



FASEB and ASN Statement Opposing Proposed Relocation of NIFA and ERS

The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) and the American Society for Nutrition (ASN) have serious concerns about the plan currently being implemented by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to relocate the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and the Economic Research Services (ERS) outside of the Washington, DC region. Without a concerted effort to maintain personnel and expertise of these agencies as well as their ability to continue collaborations with other federal agencies, this action by USDA risks undermining critical areas of research. In addition, the lack of a timely, transparent process leading up to this decision sets a harmful precedent for future efforts to reorganize federal science agencies.

NIFA supports vital research and education in the agricultural, food, and nutritional sciences. Through programs such as the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), NIFA funding has led to numerous advancements, including new cultivars of wheat and better tools for monitoring and preventing avian flu outbreaks. ERS develops and maintains over 70 national level databases that enable understanding of how economic issues relate to agricultural productivity, food product consumption, international trade, and food security. Such data underpin a broad range of research objectives and provide a basis for important national policy activities.

These agencies are a key part of our nation's broader scientific enterprise. Further, in recent years, as research has become increasingly interdisciplinary, NIFA, as well as ERS, have fostered productive collaborations with numerous other federal science agencies including the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and the Department of Energy Office of Science. These research partnerships seek to address many of our nation's most vexing challenges, from combatting infectious and chronic diseases to meeting global demand for energy.^{1,2,3}

To date, despite the findings of a recent cost-benefit analysis commissioned by USDA,⁴ reports suggest that the department's rapid timeline for relocating NIFA and ERS is leading to high rates of staff attrition.⁵ This loss of talent and unique expertise will seriously jeopardize these agencies' capacity to remain at the forefront of scientific research. The problem of personnel retention, and other concerns, were recently raised by the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board.⁶ Moreover, the USDA Office of the Inspector General has recently questioned whether the department has the budgetary authority to use appropriated funds to move these agencies.⁷

We believe the decision to relocate NIFA and ERS commenced without sufficient time for a broader discussion concerning the effects of the relocation and without opportunity for the scientific community to comment and provide feedback about the effects of such a move on these agencies' ability to fulfill their missions. The notable absence of a timely and comprehensive process for evaluating the move sets a harmful precedent should USDA or other parts of the executive branch undertake similar efforts to reorganize federal science agencies in the future.

In light of the possible risks to our nation's research endeavors, FASEB and ASN – organizations that combined represent over 130,000 researchers and scientists – strongly urge USDA to reconsider its

decision to proceed with the relocation of NIFA and ERS until a thorough evaluation of the proposed reorganization, including further input from the scientific community, is considered.

¹ <https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2018/nsf18581/nsf18581.htm>

² https://genomicscience.energy.gov/BERfiles/SC_FOA_0001857.pdf

³ <https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2018/nsf18545/nsf18545.htm>

⁴ <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/062819-CBA.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2019/07/17/742519999/future-of-key-farming-research-uncertain-as-2-3-of-usda-staff-say-they-wont-move>

⁶ <https://nareeeab.ree.usda.gov/sites/nareeeab.ree.usda.gov/files/2019-08/NAREEE%20Response%20to%20ERS%20NIFA%20Relocation%2007192019.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.usda.gov/oig/webdocs/91801-0001-23.pdf>