

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
200A Jamie L. Whitten Building  
1400 Independence Ave. SW  
Washington, DC 20250

September 6, 2018

Dear Mr. Secretary:

On behalf of the undersigned agricultural research stakeholders, we write to express our serious concerns with your proposal to move the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) outside of the national capital region (NCR), and would urge you to delay the process for the proposed relocation until the questions and concerns raised by NIFA's stakeholders can be fully addressed.

Your recent announcement and subsequent federal notice soliciting Expressions of Interest (EOI) for Potential Sites for Headquarters Office Locations (published on August 15) came as a surprise to the research community and policymakers alike. With only 30 days for interested parties to submit bids for the new location, this rapid timeframe has left the agricultural research stakeholder community little time to digest the implications of relocating NIFA, and weigh in on whether or not such a relocation is in the best interest of its stakeholders and the agency's overall mission.

Given the importance of scientific research and education to our nation's entire agricultural economy, we urge the Department to solicit public comment from its stakeholders prior to soliciting bids for expressions of interest for a new location, to ensure that this important decision truly reflects the needs of all of NIFA's stakeholders within the agricultural community and ensures the effectiveness of NIFA in carrying out its vital mission.

Some of the questions and concerns which have been raised within the research community and which must be addressed before any steps are taken to move forward with a potential relocation, include:

- How will any proposed relocation affect NIFA's relationship with its stakeholders and the scientific community, and the grant application and decision-making process?
- How will any proposed relocation affect NIFA's relationship and influence with other federal research agencies and policymakers?
- How will any proposed relocation impact NIFA's staff recruitment and retention, as well as the core functions of the agency?
- How will any proposed relocation affect NIFA's budget, and ultimate cost to taxpayers, in both the short and long-term?

Additional questions that have been raised to date and must also be addressed can be viewed at: <https://bit.ly/2NeS52D>.

Furthermore, the short timeframe of the announcement and request for Expression of Interest has placed many of the nation's land-grant institutions in a problematic position. As these are state institutions, many LGU administrators will feel obligated to submit EOIs or support state EOIs. At the same time, as administrators of scientific research, they also question the impact relocation of NIFA may have on its' future role and strength. By asking for the EOI prior to allowing for input on the potential relocation of NIFA outside of the NCR, the Department has placed university administrators in the very difficult position of risking the elimination of their state as a potential future site should they choose to publicly express concerns about moving NIFA away from the NCR.

For this reason, we ask you for an extension of 60 days on the EOI. We also request a separate opportunity to provide public input on whether to relocate NIFA outside of the NCR. It is our hope that the Administration will work with its stakeholders and put forward a good faith effort to reach a solution that fully addresses the concerns raised by the agricultural research community.

We look forward to remaining in dialogue on this important issue and appreciate your consideration of our concerns and recommendations for how best to move forward.

Sincerely,

Agricultural & Applied Economics Association  
Agronomy, Crop, Soil, and Environmental Science Societies  
American Society for Nutrition  
American Society of Animal Science  
American Society for Horticultural Science  
American Statistical Association  
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges  
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities  
National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
National Turfgrass Federation  
National WIC Association  
Organic Farming Research Foundation  
Society of American Foresters  
Supporters of Agricultural Research