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September 21, 2018

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

On behalf of the Weed Science Society of America (WSSA), I am writing to express concerns our members have about the relocation of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) outside the National Capitol Region (NCR). The WSSA is a nonprofit scientific society that promotes research, education and extension outreach activities related to weeds, provides science-based information to the public and policy makers, and promotes cooperation among weed science organizations across the nation and around the world.

We appreciate USDA's efforts to save taxpayer dollars and improve customer service, but there will undoubtedly be tradeoffs. Like many other agricultural research stakeholders, some of our main concerns with a plan to move NIFA out of the NCR include:

- Isolating NIFA from stakeholders (commodity groups, agricultural leaders, university administrators, academic scientists). Stakeholder leaders routinely travel to the NCR to meet with legislators and many other agencies. If NIFA is located outside the NCR, it will become more difficult for many stakeholders to visit NIFA, and many stakeholders would incur additional travel expenses and inconvenience to do so, making these trips less frequent. How does USDA envision maintaining strong stakeholder input?
- Isolating NIFA from other research agencies (i.e. NSF, DOE). Increased inter-agency collaboration is needed in order to address the major scientific challenges facing agriculture. For example, herbicide-resistant weeds can now be found on over 100 million acres in the U.S. New technologies like robotics with computer vision and machine learning algorithms for intelligent weed removal are likely to play a role in addressing this challenge. Innovations like these will require transdisciplinary research in agriculture, engineering and computer sciences. How does USDA envision strengthening these needed collaborations if NIFA is located outside the NCR?
- Loss of NIFA personnel who are unable to move will likely disrupt productivity and take considerable time to fully re-staff. How long does USDA anticipate it will take to build back to full staffing? How will USDA assure program continuity and minimize disruption during this transitional period?

- Potential conflict of interest with land grant universities near the new location. For example, would a NIFA location in Missouri favor grants to agricultural commodities prevalent in Missouri? How does USDA envision maintaining an unbiased prioritization and proposal review process?

NIFA is a critical partner with WSSA in solving issues with weeds that limit agricultural productivity and profitability and pose threats to food safety and security. For the reasons listed above, we are concerned that relocation of NIFA outside the NCR could weaken the very positive partnership among NIFA, agricultural producers, academic researchers, and professional research societies such as WSSA. We request that this relocation be thoroughly analyzed prior to a final decision. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Scott Senseman".

Dr. Scott Senseman
2018-2019 President
Weed Science Society of America