

New USDA Personnel Data Spurs ASA to Reiterate Call for Congress to Block USDA Move

In August, the USDA [announced](#) it would move the Economic Research Service outside Washington, DC, and from the research arm of the USDA to the Office of the Chief Economist. They claimed a need to better attract and retain highly qualified staff, citing in a media call August 9 the high attrition rates at ERS. Upon follow-up by the ASA, a USDA spokesperson specified, “Over the past five years, attrition at ERS has averaged 16.5% annually compared to 12.0% for USDA as a whole (excluding firefighters).”

Newly available [USDA attrition rate data](#)—broken down by all employees and all permanent employees—tell a different story. The former category includes summer interns, a large program for the ERS and one that has a 100% attrition rate. It appears the USDA used the all-employee category in justifying their proposal. Looking at the more relevant data for only permanent employees, the ERS attrition rate averages about 8% compared to 7% for USDA.

Considering the new data, American Statistical Association Executive Director Ron Wasserstein issued the following statement:

The apparent willingness of the USDA to use interns to inflate attrition statistics speaks to our concern for Economic Research Service being placed under the USDA Office of the Chief Economist. The products of the ERS must be viewed by producers and consumers everywhere as objective and neutral. ERS should remain in the information-providing arm of the USDA and not move to the policy-supporting Office of the Chief Economist. The new data also undermine USDA’s justification for moving ERS outside of Washington, DC. We call on congressional appropriators and authorizers to stop these illogical and unfounded moves.

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See also September 6, 2018 press release, [Penny-Wise, Dollar-Foolish Move at USDA Amounts to Big American Food and Agriculture Loss](#).

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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.