materials would not be filled.

There is no question about the need for continued, increased support for the creation and delivery of digital content, and the need for more sophisticated systems for access based on new user requirements. NAL has been a leader in facilitating the development of innovative digital projects of national and international importance, such as AgNIC. We applaud the efforts to improve the quality of AGRICOLA, an electronic index to agricultural literature, and their creation of Digitop which provides desktop access of research materials to USDA staff worldwide. New web portals such as nutrition.gov and invasivespeciesinfo.gov have proven to be invaluable sources of free information for consumers and researchers alike. However, in the United States almost half of the population continues to rely on printed resources, without access to the Internet. Especially in rural communities, including farms and ranches, those who need the information rely heavily on printed leaflets, handbooks, books and trade journals. It is unlikely such material will be made available electronically in the immediate future. At the same time, it is not clear that agricultural information received from worldwide sources will become digitized in a timely fashion.

The ramifications of the proposed reductions or redirections of NAL funding include not only the inability for NAL to fill requests for materials available only in print, but the complete cessation of book and journal purchases, and the inability to catalog and make available print materials already acquired. In addition, cancellation of the receipt of free publications from the U.S. and other countries would have a major impact. In recent years the USDA required all USDA-authored publications to be delivered to the NAL; but what good is this if there no money to catalog them and make them findable?

Publications coming from scholarly societies in addition to those from commercial publishers will no longer be available to USDA researchers, and in some instances to researchers, educators and librarians throughout the United States who utilize the collections housed at NAL.

**Libraries throughout the United States rely on the NAL as its primary national depository for agricultural literature, in the same way that other libraries and the public rely on the Library of Congress or the National Library of Medicine. It should be noted that the materials collected by NAL are not frequently held in the Library of Congress. Universities and other institutions are also faced with budget cuts, and increasingly, have depended on regional and national partners to ensure that our patrons can access these shared print resources. USDA staff without ready access to the ARS field libraries or university collections would be further hampered in their research.**

In addition, one of the more severe impacts of the ARS proposal on researchers, scientists, educators and the general public is the suggested elimination of the NAL Special Collections Program. These collections are what makes the NAL unique and valuable for U.S. citizens, with materials in several subject areas-- entomology, plant science, and pharmacology, among other disciplines. Examples of the materials housed there, which are in constant need of preservation, include early herbals, heirloom plant varieties, the origins of invasive species, and the history of agriculture itself. Seed catalogs are another example of the unique collections housed at NAL. While there has been an attempt to preserve the most significant literature of agriculture and rural life, through grants such as those from the National Endowment for the Humanities ( a program formulated under the auspices of USAIN), the major portions of the Special Collections at NAL are often too brittle to be included in such preservation projects. A high percentage of these special collections have yet to be processed, and it was only recently that there was funding to improve the climate and physical space that is essential to maintain these rare items. Current efforts by the NAL working with several publishers who use the images and information will be difficult or impossible to continue if this funding proposal is approved. We fear the loss of these valuable, archival collections.

We recognize the difficulties you face in balancing budget priorities. However, NAL cannot continue to be a National Library if access to the vast print collections, and the ability to acquire, process and preserve, and make accessible online this material, is taken away. The vision of the National Agricultural Library and cooperating institutions is to create a comprehensive, collaborative information system, and we hope that you will support our efforts to achieve this vision.

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.

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