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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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March 25, 2023

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman
U.S. House of Representatives
House Appropriations Committee
H-307 – The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
U.S. House of Representatives
House Appropriations Committee
H-307 – The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Granger and Ranking Member DeLauro:

I am requesting funding for Pontotoc, MS - Enhancing Sweet Potato Value through Post Harvest Technology in fiscal year 2024. The entity to receive funding for this project is Mississippi State University at P.O. Box 9800 Mississippi State MS 39762.

This is a good use of taxpayer funds because sweet potato production is a thriving specialty crop industry in Mississippi, and the state is ranked as number two for national production. Harvesting, storing, curing, and processing sweet potatoes is a highly manual, subjective process and in need of technology advancements that will offer new evaluation methods to streamline processes and improve product consistency. Currently, external quality of sweet potatoes is manually evaluated (grading and sorting), which is labor intensive, costly, and subject to human error, while internal quality factors influencing consumer acceptance, such as texture, flavor, and hidden defects, are not evaluated. Incorporation of non-destructive, automated detection technologies will allow the sweet potato industry to more consistently evaluate external and internal quality factors to deliver superior products to the marketplace, enhancing consumer satisfaction and commodity profitability. There is currently a missing link that can vastly improve the economic value by creating value-added opportunities for producers. The North Mississippi Research and Extension Center (NMREC) located in Pontotoc, MS will fill this missing element by developing a storage and processing facility that will advance processing operations and post-harvest product quality for producers. The NMREC processing facility will allow researchers to engage in public-private partnerships with producers through post-harvest research that is not currently feasible.

The project has a Federal nexus because the funding provided is for purposes authorized by the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program: 42 U.S.C. 5305(a)(1), 5305(a)(2), 5305(a)(4), and 5305(a)(5)].

I certify that I have no financial interest in this project, and neither does anyone in my immediate family.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Trent Kelly'.

Trent Kelly
Member of Congress

TK/smr