

GROWERTALKS

SAF in the Lobby

5/1/2018

FNRI Receives Historic \$1 Million in Funding

Society of American Florists

The Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative (FNRI) has received \$1 million in funding through the omnibus spending bill approved by Congress and signed into law by President Trump.

The number represents the largest single increase in almost 20 years for FNRI, which plays a critical role in generating scientific research on high-priority issues that affect all segments—including post-harvest technology, water quality, and pest and disease management.

The increase is a direct result of the Society of American Florists' year-round lobbying for FNRI and it came just two weeks after more than 90 SAF members took to Capitol Hill during Congressional Action Days to ask their lawmakers to increase Initiative funding.

"This is very big news," said Shawn McBurney, SAF's senior director of government relations, who called the seven-digit figure "a testament to the effectiveness of SAF members becoming directly involved in working with their members of Congress. Their work is a big reason Congress specifically wrote that floriculture would receive a funding increase in its bill, where many other industries weren't mentioned."

The support for additional floral research funding through FNRI "demonstrates the need for floriculture research and recognition of the value of the floral industry to the agricultural economy," said Dr. Terril Nell, research coordinator for the American Floral Endowment (AFE) and a former SAF president.

Terril has long been deeply committed to FNRI, which funds research conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and university scientists focused on addressing and solving the industry's issues and needs. During CAD this year, he presented an overview of FNRI and how it's benefited the industry, along with the general public, by bringing some of the top academics and researchers to work on the industry's biggest challenges.

That message took hold, resonating with SAF members and the lawmakers they met with during CAD, said Rodney Crittenden, CEO and executive vice president of the Michigan Floral Association and Wisconsin & Upper Michigan Florists Association, and a longtime CAD participant.

"Our industry researchers will put this money to good use exploring ways to make the flowers and plants we sell better," he said. "This proves our time spent in Washington, D.C., is not wasted and our requests do not fall upon deaf ears. Our collective voices do make a difference."

The \$1 million funding itself represents at least two years of consistent effort by SAF and its members in four critical

areas, Shawn said:

- Identification of FNRI's work and the benefits it created for the floral industry, and with those identified, the creation of a strong, clear argument for increased funding
- Through SAFPAC, the floral industry's political action committee, support of key members of Congress who appreciate and assist the floral industry
- Network and relationship-building with key contacts in congressional offices
- Prioritizing FNRI funding as a top issue for SAF members to take to Capitol Hill during Congressional Action Days in both 2017 and 2018

"This is a huge accomplishment for the floral industry and it would not have happened without the support and hard work of SAF members," Shawn said. "This proves that conversations between SAF members and lawmakers and their staff during CAD have made a real difference."

More Progress on Floriculture Industry Priorities

Like the FNRI, requests by SAF and CAD attendees for the continued publication of the Floriculture Crops Report have made significant progress in Congress.

SAF members who attended CAD this year asked their members of Congress to fund publication of the Floriculture Crops Report. Those requests were extremely well-received. Subsequent discussions SAF has had with congressional offices and committees, as well as the USDA, have also gone very well.

The Floriculture Crops Report is produced by the USDA and is the only source of annual data on bedding and garden plants, potted herbaceous perennials, potted flowering plants for indoor and patio use, foliage plants for indoor or patio use, cut flowers, cut cultivated greens, and propagative floriculture materials. USDA decided it could not publish the floriculture report in 2016 and 2017 because of budget constraints.

SAF members visited their members of Congress during CAD, informed them of the importance of the report to the floriculture industry and urged them to designate funding for the continued publication of the report in 2019.

SAF is extremely pleased that the American Society for Horticultural Science, AmericanHort, the California Association of Flower Growers & Shippers, the California Cut Flower Commission, the Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association, and the Produce Marketing Association support the effort to continue the publication of the report. **GT**