

June 8, 2026

The Honorable G.T. Thompson
Chairman, House Committee on
Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Boozman
Chairman, Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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

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

RE: Regarding Restructuring the USDA Research, Education, and Economics (REE) Mission Area

Dear Chair Thompson, Ranking Member Craig, Chair Boozman, and Ranking Member Klobuchar,

The undersigned organizations, representing farmers, ranchers, agricultural scientists, land-grant universities, commodity groups, agribusinesses, and food producers across the country, write to express our concerns about actions taken within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area over the past year. We strongly support the goals of strengthening American agricultural competitiveness, lowering food and production costs for farmers and consumers, and securing our nation's food supply against both natural threats and foreign adversaries. It is precisely because we share these goals that we must raise these concerns. The disruptions detailed below directly undermine the agricultural research enterprise that underpins American farmers' productivity, profitability, and global leadership.

The REE mission area – comprising the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), the Economic Research Service (ERS), and the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) – is the backbone of American agricultural innovation. For farmers and ranchers, federal food and agricultural research translates directly into better seeds, more effective pest management, lower input costs, and the agronomic knowledge that keeps American producers competitive in global markets. Just as critically, USDA research safeguards the quality and safety of the food supply itself, increasing yields, advancing pathogen reduction, improving post-harvest handling, strengthening processing technologies, and ensuring that the nutritional value of crop and livestock products is maintained from farm to consumer.

This research is not an academic exercise; it is the practical science that helps corn growers in Iowa increase yields per acre, enables cattle ranchers in Texas to manage

drought conditions, and equips fruit growers in California to combat invasive pests. America's agricultural global dominance is not an accident; it is the earned result of decades of sustained, strategic federal investment in research and science. To weaken it now is to cede ground to our competitors at precisely the moment we can least afford to do so.

We respectfully urge Congress to examine the following actions and their consequences for American agriculture:

1. Staff Losses Across the REE Mission Area and the Expertise Lost with Them

According to a December 2025 report by USDA's own Office of Inspector General ([OIG Report 25-064-01](#)), USDA lost 20,306 employees between January 12 and June 14, 2025, roughly 18 percent of the department's entire workforce, in just five months. Within the REE mission area, the losses were even more severe in proportional terms:

- ARS lost 1,647 employees — 23 percent of its workforce;
- NIFA lost 169 employees — 35 percent of its workforce;
- ERS lost 84 employees — 29 percent of its workforce; and
- NASS lost 275 employees — 34 percent of its workforce.

Many of these vacated positions have not been refilled, representing a concerning hollowing-out of the scientific and technical workforce that took decades to build. The numbers alone do not capture what has truly been lost. Every departing ARS scientist, ERS economist, and NIFA program officer carried with them years, often decades, of specialized expertise in areas including crop genetics, livestock health and development, soil science, food safety and nutrition, pest and disease management, agricultural economics, innovative food processing, and natural resource management. This institutional knowledge built over years is not transferable to new hires overnight, and in many cases, it cannot be reconstructed at all.

2. REE Reorganization and Proposed ARS Lab Closures

We are deeply concerned by the recent USDA announcement to reorganize the REE Mission Area, proposing to relocate REE researchers and staff and to close, consolidate, or relocate research programs and laboratories. The permanent closure or significant downsizing of ARS labs and facilities would represent an irreversible loss, not just of physical infrastructure, but of ongoing research programs whose value compounds over time. Once these programs are ended and their scientists dispersed, they cannot be reconstituted at a later date.

We have direct evidence, from USDA's own documented history, of precisely what kind of disruption these relocation efforts could cause at REE. In 2019, USDA relocated ERS and NIFA headquarters from Washington, D.C. to Kansas City, Missouri. GAO documented the consequences ([GAO-23-104709](#) and [GAO-22-104540](#)):

- Between 40 and 60 percent of staff at both agencies departed rather than relocated.
- Before the move, 84 percent of ERS staff and 82 percent of NIFA staff had been with their agencies for more than two years, while after the move, only 34 percent of ERS and 21 percent of NIFA staff had been there for more than two years.
- ERS's output of research reports and journal articles fell by roughly half; NIFA's grant processing times increased substantially.

The loss of managerial experience was so severe that it directly impaired the agencies' ability to make hiring decisions to rebuild. It took both agencies approximately two full fiscal years to recover workforce numbers and years more to rebuild institutional knowledge and expertise. The most recent reorganization announcement could dwarf that of 2019 as it is occurring not at two agencies, but across the entire REE mission area simultaneously.

3. Delayed Distribution of Congressionally Appropriated Research Funds

Congress annually appropriates funds to support food and agricultural research at federal research laboratories, land-grant universities, and other research institutions nationwide. These funds have experienced significant delays in distribution, disrupting ongoing research projects, forcing reductions in university research workforces, and causing researchers to lose critical momentum on multi-year projects that directly support farmer productivity and rural economies.

Capacity grants, which provide stable, foundational support for state agricultural experiment stations and cooperative extension services, are particularly vital to ensuring that federally supported research reaches farmers at the local level. There have also been significant delays in ARS research distribution, and many of the requests for applications for the FY 2025 NIFA competitive grant programs were delayed or even consolidated with the funds from other fiscal years. Delays cascade quickly: graduate students lose funding, faculty positions go unfilled, and multi-year field experiments are jeopardized or abandoned. When those experiments end, the data they could have generated – data that lowers production costs, improves yields, and builds resilience – is simply gone.

Compounding these delays, USDA has issued a series of ambiguous, unclear, and at times contradictory directives that have created additional confusion and uncertainty across the research community. The resulting confusion has delayed project launches, strained university legal and compliance offices, and in some cases prompted institutions to pause or decline federal funding rather than risk noncompliance with provisions they cannot interpret. The practical effect of these unclear directives has been to further slow the delivery of research results that farmers, ranchers, and rural communities are counting on.

Our Request to Congress

We are not asking Congress to choose between efficiency and investment. We are asking Congress to ensure that in pursuing efficiency, we do not inadvertently diminish the federal research ecosystem that generations of American farmers, taxpayers, and policymakers have built, and that America's agricultural competitors would gladly like to see dismantled. Specifically, we respectfully urge you to take immediate action to:

- Require USDA to provide a comprehensive public accounting of all REE workforce reductions since January 2025, including agency, scientific discipline, years of federal service, and current vacancy status, along with a concrete plan and timeline for workforce rebuilding, specifically in the proposed new location;
- Hold hearings on the proposed closure or consolidation of ARS facilities and programs, and require full cost-benefit analyses before any closure decisions are finalized;
- Conduct oversight hearings on the operational status of NIFA grant distribution and require USDA to release all appropriated intramural, capacity, and competitive grant funds without further delay, with a full public accounting of any delays; and
- Direct USDA to engage cooperatively and transparently with the research community to resolve ambiguities in USDA directives and to ensure that compliance standards are clear, consistent, and workable for grantees.

American farmers are the most productive in the world because the United States thoughtfully made sustained, strategic investments in agricultural research over more than a century. That research does not benefit researchers alone – it benefits every farmer planting a more resilient variety, every rancher managing a healthier herd, every rural community anchored by a thriving agricultural economy, and every American consumer who benefits from an affordable, nutritious, and safe food supply. Protecting and strengthening federal agricultural research is not a partisan issue, it is a matter of farm profitability, food security, national competitiveness, biosecurity, and the long-term vitality of rural America.

We are grateful for Congress's ongoing attention to these issues and stand ready to work with you to ensure that the federal agricultural research enterprise remains strong, well-funded, and fully operational.

CC: The Honorable Tom Cole, Chair, House Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Susan Collins, Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member of the Senate Appropriations Committee

Respectfully submitted,

agInnovation North Central
agInnovation Northeast
agInnovation South
agInnovation West
Agricultural & Applied Economics Association
American Association of Mycobacterial Diseases
American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
American Dairy Science Association
American Geophysical Union (AGU)
American Institute of Biological Sciences
American Malting Barley Association
American Society for Horticulture Science
American Society for Microbiology
American Society for Nutrition
American Society of Agronomy
American Society of Plant Biologists
American Statistical Association
Aquatic Plant Management Society
Association of 1890 Research Directors
Biological Products Industry Alliance (BPIA)
Breakthrough Institute
Carbon180
Center for Women's Policy and Agricultural Innovation (CWPAI)
Crop Science Society of America
Distillers Technology Council
Ecological Society of America
Entomological Society of America
Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB)
Friends of the US Dairy Forage Research Center
Mycological Society of America
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Barley Growers Association
National Barley Improvement Committee
National Farmers Union
National Potato Council
National Sunflower Association
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Wheat Improvement Committee
North American Millers' Association
North Central Weed Science Society
Northeastern Weed Science Society
Organic Farming Research Foundation

Society of American Foresters
Soil Science Society of America
Southern Weed Science Society
Synergistic Hawaii Agriculture Council
The Good Food Institute
The Nature Conservancy
USA Pulses
Weed Science Society of America
Western Society of Weed Science