

The Honorable K. Michael Conaway  
Chair, Committee on Agriculture  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson  
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Pat Roberts  
Chair, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,  
and Forestry  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Ranking Member, Committee on Agriculture,  
Nutrition, and Forestry  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

August 28, 2018

Dear Chairs Roberts and Conaway and Ranking Members Stabenow and Peterson:

We, the undersigned groups, write to respectfully oppose the USDA's proposed move of the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) outside of the national Capitol area as well as the realignment of the agency out of the USDA's Research, Education and Economics Mission Area.

The ERS is renowned for its intramural and extramural applied social science research and is ranked third globally as an institution of agricultural economics.<sup>1</sup> The ERS provides high-quality research to inform evidence-based policymaking in the USDA and more broadly in food and agriculture. We have serious concerns that its realignment and relocation out of the Washington, D.C. area would jeopardize the ERS's products, relevance, and timeliness.

To maintain the ERS as the influential, high-quality agency it is, we, the undersigned, respectfully urge the following:

**Retain the ERS in the national Capitol region.** Relocating the ERS out of the Washington area will certainly mean a significant loss of experienced staff, which, in turn, will jeopardize the ERS operations for, potentially, years to come. Further, there are many strategic reasons to have the ERS in the Washington area, including maintenance of its strong connection with the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and other parts of the USDA, locality to its product users, staff recruitment and retention, and integration with the 12 other primary federal statistical agencies.

**Maintain and strengthen the integrity and independence of the ERS as a statistical agency.** USDA's ERS, along with the NASS, is one of the two agencies at the USDA that are designated by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as "principal statistical agencies." It is imperative that the ERS is—and, just as importantly, is perceived to be—an independent agency whose work is respected widely. We are concerned that the move out of Research, Education, and Economics (REE) to a more policy-oriented part of the USDA will jeopardize the ERS's autonomy in this regard. For this reason and to take full advantage of the ERS's synergies with the other REE

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ideas.repec.org/top/top.agr.html#institutions>.

agencies, we urge the ERS remain in REE. Regardless of the ultimate decision, we urge the protections of the ERS as an independent agency be strengthened. It is imperative the ERS Administrator is protected from improper outside influence. Further, the Administrator should be a person with unimpeachably excellent economic research credentials

**Keep the budget and personnel for the USDA Economic Research Service *at least at FY 2018 levels.*** We ask that you support the ERS and other research, extension, and integrated economics programs at sustainable levels, e.g., those outlined in FY 2018 and above. This would mean that there would be no personnel reductions (as of September 30, 2017, there were 322 permanent full-time employees). If a permanent full-time employee retires, they would be replaced within a year. Finally, we ask that there be no cuts to data and statistical resources. These resource, information, and research programs are critical for the agricultural, food, and resource economies of rural America.

Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

NB. Many of the signers on this letter are members of the Friends of Agricultural Statistics and Analysis. Questions about this letter should be addressed to [agricultural.statistics@gmail.com](mailto:agricultural.statistics@gmail.com)

American Association of Mycobacterial Diseases  
Agricultural and Applied Economics Association  
American Dairy Science Association  
American Malting Barley Association  
American Society for Nutrition  
American Statistical Association  
Association of Population Centers  
Association of Public Data Users  
Center for Foodborne Illness Research & Prevention  
Center for Science in the Public Interest  
Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation  
Consortium of Social Science Associations  
Decision Demographics  
Dept. of Agricultural Business, California State University, Fresno  
Entomological Society of America  
FASS, Inc  
Food & Water Watch  
Global Harvest Initiative  
Hop Growers of America  
Land for Good  
Mathematical Association of America

Michigan State University, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources  
Mycobacterial Disease of Animals Multistate Initiative  
National Association for Business Economics  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
National Turfgrass Federation, Inc.  
National WIC Association  
Organic Farming Research Foundation  
Population Association of America  
Restaurant Services, Inc.  
Rural Sociological Society  
Union of Concerned Scientists  
US Dairy Forage Research Center Stakeholder Committee  
World Perspectives, Inc.