

## 101 Agriculture, Food, and Science Organizations Urge Congress to Block USDA Moves



*Getty Images*

One hundred and one<sup>1</sup> organizations signed a [letter sent to Congress](#) today urging appropriators to block the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) relocation and reorganization of the Economic Research Service (ERS) and relocation of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).

"The greater agriculture and food community has been clear in its opposition to USDA's unilateral decision to uproot its research arm: It is a counter-productive and ill-conceived plan that should be stopped," said Ron Wasserstein, executive director of the American Statistical Association.

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<sup>1</sup> More than 101 organizations have now signed the letter. Please follow the link to the letter for an up-to-date number.

“This letter includes 50 organizations new to our campaign,” stated Nichelle Harriott, policy specialist to the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. “We’re seeing more and more opposition. In fact, there are few, if any, supporters within the farm and food research community for the administration’s misguided plan.”

The [letter](#) reiterates the concerns of the food and agriculture research community stated since the [plans were announced](#) in August 2018:

The proposed relocation and reorganization will undermine the quality and breadth of the work these agencies support and perform—work that is vital to informing and supporting US agriculture, food security, and rural development. The rationale provided by the USDA for the relocation also fails to identify problems substantive enough to justify such a disruption of ERS’s and NIFA’s operations and jeopardizes the much-needed growth in funding for both agencies’ programs. Equally concerning is that USDA made their decision last summer without stakeholder or congressional input.

The letter urges congressional intervention through bill language in FY 2020 agriculture appropriations legislation stating no funding be used for relocation or reorganization of ERS and no funding be used for the NIFA relocation outside the National Capital Region. Additionally, the signers request appropriators to deny any FY 2019 reprogramming requests from USDA for them to continue to implement relocation.

Wasserstein also pointed out USDA’s rationale for this upheaval was further [undermined](#) by the FY20 proposed budget released earlier this month. It slashes ERS’s budget by cutting research and analysis in four areas: farm, conservation, and trade policy; food assistance, nutrition, and diet quality; rural economy and well-being; and food safety. “Secretary [Sonny] Perdue told us in August that the reorganization was ‘intended to improve customer service, strengthen offices and programs, and save taxpayer dollars.’ Their attempts to cut the agency’s budget in half for the second year in a row reveals they don’t care about the first two. It’s abundantly clear their proposed reorganization is just an end run around appropriations and the USDA food and agriculture stakeholder community.”

Among the most vocal opponents of the USDA plans are Gale Buchanan and Catherine Woteki, the USDA chief scientists and under secretaries under President George W. Bush and Barack Obama, respectively. They have organized a [letter that has now been signed by 75](#) leaders of the land grant university agricultural research network. The letter—originally sent in November with 21 signers—states, “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.”

Buchanan and Woteki will testify Wednesday before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies: [USDA’s Proposed Relocation of the Economic Research Service and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture](#).

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See also the March 12 press release, [American Statistical Association, Other Leaders Maintain USDA’s Upheaval of Research Arm Unwise, Counterproductive](#); the February 14 press release, [American Statistical Association Statement on Reintroduction of Agricultural Research Integrity Act and Fiscal Year](#)

[2019 Explanatory Statement Putting Brakes on Controversial USDA Research Arm Restructuring](#); and the December 5 press release, [The American Statistical Association Board of Directors Decries USDA Undermining of Federal Statistical Agency and Evidence-Based Policymaking](#).

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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](http://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](http://www.countonstats.org).