

## ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH LIBRARIES



March 20, 2008

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
2362-A Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro,

On behalf of the Association of Research Libraries and the American Library Association, we write in support of a Fiscal Year 2009 appropriation for the National Agricultural Library (NAL) that will ensure that the Library can effectively serve the information needs of agricultural researchers, farmers, agriculture extension agents, educators, and the public throughout the country. Unfortunately, the President's FY 2009 budget request fails to provide the support needed to maintain current services at NAL and position the Library to serve our Nation in the years ahead. At a minimum, restoration of the proposed reductions is critically important if NAL is to maintain its leadership in the provision of long-term preservation and access to agricultural information and literature.

Since 1862, NAL has actively provided agricultural information to farmers, researchers, educators, policymakers, consumers of agricultural products, and the public. The Library is the world's largest 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. Libraries and users throughout the country, indeed the world, depend upon NAL for agricultural information and resources not found elsewhere. For example, a recent survey by OCLC, a computer library service and research organization, found that NAL holds 166,0000 unique book and journal titles, nine times the average U.S. research library which the survey shows holds an average of 19,000 unique book and journal titles.

NAL engages in many collaborative relationships with university research libraries throughout the United States. U.S. research libraries and members of the agricultural community depend upon NAL for a diverse array of services and information resources. For example, NAL acquires, preserves and manages information and services in agricultural and allied sciences; organizes agricultural information by cataloging, indexing, and making it readily available; and cooperates with public and private agricultural industries and programs to manage a comprehensive information network. Unfortunately, some of the NAL services are in jeopardy because the President's proposed FY 2009 request of \$18

million falls short of the FY 2008 budget by \$4 million, and is \$6 million less than the FY 2007 budget for the Library.

The following are some of the anticipated impacts of the President's FY 2009 request.

- *NAL non-digital resources would no longer be publicly available via document delivery services to both USDA employees and the public due to a \$3 million reduction.*

USDA personnel and the public depend upon the NAL to provide access to a wide range of agricultural information. This information spans national and international resources, and includes special collections. Libraries throughout the world, on behalf of their users, rely upon NAL to provide access to agricultural information that is not found elsewhere. Document delivery service to libraries would cease under the proposed budget. For example, NAL would be forced to discontinue free document delivery service to Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and libraries in developing countries. In FY 2007, NAL document delivery services filled 29,000 requests for print-based materials. Under the proposed budget request, NAL would not be able to continue to provide such service in FY 2009 if the proposed reductions are enacted. The public, including USDA researchers outside of Beltsville, MD, scientists, students, educators, and researchers would be forced to travel to NAL to view needed resources on-site. This would effectively impose significant barriers for access to critical material in NAL's comprehensive collections. And, as many rare and unique items are extremely fragile and/or brittle, digitization is not an option that would then permit broad and remote availability. NAL's collections include one-of-a-kind manuscripts, letters, and association records that represent a significant portion of agricultural history. Though normally quantified as 365 special collections, these documents, photographs, and records actually number close to 39 million items, many of which are fragile or in special formats not subject to digitization.

- *Proposed elimination of Special Collections would impair research.*

Researchers, educators, scientists within USDA and beyond, and the public utilize NAL's unique Special Collections. NAL's mission is to "acquire and preserve... all information concerning agriculture and rural development." NAL's Special Collections include papers of individuals and organizations whose history is important to agriculture. These historical collections are often essential to foster new scientific discovery. For example, NAL's Special Collections are used by scientists to identify the origins of invasive species. NAL's invasive species information center has provided information about colony collapse disorder which is affecting the bee industry in the U.S. These efforts provide an excellent example of the importance of NAL to the Nation's economy. While USDA funds the research into topics related to agriculture such as colony collapse disorder, avian influenza, and mad cow disease, NAL is a critical means for accessing the information resulting from this investment. Understanding our past is oftentimes key to our future, especially in the science fields such as

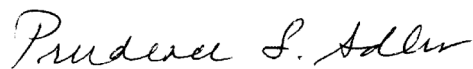
agriculture. The resurgence in the growing of heirloom plants is one such example, as is the concern for achieving a balance between agricultural production and a healthy environment. NAL's Special Collections have significant holdings of interest to growers and breeders of heirloom fruits and vegetables, as well as research material reflecting historical research investments in fields as biofuels and the production of renewable energy from agricultural crops.

• *Acquisition and access to agricultural resources, nationally and internationally would be significantly reduced.*

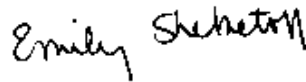
As the National Library of Agriculture, the Library acquires, preserves and provides access to agricultural literature in all languages and formats collected from around the world. No other library collects and preserves the range of agricultural related literature as does NAL. Budget reductions will result in NAL canceling long standing global partnerships whereby NAL obtains materials through gift and exchange programs. Under the proposed reductions, NAL will be unable to acquire, process, and catalog these resources due to lack of funding.

The impacts of the reduction and redirection of funding in the proposed FY 2009 NAL budget request are severe. NAL would be forced to eliminate needed services that support research, science and education within the U.S. Department of Agriculture and beyond. In many respects, NAL could not fulfill its role as a National Library. This would be a loss to the Nation. We appreciate that there are many competing and important priorities that the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies must consider. We ask for your continuing support for NAL as you consider the FY 2009 appropriation for the Library. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,



Prudence S. Adler  
Associate Executive Director  
Association of Research Libraries



Emily Sheketoff  
Executive Director, Washington Office  
American Library Association