

Chairs and Ranking Members of the House and Senate Agriculture Committee

Chairs and Ranking Members of the House and Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee

August xx, 2018

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

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

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2018, Congress provided USDA with \$6 million for initial expenses associated with relocating the agency after its current lease expires in December 2019. There was no indication at the time the funds were appropriated, that these funds would support any move other than one within the National Capital Region. The recent announcement and subsequent federal notice soliciting Expressions of Interest for Potential Sites for Headquarters Office Locations (published on August 15) came as a surprise to not only the research community and policymakers alike, but also to agency personnel themselves.

With only 30 days for interested parties to submit bids for the new location, this rapid timeframe has left the research stakeholder community little time to digest the implications of relocating NIFA. Given the importance of scientific research and education to our nation's entire agricultural economy, we believe the Department should first 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.

Some of the questions and concerns which have been raised within the research community and which must be addressed before any subsequent funding is appropriated for relocation, include:

- How will any proposed relocation affect NIFA's relationship with its stakeholders and the scientific community?
- How will any proposed relocation affect NIFA's relationship 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 and must also be addressed can be viewed at: [insert link for full list of question].

Furthermore, the short timeframe of the announcement and request for Expression of Interest has placed many of the nation's land-grant institutions in an untenable 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 impossible 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 have asked the Secretary for an extension of 60 days on the EOI and for the opportunity to provide public input on whether to relocate NIFA outside of the NCR. We ask your Committees to secure a delay of this proposed relocation and withhold any subsequent appropriations for relocation expenses so that full thought and consideration can be given to the costs and benefits of the proposal.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[Participating organizations]