



PRESS RELEASE
June 12, 2012

CONTACT: Michael Sligh, (919) 641-9341
msligh@rafiusa.org

PUBLIC VARIETY RESEARCH A PRIORITY, FARM GROUPS, RESEARCHERS SAY

This year's Farm Bill should direct more research dollars to classical breeding projects that result in finished, publicly owned plant and animal varieties, according to a letter from more than 100 farm organizations and scientists.

The letter supports the Tester Amendment to the Farm Bill, which would reserve five percent of the USDA Agriculture and Food Research Initiative's funds for such projects.

The 2008 Farm Bill mandated that the Initiative prioritize this kind of research. Yet a 2011 study by the Rural Advancement Foundation International – USA and the National Organic Coalition showed that, between 2009 and 2011, the Initiative only funded one grant, out of 127, that fit the description.

"The amendment has obvious benefits for researchers and consumers, and it's good for every farmer, no matter what kind of crop they choose to grow," says Michael Sligh, Just Foods Program Director at RAFI.

"Classical breeding is a proven, cost-effective complement to genomic techniques. Without federal support, we are losing public seeds and breeds, a critical resource for American farmers and researchers and for the stability of the global food supply," Sligh said.

Todd Leake grows wheat and soybeans with his brother on 2,000 acres in Grand Forks County, N.D., where soil acidity is high and the growing season is short. "I depend on my state's land grant university for crop lines that can handle our emerging disease and pest pressures, as well as our local soil and climate and growing conditions," he said.

-MORE-

TESTER LETTER/Pg. 2

“But without federal funding,” Leake said, “public program breeders can’t develop these crops, and farmers like me won’t have the choices we need. Already, my crop choices are dwindling,”

Leake said that larger seed companies also benefit from healthy public breeding programs. “A lot of the genetic material large seed companies use comes from the public sector,” he said.

“I hope our Senators will do the right thing for the farmers and the excellent researchers that support us, and support the Tester Amendment,” Leake said.

###

A full copy of the letter, including the names of all organizations and researchers who signed, is available at www.rafiusa.org/docs/testeramendletter.pdf.

RAFI is a nonprofit organization that cultivates markets, policies and communities that support thriving, socially just, environmentally sound family farms. For more information, visit www.rafiusa.org.