

November 18, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Shelby, Vice Chairman Leahy, Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Granger:

As strong supporters of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Research, Education, and Extension (REE) mission area, we write to express our united and steadfast opposition to the USDA's relocation of the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) from Washington, DC to Kansas City, MO. Earlier this year, the House of Representatives passed an FY2020 Agriculture Appropriations bill that would prohibit funding for the relocation of ERS and NIFA outside of the National Capital Region. We urge conferees to adopt the House position in the final FY 2020 Appropriations bill text.

In August 2018, the USDA proposed a costly, legally questionable, and ill-advised relocation of the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) outside of Washington, DC.^{1,2,3} With no opportunity for stakeholder input provided throughout the process, the USDA announced its decision to relocate these agencies to the Kansas City Region in June 2019. Furthermore, in relocation orders to employees, the USDA offered an unreasonably short window of time for employees to decide whether to relocate or not.

Since the initial announcement more than one year ago, USDA's management of the relocation could be described as willfully negligent. This, in turn, has created tangible and immediate problems for the stakeholders that USDA was created to serve. Despite baseless claims of the

¹ <https://www.aaea.org/UserFiles/file/Report-MovingUSDAResearchersWillCostTaxpayers-AAEARReport2019june19final.docx.pdf>

² <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/08/05/inspector-general-usda-may-have-broken-law-in-moving-ers-nifa-1636046>

³ https://www.amstat.org/asa/files/pdfs/POL-ERS_NIFAGroupLetter-June262019.pdf

improvements that the relocation would bring, USDA has left its key stakeholders to deal with the following facts:

- A staggering 75 percent of staff have left ERS and NIFA, including all of the grants management staff at NIFA and publishing staff at ERS⁴
- Important research dollars from NIFA's \$1.7 billion portfolio are being significantly delayed to our nation's premier research institutions.⁵
- Dozens of critical ERS reports have been delayed or discontinued, including those on the opioid epidemic, international trade markets, SNAP, veterans' diets, and the consolidation of dairy farming.⁶

The harm done to American farmers, food and agricultural science, and hardworking federal employees at the hands of USDA is astonishing, but not irreversible. Absent USDA's desire to fulfill its own mission to – “provide leadership ... based on public policy, the best available science, and effective management” – we ask that you fight against the dismantling of ERS and NIFA for the best interest of American food and agricultural research, and the millions who depend on it.

We urge you to adopt the House-passed language prohibiting funding for the relocation of ERS and NIFA outside of the National Capital Region in the final FY 2020 Appropriations bill text.

Sincerely,

American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE)
 American Malting Barley Association
 American Statistical Association
 Antibiotic Resistance Action Center, George Washington University
 Association of Population Centers
 Association of State Public Health Nutritionists
 Center for Rural Affairs
 Center for Science in the Public Interest
 Consortium of Social Science Associations
 Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
 Decision Demographics
 FoodCorps
 Food & Water Watch
 Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)
 Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
 International Federation of Professional & Technical Engineers (IFPTE)

⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2019/10/02/usda-relocation-has-delayed-key-studies-millions-funding-employees-say/>

⁵ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/gutting-two-usda-research-agencies-warning-all-federal-agencies-ex-n1062726>

⁶ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2019/10/02/usda-relocation-has-delayed-key-studies-millions-funding-employees-say/>

Land For Good
Maine Farmland Trust
National Barley Improvement Committee
National Farmers Union
National Federation of Federal Employees
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National WIC Association
National Young Farmers Coalition
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
Organic Seed Alliance
Population Association of America
Produce Perks Midwest, Inc.
Public Advocacy for Kids
Revolving Door Project
Rural Coalition
Rural Sociological Society
Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior
Southeast Michigan Census Council
Sustainable Food Center
The National Association of Government Employees
Union of Concerned Scientists
Utahns Against Hunger