

December 14, 2018<sup>1</sup>

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 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.<sup>2</sup> The mission of ERS complements that of NIFA by

---

<sup>1</sup> This letter was originally sent November 27 with 21 signers. It is being updated as additional signers are added.

<sup>2</sup> <https://nifa.usda.gov/about-nifa>

anticipating “trends and emerging issues in agriculture, food, the environment, and rural America and to conduct high-quality, objective economic research to inform and enhance public and private decision making.”<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/about-ers/>

<sup>4</sup> <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



Theodore G. Andreadis

Director, The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station



Dan Arp

Dean Emeritus, College of Agricultural Sciences, Oregon State University



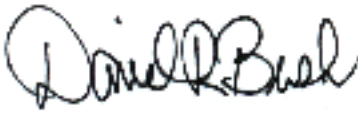
Kathryn J. Boor

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



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



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 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



Bret W. Hess

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



Govind Kannan

Former Dean, College of Agriculture, Family Sciences and Technology, Fort Valley 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

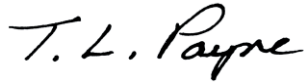
Daryl Lund  
Former Dean of Agricultural and Natural Resources, Rutgers University & Cornell University;  
Former Executive Director of the North Central Regional Association of State Agricultural Experiment Stations

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



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



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

---

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

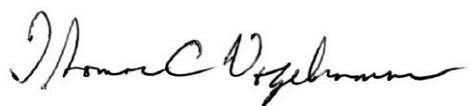


Fred Schlutt  
Vice Provost for Extension and Outreach and Director of Cooperative Extension Service,  
University of Alaska Fairbanks

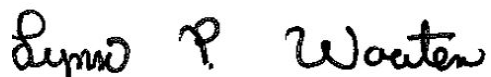


Milo Shult  
Vice President for Agriculture, Emeritus, University of Arkansas

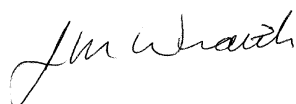




Thomas Vogelmann  
Dean, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, University of Vermont



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