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The Honorable Henry Bonilla
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related
Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
2362 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515-6016

Dear Chairman Bonilla,

The American Library Association (ALA) and the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) write in strong support of the FY 2006 funding request for the National Agricultural Library (NAL). We greatly appreciate your past generosity to NAL and ask you to support President Bush's request of a \$1.8 million increase for NAL programs and services and an additional \$3 million for repair and modernization of NAL's antiquated facility Beltsville, Maryland.

Since 1862, NAL has sought to increase the availability and use of agricultural information for researchers, educators, policymakers, consumers of agricultural products, and the public. The Library is the world's largest and most accessible agricultural research library and plays a vital role in supporting research, education, and applied agriculture. Moreover, it offers specialized services in such areas as: alternative farming; animal welfare; food and nutrition; food safety; invasive species; and water quality.

The President's FY 2006 request for NAL will allow it to continue to serve as the Nation's premier provider of agricultural information by expanding its capabilities, programs, collections and services. Specifically, President Bush's request will allow NAL to devote critical resources to develop and deliver content for a National Digital Library for Agriculture (NDLA). Establishing a NDLA is vital for NAL to ensure that information will continue to be readily and conveniently available to the public in this ever-growing digital era. The development of a digital library would operate as a central hub to gather knowledge and exchange ideas within the American agricultural community, increase collaboration with U.S. Agricultural Information

Network (AgNIC) and improve access to the non-digital publications in the NAL collection through digital reformatting of 15,000 core document images for public Web access.

U.S. research libraries and members of the agricultural community depend on NAL for widespread and thorough information. For example, NAL acquires, preserves and manages information and services in all phases of agricultural and allied sciences; organizes agricultural information by cataloging, indexing, and making it readily available in the public domain, including USDA and research libraries; coordinates with library needs on related agricultural research and education; and cooperates with public and private agricultural industries and programs to develop a comprehensive information network. As demonstrated, NAL provides a solid, and necessary, support system for organizations, higher education institutions, libraries, individuals, and others. The request appropriations will allow NAL to develop the necessary collaborative partnerships with selected university research libraries offering strong programs in the agricultural and related sciences. Since 1991, these libraries have increased their interlibrary borrowing of NAL materials by 113 percent.

AGRICOLA, NAL's rapidly expanding bibliographic database of more than four million records and the chief resource for agricultural information, has been available free of charge via the NAL website since 1998. This resource has served as an invaluable tool in keeping members of the agricultural community connected and informed. The President's request would integrate the AGRICOLA Database into a NDLA and improve access. Specifically, the funding would go toward implementing mechanisms to digitally link current AGRICOLA records for core agricultural resources to corresponding digital objects including text, images, and data that yield an increase of 10 percent annually.

We are also pleased that the President has included \$3 million in his budget for the repair and modernization of NAL's Abraham Lincoln building, which first opened in 1968. The nation's premier provider of agricultural information should have a first-class facility to house its collection of over 3.3 million items and almost 200 employees. Instead, the current facility is in dire need of repair and has forced employees to work in an infrastructure that threatens their safety.

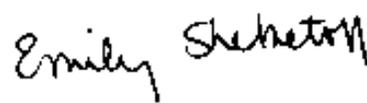
ARL and ALA strongly urge you to support this valuable national resource. NAL's information, services, and programs are vital to the success of the agricultural community and our economy.

Thank you for your consideration of NAL's FY 2006 funding request. As always, we look forward to working with you and the Subcommittee.

Sincerely,



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The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) is a not-for-profit membership organization representing the leading research libraries in North America. Its mission is to influence forces affecting the future of research libraries in the process of scholarly communication ARL's programs and services promote equitable access to and effective use of recorded knowledge in support of teaching, research, scholarship, and community service.

The American Library Association is the oldest and largest library association in the world, with more than 64,000 members. Its mission is to promote the highest quality library and information services and public access to information. ALA offers professional services and publications to members and nonmembers, including online news stories from American Libraries and analysis of crucial issues