

The Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
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Disclaimer: The opinions expressed herein are our own and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Johns Hopkins University.

We, the undersigned, are researchers at the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future in Baltimore, Maryland. Thank you for the opportunity to share our statement regarding the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) plan to relocate the Economic Research Service (ERS) and National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) from the National Capital Region (NCR) to Kansas City, Missouri. As a team of Public Health and food system researchers, we strongly oppose the USDA plan to remove these core research entities from the scientific, research, statistical, and political hub of the NCR.

Members of the United States Congress are the primary “customers” of the ERS and NIFA. We believe that sound scientific evidence is crucial to improve agricultural programs and policy across the USDA and the country. The proposed relocation would cut crucial ties with other USDA departments, policymakers and research institutions in the NCR. This would create a long-term and damaging separation between robust scientific evidence and national agricultural policy and practice. The research that ERS and NIFA conduct, and its dissemination, is crucial to maintain agricultural productivity, farmer wellbeing, and rural economies across the entire nation. In a country of vastly diverse production and crop systems, the proposed relocation to enhance “connection to stakeholders” in one agricultural region, would lead to both real and perceived accusations of favoritism and bias.

Furthermore, the idea that the NIFA and ERS employees should interact directly with producers confuses the role of economic research and national programming with that of the role of agricultural extension agents. This loss in efficiency and clarity is especially concerning given the mass exodus of experienced employees that are choosing to resign, instead of relocate. Furthermore, the high cost of employee turnover was not considered in the recent cost-benefit analysis.

We join the growing list of over 140 organizations, universities, and stakeholders, as well as 1,100 researchers that have signed and written against the proposed relocation. We object to the expedited process by the USDA to bypass widespread opposition from stakeholders and Members of Congress and urge the committee to dismiss any budget expenditures for relocation to the Kansas City Region.

Sincerely,

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