

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, 2018¹

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 as 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.