

October 1, 2018

Honorable Pat Roberts
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture
328A Russell Senate Office Building
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Honorable Debbie Stabenow
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture
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Honorable John Hoeven
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
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Honorable Jeff Merkley
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
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Honorable Mike Conaway
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
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Honorable Collin Peterson
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Honorable Robert Aderholt
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
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U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
2362-A Rayburn House Office Building
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Honorable Sanford Bishop
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
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Dear Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, Chairman Hoeven, Ranking Member Merkley, Chairman Aderholt, and Ranking Member Bishop:

We, the undersigned scientists and researchers, write to respectfully oppose the Trump administration's proposed reorganization of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS). Given the scale of this proposal and the importance of science-based agriculture research and education to our nation's agricultural economy, we urge you to delay the reorganization until Congress and stakeholders have been appropriately briefed, and have been given the opportunity for input into the process.

The world class research carried out through NIFA and the ERS comprises part of the science-based bedrock of our food and farm system. It empowers producers, businesses, and decisionmakers across the country with the accurate, unbiased data they rely on every day. As scientists and researchers, we are a part of the USDA's constituency and have a vested interest in the continued success of the agriculture research conducted through the USDA. However, we believe the proposed changes would have both immediate and long-term negative impacts on the USDA's science-based mission and consequently on those who the USDA is meant to serve.

As the USDA's premier extramural agriculture science agency, NIFA and the research it supports must be at the center of the department's decision-making. Distancing NIFA from USDA headquarters would directly diminish the ability of the director, senior staff and national program leaders to effectively inform the USDA's decisions. Furthermore, relocating NIFA outside of the

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Capitol area could hamper the ability of the agency to raise the profile of agricultural research, extension, and education, by preventing collaboration with a broad base of stakeholders and federal agencies, many of whom are based in the Capitol area. The interdisciplinary research and collaboration that NIFA currently engages in with the Department of Defense; the National Science Foundation; the National Institutes of Health; the Office of Science, Technology and Policy; and myriad other entities in Washington, DC, would also be threatened or even stopped, negatively impacting stakeholders across the country.

The ERS, which is designated by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as a "principal statistical agency," is renowned for intramural and extramural applied social science research that provides high-quality research intended to inform evidence-based policymaking on food and agriculture issues. We have serious concerns that internally relocating the ERS under the control of the Office of the Chief Economist and externally relocating it outside of the Capitol area would jeopardize the ERS's products, relevance, and overall integrity. It is imperative the ERS remains an independent agency whose work is respected widely, and moving the ERS out of the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area to a more policy-oriented part of USDA will jeopardize the ERS's autonomy in this regard. We urge that the ERS remain in REE, and the protections of the ERS as an independent agency be strengthened. We ask you to provide support for the ERS at least at FY 2018 levels and ensure that they continue to have access to data and statistical resources.

A primary justification offered by the administration for this proposed reorganization was to "attract and retain highly qualified staff." Not only has the administration not provided evidence that that is a current issue, they have failed to put forth any plan to demonstrate that they could attract and retain highly qualified staff in a new location.

Science-based agriculture research is critical to everything the USDA does. As scientists and researchers deeply vested in the success of US agriculture, we ask that you use your authority to protect agriculture research and scientific integrity. The scientific resources provided by NIFA and the ERS are critical to maintaining our food system, supporting nutrition, maintaining national security, and ensuring the success of agriculture in the United States.

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