

USDA's Research Short-List Announcement Another Step in Wrong Direction for Food and Agriculture Research and Policy

The US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) announcement today of its [short list of finalists](#) to host the Economic Research Service (ERS) and National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) underscores its unilateral and evidence-lite approach to addressing the future of US food and agriculture research.

“Any gains that USDA asserts will result from relocating ERS and NIFA away from our nation’s research, food and agricultural policymaking are overwhelmingly outweighed by the detrimental impacts,” stated Ron Wasserstein, executive director of the American Statistical Association (ASA). “Further, USDA has neither made a compelling case for such an upheaval nor listened to their own stakeholders, experts and leaders. Adding insult to injury, they have bypassed the 155-year partnership with land grant universities and Congress that has been a hallmark in determining American agricultural and food research policy.”

ASA leaders also reissued their [points made regarding USDA's March release of the “middle” list](#):

“We’re disappointed to see USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue persisting in his plans to uproot the USDA research arm, despite the overwhelming concerns of its former leaders and the greater statistical and agricultural research community,” said Wasserstein. “The USDA leadership developed their plans without consulting any of the agency’s current or former research and statistical heads or the broader research community. With that community now having strongly voiced its concerns and opposition, USDA seems intent to proceed without course corrections.”

“We thank Congress for expressing its concerns and seeking clarity from USDA for both the rationale and the costs and impacts of the ERS/NIFA move,” said 2019 ASA President Karen Kafadar. “Regrettably, USDA’s announcement today dismisses the input from ERS/NIFA’s customers and stakeholders, primarily policy- and decision-makers. We continue to believe that this move is not only costly to US taxpayers but removes ERS from its critical mission, ‘to conduct high-quality, objective economic research to inform and enhance public and private decision-making.’ We strongly urge Congress to halt USDA’s plans to move ERS/NIFA to protect the research and statistical foundations of our food, agricultural and rural economies.”

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See also the March 25 press release, [101 Agriculture, Food, and Science Organizations Urge Congress to Block USDA Moves](#); the March 12 press release, [American Statistical Association, Other Leaders Maintain USDA's Upheaval of Research Arm Unwise, Counterproductive](#); 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.

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.