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AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND 2018 FARM BILL IMPLEMENTATION

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BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

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C O N T E N T S

Thursday, July 18, 2019

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND 2018 FARM BILL IMPLEMENTATION

THURSDAY, JULY 18, 2019

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:28 a.m., in room 328A, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. Pat Roberts, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Roberts, Boozman, Hoeven, Ernst, Hyde-Smith, Braun, Perdue, Grassley, Thune, Fischer, Stabenow, Leahy, Brown, Klobuchar, Casey, and Smith.

STATEMENT OF HON. PAT ROBERTS, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF KANSAS, CHAIRMAN, U.S. COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

Chairman ROBERTS. Good morning. I call this meeting of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry to order.

Over two years ago, we kicked off the 2018 Farm Bill, and that whole process by holding a hearing at Kansas State University, our land grant institution in Manhattan, Kansas.

A few months later, we held a hearing in this room, where we heard from the United States Department of Agriculture officials, representatives from research institutions, and agricultural producers. We heard about the critical role that agricultural research has played throughout our Country's history. We also heard about the research priorities for the 2018 Farm Bill.

The needs are certainly great. Every day our producers encounter extreme and unpredictable weather, pests, and disease, just to name a few. Researchers and institutions tasked with addressing these challenges are asked to do so with minimal Federal resources and an aging infrastructure.

The United States produces the safest, most affordable, and abundant food and fiber in the world, ever.

In crafting the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, the distinguished Ranking Member Deborah Stabenow and myself along with members of this Committee recognized that we had to continue to build on the strong history of agricultural research in the United States.

With the enactment of the bill, the primary Department of Agriculture Research, Education, and Extension authorities were reauthorized, including the Agriculture Research Service and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Land-Grant University formula funds, including the Hatch Act, Smith-Lever, McIntire-Stennis, and Evans-Allen were extended, and competitive grant programs were included to support research facilities and equipment improvements.

Provisions were included to bring equity to 1890 and 1994 institutions. The Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network was reauthorized and strengthened to support the mental health of farmers and individuals facing highly stressful working conditions.

New authorities were established, including the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority, AGARDA. It was modeled after authorities at other agencies, including DARPA and BARDA, which allows the USDA to carry out advanced research and development of qualified products, technologies, and research tools.

During the Farm Bill process, budgets were tight, and many difficult choices were made in an effort to negotiate a bill that provides certainty and predictability.

Notably, the Research title was one of the few in the Farm Bill to receive an increase in mandatory funding over the life of the bill. In fact, it included nearly $800 million in mandatory funding over five years for research programs. That is a big investment, a needed investment.

I am very proud of the bipartisan effort to support agricultural research and the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, and I know the Ranking Member shares that pride.

This morning I look forward to hearing an update from the Department about the implementation of these updated and new provisions.

I am also interested to hear about the status of other efforts related to Research, Education, and Economics, the REE mission area, including the relocation of the Economic Research Service, ERS, and NIFA to the Kansas City Region.

My home State of Kansas has a strong history of agricultural research, including Kansas State University, the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility currently under construction, and the broader Animal Health Corridor, stretching from Columbia, Missouri, to Kansas City on the way out to Manhattan. The relocation of ERS and NIFA to this region would allow these agencies to access the many existing resources and benefits of the region.

Research and analysis are essential to the work that the Department does for producers and for the agricultural economy. With any significant structural change, it is vital that we ensure the research mission remains intact and is supported and strengthened for this Nation's growers. For instance, we need to ensure that the Department continues to produce quality analytic reports, without delay, during this transition.

From the onset of the Farm Bill process, agricultural research was something every member could unite behind and support. This is true regardless of what State each member hails from or what crops are grown there.

This bipartisan, bicameral support for agricultural research will continue and is key as we seek to keep working together to strengthen U.S. agriculture.

I now recognize the distinguished Ranking Member, Senator Stabenow, for her remarks.

STATEMENT OF HON. DEBBIE STABENOW, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF MICHIGAN

Senator STABENOW. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much for holding what is a very important hearing.

Before giving my opening remarks, I want to put into the record, with your agreement, testimony from a number of groups and individuals regarding the relocations of ERS and NIFA. This includes statements from organizations representing researchers, agricultural economists, and former USDA researchers from both Republican and Democratic administrations. So I would ask submission.

Chairman ROBERTS. So ordered.

[The following information can be found on pages 36-143 in the appendix.]

Senator STABENOW. Thank you very much.

Thank you very much for the hearing, as I indicated, and I share the Chairman's commitment to what has been really a source of pride for us in terms of support for not only traditional agriculture but the new foundation that we have now had in place for two Farm Bills that we worked together on.

Dr. Hutchins, welcome back, and thank you for being here. Agricultural research has always been the heart of the Department of Agriculture since its beginning, and you have a very important responsibility at a very challenging time, in my judgment.

In 1862, President Lincoln created the USDA with the mission to procure, propagate, and distribute agricultural knowledge. That strong foundation created our modern system of land-grant universities, including, Mr. Chairman, our alma maters of Michigan State and Kansas State.

It has also led to breakthroughs that have made our farmers more productive, more profitable, and more resilient.

The development of the first hybrid corn seeds have resulted in better yields in many types of crops. Extension specialists helped farmers utilize crop rotation to replenish soil after the Dust Bowl.

USDA studies have made wheat more resistant to drought and disease, developed more nutritious rice varieties, and improved vaccines to prevent foot and mouth disease.

Even off the farm, a wide variety of interesting research, important research. Ag research has enhanced the life for all Americans, improving the disposable diaper, making the U.S. military uniforms resistant to mosquitos, and developing better turf for NFL fields so that my Detroit Lions can tear up the Chairman's Kansas City Chiefs without tearing up the grass.

Even with these great innovations——

It is my opening statement, Mr. Chairman.

[Laughter.]

Senator STABENOW. Even with these great innovations, we consistently hear we need more research and a broad array of research, not less. That is why the bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill increased funding for USDA research efforts in animal disease, specialty crops, urban agriculture, organics, and expanded public-private partnerships in the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research.

Unfortunately, the bipartisan commitment to agricultural research, which started over 150 years ago, is now at risk. I am deeply concerned that this administration is undermining the foundation of the USDA's scientific research mission.

The administration's haphazard decision to relocate two critically important research institutions—the Economic Research Service and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture—will affect real people who rely on the USDA services and hamper its capacity to support farmers, families, and rural communities for years to come.

And for what? For what? It is still unclear to me what problem the USDA is trying to solve with this move, but we can see the problems and the risks related to this move.

The administration is requiring employees to uproot their families and move by September 30th, even though they have not secured a permanent office space. There are questions about their authority and budget for the relocation. According to the USDA, at least 63 percent of employees directed to move will leave instead of relocating, 63 percent or more. That is on top of extremely high current vacancy rates at these agencies.

Rebuilding an entire workforce will take time. In the interim, these agencies will not have the capacity to do their important work.

The USDA will also lose irreplaceable expertise. For example, the USDA is losing Vince Crawley, an army veteran originally from Indiana, whose work publishing reports is critical to expanding export markets, supporting transparent commodity prices, and strengthening rural economies.

The USDA is losing Jeffrey Steiner, one of the Nation's leading experts on hemp research, which we are doing a hearing on this as we move forward, the leading expert on hemp research whose knowledge would have helped develop new markets for hemp, which was legalized in the Farm Bill.

The USDA is losing Tim Steinberg, whose economic research supports rural manufacturing and business innovation. His critical work on the competitiveness of rural America will shut down on September 30 because no one else in the Department is qualified to work with this confidential, highly sensitive data.

There are hundreds more stories like these that we could share, the knowledge that we are throwing away and the expertise we are throwing away with this move.

It is no wonder that leading scientists, land-grant universities, former USDA officials from both sides of the aisle stand in staunch opposition to this move.

Now, the administration could keep these experts from leaving by giving employees the flexibility to continue their important work here until at least a permanent location is ready. The administration could extend the deadline for researchers to decide whether they will leave their jobs or relocate themselves and their families to a new city over a thousand miles away.

Instead, the administration is forcing out its employees with rushed, politically calculated ultimatums designed to derail important agricultural research, and I do not say that lightly.

This relocation fits a troubling pattern of this administration undermining the important work of the USDA, including critical research our farmers need to address the impacts of the severe weather caused by the changing climate.

Congress has resoundingly rejected multiple budget proposals that would have cut USDA economic research by 50 percent, rejected, both sides of the aisle. I am concerned that this so-called relocation is an attempt to go around Congress and to carry out the steep reductions in capacity and research, anyway.

It is clear to me that this is not a relocation; it is a demolition. It is a thinly veiled, ideological attempt to drive away key USDA employees and bypass the intent of Congress.

I urge the administration to stop this and salvage what valuable expertise is left. This decision does far more than hurt USDA employees. If this chaotic plan is not stopped, our farmers, our families, and rural communities will be the ones that suffer in the long run.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROBERTS. I will remind members of the Committee, time is very limited. We have votes at 11:30. That is most unfortunate, given the issues that are concerned.

I would like to welcome our witness before the Committee this morning. Dr. Scott Hutchins is the Deputy Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics, REE, at the Department of Agriculture. Prior to working at the Department, Dr. Hutchins held a variety of roles in the Agricultural Research and Development, most recently as the Global Research Development Leader of Corteva Agriscience, the agricultural division of Dow-DuPont.

He received his bachelor's degree in entomology from Auburn University, a master's degree from Mississippi State University, and his doctorate from Iowa State University.

Notably, Dr. Hutchins last testified in this room in November after he was nominated to serve as the Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics, and his nomination was reported out of this Committee on a voice vote for a second time on May 14th.

Welcome back to the Committee, Dr. Hutchins. I look forward to your testimony.

STATEMENT OF SCOTT HUTCHINS, Ph.D., DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY, RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND ECONOMICS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss agricultural research and implementation of related provisions in the 2018 Farm Bill.

The Research, Education, and Economics Mission Area at USDA is an incredible team and powerful force for the good of U.S. agriculture.

The REE Mission Area is comprised of four agencies: the Agricultural Research Service, the Economic Research Service, the National Agricultural Statistics Service, and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

I will offer a few updates on each followed by some comments on some current topics.

ARS, or the Agricultural Research Service, under the leadership of Dr. Jacobs-Young, is the primary intramural research agency for USDA. ARS has as long track record of scientific breakthroughs that benefit U.S. producers, consumers, and ARS is also one of the two USDA agencies, along with APHIS, responsible for the stand-up and management of the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility, NBAF, in Kansas.

Just recently, with Chairman Roberts joining, I was pleased to cosign with Under Secretary Ibach a memorandum of agreement with the Department of Homeland Security to enable the transfer of responsibilities to USDA.

ERS, or the Economic Research Service, currently led by Acting Administrator Leibtag, continues to be a trusted source of high-quality and objective economic research to inform and enhance public and private decision-making. Recent ERS reports have highlighted trends in sales and development of veterinary antibiotics, a slowing of retail food price inflation, food loss amounts at the farm level, and additionally, ERS has provided studies showing the impact that agriculture has on the larger economy. They have modeled shifts on the impact of climate on farm productivity and balance of public versus private R&D sector investment.

NASS, or the National Agricultural Statistics Service, led by Administrator Hamer, provides timely, accurate, and useful statistics and service to U.S. agriculture. They conduct hundreds of surveys each year and produce reports for the entire agricultural sector, including production and supplies of food and fiber, prices paid and received by farmers, farm labor and wages, farm finances, chemical use, and changes in the demographics of U.S. agriculture.

Earlier this year, we were proud to have the opportunity to provide NASS's largest and most visible report, the Census of Agriculture.

NIFA, or the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, under the leadership of Dr. Angle, is USDA's extramural research agency providing funding and leadership to support research, education, and extension programs that address national agricultural priorities and transformative practices. NIFA primarily does this through competitive and formula grants.

An additional aspect of NIFA is the support workforce development in agriculture, including the 4-H organization. In 2018, NIFA-funded programs supported over 104,000 students through recruitment, retention, and curriculum development and faculty development. Through 4-H, NIFA supports a new generation of community leaders.

The Office of the Chief Scientist serves to coordinate all four agencies on certain topics and also supports all of USDA via the Science Council. The council facilitates cross-departmental scientific coordination and includes the important function and oversight of scientific integrity.

With regard to the 2018 Farm Bill implementation, first let me congratulate this Committee and particularly Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow on the timely and positive bill in support of U.S. agriculture.

REE held a special listening session on March 21st of this year to begin the process of Farm Bill implementation with all the REE leadership present. While each of the four REE agencies and the Office of the Chief Scientist are included in the Farm Bill, the vast majority of the provisions pertained to NIFA, and I am pleased to report that, thus far, NIFA has addressed the key expectations of the legislation that are funded. We are aggressively implementing it across the Department.

With regard to relocating the ERS and NIFA agencies, Secretary Perdue announced in June that ERS and NIFA will relocate to the Kansas City region after a long deliberative process. The Kansas City region is a vibrant urban center in the Heartland, a growing agricultural hub, and a home to considerable Federal workforce already. Long-term savings, the ability to attract top agricultural talent and proximity to numerous agricultural constituents will enhance the mission of these agencies in the long term.

USDA is fully committed to seeing NIFA and ERS thrive as mission-critical agencies, and in fact, we will welcome six brand-new ERS employees to Kansas City this coming Monday.

In conclusion, thank you for the opportunity to be with you today. I respect the role this important Committee plays in the success of the REE mission and look forward to answering your questions.

Thank you also for the unwavering bipartisan support that this Committee has always shown for the critical missions of research, education, and economics. On behalf of U.S. agriculture, it is an honor to support the USDA mission to do right and feed everyone.

I am happy to answer your questions.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Hutchins can be found on page 26 in the appendix.]

Chairman ROBERTS. Thank you, Doctor.

I want to remind everybody that has just come to the Committee, time is very limited today. We have votes at 11:30. We will let the floor know that if we are here still in session that we will wait for maybe 14 minutes to expire or something like that, but I am going to enforce the 5-minute rule. I think I have kept mine under five.

[Laughter.]

Chairman ROBERTS. So I just want to encourage people to be brief if they possibly can. I know there is a lot of concern with regards to the relocation issue.

I thank the distinguished Member for asking unanimous support for questions to be submitted for the record on many of the concerns people have. I know that the Department will respond. I will make sure of that, along with the distinguished Ranking Member.

Doctor, the research title, the 2018 Farm Bill, was truly a bipartisan collaboration for members of this Committee and others throughout the Congress. One example of this collaboration is the new Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority, or AGARDA.

The Ranking Member and I worked closely on this authority to provide the Department with a new set of tools to promote and ensure innovation with private entities for research, and development solutions.

Dr. Hutchins, how does the USDA envision utilizing this new authority to complement your mission to advance research and develop the tools necessary to protect our U.S. food supply?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Thank you for the question, Mr. Chairman.

AGARDA presents a truly unique opportunity in agricultural science. Much like the DARPA and the ARPA-E in other Departments, this proposed program provides the ability to partner in unique ways with private entities to allow USDA and Ag Research to stay on the cutting edge with technology.

We would envision within USDA and REE, AGARDA operating similarly in these other agencies, and once we stand it up, we would love to collaborate with those agencies and understand how best practices could be incorporated.

I would be particularly excited to see what we would be able to do if the potential collaborations that would transpire between the private sector and the public sector would turn out, as an example. NBAF would be an excellent role model for that.

Unfortunately, at this point in time, AGARDA was not funded in the fiscal year appropriations, but we stand ready and excited to stand this up and to participate and bring it to life as you have envisioned it.

Might I add, on a broader point, I believe the U.S. needs a more comprehensive ag innovation strategy, one that incorporates not just the capabilities and the contributions that can come from the public sector but also one that can come from the private sector so that we can benefit from a total integration of efforts to stay ahead of the challenges that we face, including climate change.

Issues along these lines have demonstrated that the private sector is funding, through recent ERS reports, three times what the public sector is funding. So it becomes important for U.S. agriculture truly to synergize and partner in this way to make sure that we get the most bang for the buck, if you will, from our investments that we are enabled to have.

Chairman ROBERTS. Doctor, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, NIFA, and the Economic Research Service, ERS, provide valuable research and data that producers and industry stakeholders rely on. The external Research Extension and Education programs operated through NIFA supports producers and consumers in communities all across our Country. ERS provides valuable data, research and reports on several items such as U.S. farm income, not where we want that to be, commodity cost and returns, and monthly commodity outlook reports, which we are waiting on the last report here in just a few short days.

Could you assure me, Dr. Hutchins, that these critical reports will not be delayed within the transition occurring with the ERS?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Yes, I can assure you, and more so, I assure you that we will seek more opportunity to expand the research and the influence of ERS through the use of considerable cost savings from this move. That is our goal. Our intention is to make this and our desire to make this, and the recognition is to make this an opportunity for us to allow this agency to grow and to be sustainable in the long term. It is a very important aspect.

Now, if I could add, with regard to my role with this project and the role that we are currently in, when I was with this Committee last time, I was asked about these topics, and I indicated to you that I believe that the goals that the Secretary had for this were the right goals. I still believe that.

As we move forward, there are really two key primary and focus areas that I am aligned on. One is to support our employees. This is a difficult move. Any move is difficult. I have done these moves in my professional life over time. They are very, very difficult, and so what I have realized through those experiences is that we need to support our employees in a number of ways. That includes continuous communication. It includes being as decisive as we can on various aspects of things, and it means supporting them in every way possible. That means the employees that are choosing to relocate as well as the employees who are choosing not to relocate.

The second aspect of this, which is more to your point, I think, is to ensure the continuity of mission, and I have given my assurances to the Secretary and all who have asked that we will continue this mission. We will have a difficult time. As I have said to others, I am not trying to sugarcoat the difficulty that this will post, but we are actively working with the Office of the Secretary and with all the agencies that can contribute to ensure continuity of mission.

ERS' economists are rock stars, and I have described them as that. The work that they do is tremendous, and so we have every intention—and I do give you my assurance—that we will maintain that capability.

Chairman ROBERTS. Senator Stabenow?

Senator STABENOW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and again, thank you, Dr. Hutchins.

I realize that you were not here at the beginning when this decision was made, but it is in your lap now. You are in charge, and it is incredibly important what decisions are made and how they are made.

I agreed with you that the mission is the focus in making sure we are not losing the important service and mission provided to farmers and families in rural communities.

There is a huge problem according to the USDA. Sixty-three percent of the employees directed to move will leave instead of moving, and USDA will fire employees that do not relocate by September 30th.

So far, ongoing hiring efforts have resulted in four employees, four employees being ready to start in Kansas City next week, four.

Furthermore, the Government Services Agency says the permanent office space for these agencies will not likely be ready for a year. So my question is, What is the rush? Why is USDA so fixated on moving or firing everybody by September 30th?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Thank you, Senator, for the question.

I would not describe it as a rush. Through the communication process that we have had with the employees from the earliest days—and I have personally participated in monthly and sometimes even weekly all-hands meetings—at present time, we are communicating weekly through newsletters and through communication mechanisms.

We are working constructively as best we can through the process with the unions that represent both aspects of it.

What the employees have told us loud and clear throughout this process, which has been a long process—I mean, it was announced last August, and now it is July—is we just want to know when and where. Give us a date, and give us a location.

So we went through a very long deliberative process. It was very much open in communication with your staffs to identify that, and we are staying true to that plan.

We have provided a city. It is a fantastic city. Kansas City has been so opening and welcoming to the opportunities that we have here, and I will not try to sell the city. I suspect someone else in this room could do that better than I, but the——

Senator STABENOW. Well, if I might just interrupt.

Mr. HUTCHINS. Sure.

Senator STABENOW. First of all, next to Michigan, I love Kansas. So this is not about Kansas City.

June 13th, I understand is when employees knew they were going to Kansas City. June 13th. That is a little over a month ago that they knew that, and so that is my concern.

To just add to that and let you respond, I understand that Secretary Perdue had a conversation with Senator Van Hollen, which he said he would consider employees doing telework during the transition, and I am wondering if you will agree to let current employees work in their current location until the permanent facility is ready in Kansas City.

By the way, there is still a lot of vacant space here in D.C., where they could work during that transition.

Is that something that you are willing to do?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Senator, two points. One is through the communication process with the employees, that every time we had indicated that once a city is identified, it would be a 30-day decision period. So we stayed true to that. We actually provided 32, if you count.

The second point, with regard to the telework and the rest of it, those are all demands and requests that have come from the union, and so those will be part of that negotiation process with the two agencies. That process actually begins tomorrow, is the first meeting between the union and with the agency.

Senator STABENOW. So tomorrow is the first meeting with the union. So you have not yet met with them, but tomorrow is the first meeting?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Well, I will not be meeting with them because their agreement, their process is with the actual agency.

Senator STABENOW. I understand. Okay. Tomorrow is——

Mr. HUTCHINS. By agreement of both sides, tomorrow is when that process begins.

Senator STABENOW. Gotcha.

Let me just quickly move through here timewise. I assume that you are as concerned as we are about unnecessary brain drain, with 63 percent of the people have said they are not going to be moving, and you basically gave 547 employees 30 days to decide if they were going to move halfway across the country and take their families.

Right now I understand there is enough space for 270 employees in Kansas City.

Given time, I want to ask one other important question, though. Recent press reports, including a new article published today, suggest that USDA has taken steps to suppress public release of the agency's work related to climate change.

I am very proud of the fact that this Committee did a thoughtful bipartisan—it may have been the first thoughtful bipartisan—Senate hearing on climate change and how farmers can be a part of the solution going forward, which is absolutely critical.

You addressed the downplaying of climate research in your testimony, and in a letter you sent to me yesterday, I appreciate the response. However, this morning's story suggests that senior Trump officials also held back an agency-wide Climate Science Plan slated for public release in late 2017, which we certainly could have benefited from.

Let me just ask this. At this point, in terms of publicizing the work of agency researchers and so on, will you commit to provide this committee with all studies related to climate change that have involved USDA researchers and were published after January 21, 2017?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Thank you, Senator.

May I clarify and ask are you talking about the research studies?

Senator STABENOW. I am talking about all the research studies that have been done, everything the USDA has done with public money, the universities and so on. We know there is a lot of work, really important work, that has been done, and we need to have that information.

Mr. HUTCHINS. Yes, ma'am. That is all in the public domain.

Just as an example, if you look at the ramp-up rate of climate research through NIFA, from 2016 there were 964 reports, if you were to use Google Scholar, as an example. In 2018, there were over a thousand, and we are on target or on pace in 2019 to have over 1,200.

The climate work focus, primarily in my context on adaptation and mitigation, is expansive and robust, and we would be more than happy——

Senator STABENOW. Does that include, though, the public release of the agency-wide Climate Science Plan that was referred to in the press today?

Mr. HUTCHINS. The plan that was referred to in the press was an internal document in order for us to design and implement all aspects of this overall research program. It was not ever intended to be released to the public. No problem with it being released to the public because it really signals very clearly all the work that is being done, and all the work that is in that document is actually being done. That is our guidepost, and that is what we were using to develop our research program.

Senator STABENOW. I look forward to receiving that. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROBERTS. Again, we have limited time today. We are like King Tut. We are pressed for time. We have votes at 11:30. We can hold it off until about 11:45. Questions for the record will be available, and the Chair will have to enforce the 5-minute rule. Thank you.

Senator Boozman?

Senator BOOZMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for having the meeting.

We have got a lot of concern, disagreement, but I think that the one thing that we can all agree on is that, as a nation, we must continue to invest in ag research and the future of agriculture.

We can look at Arkansas, for example, and how far we have come in Arkansas. We can take rice, for example. From 1980 to 2015, rice yield per acre increased by 62 percent. Over the same time, the water use associated with growing rice decreased by 52 percent. Soil loss decreased by 28 percent, and energy use decreased by 34 percent. None of this would have been possible without the innovation that has come about from the research and technology.

Ag research will become even more important so that we can feed and clothe 9 billion people by 2050 on the same amount of arable land, essentially, that we have today.

So I guess the question is, Dr. Hutchins, understanding the challenges that agriculture will have to overcome as the global population grows, what do you see as the most important research areas to focus on in both the short term and long term?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Thank you, Senator, for the question.

One of the things that we have done with the leadership team with REE is to identify one of the primary themes of research and focus and impact and influence that we really need to have for U.S. agriculture, and if I can, I will just briefly overview those.

The first is sustainable intensification, and this would capture a lot of the things that you have just listed. It is the opportunity for us to really focus in a sincere and expansive way on soil health, an opportunity to focus on water conservation and water quality, and the opportunity really to take advantage of the tremendous digital revolution that is happening today within agriculture. All of that will allow farmers to not only be more productive but clearly more profitable as they are able to maximize the inputs that they put forth. So that is one of the key themes.

By the way, as we do soil health and these other things, that will have very positive impacts on carbon sequestration and on overall greenhouse gas production.

The second piece, if I could just do one more, the second piece is actually ag climate adaptation, and that is another key theme that we have where we are investing well over $100 million of research just in that theme.

Senator BOOZMAN. We in Arkansas benefit from several research universities, which has been so, so important. One of these, the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, is an 1890's institution. UAPB is especially important to Arkansas' aquiculture industry, as they are a leader in aquiculture research.

In the Farm Bill, there were several provisions regarding the 1890's institutions. Could you update us on the implementation of those provisions?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Yes, sir. There were a number of them in the context of scholarship programs, for example, and the USDA hosted a tremendous event where they outlined and demonstrated with bipartisan support how that program was being stood up and put forth.

The 1890 institutions overall are very highly supported by the Secretary as well as by the Department, and all of the provisions that are within that for both the individual ones as well as the others are being implemented with speed and rigor to ensure that the intent of this Committee and the intent of the 1890 institutions is fulfilled.

Senator BOOZMAN. Good. We appreciate that, and I think I can speak for the Committee that I think this is something that is very, very important that we do that with as much speed as possible. If you need any help in that regard, be sure and let us know.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back on time.

Chairman ROBERTS. That helps.

Senator Smith? Oh, pardon me. Senator Leahy?

Senator LEAHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good to see you.

Chairman ROBERTS. Good to see you too.

Senator LEAHY. I try to keep an eye on you when I am not in the room.

Chairman ROBERTS. Yes, I know that. I do not look at your picture. They have a hypnotizing effect on me.

[Laughter.]

Senator LEAHY. I am concerned, Doctor, listening to some of the discussion here. I remember in a previous administration, the head of one of our environmental agencies kept reorganizing, reorganizing, and reorganizing so that they would never have to do anything, enforce the environmental laws. A Republican Senator called her on that, and that was Robert Stafford of Vermont.

When I look at the Department's planned relocation of ERS and NIFA, I do not see where it has any merit or justification. I believe it really undermines the mission of both agencies. I am saying that with New England understatement.

The move has already dealt a significant blow to the Department's scientific and economic research capacity, and many employees within these agencies will tell you, honestly, they feel this is the intent, to undermine the research capacity.

Further, though, USDA failed to submit with its 2020 budget justification reporting all the costs and benefits for the move as well as a detailed analysis of any research benefit of a relocation. Those are required, and as Vice Chairman of the Appropriations Committee, I am well aware of this. They are required by Congress to the enacted fiscal year appropriations bill. That is a requirement which USDA totally ignored and violated.

On the contrary, USDA requested $15.5 million for ERS relocation, even at the same time they are proposing a $26 million cut in the agency. You know, it is Kafkaesque.

The final thumb in the eye, the USDA sent the Appropriations Committee a reprogramming request just 6 days prior to publishing its intent in the Federal Register. That violates the 30 days that is required. It is like you guys do not even care what the law is.

Congress is irrelevant, including the appropriators and the authorizers.

So let me ask you. Insofar as you are ignoring congressional mandates, not following the law, Doctor, let me ask you this. Yes or no. Will you submit to the committees of jurisdiction all analyses related to relocation, including the full report by Ernst & Young on which USDA's cost-benefit analysis released last month was based? Yes or no.

Mr. HUTCHINS. Yes, sir. We have released and published and made public the cost-benefit analysis prepared by Ernst & Young.

Senator LEAHY. What cost-benefit analysis was conducted prior to the Secretary's August 2018 announcement they would relocate the agencies?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Senator, I did not join USDA until January of this year.

Senator LEAHY. I understand that.

Mr. HUTCHINS. So I really do not know what was prepared for this.

Senator LEAHY. Okay. Will you—yes or no. Will you find what cost-benefit analysis was conducted prior and supply it to this Committee?

Mr. HUTCHINS. I will inquire with the Secretary as to what is available.

Senator LEAHY. So you cannot give us an answer that you will?

Mr. HUTCHINS. I do not know what is available, sir, but I will do all that I can to provide what is available.

Senator LEAHY. Well, was all that was provided, did you give us all that was provided, or did you give us just a summary?

Mr. HUTCHINS. We provided all that exists for the cost——

Senator LEAHY. It was not a summary. It was all that exists?

Mr. HUTCHINS. The summary captured all of the——

Senator LEAHY. Oh, so you gave a summary. You did not give all?

Mr. HUTCHINS. No, sir. We provided it all, and in the summary, it referenced all the data and all the information that went into that. So it was the cost-benefit analysis. I would be happy to——

Senator LEAHY. So that is available? All that data is available to the Committee?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Yes, sir.

Senator LEAHY. So we should be able to get the prior, prior to your time there also?

Mr. HUTCHINS. I will inquire on your behalf.

Senator LEAHY. If Congress does not provide relocation funds in fiscal year or blocks funds from being used for such a relocation, will USDA follow the law, as enacted by Congress?

Mr. HUTCHINS. USDA, from my standpoint, always follows the law and has deep respect for how it is created and how it is implemented.

Senator LEAHY. Well, then watch what we put because if we put that, you are going to have to.

Lastly, EFNEP, that in the 2019-enacted appropriations bill, Congress called for a pilot expansion to provide evaluation and improved food resources. What has USDA done to implement these instructions in the fiscal year law, and would a land-grant institution with an established EFNEP program be well positioned to undertake the pilot?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Yes, sir. The Agriculture appropriations report included language encouraging the Secretary to support a special pilot extension of EFNEP, and NIFA at present is assessing how to incorporate that into further effectiveness of that program.

I might also add for that program, I had the honor to address that group and visit with that group earlier this year. Their mission and their focus is just tremendous, and so——

Senator LEAHY. I agree with you on that.

Mr. HUTCHINS. What they do is something that we absolutely want to encourage, and we will make every effort from our standpoint to ensure that that pilot is successful.

Senator LEAHY. I can find you a good land-grant institution to do it.

Thank you. Mr. Chairman, it is so nice to be here with you.

Chairman ROBERTS. Well, thank you, sir. You are only about 40 seconds overtime. This is of great concern to me because it did not give me enough time to congratulate you on your 16,000th vote on the floor of the U.S. Senate. I will tell you in private how many times I voted with you.

Senator LEAHY. I have the list on a small card here.

[Laughter.]

Senator LEAHY. On the Farm Bill, we have always voted together.

Senator STABENOW. That is right.

Chairman ROBERTS. That is correct, and that is the most important thing.

Senator Braun?

Senator BRAUN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Acknowledging the comments of Senator Stabenow and Leahy, I think those are valid, but I would also cite a few things. One, I am glad we are relocating to Kansas City. It is in the middle of the Farm Belt. I am a farmer, a tree farmer, involved with a lot of farmers, and I think it makes sense to be in the middle of where the bread basket is.

When it comes to the talent pool, I have got to believe there is more of it in the universities that specialize in ag in that area as well.

Then what is normally not talked about here would be can we lower the cost of operation in a place like that, and I am almost certain that it will be lower cost of doing business in Kansas City than D.C.

I am looking forward for you to carry out this smooth transition, what you think can be done.

I want to get to a question of what your agency is all about. African swine fever, foot and mouth disease, wheat stem rust, all examples of current threats to global agriculture that know no borders. I am sure there are others as well.

Where are you at on diseases like that, and are we making headway, or are we being overwhelmed by more of them that seem to crop up every year?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Thank you, Senator, for the question.

The answer is that we are making headway on many, and as an entomologist, I am familiar with the whole concept of invasive species and those kinds of difficult topics.

We are making headway on a number of those, but there will always be more. We are in a global travel situation, and so there is always a risk. APHIS does a fantastic job, but there is always a risk of more. We always have new challenges. We have them in all parts of the country.

Growers every year face some sort of new challenge or outbreak. Much of that is stimulated by some sort of current weather pattern or what have you, but I can tell you with confidence that the Agricultural Research Service and NIFA both—and NIFA working more recently and locally through all of the great land grants in this country—are doing world-class science and making tremendous efforts. If you combine that with the great system we have of cooperative extension, it allows us to get that research. It allows us to get those advancements and those discoveries into the hands of our farmers quickly enough so that they can respond and minimize any losses from those kinds of pests.

Senator BRAUN. So, as a tree farmer, does forestry, which I think in Indiana has almost twice the financial impact of row crops, which many people do not realize that—and I am sure that varies by State somewhat. Emerald ash borer, Japanese stiltgrass, tree of heaven, and most of that stuff has arisen in the last 10 to 15 years. Some of it, like Japanese bush honeysuckle, is so prevalent that most people do not even know it is not a native. Are we spending as much time and effort there when in many States, forestry has more impact than agriculture in the sense of row crops? Are we putting resources to that as well?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Thank you, sir, for the question.

Two things I would point out. One is the Forest Service, which is not part of this mission area, has its own R&D organization that is focused specifically on a lot of those diseases, insects, and so forth associated with forestry, but we work very closely together.

So a lot of the basic biology, the basic information, and the control methods for pests like Emerald ash borer, which has cost me a number of ash trees myself, is collaborative.

In fact, we use within our leadership team—we utilize the R&D leader for the Forest Service as part of our leadership team.

So we are doing all we can to coordinate, and we do include the ecosystems, the forest ecosystems as part of our mandate and part of our challenge.

Senator BRAUN. Thank you. Good luck in your transition to Kansas City.

Mr. HUTCHINS. Thank you, sir.

Senator BRAUN. I yield back.

Chairman ROBERTS. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Klobuchar?

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for being here, Dr. Hutchins.

I have already expressed my concern, and Senator Stabenow focused on that in her questions about this relocation.

Do you truly believe that you are not going to lose significant expertise in areas of research, agricultural research, Dr. Hutchins, with this move?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Thank you for the question.

Ma'am, I have never suggested that we would not lose expertise. I have been part of some major moves in the past, some large mergers and so forth, and they are never easy. There is always a large attrition with that, and there are good personal reasons for that. People are making choices.

In this particular situation, every employee has been offered a job. I have never been through one of these where there was no workforce reduction in the context of mandated. So the opportunity is there.

The numbers that came from this were not at all unexpected. We expect that for these kind of moves. We will be working desperately and deliberately to make sure, as Chairman Roberts has requested, that we do not drop the ball on the mission in the short term, but I want us to keep an eye on the long term. I want us to keep an eye on what the next version, with the expertise that we are retaining, how we build on that and how we take these agencies to the next level.

The Secretary has committed to reinvest some of these considerable savings, $300 million nominally over the first least period, in order to allow us to grow these agencies, grow their impact, and grow their influence and expand the research capabilities.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Just as we are out of time with climate change and climate science where this research is just important across the Government, and last month I wrote to Secretary Perdue with concerns about a news report that detailed the suppression of scientific studies conducted by the Agricultural Research Service related to the effects of climate change on agricultural production. This is having been seen in the Midwest the flooding that we are having and the broken levees and farmers that are no longer able to produce because their cropland is under water. We are having huge problems right now in Minnesota.

Dr. Hutchins, can you elaborate on how the Department determines which type of research projects to publicize as opposed to just get them done?

We have had an issue where a lot of this climate research seems to come out on late Friday afternoons, where maybe people will not notice it, not just out of USDA but out of other agencies, when I think we should be highlighting this as we look at solutions to what is an obvious crisis that is not happening in 100 years. It is happening now.

Can you talk about how the Department determines which type of research projects to publicize?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Thank you for the question.

I can certainly provide you with an overview of that.

First of all, with 5,000 publications coming just out of ARS alone across a number of topics, we need to look at which ones really will set the stage. We have over 450 research publications just in the climate area from just ARS, not to count the thousand that are sponsored by NIFA.

So what we are looking for is a standard that says is there something new and novel here, is it most relevant to U.S. growers and U.S. agriculture, and is it something that we could ultimately translate and take to a point where we can reduce it to practice?

I have returned a response to your letter. I do not know if you have seen that, but that particular publication that was in question was specifically focused on rice varieties in China and Japan. So it did not meet the standard relevant to U.S. rice growers. It focused on the concept of nutrition. There were 18 varieties evaluated. Two of those varieties clearly showed a reduction in vitamin B. Two of those varieties showed an increase in vitamin B, and 16 had no change.

So we looked at that and said that it is not as conclusive with the type of promotion that was being suggested. It has nothing to do with climate change. It simply has to do with what we felt like the promotion of that did not meet the standard.

There will be many other articles and many other studies that we will promote that meet those other standards.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay. Because I just know there have been a number of these studies that have been kind of, in my mind, deep-sized, and it is not just at USDA. I think that, as a whole, the administration is not dealing with climate change, and we are losing time by not dealing with it.

Questions were asked by—and I will not go on here—by Senator Braun about animal and plant diseases, and I worked to include several animal disease provisions in the 2018 Farm Bill. How are you working to better deliver research solutions that combat these disease threats?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Well, one of the, I think, outcomes of a shifting climate or a warming climate is that there will be, I think, an additional increase, a range change, if you will, in terms of some of these diseases and so forth.

One of the key areas of focus under this area I had mentioned previously of sustainable intensification is really a deep understanding and development of management tactics that are practical and useful, both short term and long term, in terms of dealing with these kinds of diseases. Some of them are an annual basis. Some of them, we would need to be able to deal with, with biological control and other kinds of things.

Rest assured that it is a primary area of focus for both ARS and NIFA to give our growers the opportunity to manage their pests.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay. Thank you very much. I will submit some more questions on the record.

Mr. HUTCHINS. Thank you. Thank you.

Chairman ROBERTS. Senator Grassley? Mr. Chairman?

Senator GRASSLEY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and welcome, Dr. Hutchins.

Senator Braun brought up about diseases, et cetera. I would like to zero in on something that affects pork producers in Iowa, and they are concerned about the potential of African swine fever coming to the United States. Could you give me an update specifically on that disease, the Department's efforts to research methods to detect and treat African swine fever?

If you were in another Department, Homeland Security, I would ask you to do what you are doing to keep it out of the Country.

Mr. HUTCHINS. Thank you, Senator, for the question.

The entry of that horrible disease is really under the purview of APHIS, and they are doing a fantastic job getting ahead of things in terms of making sure everything is in place. They have intercepted a number of shipments that should not be coming in because they could be potentially contaminated.

To your point with regard to research, that is really a key priority for our organization to develop a vaccine in partnership with the private sector and make sure that our farmers never have to deal with what a large part of the world is dealing with today. So that is a primary focus.

The completion and utilization of the NBAF facility, referenced earlier, is going to be front and center in our ability to do that work, which is presently being done, for example, in Plum Island and a number of areas.

That is an excellent example of how one disease can radically change and alter a significant commodity such as our pork producers rely on. Over $200 billion are some of the estimates, depending on how long the outbreak would last.

Senator GRASSLEY. Okay. My next question is a provision in the Farm Bill calling for the development of Genome to Phenome research program at NIFA. The intent of the program is to better understand how plant and animal genomes interact with particular environments to control crop and animal growth in order to stabilize and increase our yields. Can you give an update on the Department's effort so far to implement the project?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Senator, that theme, that area of Genome to Phenome, is a fantastic opportunity for us in a number of ways. You had mentioned plants and animals, but also, let us not forget microbes. That opportunity to use technologies in that way and to make that resolution is going to be, in some ways, at the core of the soil health approach with the soil microbiome.

From our standpoint, what we are looking to do is be able to understand how that links together the ability to predict performance through phenome. It is critical to understanding how plants and animals and microbes will respond, for example, to climate.

The current 2018 Farm Bill authorizes $40 million for the program. However, no discretionary funding has been appropriated to this effort. We would love to be able to stand that up and to incorporate that within our research programs, and I would also add, because I know there is tremendous capability in Iowa, to be able to use this as another example of how we partner with the private sector in order to make larger advances than we might be able to on our own.

Senator GRASSLEY. I will submit two questions for answer in writing and yield back my time.

Chairman ROBERTS. Senator Casey?

Senator CASEY. Chairman Grassley just put pressure on all of us, so I will try to comply.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to start with a Federal employee, the story of a Federal employee. Often in this town, Government workers are the subject of denigration, not commendation. We do not talk about their work enough, and so I want to try to give you one example and then use that as a predicate for my question for Dr. Hutchins.

This is a story of Catherine Greene. She is senior agricultural economist at the Economic Research Service, which we know here in the hearing as ERS. She has been there for more than 30 years.

In the 1980's, Catherine Greene initiated the first ERA outlook reporting on U.S. organic production. It seems like a long time ago.

Since then, Catherine has initiated dozens of ERS and USDA projects, collaborating across every single agency of USDA to provide publicly available data, research, and information to U.S. producers interested in organic production and marketing.

Catherine Greene is unable to relocate to Kansas City. Further, three of the young economists Catherine has trained for several years have already resigned rather than be relocated.

Catherine Greene expects most of the institutional knowledge on organic agriculture will be lost when she is forced to retire.

Sometimes we do not put a premium on or pay attention to the fact that in one agency of the Federal Government, you can have thousands of years of combined expertise and experience.

So, Doctor, I have two questions on this subject. One is about attrition rates, and the other is about lost capacity. The first is, What is the expected attrition rate for employees working on organic agriculture in ERS? That is question one, and question two is, How do you anticipate the lost capacity of employees like Catherine Greene, who has spent 30 years developing expertise, to impact the agency's ability to provide accurate and timely data to organic producers? So if you could answer both questions.

Mr. HUTCHINS. Thank you for the question.

Two things. First, with regard to Catherine, we would love for Catherine to join us, if she would. We have offered roles to everyone in those two agencies, and we would be delighted to have her take that opportunity.

With regard to the organic ag and the specific capabilities in that space, sir, I would have to get back with you on that. There are dozens of particular areas, and I do not have right in front of me today what the specifics are for that. I would certainly commit to do in that particular area, as you had requested.

I am sorry. The third?

Senator CASEY. On the lost capacity, you will have to get back to us?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Yes, for that specific area.

Senator CASEY. Okay.

Mr. HUTCHINS. In an overall capacity standpoint, we are putting together a strategy that allows us to take advantage of a number of short-term and long-term aspects. We have a very aggressive hiring plan for vacancies in both of these.

As I indicated in my opening remarks, six new ERS employees start to work in Kansas City on Monday.

We also will be looking at several employees who cannot move for personal reasons, have approached us to see can we work after the date in some sort of contractual capacity or in some agreement like that.

Universities have contacted us and asked us, "We can help support you," and so forth.

So a lot of groups at this point are starting to rally together to see how we can make sure we do this, and the commitment I have made to this Committee is that we will put all of those pieces together. We will not drop the ball on any of these, both of these agencies, and we will build them for the future.

Senator CASEY. The point I make is, look, I am just talking about organic production, one part of the responsibility of USDA, and we want to make sure that those organic producers, those organic farmers have accurate and timely data.

It stands to reason that when you have a group of people that have accumulated all this experience that the likelihood, the high likelihood, is there is going to be a drop-off in terms of providing that information. So if you can get us that answer, we appreciate that.

Mr. HUTCHINS. Yes, sir.

Senator CASEY. The second part of it was what I had asked first about the attrition rate for those working. What is the expected attrition rate for those working in organic agriculture at ERS?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Again, I do not have the attrition rate for the organic agriculture aspect of ERS. I can get that back to you.

Senator CASEY. If you can get those in writing to us.

Mr. Chairman, I will submit a second question for the record. Thank you.

Chairman ROBERTS. I thank the distinguished Senator.

Senator Hyde-Smith?

Senator HYDE-SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I commend you and our Ranking Member Stabenow for a job well done for the 2018 Farm Bill. That was such a success. The research, in particular, was very good to me. Our commitment to the ag research is one of the reasons Under Secretary has remained a global leader, as we well know, in ag production.

I am really proud of the important research conducted at the Agricultural Research Service, the ARS, in Stoneville, Mississippi, as well as at our public universities. I think you guys are doing a great job there.

Dr. Hutchins, first of all, thank you for appearing before the Committee today. You have done a fantastic job.

One of the things I want to ask about is the chronic wasting disease, CWD. It is a fatal disease that affects white-tailed deer and several other members of the deer family, very important in Mississippi, and there is still a lot to learn about the cause, the spread, and the management control of CWD.

It has made its way to Mississippi, and I am really concerned about the impact it could have because we have a billion-dollar industry there of deer hunting. A large area of our State has been flooded, more than 500,000 acres for more than 6 months, and it is confining the deer to a very small area in the levees, which obviously would be facilitating the spread of chronic waste disease.

So a provision of the 2018 Farm Bill lists CWD as a high-priority research and extension initiative and for very good reason.

The land-grant universities in the Southeast, such as Mississippi State University, which you are quite familiar with, we have established white-tailed deer research programs, colleges of veterinary medicine, and technical and scientific expertise relevant to CWD.

We are in pretty good position there, but as you proceed with the implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill, will you commit to ensuring that CWD is, indeed, treated as a high-priority research and extension initiative, and would you work continuous, as you have done such a great job, with land-grant universities in the Southeast that are well positioned to join the efforts and combat in many research programs on CWD?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Thank you, Senator, for the question.

Great to see you. The last time I was at the Committee, I think you were in the process of winning your election, so nice to see you and nice to see someone from Mississippi State. That was a great place to go.

To your question, what I can tell you is that chronic wasting disease was added to the high-priority research and extensions initiatives in the Farm Bill. There is no funding there, but we are gearing up to make sure that we support all of these efforts.

The issues with chronic wasting disease are very challenging technically, but we can overcome those. NIFA has funded a study at Iowa State University to attempt to find a skin test for the disease. The incubation period for this disease is two to four year. That makes it particularly challenging from a technical standpoint, but if we develop a rapid, consistent testing regime, we think that we can have a significant impact.

ARS is currently investigating the pathobiology, genetics, and detection of the transmissible aspects of it. It is a spongiform encephalopathy, TSE, that affects not just deer but elk and moose. So it is a very significant disease and challenge for us that we want to contribute and we will contribute to the solution and partnership with the land grants.

Senator HYDE-SMITH. Fantastic. Thank you very much, and Go Dawgs.

Mr. HUTCHINS. That is right. Hail State.

Chairman ROBERTS. I thank the Senator.

Senator Hoeven, with the admonition, of course, that we have started the vote. Not to pressure you.

Senator HOEVEN. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

I will try to keep it moving along here.

I do want to ask. North Dakota is the Nation's top producer of canola, and so we included some—in our NIFA funding, we want to see research for canola. So does NIFA intend to make canola eligible for the program, and can you share a timeline for when that action will be completed?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Senator, I am aware of a Hard Red Spring and Durham Wheat Laboratory involvement within North Dakota. I would need to get back to you with the specifics of that particular question, and I would be happy to do that ASAP.

Senator HOEVEN. Good, because we are going to want to work with you to make sure that that research is included as part of NIFA.

Mr. HUTCHINS. Absolutely.

Senator HOEVEN. So I will look forward to working with you on that.

Also, how about in the sugar beet area? We provided a million-dollar increase in sugar beet research funding. Is that one that you can comment on, or should we follow up on that one later too?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Well, I will to follow up with some details, but I can assure you that sugar beet research in a number of areas is a high priority for us. We are actively engaged in that within the ARS as well as NIFA.

Senator HOEVEN. Good. How about chronic wasting disease?

Mr. HUTCHINS. Yes, sir. We just spoke about that in Mississippi, and I know it is much broader than Mississippi. Certainly, it is identified as a priority, and we are working in both intramural and extramural research efforts and partnering to address that. It is a challenging—it is a real challenging disease.

Senator HOEVEN. How about the U.S. Wheat and Barley Scab Initiative?

Mr. HUTCHINS. The U.S. Wheat and Barley Scab Initiative is on track, and the ARS researchers in Fargo have transferred a number of major genes for that resistance for common wheat and to durum, using multiple backcrosses in selection. So I have got a bit of an update on that, but as with the others, I would be happy to give you as much detail from our subject-matter experts as you desire.

Senator HOEVEN. Good. We will look forward to working with you on those initiatives and others. I personally am a huge fan of ag research. I think it is unbelievable what we have done, both through ARS and NIFA, and we are very committed to funding that ag research and working with you on these and other initiatives.

Mr. HUTCHINS. Thank you, sir, and I would just add to that. We are in a renaissance period right now with ag research and in agriculture more broadly. So we look forward to being part of the next era to make sure that U.S. agriculture is the most competitive.

Senator HOEVEN. Thank you.

Now out of deference to our outstanding Chairman and the fact that we have a vote on the floor, I will yield the rest of my time.

Chairman ROBERTS. Thank you very much.

That will conclude our hearing today. Thank you to our witness for taking time to discuss agriculture research, the 2018 Farm Bill, and relocation.

To my fellow Members, we ask that any additional questions you may have for the record be submitted to the Committee Clerk in 5 business days from today or by 5 o'clock p.m., next Thursday, as of Thursday, July the 25th.

I want to at least emphasize one other point. Employees had until July 15 to make a decision. Employees do have until September 30 to report to their new location. I hope they take advantage of that. There is a huge welcoming committee from both Missouri and Kansas to any employee that would visit.

Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:38 a.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

JULY 18, 2019

Testimony of Deputy Under Secretary for Research, Education, & Economics
Scott Hutchins
U.S. Department of Agriculture before the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Agricultural Research and 2018 Farm Bill Implementation

Good morning. Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you all today to discuss agricultural research and implementation of related provisions in the 2018 Farm Bill. The Research, Education, & Economics (REE) Mission Area at USDA is an incredible team and powerful force for the good of U.S. Agriculture – we have fantastic success stories each and every day, and I appreciate the opportunity to share a few of those with you today, as well as inform you on the progress we have made in the implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill.

The REE Mission Area is comprised of four agencies; the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the Economic Research Service (ERS), the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). Each of these agencies provide services that are critical to the well being of the American agriculture system- provider of the most affordable, abundant, and safe supply of food and fiber in the world.

ARS

The Agricultural Research Service is United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) primary intramural research agency. ARS has approximately 2,000 scientists and post-doctoral researchers and 6,000 additional staff supporting around 690 research projects over 90 locations. These researchers produce an immense output of scientific and technical knowledge. ARS scientists produced over 4,500 peer-reviewed journal articles in 2018 alone. Without a doubt, ARS has produced, and continues to produce, a wide range of scientific breakthroughs that benefit U.S. Producers and Consumers.

Among these are a new bio-based insect repellent that uses fatty acids derived from coconut oil to ward off blood-sucking insects that cost the cattle industry more than $2.4 billion annually, a test strip for major foodborne pathogens that reduces testing time from 24-72 hours to about 30 minutes, and a new insecticide for use on the fruit fly – methyl benzoate.

As you know, ARS is one of the two USDA agencies, along with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), responsible for the stand up and management of the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF). NBAF will be a state-of-the-art science facility whose capability will ensure the U.S. is best prepared for threats to agricultural and food security. Recently USDA signed a memorandum of agreement with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to enable the transfer of responsibilities for this facility to USDA.

ERS

The Economic Research Service continues to be a trusted source of high-quality and objective economic research to inform and enhance public and private decision making. ERS research covers a range of topics which fit generally into six buckets: Agricultural Economy, Food and Nutrition, Food Safety, Global Markets and Trade, Resources and Environment, and the Rural Economy. ERS reports provide information to decision makers across the Federal government. I personally request briefings on many reports and analysis of key topics and find them insightful and informative.

Recent ERS reports have highlighted trends in sales and development of veterinary antibiotics, a slowing of retail food price inflation, and food loss amounts at the farm level.

Additionally, ERS has provided studies showing the impact that agriculture has on the larger economy. For instance, ERS found that U.S. Agricultural Exports supported 1.2 million full time jobs in 2017.

NASS

The mission of the National Agricultural Statistics Service is to provide timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service of U.S. Agriculture. They conduct hundreds of surveys each year and produce reports on the entire agricultural sector, including production and supplies of food and fiber, prices paid and received by farmers, farm labor and wages, farm finances, chemical use, and changes in the demographics of U.S. Agriculture.

Earlier this year we were proud to have the opportunity to provide NASS's largest and most visible report, The Census of Agriculture. Conducted every five years, the Census of Agriculture provides a complete count of U.S. farms, ranches, and the people who operate them. The Census also looks at ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, income and expenditures.

Highlights from the 2017 Census include:

- One in four producers is a beginning farmer with 10 or fewer years of experience.
- Thirty-six percent of all producers are female, and 56 percent of all farms have at least one female decision maker.
- Ninety-six percent of farms and ranches are family owned.
- Farms with Internet access rose from 69.6 percent in 2012 to 75.4 percent in 2017.

NIFA

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture is USDA's extramural research agency, providing funding and leadership to support research, education, and extension programs that address national agricultural priorities. NIFA primarily does this through competitive and formula grants.

The competitive grant portion is comprised of different grant programs with the largest being the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). Because of AFRI, grants researchers across the country were able to conduct research and find solutions to problems that face our producers. For instance:

- Researchers at the University of Illinois found that cooperating with neighboring farmers to make decisions about how to manage herbicide-resistant weeds delays the spread of herbicide resistance. Corn and soybean producers in North America lose more than $40 billion per year to herbicide resistance.
- Clemson University researchers are using new nutrient-management drone and camera technology to save up to $54 per acre on cotton production.
- Fellow entomologists at my Alma Mater, Auburn University, have discovered a wasp that may help soybean producers and other farmers in the Southeast rid their fields of the invasive pest known as the kudzu bug, enabling them to produce more crops and see higher yields.
- And researchers at Kansas State University are using the gene editing tool CRISPR to improve the wheat genes that control several yield component traits, such as seed size and the number of seeds per plant.

Formula grants are grants that go to land-grant universities to support them in conducting agricultural research and extension. While much of this funding is used to support research projects similar to those conducted on the competitive grant side, formula funding is also used to support the basic research and extension infrastructure needed to disseminate knowledge and provide training to individuals in a variety of ways.

One example of this is at North Carolina State University, where extension professionals and volunteers provided 13,000 educational programs to 1.9 million residents. Their efforts improved the health and well-being of 115,000 North Carolinians through food and nutrition programs, prepared more than 263,000 youth through 4-H programs, and provided $300 million of economic impact to the state.

However, it is not just farmers and ranchers who benefit from these programs. There are millions of family caregivers and more than 80 percent of them feel they don't have the information or training they need. With a NIFA formula grant, Family & Consumer Sciences educators from Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension have developed a comprehensive health education curriculum that includes lessons in proper nutrition, aging and finances, and prevention of elder abuse and exploitation.

An additional aspect of NIFA is to support workforce development, including the 4-H organization. In 2018, NIFA-funded programs supported 104,149 students through recruitment/ retention, curriculum development, and faculty development. Through 4-H, NIFA supports a new generation of community leaders.

Office of the Chief Scientist

In addition to serving as Deputy Under Secretary, I oversee the Office of the Chief Scientist. The Office of the Chief Scientist supports scientific prioritization and coordination across the entire Department and regularly convenes the USDA Science Council. The council facilitates cross-Departmental scientific coordination and collaboration, and ensures research supported by and scientific advice provided to the Department and its stakeholders is held to the highest standards of intellectual rigor and scientific integrity.

Recent media reports of suppression of climate change research simply could not be further from the truth. USDA has no policy, no practice, and no intent to minimize, discredit, de-emphasize, or otherwise influence the excellent climate-based science of any agency or partner institution. We support the work done by our scientists in this area of our research. Tools such as USDA's Climate Hubs and the Long-Term Agroecosystem Research (LTAR) Network communicate climate research *directly* to the producers these changes most directly impact. Additionally, the National Climate Hub Coordinator compiles a quarterly report that provides information on publications, outreach events, and technical support. We are fully committed to supporting research that ensures U.S. producers will be able to adapt to a changing climate, even as we develop and advocate for a wide range of sustainable intensification practices that will help mitigate any contribution from agriculture to the broader core issues of greenhouse gas emissions.

2018 Farm Bill Implementation

REE held a special listening session on March 21, 2019 to begin the process of Farm Bill implementation, with all REE leadership present. While each of the four REE agencies and the Office of the Chief Scientist were included in the Farm Bill, the vast majority of the provisions pertain to NIFA. Thus far, NIFA has:

- Published the Request for Applications (RFA) for the Organic agriculture research and extension initiative (OREI).
- Published the updated matching requirements chart and indirect cost chart on its website and sent an update to all stakeholders.
- Published the RFA for The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) component of the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach.
- Published a Federal Register Notice regarding new Non Land-Grant Colleges of Agriculture certification process. Currently, NIFA has certified 39 Non Land-Grant Colleges of Agriculture using the updated definition.
- Held multiple listening sessions and webinars for feedback on how to best implement the new 1890 Scholarship program.
- Provided guidance to 1890 universities regarding the change to carryover of funds for extension at these institutions.
- Published the RFA for the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (Formally known as FINI)

ERS/NIFA

In August 2018, Secretary Perdue announced that the Department would be relocating both the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) outside of the National Capital Region. We believe this decision will improve USDA's future ability to attract and consistently retain highly qualified staff with training and interests in agriculture from numerous land-grant universities to complement the current talented staff, to place these important USDA resources closer to many of our stakeholders and to benefit the American taxpayer. Following a rigorous site selection process, on June 13, 2019, the Secretary announced the final selection of the Kansas City Region as the new home for these agencies. A short driving distance from multiple land-grant and research universities, Kansas City is a vibrant urban center in the heartland of America and a growing agriculture hub. It is also already home to a considerable Federal workforce, including a significant presence of USDA employees and the Kansas City 'Ag Bank' Federal Reserve. Potential savings will allow more funding for research of critical needs like rural prosperity and agricultural competitiveness, and for programs and employees to be retained in the long run, especially in the face of tightening budgets.

As a result of this move, no ERS or NIFA employee will be involuntarily separated. Every employee who wants to continue working in their position will have an opportunity to do so, although that will mean moving to a new location for most. Employees will be offered relocation assistance and will receive the same base pay as before in tandem with the locality pay for the new location.

The work of NIFA and ERS is essential, and we know that our employees are our most valuable asset. ERS and NIFA leadership, under the direction of the REE Mission Area, are working diligently to implement this transition efficiently and with minimal disruption to our employees and mission critical work.

In conclusion, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to highlight some of the fantastic research being done in the Research, Education, & Economics mission area, provide an update on the status of Farm Bill Implementation as well as address some specific topics of interest. Thank you for your continued support of this vital aspect of the services USDA provides in our quest to "Do Right and Feed Everyone." I look forward to answering your questions and I thank you for the unwavering bipartisan support that this Committee has always shown for Agriculture and Agricultural research and innovation.

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

July 18, 2019

Agricultural & Applied Economics Association
555 East Wells Street, Suite 1100
Milwaukee, WI 53202
Phone: (414) 918-3190

July 17, 2019

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow:

The AAEA appreciates that you are taking the time to discuss the 2018 Farm Bill Research title at today's hearing. We deeply appreciate your support of the integrity of the agricultural economic statistical investments. Indeed, we as a discipline wish to be of service to the nation. As such, we are committed to providing timely, accurate, and useful agricultural economic statistics, analysis, research and extension in service to U.S. agriculture.

Our members are active in public sector research, education and extension on a wide variety of issues that span the agricultural, food, and resource supply chains. Within the REE Mission Area portfolio, we would like to emphasize key programs that underpin the investments in agricultural economics.

- The **National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)** supports agricultural economics via the nation's premier competitive grants program, the Agricultural and Food Research Imitative broadly, but especially related to the Agriculture Economics and Rural Communities Program Area. We also value **capacity funding for education, Extension, and research in colleges of agriculture**.
- The **Economic Research Service (ERS) provides a** flow of objective, credible statistics to support the decisions of individuals, households, governments, businesses, and other organizations. The ERS is one of the U.S.' designated principal statistical agencies and we strongly find it should be subject to internal controls that maximize the objectivity, utility, and integrity of information. The structure of the ERS Office of the Administrator and four divisions
  - Market and Trade Economics Division
  - Food Economics Division
  - Resource and Rural Economics Division
  - Information Services Division

  organized by sub-disciplines. This structure results in an effective and productive research unit that is recognized internationally for the quality of its research. We believe that the importance and complexity of the U.S. agricultural and food system requires the national-scale, specialized research that the current ERS structure and location supports.
- Lastly, but not least, the **USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)** conducts hundreds of surveys every year and prepares reports covering virtually every aspect of U.S. agriculture. Production and supplies of food and fiber, prices paid and received by farmers, farm labor and wages, farm finances, chemical use, and changes in the demographics of U.S. producers are only a few examples. We highly value NASS' commitment to providing timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture.

In light of the USDA's plan to relocate the first two agencies out of the National Capital Region, we remain concerned. Our concern stems from two branches of the same tree. Firstly, the nation's capital is the best place for the Economic Research Service, a principal statistical agency that provisions economic statistics and analysis for informed decision-making both at USDA and in service to you, our national legislative leadership. Our primary objective is to retain this capacity and full function. However, the accelerated timeline with which USDA is undertaking the move is already devastating the human capital inside the agency. As a result, we respectfully request that you ask the USDA to delay the relocation until a final location can be determined so that employees can make a clear decision on relocation and perhaps be incentivized to relocate to it. We hope this will accommodate retention of employees so that both agencies can maintain proper function and undertaking of their mission. The goal is to preserve the human capital and plan for a relocation that will retain the capacities of the agencies.

The AAEA would also like to work with you in the near future on critical issues facing our agricultural economy. As the agricultural and food sectors continues to evolve, we hope to adapt our NIFA based research, education, extension, and economics systems to evolve with it. We appreciate your leadership and consideration of our comments.

Best regards,

David Zilberman
AAEA President

Keith Coble
AAEA President Elect

Scott Swinton
AAEA Past President

American Statistical Association Public Witness Testimony for the US Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Hearing:

Agricultural Research and 2018 Farm Bill Implementation

July 16, 2019

Chair Roberts, Senator Stabenow and members of the committee, the American Statistical Association (ASA) is grateful to you for holding this hearing and for this opportunity to provide testimony. We are the oldest scientific professional association in the United States and have 18,000 members in industry, academia, and government. Founded in 1839 with a focus to help modernize the decennial census, the ASA has a long history of supporting the federal statistical agencies, which now of course include the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Agricultural Statistics Service as two of the designated "principal" federal statistical agencies.

In promoting the practice and profession of statistics, the ASA also has a long history of supporting statistics, the science of learning from data. Our discipline has played a fundamental role in agriculture, which has helped to improve crop yields by quantifying the effects of such factors as crop varieties, nutrients, and fertilizers. Indeed, many important statistical developments were born out of agricultural research. For example, Ronald Fisher, one of statistics' most important historical figures, developed his principles of experimental design in the context of agricultural field trials in the 1910s and 20s. Fisher invented statistical models to account for confounding factors affecting crop yields such as soil type and weather. These principles, along with new statistical methods, continue to have an important role in agricultural research, such as in precision agriculture where interventions are targeted to the needs of a crop at a specific location in a field.

Given the ASA's long history of supporting the federal statistical agencies and statistics contributing to food and agricultural research, we have repeatedly expressed profound concern and opposition to the relocation of the ERS and National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) from their present location since the announcement last August.

The reasons for our concern and opposition are the following: (i) USDA's rushed process that also sidesteps congressional input and oversight; (ii) the detrimental impacts to the agencies and greater USDA mission area; (iii) the lack of justification for the moves and of transparency; (iv) the lack of consultation with experts and the stakeholder community; and (v) concern for the underlying motives for the moves and for the integrity of USDA science.

Despite USDA's history of careful consultation with Congress and stakeholders, USDA has rushed these moves and eschewed, ignored, or sidestepped such consultation in unilaterally deciding to relocate ERS and NIFA. We urge you as leaders of the US Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry to tell Secretary Perdue to halt these relocations until Congress has considered the plans and given its consent in the FY20 appropriations bill.

If the moves are worth making, they are worth making through a methodical process that provides Congress the time it needs for consideration and incorporates stakeholder and expert input.

To the best of our knowledge, neither Secretary Perdue nor his staff consulted Congress or any of the USDA research community, including: (i) current or former leadership of the Research, Education and Economic (REE) mission area, ERS, or NIFA; (ii) any land-grant university representatives that have been USDA's partners in agricultural research since 1862; and (iii) USDA REE stakeholders and other research/analysis experts. While the USDA acknowledged some communications missteps regarding their initial announcement and have promised they are now listening to Congress and the research community, they have not heeded Congress's FY19 appropriations report language directing USDA to "include all cost estimates for the proposed move of the two agencies, as well as a detailed analysis of any research benefits of their relocation" as part of their FY20 budget justification or made changes to their initial relocations plans in a way that indicates they are taking the relocation concerns to heart. To their credit, USDA did retreat from their plans to administratively shift the ERS from its research arm to the office of the chief economist.

Secretary Perdue's June 13 announcement is a win for Kansas City but it comes at too great a cost for the nation. National policy is made in Washington, DC. It is common sense that ERS and NIFA, so vital to informing food and agriculture policy, should be located where national policy is made.

We all pay for a dismantled ERS that may never get back to its current number-three ranking in the world for agricultural economics research. Experts estimate that it will take at least five years for both agencies to get back to currently operating capacity.

The relocation disrupts the quality, breadth and timeliness of ERS' reports on topics ranging from trade and farm income to nutrition assistance and commodity projections to rural economies and food safety. Being located outside DC also means it will be far removed from its primary audiences and collaborators, not to mention the rich talent pool so appealing to Amazon for its new headquarters. Such setbacks will affect the work of ERS in the long-run.

We will also pay for USDA's extramural research funding agency, NIFA, being dissociated from the planning and collaborations that happen in person in Washington with funding agencies for health, energy, international development, basic research and more. The interdisciplinary research NIFA coordinates with the other agencies is especially important to ensuring we keep a growing population fed and nourished on existing farmland.

In short, helping a local economy should not come at the expense of scientific research and evidence-based policymaking for food, agriculture and rural economies more broadly.

USDA has also asserted with little documentation that these moves will save taxpayers $30 million annually. Their analysis is, in reality, a post-hoc justification for their move. As the cost-benefit analysis of the Agricultural and Applied Economics association demonstrated, the move will end up costing taxpayers. AAEA explains that USDA didn't include accurate rent estimates for other space in the National Capital Region or the cost of replacing the top talent leaving the agencies. Among the many other omitted considerations in the USDA cost justification are the additional costs of doing business from two locations; of leadership and staff having to travel between the two locations in addition to the locations they currently visit; of ERS and NIFA stakeholders needing to travel to Kansas City in addition to DC; and of the effects to the quality, breadth and timeliness of the agencies' work.

Beyond the discounted cost savings assertion, USDA's other justifications for the move fall short. The USDA stakeholder community has thoroughly dissected Secretary Perdue's rationale provided in the USDA short press release in August, which gave three main reasons: (i) "to improve USDA's ability to attract and retain highly qualified staff"; (ii) "to place these important USDA resources closer to many of its stakeholders"; and (iii) "to benefit the American taxpayers." It was asserted the realignment will "enhance the effectiveness of economic analysis at USDA." The ASA provided an especially thorough consideration of USDA's rationale and concluded the "likely negative effects of the USDA plans seem far greater than any supposed problems or asserted benefits."

USDA's credibility in presenting a justified and transparent case for moving ERS and NIFA was further undermined by the absence of a publicly available cost-benefit analysis and the use of misleading data. In supporting their claim that ERS suffered a staff attrition problem, USDA reported the ERS had a 4.5 percentage point greater annual average attrition rate than the rest of USDA for the past five years. It was later revealed the administration used attrition data that included summer interns. More accurately, the ERS annual attrition rate is less than 1% higher than the whole of USDA for permanent employees for the last five years (FY13–FY17), according to data provided by the USDA to Sen. Pat Roberts and Sen. Debbie Stabenow. These actions also present concerns for practicing sound evidence-based policymaking and being stewards of objective, reliable data.

USDA has been unable to show that recruitment has been an overly burdensome challenge for either agency or that any challenges will be lessened in Kansas City. Indeed, especially for ERS, recruitment is likely to be more of a challenge outside Washington, DC. The Office of Personnel Management noted last fall the challenge of recruiting economists and other science-related professionals and put in place direct hire–appointing authorities and a new pay system. Therefore, recruiting challenges will likely be greater in Kansas City, at least for economists where the expected lower pay will negate any cost-of-living gains. The Washington area has several advantages for hiring specialized professionals as noted already by Amazon's decision to place its second headquarters there. Among the advantages are the many opportunities for dual-career households. For economists specifically, the other three of the top four ranked agricultural economics research institutions in the world are all in the Washington, DC, area.

Because USDA's stated rationale doesn't come close to justifying the relocation, there is broad concern for other motives, which is part of our grave concern for the integrity of USDA science. Secretary Perdue's relocations of ERS and NIFA and realignment of ERS appear, at least, to disregard the work of ERS and NIFA and, at worst, as an attempt to undermine their work. The secretary's budget requests to slash ERS funding indicate a desire to undercut the work of ERS. USDA's requirement that its scientists label their journal-published work as "preliminary"—finally reversed last month after an outcry—also seems more an attempt to undermine USDA science than good policy. If Secretary Perdue had consulted with scientific leaders and experts before announcing his ERS and NIFA plans or had made course corrections since, perhaps we wouldn't be as concerned for USDA scientific integrity. Our concerns would also likely be lessened if there were a Senate-confirmed—with broad bipartisan support—chief scientist in place at USDA. One role of the chief scientist is to protect USDA scientific integrity.

Without a Senate-confirmed chief scientist and other checks in place for the integrity of science at USDA, we call on the US Senate to protect the integrity of USDA science and evidence-based policymaking by at least slowing down the relocation.

The opposition to Secretary Perdue's plans has been broad. The ASA is one of many groups opposing the moves. In June, 177 organizations signed a letter to Senate appropriators urging they block the USDA moves. In March, 108 organizations signed a letter to House and Senate appropriators urging they block the USDA moves. The chief scientists and REE undersecretaries from the previous two administrations have also actively opposed the moves, including in testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies and a letter to Congress that has since been signed by 79 other leaders in the land-grant university system. Former USDA officials and leaders of federal statistical agencies also voiced their concerns in October. In November, the ASA Board of Directors issued a statement of concern for the USDA Economic Research Service and on the vital and unique role of federal statistical agencies. We attach these letters.

The Honorable Richard Shelby
United States Senate
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
United States Senate
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven
United States Senate
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
United States Senate
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

June 26, 2019

Dear Chairmen Shelby and Hoeven and Ranking Members Leahy and Merkley:

We, the undersigned stakeholders, are committed to scientific integrity and to growing public funding of food and agricultural research to address pressing global, domestic, and local challenges. We are grateful for the increases you have been able to make for research over the past several years in the agricultural appropriations bill, and we urge you to keep moving forward to revitalize the research budget. We are very concerned, however, that this progress, and indeed the integrity of USDA science, is being undermined by recent administrative decisions.

In light of our commitments to scientific integrity and to enhancing agricultural research funding, commitments we share with you, we urge you to immediately take all steps necessary to support agricultural research by rejecting funding cuts and rejecting the expenditure of funds to relocate the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and Economic Research Service (ERS) outside the hub of science and statistical agencies located in the National Capital Region (NCR).

As stakeholders, we know firsthand the importance of scientific research, education, extension, economics, and statistics to our nation's trillion dollar plus agricultural economy. The investments made through USDA's Research, Education and Economics (REE) mission area are essential for American trade, agricultural production, human health and nutrition, innovation, and to complement our nation's broader basic research and statistical investments. As partners who leverage public dollars to achieve solutions to local and global agricultural problems, we do not support severing beneficial ties across science and statistical institutions. We also believe that relocating these agencies with no clear multi-stakeholder engagement plan will have severe short- and long-term effects on investment efficiency and result in unnecessary transaction costs that will undermine the agencies' viability into the future.

Relocating NIFA and ERS will have a significant negative impact on the future role and strength of America's vaunted agricultural research and extension enterprise. The action jeopardizes the efficacy of state, local, private, and non-governmental sector funding for agricultural research and extension, creating a potential economic loss of more than $26 billion,[i,ii] and impacting tens of thousands of direct and indirect jobs in every district of every state. Keeping NIFA in NCR is essential for its interactions with the other major research agencies in Washington. Moving it away sends a clear message that agricultural research is not as important as research funded by the National Science Foundation, Department of Energy, the National Institutes of Health, and numerous other major research agencies. Simply put, these actions would needlessly unravel a strong system that provides innumerous benefits to our nation's productivity, profitability, and rural economy and human health.

We note, with alarm, that Congress was not given a cost benefit justification prior to the announcement in August 2018. Additionally, Congress has still not been given a cost benefit analysis that is informed by OMB circular guidance, a detailed budget plan, the Office of the Inspector General report, or a multi-stakeholder plan to provide input on the future of agricultural research and statistics.

We therefore respectfully request that you include bill language stating that no funding be used for relocation or reorganization of ERS and NIFA in FY20. We further urge you to withhold approval of any and all reprogramming requests. We believe a robust congressional response is necessary to uphold the future efficacy of public agricultural research investments.

Sincerely,

Aaniiih Nakoda College
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Acadia Foods
Agricultural & Applied Economics Association
Agriculture and Land Based Training Association
Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network
Alamosa Farmers' Market
American Association for Public Opinion Research
American Association for the Advancement of Science
American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences
American Dairy Science Association
American Federation of Government Employees
American Heart Association
American Indian Higher Education Consortium
American Indian Mothers Inc.
American Institute of Biological Sciences
American Malting Barley Association
American Public Health Association
American Samoa Community College, Agriculture, Community & Natural Resources Division

American Society for Horticultural Science
American Statistical Association
Antibiotic Resistance Action Center, GW Milken Institute School of Public Health
Appetite for Change
Arkansas Land and Community Development
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges
Association of Population Centers
Association of State Public Health Nutritionists
California Institute for Rural Studies
California Polytechnic State University, College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association
CASA del Llano, Inc.
Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship
Center for Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention
Center for Rural Affairs
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Certified Naturally Grown
Child Care Aware of America
Clif Bar & Company
Coalition on Human Needs
Coastal Enterprises, Inc.
Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger
Colorado Springs Food Rescue
Community Farm Alliance
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Consumer Federation of America
Cooperative Development Institute
Cornell University, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
Dawson Resource Council
Decision Demographics
Defenders of Wildlife
Detroit Food Policy Council
Double Up Food Bucks Garfield County
Entomological Society of America
Fair Food Network
Family Farm Defenders
Farm Aid
Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance
Farm to Institution New England
Farm Women United
Farmworker Association of Florida
Federation of Animal Science Societies
First Focus Campaign for Children
Food & Water Watch

Food Animal Concerns Trust
Food Policy Action
FoodCorps
Friends of the Earth
Friends of the Earth
Good Food for All
Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities
HEAL (Health, Environment, Agriculture, Labor) Food Alliance
Hempstead Project Heart
Holy Moly Farm
Hunt or Gather
Ilisagvik College
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Jefferson County Food Policy Council
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Kansas Black Farmers Association, INC
La Semilla Food Center
Land for Good
Little Big Horn College
LiveWell Colorado
Maine Farmland Trust
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
Michigan Food and Farming Systems
Michigan State University, AgBioResearch
Michigan State University, College of Agriculture & Natural Resources
Missouri Coalition for the Environment
Montana Organic Association
Montana State University
National Association of University Fisheries and Wildlife Programs
National Barley Improvement Committee
National Family Farm Coalition
National Farm to School Network
National Farmers Union
National Hmong American Farmers, Inc.
National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association
National Latinos Farmers and Ranchers
National Organic Coalition
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National WIC Association
National Young Farmers Coalition
Natural Resources Defense Council
Nebraska Indian Community College
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee
North American Regional Science Council

North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers Land Loss Prevention Project
Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA)
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Massachusetts (NOFA-MA)
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY)
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT)
Northeast Organic Farming Association-Interstate Council
Northwest Forest Worker Center
Northwest Indian College
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
Oregon State University, Center for Small Farms & Community Food Systems
Oregon State University, College of Agricultural Sciences
Oregon Tilth
Organic Farming Research Foundation
Organic Seed Alliance
PCC Community Markets
Peace Roots Alliance
Penn State University, College of Agricultural Sciences
Pesticide Action Network
Pinnacle Prevention
Poetry X Hunger
Population Association of America
Renewing the Countryside
Restoration Urban Farm of New England
Rhode Island Food Policy Council
Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition
Roots of Change
Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA
Rural Coalition
Rural Sociological Society
Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College
San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition
Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior
South Carolina State University
South Dakota State University
Southeast Michigan Census Council
Southern Regional Science Association
Southwest Institute for Resilience
Strategic Consulting Services
Sustainable Food Center
SustainFloyd
The American Phytopathological Society
The Food Trust
The Ohio State University, College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences
Union of Concerned Scientists
United States Breastfeeding Committee
University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources

University of California, Berkeley
University of California, Davis
University of California, Merced
University of California, Riverside
University of California, Santa Cruz
University of Colorado, Colorado Springs - Sustainability, Wellness and Learning Program
University of Maryland
University of Rhode Island, College of the Environment and Life Sciences
University of Tennessee, Institute of Agriculture
University of Vermont, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
US Dairy Forage Research Center Stakeholder Advisory Committee
Utahns Against Hunger
Virginia Association for Biological Farming
Washington State Department of Health
Washington State University
World Perspectives, Inc.
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

[i] OECD (2016), *Innovation, Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability in the United States*, OECD Food and Agricultural Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264264120-en.

[ii] Alston, J.M. Andersen, J. James, and P.G. Pardey (2011), "The economic returns to US public agricultural research", American Journal of Agricultural Economics Vol. 93, pp. 1257–1277. http://ajae.oxfordjournals.org/content/93/5/1257.abstract.

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United States Senate
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

June 26, 2019

Dear Chairmen Shelby and Hoeven and Ranking Members Leahy and Merkley:

We, the undersigned stakeholders, are committed to scientific integrity and to growing public funding of food and agricultural research to address pressing global, domestic, and local challenges. We are grateful for the increases you have been able to make for research over the past several years in the agricultural appropriations bill, and we urge you to keep moving forward to revitalize the research budget. We are very concerned, however, that this progress, and indeed the integrity of USDA science, is being undermined by recent administrative decisions.

In light of our commitments to scientific integrity and to enhancing agricultural research funding, commitments we share with you, we urge you to immediately take all steps necessary to support agricultural research by rejecting funding cuts and rejecting the expenditure of funds to relocate the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and Economic Research Service (ERS) outside the hub of science and statistical agencies located in the National Capital Region (NCR).

As stakeholders, we know firsthand the importance of scientific research, education, extension, economics, and statistics to our nation's trillion dollar plus agricultural economy. The investments made through USDA's Research, Education and Economics (REE) mission area are essential for American trade, agricultural production, human health and nutrition, innovation, and to complement our nation's broader basic research and statistical investments. As partners who leverage public dollars to achieve solutions to local and global agricultural problems, we do not support severing beneficial ties across science and statistical institutions. We also believe that relocating these agencies with no clear multi-stakeholder engagement plan will have severe short- and long-term effects on investment efficiency and result in unnecessary transaction costs that will undermine the agencies' viability into the future.

Relocating NIFA and ERS will have a significant negative impact on the future role and strength of America's vaunted agricultural research and extension enterprise. The action jeopardizes the efficacy of state, local, private, and non-governmental sector funding for agricultural research and extension, creating a potential economic loss of more than $26 billion,[i,ii] and impacting tens of thousands of direct and indirect jobs in every district of every state. Keeping NIFA in NCR is essential for its interactions with the other major research agencies in Washington. Moving it away sends a clear message that agricultural research is not as important as research funded by the National Science Foundation, Department of Energy, the National Institutes of Health, and numerous other major research agencies. Simply put, these actions would needlessly unravel a strong system that provides innumerous benefits to our nation's productivity, profitability, and rural economy and human health.

We note, with alarm, that Congress was not given a cost benefit justification prior to the announcement in August 2018. Additionally, Congress has still not been given a cost benefit analysis that is informed by OMB circular guidance, a detailed budget plan, the Office of the Inspector General report, or a multi-stakeholder plan to provide input on the future of agricultural research and statistics.

We therefore respectfully request that you include bill language stating that no funding be used for relocation or reorganization of ERS and NIFA in FY20. We further urge you to withhold approval of any and all reprogramming requests. We believe a robust congressional response is necessary to uphold the future efficacy of public agricultural research investments.

Sincerely,

Aaniiih Nakoda College
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Acadia Foods
Agricultural & Applied Economics Association
Agriculture and Land Based Training Association
Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network
Alamosa Farmers' Market
American Association for Public Opinion Research
American Association for the Advancement of Science
American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences
American Dairy Science Association
American Federation of Government Employees
American Heart Association
American Indian Higher Education Consortium
American Indian Mothers Inc.
American Institute of Biological Sciences
American Malting Barley Association
American Public Health Association
American Samoa Community College, Agriculture, Community & Natural Resources Division

American Society for Horticultural Science
American Statistical Association
Antibiotic Resistance Action Center, GW Milken Institute School of Public Health
Appetite for Change
Arkansas Land and Community Development
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges
Association of Population Centers
Association of State Public Health Nutritionists
California Institute for Rural Studies
California Polytechnic State University, College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association
CASA del Llano, Inc.
Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship
Center for Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention
Center for Rural Affairs
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Certified Naturally Grown
Child Care Aware of America
Clif Bar & Company
Coalition on Human Needs
Coastal Enterprises, Inc.
Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger
Colorado Springs Food Rescue
Community Farm Alliance
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Consumer Federation of America
Cooperative Development Institute
Cornell University, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
Dawson Resource Council
Decision Demographics
Defenders of Wildlife
Detroit Food Policy Council
Double Up Food Bucks Garfield County
Entomological Society of America
Fair Food Network
Family Farm Defenders
Farm Aid
Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance
Farm to Institution New England
Farm Women United
Farmworker Association of Florida
Federation of Animal Science Societies
First Focus Campaign for Children
Food & Water Watch

Food Animal Concerns Trust
Food Policy Action
FoodCorps
Friends of the Earth
Friends of the Earth
Good Food for All
Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities
HEAL (Health, Environment, Agriculture, Labor) Food Alliance
Hempstead Project Heart
Holy Moly Farm
Hunt or Gather
Ilisagvik College
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Jefferson County Food Policy Council
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Kansas Black Farmers Association, INC
La Semilla Food Center
Land for Good
Little Big Horn College
LiveWell Colorado
Maine Farmland Trust
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
Michigan Food and Farming Systems
Michigan State University, AgBioResearch
Michigan State University, College of Agriculture & Natural Resources
Missouri Coalition for the Environment
Montana Organic Association
Montana State University
National Association of University Fisheries and Wildlife Programs
National Barley Improvement Committee
National Family Farm Coalition
National Farm to School Network
National Farmers Union
National Hmong American Farmers, Inc.
National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association
National Latinos Farmers and Ranchers
National Organic Coalition
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National WIC Association
National Young Farmers Coalition
Natural Resources Defense Council
Nebraska Indian Community College
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee
North American Regional Science Council

North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers Land Loss Prevention Project
Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA)
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Massachusetts (NOFA-MA)
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY)
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT)
Northeast Organic Farming Association-Interstate Council
Northwest Forest Worker Center
Northwest Indian College
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
Oregon State University, Center for Small Farms & Community Food Systems
Oregon State University, College of Agricultural Sciences
Oregon Tilth
Organic Farming Research Foundation
Organic Seed Alliance
PCC Community Markets
Peace Roots Alliance
Penn State University, College of Agricultural Sciences
Pesticide Action Network
Pinnacle Prevention
Poetry X Hunger
Population Association of America
Renewing the Countryside
Restoration Urban Farm of New England
Rhode Island Food Policy Council
Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition
Roots of Change
Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA
Rural Coalition
Rural Sociological Society
Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College
San Luis Valley Local Foods Coalition
Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior
South Carolina State University
South Dakota State University
Southeast Michigan Census Council
Southern Regional Science Association
Southwest Institute for Resilience
Strategic Consulting Services
Sustainable Food Center
SustainFloyd
The American Phytopathological Society
The Food Trust
The Ohio State University, College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences
Union of Concerned Scientists
United States Breastfeeding Committee
University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources

University of California, Berkeley
University of California, Davis
University of California, Merced
University of California, Riverside
University of California, Santa Cruz
University of Colorado, Colorado Springs - Sustainability, Wellness and Learning Program
University of Maryland
University of Rhode Island, College of the Environment and Life Sciences
University of Tennessee, Institute of Agriculture
University of Vermont, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
US Dairy Forage Research Center Stakeholder Advisory Committee
Utahns Against Hunger
Virginia Association for Biological Farming
Washington State Department of Health
Washington State University
World Perspectives, Inc.
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

[i] OECD (2016), *Innovation, Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability in the United States*, OECD Food and Agricultural Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264264120-en.

[ii] Alston, J.M. Andersen, J. James, and P.G. Pardey (2011), "The economic returns to US public agricultural research", American Journal of Agricultural Economics Vol. 93, pp. 1257–1277. http://ajae.oxfordjournals.org/content/93/5/1257.abstract.

December 14, 2018[1]

The Honorable K. Michael Conaway
Chair, Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chair, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Roberts and Conaway and Ranking Members Stabenow and Peterson,

We write to express our profound concern for USDA's plan to relocate the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) outside of Washington, DC and to realign ERS out of the USDA Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area. We believe the restructuring will undermine our food and agriculture enterprise by disrupting and hampering the agencies' vital work in support of it—through research, analyses, and statistics. We are also deeply troubled such a major upheaval of the USDA research arm would be carried out with such haste and without the input and prior consultation of the USDA research stakeholders.

In the best interests of American agricultural, food, and rural sectors, we respectfully request that you intervene to stop the restructuring of REE at least until there has been a comprehensive independent study and full consultation with the stakeholder community.

We write from the perspective of current and former university agricultural administration leaders and former USDA chief scientists. Our positions in land grant universities (LGUs) as well as our broader experience and leadership in food and agriculture provide us a unique and important perspective on the US food and agriculture enterprise. LGUs and the broader academic network work hand in hand with the USDA to identify priorities, carry out research and analysis, and disseminate results to the broader community. An integral part of USDA's support for our food and agriculture enterprise along with ERS, NIFA takes an integrated approach to support programs to find innovative solutions to the most pressing local and global problems to ensure the long-term viability of agriculture.[2] The mission of ERS complements that of NIFA by anticipating "trends and emerging issues in agriculture, food, the environment, and rural America

[1] This letter was originally sent November 27 with 21 signers. It is being updated as additional signers are added. The current count is 81. Note also an identical version of this letter has been sent to appropriators.
[2] https://nifa.usda.gov/about-nifa

and to conduct high-quality, objective economic research to inform and enhance public and private decision making."[3]

Through the partnership of LGUs, USDA, other federal research funding agencies, and the private sector, agricultural research has increased many-fold the productivity of our farms and farmers, despite the continual challenges of disease, pests, extreme weather, and invasive species. The progress and accomplishment are by design, through the leadership and vision of many in the USDA, LGUs, and larger private-sector community over the past many decades.

The engagement of the broader scientific funding research community—the National Science Foundation (NSF), the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the National institutes of Health (NIH), and many more—has also been integral to the impressive progress. For example, NIFA partnered with NSF, NIH, and the Department of Energy to launch the Plant Genome Initiative. This initiative has sequenced the genomes of economically important plants and led to improved bean, potato, tomato, wheat and barley cultivars while at the same time training thousands of undergraduate and graduate students who will be the next generation plant scientists and breeders.

To further exemplify the advances that have come from multi-agency involvement, consider the Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS) virus, which was first detected in the U.S. in 1987 and that costs North American farmers more than $660 million annually. A collaborative effort between land-grant universities and the private sector supported by NIFA and NSF has resulted in the breeding of pigs that are not harmed by the disease. Another example is a university-ARS collaboration supported by USDA-ARS, NIFA, and other federal funding agencies to create soybean oil with no trans fats.

The advances that have occurred because of the close collaboration of numerous research funding agencies have been greatly facilitated by their proximity. This is because of the close collaboration that must occur between the agencies, researchers, and university leaders like ourselves. University agricultural leaders and researchers make regular visits to Washington, DC to meet with USDA offices, research funding agencies, our congressional delegations, and other farm and research organizations based or meeting in Washington. Locating NIFA outside the Washington, DC area will hamper our work and the effective integration of NIFA with other research agencies and stakeholders.

Such integrative science is essential for meeting the challenges of the next 50 years. For example, NIFA is currently partnering with NSF on an Initiative at the Nexus of Food, Energy and Water Systems to significantly advance our understanding of how these three interrelated systems interact and function with the objective of increasing their resilience and ensuring long-term sustainability.

We are also concerned the relocation of NIFA will undermine USDA funding of research, which has stagnated for the last 40 years. Since 1976, it has lost two thirds of its purchasing power.[4]

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[3] https://www.ers.usda.gov/about-ers/

[4] https://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/s3fs-public/TotRes%253B.xlsx

With NIFA being relocated outside of Washington, we worry it will become less relevant and therefore more susceptible to further degradation of its budget.

In addition, the relocations are likely to weaken the coordination of NIFA and ERS with their sister REE agencies, the ARS and the National Agricultural Statistics Service. This would set back the work of Congress over several farm bills and appropriations bills to ensure more coordination and integration between the agencies. Equally important, it will remove ERS and NIFA from the important role of bringing science to bear on the work of the USDA frontline program agencies, all of which will also remain in Washington. Separating the agencies between a new location and Washington, DC, with leadership and some staff of each agency being kept close to USDA headquarters, could also undermine the respective internal operations and coordination.

For the ERS specifically, we believe the relocation will set back the agency for 5-10 years and undermine its independence as a federal statistical agency. In a major relocation, there will be substantial staff loss because of either an unwillingness or other preventing circumstances to move. Given the ERS's highly specialized work, it will be a long process to replace the loss of experience and expertise. We also believe ERS's work is served well in DC where its many of its primary audiences, partners, and collaborators are located.

ERS also thrives both in its independence and its work in REE thanks to the leadership of the USDA chief scientist and the synergies it enjoys with the other REE agencies. Congress was wise in placing ERS within REE, and it would be most unfortunate to allow that deliberative choice to be undone by administrative fiat.

Given the decades of planning and adjustments to optimize the work of REE, we are troubled the USDA seeks to dismantle the research arm in such a major way in a matter of months without a confirmed chief scientist, consultation of current or former REE, NIFA, and ERS leaders, prior engagement and input of the greater research community, and other good-government procedures. Indeed, there seems to be little evidence of any planning or study before the announcement to make the relocation.

Making changes in a successful enterprise should be based on two criteria: (i) to fix a real problem that jeopardizes future success; or (ii) to ensure further improvements for the system. The ERS-NIFA moves satisfy neither. In addition, stakeholders have been waiting for a cost-benefit analysis of the proposal to be presented and an explanation of how this move relates to REE's existing long-term strategic plan. For these reasons, it is premature to allow any final action to be taken in the absence of basic good government practice.

In closing, as leaders in the USDA agricultural research partnership committee, we have deep concerns about USDA's upheaval of its research mission area without broader consultation. The Research, Education, and Economics mission reached its current make-up following years of planning, adjustments, and optimization informed by consultation, study, and public comment. We see no justification that it should be restructured on such a large scale on USDA's short timeline and without proper study.

We urge you to intervene to ensure the integrity of our food and agriculture enterprise over the next 50 years.

Sincerely,

Gale Buchanan
Former USDA Chief Scientist and Under Secretary of Agriculture for Research, Education & Economics; Dean and Director Emeritus, University of Georgia, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

Catherine E. Woteki
Former USDA Chief Scientist and Under Secretary of Agriculture for Research, Education & Economics

Roger Beachy
Former USDA Chief Scientist and Director of National Institute of Food and Agriculture

Sonny Ramaswamy
Former Director of National Institute of Food and Agriculture

David Ackerly
Dean, College of Natural Resources, University of California, Berkeley

Theodore G. Andreadis
Director, The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station

Aufa'i Apulu Ropeti Areta
Agriculture, Community and Natural Resources Division (Land Grant Program), American Samoa Community College

Dan Arp
Dean Emeritus, College of Agricultural Sciences, Oregon State University

Ken Blemings
Interim Dean, Davis College of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Design, West Virginia University

Kathryn J. Boor
Robert P. Lynch Dean, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences, Cornell University

Charles Boyer
Vice President for Agriculture, Dean, and Director, Montana State University College of Agriculture

Douglas D. Buhler
Director, MSU AgBioResearch & Assistant Vice President for Research and Innovation, Michigan State University

Daniel Bush
Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, Colorado State University

/Neville Clarke/
Neville Clarke
Director Emeritus, Texas Agricultural Experiment Director; Former Executive Director, Southern Association of State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors; Chair, Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy (ESCOP)

Mark J. Cochran
Vice President for Agriculture, University of Arkansas System

Nicholas Comerford

Dean and Director for Research and Cooperative Extension, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Nancy M. Cox
Dean, College of Agriculture, Food and Environment, University of Kentucky

Gerard D'Souza
Dean and Director of Land Grant Programs, Prairie View A&M University

Helene Dillard
Dean and Professor, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, University of California, Davis

Dan Dooley
Former Vice President, Agriculture and Natural Resources; Former Senior Vice President for External Relations, University of California

/Robert Easter/
Robert Easter
President Emeritus; Dean Emeritus College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences, University of Illinois

Cameron Faustman
Interim Dean, College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources, University of Connecticut

John D. Floros
President, New Mexico State University

Robert Godfrey
Director, Agricultural Experiment Station, University of the Virgin Islands

Robert M. Goodman
Executive Dean, School of Biological and Environmental Sciences, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Alan L. Grant
Dean, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Virginia Tech

Jim Hanson Digitally signed by Jim Hanson Date: 2019.02.19 10:30:42 -05'00'

Jim Hanson
Associate Dean and Associate Director, University of Maryland Extension

Ronald Hendrick
Dean, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Michigan State University

Bret W. Hess
Interim Dean, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources; Director, Wyoming Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Wyoming

Walter A. Hill
Vice Provost, Dean, College of Agriculture, Environment and Nutrition Sciences, Research Director and Extension Administrator, Tuskegee University

Glenda Humiston
Vice President, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Director of the Agricultural Experiment Station, Director of Cooperative Extension, University of California

Jody Jellison
Director, UMass Extension; Director, Massachusetts Agricultural Experiment Station; Assistant Vice Chancellor, Agricultural Research and Engagement, University of Massachusetts

Moses T. Kairo, Dean, School of Agricultural and Natural Sciences, University of Maryland Eastern Shore

Govind Kannan
Former Dean, College of Agriculture, Family Sciences and Technology, Fort Valley State University

John Killefer, South Dakota Corn Endowed Dean, College of Agriculture, Food & Environmental Sciences, South Dakota State University

John Kirby
Dean, College of the Environment and Life Sciences and Director, Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension, University of Rhode Island

Cathann A. Kress
Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Dean, College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences, The Ohio State University

Michael D. Lairmore DVM, PhD
Dean and Distinguished Professor, School of Veterinary Medicine, University of California, Davis

Daryl Lund
Former Dean of Agricultural and Natural Resources, Rutgers University & Cornell University; Former Executive Director of the North Central Regional Association of State Agricultural Experiment Stations

Michael V. Martin
President, Florida Gulf Coast University

Ali Mitchell
Executive Director, Association of Northeast Extension Directors

Ron C. Mittelhammer
Dean Emeritus, College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Services, Washington State University

Bobby Moser
Former Vice President, College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, The Ohio State University

Sabine O'Hara
Dean, of CAUSES and Land-grant Programs, College of Agriculture, Urban Sustainability and Environmental Sciences (CAUSES), University of the District of Columbia

Jack Payne
Senior Vice President, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida

Thomas L. Payne
Vice Chancellor and Dean Emeritus, College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, University of Missouri

William A. Payne
Dean, College of Agriculture, Biotechnology and Natural Resources, University of Nevada Reno

Barbara Petty
Associate Dean and Director of Extension, University of Idaho

Chandra Reddy
Dean and Director of Research/Administrator of Extension, College of Agriculture, Human, and Natural Sciences, Tennessee State University

Chuck Ross
Director, University of Vermont Extension

Alan Sams
Reub Long Dean, College of Agricultural Sciences, and Director, Oregon Agricultural Experiment Station, Oregon State University

Eugene G. Sander

Eugene G. Sander
President Emeritus, Former Vice President and Dean for Agriculture and Life Sciences, University of Arizona

Fred Schlutt
Vice Provost for Extension and Outreach and Director of Cooperative Extension Service, University of Alaska Fairbanks

Milo Shult
Vice President for Agriculture, Emeritus, University of Arkansas

Robert W. Taylor
Dean, College of Agriculture and Food Sciences, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University

Andrew J. Thulin
Dean, College of Agriculture, Food, and Environmental Sciences, California Polytechnic State University

Thomas Vogelmann
Dean, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, University of Vermont

Christopher B. Watkins
Associate Dean, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences and College of Human Ecology and Director, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Cornell University

Lynn Wooten
Dean, The Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, Cornell University

Jon Wraith
Dean, College of Life Sciences and Agriculture and Director, NH Agricultural Experiment Station, University of New Hampshire

André-Denis Girard Wright
Dean, College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences, Washington State University

Delegates to the Council for Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching (CARET)

Nathan Andre, Ohio

Linda Ameroso
Linda Ameroso, New York

James J. Bittner, New York

James G Brown, Jr., Tennessee

Susan Crowell, Ohio

William J. Cutts, New Jersey

Jeremy Drew, Nevada

Kristin Hughes Evans, Virginia

Beatrix Fields, District of Columbia

Larry Holmes, Virginia

Terry McClure, Ohio

Michael A. Mellano, California

Roberta A. Moseley, New Jersey

Madeline Mellinger, Florida

Kenneth Nicewicz, Massachusetts

Caird Rexroad, West Virginia (also former Associate Administrator, ARS, USDA)

Christopher M. Streeter, New Hampshire

/Eric Tanouye/
Eric Tanouye, Hawaii

/Oscar Taylor/
Oscar Taylor, Texas

Jake Tibbitts, Nevada

March 25, 2019[1]

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chair, Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member, Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chair, Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member, Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Shelby and Lowey and Ranking Members Leahy and Granger,

As strong supporters of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) research mission area, we write to express serious concern regarding the USDA's proposed relocation of the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and the reorganization of ERS. In our view, these proposals are likely to result in a major negative impact on U.S. farmers, ranchers, consumers, and researchers.

As you prepare FY 2020 agriculture appropriations legislation, we respectfully request that you include bill language stating no funding be used for relocation or reorganization of ERS and that no funding be used for the NIFA relocation outside the National Capital Region. We also request that you deny any FY 2019 reprogramming requests from USDA for them to continue to implement relocation.

Our shared fundamental belief is that the proposed relocation and reorganization will undermine the quality and breadth of the work these agencies support and perform – work that is vital to informing and supporting US agriculture, food security, and rural development. The rationale provided by the USDA for the relocation also fails to identify problems substantive enough to justify such a disruption of ERS's and NIFA's operations, and jeopardizes the much needed growth in funding for both agencies' programs.

Equally concerning is that USDA made their decision last summer without stakeholder or congressional input. How USDA fosters, supports, and guides US agriculture and food research and analysis has evolved through the decades in close consultation with the broader community. Secretary Perdue's unilateral decision goes against decades of improvements and collaboration and contradicts the Department's stated goal of better serving stakeholders.

[1] This letter was originally sent on March 25 with 101 signers. The letter is being kept open for additional signers, with the total number now 108.

The USDA proposal has the potential to reverse the significant progress your subcommittees have made in recent years to revitalize agricultural research, education, extension, and economics. Consequently, we believe that preventing the proposal from moving forward is in the best interest of American food and agricultural research, and the millions who depend on it.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss these issues with you.

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Agricultural & Applied Economics Association
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas
American Association for Public Opinion Research
American Dairy Science Association
American Heart Association
American Indian Mothers Inc
American Malting Barley Association
American Phytopathological Society
American Public Health Association
American Pulse Association
American Society for Nutrition
American Society of Animal Science
American Statistical Association
Antibiotic Resistance Action Center, The George Washington University
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges
Association of Population Centers
BioRegional Strategies
California Institute for Rural Studies
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association
Center for Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention
Center for Rural Affairs
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Concerned Citizens of Tillery, NC
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Consumer Federation of America
Cooperative Development Institute
Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
Decision Demographics
Entomological Society of America
Fair Food Network
Family Farm Defenders
Farm to Institution New England
FASS
Fertile Ground
First Focus Campaign for Children
Food & Water Watch
Food Animal Concerns Trust
Food Research and Action Center
FoodCorps
Friends of the Earth
Harvest Time Outreach Ministries
Idaho Barley Commission
Indigenous Environmental Network
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Kansas Black Farmers Association
Keep Antibiotics Working
Land For Good
Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy, Teachers College Columbia University
Maine Farmland Trust
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
Michigan State University AgBioResearch
Mississippi Association of Cooperatives
Missouri Coalition for the Environment
National Barley Growers Association
National Barley Improvement Committee
National Family Farm Coalition
National Farmers Union
National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Assn
National Organic Coalition
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National WIC Association

National Young Farmers Coalition
North American Regional Science Council
North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers Land Loss Prevention Project
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont
Northeast Organic Farming Association, Interstate Council
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group
Northern New Mexico Stockmen's Association
Northwest Forest Worker Center
O'Connor Analytics LLC
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project, Inc.
Oregon State University Center for Small Farms & Community Food Systems
Oregon Tilth
Organic Farming Research Foundation
Organic Seed Alliance
Peace-Work
Pesticide Action Network
Pima County Food Alliance
pineapple collaborative
Pinnacle Prevention
Population Association of America
Restaurant Services, Inc.
Rural Advancement Fund of the National Sharecroppers Fund
Rural Coalition
Rural Development Leadership Network
Rural Sociological Society
Share Our Strength
Slow Food USA
Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior
Southeast Michigan Census Council
SouthEast Michigan Producers Association (SEMPA)
Southern Regional Science Association
Sustainable Agriculture of Louisville
Sustainable Food Center
Union of Concerned Scientists
University of California, Davis
US Canola Association
US Dairy Forage Research Center Stakeholder Committee
USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council
Utahns Against Hunger
Virginia Association for Biological Farming
WineAmerica
World Farmers
World Perspectives, Inc.
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

CC: Members, House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

NB: An identical version of this letter was sent to the chair and ranking members of the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies.

February 1, 2019

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chair, Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member, Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chair, Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member, Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Shelby and Lowey and Ranking Members Leahy and Granger,

We thank you for the pending conference report language accompanying your FY19 spending bills regarding the proposed moves of the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) outside of the National Capital Region and the realignment of ERS out of the USDA Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area.

The language directly addresses our fundamental concern that the proposed relocation and realignment is likely to undermine the quality and breadth of the work these agencies support and perform – work that is vital to informing and supporting the US agriculture, food and rural economies and US food security. We also believed the rationale provided by the USDA for the relocation failed to identify problems substantive enough to justify such a disruption of ERS's and NIFA's operations and were deeply troubled that USDA acted without stakeholder and congressional input.

We also appreciate that you heard our concerns about the proposed transfer of ERS to the Office of the Chief Economist by directing the USDA to indefinitely delay it.

We strongly support the adoption of this language with the final 2019 appropriations bill and trust that USDA will abide by its directives and halt any further action on relocation or reorganization. Thank you again for your leadership on and attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Agricultural and Applied Economics Association
American Association for Public Opinion Research
American Association of Mycobacterial Diseases
American Dairy Science Association
American Educational Research Association
American Malting Barley Association
American Phytopathological Society
American Public Health Association
American Society for Nutrition
American Society of Animal Science
American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers
American Sociological Association
American Statistical Association
Antibiotic Resistance Action Center, The George Washington University
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges

Association of Population Centers
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association
Center For Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention
Center for Rural Affairs
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation
Consortium of Social Science Associations
Consumer Federation of America
Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
Decision Demographics
FASS
Food & Water Watch
Food Animal Concerns Trust
Food Research and Action Center
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Keep Antibiotics Working
Maine Farmland Trust
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
Mycobacterial Diseases of Animals Multi-State Initiative
National Barley Improvement Committee
National Farmers Union
National Organic Coalition
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National WIC Association
National Young Farmers Coalition
Natural Resources Defense Council
North American Regional Science Council
Northeast Organic Farming Association
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
Oregon State University Center for Small Farms & Community Food Systems
Organic Farming Research Foundation
Organic Seed Alliance
Pinnacle Prevention
Population Association of America
Restaurant Services, Inc.
Rural Sociological Society
Southeast Michigan Census Council
Union of Concerned Scientists
US Dairy Forage Research Center Stakeholders
World Perspectives, Inc.
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

CC: Member, House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

NB: An identical version of this letter was sent to the chair and ranking members of the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies.

ASA
AMERICAN STATISTICAL ASSOCIATION
Promoting the Practice and Profession of Statistics

Addressing the USDA's Rationale for Relocating and Realigning the Economic Research Service

In August 2018, the USDA announced it would relocate the Economic Research Service (ERS) outside of Washington, DC, and realign it from the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area to the Office of the Chief Economist (OCE). The USDA cited three main reasons for the relocation: (i) "to improve USDA's ability to attract and retain highly qualified staff"; (ii) "to place these important USDA resources closer to many of its stakeholders"; and (iii) "to benefit the American taxpayers." The USDA asserts the realignment will "enhance the effectiveness of economic analysis at USDA."

This document is an examination of the USDA's reasons and assertions, compiling responses by the ERS stakeholder community. The reasons are generally found to be lacking in substance or evidence, or needing additional and independent study. Indeed, it remains unclear what problems the USDA seeks to address with their plans. The attrition rate amounts to an average of three more employees leaving ERS annually than would be the case if ERS's rate were the same as that of USDA, hardly a reason to help justify moving ERS's 260 employees to another location. The USDA provides no data to substantiate a recruitment challenge and is not releasing its cost-benefit analysis. The USDA does not cite problems with ERS being located in Washington, DC, or with the extensive system in place to reach its many audiences, many of the primary ones being in the nation's capital. Similarly, the USDA does not identify any problems with ERS being in REE.

In reality, the ERS is an effective and well-run agency. It is the #3-ranked agricultural economics research institution in the world, providing research, statistics, and analysis covering broad aspects of our food, agriculture, and the rural economy. It is also one of the 13 primary federal statistical agencies, thereby playing a bedrock role in evidence-based policymaking and, more broadly, US data infrastructure. It has been at the forefront of addressing the challenges facing the federal statistical agencies, including illustrating what can be achieved by linking data from different agencies.

The likely negative effects of the USDA plans seem far greater than any supposed problems or asserted benefits. Experts expect high attrition rates among ERS employees preferring to stay in or unable to move their households from the Washington area. The loss of staff in turn is expected to impinge upon ERS's ability to continue to produce the same quality, quantity, and breadth of reports, analyses, and statistics. It will likely take years for ERS to build back up to its current level of high-quality production and operations. The remote location of the majority of ERS staff is also expected to reduce ERS's influence on and relevance to evidence-based policymaking at USDA and nationally. Finally, the move of

ERS from the information-producing arm of USDA, REE, to the policy-supporting arm, OCE, raises the risk of ERS reports being perceived as less objective and neutral.

The USDA's rationale and plans are also questionable for their rapid, closed process and for not considering other resources or ERS challenges. The USDA announced its plans in August 2018 while Congress was away for its summer recess. To the best of the community's knowledge, they did not consult any stakeholders, agency leadership, or Congress and are proceeding in haste without a public comment process, an independent study, or congressional consideration.

Their approach is to be contrasted with other government reorganization efforts. For example, the White House proposed this summer, as part of its government reorganization plan, to move the Bureau of Labor Statistics from the Department of Labor to the Department of Commerce. Their plan followed a year of planning facilitated and overseen by the Office of Management and Budget, is to be considered over several years, and includes congressional consideration and public comment.

Consider also the Department of Transportation (DOT) proposal to move the Bureau of Transportation Statistics to the Office of the Under Secretary of Policy. The move is concerning to the federal statistical community for many of the reasons discussed here, but the process has been more open, with DOT commissioning a study by the National Academy of Public Administration during the many months between proposal and implementation.

USDA also seems to not have engaged the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) for the apparent recruitment and retention challenges they say ERS faces. Had USDA done so, they might have been informed of OPM's intent to introduce in October new authorities and systems for hiring economists, as discussed below. Further, USDA neglects to mention ERS's biggest challenge: Its budget has lost 19% in purchasing power due to inflation since FY09. Its staff size has shrunk from 388 in FY09 to 303 in March 2018. It's probable that such restricted funding has had an impact on ERS recruiting and retention.

The American Statistical Association and the broader community remain concerned about the USDA's plans for ERS. The alleged problems being addressed seem minor, nonexistent, or unsubstantiated. Similarly, any possible benefits are asserted without support. Meanwhile, the disruptions that would likely result to ERS work are clear and would have ramifications for at least the next decade.

For the sake of good government and evidence-based policymaking in the food, agriculture, and rural sectors, we again call for Congress to intervene and stop the USDA actions to relocate and realign the ERS until an independent cost-benefit analysis is conducted and made public.

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This is a working document intended to illustrate the community's attempts to understand the USDA's rationale for the move and realignment of ERS out of REE. Any comments can be sent to Steve Pierson, ASA director of science policy, at pierson@amstat.org.

Addressing the USDA's Rationale for Relocating and Realigning the Economic Research Service

Attrition: USDA says ERS employee attrition is a reason to relocate the agency	1. The ERS annual attrition rate is less than 1% higher than the whole of USDA for permanent employees for the last five years (FY13-FY17), according to data provided by the USDA to Senator Pat Roberts and Senator Debbie Stabenow.[1] With an average of 316 ERS employees for each of the past five years, the average number of permanent ERS employees leaving annually was 25: four to another federal agency; seven quitting federal service altogether; and 13 to retirement.[2] If the ERS average attrition rate were the same as that of the whole of USDA, an average of 22 employees would leave ERS annually. This is a minor difference in attrition. o The administration initially used attrition data that included interns or other nonpermanent employees to justify the move.[3] With summer intern data included, ERS has a 4.5 percentage point greater annual average attrition rate than the rest of USDA for the past five years because of its active summer internship program. 2. The ERS attrition rate could be slightly higher due in part to the high demand for economists and ERS's employees being recruited away to other opportunities. o OPM just called economists a "high-risk, mission-critical" occupation in need of a "new approach" for pay. They will issue their "first alternative pay system for economists in the federal government."[4] o In October 2018, OPM authorized new direct hire appointing authorities for agencies to address "the most pressing hiring needs". Economist is at the top of the list[5].

[1] http://www.hagstromreport.com/assets/2018/2018_0924-USDA-PerdueNIFA-ERS-Response.pdf?utm_source=MadMimi&utm_medium=email&utm_content=The+Hagstrom+Report+%7C+Monday+09_24_2018&utm_campaign=20180924_m147316021_The+Hagstrom+Report+%7C+Monday+09_24_2018&utm_term=USDA+_E2_80_94+Secretary+Perdue+response+to+Roberts+and+Stabenow

[2] https://www.fedscope.opm.gov/; ERS also lost an average of one employee per year to death.

[3] http://www.amstat.org/asa/files/pdfs/pressreleases/2018-ASA_ERS_Statement-9-13-18.pdf

[4] https://www.govexec.com/pay-benefits/2018/10/trump-administration-create-new-pay-systems-some-federal-jobs/151952/; https://www.fedweek.com/fedweek/opm-plans-new-pay-system-for-economists-others-to-follow/

[5] https://chcoc.gov/content/announcing-government-wide-direct-hire-appointing-authorities

	3. The ERS ranked in the top quartile of best places to work in the federal government for agency subcomponents in 2016 and 2017.[6] It is the highest ranked USDA agency in this category, a ranking difficult to square with USDA saying the agency has attrition (and recruitment) problems. 4. USDA asserts another location with lower cost of living (and lower salaries) will ease attrition while providing no evidence their logic will solve the problem they identify. Lower salaries might fail to attract qualified economists, who have robust opportunities in the national job market. 5. Where do employees departing ERS but staying in federal service go? Anecdotally, it seems ERS economists often leave ERS for or are recruited by other parts of USDA in Washington, DC.[7] This speaks to the role of ERS in recruiting useful analytical talent for the USDA as a whole.
Recruitment: USDA states ERS has recruitment challenges that will be eased in another location	1. USDA has provided no data publicly to justify ERS has a recruitment problem or that it will be improved in another location. Former administrators and deputies have not confirmed ERS has unique recruitment challenges, other than needing to hire more economists than other agencies do. 2. Any recruitment challenges could be due to high demand for economists and other science, technology, engineering, and mathematics positions noted above. Statistician is also high on the list provided in the OPM list in their direct hiring authorities document. 3. ERS's apparent ability to avoid the recruiting challenges faced across the federal government may be due to several factors. As the #3-ranked institution in the world for agricultural economics research,[8] ERS is a top agency for which to work. The opportunities for meaningful and impactful work also attract top talent. Further, Washington, DC is likely the largest concentration of agricultural economists in the world, with

[6] http://bestplacestowork.org/rankings/overall/sub

[7] Consider, for example, the current chief economist, the Farm Services Agency Director of the Economic and Policy Analysis Staff, many senior World Agricultural Outlook Board commodity analysts, current and recent Resources Assessment Division of the Natural Resource Conservation Service economists, recent chief economist of the Risk Management Agency, CIO of the Agricultural Research Service, and many economists in the OCE.

[8] https://ideas.repec.org/top/top.agr.html#institutions

	the other three top-four agricultural economics agencies in the world all located there. 4. In spring 2018, the secretary announced telework days would be cut to one day per week. The telework cutback increased employees' commuting burden, which the department had cited as a deterrent to recruiting. The telework cutback also reduced employee flexibility in managing family commitments, which harmed the family-friendly approach ERS has successfully used in recruitment. The telework cutback also may increase rent costs because more staff must be housed onsite, reducing the potential for sharing space. By reversing the telework cutback, USDA can address the problems it alleges can only be solved by relocation. 5. The administration may not appreciate the hiring cycle for ERS. New PhDs are recruited between January and March each year, and then join the agency the following fall during the subsequent fiscal year. The job searches authorized have not been timed to this cycle. For the last three budget cycles, ERS was not permitted to meet the optimal recruitment period for PhD candidates, which is between January and March of each year.
Cost savings	1. While there may be cost savings for cost of living and rent, administration after administration has explored such cost savings and ultimately left agencies in Washington, DC. USDA should be required to document the savings. Indeed, USDA backed off the claim in its August 9 press release that "there will be significant savings on employment costs and rent" to say in its September 20 letter to senators Roberts and Stabenow, "there will be potential for saving on employment and facility costs ..." 2. Many other costs should be considered, including relocation/moving costs, early retirement and other buyouts, lease termination costs, travel for staff in new location to Washington, DC, and for HQ staff to new location, and new staff recruitment. For example, it is likely staff in the new location will be required to travel more to effectively partner with World Agricultural Supply and Demand estimates, National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), Bureau of the Census, Congressional Research Service, OMB, the other 12 principal statistical agencies, and others. Travel costs to

	Washington, DC, might also mean less travel to visit stakeholders in other parts of the country. 3. USDA's plan needs to consider impacts to the breadth, quality, and impact of the agency's work due to attrition, lost in-person interactions, distance from key stakeholders, and other factors. In particular, since it is highly likely that a significant share of staff is expected to not relocate and recruiting highly talented staff is costly, the costs associated with recruiting new staff should not be underestimated. 4. According to a September 2018 document responding to ERS employee questions, USDA conducted a cost-benefit analysis that is an "internal deliberative document that will not be published or issued to the public." 5. Congress, stakeholders, and taxpayers deserve an independent entity to do a full and transparent cost-benefit analysis to fully understand the costs, benefits, and other ramifications of the move, as well as the rationale. Any actions should also be delayed until the office of inspector general for the Agriculture Department has completed its probe of the legal basis for the USDA decision to move ERS and NIFA.[9] 6. Congress has provided no funding for a move of ERS in their FY19 appropriations deliberations to date. How would USDA pay for their move? A likely offset for the cost of the move would be ERS programs. If ERS programs are the offset, USDA should explain how they will pay for the move and how this would impact ERS products. 7. Cost savings on rent could be achieved by moving ERS into the USDA South Building once the long-term renovations are completed. Indeed, the FY19 budget request notes "the modernized building will accommodate an increased population."[10] 8. The GSA lease for ERS space runs through March 2026.[11] There is no reason for moving ERS for lease reasons and the process should be slowed to fully understand the rationale for moving ERS and the ramifications of doing so.

[9] https://www.govexec.com/oversight/2018/11/agriculture-watchdog-investigating-secretarys-plan-move-offices-out-dc/152539/

[10] https://www.dm.usda.gov/oo/sb-overview.htm p. 12-9.

[11] https://www.gsa.gov/cdnstatic/FY14_Reg11_LDC02141_files.zip

Proximity to stakeholders: The USDA says ERS needs to be closer to stakeholders	1. Many of ERS's primary stakeholders are in Washington, DC, because its focus is on *national* statistics and research relevant to *national* policies. In particular, the top-tier customers of ERS are other parts of USDA, Congress, and other key policymakers. ERS has a reputation for providing objective economic indicators of agriculture and rural America, and it often does so in collaboration with key USDA partners such as NASS and the World Agricultural Outlook Board, which are largely located in Washington, DC. 2. Moving ERS to a single location outside the national capital area will not bridge any supposed gaps between ERS and farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses, which are distributed broadly across the nation. 3. Because national policy is made in Washington, DC, representatives of all ERS stakeholder groups have offices there. These include major farm and commodity organizations, the food industry, rural development interests, environmental groups, and those concerned with food and nutrition assistance. Instead of moving closer to stakeholders, the department would increase the distance between the agency and key stakeholder advocates attuned to federal matters. 4. USDA has alleged specifically a problem with the current location in terms of interactions with stakeholders. Is USDA receiving criticism about where ERS is located? If there has been criticism, are there improvements that could be made through the current USDA system that includes an efficient and well-functioning extension service and land-grant universities? How would claimed problems of current location be rectified with another location, which might narrow the stakeholder interactions? The scores of organizations that signed a letter to Congress did not indicate any problem with interaction with ERS in Washington, DC. 5. Farmers are one of many audiences of ERS research. ERS helps farmers understand the environment in which they are operating. The results of ERS analysis are widely used by the extension networks of the land grant universities and reach farmers through this important institution and a variety of other outlets such as producer groups and the agricultural media. ERS often plays a role in coordinating state-by-state and regional research that informs extension efforts.

	6. ERS provides the required economic research for every federal agency proposing to assess or repeal regulations. ERS provides the critical backstopping for regulatory analysis through both data development and longer-term analysis that supports short-run analysis within the agencies. This research also must be regarded as accurate and even-handed to withstand policy and legal challenges to the underlying regulations. This collaboration occurs in Washington, DC, where regulatory agencies are based. 7. In addition to the Washington, DC, location as a logical location for a research agency with a national policy mission, location elsewhere may lead to an imbalance in the research portfolio toward the priorities of the issues facing the particular locale chosen. It is widely acknowledged that US agriculture and rural America are highly diverse across geographic space. If ERS researchers are interacting with researchers at nearby institutions, ERS researchers are likely to engage in research activities in which the applications and examples focus on agricultural or rural issues of importance at that particular locale, state, or region. This was the experience of a previous organization of ERS, where a large share of the staff was located at field stations around the land grants. The agendas of those staff often reflected the local issues that were of a lesser priority to an institution with a national policy focus. Hence, ERS leadership decided to end the field staff policy in Washington, DC, in the early 1980s. 8. ERS is already ideally located because of the close collaboration across the principal statistical agencies, all located in the Washington, DC, area. ERS has a particularly close working relationship with its sister agency within REE, the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). Among their many areas of interest, NASS and ERS staff meet regularly (at times daily) to collectively design, collect, and analyze critical data through the Agricultural Resource Management Survey. This same collaboration is critically important for the quinquennial census of agriculture. The proximity of staff facilitates these complex collaborations. Additionally, ERS has engaged in creative initiatives with other principal statistical agencies, namely the Census Bureau and National Center for Health Statistics, to produce timely new

	statistics. This collaboration is facilitated through the proximity of staff location within the Washington, DC, area.
Enhanced Effectiveness: USDA states ERS should be moved from Research, Education, and Economics to Office of the Chief Economist to "enhance the effectiveness of economic analysis at USDA"	1. USDA has not identified any problems with ERS aligned under Research, Education, and Economics and only makes the assertion the realignment will "enhance the effectiveness of economic analysis at USDA." 2. Upon inquiry from Congress, USDA cited in its letter to Senators Roberts and Stabenow a 1999 National Academies' report highlighting "some concerns" with ERS under REE and recommending realignment to OCE. Citing a 19-year-old report appears to be cherry picking. Congress, ERS stakeholders, and taxpayers deserve an up-to-date and independent analysis as noted above. 3. ERS has thrived under REE, achieving its #3 ranking worldwide as noted above. 4. ERS experts consult on a regular basis with the undersecretaries of each mission area and the chief economist to determine what their research and policy analysis needs are and to develop its annual work plan. Relocation to OCE may also compromise its ability to provide support to other mission areas. 5. REE was created by statute by Congress to strengthen and coordinate research to benefit all citizens of the United States. It provides independent research, analysis, and statistics respected widely throughout the US and the world. A role of OCE is to support the secretary's policies. With ERS being in the secretary's office, its objectivity and neutrality is potentially compromised in perception and possibly in reality. It is better to have ERS stay in the information-providing mission of USDA, where it is perceived solely as information providing—not possibly as USDA policy supporting—and where its work can be coordinated, leveraged, and supported by other REE entities. 6. As one of the 13 OMB-designated primary federal statistical agencies, ERS can best serve its mission and stakeholders by staying with NASS in REE—the USDA information-*providing* arm, rather than the policy-*supporting* OCE in the secretary's office. The following guidance from the OMB and National Academies documents this point. We especially emphasize the requirement that a statistical agency must "avoid even

	the appearance that its collection, analysis, and reporting processes might be manipulated for political purposes." OMB Statistical Policy Director Number 1[12] states the following: It is paramount that federal statistical agencies and recognized statistical units produce data that are impartial, clear, and complete and are readily perceived as such by the public. The objectivity of the information released to the public is maximized by making information available on an equitable, policy-neutral, transparent, timely, and punctual basis. Accordingly, federal statistical agencies and recognized statistical units must function in an environment that is clearly separate and autonomous from the other administrative, regulatory, law enforcement, or policy-making activities within their respective departments. Similarly, the National Academy of Science document[13] for federal statistical agencies begins its independence principle section with the following two excerpts: o The reason for a statistical agency to exist is to serve as a trustworthy source of objective, relevant, accurate, and timely information for decision-makers, analysts, and others—both inside and outside the government—to help them understand present conditions, draw comparisons with the past, and guide plans for the future. For these purposes, it is essential that a statistical agency be distinct from those parts of a department that carry out administrative, regulatory, law enforcement, or policymaking activities. It is also essential that a statistical agency have a widely acknowledged position of independence from political and other undue external influence in developing, producing, and disseminating statistics, together with the necessary authority to protect independence.

[12] https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-02/pdf/2014-28326.pdf

[13] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2017. *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency*: Sixth Edition. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. https://doi.org/10.17226/24810.

	○ A statistical agency must be able to execute its mission without being subject to pressures to advance a political agenda. It must be impartial and avoid even the appearance that its collection, analysis, and reporting processes might be manipulated for political purposes or that individually identifiable data collected under a pledge of confidentiality might be turned over for non-statistical purposes. Independence from any undue outside influence is an essential element of credibility with data users and the public and of trust among data providers.

November 13, 2018

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Hoeven and Aderholt and Ranking Members Bishop and Merkley:

We remain very concerned about the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) plans for the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). As you finalize the FY19 spending bill that includes funding for USDA, we respectfully request you specify that no funding be used for relocation or realignment of ERS and that no funding be used for the NIFA relocation beyond that already provided for its relocation within the National Capital Region.

Our fundamental concern is that the proposed relocation and realignment will undermine the quality and breadth of the work these agencies support and perform – work that is vital to informing and supporting US agriculture, food and rural economies. The rationale provided by the USDA for the relocation also fails to identify problems substantive enough to justify such a disruption of ERS's and NIFA's operations. Finally, USDA's decision to move forward with the relocation and realignment without stakeholder and congressional input and without a cost-benefit analysis raises serious concern. We have explained these concerns in numerous letters and will not repeat them here.

We ask that you delay long-distance relocations of ERS and NIFA and the realignment of ERS at least until an independent and comprehensive cost-benefit analysis is completed and then a public hearing is conducted to hear from stakeholders. This delay is necessary in order for Congress and stakeholders to understand the problems USDA seeks to address and the ramifications of the USDA's proposed moves. It would also be informative to study alternative solutions to the problems, once illuminated and better characterized.

The USDA moves have the potential to reverse the significant progress your subcommittees have made in recent years to start revitalizing agricultural research, education, extension, and economics. The setbacks would be particularly acute if the USDA were allowed to proceed with its plan in FY19 and no additional appropriations are provided for relocation. Based on the approximately $20 million provided for NIFA's local move, relocating each agency outside of Washington, DC is likely to cost tens of millions of dollars, costs likely to have to come out of ERS and NIFA programs. We urge you to delay these ill-considered changes that could jeopardize and compromise your good work in recent appropriations bills.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss these issues with you.

Sincerely,

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Agricultural & Applied Economics Association
American Association for Public Opinion Research
American Association of Mycobacterial Diseases
American Dairy Science Association
American Educational Research Association
American Malting Barley Association
American Phytopathological Society
American Public Health Association
American Society for Horticultural Science
American Society for Nutrition
American Society of Animal Science
American Statistical Association
APB Associates
Association of Population Centers
Association of Public Data Users
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association
Center for Food Safety
Center for Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention
Center for Rural Affairs
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation
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Consumer Federation of America
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Food Animal Concerns Trust
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Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
International Center for Technology Assessment
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Maine Farmland Trust
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute
Mycobacterial Diseases of Animals Multi-State Initiative
National Barley Improvement Committee
National Farmers Union
National Organic Coalition
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Turfgrass Federation
National WIC Association
National Young Farmers Coalition
Natural Resources Defense Council
North American Regional Science Council
Northeast Organic Farming Association-Interstate Council
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
Oregon State University Center for Small Farms & Community Food Systems
Organic Farming Research Foundation

Organic Seed Alliance
Pinnacle Prevention
Population Association of America
Restaurant Services, Inc.
Rural Sociological Society
The Common Market
Union of Concerned Scientists
US Dairy Forage Research Center Stakeholders
World Perspectives, Inc.
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

October 10, 2018

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Hoeven and Aderholt and Ranking Members Bishop and Merkley:

We thank you for your attention to the USDA proposal for the Economic Research Service and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. With USDA funded through December 7 on a continuing resolution, we write to respectfully request you exercise your authorities to convey to USDA that it not take any action to implement any part of the relocations and realignment prior to your action on a final bill.

There are many questions in the USDA community about the justification, rapid timeline, and the ramifications of the moves. We believe the justifications and ramifications should be thoroughly examined and understood before USDA moves forward with either the reorganization or the relocations.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss these issues with you.

Sincerely,
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Agricultural & Applied Economics Association
American Association for Public Opinion Research
American Association of Mycobacterial Diseases
American Dairy Science Association
American Malting Barley Association

American Phytopathological Society
American Society for Nutrition
American Society of Agronomy
American Society of Animal Science
American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers
American Statistical Association
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges
Association of Population Centers
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Center for Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention
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Mycobacterial Diseases of Animals Multi-State Initiative
National Barley Improvement Committee
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National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Turfgrass Federation
National WIC Association
National Young Farmers Coalition
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North American Regional Science Council
Organic Seed Alliance
Population Association of America
Rural Sociological Society
Soil Science Society of America
Union of Concerned Scientists
University of Illinois, Department of Agricultural & Consumer Economics
WineAmerica
World Perspectives, Inc.

The Honorable K. Michael Conaway
Chair, Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chair, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

October 2, 2018[1]

Dear Chairs Roberts and Conaway and Ranking Members Stabenow and Peterson:

We, the undersigned groups, write to respectfully oppose the USDA's proposed move of the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) outside of the national Capitol area as well as the realignment of the agency out of the USDA's Research, Education and Economics Mission Area.

The ERS is renowned for its intramural and extramural applied social science research and is ranked third globally as an institution of agricultural economics.[2] The ERS provides high-quality research to inform evidence-based policymaking in the USDA and more broadly in food and agriculture. We have serious concerns that its realignment and relocation out of the Washington, D.C. area would jeopardize the ERS's products, relevance, and timeliness.

To maintain the ERS as the influential, high-quality agency it is, we, the undersigned, respectfully urge the following:

Retain the ERS in the national Capitol region. Relocating the ERS out of the Washington area will certainly mean a significant loss of experienced staff, which, in turn, will jeopardize the ERS operations for, potentially, years to come. Further, there are many strategic reasons to have the ERS in the Washington area, including maintenance of its strong connection with the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and other parts of the USDA, locality to its product users, staff recruitment and retention, and integration with the 12 other primary federal statistical agencies.

Maintain and strengthen the integrity and independence of the ERS as a statistical agency. USDA's ERS, along with the NASS, is one of the two agencies at the USDA that are designated by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as "principal statistical agencies." It is imperative that the ERS is—and, just as importantly, is perceived to be—an independent agency whose work is respected widely. We are concerned that the move out of Research, Education, and Economics (REE) to a more policy-oriented part of the USDA will jeopardize the ERS's autonomy in this regard. For

[1] This letter was originally sent August 28 and is being updated ass additional signers are added.
[2] https://ideas.repec.org/top/top.agr.html#institutions.

this reason and to take full advantage of the ERS's synergies with the other REE agencies, we urge the ERS remain in REE. Regardless of the ultimate decision, we urge the protections of the ERS as an independent agency be strengthened. It is imperative the ERS Administrator is protected from improper outside influence. Further, the Administrator should be a person with unimpeachably excellent economic research credentials

Keep the budget and personnel for the USDA Economic Research Service *at least* at FY 2018 levels. We ask that you support the ERS and other research, extension, and integrated economics programs at sustainable levels, e.g., those outlined in FY 2018 and above. This would mean that there would be no personnel reductions (as of September 30, 2017, there were 322 permanent full-time employees). If a permanent full-time employee retires, they would be replaced within a year. Finally, we ask that there be no cuts to data and statistical resources. These resource, information, and research programs are critical for the agricultural, food, and resource economies of rural America.

Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

NB. Many of the signers on this letter are members of the Friends of Agricultural Statistics and Analysis. Questions about this letter should be addressed to agricultural.statistics@gmail.com

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Agricultural and Applied Economics Association
American Association for Public Opinion Research
American Association of Mycobacterial Diseases
American Dairy Science Association
American Educational Research Association
American Malting Barley Association
American Phytopathological Society
American Society for Nutrition
American Statistical Association
Antibiotic Resistance Action Center, George Washington University
APB Associates
Association for University Business & Economic Research
Association of Population Centers
Association of Public Data Users
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges
Center for Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention
Center for Rural Affairs
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation

Consortium of Social Science Associations
Decision Demographics
Department of Agricultural Business, California State University, Fresno
Entomological Society of America
FASS, Inc
Food Animal Concerns Trust
Food & Water Watch
Global Harvest Initiative
Hop Growers of America
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Land for Good
Mathematical Association of America
Michigan State University, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources
Mycobacterial Disease of Animals Multistate Initiative
National Association for Business Economics
National Family Farm Coalition
National Organic Coalition
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Turfgrass Federation, Inc.
National Young Farmers Coalition
National WIC Association
North American Regional Science Council
Northeast Organic Farming Association
Organic Farming Research Foundation
Organic Seed Alliance
Ornithological Council
Pinnacle Prevention
Population Association of America
Restaurant Services, Inc.
Rural Sociological Society
Southeast Michigan Census Council
Union of Concerned Scientists
US Dairy Forage Research Center Stakeholder Committee
World Perspectives, Inc.

October 9, 2018

The Honorable K. Michael Conaway
Chair, Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chair, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Roberts and Conaway and Ranking Members Stabenow and Peterson,

Recently, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) proposed to move the Economic Research Service (ERS) out of the DC geographic area and place it organizationally under the Office of the Chief Economist. As one of the principal federal statistical agencies, ERS provides Congress, state and local governments, and the commodity community with critical research and data on agricultural and rural communities. Removing the agency from the Washington, DC, area poses risks to the quality and relevance of the information ERS produces.

As former senior administration officials and heads of statistical agencies invested in informing evidence-based policy decisions, our primary concerns are the following:

1. **Retaining staff expertise**
   While current professional staff members will be offered the opportunity to retain their positions, it is anticipated that many will not move. ERS has already lost a respected and effective administrator. Staff attrition will dilute valuable organizational knowledge and expertise and damage established networks, even if newly vacated positions are filled.

2. **Continuing valuable collaborations**
   ERS is one of the principal federal statistical agencies, all of which are in the DC area. ERS has an integrated approach to its broad research portfolio, in part due to its ability to collaborate. Locating it far from its collaborators, both within and outside the USDA, will severely limit its contributions to important activities such as the Agricultural Resource Management Survey, which is carried out in cooperation with the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

3. **Maintaining visibility with policymakers**
   ERS currently responds efficiently and effectively to requests from Congress and other agencies. ERS provides timely and relevant economic research and analysis to inform

important policy decisions. Removing ERS from its proximity to key consumers means policy decisions may be made without the best analysis available, to the detriment of some of our nation's most vulnerable communities.

4. **Risks to independence and credibility**
The federal statistical agencies provide relevant, accurate, and timely information. Removing ERS from its position in the Research Education and Economics Mission Area to place it under the USDA chief economist jeopardizes its independence as a research agency and increases the potential for interference in the direction, design, analysis, and release of studies and reports. It threatens the independence and credibility necessary for a federal statistical agency to function objectively.

ERS is ranked as number three in the world of institutions in the field of agricultural economics, a reflection of our leadership in economic research. This proposal puts a world-renowned research agency at risk and could set back the federal statistical system at a time when the United States should be leading the world in innovation. In closing, we urge you to keep ERS in the Research Education and Economics Mission Area within the USDA and to keep the agency in the Capital region.

Sincerely,

Katharine G. Abraham, Commissioner, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Oct. 1993 – Oct. 2001

Vincent Barabba, Director, U.S. Census Bureau, July 1973 – Nov. 1976, July 1979 – Jan. 1980

William Barron, Deputy Commissioner, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1983 – 1998; Deputy Director, U.S. Census Bureau, 1999 – 2002

Donald Bay, Administrator, National Agriculture Statistics Service, USDA, 1992 – 1999

William T. Boehm, Branch Chief, Food Economics, ERS, USDA; Senior Economist, Council of Economic Advisors, 1976 – 1981

Raymond R. Bosecker, Administrator, National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA, 1999 – 2008

Gale Buchanan, Chief Scientist and Undersecretary for Research, Education, and Economics, USDA, 2006 – 2009

Jack Buckley, Commissioner, National Center for Education Statistics, 2011 – 2013

Carol S. Carson, Director, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Commerce Department, 1992 – 1995

Kevin W. Concannon, Undersecretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services, USDA, 2009 – 2017

Lynda T. Carlson, Director, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2000 – 2012

Guy Caruso, Administrator, Energy Information Administration, 2002 – 2008

Cynthia Z.F. Clark, Administrator, National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA, 2008 – 2014

Neilson Conklin, Director, Market and Trade Economics Division, Economic Research Service, USDA, 1999 – 2008

Stephen R. Crutchfield, Assistant Administrator and Staff Analysis Coordinator, Economic Research Service, USDA, 2007 – 2016

Emerson J. Elliott, Commissioner, National Center for Education Statistics, 1984 – 1995

Martha Farnsworth Riche, Director, U.S. Census Bureau, 1996 – 1999

Philip N. Fulton, Associate Administrator, Economic Research Service, USDA, 2000 – 2005

John R. Gawalt, Director, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2012 – 2018

Erica Groshen, Commissioner, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011 – 2013

Hermann Habermann, Chief Statistician of the United States, U.S. Office of Management and Budget, 1988 – 1992

Jay Hakes, Administrator, U.S. Energy Information Administration, 1993 – 2000

George Hoffman, Associate Administrator, Economic Research Service, USDA, 1980 – 1984

Carol C. House, Deputy Administrator, National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA, 2006 – 2010

John R. Kort, Associate Administrator and Acting Administrator, Economic Research Service, USDA, 2008 – 2011

John Lee, Administrator, Economic Research Service, USDA, 1982 – 1993

James Lynch, Director, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010 – 2013

Tom Mesenbourg, Deputy Director, U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 – 2013

Elsa Murano, Undersecretary for Food Safety, Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA, 2001 – 2004

Steve Murdoch, Director, U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 – 2009

Richard Newell, Administrator, Energy Information Administration, 2009 – 2011

Susan Offutt, Administrator, Economic Research Service, USDA, 1996 – 2006

Gregory L. Parham, Assistant Secretary, Departmental Administration and Administrator, USDA, 2013 – 2017

Thomas Petska, Director, Statistics of Income Division, Internal Revenue Service, 2001 – 2009

Robin Picanso, Associate Administrator, National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA, 2014 – 2017

Susan Powers, Director, Statistics of Income, Internal Revenue Service, 2010 – 2014

Kenneth Prewitt, Director, U.S. Census Bureau, 1998 – 2001

Joe Reilly, Administrator, National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA, 2014 – 2016

Richard E. Rominger, Deputy Secretary, USDA, 1993 – 2001

Philip L. Rones, Deputy Commissioner, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2003 – 2011

William J. Sabol, Director, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014 – 2016

Fritz Scheuren, Director, Statistics of Income, Internal Revenue Service, 1980 – 1994

John A. Schnittker, Undersecretary and Deputy Secretary, USDA, 1965 – 1969

Jeffrey L. Sedgwick, Director, Bureau of Justice Statistics, United States Department of Justice, 2006 – 2008

Katherine Smith Evans, Administrator, Economic Research Service, 2007 – 2011

Edward J. Sondik, Director, National Center for Health Statistics, CDC/DHHS, 1996 – 2013

Angie Tagtow, Executive Director, Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, USDA, 2014 – 2017

Michael R. Taylor, Administrator, Food Safety and Inspection Service and Acting Undersecretary for Food Safety, USDA, 1994 – 1996

John Thompson, Director, U.S. Census Bureau, 2013 – 2017

Robert L. Thompson, Assistant Secretary for Economics, USDA, 1985 – 1987

Laurian Unnevehr, Director, Food Economics, Economic Research Service, USDA, 2008 – 2012

Katherine K. Wallman, Chief Statistician of the United States, U.S. Office of Management and Budget, 1992 – 2017

Shirley Robinson Watkins, Secretary of Agriculture for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services, USDA, 1997 – 2001

James C. Webster, Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs, USDA, 1977 – 1981

Kathryn Wilson, Deputy Undersecretary, Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services, USDA, 2015 – 2017

Catherine E. Woteki, Chief Scientist and Undersecretary for Research, Education, and Economics, USDA, 2010 – 2016

ASA
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www.facebook.com/AmstatNews www.twitter.com/AmstatNews

August 22, 2018

The Honorable K. Michael Conaway
Chair, Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chair, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Roberts and Conaway and Ranking Members Stabenow and Peterson,

I write as president of the American Statistical Association (ASA) to respectfully request you exercise your authority to maintain the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) as a strong and independent statistical agency. We have serious concerns that the August 9 USDA proposal to organizationally realign and relocate ERS out of the Washington area will undermine ERS work and product quality. This proposal will reduce ERS's ability to contribute to evidence-based policymaking in the USDA and, more broadly, for food, agriculture, and the environment.

The ERS is ranked #3 in the world of institutions in the field of agricultural economics (out of 2,512 institutions).[1] Given the portion of the U.S. economy dealing with food, agriculture, and the environment, along with the importance of these areas to our health and well-being, ERS should be kept in the Washington area and under the Research, Education, and Economics Mission Area to maintain its independence and premier work.

The ERS also should stay in the Washington area to maintain the quality and relevance of its work. A sizable portion of the 330 ERS employees will not have the wherewithal to or interest in relocating their families outside the Washington area. The resulting staff loss due to the relocation will likely jeopardize ERS's quality work for decades. The ERS should also stay in the Washington area to remain close to its primary clients. This will ensure continued close and necessary collaboration with the National Agricultural Statistics Service, Agricultural Research Service, and other USDA agencies. It will also ensure

[1] https://ideas.repec.org/top/top.agr.html#institutions

close coordination and contribute more effectively to efficiencies and best practices within the 12 major federal statistical system agencies, which are all within the Washington area.

The ERS should remain in the USDA Research, Education, and Economics (REE) Mission Area and not be moved to the Office of the Chief Economist (OCE). REE is the information-producing arm of the USDA that informs the work of not just the USDA, but also the food and agriculture community more broadly. Reporting to the OCE would jeopardize ERS's decades-long standing as an independent and credible statistical agency (a standing granted by the Office of Management and Budget), because one of OCE's roles is to support the position of the Secretary of Agriculture. It is also important to keep ERS in REE to ensure its research portfolio remains broad and sufficiently interdisciplinary.

We ask you to reject this proposal so ERS can continue producing its products at the same high quality and with the same credibility, relevance to national discussions, and timeliness.

Please see the attachment for elaboration on the ASA's concerns for this move.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa LaVange

Lisa LaVange, Ph.D.

CC:
The Honorable Sonny Perdue, Secretary, US Department of Agriculture
Members of the House Committee on Agriculture and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

An identical version of this letter was sent to the leadership of the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies and copied to its members.

Attachment: Elaborating on concerns of relocating and realigning ERS

The American Statistical Association's concern for the quality of ERS work and its ability to support evidence-based policymaking at USDA arises for several reasons. Primary among them, ERS is sure to lose a substantial portion of its staff who are not willing or able to relocate outside of the Washington, DC, area. The ERS is composed of a unique combination of staff—including those with expertise or training in economics, agriculture, sociology, nutrition, agricultural economics, and statistics—that is effective because of the staff members' interdisciplinarity. We believe there is a strong likelihood the ERS relocation outside the Washington area would jeopardize ERS's ability to maintain its quality work for years to come because of the staff loss. Just as it has taken years to build such a staff, it would take years to rebuild it in another location.

We are also concerned about the move out of Research, Education, and Economics (REE) to the chief economist's office beyond the policy-informing versus policy-support roles discussed in our letter. The ERS mission is well aligned with the other components of REE and contributes to the portfolio's overall value. In particular, as transdisciplinary research becomes ever more important to solving grand challenges, it is beneficial to have the economics and social science research from ERS informing the physical and biology research supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture and Agricultural Research Service. Such synergistic activity is best facilitated by having all the agencies within REE.

Further, it is critical for ERS to maintain its status as an independent federal statistical agency so its products are viewed as objective and credible by all stakeholders. The relevant guidance for a federal statistical agency, as you know, is laid out in Office of Management and Budget (OMB) policy directives—especially Statistical Policy Directive #1—and in the National Academies' *Principles and Practices of a Federal Statistical Agency*.

We also believe in the following strong justifications for keeping ERS in the Washington, DC, area:

- Many of ERS's primary product users, including USDA, are in Washington. It is sensible that ERS remain near such users of its products to interact first hand. As one example, when the Interagency Commodity Estimates Committees meet to develop the World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates report, ERS should be present.
- The location facilitates the close collaboration between ERS and the National Agricultural Statistics Service on the Agricultural Resource Management Survey and other programs.
- As one of 13 primary federal statistical agencies in a distributed statistical system, all of which are located in the Washington area, ERS's integration to the broader system is facilitated in part by proximity. Under the guidance and coordination of the OMB chief statistician's office, these agencies are in regular contact on joint projects, best practices, and shared challenges. Indeed, ERS has been a leader in taking advantage of new data sources and addressing challenges facing all the agencies. Locating ERS out of the Washington area puts ERS at risk of alienation from the other federal statistical agencies, which could jeopardize the quality of its work.
- As a federal statistical agency, ERS is bound by the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA) and the OMB Statistical Policy Directive (SP) #1, which affords ERS its authority to collect data among other benefits and protections. The chief statistician's

office assures each agency's compliance with CIPSEA and SP #1. ERS should remain in the Washington area to facilitate ERS maintenance of its CIPSEA status.

We are also concerned about the scant justification provided for this move. USDA stated that ERS's staff average annual attrition rate over the last five years being higher than that of USDA—16.5% versus 12.0% for USDA—is the problem they are trying to address. Despite years of interaction with ERS, this is the first we or other ERS stakeholders have heard of staff attrition being such a problem. Further, it is far from clear that recruitment and attrition will not be a problem in another location. Indeed, the Washington area has many advantages for staff recruitment and retention. We are also concerned with the speed at which USDA seeks to execute this proposal. Such a move with the risks detailed above deserves careful consideration.

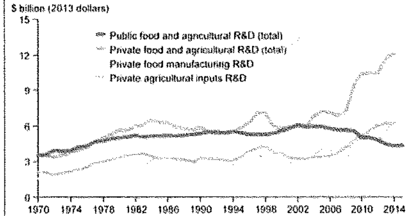
Testimony of Catherine E. Woteki, Ph.D.
Senate Agriculture Committee
July 18, 2019

I am Catherine Woteki and from 2010-2016 I held the position of Chief Scientist and Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics (REE) at USDA. In that capacity, I had direct oversight responsibility for the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) as well as for the Agricultural Research Service and the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

I am opposed to the Secretary's proposal to relocate ERS and NIFA and believe that it will significantly weaken the scientific enterprise that is so critical to America's food, economic and national security. The location of the four agricultural research and statistical agencies in Washington, DC is important to their ability to carry out their missions. The analysis of costs and benefits provided by the Department is inadequate and only provided after its decision was made. Enormous damage is being done to the agencies' functional capacity. I also believe that the proposed relocation of the agencies should be considered together with the President's budget request for FY 2020 which proposed major reductions in funding and staff in ERS. Taken together, they indicate a lack of commitment to strengthen agricultural research and deliberately undermine America's ability to address the looming threats to our food security and economic vitality.

The major reason that I oppose this proposal is that the biggest problem facing agricultural research and statistics is <u>not</u> the location of the agencies, rather it is the historic disinvestment in public funding that has occurred over the last 30 years. As shown in the graph below, the current level of funding for agriculture, food and natural resources research is less than in the 1980's as measured in inflation-adjusted dollars.

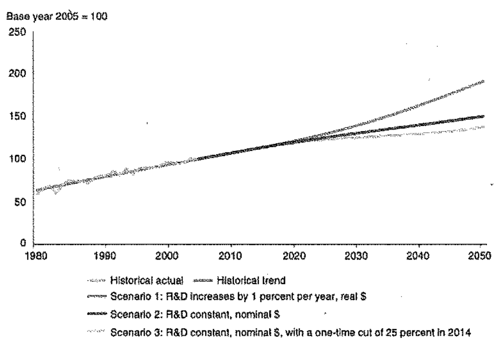
Food and agricultural research and development (R&D) funding, real (inflation-adjusted) dollars, 1970-2015



Note: Private agricultural research funding data are through 2014; public agricultural research funding is available through 2015.
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service (ERS) using data from National Science Foundation, USDA's Current Research Information System, and various private sector data sources. Data are adjusted for inflation using an index for agricultural research spending developed by ERS. Data as of February 2019.

Both Federal funding and state funding to support agricultural research have stagnated and the end result is that the US is in danger of losing its leadership role in areas critical to our long-term welfare. This has implications for farmers and for our national security because since World War II, productivity growth in the farm sector has come almost exclusively from science-based innovation or what economists call total factor productivity. Based on ERS research, we can expect little change in US farm sector's total factor productivity over the next few years, but beyond that it is expected to slow and how much our agricultural productivity will be harmed depends on the current and future amount of public investment in research.

Projected agricultural TFP growth based on alternative research investment scenarios moved closely in the first decade before diverging at an accelerating rate



R&D = Research and development. TFP = Total factor productivity.
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service based on Heisey et al. (2011) and Wang et al. (2012).

In the meantime, some of our rivals have made substantial investments in agricultural research. China's investment now surpasses ours. For the time being, the US is maintaining its scientific preeminence in agricultural fields as measured in publications, citations and patents, but each year we are losing ground to other countries that are providing more public support for agricultural research.

All of this has long-term implications for the national security of the United States. The 2019 Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community[1] identifies the erosion of the US lead in science and technology as one of ten global threats because research produces disruptive technologies and threats to economic competitiveness. The assessment calls out rapid advances in biotechnology, including gene editing and synthetic biology, as posing new economic, ethical and regulatory challenges. At the same time that these technologies hold great promise for agriculture, they also introduce risks as adversaries may use them to develop biological warfare agents and threaten food security. A second global threat pertinent to agriculture is environmental and ecological degradation that is likely to fuel competition for resources, economic distress, and social discontent now and in the future. Drought, floods, wildfires, and soil degradation are intensifying and threatening food security on a global scale which in turn spur social unrest, migration and tension between countries. Agricultural research to develop resilient agricultural systems is key to being able to respond to more unpredictable and extreme weather patterns and provide for long-term food security at home and abroad.

Finally, moving ERS and NIFA will cause loss of key staff that will take many years to recruit and train. Since the Secretary's announcement last August, the agencies report losing 3-5 employees a week. Now that employees have had to decide whether they will relocate to Kansas City, we can expect announcement of further attrition. These are highly specialized jobs that require training and experience to perform and we are losing capacity to perform the agencies' key functions even before the relocation site is identified.

In conclusion, I want to thank the members of this committee for holding this oversight hearing and providing the opportunity for me to share my views on what I consider to be a proposal that is ill-considered and terribly damaging to our long term future.

[1] Coats, D.R. Statement for the Record, Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 29, 2019. https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/2019-ATA-SFR---SSCI.pdf

July 15, 2019

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow:

Thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns regarding the relocation of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and the Economic Research Service (ERS) out of Washington, DC. Having retired many years ago, some would say, "I don't have a dog in this fight". However, I still care deeply about the future success of agricultural research and education programs that support American agriculture. I think they are very important and should be nurtured and supported and only changed with a great deal of care and after careful study.

I'm reminded that soon after the passage of the Morrill Land-grant Act of 1862 that provided for the nation's land-grant university system, it was discovered that if we were going to teach agriculture, there was a need for more information to teach. Such information could only come about through dedicated research. There was much discussion by groups across many states about how to accomplish such a goal. One of the first meetings to discuss agricultural research occurred in 1871 in Chicago. After a 10-year hiatus, the Chicago meeting was followed by meetings in 1881 in Michigan, 1882 in Iowa, 1883 in Ohio, 1884 in New York, and 1885 in Indiana. Finally, legislation providing support for agricultural research was sponsored in the US House of Representatives by William Henry Hatch of Missouri and in the U.S. Senate by Sen. J.Z. George of Mississippi. This legislation, usually referred to as the "Hatch Act of 1887", provided for the state agricultural experimentation system that we have today. By the time this legislation passed, 14 states had already established some form of agricultural experiment Station system. All of this is to say our agricultural research system was created quite deliberately over a considerable period of time with a great deal of thought and input by all concerned parties. This is in sharp contrast to the approach by Secretary Perdue who is making fundamental changes in this important system with little or no careful study, analysis, or input from anyone. Apparently, he has not considered any alternatives to achieve his goals. He has done this essentially with no support by those engaged in the agricultural research process.

I take no pride in opposing Secretary Perdue. Indeed, I consider him a friend that I've known for many years. I got to know him quite well especially while I served as Dean and Director of the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences at the University of Georgia. I recognize him as a leading agribusiness man, state senator, and, finally, as governor of our state. He was always supportive of the programs that I had responsibility for at the University of Georgia. When his appointment was announced, I conveyed to many of my former dean and director colleagues from across the country that I thought President Trump had made an excellent choice in selecting Governor Perdue as the next secretary of agriculture. I thought he would be an outstanding secretary similar to that of Secretary Johann, Secretary Schaefer, and acting Secretary Conner. In President George W. Bush's administration these were, of course, secretaries that I served under while I was chief scientist and Undersecretary for Research, Education, and Economics. Obviously, I have great regard and respect for Secretary Perdue. I would never oppose Secretary Perdue, unless I truly believed this action would not be in the best interest of agriculture research and education programs. Unfortunately, I think this proposed relocation will be extremely counterproductive for our agricultural research system in this country.

My reasons and rationale for opposing this relocation are well documented by articles, op-ed's, webinars, testimony, and comments by me and many of my colleagues (see attached). Consequently, I will not restate my rationale for opposition in this letter.

I hope that you and your colleagues can find a workable solution that will address the Secretary's concern as well as ensure the continued integrity of our agricultural research system. I propose that the USDA and the Association of public and land-grant universities (APLU) jointly request a study by the National Academies of Science who could convene a truly blue-ribbon, inclusive panel to review and study our agricultural research system. They could make recommendations for the best course of action that would address the Secretary's relocation plans as well as other aspects of our agricultural research system.

As noted in my book, "Feeding the World: Agricultural Research in the Twenty-First Century", I think we are overdue for a comprehensive review of our agricultural research system. This would be an opportune time to address the Secretary's concerns as well as address the overall nature of agriculture research.

While I represent only myself I can say that I will be supportive of the findings and recommendations of such a distinguished review panel.

Again, thank you for the opportunity for providing input regarding this important matter.

Gale A. Buchanan
Former USDA Chief Scientist and
Under Secretary of Agriculture
for Research, Education & Economics,
Dean and Director Emeritus, University of Georgia
College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

Work: (229) 386-7057
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Enclosures:

- List of commentaries by USDA stakeholders expressing concern with and opposition to ERS and NIFA relocation.
- Letter from 80 current and former university administrative heads and CARET delegates

Commentary on the UDSA ERS/NIFA Moves by Members of the Stakeholder Community

1. USDA's plans threaten the integrity and viability of data that farmers need, Katherine Wallman, Des Moines Register, July 3, 2019.
   Former Chief Statistician of the US Katherine Wallman says "headlong rush to disrupt the service appears to be a political act designed to undermine the nonpartisan economists at ERS" and explains why we should all be alarmed. Key exceprts include the following,

   - "Policies built on objective data and credible analyses serve all of us by eliminating political whims from the equation."
   - "Government statistics level the playing field by giving everyone — Republican and Democrat, family farmer and agribusiness — the same set of facts."
   - "Real or perceived political influence on the work of our historically independent, autonomous statistical agencies hurts us all. It erodes our ability to recruit and retain the best experts and shatters the trust of people who depend on the data."

2. This is not the way to move USDA agencies out of Washington, Scott Swinton, *The Hill*, July 2.
   Past president of the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association (AAEA) Scott Swinton discusses an AAEA cost-benefit analysis that he co-authored and that found the ERS/NIFA moves would end up costing taxpayers money because of the high cost of replacing the many experienced and highly specialized staff not making the move. Stating that as important in discussing whether a move is sensible is focusing on how this move has been planned and implemented. He concludes, "this move fails the benefit-cost test." Key excerpts include the following,

   - "The sad truth is that if done right, the relocation of the ERS and NIFA outside of Washington, might have made sense for America's taxpayers, farmers and food consumers."
   - "Many organizations with highly skilled employees make special efforts to retain experienced staff. A common way to do that while moving is to open a branch office and to entice seasoned employees to move with attractive incentives and time to work out the details."
   - "Had the consideration of an agency move begun as a planning process that engaged agency staff to weigh the benefits and costs of moving, they would have been aware, and they would have felt included and valued. Instead, they felt alarmed and alienated when Purdue announced on Aug. 8, 2018, that they would be relocated."

3. Colorado's food system relies on a strong USDA research base, Laurian Unnevehr and Dawn Thilmany, *The [Grand Junction] Daily Sentinel*, June 23, 2019.
   Colorado State University faculty Thilmany and Unnevehr warn against the ERS move because of how it will diminish research and analysis vital to food and agriculture. Key excerpts include the following,

- "this small USDA agency is seemingly under attack within this administration, for no apparent reason other than doing the job of providing sound information to policy makers."
- "Moreover, bringing the agency closer to stakeholders in one state means that its research is less focused on the needs in the other 49 states."
- "the analysis of cost-savings failed to consider lower cost locations within the capital region, or the substantial up-front costs of relocating hundreds of staff within a few months, in addition to disrupting important price and market reports through the harvest season."
- "Colorado farmers and ranchers need the best support possible as they face all the challenges inherent in a variable climate and an evolving set of local and global demand conditions."
- "A strong national data and research system is particularly important to a state like ours, where agriculture is diverse and faces unique environmental challenges. Now is the time for a stronger agricultural research system, not for dismantling key pieces."

4. At Trump's Agriculture Department, science is being plowed under, Gale A. Buchanan and Catherine E. Woteki, *Washington Post*, June 7, 2019.
   Former USDA Chief Scientists and Undersecretaries Buchanan and Woteki express their deep concerned about the harm being done to scientific integrity at USDA with the ERS/NIFA moves and several other developments. Key excerpts include the following,

   - "Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue appears to be taking a multipronged approach toward dismantling the science that for years has undergirded policy decisions."
   - "Policymakers in Congress and America's farmers will lack the sound science they need to make decisions about how best to feed the nation, improve the rural economy and bolster U.S. agricultural exports."
   - "Food and agriculture in the United States face perennial challenges from a multitude of sources: pests, diseases, droughts, flooding, brutally competitive markets and trade disputes. It is disheartening to think that the science underpinning these vital contributors to the U.S. economy, and to the health and well-being of every American, is under threat from the very government department overseeing them."

5. Agriculture Department plans for feeding the nation miss the mark, Gale A. Buchanan, *The Hill*, June 6, 2019.
   Former USDA Chief Scientist and Undersecretary Buchanan points out Secretary Perdue's "Fire, Aim, Ready" approach to moving ERS and NIF and explains how the backwards approach will hurt American food and agricultural research. Key excerpts include the following,

   - "With any new administration, preparation should have included a thorough process to understand the Agriculture Department research arm, its strengths and weaknesses, and its stakeholders, not to mention the major agricultural challenges being addressed."
   - "For the same reason the federal government has strong research programs in health, defense, and energy, we need strong research programs for our $1 trillion food and agriculture industry."

- "It is essential that we maintain the vitality and competitiveness of our commodities, which in turn will keep our farms and rural economies vibrant and flourishing."
- "It is true we will still be able to buy groceries at our local stores, however, we need to be concerned about the long term challenges of feeding and nourishing 40 percent to 50 percent more people in the world in the next 30 years on the same amount of land."
- "I see little in current plans by the Agriculture Department to help our nation in any of these areas. In fact, I see the opposite. My resistance and that of the rest of the vocal opposition is not fear of change."
- "The backwards "fire, aim, ready" without preparation approach under Secretary Perdue is not good government. To ensure the success of our farmers, our food supply and safety, and rural areas, the Agriculture Department should heed a common sense approach by withdrawing its plans and fully preparing."

6. Time for USDA and Agricultural Research Community to Unite to Tackle Food and Ag Challenges, Gale A. Buchanan, *Agri-Pulse*, May 29, 2019.
Former USDA Chief Scientist and Undersecretary Buchanan says the USDA proposal has created an unfortunate and unnecessary conflict between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the agricultural research community. He proposes to USDA and the agricultural research community unite to form a joint commission to plot a course for agriculture research in this country. Key excerpts include the following,

    - "Our agricultural research system needs to be reenergized."
    - "Agricultural research is far too important to be the subject of conflict between the secretary of agriculture and the agricultural research community. We have enough challenges without expending any energy on this fight."
    - "Such an effort could truly be a legacy for the Secretary. This would turn what is now a problem into a golden opportunity."
    - "Such an approach has proved productive and transformational in the past."
    - "The intent of my proposal is to stop fighting and work together to make the system be all that it can be."

7. Moving food feds out of D.C. hurts Florida farms, Jack Payne, *Orlando Sentinel*, May 8, 2019.
University of Florida's Senior Vice President For Agriculture and Natural Resources Jack Payne explains how the move of ERS and NIFA outside of the US hurts Florida agriculture and that of all the other states that don't ultimately host the two agencies. Key excerpts include the following,
    - "Other nations have lower labor costs and fewer environmental regulations. Florida farmers' edge is innovation. They keep ahead of global competitors with science and technology to produce locally grown food you can afford."
    - "ERS and NIFA's D.C. addresses keep their focus national and not partial to a particular region and its commodities. The Founding Fathers established the District of Columbia in the first place to create a neutral ground for states to conduct national affairs."
    - "Those who would relocate USDA also contend that the lower cost of living of a remote location would help it attract talent. Amazon doesn't think so."
    - "Such a brain drain would set back the work of NIFA and ERS by years."

8. The botched plan to 'fix' USDA's research arm, Steve Pierson, *The Hill*, December 21, 2018. American Statistical Association Director of Science Policy Steve Pierson explains how USDA justification for the move doesn't add up and how USDA is skirting sound government practices.

   Key excerpts include the following,

   - "USDA's decision not to engage OPM or the Economic Research Service leadership isn't the only instance of the department skirting good-government practice."
   - "the move will likely make recruitment more difficult and undermine the quality, relevance, and timeliness of the agency's work to inform evidence-based policymaking across our $1 trillion food, agriculture and rural economies."
   - "If USDA wants to worry about attrition, they should be much more concerned about the brain drain that will result from moving the agency outside of D.C."
   - "Congress should exercise its oversight responsibilities and stop USDA's plans."

9. Opinion: Florida Benefits if the USDA moves its agencies to...Fargo?, Gale Buchanan, *Tallahassee Democrat*, December 17 2018.
   Former USDA Chief Scientist and Undersecretary Gale Buchanan says any relocation of ERS disadvantage states and land-grant universities across the country. Key excerpts include the following,

   - "As former USDA chief scientist appointed by President George W. Bush, I urge we harken the words of wisdom attributed to a Southern farmer: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."
   - "All signs point to this proposal [to relocate ERS] being counterproductive"
   - "We're all used to hearing that Washington is broken – sometimes metaphorically, sometimes literally. But our government support structure for agriculture is far from broken; in fact, it is the envy of the world."

10. Selling off USDA research agency to the highest bidder is a mistake, John E. Lee, Jr, *The Hill*, November 24 2018.
    Past administrator of the Economic Research Service under President Reagan and President George H.W. Bush describes his view that relocating ERS will be a long-term negative for USDA. Key excepts include the following,

    - "USDA's proposal will be a long-term negative for the department."
    - "A major physical move that causes the loss of many experienced staff would cripple the agency and mean years of re-building and training to regain its present eminence. The secretary and the Congress should reconsider this counterproductive move."
    - "Moving ERS out of the Washington area will move it away from its most direct stakeholders."

11. Opinion: Fargo or Kansas City could "win" the USDA economic research agency but the country will lose, Susan Offutt, *The Hill*, October 15, 2018.

Past administrator of the Economic Research Service under Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush says an independent assessment of the proposed rationale to relocate ERS must take place to examine potential consequences. Key excerpts include the following,

- "[Relocation of ERS] should be halted pending an independent assessment of the rationale for the potential consequences of realignment and relocation of ERS. Too much is at stake for the agriculture, food, and rural economy to take the drastic actions the USDA proposes without such as assessment"
- "[Relocation of ERS] was not previously discussed with the Congress or those in the public and private sectors who use and rely on the agency's work. Subsequently, the Department has moved with uncharacteristic speed to implement its plan since it was announced in August."
- "The August pronouncement comes on the heels of the Administration's February budget proposal to cut the agency's funding in half, which would eliminate most of the agency's analyses on policy topics in food and nutrition, the environment, and rural development"

12. Opinion: Buchanan to USDA on research move: slow down and do careful study, Slashing Food Research Funding Is a Mistake, Gale Buchanan, *Agri-Pulse,* September 28 2018.
Former USDA Chief Scientist and Undersecretary Gale Buchanan says any relocation of ERS should involve careful analysis and study. Key excerpts include the following,

    - "Our agricultural research enterprise is far too important to our country and civilization to offer such far-reaching changes as the Secretary has proposed without careful study and analysis"
    - "For the past half-century many agricultural research leaders have been working to more fully integrate agricultural research in the national scientific community. Such integration is key to sustaining the knowledge-based productivity gains. We have made much progress but still have a long way to go to be considered equal players in the research community in Washington"
    - "I would encourage the administration to slow down, initiate a useful, comprehensive, in-depth study before taking such an action."

13. Knowing the value of America's food, Scott Swinton, *Des Moines Register,* August 27 2018.
Past president of the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association (AAEA) and Professor at Michigan State University Scott Swinton describes the importance of ERS to the nation's food supply and what is at risk with its proposed relocation. Key excerpts include the following,

    - "[The] plan to relocate ERS employees away from Washington is likely to trigger widespread staff resignations"
    - "Congress should review the plan to reorganize and relocate the ERS to determine whether these changes are in the best interests of the nation"
    - "A hasty move [to relocate ERS] could irreversibly erode the integrity and capacity of the nation's food"

14. The Department of Agriculture has a world class economics research institution ... and is throwing it away, Susan Offutt, *The Hill*, August 27 2018.
Past administrator of the Economic Research Service under Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush explains that ERS is a world-class economic research institution that will be dismantled by the Secretary's relocation. Key excerpts include the following,

- "The Economic Research Service is ranked No. 3 in research quality among more than 2,500 academic and government agricultural economics institutions worldwide."
- "[ERS] is not a "farmer-facing" agency, but rather supports congressional and administration policy officials as well as the program agencies of USDA that deliver key farm, environmental and food services."
- "There has been no consultation with those who use and rely on data and analysis from the Economic Research Service despite the secretary's stated intention to improve customer service."
- "Many of the 330 staff are not likely to make the move, and the loss of their expertise will jeopardize the quality, relevance, and timeliness of the agency's products."

December 14, 2018[1]

The Honorable K. Michael Conaway
Chair, Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chair, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs Roberts and Conaway and Ranking Members Stabenow and Peterson,

We write to express our profound concern for USDA's plan to relocate the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) outside of Washington, DC and to realign ERS out of the USDA Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area. We believe the restructuring will undermine our food and agriculture enterprise by disrupting and hampering the agencies' vital work in support of it—through research, analyses, and statistics. We are also deeply troubled such a major upheaval of the USDA research arm would be carried out with such haste and without the input and prior consultation of the USDA research stakeholders.

In the best interests of American agricultural, food, and rural sectors, we respectfully request that you intervene to stop the restructuring of REE at least until there has been a comprehensive independent study and full consultation with the stakeholder community.

We write from the perspective of current and former university agricultural administration leaders and former USDA chief scientists. Our positions in land grant universities (LGUs) as well as our broader experience and leadership in food and agriculture provide us a unique and important perspective on the US food and agriculture enterprise. LGUs and the broader academic network work hand in hand with the USDA to identify priorities, carry out research and analysis, and disseminate results to the broader community. An integral part of USDA's support for our food and agriculture enterprise along with ERS, NIFA takes an integrated approach to support programs to find innovative solutions to the most pressing local and global problems to ensure the long-term viability of agriculture.[2] The mission of ERS complements that of NIFA by anticipating "trends and emerging issues in agriculture, food, the environment, and rural America

[1] This letter was originally sent November 27 with 21 signers. It is being updated as additional signers are added. The current count is 81. Note also an identical version of this letter has been sent to appropriators.
[2] https://nifa.usda.gov/about-nifa

and to conduct high-quality, objective economic research to inform and enhance public and private decision making."[3]

Through the partnership of LGUs, USDA, other federal research funding agencies, and the private sector, agricultural research has increased many-fold the productivity of our farms and farmers, despite the continual challenges of disease, pests, extreme weather, and invasive species. The progress and accomplishment are by design, through the leadership and vision of many in the USDA, LGUs, and larger private-sector community over the past many decades.

The engagement of the broader scientific funding research community—the National Science Foundation (NSF), the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the National institutes of Health (NIH), and many more—has also been integral to the impressive progress. For example, NIFA partnered with NSF, NIH, and the Department of Energy to launch the Plant Genome Initiative. This initiative has sequenced the genomes of economically important plants and led to improved bean, potato, tomato, wheat and barley cultivars while at the same time training thousands of undergraduate and graduate students who will be the next generation plant scientists and breeders.

To further exemplify the advances that have come from multi-agency involvement, consider the Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome (PRRS) virus, which was first detected in the U.S. in 1987 and that costs North American farmers more than $660 million annually. A collaborative effort between land-grant universities and the private sector supported by NIFA and NSF has resulted in the breeding of pigs that are not harmed by the disease. Another example is a university-ARS collaboration supported by USDA-ARS, NIFA, and other federal funding agencies to create soybean oil with no trans fats.

The advances that have occurred because of the close collaboration of numerous research funding agencies have been greatly facilitated by their proximity. This is because of the close collaboration that must occur between the agencies, researchers, and university leaders like ourselves. University agricultural leaders and researchers make regular visits to Washington, DC to meet with USDA offices, research funding agencies, our congressional delegations, and other farm and research organizations based or meeting in Washington. Locating NIFA outside the Washington, DC area will hamper our work and the effective integration of NIFA with other research agencies and stakeholders.

Such integrative science is essential for meeting the challenges of the next 50 years. For example, NIFA is currently partnering with NSF on an Initiative at the Nexus of Food, Energy and Water Systems to significantly advance our understanding of how these three interrelated systems interact and function with the objective of increasing their resilience and ensuring long-term sustainability.

We are also concerned the relocation of NIFA will undermine USDA funding of research, which has stagnated for the last 40 years. Since 1976, it has lost two thirds of its purchasing power.[4]

[3] https://www.ers.usda.gov/about-ers/

[4] https://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/s3fs-public/TotRes%253B.xlsx

With NIFA being relocated outside of Washington, we worry it will become less relevant and therefore more susceptible to further degradation of its budget.

In addition, the relocations are likely to weaken the coordination of NIFA and ERS with their sister REE agencies, the ARS and the National Agricultural Statistics Service. This would set back the work of Congress over several farm bills and appropriations bills to ensure more coordination and integration between the agencies. Equally important, it will remove ERS and NIFA from the important role of bringing science to bear on the work of the USDA frontline program agencies, all of which will also remain in Washington. Separating the agencies between a new location and Washington, DC, with leadership and some staff of each agency being kept close to USDA headquarters, could also undermine the respective internal operations and coordination.

For the ERS specifically, we believe the relocation will set back the agency for 5-10 years and undermine its independence as a federal statistical agency. In a major relocation, there will be substantial staff loss because of either an unwillingness or other preventing circumstances to move. Given the ERS's highly specialized work, it will be a long process to replace the loss of experience and expertise. We also believe ERS's work is served well in DC where its many of its primary audiences, partners, and collaborators are located.

ERS also thrives both in its independence and its work in REE thanks to the leadership of the USDA chief scientist and the synergies it enjoys with the other REE agencies. Congress was wise in placing ERS within REE, and it would be most unfortunate to allow that deliberative choice to be undone by administrative fiat.

Given the decades of planning and adjustments to optimize the work of REE, we are troubled the USDA seeks to dismantle the research arm in such a major way in a matter of months without a confirmed chief scientist, consultation of current or former REE, NIFA, and ERS leaders, prior engagement and input of the greater research community, and other good-government procedures. Indeed, there seems to be little evidence of any planning or study before the announcement to make the relocation.

Making changes in a successful enterprise should be based on two criteria: (i) to fix a real problem that jeopardizes future success; or (ii) to ensure further improvements for the system. The ERS-NIFA moves satisfy neither. In addition, stakeholders have been waiting for a cost-benefit analysis of the proposal to be presented and an explanation of how this move relates to REE's existing long-term strategic plan. For these reasons, it is premature to allow any final action to be taken in the absence of basic good government practice.

In closing, as leaders in the USDA agricultural research partnership committee, we have deep concerns about USDA's upheaval of its research mission area without broader consultation. The Research, Education, and Economics mission reached its current make-up following years of planning, adjustments, and optimization informed by consultation, study, and public comment. We see no justification that it should be restructured on such a large scale on USDA's short timeline and without proper study.

We urge you to intervene to ensure the integrity of our food and agriculture enterprise over the next 50 years.

Sincerely,

Gale Buchanan
Former USDA Chief Scientist and Under Secretary of Agriculture for Research, Education & Economics; Dean and Director Emeritus, University of Georgia, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

Catherine E. Woteki
Former USDA Chief Scientist and Under Secretary of Agriculture for Research, Education & Economics

Roger Beachy
Former USDA Chief Scientist and Director of National Institute of Food and Agriculture

Sonny Ramaswamy
Former Director of National Institute of Food and Agriculture

David Ackerly
Dean, College of Natural Resources, University of California, Berkeley

Theodore G. Andreadis
Director, The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station

Aufa'i Apulu Ropeti Areta
Agriculture, Community and Natural Resources Division (Land Grant Program), American Samoa Community College

Dan Arp
Dean Emeritus, College of Agricultural Sciences, Oregon State University

Ken Blemings
Interim Dean, Davis College of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Design, West Virginia University

Kathryn J. Boor
Robert P. Lynch Dean, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences, Cornell University

Charles Boyer
Vice President for Agriculture, Dean, and Director, Montana State University College of Agriculture

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Director, MSU AgBioResearch & Assistant Vice President for Research and Innovation, Michigan State University

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Director Emeritus, Texas Agricultural Experiment Director; Former Executive Director, Southern Association of State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors; Chair, Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy (ESCOP)

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Dean and Professor, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, University of California, Davis

Dan Dooley
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Alan L. Grant
Dean, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Virginia Tech

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Jeremy Drew, Nevada

Kristin Hughes Evans, Virginia

Beatrix Fields, District of Columbia

Larry Holmes, Virginia

Terry McClure, Ohio

Michael A. Mellano, California

Roberta A. Moseley, New Jersey

Madeline Mellinger, Florida

Kenneth Nicewicz, Massachusetts

Caird Rexroad, West Virginia (also former Associate Administrator, ARS, USDA)

Christopher M. Streeter, New Hampshire

/Eric Tanouye/
Eric Tanouye, Hawaii

/Oscar Taylor/
Oscar Taylor, Texas

Jake Tibbitts, Nevada

Public Witness Testimony for the hearing on Agricultural Research and 2018 Farm Bill Implementation

U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510
Jeffrey J. Steiner, Ph.D. (retired)
Division Director for Plant Production
USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture

I appreciate the opportunity to provide my perspectives on why I recently left Federal service with the USDA; my take on the NIFA relocation; and what I see can be done for NIFA to move ahead successfully from this time forward.

Many factors added together led me to retire this past May.

I believe in my responsibility as a Federal employee to follow the leading of the Administration and directions of our Congressional leaders. It is a fair political debate as to what the right size of Federal government should be, the right balance between Federal and State governance and responsibilities, and so whether it is better for Federal agencies to be located in the D.C. Capitol Region, or elsewhere across the country.

The proposal to move NIFA outside of the D.C. region for beliefs such as above is fair, and in my opinion, if the Administration would have stayed with that reason, it would have been more palatable for NIFA employees to accept. However, this was just one of a number of factors added together with the relocation proposal led me to decide to retire.

I have more than 25 years of service with the USDA – I owe a great deal to the department for my professional develop and the opportunities provided me throughout my career. During my tenue at USDA, I have held positions that were best served by me being close to our farming community customers in Pacific Northwest, and jobs that brought me close to agricultural organizations headquartered in D.C. that represented farmers across the country. My proximity to other federal agencies and organizations that likewise served agriculture across the country and the world, helped my agency and me serve the public. Because I have lived and worked close and far from agricultural producers, I know first-hand the difference and how and where to be most effective with my service, so the justification to move NIFA closer to the agricultural community just didn't ring true.

But this alone was not the reason it was time to leave NIFA.

Moving back in my time, a strong incentive to work hard was knowing to what bigger purpose I was making a contribution at USDA. During my tenure since 1988, in addition to contributing to my agencies' missions, I have had the privilege to provide support to staff in the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations. But the past two years at NIFA have been filled with uncertainty as to what we were about, what were the unspoken landmines we should avoid, and even whether we were wanted (or needed) as an agency. As a manager, I prepared staffing plans for my division but watched, along with the rest of the agency's requests, as those were put on hold by a hiring freeze while we waited for direction from the Department. My staff responded by looking for ways to increase our efficiency, while I watched my leadership try to respond as best they could, and we tried to help our employees maintain perspective.

With the announcement last year of the intent to relocate NIFA, more uncertainty rocked my group and the rest of the agency: not only was there no relief in sight for replacing those employees who had left, but a future with more attrition was certain and the responsibility weighing on everyone to find ways to effectively provide our services. We continued to rearrange duties, and double up as needed, but the sense was, "If you can do more with less, then you weren't working efficiently from the beginning." From my perspective, while my employees were diligent with their duties, they were also looking for a way out. Added to these above challenges were the uncertainties associated with the five-week government shutdown, and the resulting compressed time-lines we faced to deliver our programs and obligate appropriated funds before the end of this fiscal year.

However, a starting point for my decision to retire goes back two years ago when we were ordered to work four days per week in our offices, and so could not use more than one scheduled telework day per week. The reason we were given was the same for why NIFA should relocate: to better serve our farming community clientele'. It may seem like a minor issue, but everyone knew this wasn't a valid reason, and commuting into work four days a week had a physical toll on me, because I had chosen to live a two-hour commute away from D.C.

NIFA does not directly serve the farming community, and so farmers and ranchers do not walk in the door for us to serve them. Rather our programs help enable our university, other federal agencies, and industry partners deliver their research, education, and engagement services directly to agricultural producers, rural and urban communities, and others engaged in the food and agriculture value chain.

Any one of these above points may seem small and not the best reason to retire, but when added together with other justifications that were given for the need to relocate NIFA: there is a better quality of life for employees elsewhere, greater access to a diverse workforce, greater ease in recruiting employees not willing to work in DC – those reasons given by our leaders didn't ring true, and so trust in leadership could not be built for me to support the idea that it would be better to have NIFA and its employees outside of D.C.

I believe in the USDA mission and the purposes for its agencies, and have been proud to contribute. I am grateful for the service opportunities afforded me by NIFA these past three years.

So what suggestions do I have that can help NIFA move ahead successfully from this time forward:

There is deep knowledge among the program leaders and other staff who manage and deliver NIFA research, education, and extension programs. There could be as high as 80% attrition within my former division. This institutional capital represents significant and large competitive grant programs that greatly benefit American agriculture, and their experience cannot be replaced solely by newly recruited employees. Short-term flexibility should be provided to retain experienced employees and utilize their knowledge and services remotely, even if they choose not to relocate to Kansas City.

With a geographically split program leadership structure – those positions remaining in D.C. and those located in Kansas City – a high quality professional scientific staff must be retained at both locations. The programs delivered must remain relevant and overseen by highly qualified and creative scientific professionals. These leaders must be resourced in a way that allows connections to not only the NIFA partners and stakeholders that depend on its programs, but who are science-leaders themselves with professional standing among peers outside of NIFA. This cannot be served by only a small cadre of scientists that remain the D.C. region – NIFA program management success cannot be measured solely by award processing efficiency. It is also critical that connections among NIFA scientists and services be of the highest quality, and so IT virtual connections and travel must be seamlessly facilitated. There is a poor history of this being accomplished with present technology and policies.

It is important that the perspectives of all NIFA employees and their views of place, home, quality of life, and diversity be truly respected and acted upon on their behalf by Department and NIFA leadership. It is critical that truthful reasons and explanations for all decisions be made from this point forward. Doing so will be most beneficial to help NIFA serve its clientele' and the rest of agriculture that depend on USDA programs and the rest of the Department's services.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to your deliberations.

Testimony of Katherine Smith Evans
Regarding the proposed relocation of the USDA Economic Research Service
Before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
July 2019

My three decades of experience with principle statistical agencies, including my position as Economic Research Service (ERS) Administrator *2007-2011* and my service as Executive Director of the Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics (COPAFS) from 2012-2017 make me uniquely qualified to comment on the vulnerable infrastructure for U.S. federal statistics. But in this statement, I call equally upon my experience in having held officer and staff positions at several different scientific societies.

Scientific societies are vital contributors to the research ecosystem. In this statement I wish to draw attention to actions by two solid and somewhat staid societies that, perhaps at the edge of their comfort zones, express concerns about USDA plans for the Economic Research Service (ERS).

The American Economic Association (AEA), established in 1885, is a non-profit, non-partisan, scholarly association dedicated to the discussion and publication of economics research. It's more than 20,000 members come from academia, government, and the private sector. The AEA represents the interests of the economics profession without taking a position on questions of economic policy or on any partisan matter. The **AEA's Statement on Principles of Economic Measurement** HERE lays out the imperative for Principal Federal Economic Indicators and other federal statistics, and the basic standards they must meet, including reliability, objectivity, accuracy, relevance, transparency, consistency in a changing world, timeliness, and accessibility. In early 2019, AEA's Committee on Economic Statistics issued a **Statement of Support for Maintaining Statistical and Scientific Integrity of the USDA's Economic Research Service** HERE. This Statement indicates that USDA's announced plans would threaten or violate ERS's achievement of basic principles of economic measurement. It says that "Relocating the ERS will require substantial resources and will likely result in the loss of a substantial number of professional researchers. If replacements are hard to find outside of the Washington DC employment area, and funds appropriated for research are devoted instead to relocation, neither staff nor financial resources may be adequate for ERS' on-going, high- quality economic measurement responsibilities." It also says that the presently called-off plan to realign ERS from the Undersecretary For Research, Education and Economics to the Secretary's Office would conflict with AEA's Principles "as well as with Title III of the Foundations for Evidence Based Policymaking Act ...both of which suggest that to be credible, trustworthy, and unhindered in its mission, a statistical agency must maintain a position of independence from undue external influences, avoiding even the appearance that its collection, analysis, or dissemination processes might be manipulated for political or partisan purposes."

The Agricultural & Applied Economics Association (AAEA), established in 1910, is a not-for-profit association serving the professional interests of its roughly 3,000 members working in food, agricultural, natural resource, rural development and broadly related fields of applied economics. In a review of USDA's plan to relocate the Economic Research Service (ERS) and National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) from Washington, DC, to Kansas City, a team of AAEA member economists find that the ERS move will result in a net cost to taxpayers rather than a net savings, and that a rushed, unplanned move will undermine the quality of USDA agricultural economic information at a critical time for the nation's agricultural and rural economy. The **AAEA Review** HERE finds that the proposed move would cost United States taxpayers $83 to $182 million dollars, instead of saving them $300 million as the USDA's analysis claims. AAEA's analysis corrects two errors in the original USDA analysis: 1) the USDA had overstated the cost of keeping the agencies in the National Capital Region, and 2) the USDA had failed to take account of the value of research and data lost through resignations and retirements.

Says former AAEA President, Scott Swinton, "The ERS and NIFA have ... a world-class staff, who have a deep knowledge and understanding of agriculture and rural issues, to support the U.S. food and agriculture sector, as well as the data and information systems that support timely, objective research and analysis of major agricultural issues." "Few people realize how much the USDA Economic Research Service's analysis has saved American taxpayers," stated current AAEA president David Zilberman. "To be frank, America's agricultural economy today faces serious challenges," continued Zilberman. "This is the worst possible time to dismantle the USDA's capability to analyze agricultural markets, crop insurance, and trade policy."

Thank you for the opportunity to highlight the public statements of these two respected scientific societies and AAEA officers.

Testimony of Sonny Ramaswamy
July 18, 2019
Redmond, Washington

Chairman Pat Roberts, Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow, and members of the committee.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit this written testimony for the record at the Full Committee Hearing of the United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry on Agricultural Research and 2018 Farm Bill Implementation.

My name is Sonny Ramaswamy. I currently serve as the president of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities located in Redmond, Washington.

From May 6, 2012 to May 5, 2018 I served as director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) in the Obama and Trump administrations.

Your committee was instrumental in establishing NIFA in the 2008 Farm Bill, as the federal food and agricultural science counterpart to the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). By investing in science and solving critical issues—such as farm productivity and profitability, nutrition, obesity, climate change, renewable energy, and positive youth and workforce development—NIFA's work is integral to the health and security of ALL Americans.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) shocked the scientific, academic, and farm communities with the announcement on August 8, 2018 (https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2018/08/09/usda-realign-ers-chief-economist-relocate-ers-nifa-outside-dc) to relocate NIFA and ERS to Kansas City (https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2019/06/13/secretary-perdue-announces-kansas-city-region-location-ers-and-nifa).

The proposal to relocate NIFA and the Economic Research Service to Kansas City will have significant negative impact on the research and extension portfolio under Title VII of the 2018 Farm Bill.

As a scientist and former director of NIFA, I will speak to the potential negative impacts of the proposed relocation of NIFA to Kansas City and action your committee could take to prevent the same.

I can state unequivocally the rationale for the proposed relocation—attracting and retaining highly qualified staff, placing the agency closer to stakeholders, and cost-savings—does not stand to reason and evidence.

Since the announcement of the proposed relocation, NIFA has been hemorrhaging and losing three to five staff members each week; just today, July 17, 2019, I have learned that only 73 NIFA employees (out of a total of 400 full time equivalents) have agreed to moving to Kansas City.

The scientific staff has been decimated—they're leaving because of family reasons such as health, education, costs of relocation, intimidation and lack of support—and in the Awards

Management Division of the Office of Grants and Financial Management only three staff members remain.

This above situation is resulting in tens of millions of dollars, if not hundreds of millions, not being deployed in a timely manner during this fiscal year and it will be worse next fiscal year. These dollars are desperately needed for the urgent research and extension work, for which Congress appropriated funds meant to address issues such as citrus greening disease, damage to crops and livestock in the Midwest due to extreme weather events, diseases of cotton and poultry, to name just a few examples.

In announcing the selection of Kansas City as the site, USDA Secretary Perdue claimed that over $300 million would be saved. The purported savings has been found to be non-existent and indeed is going to cost the United States government an additional almost $130 million according to a recent economic analysis (https://www.aaea.org/UserFiles/file/Report-MovingUSDAResearchersWillCostTaxpayers-AAEAReport2019june19final.docx.pdf).

NIFA is part of the United States government's science agenda, created by the Office of Science and Technology Policy, which brings together NSF, NIH, EPA, Food and Drug Administration, Department of Energy, Department of Defense, and others to address compelling societal challenges, including agricultural. Relocating NIFA to Kansas City would not only take the agency out of the critically needed national conversations and partnerships, which NIFA often convenes, but also would have significant negative impact on our nation's ability to solve societal problems and ensure its global competitiveness, a vision articulated by President Donald Trump.

Finally, the proposed relocation would entail significant additional costs to the American taxpayer—none of which has been transparently calculated by USDA—for shutting down operations in the National Capital Region, including buyouts for early retirements, startup costs in a remote location, recruitment of personnel and relocation costs, and costs for the creation and deployment of information technology and grants, financial management, and policy infrastructure.

Recreating NIFA in Kansas City would likely take two to five years, and in the meantime, its ability to convene the best knowledge and ideas and deployment of funding to solve problems of farm productivity and profitability, nutrition and obesity, mitigation of the impacts of droughts, extreme weather events, and environmental and other societal challenges will come to a halt, potentially resulting in decades-long negative impacts on farmers and consumers and our nation's international trade. Farm incomes, which are currently significantly depressed, will suffer further.

Foundational changes in organizations, including relocation, must result in improved efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and accountability. Indeed, President Donald Trump's 2018 Management Agenda (https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Presidents-Management-Agenda.pdf) focuses on improved mission, service, stewardship, efficiency, and effectiveness. The proposed relocation of NIFA is not supported by any of these criteria.

During the last few years, NIFA has used evidence-based, six-sigma continuous process improvements in the operations to reduce its footprint, streamline processes, develop and deploy paperless transactions, enhance transparency and accountability, and create dashboards to track changes. These continuous process improvements have already contributed to reduced costs and savings of millions of dollars each year—NIFA has the data and your committee can request the same as you make decisions about this proposed relocation.

NIFA's legacy dates back to 1862 when President Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act into law. During the last century and half, the partnership between the federal government through NIFA and its predecessor agencies, state and county governments, and the 1862, 1890, and 1994 Land-Grant Universities resulted in the most effective system of agricultural science and education: there is no other such system in the world!

The outcomes of the oversight and convenings provided by NIFA for our nation's research, education, and extension enterprise have created the most productive agricultural production system in the world, allowing America to become the wealthiest and most powerful nation on Earth.

By relocating NIFA, which could potentially lead to the loss of its global influence, I am perplexed at how USDA believes America can solve the continuing societal and agricultural challenges, while remaining the global leader in the food and agricultural enterprise.

I call on Congress to proscribe USDA from moving forward with its proposal to relocate NIFA and ERS before undertaking a third-party, transparent, evidence-based, and unbiased review and analysis of costs and benefits, lest they destroy the finest research enterprise the world has ever known.

I thank you for this opportunity to submit this testimony.

Testimony of Susan Offutt

Chief Economist, US Government Accountability Office (retired)

Regarding the proposed relocation of the USDA Economic Research Service

Before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

As a career civil servant, I have a broad and deep understanding of the best practices, principles, and legal and regulatory requirements that underpin good government. My final post in Federal service was as Chief Economist of the US Government Accountability Office, the independent Congressional watchdog. Immediately before that tour, I spent a decade as Administrator of the Economic Research Service of the US Department Agriculture. Also, I was Chief of the Agriculture Branch at the US Office of Management and Budget in the Executive Office of the President. Based on the expertise I gained from these experiences, I find USDA's plan to relocate ERS to be unjustified by any substantive concerns about the agency's functioning and to be so poorly executed as to endanger the agency's ability to provide even minimal levels of research and data analysis.

The Committee should probe USDA's fundamental motivation for upending the ERS program and mistreating its professional staff. This question ought to have a satisfactory answer before any consideration of the (opaque and now chaotic) process by which relocation has been pursued. The claim of cost savings was always risible and has been debunked in analysis by the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association, to which I contributed. The assertion that the agency's functioning could be improved by physical proximity to farmers belied a lack of understanding of the way the agency does its work and represented a cavalier dismissal of the broad range of citizens who use its output. ERS makes serious efforts to plan and disseminate its research and data analysis, all well documented. It catalogues its key outputs in a transparent and accessible way. Where, exactly, does it fall short? In what areas of its expertise could it improve? The Department has not addressed these questions, and Congress should require it to do so. Lacking a cogent and compelling justification, the Department has effectively used relocation as an excuse to degrade the agency's ability to function as an objective policy research organization serving the public.

The "process" by which USDA has pursued relocation lacks even superficial adherence to the practices of good government. Most egregious is the intent to send ERS (and the National Institute for Food and Agriculture) to the locality willing and able to make the "best" bid (based on unspecified incentives). A private firm, Ernst & Young, provided a propriety analysis of alternative locations. This lack of transparency and of regard for established procurement policies and procedures risks wasting taxpayer funds on what may well be a politically motivated site selection. USDA's failure to address the possibility that ERS (and NIFA) could remain in the National Capital Region at lower than current cost betrays its bias against fair and open competition. As for the way it has handled Federal civil servants, the Department has wasted the investment taxpayers have made in recruiting, training, and motivating the human capital that is the agency's major asset. The proposal to slash the agency's budget sent employees a clear signal about its perspective on the agency's mission, and though Congress rejected the cut, staff began to look for alternative employment. Subsequently, the harsh terms and confusing statements about the consequences of relocation have driven off dedicated analysts and supporting professionals. The Department's continued insistence that it values ERS employees could not, in such circumstances, appear more insincere.

No doubt the Committee is aware of the widespread alarm among stakeholders who were surprised and saddened by the Department's decision to relocate ERS and NIFA. Colleagues in the land grant universities, those who rely on Federal statistics, and citizens in urban and rural America have raised objections to the substance of the plan and the process by which it has unfolded. Consultation with the public is a bedrock principle of government that ensures the most effective use of limited resources. The Congress should remedy this significant omission by insisting on constructive engagement by the Department with its constituents.

In sum, USDA's plan to relocate ERS and NIFA makes a mockery of the way the Federal government should make decisions, manage its resources, and respond to the public that funds it. In my years in Federal service, I have seen few other agency initiatives that have been so weakly rationalized and so ineptly executed. The Congress should take the opportunity to rectify this situation by mandating a halt to this ill-considered scheme.

Union of Concerned Scientists
Science for a Healthy Planet and Safer World

Testimony
from the Union of Concerned Scientists: Food and Environment Program
on "Agriculture Research and 2018 Farm Bill Implementation"
before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
July 18, 2019
Washington, DC

Publicly funded agriculture research is the foundation of success for American agriculture. In particular, implementation of mandatory funding provided to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Research, Education, and Extension (REE) mission area in the 2018 Farm Bill is a critical piece of ensuring that success.[1] Which is why we respectfully request that this Committee and Congress act immediately to halt the relocation of USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). We also request that the Committee ensure that the integrity of USDA research is maintained now and in the future.

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), a national non-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to evidenced-based policy making, and its 500,000 plus members have and continue to advocate for increases in publicly funded food and agriculture research due to the benefits for farmers, eaters, and the environment.

Over the years, investments in USDA research have led to important scientific breakthroughs. Strong investments in USDA's research programs allowed U.S. drug companies to mass produce penicillin to aide Allied troops during World War II; it has allowed farmers to understand the competitiveness of their products in U.S. and international agricultural markets; and it has provided critical analysis of the impacts of climate change on farmers and the land they hope to pass on to future generations.[2] USDA REE staff also monitor food insecurity in the United States to help ensure that every family can put food on the table. Moreover, publicly funded research employs taxpayer dollars with astounding efficiency, with a benefit-cost ratio of at least 20:1, if not more.[34] Due to the clear and tangible benefits of agriculture research, it's imperative that any proposals to alter the function of USDA research be scrutinized. Over the past year, the bipartisan scrutiny rightly directed toward USDA's relocation proposal has unmasked the proposal for what it is – an attempt to downsize agriculture research into alignment with the Trump Administration's narrow-minded view of what American agriculture should be.

Since the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) unexpectedly announced its intent to relocate the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) in August 2018, USDA has withheld or simply failed to develop sufficiently compelling information to demonstrate that the relocation would be a net benefit for U.S. agriculture and the nation's food supply.

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[1] https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R45525.pdf
[2] https://www.politico.com/story/2019/06/23/agriculture-department-climate-change-1376413
[3] OECD (2016), *Innovation, Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability in the United States*, OECD Food and Agricultural Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264264120-en.
[4] Alston, J.M. Andersen, J. James, and P.G. Pardey (2011), "The economic returns to US public agricultural research", American Journal of Agricultural Economics Vol. 93, pp. 1257–1277. http://ajae.oxfordjournals.org/content/93/5/1257.abstract.

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Given our concerns about the relocation proposal - UCS along with hundreds of organizations and universities, thousands of scientists, the overwhelming majority of ERS and NIFA employees, and dozens of bipartisan agriculture leaders – have opposed this relocation.[5,6,7,8] Most recently, in June 2019, UCS and more than 170 organizations wrote Congress in strong opposition to the relocation.

Both agencies impacted by the relocation are known internationally for rigorous and objective food and agriculture research. This research includes reports on the impacts of climate change on U.S. agriculture, the effectiveness of nutrition assistance programs, and the negative impacts of the President's trade war with China. However, since the beginning of the Trump Administration, rigorous and objective research has proven inconvenient to Secretary Perdue's and President Trump's political objectives. The scientific community writ large sees this relocation, and the speed at which the USDA has moved to make it happen, as a way for the administration to effectively hollow out these agencies so that the quality and timeliness of their research is diminished in the short term and that federal investment in them is diminished in the long term.

UCS believes this relocation will negatively impact farmers and eaters across the country for several key reasons:

- **Loss of highly qualified staff at ERS and NIFA:** In June 2019, Politico reported that because of the pace at which USDA has moved forward with this relocation, it could force as many as four out of five ERS employees to quit, including more than 90 percent of employees who study climate change, conservation, the environment, and the state of the rural economy, and close to 89 percent of employees who work on nutrition and food safety programs.[9] At NIFA, more than 70 percent of all employees are expected to quit. This exodus and the time it will take to re-staff these agencies will impact the quality and timeliness of U.S. food and agriculture research produced by these world-class scientific research agencies. It is estimated that this loss of staff will "set ERS back five to 10 years" according to Gale Buchanan, USDA Chief Scientist under President George W. Bush, and Catherine E. Woteki, Chief Scientist during the Obama administration.[10]

  Loss of highly qualified staff will have different impacts at ERS and NIFA. In FY 2018 NIFA distributed over $1.4 billion in grants, primarily to universities. The grants went to research projects and institutions in about half of all U.S. Congressional districts.[11] These grants fund a range of research, including support for workforce development and family services for military families, building stronger university agriculture programs, and

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[5] https://www.amstat.org/ASA/Files/pdfs/POL-ERS_NIFA_FY20.pdf
[6] https://s3.amazonaws.com/ucs-documents/food-environment/USDA-reorg-petition-REV.pdf
[7] https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/13/politics/usda-employees-relocated-kansas-city-perdue/index.html
[8] https://www.amstat.org/asa/files/pdfs/BlueRibbonLetterAgCmtes.pdf
[9] https://www.politico.com/story/2019/06/25/department-agriculture-union-relocation-1554201
[10] https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2019/06/13/usda-research-agencies-will-move-kansas-city-region-perdue-announces/?utm_term=.d77968a57963
[11] https://www.dailyyonder.com/usda-agencys-relocation-affect-grantmaking-abilities-union-says/2019/07/10/32779/

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helping farmers who are experiencing mental health crises.[12] With up to 70 percent of its staff expected to quit by the end of fiscal year 2019, there is a serious concern that such a loss could delay funding from NIFA to grant recipients.[13] Such funds should not be at risk of being delayed in FY 2020 and beyond.

At ERS, consumers, universities, congressional leaders, and international markets rely on data products and reports produced by the agency. With four out of five ERS employees expected to quit due to the hastiness of the relocation, among other reasons, there is legitimate concern that the quality of these products will decline or that they will be delayed. Members of Congress and other stakeholders should also be concerned that some data products or reports may be suspended or discontinued due to low staff levels. For example, ERS is Congressionally mandated to complete the following:

1. Monthly Commodity Reports – provides monthly updates and short-term outlooks for agricultural commodities.

2. Commodity Costs and Returns – provides recent and historical cost and return estimates for agricultural commodities.

3. USDA Baseline Report - USDA's long-term agricultural projections provide a scenario for the farm sector for the next 10 years. Projections cover agricultural commodities, agricultural trade, and aggregate indicators of the sector such as farm income.

4. US Food Assistance Landscape – examines the effectiveness of the nutrition assistance programs, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

5. US Food Security Data – this data set provides information about food security in the U.S., including the most vulnerable populations (i.e. children and low-income populations).

We have deep concerns that some of these reports and other ERS products may be at risk if the relocation moves forward.

- **Cost to Taxpayers:** An analysis conducted by the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association (AAEA), found that the relocation will cost taxpayers between $83 and $182 million, rather than saving $300 million dollars as predicted by the USDA.[14] AAEA's analysis found that the USDA's analysis did not consider the lost value in research quality that would result from the relocation.

[12] https://portal.nifa.usda.gov/web/maps/nifa-funding-by-congressional-district/
[13] https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/15/politics/usda-climate-research-kansas-city-sonny-perdue/
[14] https://www.aaea.org/UserFiles/file/Report-MovingUSDAResearchersWillCostTaxpayers-AAEAReport2019june19final.docx.pdf

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- **The diminishment of American food and agricultural research:** At no point has the USDA provided an explanation for how this relocation will increase or improve public investment in agriculture research. In fact, improving agriculture research wasn't even a stated goal of the relocation.[15] The Administration's FY 2020 budget proposed $229 million in cuts to USDA research; the deepest cuts were made to ERS (30% budget cut and a 52% cut to staff years at the agency).[16] The FY2020 budget request also proposed eliminating research on beginning farmers and ranchers, rural economies, and food and nutrition assistance programs, among other research topics. At a time when China has surpassed the U.S. as the top investor in agriculture research, we can't afford to fall even further behind.[17] The future of U.S. agriculture and our nation's food supply depends on investing more in agriculture research, not less.

- **The abandonment of nationally beneficial research:** There is legitimate concern that moving ERS and NIFA to a specific region will skew research or research funding in favor of that region, to the detriment of farmers, ranchers, researchers, and consumers in the rest of the country. The purpose of having science-based and statistical research agencies based in the nation's capital is to prevent any regional bias and to ensure that the national interest is being served. William F. Tracy, a Professor of Agronomy in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at the University of Wisconsin Madison stated in testimony on June 5, 2019 before the House Agriculture Committee that:

  "By moving the agencies outside Washington some types of agriculture may be favored over others when it comes to research and funding. Even if favoritism is untrue it is likely that some will see bias. Keeping the agencies in Washington helps ensure prioritization of all types of agricultural research and maintains trust in the fairness of the granting process."[18]

While the opposition to this relocation continues to mount, it's worth pointing out the sparse and listless support for the relocation proposal, which to date has been mostly limited to an extremely small cohort of Members of Congress. It's unconscionable to allow a proposal that will negatively impact millions of Americans to be carried out based on the unsubstantiated claims of so few.

For all of these reasons, UCS asks the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry to halt this ill-advised, costly, and detrimental relocation. We also urge the Committee to use its authority to protect the integrity and quality of USDA research, so that it can continue to generate new discoveries and innovations that support U.S. farmers and protect our nation's food supply.

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[15] https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2018/08/09/usda-realign-ers-chief-economist-relocate-ers-nifa-outside-dc
[16] https://www.obpa.usda.gov/budsum/fy2020budsum.pdf
[17] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0306919218308728
[18] https://agriculture.house.gov/uploadedfiles/hhrg-116-ag14-wstate-tracyw-20190605.pdf

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

July 18, 2019

Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
Agricultural Research and the 2018 Farm Bill
July 18, 2019
Questions for the Record
Deputy Under Secretary Scott Hutchins

Chairman Pat Roberts

1) Thank you for your commitment to ensure that the critical reporting and other functions performed by the Economic Research Service (ERS) will not be delayed due to the relocation to the Kansas City area. Can I have your commitment that the grant-making and other important functions of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) will also be carried out to obligate fiscal year 2019 grant funds and to meet other pending programmatic and statutory requirements?

   Response: Yes, USDA commits that the functions of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) will be performed to obligate fiscal year 2019 grant funds and meet programmatic and statutory requirements.

2) One factor that will be essential to a successful transition of ERS and NIFA to Kansas City is the hiring and training of employees for positions in which staff opted not to relocate from Washington, DC. What are the short term and long-term strategies for recruiting, hiring, and training the specialized personnel needed to ensure ERS and NIFA functions and obligations are fully performed without interruption?

   Response: ERS and NIFA have created and are implementing a robust talent acquisition strategy for the short- and long-term needs of both agencies. In the short term, agencies are underway posting job opportunities and initiating the hiring process for vacancies. Job postings for internal and external candidates are through usajobs.gov. Each agency has assessed gaps for which they have obtained short term contractors and accessed assistance from employees in other areas of the Department. Each agency has a training plan in place that includes knowledge transfer from employees that will not be relocating to the new location to their peers to ensuring mission continuity responsibilities and deliverables are captured and transferred prior to employee exit interviews.

   Long term strategies include the continuation of hiring for vacant positions across both agencies. In both the short- and long-term, a top priority for ERS and NIFA is to provide a positive experience for existing and new employees and deliver value from respective mission areas to stakeholders.

USDA will work closely with the agriculture industry in the Kansas City area and within the nearby and greater land-grant university system to promote the career opportunities within ERS and NIFA located in Kansas City.

3) **Building upon the hemp research pilot authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill, the 2018 Farm Bill authorized hemp cultivation in the United States. There is a scarcity of data and research to sufficiently support this new industry. What is USDA, and in particular the REE mission area, doing to meet the rapidly growing needs of producers, the hemp industry, and related input and service suppliers in terms of data, analysis, and research?**

   Response: REE, through NIFA, has awarded several grants for hemp-related projects including a multi-state, multi-university initiative for a number of topics related to hemp production. Additionally, the REE funded the IR-4 program where USDA will work with EPA to determine what information is needed to initiate pesticide registrations for hemp. Finally, ARS researchers are exploring ways to work under both the 2014 Farm Bill and forthcoming 2018 Farm Bill rules to begin USDA intramural research projects.

4) **USDA is planning to take ownership and operational control of the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF), currently under construction by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), effective in December of 2020. DHS has contracted with the private sector for a portion of the construction and operational needs. I understand from some contracted personnel that their contracts will be expiring in December of 2019, and some of these contracted functions will be brought under USDA. Understanding that USDA and DHS operate in different capacities, how does USDA intend to partner with the private sector to ensure the success of NBAF? Please provide a comprehensive inventory of other significant changes that are expected by the end of December of 2019, one year prior to the transfer of ownership in December of 2020.**

   Response: USDA and DHS worked closely together to transfer the OPTIC (Operational Planning and Technology Integration Contract) contract from DHS to USDA which occurred on July 1, 2019. USDA has benefitted from DHS' previous operational planning efforts and development of the OPTIC contract and this contract is a critical component of standing up NBAF operations. The US Engineering subcontract for operating the NBAF Central Utility Plant runs through December 2020, not 2019.

   Partnership with the private sector is valuable and will take several forms. From the research and development perspective, USDA will have partnership and collaborative opportunities including technology development and veterinary medical countermeasures. The Biologics Development Module (BDM), a new capability at NBAF, is intended to accelerate the process of moving from promising laboratory research to small scale production conditions more rapidly. USDA is currently evaluating the operational model and intends to work closely with private sector partners to scale up discoveries in the BDM. USDA representatives have interacted with other Government Owned and Contractor Operated Facilities to learn best practices including the Walter Reed Army Institute for Research Pilot Bioproduction Facility and the National Biodefense and Counterterrorism Center because we realize the BDM is an area where we may find improved functionality through contracting operations.

Lastly, there are several support contracts the Department is in the process of researching and awarding including a security contract for the guard force, contracts to train workers in biosafety and high containment, waste removal contracts, uniform supply and laundry service contracts, and utility supply contracts to name just a few services. All are intended to be operational before December 2020.

5) **Foot and mouth disease, African swine fever, and wheat stem rust are a few examples of emerging threats that could cause significant damage to U.S. agricultural industries and the agricultural economy. In addition to the harm they could cause to domestic industries, the national security impacts of the spread of pests and disease in the U.S. could be catastrophic in terms of food security and economic damage. NBAF was created specifically to combat these challenges. Understanding that USDA has experience operating research facilities across the country, how will NBAF be elevated to ensure that national security is the top priority? How is USDA planning to meet the capacity needs of NBAF, while also ensuring the current research functions of USDA are not reduced or diminished?**

Response: USDA understands that agriculture security is national security and is actively working to ensure that the evolving threat landscape will inform prioritization of research at NBAF. Because of the size, scope, and high priority research areas NBAF will be managed differently from other USDA labs around the country. For example, NBAF will have a director responsible for facility operations and research. This director will report through an elevated reporting structure, directly to the ARS Associate Administrator for National Programs to ensure that oversight of NBAF will be done at the highest levels of ARS and coordinated across the Department as appropriate.

Ultimately NBAF operations will need to be funded in a way that does not disrupt other USDA research programs. USDA has had excellent and consistent support from the administration, Congress and stakeholders to both maintain its current investments across the agricultural research spectrum and to stand up NBAF, a world-class, world leading facility to address foreign, emerging and zoonotic livestock disease challenges. We are fully committed to fulfill this mission.

6) **From the onset, the intent of NBAF has been to address emerging threats to national security. There is some concern that with the transfer from DHS to USDA that the mission of national security may be diminished. How does USDA plan to engage DHS to**

ensure that NBAF can fulfill its research requirements while also addressing potential national security threats?

Response: Since 2004, USDA and DHS have maintained a strong partnership at PIADC. This relationship will continue at NBAF. Given NBAF's role as a critical asset for national security relevant to both animal and public health, DHS and USDA are developing a strategy to address homeland security mission priorities and collaborative evaluation of programmatic needs to advance bio- and agro-security. Examples of areas through which these joint USDA-DHS initiatives will take place include:

- Homeland security meetings that include the National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center (NBACC), Kansas Intelligence Fusion Center (KIFC), and representatives from other federal partners involved in the bio and agro-defense domain to maintain awareness for NBAF programmatic activities and aligned USDA priorities.
- DHS continuing to provide input towards the international gap analysis of animal disease countermeasures conducted by USDA.
- DHS participation in annual NBAF stakeholder meetings in order to gather input and to provide guidance on NBAF research priorities.

7) **During the development and management of NBAF by DHS, the NBAF Program Executive Office was organized into construction management, operational planning, program support, and partnership development. Will USDA establish any management structure and dedicate resources dedicated to partnership development for NBAF?**

Response: Establishment and maintenance of robust stakeholder relationships are critical in the strategic approach for the facility. The bio and agro-defense mission domain is complex and requires the coordinated efforts of multiple government agencies and private partners, particularly for the development of veterinary medical countermeasures (MCM) technologies, knowledge products, and policies/practices necessary for emergency preparedness and response. Within the NBAF structure, the Communication and Technology Dissemination Office, a first for a USDA laboratory facility, recognizes the unique and special role that NBAF partnerships will play. This office will be the first point of contact for the use of several mechanisms to enhance collaborative opportunities and outcomes. Partnership intermediary agreements (PIAs), collaborative research agreements (CRAs) such as cooperative research and development agreements (CRADAs), material transfer research agreements (MTRAs), data transfer research agreements (DTRAs), other transaction authorities (OTAs), cooperative agreements, and prize/ challenges are potentially a few of the mechanisms that may be used. Alignments across NBAF and the stakeholder network will guide partnership formation and strengthen animal and public health protection while also promoting economic growth.

The types of partnerships engaged by USDA include: Regional Partnerships, U.S. Partnerships, and Global Alliances. Agro-security Partnerships for Innovative Research (ASPIRE) is the conceptual framework to engage creative partners and collaborators well beyond the walls of NBAF and stimulate the entire bio and agro-defense sector. Building on the partnering success that DHS initiated, NBAF will leverage its proximity to the KCAHC, Kansas State University (KSU) and BioNexus KC, and work to attract collaborators from across the U.S. and internationally.

8) The research title of the Farm Bill enacted several “high priority research initiatives”, including a fertilizer management initiative. This initiative will help provide farmers with critical information about the most effective management practices to ensure that even in the face of multiple major rain events, nutrients stay in the field and do not run off into the water. How does NIFA plan to implement this and other high priority research initiatives in the Farm Bill?

   Response: NIFA will work with the Congress to implement these high priority research initiatives identified in the Farm Bill, should funding be appropriated.

<u>Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow</u>

1) The 2018 Farm Bill attempted to level the playing field for all National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) sponsored programs, removing matching fund carve-outs for certain eligible grantees. However, in removing the 2014 Farm Bill matching requirement language, entities are now required to provide a full match in the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) program without flexibility to include a research institution’s indirect costs or allow flexibility to waive the matching requirements. For many research institutions, this change has created a funding burden that is too high for them to participate in the SCRI program. I strongly encourage NIFA to follow previous guidance and congressional intent prior to the 2014 Farm Bill *(*see Sec 710 of the 2013 Ag appropriations bill)* by allowing indirect costs to count toward institutional matching fund requirements.

   a. Will you commit to allowing maximum flexibility for institutions seeking to use indirect costs as part of the matching fund requirement?

      Response: NIFA allows in-kind contributions toward required matching for all of its competitive grant programs, as permitted by law. While NIFA’s Administrative Provisions [see 7 CFR 3430.52(b)] restrict its treatment of unrecovered indirect costs as in-kind matching contributions for competitive grants including SCRI, NIFA is exploring the potential to modify these Administrative Provisions. Any and all changes, however, would be subject to regulatory approval and would only take effect upon NIFA's publication of a final rule.

b. **Can you please explain what steps you will take to ensure that all appropriate sources of institutional funding and support from SCRI grantees is included when calculating matching funds assessments?**

Response: NIFA has an established process to ensure that all appropriate sources of institutional funding and support from competitive grantees, including SCRI, are included when calculating matching funds assessments. Specifically, in instances where a match is mandatory, any resulting award requires the signature of an Authorized Representative (AR). The purpose of the signature is to ensure that grantees are aware of the matching requirements and their commitment to meet them. Only when NIFA receives the award signed by the AR will award funds be released and available for drawdown. Where a match is required, the award document necessitates a bilateral agreement resulting in all funds being withheld pending NIFA's receipt of the fully executed grant award document. Upon receipt of the counter-signed Notice of Award (Award Face Sheet), NIFA will release grants funds for placement in the Automated Standard Applications for Payment System (ASAP). ASAP, operated by the Department of Treasury's Bureau of the Fiscal Service, is NIFA's designated payment system for awards. NIFA lastly conducts post-award follow up on the match requirement through the receipt and review of the grantee's annual and final SF 425 financial reports, which are used to determine if grantees are reporting match expenditures in accordance with the award. To ensure grantees are complying with matching requirements post award, NIFA may also conduct administrative reviews during the awardee's period of performance.

2) **I was recently made aware from several research institutions and stakeholders that USDA has stopped collecting local food information on the Economic Research Service's (ERS) Agriculture Resource Management Survey, which is USDA's primary source of information about production practices, resource use, and the economic well-being for farmers and ranchers. This change occurred without any stakeholder input and will significantly hinder the ability for researchers to adequately measure impacts of local and regional foods systems on local economies. The information from this survey also helps provide other agencies within USDA with the data needed to help support these farmers through farm programs, loans, and risk management tools.**

a. **Will you commit to reinstating the local food related questions on the 2020 Agriculture Resource Management Survey and all future surveys?**

Response: NASS receives an annual appropriation for the Agricultural Estimates Program to produce estimates of farm production expenses and partners with the Economic Research Service in developing content for the Agricultural Resource Management Survey related to information on farm income and other policy relevant topics. Since funding levels for FY 2020 have not been set, NASS and ERS are unable to make this commitment at this time.

b. **Please explain why these questions were removed from survey in the first place.**

Response: Historically these questions have rotated on and off of the Agricultural Resource Management Survey questionnaires. This rotation has allowed data on multiple topics of importance to be gathered over the course of three to four years. Local food related questions have been on the survey for the last several consecutive years. The availability of data from other sources, policy needs, and relevance of the topic are all considerations that are evaluated as content is developed annually. NASS and ERS are currently evaluating content for the 2020 survey and will take the items noted into account when prioritizing content.

c. **Please explain why USDA did not have discussions with stakeholders who use this information before the decision was made to remove the questions.**

Response: The Agricultural Resource Management Survey is one of several projects which collects data on local foods. On April 11, 2019, NASS released the Census of Agriculture which included detailed information down to the county level on local food marketing practices. In addition, NASS plans to conduct a special local foods study as part of our Census of Agriculture program in FY 2021 if funds are available.

3) **It has come to my attention that the National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS) has suspended its data collection on honeybees. This is alarming given the ongoing concerns about pollinator and honeybee population loss. This information is critical not only to the honey industry but to all of the crops that need pollinators to produce food. I am very concerned that NASS has discontinued this data collection.**

a. **Will you commit to resuming this data collection next year and every year in the future?**

Response: NASS receives an annual appropriation for our Agricultural Estimates Program. Since funding levels for FY 2020 and beyond have not been set, NASS is unable to make this commitment at this time.

b. **Please explain why USDA made the decision to discontinue this data collection.**

Response: NASS made this decision to stay within our resources after reviewing our estimating programs against mission- and user-based criteria, the amount of time remaining in the fiscal year to meet budget and program requirements, and the need to maintain the strongest data in service to U.S. agriculture. The decision to suspend data collection was not made lightly but was necessary given available resources. We will continue to review our federal agricultural statistical programs using the same criteria to ensure timely, accurate and useful statistics.

c. **Is USDA continuing any parts of this data collection report? If yes, please explain what information NASS is collecting.**

Response: NASS will publish the annual Honey Bee Colonies report as scheduled on August 1, 2019. This report will include data from January 1, 2018 through April 1, 2019. The suspension of one quarter in fiscal year 2019 is considered temporary as future fiscal year budgets have not yet been determined. USDA will continue collecting and publishing data for the annual Honey report which records number of colonies producing honey, yield per colony, honey production, average price, price by color class and value and honey stocks nationally and by state. The report also notes trends and changes in the honey producing sector, such as percent change in honey prices and quantity of production, which is an effective way to monitor bees captures general trends in colony numbers over time

4) **The National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) administers several programs with mandatory funding including the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, the GUS Nutrition Incentive Program, Specialty Crop Research Initiative, and the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative. When do you anticipate FY2019 awards to be announced for these competitive grant programs?**

Response: NIFA is committed to servicing our partners and customers as quick as we can. NIFA staff are making every effort to obligate all FY 2019 annual awards before September 30. NIFA will announce awards once agreements have been finalized with recipients.

5) **Will you commit to providing the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry with all of the scientific reports and studies published after January 20, 2017**

that relate to the issue of climate change that USDA researchers either authored or collaborated on? Will you commit to posting all of these reports on USDA's website?

Response: Please see Attachment A for a list and link to the reports requested.

The National Agricultural Library (NAL), www.nal.usda.gov, makes citations and full-text articles of USDA-funded research, including ARS research publications, available through its repository, PubAg, at https://pubag.nal.usda.gov/. These materials are also cataloged and indexed in AGRICOLA, at https://agricola.nal.usda.gov/, NAL's catalog of published agricultural information from around the world.

NAL collaborates with ARS's Office of National Programs (ONP) to ensure ARS scientists submit their final, peer-reviewed, publisher-accepted manuscripts to PubAg for public access. The final, peer-reviewed articles are also available through the scholarly publications that publish the scholarship in its final form. NAL makes every effort to be as comprehensive and as inclusive as possible, but there may be gaps in this publication record, particularly from smaller publishers. NAL is making enhancements to PubAg in the next 12 to 18 months to improve discoverability and access to ARS scientists' research outputs.

Attached is a list of 1,447 citations on climate change, global warming, and global change. The articles include at least one USDA-affiliated author and were published between 2017 and the present. The date assigned for each record is the final publication date of the article; research reported has often been conducted years in advance of article publication.

6) **During our July 18, 2019 hearing you indicated that the USDA's climate resilience science plan, as reported in the Politico article published on 7/18/2019, that was developed in 2017 was never intended to be released to the public. However, the 2017 plan itself plainly reads that its development "follows the USDA Climate Science plan published in 2010," which *was* released publicly. Why do you believe the 2017 plan was never intended to be released to the public? Who told you that and who made this decision? Why did USDA change course and decide to restrict public release of this report – thereby blocking all the information contained therein from American farmers and ranchers – when an earlier iteration of the report was released publicly?**

Response: The December 2017 version states, "This document is intended for USDA internal use to ensure that resources are directed toward the most necessary science for advancing the Department's ability to meet the needs of its stakeholders." The document published in Politico was a working draft of an updated USDA Climate Change

Science Plan. The original report was prepared in 2010 by the Office of the Chief Economist with input from agencies across the Department. The purpose of the 2010 report was to coordinate and guide the future direction of climate change research across the Department.

In 2016 and 2017, USDA staff from the across the Department prepared an update to the plan. This update was also coordinated by the Office of the Chief Economist. The update reflected progress in meeting the 2010 goals and outlined future research challenges. As the document states, the primary audience for this update was internal to the Department to aid in planning and priority setting. Technical work on the report was completed in late 2017. The December 2017 version of the report was provided to the research agencies as a staff report for their use in research agency planning.

7) **Your written testimony mentioned four Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) grants including one to researchers at the University of Illinois regarding the impact of cooperation between neighbors to address the spread of herbicide resistance. The testimony then asserts: "Corn and soybean producers in North America lose more than $40 billion per year to herbicide resistance." Frankly, the alleged annual losses seem implausibly high. Please provide the data that were used to arrive at the $40 billion per year loss number.**

Response: This was a typographical error. The sentence should have read, "Corn and soybean producers in North American could lose $40 billion per year to herbicide resistance." This data comes from a Weed Science Society publication in 2016[1].

8) **Section 12618 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-334) requires the Secretary to identify data sets within USDA regarding conservation practices and farm profitability and produce a report within a year of enactment on how access might be granted to university researchers to maximize the research benefits with appropriate privacy safeguards to protect producer privacy. Your mission area has a long history of balancing the interests of producer privacy while providing access to researchers. Who has USDA designated as the lead agency or official for this effort? To what extent has REE engaged with the effort to provide insights on what has worked effectively that could be a model for a conservation and farm profitability effort?**

Response: This effort is being led by different entities within USDA including the Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) mission area in conjunction with the Office of the

[1] http://wssa.net/2016/05/wssa-calculates-billions-in-potential-economic-losses-from-uncontrolled-weeds/

Chief Economist. REE has engaged and consulted with FPAC on implementation of this section and will work to provide any additional data or support needed to complete this report.

9) **Will you commit to providing the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry with weekly updates on the number of employees working in each office of ERS and NIFA in Kansas City and areas of expertise for each new hire?**

   Response: USDA can provide the Committee with biweekly updates on NIFA and ERS employee numbers located in Kansas City. New hires will be employed based on meeting the expertise requirements as outlined in the job posting for which they applied, consistent with Department policy. Job postings can be found on usajobs.gov. The rationale for a biweekly cadence is due to pay period cycles which is when the Department tracks employee changes and traditionally onboards new employees.

10) **USDA recently announced that 73% of current employees will not relocate to Kansas City.**

    a. **How long do you anticipate it will take to fill all of the vacated positions?**

       Response: Employees that received a reassignment letter can decide to report to Kansas City on September 30th and maintain their job regardless of if they had previously declined. Therefore, it is not possible to provide a detailed response to this question until after September 30th when both agencies will know how many employees did opt to relocate.

    b. **In general, how long do you anticipate it will take a new employee to develop the expertise and capabilities necessary to replace an experienced employee who chose not to relocate to Kansas City?**

       Response: ERS and NIFA will hire for the positions and capabilities that are needed to deliver their respective missions. The agencies will hire for the qualities and experience needed for each position and determine the training and development needs for each employee on a case-by-case basis.

    c. **What is your strategic hiring plan to fill those positions? Please provide all ERS and NIFA hiring plans to the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Agriculture Committee.**

       Response: ERS and NIFA have a talent acquisition strategy for the short- and long-term needs of both agencies. In the short term, agencies are underway posting job opportunities and initiating the hiring process for vacancies. Job postings for internal and external candidates are through usajobs.gov, and the Department is working with the Office of Human Resources Management to obtain additional Direct Hiring Authority for both agencies to expedite hiring efficiency. Each agency has assessed gaps for which they have obtained short term contractors and accessed assistance from employees in other areas of the Department. Each agency has a training plan in place that includes knowledge transfer from employees that will not be relocating to the new location to their peers to ensuring mission continuity responsibilities and deliverables are captured and transferred prior to employee exit interviews.

Long term strategies include the continuation of hiring for vacant positions across both agencies. In both the short- and long-term, a top priority for ERS and NIFA is to provide a positive experience for existing and new employees and deliver value from respective mission areas to stakeholders. USDA will work closely with the agriculture industry in the Kansas City area and within the nearby and greater land-grant university system to promote the career opportunities within ERS and NIFA located in Kansas City.

d. **Will you commit to hiring individuals that have the same specialties and expertise of those employees that are leaving? For example, will you commit to replacing climate change specialists with other climate change specialists and replacing nutrition specialists with nutrition specialists?**

Response: We are committed to a robust and mission-driven recruitment process to ensure we have qualified employees with the skill sets and expertise needed to continue and build upon capacity and capability for both agencies upon relocation.

e. **Please describe in detail how you plan to ensure these agencies will continue to carry out their missions with such high percentage of vacancies.**

Response: NIFA and ERS have assessed the short- and long-term needs for their respective missions and both agencies are committed to meeting congressionally mandated deadlines for their work. Prioritization of work is a constant focus and needed resources are being acquired in the interim for hiring and onboarding new employees.

f. Has USDA made any attempt to or will it attempt to replace the employees who are not accepting the reassignment with contractors? If so, please explain in detail the process USDA will use to do so. Will USDA competitively bid out a contract for such purposes?

Response: Support needs in both agencies are continually assessed. Neither ERS or NIFA plan to replace full-time positions with permanent contractors.

g. Has any USDA official asked ERS or NIFA employees that are not accepting the reassignment if they will continue their work as a government contractor? If yes, please explain in detail.

Response: Employees have expressed interest in knowing what the process is for working with the agencies in contractor positions, however neither agency has offered or promoted this in lieu of an employee accepting their reassignment. USDA has provided information to eligible employees that received reassignment orders about the USDA National Finance Center's Reemployed Annuitant Program. A reemployed annuitant is a person who is receiving a Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) or Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS) retirement annuity and, at the same time, is earning a paycheck as a Federal Employee. It is the duty of the Department to provide this information to eligible employees and express willingness to work with them should they qualify, be interested in doing so and provide a value to the Department.[2]

11) In Secretary Perdue's June 12, 2019 response to the letter that Ranking Members Carper, Peters, and I sent, he stated that USDA's final decision would "include an evaluation of any acceptable incentives." The final decision indicated that incentives of more than $26 million dollars have been offered but failed to explain what those incentives actually were.

a. Please describe in detail the incentives that have been offered.

Response: The Department views the proposals and incentives offered by the States and localities involved to be proprietary business information. The states and localities can release this information to the Committee if they desire to do so.

b. Please provide USDA's analysis on whether there are any legal or ethical concerns in accepting each of these incentives.

[2] https://www.nfc.usda.gov/Publications/HR_Payroll/Processing_Tips/reemployedannuitant.php

Response: The Department views the proposals and incentives offered by the States and localities involved to be proprietary business information. The Office of General Counsel and Office of Ethics are available to brief the committee on legal and ethical considerations should these documents be released publicly.

12) **I have concerns that USDA does not really intend to fill all of the current positions that will soon be vacant. There is already a high vacancy rate across USDA's research mission area – 22% vacancy rate – and USDA has been slow to fill those slots. In Secretary Perdue's response to my letter with Ranking Members Carper and Peters he indicated that "essential positions" at ERS and NIFA would be filled and did not commit to ensuring the continuation of some vital research. What does USDA mean by "essential positions"? Which positions will be filled?**

Response: ERS and NIFA are working aggressively to fill <u>all</u> vacancies at their respective agencies.

13) **How many employees have been hired for the Research, Education, and Economics mission area since January 20, 2017?**

Response: From January 20, 2017 to July 20, 2019, 613 permanent positions were hired competitively in the REE mission area.

a. **What is the average number of days to identify a vacancy and onboard an employee for this vacancy in the Research, Education, and Economics mission area during the time period of January 20, 2017 to present?**

Human Resources tracks time to hire from the date of the job announcement opened until the employee has on-boarded. For REE, during the request timeframe, the average time to hire has been 133 days. In general, PhD positions take longer than average and administrative positions take less than average. Days are in calendar days.

b. **How many employees are currently working in the human resources office responsible for hiring employees for ERS and NIFA in Kansas City? How many existing positions in that office are currently vacant?**

We have 11 staff and 2 vacancies in the HR office responsible for hiring employees for ERS and NIFA in Kansas City.

14) For a wide range is reasons, many current ERS and NIFA employees are unable to relocate to Kansas City. Many such employees have been trying to move to other parts of USDA by applying for noncompetitive transfers. However, I have heard concerns that such transfers are being denied and that noncompetitive transfers are being held until further guidance is provided. Are otherwise qualified employees of ERS and NIFA that are interested in transferring to another positions within USDA in the Washington DC area being prevented from making such transfers? Please explain in detail the requirements for intra-agency transfers for ERS and NIFA employees who are unable to relocate to Kansas City.

Eligible employees that choose not to relocate to Kansas City can utilize the Career Assistance Transition Program (CTAP). CTAP eligibility provides selection priority for a USDA vacancy in which a CTAP employee applies and is found to be 'well qualified' at a lateral position or below. Eligible employees can apply to vacancies. The Department is actively working to ensure opportunities for those who apply are handled in a fair and consistent manner. The Office of Human Resource Management (OHRM) is working with Department leadership, AFM Human Resources Division and all USDA mission areas on CTAP execution.

15) With regard to the ERS please report the number of employees in each division, i.e., Food Economics Division, Information Services Division, Market and Trade Economics Division, and Resource and Rural Economics Division, and office within each division who have indicated they will accept the reassignment to Kansas City and the number of employees who have indicated they will not accept the reassignment to Kansas City. For each division and office please indicate the total number of years of experience associated with those anticipated departures.

Response: This data can change daily as employees have the option to change their decision to relocate.

16) With regard to NIFA, please report the number of employees in each institute, i.e., Institute of Food Production and Sustainability, Institute of Bioenergy, Climate, and Environment, Institute of Food Safety and Nutrition, and Institute of Youth, Family, and Community, and office within each division who have indicated they will accept the reassignment to Kansas City and the number of employees who have indicated they will not accept the reassignment to Kansas City. For each division and office please indicate the total number of years of experience associated with those anticipated departures.

Response: This data can change daily as employees have the option to change their decision to relocate.

Senator Charles E. Grassley

1) Over the past 3 years, the animal agriculture industry has been successful in significantly decreasing the usage of medically important antimicrobials in food animals through implementation of the Veterinary Feed Directive Rule. Soon the use of these will transition to a prescription-only basis. As antimicrobial resistance continues to be one of the greatest threats to society, human and animal health, and economic prosperity, we are presented with new challenges in how we will continue to ensure animal health and welfare as well as food safety in this country. How will USDA continue to prioritize the mitigation of antimicrobial resistance, while continuing to uphold our country's high standards of safe food and healthy animals and people?

   Response: The USDA, as co-chair of the Combating Antibiotic Resistant Bacteria (CARB) Task Force continues its commitment to address antimicrobial resistance (AMR) through a coordinated U.S. Government strategy with its co-chairs, the Departments of Health and Human Services and Department of Defense. The Task Force is currently in the process of drafting a new CARB National Action Plan (NAP) for 2020-2025 and considering recommendations made by the Presidential Advisory Council for Combating Antibiotic Resistant Bacteria in July based on input received from stakeholders through a request for information and public meeting.

   USDA is taking into consideration what has been learned in the last 5 years since the CARB National Strategy was released, what has changed in the scientific landscape, and what gaps remain to be addressed to continue progress. While we are still working on specific inputs for the new plan, we intend to build on our efforts by working closely with the Food and Drug Administration to support them in continuing to optimize antimicrobial use stewardship; exploring development of new therapeutics, vaccines, and diagnostics to address animal health and minimize the need for antimicrobials; investigating drivers of AMR to inform development of mitigation strategies; expanding use of next generation sequencing technologies with our partners through the National Antimicrobial Resistance Monitoring System to improve surveillance; and pursuing continued international engagement to find science-based strategies to address AMR with our interagency partners.

Senator John Thune

1) Over the years, producers have questioned the accuracy of many NASS reports; especially this spring when corn and soybean planting fell far behind schedule. I have heard from producers that NASS planted acre reports this year do not accurately reflect the unplanted acres across South Dakota and other states.

Will you be making any changes to NASS data gathering to improve the accuracy of the agency's reports?

Response: NASS continues to be transparent with our procedures and has responded and reached out to many organizations and individuals who have expressed concerns similar to this one, including the National Corn Growers Association. To better communicate to our procedures in the future staff have been asked to do the following: synchronize an announcement of re-survey plans with the *Acreage* report release; add text to the report describing the follow-up survey work; review all survey forms, instruments, and instructions for potential improvements to address weather situations such as were experienced this spring; and expand outreach explaining NASS procedures. NASS is also exploring using new technologies such as precision agriculture and remote sensing. A pilot project for the 2020 growing season is currently being explored.

2) South Dakota State University has established the Wokini – which means new beginning – Initiative, which seeks to strengthen American Indian student success through partnerships with tribal communities. To build upon the success of SDSU's initiative, the 2018 farm bill includes a provision I authored to establish the New Beginnings for Tribal Students Program, a discretionary competitive grant program to allow USDA to match up to $5 million annually of land-grant and tribal colleges and universities funding used to provide identifiable support specifically for Native American students. Since the farm bill's enactment, several universities, including Michigan State University and North Dakota State University, have expressed support for this initiative. While the New Beginnings for Tribal Students Program is subject to appropriations, the House provided $2.5 million in its fiscal year 2020 spending bill, and I am advocating for funding in Senate appropriations.

   Has USDA started implementation procedures for this program?

   Response: NIFA has been holding internal discussions about the best way to effectively implement this program should funding be provided. Additionally, I met with the President of South Dakota State University on this topic back in March to get his perspective on how best to implement this program.

   If not, I would encourage USDA to do so as we would like to get the program up and running as soon as funds are appropriated.

3) Do your long-term projections for your mission area include closing any research facilities?

   Response: USDA and REE continually evaluate our footprint with the Department's programmatic needs. While REE currently has no plans to close facilities, the average

age of our facilities is 64 years old. Should the need arise to close or consolidate a facility the need arise I would ensure that Congress is appropriately notified.

If so, the members of this committee and I would appreciate any information in advance if you plan to shutter any research facilities.

4) In the 2018 farm bill, we were able to include the term "soil health" as a priority for USDA research funding.

   Can you tell me how you plan to expand USDA research in your mission area to place more emphasis on improving soil health?

   Response: REE recognizes soil health as a priority. ARS scientists across the country have been tasked with conducting research related to soil health. Future expansion of programs will be dependent on funding levels provided by Congress.

5) Last year, Sen. Klobuchar and I introduced the Agriculture Data Act of 2018, which, in part, was included in the 2018 farm bill. Our intent was to improve agriculture data research of conservation practices to help farmers reduce risk and increase profitability.

   What plans do you have to improve data collection to make it more usable for researchers, farmers, and ranchers?

   Response: NASS, in accordance with the Confidential Information Provisions of Title V, Subtitle A, Public Law 107–347 and other applicable Federal laws, can not disclose data collected under a pledge of confidentiality in identifiable form to anyone other than employees or sworn agents. Individual participants in a NASS survey can rest assured that summary data will not be published in a way that would identify them or their operation without their written permission. For instance, if only one farm in a county produced a particular crop, NASS would protect the privacy and sensitive business information of that individual farm by combining the data for that crop with reports from other counties to publish only combined totals.

   NASS has been meeting with other USDA agencies in the Data Sharing Working Group under the leadership of the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO). The group is working on the report in section 1247 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 and has identified data sets and the legal protections for the data. The USDA group has met with AGree to learn what data is a priority. The focus has been on various conservation data sets and ways to increase access. NASS has the authority to grant sworn agent status and allow researchers to access the CPISEA protected data under controlled conditions.

6) African swine fever, foot-and-mouth disease, and wheat stem rust are all examples of current threats to global agriculture that know no borders. As crop and animal pests

and diseases emerge and spread abroad, U.S. agriculture needs to stay at least one step ahead to ensure the development of new technologies to combat these threats before they enter the United States.

How is the REE mission area working to provide research solutions to combat these threats?

Response: USDA takes the threat of crop and animal pests and diseases extremely seriously and is attune to the damage that these are and can to our farmers and ranchers. REE plays a vital role in the Department's approach in the animal and plant pest and disease threat space.

- Animal Diseases: USDA is engaged with international working groups and global plant and animal health communities to gain insights into diseases affecting world communities and anticipates how these diseases could be introduced into the U.S. in order to develop prevention and mitigation plans. For example, USDA is a member of the World Organization for Animal Health. The organization asks its member countries to report animal diseases detections, disseminates that information to other countries, and encourages international solidarity in the control of animal diseases. Using both unintentional and intentional threat analyses, recommendations of the scientific community, and gap analyses as a guide, researchers at REE select diseases that represent the classes of the diseases that are most likely to cause a disease outbreak. USDA will focus on having the right diagnostic tools to do surveillance, having trained animal and plant health first responders, and in the case of animal diseases, having the right vaccines available for control and eradication where possible. USDA continues to develop collaborations and partnerships that will lead to preparedness and innovation.

  NBAF will enhance the current work and relationships at the Plum Island Animal Disease Center and will be central to USDA's efforts to respond to an outbreak event involving transboundary and zoonotic animal disease agents of livestock, be it from intentional or unintentional sources. Since APHIS and ARS will be cohoused in the facility, task forces around disease threats involving the two agencies will be formed to coordinate research and diagnostic activities and information sharing. The main response aspects of work at NBAF will include quickly diagnosing what the disease is; performing research to ensure that diagnostics are effective; evaluating whether any existing countermeasure for the disease is protective or if vaccines need to be developed; monitoring the disease outbreak through continually evolving diagnostics; and researching proper decontamination and disposal procedures. APHIS works with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to perform diagnostics and ancillary testing for forensic and attribution purposes.

- Plant Diseases: Wheat Stem Rust- A virulent biotype (strain) of wheat stem rust (Ug99) was detected in Uganda in 1999 and has since spread to several countries in eastern and southern Africa and the Middle East. Ug99 is the most virulent wheat stem rust strain reported in 50 years and threatens worldwide grain production. ARS is leading Ug99 research and breeding for Ug99 resistance in cooperation with NIFA and APHIS. The strategy is to advance breeding lines with one or more resistance genes for all wheat/barley market classes, which is conducted in partnership with more than 15 public U.S. wheat breeding programs. Current USDA efforts include:

- ARS's National Small Grains Germplasm Collection in Aberdeen, ID, conserves more than 147,000 accessions of genetically diverse wheat, barley and other small grains. These resources are the raw material for breeders searching for new sources of genes that confer resistance to Ug99. To date, ARS and collaborators have evaluated more than 7,500 accessions for host-plant resistance to Ug99.
- Since 2005, ARS has supported a specific cooperative agreement to screen elite US wheat and barley breeding lines in East Africa for Ug99 resistance. More than 28 U.S. university wheat and barley breeding programs and 12 private sector companies participate, greatly benefitting U.S. breeders and farmers.
- ARS is contributing to the international Ug99 effort through the Borlaug Global Rust Initiative. ARS is also a subcontractor to Cornell University in the "Delivering Genetic Gain in Wheat" grant funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2016–2020). This external funding is supporting high-risk research to incorporate durable rust resistance genes from three wild relatives of wheat.
- The wheat stem rust pathogen genome was sequenced, and this information was used to develop a sensitive diagnostic method to distinguish Ug99 from similar rust pathogens. The method was validated by APHIS and is being shared with land grant university collaborators as well as the National Plant Diagnostic Laboratory Network, which conducts Ug99 monitoring in the United States.
- ARS researchers in St. Paul, MN, expanded nationwide surveillance and monitoring for the possible appearance of Ug99 in the United States by establishing sentinel plots of susceptible wheat varieties in areas, such as south Texas, where stem rust is most likely to enter first in the United States.
- New genes for Ug99 resistance have been cloned and sequenced. Several new genes for resistance have been identified and are now being used across U.S. breeding programs.
- The Pakistan Wheat Production Enhancement Program (WPEP) was initiated in 2010 in partnership with CIMMYT and the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA). WPEP's objectives are to carry out rust pathogen surveillance; prebreeding to enhance wheat diversity for rust resistance; accelerate breeding and testing of newly developed germplasm, seed multiplication, and distribution; and establish better agronomic practices. ARS researchers in Raleigh, NC are cooperating with the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council, CIMMYT, and ICARDA to better identify the rust populations in Pakistan and to develop wheat germplasm having durable rust resistance.

- Two papers, co-authored by ARS scientists and published in 2017 in the journal Science, represent a significant step forward to better understand of how plants interact with the rust pathogen.

7) **Domestically, U.S. agriculture needs to maintain its competitive edge. After 150 years of investing in public agricultural research, U.S. farmers are the most productive in the world, but funding for public agricultural research in the United States has stagnated in recent years.**

   How is the REE mission area working with OMB and the administration to increase public ag R&D funding and to prioritize this critical work?

   Response: REE has engaged through the budgetary process to ensure that limited funds are used in a manner that is efficient, effective, and responsive to the American Taxpayer.

Senator Patrick Leahy

1) **I have serious concerns about the Department's insistence on relocating two critical agricultural research agencies outside of the National Capital Region. I believe the Department's planned relocation of the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) lacks merit and justification, and has already led to significant losses of highly-qualified personnel. This has and will continue to undermine the mission of both agencies. This move has already dealt a significant blow to the Department's scientific and economic research capacity, and has had an immeasurable impact on morale at the Department. While I understand that the relocation was proposed and initiated prior to your appointment as Deputy Undersecretary of Research, Education, and Economics at USDA, you now play a pivotal role in its execution.**

2) **In your written responses to questions for the record provided by the Committee on April 12, 2019, you stated: "My understanding is that during the decision-making process, USDA conducted a preliminary cost benefit analysis estimating savings based on facility costs, locality pay adjustments and assumptions on employee behaviors."**

   a. **What specific cost-benefit analysis was conducted prior to Secretary Perdue's August 2018 announcement of the proposed relocation of ERS and NIFA? Who conducted the analysis?**

      Response: A preliminary analysis was done during a deliberative decision-making process. This cost-benefit analysis took into account currently leased facility costs, locality pay comparing DC to other USDA locations around the United

States and made preliminary assumptions about staff behavior. This analysis was completed by USDA staff.

b. **What "assumptions on employee behaviors," as you described them, were used during the decision-making process and cost-benefit analysis prior to the Secretary's decision to relocate the agencies outside the National Capitol Region, and upon what were these assumptions based?**

   Response: The analysis estimated possible attrition.

c. **Will you provide any and all cost-benefit analysis documents created prior to August 2018 regarding the relocation of ERS and NIFA?**

   Response: These are deliberative and pre-decisional documents. USDA released the cost benefit analysis for the location selection in June

d. **On June 13, USDA released a report containing a cost-benefit analysis for the relocation of ERS and NIFA to Kansas City. Was this cost-benefit analysis conducted by Ernst & Young?**

   Response: A cost benefit analysis was completed by E&Y. They consulted with USDA to set the assumptions and to obtain any agency specific information that was needed in their model (square footage, lease information, GS grades of employees, etc) and to ensure they understood how agency missions may benefit with the potential savings.

e. **Did USDA make any changes, edits, or redactions to Ernst & Young's cost-benefit analysis prior to its release?**

   Response: As stated above, E&Y worked with USDA staff to provide agency specific information. Additionally, during internal clearance process the Office of the Chief Economist reviewed the analysis and felt more comfortable with more conservative estimates.

f. **If so, will the Department provide the Committee with the unaltered analysis created by Ernst & Young, and all materials created by Ernst & Young related to the relocation of ERS and NIFA?**

   Response: All relevant materials have been shared with Congress.

3) **According to the Department, only 72 ERS employees agreed to relocate, while 99 declined. At NIFA, only 73 employees accepted the relocation, with 151 declining. By itself, this level of attrition is devastating to the missions of both agencies.**

However, among the employees who are leaving ERS and NIFA due to the relocation, it is not clear on which issue areas these employees work.

a. Of the employees who have declined to relocate, in which division did each of them work and on which issue areas did they work?

Response: The most recent employee information by division has been provided to the Committee.

4) In a written question for the record provided to you on April 12, 2019, I asked you for the Department's estimated cost for the relocation and from what funds the Department will draw to account for this cost. Your written response stated that: "This is dependent upon the final location selected."

a. Now that the site has been selected, what is the full estimated cost of the relocation, and from what funds will the Department draw to account for this cost?

Response: Spending updates can be provided to the committee as the process moves forward. Due to multiple variables, the Department is unable to provide solid estimates for FY19 at this time. An FY20 summary can be provided after the start of the new fiscal year. For source of funds, ERS will utilize their annual appropriated salary and expense fund and NIFA will utilize their general operating budget and $6 million from FY18 appropriations for the relocation.

5) Even with an aggressive hiring plan, it is impossible to expect that NIFA's research and grant making responsibilities will not be interrupted or impacted given the staggering levels of employee attrition. Land grant universities, including the University of Vermont, rely on NIFA to award grants and disburse funds in a timely manner. This dysfunction will likely be compounded by the fact that relocating employees are not required to report to Kansas City until September 30, one day before the end of fiscal year 2019.

a. What assurances can you provide the Committee that funding for land grant universities and other research partners in fiscal year 2019, fiscal year 2020, and beyond, will not be delayed by the staffing impacts of the Department's proposed relocation?

Response: NIFA and ERS have assessed the short- and long-term needs for their respective missions and both agencies are committed to meeting congressionally mandated deadlines for their work. Prioritization of work is a constant focus and needed resources are being acquired in the interim for hiring and onboarding new employees.

Senator Sherrod Brown

1) Dr. Hutchins, USDA's half-baked decision to relocate NIFA (NIF-UH) and ERS not only harms and undermines rural America, but hurts the hardworking public servants and their families. For instance, Jodi Williams, a National Program Leader in food safety, has family obligations that will force her to leave NIFA rather than relocate to Kansas City. More than 20 years ago, Ms. Williams received a USDA 1890 scholarship. With her departure, NIFA will lose a valuable science subject matter expert is presently overseeing more than 100 active competitive projects.

   Dr. Hutchins, at your nomination hearing, you touted your business experience and acumen and vowed to "do all I can each and every day to expand the long term competitiveness and sustainability of U.S. Agriculture and further develop the framework and capabilities of REE scientists and professionals."

   a. Do you think losing half of your staff of highly-skilled Ph.D.'s and other experts in their field is consistent with how thriving organizations assemble and retain talent?

      Response: Transitions are difficult, that has never been a point of debate. USDA is doing everything possible to support those employees, like Ms. Williams, who are not able to move for personal reasons. We offered her and all of her colleagues the opportunity to continue their career in Kansas City and we're working to identify opportunities across USDA for those who cannot. The transition will have challenges, but USDA is taking steps to ensure continuity of mission and investing in the long-term success of both agencies.

2) The Secretary and the Department have said many times that this move's goal is to have a strong and robust workforce. Yet, If ERS and NIFA lose half of their employees as has been reported, a tremendous amount of skill and institutional memory will also be lost. I can't decide if USDA doesn't know this, or doesn't care about losing talented staff.

   a. What will be the impact of these losses on the ability of ERS and NIFA and to serve rural communities in Ohio and across rural America?

Response: ERS and NIFA are committed to delivering on their respective missions. The Kansas City Region will allow ERS and NIFA to increase efficiencies and effectiveness and bring important resources and manpower closer to all of our customers. We did not undertake these relocations lightly, and we are doing it to enhance long-term sustainability and success to these agencies. The considerable taxpayer savings will allow us to be more efficient and improve our ability to retain more employees in the long run. We will be placing important USDA resources closer to many stakeholders, most of whom live and work far from Washington, D.C. In addition, we are increasing the probability of attracting highly-qualified staff with training and interests in agriculture, many of whom come from land-grant universities.

3) In May, 204 ERS employees voted overwhelmingly to join a union and a month later, 185 of their colleagues at NIFA followed suit. On June 18, the newly formed union issued a demand to bargain with USDA over the impact and implementation of the relocation. It's my understanding that USDA recently rejected all of the union's requests. It's hard for me to see how USDA is bargaining in good faith with employees who have dedicated their careers to the programs and research that benefit rural America and domestic agriculture.

   a. Given the rushed nature of this move, and that as of today a final location in the Kansas City region has not been selected for the permanent home of ERS and NIFA, what is your justification for denying these requests?

      Response: ERS is currently negotiating multiple requests with the Union and therefore the Department is not able to comment on the requests or negotiations. Once concluded, NIFA will begin negotiations with their Union.

4) In USDA's cost benefit analysis, USDA stated that "the largest and most robust incentives package offered providing on the top savings more than $26 million dollars." Yet, as I understand it, we don't even know if the office will be in Kansas or Missouri.

   a. What are those incentives? Please share with the Committee what financial or other incentives have specifically been offered related to this move.

      Response: The Department views the proposals and incentives offered by the States and localities involved to be proprietary business information. The states and localities can release this information to the Committee if they desire to do so.

b. Are there any ethics requirements that would require the disclosure or prohibit the acceptance of any such incentives?

Response: The Department views the proposals and incentives offered by the States and localities involved to be proprietary business information. Office of General Counsel and Office of Ethics would be happy to brief the committee on legal and ethical consideration should these documents be released publicly.

5) When you appeared before this committee in 2018, you told me that you believe Agriculture can "tell a positive story" as the world struggles to combat and adapt to global climate change. But, as my colleagues have mentioned, USDA has refused to tell that story.

However, it has been reported that USDA has actively suppressed peer-reviewed Agricultural Research Service reports detailing how climate change will affect agriculture around the world – including a report that shows rice, which feeds millions around the globe, will become less nutritious in a high-carbon environment. Dr. Hutchins, you are effectively serving as Chief Scientist of the world's preeminent ag research organization. It is unacceptable that USDA actively downplays—or even worse, suppresses—research on the serious effects climate change will have on both domestic and international agriculture.

At that same hearing last year, you also said the, "most concerning proposed finding" in the fourth National Climate Assessment "is the increase in extreme events."

a. Heavy rainfall and flooding in Ohio and throughout the Midwest have certainly had an extreme effect on farmers—many of whom were unable to plant corn or soybeans this year. What USDA research is being undertaken that could help inform farmers about the risks their crops may face from changing precipitation patterns in the United States affected by climate change?

Response: Farmers rely on USDA to provide information on water management and use, cropping conditions, and climate outlook. Managing water on the farm requires thinking about quantity and timing and planning for too much or too little water at any point in time.

USDA maintains a cooperative relationship with the National Drought Mitigation Center (NDMC). Through this relationship, USDA supports the United States Drought Monitor (USDM) and all the associated decision support tools, services, products and data that accompany it.

REE conducts or funds hundreds of studies on climate change every year. That research is disseminated through our Regional Climate Hubs which allows for the most relevant information for producers in a particular area to be more easily located. Information relating to research on the affects you describe can be found here: https://www.climatehubs.oce.usda.gov/hubs/midwest/climate-impacts/Seasonal%20Shifts

b. **How will this research, and other programs that you oversee, that help stem the effects of climate change be publicized?**

Response: Ensuring the latest research gets into the hands of farmers is a priority. Formal press releases are only one of several forms of communications. REE agencies utilize workshops, events, and conferences, list-serves, newsletters, our website, blogs, webinars, and social media to highlight and publicize USDA research on climate variability and change. The Climate Hubs program is a major resource for highlighting the work of USDA scientists and delivers information using multiple media and approaches. The

Climate Hubs Twitter account can be found here: https://twitter.com/USDAClimateHubs?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor

The calendar of Hub events can be found here: https://www.climatehubs.oce.usda.gov/calendar

c. **USDA research, published after your appearance before the Committee, found that climate change could increase the cost of federal crop insurance by 22% and reduce corn and soybean yields. This is alarming.**

i. **What research is USDA funding and what steps are being taken to protect farmers and American taxpayers from these devastating weather events that will have far-reaching impacts on American agriculture?**

Response: The recent study by ERS that focused on the intersection of agricultural production and risk management makes an important contribution to our understanding of future risks. The authors note that some aspects of behavioral adaptation were beyond the scope of the analysis, and their results point to the role of technology in improving resilience. REE will continue its mission to promote innovation and conduct the research required to address climate change.

ii. How is REE working with partners in the private sector or non-governmental organizations to develop policies and practices to help agriculture reduce greenhouse gas emissions? If yes, please provide examples.

Response: REE works to engage the private sector through the research we conduct and through coordination on the topic at the Department level. The private sector has an enormous capacity for innovation in greenhouse gas-reducing technologies, and USDA research on these practices can complement these efforts and facilitate their use, when appropriate.

Senator Michael Bennet

1) Last year, the National Academies released a study titled "Science Breakthroughs 2030: A Strategy for Food and Agricultural Research." The study concluded that current funding for food and agriculture R&D is inadequate. When you previously came before the committee in November, you told me that you would learn more about this study and the research priorities it outlined.

a. Have you since familiarized yourself with the report?

Response: Yes.

b. If so, what steps has the USDA taken to address the food and agriculture R&D shortcomings the report outlines?

Response: USDA has been working to address the goals outlined in the report. Additionally, these goals have helped to set agency and mission area priorities for the Department. These items will be incorporated into future strategic plans created by the Office of the Chief Scientist.

c. Can you guarantee that the decision to move to Kansas City—and the potential loss of long-term scientists and USDA experts—will not negatively affect the USDA's unique and innovative research that is so vital to agricultural producers at this time?

Response: ERS and NIFA are committed to delivering on their respective missions. The Kansas City Region will allow ERS and NIFA to increase efficiencies and effectiveness and bring important resources and manpower closer to all of our customers. We did not undertake these relocations lightly, and we are doing it to enhance long-term sustainability and success to these agencies. The considerable taxpayer savings will allow us to be more efficient and improve our ability to retain more employees in the long run. In addition, we are increasing the probability of attracting highly-qualified staff with training and interests in agriculture, many of whom come from land-grant universities.

Senator Tina Smith

1) A recent University of Minnesota study documents declining agricultural yields world-wide due to the changing climate. For soybeans, we are already seeing the impacts in our country. Soybean yields are declining in southern and eastern states. For now, climate change has actually helped increase soybean yields in Minnesota though the good times won't last. If we fail to take action to reduce climate change now, the problems we're seeing in the southern and eastern states will reach Minnesota. Under President H. W. Bush, the USDA Agricultural Research Service published 8 news stories about climate research per year. Under President Obama, that number rose to 11 times per year. Under the current Administration, climate news stories have only appeared once per year.

   Why has the USDA downplayed the risk that climate change poses to agriculture? What do you plan to do to change that?

   Response: USDA has not "downplayed the risk that climate change poses to agriculture." Scientific integrity is of paramount importance to USDA. We have made it clear that we have no policy, practice, nor intent to minimize, discredit, de-emphasize, or otherwise influence the climate-related science carried out by USDA scientists and agencies.

2) Farmers are directly impacted by climate change right now. This past spring was one of the wettest planting seasons, which prevented farmers from getting their crops in the ground.

   a. Can you talk about recent studies by USDA scientists that have looked into how climate change is affecting farmers?

Response: REE Agencies are providing the research and working land managers with the information and tools they need to adapt to changing climate conditions. Our agencies engage and inform agricultural stakeholders and the public of climate science efforts through two critical platforms: 1) The Long-Term Agroecosystem Research (LTAR) Network located here: https://ltar.ars.usda.gov/; and 2) the USDA Climate Hubs located here: https://www.climatehubs.oce.usda.gov/.

The LTAR network is composed of 18 locations distributed across the nation working together to address agricultural priorities and advance the sustainable intensification of U.S. agriculture. A primary goal of LTAR is to develop and to share science-based findings with producers, farmers and ranchers, which it does through the posting of LTAR Working Group accomplishments, research publications, and data inventories, which can be located here: http://usdaars.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=8f2a1f9a38df4310ae0e9e87bb968b7d.

USDA's Climate Hubs are led by ARS and the Forest Service to link USDA research and program agencies in their delivery of timely and authoritative tools and information to agricultural producers and professionals. Additionally, the Hubs provide information on programs and resources to assist with adaptation to climate change that are available to interested stakeholders via its website. You can find that website here: https://www.climatehubs.oce.usda.gov/actions-and-resources/programs.

Information relating to research on the affects you describe can be found here: https://www.climatehubs.oce.usda.gov/hubs/midwest/climate-impacts/Seasonal%20Shifts

b. **What specifically is the USDA doing to make sure farmers and ranchers are prepared to make the changes they need to adapt to extreme weather and other impacts of climate change?**

   Response: REE conducts or funds hundreds of studies on climate change every year. USDA's climate hubs is a convenient location for producers to find relevant information: https://www.climatehubs.oce.usda.gov/hubs/midwest

3) **At your nomination hearing last November, I asked you about the USDA Agriculture Research Service facility in Morris, MN. The Morris ARS facility houses the North Central Soil Conservation Research Laboratory, which supports critical research on soil and water quality and alternative crops. As we discussed, this facility was marked for closure in the President's FY 2019 budget request. At a time when agriculture producers in**

Minnesota face uncertainty in trade markets and climate change threatens productivity, the research being done at this ARS facility is so important for future planning.

At the hearing in November, I asked you to commit to advocating for the ARS facility in Morris and to make sure it gets the funding it needs to continue operations. You committed to visiting and taking a personal interest in understanding the importance of this facility.

a. Now that you have been at USDA for about seven months, have you visited the ARS facility in Morris, or do you have plans to visit?

   Response: I have not yet had the pleasure of visiting the facility. However, early on in my tenure I was able to meet with the leaders of the Barnes-Aastad Association to learn more about the facility and the work being done there.

b. Can you commit to making sure the facility stays open?

   Response: USDA and REE continually evaluate our footprint with the Department's programmatic needs. While REE currently has no plans to close this or any other facility, the average age of our facilities is 64 years old. Should the need arise to close or consolidate a facility, I would ensure that Congress is appropriately notified.

4) I hear often from farmers about the importance of Agriculture research. Our country's investment in research helps productivity and contributes to American farmers' competitiveness in overseas markets. In Fiscal Year 2018, Minnesota received nearly $50 million in research grants administered through NIFA. These dollars went to the University of Minnesota but also to the White Earth Tribal College, the Fond du Lac Tribal College, and the Leech Lake Tribal College.

If you look at the grants management office at NIFA there are very real staffing issues. Grant management specialists at NIFA are responsible for the overall management of the grants. Grant system specialists have a steep learning curve and each program has unique characterizations derived from congressional mandate. These jobs require a lot of training and are not easily replaceable.

On February 23, 2019, there were about 30 total grants management staff. Since then, five have left, and reports have indicated that another 21 employees in this office will be leaving because of the relocation. That leaves only 5 current grant specialists to do the work of 30 employees.

Research is being done in Minnesota thanks to NIFA grants on rural health, forestry, and animal health. Because of the NIFA relocation, much of this work is going to come to a halt. Universities and colleges in Minnesota are rightfully concerned that this hastily planned relocation process will undermine their work and create additional challenges for future NIFA funding proposals.

a. How can you ensure there is no disruption of grants if there are no employees left at NIFA to manage the grants?

   Response: ERS and NIFA have a talent acquisition strategy for the short- and long-term needs of both agencies. In the short term, agencies are underway posting job opportunities and initiating the hiring process for vacancies. Job postings are through usajobs.gov, and the Department is working with the Office of Human Resources Management to obtain additional Direct Hiring Authority for both agencies to expedite hiring efficiency. Each agency has assessed gaps for which they have obtained short term contractors and accessed assistance from employees in other areas of the Department. Each agency has a training plan in place that includes knowledge transfer from employees that will not be relocating to the new location to their peers to ensuring mission continuity responsibilities and deliverables are captured and transferred prior to employee exit interviews.

   Long term strategies include the continuation of hiring for vacant positions across both agencies. In both the short- and long-term, a top priority for ERS and NIFA is to provide a positive experience for existing and new employees and deliver value from respective mission areas to stakeholders.

b. How will you guarantee that agriculture research remains a federal priority despite being located out of the D.C. area?

   Response: While 90% of USDA's workforce is located outside of the National Capitol Region (NCR), ERS and NIFA are currently the only UDSA agencies that don't have representation outside of the NCR. This relocation will ensure that these important USDA resources, like every other agency in USDA, are in closer proximity to many of our stakeholders, most of whom live and work far from Washington, D.C. Additionally, the headquarters of both of these agencies will remain in the NCR, ensuring a continued synergy between agency and department leadership in advancing critical research priorities.

Senator Richard Durbin

1) USDA economists have documented that farm income has dropped 50 percent since 2013. They have reported it will take years for farmers to recover exports markets due

to Chinese retaliation against the President's trade strategy. They have reported that in the past thirty years, Chinese public investments in agriculture research has risen eightfold, while American public investment in agricultural research is falling behind. Now they are victim of the worsening American investments in public agriculture research after pointing out these truths.

a. When you evaluated this relocation plan, what was the USDA attrition estimates - lower, the same, higher – than what was reported yesterday?

   Response: Attrition estimates can change daily as employees have until the end of September to relocate.

b. What functions will be most affected?

   Response: Attrition estimates can change daily as employees have until the end of September to relocate.

c. If the affected functions are yet unknown – then why were these likely attritions not more fully studied before this move was launched?

   Response: Attrition was anticipated.

d. What is your contingency plan to avoid disruption of existing services that benefit farmers?

   Response: ERS and NIFA have created a talent acquisition strategy for the short- and long-term needs of both agencies. In the short term, agencies are underway posting job opportunities and initiating the hiring process for vacancies. Additionally, job postings and hiring are also underway for existing vacant positions that are being hired immediately at the new location. Job postings for internal and external candidates are through usajobs.gov, and the Department is working with the Office of Human Resources Management to obtain additional Direct Hiring Authority for both agencies to expedite hiring efficiency. Each agency has assessed gaps for which they have obtained short term contractors and accessed assistance from employees in other areas of the Department. Each agency has a training plan in place that includes knowledge transfer from employees that will not be relocating to the new location to their peers to ensuring mission continuity responsibilities and deliverables are captured and transferred prior to employee exit interviews.

   Long term strategies include the continuation of hiring for vacant positions across both agencies.

e. What is the rush? The September 30 deadline indicates to all observers that you are trying to beat the appropriations process – don't you think that's a reasonable conclusion?

Response: September 30th is a logical date for business planning purposes because it is the first date of a new pay period and allowed for each agency to start a new business quarter with positions settled across the NCR and Kansas City locations.

2) I have heard concerns that USDA employees who choose not to relocate to Kansas City, who have tried to explore lateral moves within USDA, have been told that they are not eligible for these lateral moves, when normally this would not be the case. I have heard that some who have applied elsewhere within the federal government, cannot get interviews despite their qualifications. And I know the federal hiring process is sufficiently cumbersome and opaque that there can be plausible deniability.

a. Is this true?

Response: No.

b. Can you confirm that USDA employees who have chosen not to relocate are <u>not</u> being blocked from similar jobs at USDA, or elsewhere within the federal government?

Response: Eligible employees that choose not to relocate to Kansas City can utilize the Career Assistance Transition Program (CTAP). CTAP eligibility provides selection priority for a USDA vacancy in which a CTAP employee applies and is found to be 'well qualified' at a lateral position or below. Eligible employees can apply to vacancies. The Department is actively working to ensure opportunities for those who apply are handled in a fair and consistent manner. The Office of Human Resource Management (OHRM) is working with Department leadership, AFM Human Resources Division and all USDA mission areas on CTAP execution.

3) USDA statisticians issued a critical report June 28, a routine nationwide forecast of how much corn, soybeans, wheat, etc. will be planted for the year, based on actual farmer surveys. The reports have serious influence on markets - USDA goes to great security to protect the information before announcement. Counter to other USDA reports and industry predictions, this June 28 report forecast corn as 3% higher than last year even though just 83 percent had been planted, far lower than the 10-year average. I understand the words of the surveys are locked in place months in advance, and that this report reflected intentions very late in planting. But USDA has years of expertise,

and you knew the implications of this report, since USDA immediately pledged to conduct another survey with results in August. The American Farm Bureau Federation reports that this USDA forecast tanked the futures market by 19 cents for corn – a $2.6 billion loss. Illinois Farm Bureau tells me quite a number of farmers who hedged lost tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars.

a. Do you agree that USDA anticipated this market reaction? If not, why not?

Response: USDA publishes statistics such as the June WASDE and the June Acreage report according to standards set out in Statistical Policy Directive Number 3[3], which provides guidance to agencies on the procedures and timing for release of Principal Federal Economic Indicators.

When NASS released the Acreage report on June 28, the corn planted area estimate was significantly higher than most people had anticipated. The World Agricultural Outlook Board in their June World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) report, forecast corn planted area to be 89.8 million acres, based only on weather developments and economic conditions at a time when planting was still in its early stages due to the unprecedented planting delays this year. This estimate came in lower than the March Prospective Plantings report. The NASS estimate in the Acreage report was above that WASDE forecast but also lower than the estimate previously published in the March Prospective Plantings report, by 1.1 million acres.

The estimates in the Acreage report were based on two surveys conducted by NASS, which reached out to nearly 100,000 farmers across the United States. Data collection was from May 30 to June 17. Each farmer was asked to report his/her acres planted and acres he/she intended to plant to each of the crops, including corn, at the time of the interview. It should be noted that this includes all corn acres planted for grain, silage, cover crop, and other uses; not simply corn for grain. This same procedure is used each year.

USDA and others have evaluated the impact of crop production reports on commodity markets and is aware that markets will react to data that is released (see for example, Karali, B. 2012. "Do USDA Announcements Affect Comovements Across Commodity Futures Returns?" Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Vol. 37, No. 1 (April): 77-97). However, the degree and direction to which any given USDA report shifts the multiple commodity markets is unknown before it is released. In the case of the June Acreage report, it was clear to the markets that there was a large degree of uncertainty around those

[3] https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/assets/OMB/inforeg/statpolicy/dir_3_fr_09251985.pdf

estimates due to the large amount of acreage that had yet to be planted. Moreover, it was clear that in past years when poor spring conditions has delayed plantings, NASS would often re-survey to get better estimates for the August Crop Production report. As such, while an immediate reaction to a report release is not surprising, it is also expected that continuing information and data will become more available throughout the crop year, which will provide producers and other market participants better information on which to develop hedging strategies and other risk management measures such as forward contracting.

b. **Do you agree USDA should have done a better job of qualifying this report when it was announced?**

Response: Following the release, some data users expressed concerns that NASS should not have released the report on June 28, specifically because more acres were left to be planted than normal. The Acreage report is a Principal Federal Economic Indicator report, and as such is part of the major statistical series that describe the current condition of the economy. Also, while Statistical Policy Directive No. 3 acknowledges that Principal Federal Economic Indicators "may affect the movement of commodity and financial markets," it nonetheless states that public release must be prompt and according to an established, publicly available schedule.

Additional concerns were raised that the report did not reflect the challenges farmers faced planting crops due to the extreme weather this year. In fact, the principal crop total (sum of the 22 major crops) published in the Acreage report was down 10.3 million acres from the previous season's plantings.

In addition to the updated information from the re-survey, NASS will also consider FSA Certified Acreage data and satellite-based indications when determining whether or not changes to the planted acreage estimates are necessary. If updates are necessary, they will be published on August 12 in the Crop Production report. It is worth noting that although the sign-up date for FSA acreage is in mid-to-late July, it often takes significant time for the reporting to be fully tabulated, therefore final certified totals will likely not be available in time for the August 12 release. A special notice will be included with the August 12, 2019 Crop Production report detailing the results of the re-interview work and the impacted states.

c. **What steps are you going to take, so that this doesn't happen again?**

Response: NASS continues to be transparent with our procedures and has responded to and reached out to many organizations and individuals who have expressed concerns similar to these, including the National Corn Growers Association. To better communicate our procedures in the future staff have been asked to do the following: Synchronize an announcement of re-survey plans with the Acreage report release; add text to the report describing the follow-up survey work; review all survey forms, instruments, and instructions for potential improvements to address weather situations such as were experienced this spring; and expand outreach explaining NASS procedures. NASS is also exploring using new technologies such as precision agriculture and remote sensing. A pilot project for the 2020 growing season is currently being explored.

4) This year, Illinois farmers faced a very complex equation on what to plant, when to plant, how to minimize costs and losses. University of Illinois Extension experts worked hard to answer these questions – providing weekly, even daily advice. I fear these weather patterns are the new normal. That means in the future, we must conduct Extension activities better than ever before – we must expand beyond only field visits and webinars by providing more tools for agents and farmers. We need stronger computing technology, interactively reaching farmers instantly, tailored to each farm, allowing farmers to plug in numbers at home, and allowing Extension to adjust their calculations based on these farmer inputs and advise on what farmers need in real time. I included in the Farm Bill a $5 million/5 year authorization for grants to help universities to begin designing such next generation Extension technology, and I am now working on appropriations.

   a. Are you aware of this concept?

   Response: Yes, we are aware of this provision in the 2018 Farm Bill.

   b. Do you agree that this should be a priority?

   Response: Yes.

   c. Can I count on your active support and involvement for this concept in the coming months?

   Response: Yes, we look forward to working with you on this concept/provision in the 2018 Farm Bill should the new program be funded.

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