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**SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE APPROVES
FY2017 AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT BILL**

Bill Invests in Agriculture Research, Supports Rural America, Funds Nutrition Programs

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Senate Committee on Appropriations today approved a \$147.7 billion appropriations bill to support federal agriculture and nutrition programs in FY2017.

The FY2017 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill was favorably reported out of committee and is now available for consideration before the full Senate. The vote was unanimous, 30-0.

The legislation recommends \$21.25 billion in discretionary funding, \$250 million below the FY2016 enacted level. Mandatory funding in the bill totals \$126.5 billion, for a total of \$147.7 billion in discretionary and mandatory funding. The overall funding level is \$21.7 billion below the President's budget request and \$7.1 billion above the FY2016 enacted level.

The committee-approved measure supports U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) agriculture, rural development, conservation programs, and food and drug safety. It also provides essential nutrition assistance for children, families and seniors. The bill also creates incentives for military veterans to enter careers in agriculture.

“This appropriations bill would help protect public health, enhance agricultural research and promote rural development throughout the country,” said Appropriations Committee **Chairman Thad Cochran** (R-Miss.). “Senators Moran and Merkley have worked diligently to fund these important programs in a thoughtful and fiscally responsible manner. I look forward to consideration of this and other appropriations measures before the full Senate.”

“The investments made in this bill will help rural America succeed,” said **U.S. Senator Jerry Moran** (R-Kan.), chairman of the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee. “Our bill not only invests in crucial priorities like agricultural research, food safety and inspection services, but also increases flood prevention and conservation efforts by addressing watershed project backlogs in all 50 states. It also incentivizes military veterans to explore career opportunities in production agriculture. With this legislation, we are charting a path forward for our agricultural community that will benefit all American families.”

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Bill Highlights:

Military Veterans in Agriculture – The bill creates several incentives for military veterans to explore career opportunities in production agriculture. It provides \$5 million through the Office of the Secretary for veteran outreach initiatives, and \$2.5 million for the Food and Agriculture Resilience Program for Military Veterans (FARM-Vets) under the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, the first funding the program has received. The bill also includes funding to waive FSA loan application fees for veteran farmers and ranchers.

Agricultural Research – \$2.54 billion to support agricultural research conducted by the Agricultural Research Service and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. This amount includes \$375 million for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative, a \$25 million increase above the FY2016 enacted level. Formula research funding for land-grant universities is maintained at FY2016 levels.

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) – \$939.3 million for APHIS, \$38 million above the budget request and \$44.9 million above the FY2016 enacted level. Overall funding will continue programs to control or eradicate plant and animal pests and diseases that threaten U.S. agriculture production. The bill includes an increase of \$27.2 million for emergency preparedness/response to address capacity shortfalls exposed by the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) outbreak in 2015. Additional increases will help address wildlife damage management issues, initiate workforce development for the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility, expand activities to combat antibiotic resistance, and improve pre-departure inspections of agriculture imports.

Natural Resources Conservation Service – \$864.5 million, \$13.6 million above the FY2016 enacted level and \$4.1 million over the budget request, for conservation operations to help farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners conserve and protect their land. The bill also includes \$150 million for the Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations program, funding the program has not received since FY2010, to support needed investments in rural communities.

Farm Service Agency (FSA) – \$1.518 billion for FSA for various farm, conservation, and emergency loan programs that are important to the nation's farmers and ranchers. It prohibits the closure of FSA county offices, and provides resources for personnel and physical security programs across county offices.

Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) – \$1.033 billion, \$19 million above the FY2016 enacted level and \$3 million over the budget request, for food safety and inspection programs that work to ensure safe, healthy food for American families, while promoting the safety and productivity of the nation's \$186 billion meat and poultry industry. The bill will support more than 8,000 frontline inspection personnel for meat, poultry, and egg products at more than 6,400 facilities in the United States.

Rural Development – \$683.3 million for salaries and expenses for Rural Development, approximately the same as FY2016 enacted level. USDA rural development programs are designed to help foster economic growth in rural regions by supporting basic rural infrastructure, rural business and industry loans, and rural housing.

- **Business and Industry Loans** – The legislation supports a \$995 million grant and loan level for rural business and industry programs that promote small business growth in rural areas. The bill includes funding for the Healthy Food Financing Initiative to improve access to affordable, healthy foods in underserved areas.

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- **Rural Infrastructure** – \$1.25 billion for rural water and waste program loans, the same as the FY2016 enacted level, and \$546 million for grants and costs, an increase of \$24 million above FY2016 enacted levels. The measure provides \$6.94 billion for rural electric and telephone infrastructure loans.
- **Rural Housing Loans and Rental Assistance** – \$24 billion in loan authority for the Single Family Housing guaranteed loan program, equal to the FY2016 enacted level and the President’s request. It includes \$900 million, the same as the FY2016 enacted level and the President’s request, for the direct loan program that provides low-income rural families with home loan assistance. In addition, \$1.4 billion, an increase of \$16 million above current levels, is included for the Rental Assistance program, which helps low-income families and the elderly in rural communities obtain affordable rental housing.

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) – \$2.759 billion in discretionary funding for the FDA, \$39 million over the FY2016 enacted level. Overall, total FDA funding, including user fee revenues, is \$4.78 billion, which is \$103 million above FY2016. Within this total, a \$40.2 million increase is provided for food safety activities, \$15 million above the President’s request, and an \$11.9 million increase is included for medical product safety activities. The Senate bill also maintains the delay for FDA implementation of the new menu labeling regulation.

Food and Nutrition Programs – The bill provides discretionary funding, as well as mandatory funding required by law, for food and nutrition programs within the USDA. This includes funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Child Nutrition programs.

- **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)** – \$6.35 billion in discretionary funding for WIC, which is level with the FY2016 enacted level and the President’s request. This amount is based on USDA estimates of WIC enrollments and will not prevent eligible participants from receiving benefits.
- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** – \$79.682 billion in required mandatory spending, which is outside the discretionary funding jurisdiction of the Senate Appropriations Committee, for SNAP. Due to declining enrollments, this is \$1.167 billion below last year’s level.
- **Child Nutrition Programs** – \$23.2 billion in required mandatory funding, which is outside the discretionary funding jurisdiction of the Senate Appropriations Committee, for child nutrition programs. This funding will provide free or reduced-price school lunches and snacks for 30.3 million children who qualify for the program.

International Programs – \$1.6 billion for Food for Peace grants, which support the delivery of American-grown food to foreign countries experiencing chronic hunger crises. The McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program is maintained at FY2016 levels, and includes \$10 million for the Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement at the Foreign Agriculture Service. The bill also includes \$1.5 million to open an overseas post in Cuba.

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