



Forced USDA Relocation Threatens Agricultural Economy and Research

Mass attrition looms as ERS and NIFA ordered to relocate to Kansas City despite lack of Congressional approval

AFGE Local 3403, the federal union representing researchers at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), is sounding the alarm following formal notices issued on April 23, 2026, ordering the relocation of two critical scientific agencies: the Economic Research Services (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). This forced move to Kansas City, Missouri, by the end of this summer threatens to trigger a catastrophic “brain drain” within USDA.

This marks the second time in six years the USDA has attempted this relocation. A previous move in 2019 resulted in 85% of affected staff resigning or retiring rather than relocating. Recent internal data suggests a similar exodus is imminent as 76% of affected employees have indicated they will not move.

“ERS and NIFA are the intellectual and financial engines of American agriculture,” according to AFGE Local 3403. “By forcing this move on an accelerated timeline, with no promise of financial help or job security, the USDA is effectively dismantling decades of institutional knowledge, jeopardizing the very data and funding that farmers, policymakers and land-grant universities rely on.”

NIFA manages the leadership and funding for programs that advance agriculture-related sciences. A depleted workforce will lead to longer grant processing timelines and significant delays in funding for universities and research institutions nationwide.

Farmers and policy makers rely on ERS data for market trends and emerging issues. The loss of subject matter expertise increases the risk of research errors, directly affecting the accuracy of economic planning.

The relocation is being initiated despite strict federal laws that prohibit the USDA from relocating employees without written approval from Congressional appropriations committees. To date, this move has not been authorized by Congress.

AFGE Local 3403 is calling for immediate Congressional intervention to halt all relocation activities.

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