



AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO

Eric Bunn Sr.
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July 28, 2025

The Honorable John Boozman
Chair
United States Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

Chair Boozman, Ranking Member Klobuchar, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the more than 800,000 federal and D.C. government workers represented by the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), including thousands at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), we submit this statement for the record to express our strong opposition to USDA's reorganization and workforce relocation plan.

Relocating more than half of USDA's Washington, D.C.-based workforce, including critical employees from the Economic Research Service (ERS), the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), and the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), would pose a direct and catastrophic threat to our nation's food supply, to the farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural interests who rely on the Department for a multitude of services.

The relocation plan is not about bringing services "closer to the people." It is a deliberate dismantling of core federal capabilities that have protected and nourished the American public for over a century. The ERS and NIFA are essential scientific agencies that conduct vital agricultural, climate, and economic research. FSIS safeguards the safety of our meat and poultry supply. Forcing these employees to relocate under threat of job loss will not strengthen service delivery but rather destroy it.

USDA's 2019 relocation of ERS and NIFA to Kansas City resulted in a mass exodus of experienced scientists. Over half of the staff resigned or retired, leaving years of research projects abandoned. The agency never recovered its full capacity. This new relocation effort—far broader in scope—will repeat and amplify that damage, not just for ERS and NIFA, but also for FSIS and other critical mission areas.

Federal scientists, economists, and public health experts will not simply pick up and move at the snap of a finger. The affected federal employees will consider the needs of their families and their community roots. Losing the deep knowledge developed over the course of time participating in longstanding institutional teams and systems will be enormously costly in terms of both dollars and ability to carry out the Department's mission. This relocation plan will not "reposition" these employees, it will drive them out of public service altogether.

Many USDA workers facing relocation are nearing retirement or have spent decades building their expertise. Others are mid-career scientists who will be forced to abandon the federal



mission entirely for private or academic jobs rather than uproot their families for lower pay in unfamiliar locations. Once lost, that talent cannot be replaced overnight—if ever.

The hollowing out of USDA's scientific workforce is not a theoretical risk. It is a documented outcome, backed by workforce attrition data from the department's last relocation attempt. This plan threatens to permanently degrade USDA's ability to deliver science-based solutions to the climate crisis, global food insecurity, farm resiliency, and economic development in rural America.

USDA claims, without justification or explanation, that this reorganization is about efficiency and cost savings. The fact is that BARC is already a highly efficient and productive agency. There is not a U.S. farmer or agribusiness that does not benefit on BARC's cutting edge research ensuring that America remains the breadbasket of the world.

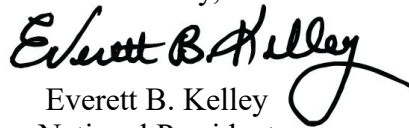
AFGE urges Congress to halt this harmful and unnecessary reorganization and calls for:

1. An immediate pause on all forced relocations and RIFs until comprehensive employee impact assessments and cost-benefit analyses are completed and reviewed by Congress.
2. Full transparency and bargaining with employee unions under federal labor law.
3. Investment in teleworking, flexible work arrangements, and retention incentives instead of mass relocations.

This is not simply a geographic reshuffling. This is a dismantling of our nation's capacity to serve its farmers, protect its food, and respond to climate and economic crises with scientific precision and public accountability. It is a decision that places ideology over integrity, and politics over the people who depend on USDA's critical mission.

AFGE stands ready to work with Congress to protect our workforce, preserve public service, and ensure USDA's future is rooted not in displacement, but in investment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Everett B. Kelley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Everett B. Kelley
National President