

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

January 9, 2008

The Honorable Charles F. Conner
Acting Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Room 200-A
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Acting Secretary Conner:

We are writing to seek the Department's commitment to ensuring the continued ability of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) and the National Agricultural Library (NAL) to undertake their critical missions as two of the world's foremost agricultural research institutions.

In recent years, the Administration's budget proposals for both facilities have failed to meet the infrastructure needs at BARC and NAL and have significantly impacted the ability to undertake research critical to our farm economy and the health and nutrition of all Americans. While Congress has successfully reversed attempts to terminate ongoing research projects at BARC, we are dismayed that the Department's operations funding allocation has reduced BARC's research staff from more than 400 to approximately 260 scientists. Further, the Department has failed to dedicate adequate funding to undertake renovations of lab space necessary to accommodate state-of-the-art research and protect BARC's unique and valuable specimen collections. At NAL, we are concerned that foreign journal subscriptions have been cancelled to meet staffing and other infrastructure needs and that leaking windows and other deficiencies continue to compromise its irreplaceable collections.

This is not how the world's most comprehensive agricultural research facility and one of the world's largest agricultural libraries should be forced to operate. For nearly 100 years, BARC researchers have been finding solutions to our nation's most challenging agricultural problems facing not just farmers but every American. As you witnessed firsthand during your visit last year, BARC's researchers also tackle food safety, nutrition, and obesity. NAL is the global information hub for all land-grant institutions and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) libraries.

We remain committed to ensuring that BARC's centennial in 2010 serves as a gateway to many more years of important scientific contributions. In preparation for this important milestone, we request that the Department develop strategic plans detailing the USDA's short and long-term visions for BARC and NAL. We also ask you to take action to address our concerns regarding the operations budgets at BARC and NAL.

The Honorable Charles F. Conner
January 9, 2008
Page 2

We are eager to see your roadmap for BARC and NAL's future. We look forward to working with you to ensure the institutions' continued success.

Sincerely,



Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress