



American Statistical Association Comments to the USDA National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board (NAREEEAB)

July 17, 2019

The ASA is grateful for this opportunity to comment to the board. We are pleased the board is almost complete and meeting. We view your role as critical to food and agriculture research.

I will focus our brief comments on our opposition to Secretary Perdue's relocation of ERS and NIFA. We echo the call for NAREEE Board not to endorse the relocations and for the Board to recommend to the USDA that it fund the National Academies to convene a study to plot a course for the future of American food and agriculture research.

I am submitting to this Board the comments we provided to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry as [public witness testimony for its hearing tomorrow](#). I will briefly summarize those here.

Let me first note that the long history of the ASA supporting the federal statistical agencies and of statistics contributing to food and agricultural research. Our commitment is to evidence-based policymaking, robust science, and scientific integrity.

The reasons for our concern and opposition are the following: (i) USDA's rushed process that also sidesteps congressional input and oversight; (ii) the detrimental impacts to the agencies and greater USDA research mission area; (iii) the lack of justification for the moves and of transparency; (iv) the lack of consultation with experts and the stakeholder community; and (v) concern for the underlying motives for the moves and for the integrity of USDA science.

Despite USDA's history of careful consultation with Congress and stakeholders, USDA has rushed these moves and eschewed, ignored, or sidestepped such consultation in unilaterally deciding to relocate ERS and NIFA.

If the moves are worth making, they are worth making through a methodical process that provides Congress the time it needs for consideration and incorporates stakeholder and expert input, including from this Board.

Secretary Perdue's decision is a win for Kansas City but it comes at too great a cost for the nation. National policy is made in Washington, DC. It is common sense that ERS and NIFA, so vital to informing food and agriculture policy, should be located where national policy is made.

We all pay for a dismantled ERS and NIFA. USDA's announcements yesterday of the decisions of employees whether or not to relocate underscore the lost of talent, expertise, and institutional knowledge. 99 ERS and 151 NIFA employees either declined to move or didn't respond and are assumed not to be moving. These numbers are in addition to the employees who had already left the agencies since FY18. For ERS, that number is 73, which would amount to a total attrition rate of 70% for the ERS positions being relocated to Kansas City. The actual number is likely larger as it doesn't account for the people whose positions are on the stay list but left the agency anyway. There are also people who are in the process of transferring to other agencies but indicated they would be relocating to facilitate their transfer.

Thank you for your consideration. We wish the board success.