April 5, 1999

The Honorable Joe Skeen, Chair
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative Skeen:

The American Library Association and the Association of Research Libraries request the support of your Subcommittee for increased FY2000 appropriations for the National Agricultural Library. We appreciate the interest and support that your Subcommittee gave to NAL in FY99 appropriations, and we ask you to continue that support for this fiscal year.

The American Library Association is a nonprofit educational organization of 57,000 librarians, library trustees, and other friends of libraries dedicated to improving library services and promoting the public interest in a free and open information society.

The Association of Research Libraries is an association of 122 research libraries in North America. ARL programs and services promote equitable accessible access to and effective use of recorded knowledge in support of teaching, research, scholarship, and community service.

With the budget caps and the recently passed House Budget Resolution, we know appropriations subcommittees will find it hard to provide increases, but we would like you to consider the following points:

1. The National Agricultural Library is the national library for all users of agricultural information. This critical library resource for research and education has been heavily impacted by the increased cost of materials, exchange rates and dramatic increases in the cost of subscriptions to important and timely magazines and journals. As we did last year, we provide you with a chart of the increased costs over time (see attached). If a library has to drastically cut back on its acquisition of materials, it quickly loses ground in its attempt to serve its community of users as a national library. An additional $1 million is needed to sustain NAL's purchasing power given these increases.

2. The National Agricultural Library has the opportunity and the mandate to provide its users with the latest electronic resources and databases. In fact, AgNIC, the Agriculture Network Information Center, is
a partnership of over 20 institutions which provides one-stop shopping for agricultural information resources via the Internet. Additional funding in the amount of $500,000 is needed to ensure the continued success of the effort.

3. In the Administration's budget request this year the National Agricultural Library has an increase of $2 million from FY99 level. The proposed increase is for an Initiative on Digital Libraries for Rural America. Funding would allow enhanced information service on specific areas like nutrition and food safety, and water quality among others, to be transmitted to rural America. We urge your support for this initiative.

4. The National Agricultural Library is in the midst of a space renovation and facility upgrade project. This is essential for care of the collection to avert serious problems in the future. Additional funding is critical for the successful completion of the first phase including replacement of air handling equipment. An estimated $1.6 million is needed in FY2000.

Both of our associations stand ready to provide you with any further information you may need and ask your positive action in giving the National Agricultural Library the needed funding to serve its many users across the Nation.

Sincerely,

Carol C. Henderson
Executive Director
Washington Office
American Library Association

Duane Webster
Executive Director
Association of Research Libraries