



May 3, 2016

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of our 200,000 family farmer and rancher members, National Farmers Union (NFU) opposes the report language included in the FY17 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill relating to commodity research and promotion boards (checkoffs).

The report language states, "The funding used to operate and carry out the activities of the various Research and Promotion programs is provided by the producers and industry stakeholders, and employees of the boards are not federal employees. Therefore, the Committee urges USDA to recognize that such boards are not subject to the provisions of 5 U.S.C. Section 552."

Consumers are increasingly demanding more information about their food. To prohibit the use of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests with Research and Promotion boards would suggest that we, as producers, have something to hide. That is a troubling message in the areas of research and promotion, and is a particularly bad message to consumers about their food.

NFU recognizes that FOIA requests and responses take time and resources away from the main mission of the commodity checkoff programs. However, FOIA is an important tool for transparency, both for the producers who are required to pay into the checkoffs, as well as the consumers to whom the checkoff boards are marketing their products.

We oppose this language because it is not in the best interest of farmers or consumers. I urge you to reject this language and to keep it out of the conference committee report.

Sincerely,

Roger Johnson
President