



April 27, 2010

Dr. Roger Beachy  
Director  
USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture  
Jamie L. Whitten Building, Room 305-A  
1400 Independence Ave., SW., Stop 2201  
Washington, DC, 20250-2201

Dear Director Beachy:

The Weed Science Society of America (WSSA) would like to thank you for taking the time to come to Denver and speak to our members and some of the society's leadership concerning the Agricultural and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). We were excited to hear about the expansion of AFRI funding and **are fully supportive of continued growth** of this program to help meet the future food, fiber and bioenergy needs of the Nation and the world. This support was agreed upon in discussions among the WSSA board of directors despite our interpretation of your remarks to mean that the primary granting source for weed science research, the Weedy and Invasive Organisms panel, was likely to be eliminated. It was understood that this might be part of your strategy to move to larger multidisciplinary and regional projects. We were initially supportive of your efforts because you also assured us that there would be ample opportunities for funding for weed science in the AFRI requests for applications (RFAs).

However, members of the National and Regional Weed Science Societies (WSSA, Aquatic Plant Management Society, North Central Weed Science Society, Northeastern Weed Science Society, Southern Weed Science Society, and Western Society of Weed Science) were **shocked and disappointed** by the 2010 RFA. These feelings have grown to a mixture of discouragement and anger among the weed science community. In short, there is almost no mention of weeds in the various AFRI RFAs. We have been trying to understand the thought process behind this omission. Is weed management considered by the USDA leadership to be a solved problem, with no further active science necessary? Nothing could be further from the current reality. In our last report to the CSREES Plant and Pest Biology stakeholder meeting in 2007 (which was based upon a survey of the WSSA membership research priorities, published in *Weed Science* (<http://www.wssa.net/WSSA/Grants/WS-09-020-Survey%20paper.pdf>), we stated that:

*"Weed science as a discipline has had many successes over the years, but its future is in some ways imperiled by its very success. A confluence of factors, including reduced farming system diversity, the widespread adoption of herbicide resistant crops grown in monoculture, a near cessation in herbicide discovery by industry, and lack of herbicide rotation has gradually undermined the foundations of weed management. Herbicide*

*resistant weed biotypes are proliferating at the same time that producer knowledge of the fundamentals of weed management is eroding. We need to add new weed management tools that increase options for the future, and this will require a far better understanding of weed biology and ecology than we currently have. Unfortunately, with the weed management successes of the past have come reduced public and commodity group concern with weeds, consolidation of industry, and stagnant government funding for weeds. How will we fund the basic and applied science needed to develop the next generation weed management tactics?"*

The recent release of the National Academy of Sciences report "Impact of Genetically Engineered Crops on Farm Sustainability in the United States" reiterates many of these points and calls for additional research to maintain present weed management tools, understand their environmental and social impacts, and develop non-pesticidal options for the future. The very recent NIFA RFA for "Critical Issues: Emerging and New Plant and Animal Pests and Diseases" shows that NIFA is aware of some of the weed management challenges U.S. farmers are facing. However, this Critical Issues RFA is **only proposing \$60,000 in funds for one project** that is limited in its weed science scope to glyphosate resistant weeds.

During the Program Manager Panel discussion at the NIFA Plant and Pest Biology meeting on April 20, it was interesting to learn how the 2007 stakeholder feedback helped inform the newly reorganized phytopathology and entomology *Foundational Programs* in the 2010 RFA. In contrast, there was no mention of how the stakeholder input related to weedy plant ecology and management had been used to inform any aspect of the current RFA. The challenges we faced in 2007 have, if anything, **grown more urgent in 2010**. Herbicide **resistant weed biotypes** continue to evolve and overrun long-established cropping systems (e.g. loss of cotton production areas in the South). **Organic farmers** have a pressing need for new, effective tactics to support weed management without herbicides in the face of a growing demand for organically produced food. Sustaining food, fiber and fuel production in a **changing climate** will not be possible without funding to develop adaptive responses to changing weed problems. Our managed **forests and aquatic ecosystems** are being compromised by unchecked spread of invasive plants. We need to maintain our wetlands and waterways to ensure potable water, hydroelectric power, flood control and conservation.

As leaders in the National and Regional Weed Science Societies, we have fielded a number of inquiries from weed scientists asking for help in finding where our discipline can participate in NIFA projects. We have had **little encouragement to give them**. To date, the only areas we would identify are in Global Food Security (Wide Area Monitoring, only 1 grant to be funded), Climate Change (we are pleased to see the word "weed" added to the amended RFA), and Sustainable Bioenergy ( "minimize herbicide inputs" is mentioned in the objectives). Perhaps the most viable area for a weed scientist to consider is the standard grants under Sustainable Bioenergy focused on plant protection for these crops. These opportunities would not be so troubling if weed science was more prominently featured in the listed priority areas for 2011 and 2012. While there is no mention of weed science or weed management specifically, the current and future priorities under Global Food Security specifically mention the other plant protection disciplines. These examples are:

In FY 2010:

- Minimizing crop plant losses from oomycete pathosystems

In FY 2011:

- Management of fungal diseases in plants

- Management of vector associated pathogens in plants

In FY 2012:

- Management of plant insect pests
- Management of plant bacterial diseases

The omission of weed management as a priority now and for the next two years jeopardizes the careers of both young and established weed scientists. Furthermore, frankly, it has the potential to destroy weed science as a discipline. It is impossible to see how new and innovative approaches to weed management will be discovered unless there is a healthy and vibrant weed science community. In addition, we need the discipline to train the students who will develop these new ways of dealing with weeds.

We realize the time is short before the 2011 AFRI RFA is finalized. We ask three things:

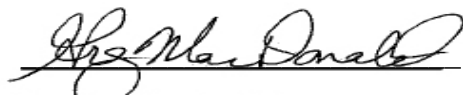
1. **Add an AFRI Foundational Program addressing weedy plant biology, ecology and management**, a program similar in scope to phytopathology and entomology programs.
2. Second, we ask that you consider reconfiguring the larger AFRI programs so that they encompass the full breadth of disciplines comprising agricultural sciences. Currently, the RFA objectives are written so narrowly as to exclude not only weed science but many other important areas of study. In particular, **place an equal priority on weed management as management of other plant pests**.
3. Finally, **restore funding** for Integrated Activities under **Section 406** Legislative Authority research programs in the FY 2011 Federal budget, and maintain funding for these programs in future years.

Thank you for considering our comments. We do want to end by emphasizing our support for your efforts in increasing support for agricultural research, extension and education. However, this support is balanced by our call for greater attention to the weed management needs to meet our agricultural production objectives.

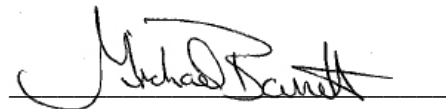
Sincerely,



Dr. John Jachetta  
President  
Weed Science Society of America



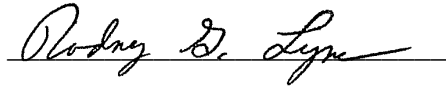
Dr. Greg MacDonald  
President  
Aquatic Plant Management Society



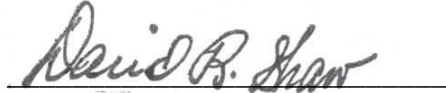
Dr. Michael Barrett  
President-Elect  
Weed Science Society of America



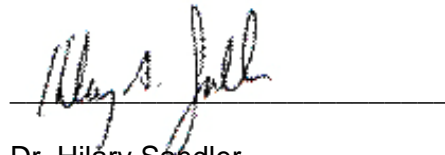
Dr. Chris Boerboom  
President  
North Central Weed Science Society



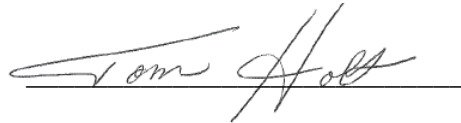
Dr. Rodney Lym  
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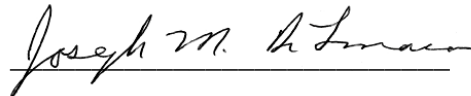
Dr. David Shaw  
Past-President  
Weed Science Society of America



Dr. Hilary Sandler  
President  
Northeastern Weed Science Society



Mr. Thomas Holt  
President  
Southern Weed Science Society



Dr. Joe DiTomaso  
President  
Western Society of Weed Science

cc: House Committee on Agriculture  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture  
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack  
Dr. Harold Coble, USDA Office of Pest Management Policy