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Ag producer calls for increased USDA research funding

By Agri-Pulse Staff

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A House Agriculture Subcommittee hearing Wednesday on implementing the research title of the 2008 Farm Bill heard multiple reasons for increased research. Joseph H. Layton, Jr., a soybean, corn and grape producer on Maryland's Eastern Shore, emphasized the priority need for increased federal funding for food and agricultural research, extension and education at the Conservation, Credit and Research Subcommittee hearing.

Speaking as a producer and a spokesman for the American Soybean Association (ASA), the National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research (National C-FAR), and the USDA National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education and Economics (NAREEE) Advisory Board, Layton said "We are all customers – farmers, consumers and, yes, even Congress – who are dependent upon our food and ag research programs for sound answers. We must seize this historic opportunity to come together in support of increased federal funding for both fundamental and applied research if we are to expect our researchers to provide the science-based outcomes needed to meet multiple challenges we are facing, both known and unknown."

Layton said USDA Under Secretary Rajiv Shah and newly appointed National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Director Roger Beachy bring vision and leadership to USDA's research mission. He promised that ASA and National C-FAR will work with USDA on the new roadmap to implement Research Title reforms and work with the administration and Congress in support of critical increases in funding. Layton pointed out that the Research Title of the 2008 Farm Bill is key to the success of every other Farm Bill title, providing vital scientific outcomes and tools for USDA's overall mission.

"Research reforms we all support will not work if the USDA research mission remains seriously underfunded," Layton warned. He said the NAREEE Advisory Board had taken a detailed look at several research areas and had been concerned about the insufficient level of funding in all instances. The ag leader called for increasing funding for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) to the fully authorized level of \$700 million annually as soon as possible, as part of increased funding overall for both extramural and intramural research.

To read the witness statements from the House hearing on implementation of the research title of the 2008 Farm Bill, go to: <http://agriculture.house.gov/hearings/statements.html>.