

American Statistical Association Praises Bill to Maintain Strength, Integrity of USDA Research Arm

“We fully endorse the intent of this week’s House bill to keep the Economic Research Service (ERS) and National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) in the national capital region and the ERS in the USDA research arm,” said Ron Wasserstein, executive director of the American Statistical Association (ASA) about [H.R. 7330, the Agricultural Research Integrity Act of 2018](#). “The nation’s capital and the current organization alignment best position these two agencies to support American food, agriculture and rural communities through research, analysis and statistics.”

“We thank the bill’s sponsors for their leadership and commend their championing of evidence-based policymaking, as well as food and agricultural research,” said ASA President Lisa LaVange. “We look forward to working with them and all members of the 116th Congress to ensure the agencies best serve the nation and its taxpayers.”

The ASA together with the greater USDA research and statistics stakeholder community has been urging Congress to block the USDA’s moves—to relocate ERS and NIFA and realign ERS under the chief economist—since it first announced them in August.

“While we recognize the bill won’t become law in this Congress, we hope it draws further attention to USDA’s counterproductive and poorly justified upheaval of USDA’s research arm,” added Wasserstein.

Others in the broader USDA research and statistical stakeholder community also praised the bill and their sponsors.

“Output of American agriculture has increased two and a half times over the past half century with no increases in total inputs,” said Gale Buchanan, USDA chief scientist and undersecretary for Research, Education, and Economics under President George W. Bush. “This has been made possible by new information, knowledge and technology developed by agriculture research, enabling farmers to use their time and resources more efficiently. NIFA and ERS play a vital role in supporting this effort. To relocate these agencies to some remote location away from the proximity to other research agencies and related activities would greatly diminish their role in coordinating and supporting the research of the nation’s land-grant and other universities.”

Kitty Smith Evans, ERS administrator under presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, said decades of widespread and profound trust in ERS statistics and analysis would be preserved by the current House bill. "ERS professionals have deep expertise and are highly motivated to produce and disseminate accurate and unbiased information. I hope the House bill will prevent any more of its staff from leaving the agency out of fear for its future."

"This bill would ensure that ERS is fully funded *and* fully functional, necessary to understanding the impacts of the new farm bill that will spend some \$850 billion over the next eight years on programs that touch more than 40 million Americans," said Susan Offutt, ERS administrator under presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

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See also the December 5 press release, [The American Statistical Association Board of Directors Decries USDA Undermining of Federal Statistical Agency and Evidence-Based Policymaking](#), the November 28 press release, [Leaders in Agricultural Community Decry Proposed USDA Reorganization](#), and the November 14 press release, [Widespread Concern Increases Over Lack of Evidence for Controversial USDA Upheaval of Research Arm](#).

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About the American Statistical Association

The ASA is the world's largest community of statisticians and the oldest continuously operating professional science society in the United States. Its members serve in industry, government and academia in more than 90 countries, advancing research and promoting sound statistical practice to inform public policy and improve human welfare. For additional information, please visit the ASA website at www.amstat.org.

As part of ASA's commitment to support the importance of government statistics for evidence-based policymaking, ASA created [Count on Stats](#). In partnership with over a dozen organizations, the initiative is designed to educate and inform the public about the critically important nature of federal data. Without federal agencies' data collection and analysis, we would not have key insights into nutrition, economic trends, community issues, public safety, agriculture, and countless other facets that are vital to our society. For additional information, please visit the Count on Stats website at www.countonstats.org.