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2010 Legislature Convenes

WSU Research Vulnerable

Inquiries from House and Senate fiscal committee staff are leading to concern by Washington State University officials that state-funded research could be considered for extraordinary cuts in this legislative session.

Federal stimulus funding requirements generally place limits on the amount of cuts the Washington Legislature can make this year to WSU, universities and community colleges (Maintenance of Effort). The governor proposed a 6.4 percent cut to each higher education institution or about \$13.55 million (the maximum her budget office identified as allowable under the maintenance of effort calculation.)

However, an anomaly in these federal requirements leaves \$26 million in WSU state research funds unprotected from state cut limits. \$21 million is in the WSU Agricultural Research Center. Because these state-funded agricultural research programs are considered to be outside the limits, they could be considered vulnerable to deep legislative-mandated cuts in the current state legislative session.

So far, no state legislator has come out in favor of unusual cuts to agriculture research but staff members in the House, Senate, and governor's budget office all confirm that it has been an issue under consideration.

The long-term impact of such a decision would be disastrous.

The \$21 million leverages approximately \$40 million in new external grants and contracts so far this fiscal year to solve problems in the food and agriculture industry which is the state's largest economic driver. This research boosts the bottom line for farmers and ranchers from Asotin to Aberdeen.

Operation of WSU research and extension centers is contingent on this state funding. This includes centers at WSU Puyallup, WSU Mount Vernon, WSU Wenatchee, WSU Prosser, and Pullman-based research facilities.

All ag-related programs, including teaching and departmentally based extension rely extensively on this funding.

WSU serves as the primary R&D organization for the agriculture industry. Agriculture research sustains the largest industry and employer in Washington's economy. From the wheat farmers on the Palouse to the tree fruit growers in the Columbia River Valley to the vintners around our state, the people who put food and wine on our tables and money in our economies, both rural and urban, value WSU researchers as partners.

In the increasingly competitive world agricultural market, Washington's farmers and growers need the advantage that locally focused and responsive research from WSU provides. If we do not maintain that edge, the economic impact would be swift and jobs, once lost, would be unlikely to return.

Examples of the benefits of WSU state-funded research include:

- ✓ The state's only breeding programs in wheat, barley, legumes, and bio-fuel crops.
- ✓ Integrated pest managements programs including projects funded by an independent commission that supports work to register new, more environmentally accepted pesticides as well as non-chemical bio-controls.
- ✓ Grape horticultural and wine production research including testing of varieties and production methods needed to optimize production of premium wines.
- ✓ Protection of the \$80 million oyster industry against a "burrowing shrimp" pest that threatens it.
- ✓ Research into options available to grow energy crops like algae, poplar, canola, and camelina.
- ✓ Irrigated crop research including grapes, hops, mint, cherries, alfalfa, corn, and potatoes. Breeding programs in cherries, for instance, produced the world famous "Rainier Cherry."
- ✓ Agricultural automation and mechanization programs that address the state's most critical industry issue – labor availability.
- ✓ Development of advanced irrigation management systems which have lead to dramatic increases in water use efficiency within the agricultural sector.
- ✓ WSU led the development of controlled atmospheric storage for tree fruit which contributed to a several-fold expansion in the market for Washington apples. Post-harvest research assures the maintenance of fruit quality after transportation and storage.
- ✓ Research and education supporting the state's organic industry.
- ✓ Soil conservation research aimed at mitigating soil erosion.
- ✓ Ongoing research to make wheat products available to individuals with Celiac Disease.
- ✓ The state's only center for developing treatments and infection avoidance protocols for non-forest plants.
- ✓ Ongoing research has led already to creation of a sustainable, affordable supply of Taxol, a powerful cancer-fighting drug.
- ✓ Strategies for maintaining water and air quality around livestock operations.
- ✓ Research that allows Washington State to produce the highest potato yields in the world.

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