



May 12, 2025

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and
Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and
Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Andy Harris
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and
Drug Administration
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr.
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and
Drug Administration
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Hoeven, Chairman Shaheen, Ranking Member Amy Harris, and Ranking Member Bishop,

We, the Unions representing bargaining unit employees across the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), write to request immediate Congressional oversight in response to ongoing cuts that are severely undermining the “People’s Department’s” infrastructure, mission, and ability to serve the American people.

The separation of powers between the Executive and Legislative branches is being dangerously eroded. USDA employees – past and present – are alarmed by growing political interference that hinders our ability to support the public. Without swift Congressional intervention, these developments will have lasting consequences for food security, public health, and rural economies.

USDA employees are essential to ensuring the safety, affordability, and sustainability of America’s food and agriculture systems. We administer financial assistance programs, conduct essential agricultural research, and support millions of families through nutrition programs like

SNAP and WIC while safeguarding public funds from fraud and waste. In FY 2023 alone, SNAP served over 42 million Americans, spending \$110 billion to provide critical support during economic hardship.

Despite these essential responsibilities, federal employees are being pushed aside and USDA's capacity is being dismantled. The Appropriations Committee must take swift action to restore their Constitutional authority over USDA spending and prevent what is rapidly becoming a national crisis. Destabilizing the USDA will have catastrophic consequences, not just for farming families, but for every American household that will face higher food prices, less sustainable agriculture, and less support during times of hardship.

The combination of harmful budget cuts, executive overreach, and politically motivated staffing changes have weakened key agencies. Without Congressional oversight, the decades of knowledge and infrastructure that ensure food safety and security will be dismantled. The 15% staff reduction from the deferred resignation program has impacted every agency in the USDA, but we want to highlight two particularly alarming examples - scientific research and food assistance.

The Agriculture Research Service (ARS) has long been recognized for its exceptional return on taxpayer investment, with every dollar spent returning over \$20 to the economy. Despite the importance of ARS research 98 out of 167 food safety scientists have recently resigned. These losses, driven by poor leadership and fear of retaliation, threaten the future of food security research. ARS scientists have also been barred from conferences and media engagement, stifling transparency and scientific advancement.

The Economic Research Service (ERS) provides the nation with vital, nonpartisan data and analysis on food prices, farm income, rural development, and federal nutrition assistance programs like SNAP and WIC. These findings directly inform policymakers and support millions of American families. The administration's treatment of federal workers has led to significant staff attrition and greatly reduced USDA's capacity to conduct vital research on topics like climate adaptation, food insecurity measurement, and rural economic resilience.

Nearly 30% of staff at the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) have been terminated, put on administrative leave, or resigned amid uncertainty about the agency's future. This has disrupted core fraud detection and oversight functions. Overreach by the administration has also caused a delay in \$5 million in grants to States aimed at detecting and preventing SNAP fraud. If FNS is moved to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Committee would lose oversight of nearly \$140 billion in annual funding for SNAP, WIC, and the National School Lunch Program.

USDA employees have withstood shutdowns, pandemics, and political upheaval to keep vital programs running. But the current environment of fear and uncertainty, scientific suppression, and instability is untenable. Further workforce reductions, under the guise of “deferred resignations”, relocations, or reorganizations, threaten the long-term viability of USDA’s mission and the communities we serve.

This is not just about agency management, it is about protecting the nation’s food supply, rural economy, and scientific integrity. Privatization will not solve these problems. Federal employees are the ones who protect public health, safeguard food systems, and ensure accountability in how taxpayer dollars are used.

We urgently request the following actions from the Committee:

1. **Immediate halt to any Reduction in Force (RIF), relocation, or reorganization** until Congressional oversight is implemented and impacted employees are meaningfully consulted.
2. **Full transparency** regarding USDA workforce plans and budget priorities.
3. **Reassertion of Congressional authority** over USDA spending to prevent further damage to essential programs.
4. **Protections for civil servants** from politically motivated removals or reassignments.
5. **Restoration of communication channels** between the USDA and key stakeholders.
6. **Restoration of critical staffing and resources** to ensure USDA’s programs can meet their mission.

The damage to USDA will not just impact farmers and rural communities – it will affect every American’s plate, pocketbook, and community. We urge the Committee to act swiftly to restore oversight, protect USDA’s core mission, and ensure the continued service of its dedicated workforce.

Sincerely,

Skye Carpenter

President of AFGE Local 3247

Terrence Johns

President of AFGE Local 2341

Ethan Roberts

President of AFGE Local 3748

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