

GROWERTALKS

SAF in the Lobby

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SAF Lobbies for Additional Research Funding

Society of American Florists

Every year, U.S. citizens, buoyed by their own initiative or representing an industry they work in or a cause they believe in, submit tens of thousands of requests to members of Congress to fund various programs. Typically, those requests are acknowledged by congressional offices and then politely dismissed, citing tight budgets and lack of money.

That was not the case for SAF members during Congressional Action Days (CAD). The requests made by SAF members to help fund the Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative (FNRI) were extremely well-received by congressional offices and are a testament to the effectiveness of personal involvement in the political process.

So far, as a direct result of SAF members lobbying during CAD, 15 congressional offices have submitted appropriations requests to increase current FNRI funding.

FNRI is a partnership between the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the floriculture and nursery industry (SAF and AmericanHort), and the academic community. The program obtains and guides federal research funding targeted to the needs of the floriculture and nursery industries.

Over the last 19 years, research funding through FNRI has included methods to address Botrytis control and management, thrips control and management, improving cut flower longevity, pesticide use reduction, breeding to enhance post-harvest quality, plant and flower quality, and many other areas.

The Initiative reached a high of \$5.1 million. Due to inflation and funds being diverted to other programs, the initiative is now funded at \$4.6 million.

In order to recoup some of the funding lost and to continue the critical research FNRI supports, during CAD SAF members asked their members of Congress to provide \$250,000 to FNRI to replenish the funding that's been lost.

When CAD attendees discussed FNRI with congressional offices, noted its importance and asked that the program's funding be partially restored, those offices enthusiastically responded. Rather than being politely dismissed, SAF members were listened to and commitments were made on the spot to support FNRI funding through an official funding request procedure.

Some of the 15 members of Congress who submitted the FNRI requests include members of the Appropriations Committee and Agriculture Committee. Those requests carry a great deal of weight and are how things are funded in the federal budget.

Not only did SAF members explain the value of FNRI during the CAD meetings, but congressional offices appreciated the modest request to restore the program's funding. One office said it was the smallest request they'd ever seen and would support it (that member of Congress is very well-known for efforts to cut spending—a testament to CAD attendees' effectiveness), while another saw the amount and asked half-jokingly whether a zero was accidentally left off the request.

For those members of Congress who did not submit an official funding request, they learned the importance of FNRI and why it needed additional funding. As a result, FNRI will receive support on the floors of Congress when the funding comes up for a vote.

While it will not be clear until late summer, if then, whether the \$250,000 for FNRI will be included in the final funding bill for the USDA, it's very clear the personal involvement of SAF members during CAD to promote the floral industry made a significant difference.

Personal Involvement Gets Results

Meeting face-to-face with lawmakers and their staffs is political involvement at its most basic. But appearing in a formal congressional hearing is another step entirely and one that many people don't get a chance to experience.

A week after a record number of SAF members attended CAD, SAF member Skip Paal of the Rutland Beard Floral Group, testified before a committee in the House of Representatives.

Paal, 37, is the fourth generation in the family-owned floral business and oversees strategic direction of the Baltimore-based floral company. With more than 180 employees across four states, Rutland Beard is one of the country's largest retailers, but it also controls its own wholesale, import and logistics companies.

The House Committee on Small Business asked if SAF could provide a member to testify at a hearing entitled "Making Washington Work for America's Small Businesses." The committee held the hearing to learn from small businesses what Washington could do to help them grow.

Paal was one of only four witnesses invited to testify to represent not only the floral industry, but small businesses throughout the country.

In his testimony, he outlined several areas where federal policies have made it difficult for him to grow his business and hire more employees, including challenges posed by the Affordable Care Act, and the general

uncertainty created by constantly-changing rules and regulations.

His testimony was so compelling that he was featured in the committee's press release following the hearing.

Just as it was clear that SAF members attending CAD made a difference, Paal's personal involvement before a congressional committee allowed him to influence national policy to help the floral industry.

New Manual on Import Regulations Available

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has released a new edition of its "Plants for Planting Manual."

A comprehensive reference for regulations that apply to imported plants, the manual includes the restrictions, emergency actions, Federal import orders and policy guidance that pertain to importing plants for planting. An informational webinar is expected to be released soon.

APHIS regulates the importation of plants for planting under the authority of the Plant Protection Act. The regulations in 7 CFR part 319 prohibit or restrict importation into the United States of certain plants and plant products to prevent introduction of plant pests into the United States. The regulations contained in "Subpart–Nursery Stock, Plants, Roots, Bulbs, Seeds, and Other Plant Products" (§ 319.37) prohibit or restrict the importation of living plants, plant parts and seeds for propagation. **GT**

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