The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

March 18, 2025

To Secretary Rollins,

As leading trade associations, farmer and grower organizations, and academic associations representing the agricultural sector, we are writing to express our strong support for the U.S. National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS). The NPGS, managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS), continues USDA's proud tradition that began as early as 1899 of collecting and evaluating seeds and plants to benefit the U.S. agriculture community.

Today, the NPGS plays a critical role in conserving and distributing plant genetic resources — including seeds, cuttings, and other plant materials — that are essential to U.S. farmers, plant breeders, researchers, and companies. Continued investment in the NPGS is vital to keep pace with strategic competitors such as China, who invests significant capital into agricultural research programs[1]. Consistent support for the NPGS is essential to maintain the United States' global leadership in agricultural research and development (R&D) and the foundation of our nation's ability to develop new crop varieties, respond to emerging agricultural threats, and deliver innovative solutions to U.S. farmers.

The NPGS maintains one of the most diverse and valuable collections of plant germplasm in the world, including staple crops such as wheat, corn, soy, and rice; fruits like apples, peaches, grapes, and citrus; vegetables like beans, tomatoes, peppers, and onions; as well as cotton, tree nuts, peanuts, forages, barley, oats, and industrial crops. Notably, the NPGS also houses collections of many wild relatives of these important crops, which serve as sources of genetic diversity for crop improvement. Many specimens in the NPGS are irreplaceable and invaluable; some no longer exist in commerce or in their wild habitats, and reacquiring new specimens today would be cost-prohibitive and mired by complex international regulations and obligations.

[1] World Spending on Agricultural Research: https://agpolicyreview.card.iastate.edu/winter-2023/world-spending-agricultural-research-and-development

The true value of the NPGS goes beyond merely storage for specimens. As a dynamic, living seed bank, the NPGS serves as an unparalleled source where U.S. farmers, companies, and researchers can request access to diverse plant materials at any time, thus powering innovation through plant breeding, research, and public-private partnerships. Research using NPGS collections has directly increased U.S. farmers' income and livelihoods through the development of innovative seeds and crops that are used by farmers every day[2].

As you consider the future direction of USDA programs, we urge you to maintain the NPGS as one of USDA's priority research programs. Disruptions in the continuity of the NPGS functions would have a profound impact on U.S. farmers, consumers, and the entire agricultural sector. For example, seed companies rely on a functioning NPGS to deposit seeds, which is a condition for receiving intellectual property rights under Plant Variety Protection[3], and delays in these critical functions could prevent users from having timely access to innovative seeds. Further, NPGS facilities are continuously characterizing and refreshing specimens in the collection, which involves planting, harvesting, and conditioning the seed for ongoing storage. Any disruption in these processes would irreversibly set back research trials and impact integrity of the seed collections. In the longer term, a strong and well supported NPGS ensures the preservation of irreplaceable genetic collections, enables U.S. farmers access to stronger and higher-yielding crops, lowers food costs, and ensures the United States continues to lead the world in agricultural innovation.

We stand by to support USDA as it continues to assess how to increase the efficiency of its research programs. We hope to be partners in ensuring the continued long-term functioning of the NPGS to ensure that U.S. farmers, companies, and researchers have access to the important genetic resources housed in these collections for future generations.

Sincerely,

American Seed Trade Association

agInnovation North Central

agInnovation Northeast

Alabama Agribusiness Council

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[2] NPGS Success Stories: https://colostate.pressbooks.pub/pgrsuccessstories/
[3]USDA Plant Variety Protection: https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/plant-variety-protection

Almond Alliance

American Malting Barley Association

American Peanut Research and Education Society

American Phytopathological Society

American Pulse Association

American Society for Horticultural Science

American Society of Agronomy

American Society of Plant Biologists

American Soybean Association

AmericanHort

Arnold Arboretum

Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies

Bailey Nurseries

Ball Horticultural Co

Biotechnology Innovation Organization

California Specialty Crops Council

California Walnut Commission

Cereals & Grains Association

Chicago Botanic Garden

Cornell University

Crop Science Society of America

Currey Horticulture

Denver Botanic Gardens

Farm Journal Foundation

Fearless Gardening

Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association

Griffin Greenhouse Su.

Hawaii Macadamia Nut Association

Hawaii Master Food Preservers

Hawaii Tropical Fruit Growers

Idaho Grain Producers Association

Illinois Seed Trade Association, Inc.

Illinois Soybean Growers

International Fresh Produce Association

Iowa Arboretum & Gardens

JC Raulston Arboretum at NC State University

Kingwood Center Gardens

Latitude 46

Longwood Gardens

Independent Professional Seed Association

Michigan State University

Missouri Botanical Garden

Montana Seed Growers Association

Montana Seed Trade Association

Montana State University

Montana Wheat & Barley Committee

National Association for Plant Breeding

National Association of Wheat Growers

National Barley Growers Association

National Barley Improvement Committee

National Corn Growers Association

National Cotton Council of America

National Grain and Feed Association

National Sorghum Producers

National Sunflower Association

National Wheat Improvement Committee

ND State Seed Commission

New Crops Crop Germplasm Committee

North American Blueberry Council

North American Craft Maltsters Guild

North American Millers' Assoc

North Dakota Barley Council

North Dakota State University

Pacific Northwest Canola Association

Polly Hill Arboretum

Seed Savers Exchange

Sierra Gold Nurseries

Soil Science Society of America

South Carolina Peach Council

Spring Grove Cemetery and Arboretum

Spring Meadow Nursery

Synergistic Hawaii Agriculture Council

Texas Grain & Feed Association

The Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University

The Breakthrough Institute

The Dawes Arboretum

The Morton Arboretum

U.S. Apple Association

U.S. Canola Association

University of Idaho

University of Wisconsin Arboretum

US Dry Bean Council

USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council

USA Rice

USDFRC Stakeholder Advisory Committee

Washington State Crop Improvement Association

Washington State University

Western Plant Health Association

World Coffee Research