

## JOINT PRESS RELEASE



Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA and Organic Seed Alliance

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 22, 2013

### **More than 100 groups urge Congress to support Tester Amendment in 2013 Farm Bill**

*Letter says more public research dollars for seeds and breeds will greatly benefit U.S. agriculture*

More than 100 farm organizations, scientists, businesses and nonprofits, including Organic Seed Alliance and Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA, have signed a letter urging Congress to support Senator Tester's amendment to the Senate Farm Bill.

The proposed Farm Bill currently on the Congress floor fails to direct more research dollars to classical breeding projects that would result in the benefit of publicly owned plant cultivars and animal breeds.

However, Senator Tester's amendment seeks to reinvigorate classical plant breeding in the public sector to better ensure farmers have the seeds and breeds they need to be successful.

"Basic research is the platform from which all other discoveries are launched," says Harvey Howington, Vice President of the Arkansas Rice Growers Association. "Our land grant universities provide that foundation for cutting edge research—and this includes the development of high-quality public cultivars."

Growing support of the Tester Amendment comes from a diverse population of farmers, businesspeople and researchers who agree with its effort to enhance farmer access to improved crop cultivars and livestock breeds that are adapted to diverse and regional farming needs. By directing more public dollars toward classical breeding projects that result in finished seeds and breeds, the competitiveness of U.S. agriculture increases for the better.

Such is the case for fifth-generation farmer George Teague of Reedy Fork Organic Farm in Elon, North Carolina. He runs an organic feed mill and dairy as part of the Organic Valley Co-op. Teague is concerned with a current Farm Bill that ignores classical breeding, limiting his advantage in keeping up with market competition.

"Without federal funding, our choice in public seeds is limited," Teague says. "There is less grown here in the Southeast, so most of the seed companies will devote their attention to other areas with greater acreage and yields, instead of here."

Classical breeding is a proven approach to meeting our nation's food and fiber needs, says the letter published today, including increasing food security for our growing population.

According to Irwin Goldman, Horticulture Department Chair at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, public plant breeding is a "relatively low-cost investment that yields huge downstream benefits for agriculture and food

production in this country.” Goldman has been a public plant breeder for more than twenty years, assisting consumers who use the products from his university’s breeding programs.

“Farmers and consumers consistently express to us how much they value the efforts of public plant breeding,” Goldman says. “Most of them identify specific cultivars or research findings discovered by public sector scientists as important and useful. And the agricultural industries that depend on our work also value the many students who get their science training in our programs. These are our stakeholders, and the message we hear is that public funding invested in this enterprise results in long-term gains for agriculture and food production in the U.S.”

Additional benefits of the Tester Amendment include mitigating the effects of climate change.

“We need diverse seed options, including those that are adapted to our soil types and help us deal with our increasingly humid climate,” says Teague.

The monoculture of seeds perpetuated by industrial agriculture is extremely vulnerable to our increasingly volatile global climate, along with the pests and diseases that accompany the heat. Further research supported by public funding will help identify and disseminate seeds adapted to a range of conditions to meet the regional needs of farmers.

“Funding for classical plant breeding has the dual benefit of training the next generation of agricultural researchers, while also serving as a catalyst for competition and innovation in crop genetics,” said Matthew Dillon, Agricultural Policy and Programs Manager for Clif Bar & Company. “Seed innovation is the foundation for improving the quality, nutritional value, and ecological footprint of the food we eat and fiber we wear.”

###

#### **Media Contacts**

Victoria Bouloubasis (RAFI-USA)  
(919) 621-3593  
victoria@rafiusa.org

Kristina Hubbard (OSA)  
(406) 493-6965  
kristina@seedalliance.org

#### **About Rural Advancement Foundation International – USA**

RAFI-USA is a nonprofit organization that cultivates markets, policies and communities that support thriving, socially just and environmentally sound family farms. RAFI-USA is based in Pittsboro, N.C. Find us online at [www.rafiusa.org](http://www.rafiusa.org) or call (919) 542-1396.

#### **About Organic Seed Alliance**

Organic Seed Alliance advances the ethical development and stewardship of the genetic resources of agricultural seed. We accomplish our mission through research, education, and advocacy programs that closely engage farmers and other agricultural community members. Learn more at [www.seedalliance.org](http://www.seedalliance.org).