

AGENCY OVERVIEW

ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE (ERS)

SUMMARY OF KEY CRITICAL SUPPORT AREAS AND LEADERSHIP

Leadership

The administrator since 2020, Spiro Stefanou, retired in September 2025, with a successor yet to be named; the acting administrator, Kelly Maguire, was placed on administrative leave for a few weeks Fall 2025 (see below). The associate administrator position is vacant.

Budget

(see figure below and Table 2.2 in body of report):

- ERS's FY25 budget was kept at its FY24 level of \$90.6 million, which amounts to:
 - an estimated 2.4% loss of purchasing power from FY24.
 - a 28% loss of purchasing power from FY09.
- The FY26 President's Budget Request is for \$80 million, which represents a 14% cut in purchasing power.

Staffing

(see Table 2.1 in body of report):

- ERS has lost an estimated 26% in staffing from its FY24 level of 329.
- The FY26 President's Budget Request is for a staffing level of 244, the same as for its estimated FY25 level.

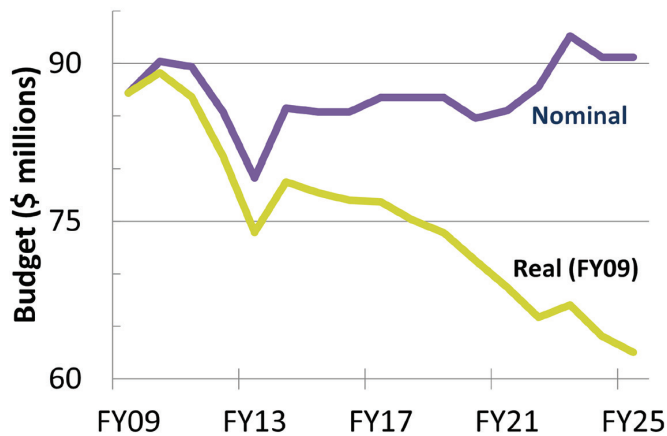
Parent Agency

Because statistical agencies are hesitant or not allowed to communicate with outside entities, and the parent agencies are communicating little information specific to statistical agencies, we have no agency-specific updates in this category beyond USDA's plans to relocate ERS's Washington, DC-based staff out of their current building. The fact that the staffing cuts and the proposed budget cut occurred indicates a lack of support for the statistical agency, support that is required by the Evidence Act. Furthermore, the September comments of the USDA Secretary and the USDA release discussed below indicate a lack of understanding and appreciation for at least one component of ERS's work, if not for the agency itself, and for evidence-based policymaking, more broadly.

Statistical Integrity Safeguards

Because statistical agencies are hesitant or not allowed to communicate with outside entities and the parent agencies are communicating little information specific to statistical agencies, we have no agency-specific updates in this category. A degree of open communication with outside stakeholders is an important component of statistical integrity safeguards and government transparency.

Economic Research Service



Appropriations for ERS in Nominal and Inflation-Adjusted ("Real") Dollars, Fiscal Years 2009–2025 *

NOTE: The GDP deflator is used to adjust nominal appropriations for inflation.

SOURCE: [ASA online resources](#)

IMPACTS

The ERS developments went beyond the estimated 26% staff loss starting in early June and has since experienced three major disruptions and an announcement that could potentially cripple the agency for much of the next decade. ERS also saw a leadership transition and a steep proposed budget cut.

In June, the administration delayed and redacted the Outlook for U.S. Agricultural Trade report because officials “disliked what it said about the [trade] deficit,” according to [Politico](#), indicating likely political interference in statistical release schedules. The data were released after a four-day delay, but the accompanying report—which provided subject matter experts’ analysis, perspectives, and judgement—was not.

USDA announced plans in July to relocate most Washington-area staff to five locations nationwide and close the South Building housing NASS and ERS components, echoing the disruptive 2018–2021 relocation that caused 70% staff loss from which ERS only recently recovered.

In September, USDA discontinued the annual interagency agreement with the Census Bureau for the Food Security Supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS-FSS), eliminating data collection that has occurred annually since 1995 and supports ERS’s widely cited [Household Food Security in the United States report series](#). This represents the most significant program cut, eliminating a cornerstone data product that is used as a metric and research tool to understand how well USDA meets the nutrition component of its [mission to increase food security and reduce hunger](#). The situation deteriorated further when USDA placed a dozen ERS employees, including the acting administrator, on leave in late September while investigating the leak that the United States had cancelled the CPS-FSS. Acting administrator Maguire was recalled during the government shutdown. As of this document going to print (November 24, 2025), 11 employees remain on administrative leave.

Also in September, USDA discontinued a second ERS [interagency agreement](#): this one with both the Census Bureau and the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to collect state administrative data from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to improve research and statistics on the effectiveness of these food assistance programs and to improve efficiency of Census Bureau data collections. ERS and authorized external researchers used the data to answer policy questions such as the impact of SNAP work requirements on employment, health, and participation; how long SNAP participants receive benefits and how frequently they return to SNAP when they leave; how underreporting of SNAP impacts the estimated relationship between SNAP participation and food security; and how well SNAP benefits are targeted to eligible populations.

The [USDA statement on the cancellation of CPS-FSS](#) and termination of future Household Food Security reports referred to the latter as “redundant, costly, politicized, and extraneous studies [that] do nothing more than fear monger.” The statement also acknowledged the study had been conducted for 30 years but had “failed to present anything more than subjective, liberal fodder” and said the “USDA will continue to prioritize statutory requirements and where necessary, use the bevy of more timely and accurate data sets available to it.” For context, the annual cost of the CPS-FSS and the SNAP and WIC administrative data program were each approximately \$1 million, a very modest investment compared to the \$142 billion FY2024 cost of all of USDA nutrition assistance programs, for which they were established to measure and evaluate.

The September statement was a sharp departure from the [June comments of Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins](#) accompanying the release of another USDA statistics and research product to which ERS contributes, namely the World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) report:

American agriculture leads the world and the agricultural industry relies on the gold standard statistics and analysis in USDA reports. It is a privilege to sign this critical market report put together by the expert researchers and market analysts at USDA who work tirelessly to give farmers the data they need to anticipate how American goods will be exported with the world.

Also in September, ERS administrator Spiro Stefanou retired, making ERS one of the then 8 statistical agencies (out of 13) operating under acting leadership.

In addition, the President’s FY26 Budget proposes \$80 million for ERS, an \$11 million cut from the estimated \$91 million FY25 budget—representing a 12% reduction.

SUMMARY

In summary, the Economic Research Service has experienced significant disruption in 2025 through leadership instability, likely political interference, a key program cancellation, proposed budget cuts, and substantial staff departures—threatening its capacity to fulfill its mission as a principal federal statistical agency.

While we are not updating our ratings for parent agency support and statistical integrity safeguards—primarily for lack of information—we rate the ERS resources as WEAK owing to the sharp drop in staffing. According to our 2024 report rubric, this rating means, “The agency’s efforts to meet its Evidence Act responsibilities are severely challenged.” This rating is compounded by the 28% loss of purchasing power since FY09, which is slightly higher than the value in our 2024 report of 27% loss from FY09. Like those of other agencies, ERS staff have been able to partially offset the purchasing power loss through technology and efficiency improvements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the all-agency recommendations in the body of the report, we reiterate the recommendations from last year, namely that:

- Congress should authorize a portion of ERS’s budget to be used across fiscal years in order to provide much-needed flexibility to adequately plan for multiyear projects, including survey redesigns and ramp-ups.
- USDA should strengthen its commitment to ERS through increased agility and support for IT and hiring services.

ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE: 2024 HEALTH ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

For full text, see <https://bit.ly/NationsDataAtRiskERS>.

The July 2024 assessment of ERS documents a principal federal statistical agency that has demonstrated remarkable resilience while navigating significant challenges. As USDA's economic research and policy analysis leader, ERS maintains its world-class standing despite substantial resource constraints and recent institutional disruption.

KEY SUCCESSSES AND STRENGTHS

ERS has successfully recovered from a 2018–2021 forced relocation that caused 70% staff loss, restoring economic staffing to pre-relocation levels and exceeding previous publication output, with 78 reports in FY23. The agency maintains its #3 global ranking for agricultural economic research institutions (out of 2,512) and shows strong engagement with stakeholders through 5 conferences over three years and 16 webinars in FY23. Website views grew from 6.3 million (FY19) to 10.2 million (FY23), reflecting expanding influence. ERS demonstrates exceptional agility, delivering timely pandemic-related food statistics, infant formula shortage analyses, and food inflation data. The agency maintains approximately 200 cooperative agreements with universities, enhancing expertise while managing resource constraints. Parent agency support has been strong, with USDA including ERS in leadership meetings and policy initiatives.

CRITICAL CHALLENGES AND VULNERABILITIES

Budget constraints represent ERS's most severe challenge, with 27% purchasing power loss since FY09, threatening the agency's innovation culture. One-year budget cycles, compounded by continuing resolutions and government shutdowns, hinder multiyear survey planning essential for redesigns and ramp-ups. Data acquisition costs consume 20% of the annual budget, straining resources. ERS lacks enabling legislation and statutory autonomy protections, leaving it vulnerable to political pressure. The agency's reliance on other agencies' data creates dependencies that threaten continuity when external data sources are discontinued.

2024 REPORT SUPPORT RATINGS SUMMARY

The assessment assigned:

- Autonomy: **Mixed**, due to absence of enabling legislation but generally good operational autonomy within USDA;
- Parent agency support: **Good**, reflecting current strong USDA backing (excluding 2018-2021); and
- Budget/staffing: **Challenging**, acknowledging 27% purchasing power erosion despite adequate staffing for current programs.