

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 26, 2018

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman
Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies
Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 129
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies
Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 190
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Hoeven and Ranking Member Merkley:

As you develop the Fiscal Year 2019 (FY19) Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we respectfully request an increase in funding for the Minor Crop Pest Management Interregional Research Project, also known as the IR-4 Program. The IR-4 Project has been supported by the Appropriations Committee in the past and is currently funded at \$11.9 million annually. We are requesting an increase in funding to \$19 million for FY19, which would provide a much needed funding boost that would support specialty crop farmers nationwide.

Established by Congress in 1963 within the Department of Agriculture (USDA), the IR-4 Project provides research and technical assistance to support minor/specialty crop industry in gaining Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approval of safe and effective biological and chemical pesticides needed by farmers to grow their crops. More recently, the IR-4 Project's mission has expanded to include pest management products for organic agriculture. The IR-4 Project is critical for specialty crop farmers to protect their high value commodities from damage caused by destructive insects, plant diseases and weeds. This is because the private sector often does not register specialty crop protectants with the EPA due to the high cost and the low return on investment related to the lower acreage of minor/specialty crops versus major crops. The IR-4 Project fills this void for minor/specialty crop farmers and utilizes a combination of state, federal and private sector funds to develop the required data to facilitate registration of safe pest management products to protect specialty crops.

The IR-4 Project is a nationwide initiative that works with a diverse array of specialty crops, including most vegetables, fruits, tree nuts, herbs and ornamental crops, in almost every state in the Country. In addition to specialty crops, the IR-4 Project covers other minor crops, which includes nearly all other types of products with the exception of cotton, corn, soybeans, and grain crops such as wheat, oats, and rice. The documented value of the IR-4 Project is significant. A

Michigan State University Center for Economic Analysis report issued in December 2017 found that the IR-4 Project's work contributes over \$9.4 billion to the annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and supports 95,261 jobs throughout the United States.

The IR-4 Project has been instrumental in protecting a wide array of specialty crops across the country for many years. A selection of examples include:

- Michigan cherry farmers are being helped by the IR-4 Project in combatting the new invasive pest Spotted Wing Drosophila.
- The Florida avocado industry is currently fighting Laurel Wilt disease, which is transmitted by an invasive Ambrosia Beetle from Asia, with the help of the IR-4 Project.
- North Carolina sweet potato farmers are being helped by the IR-4 Project as they fight to maintain access to the European market after The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) threatened to remove authorization of the use of a specific fungicide on sweet potatoes.
- Ornamental horticulture in the Northeast states, Florida, California, and Oregon are expected to produce high quality, blemish free plants to meet customer demand and they rely upon the IR-4 Project to facilitate multistate projects on mitigating key invasive pests on ornamental crops.

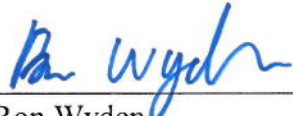
Under current funding levels, the IR-4 Project is able to process only 50 out of approximately 350 projects requested annually. An increase in funding would allow the IR-4 Project to process an additional 25 projects per year and would further allow more work related to biopesticide projects and organic projects. Unlike most major crops, many American specialty crops have difficulty reaching lucrative international markets due to the lack of a harmonized pesticide approval system between our sovereign trading partners. An increase in funding would allow the IR-4 Project to expand harmonization activities with America's key trading allies. Finally, an increase in funding would help leverage matching funding from other participating stakeholders.

With this in mind, we respectfully request your support in this funding request of \$19 million for the IR-4 Project within the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies Appropriations bill and we are grateful for the Appropriations Committee's past support of this critical research program.

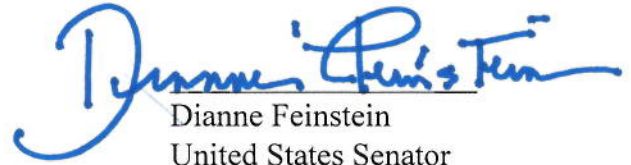
Sincerely,


Robert Menendez
United States Senator


Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



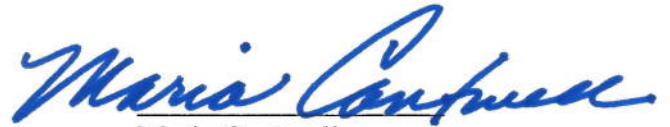
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



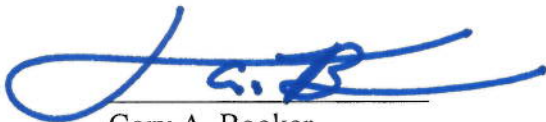
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