

**HEARING TO REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION OF
USDA FARM BILL RESEARCH PROGRAMS**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
BIOTECHNOLOGY, HORTICULTURE, AND RESEARCH
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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HEARING TO REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION OF USDA FARM BILL RESEARCH PROGRAMS

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2019

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BIOTECHNOLOGY, HORTICULTURE, AND
RESEARCH,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
Washington, D.C.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:02 a.m., in Room 1300 of the Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Stacey E. Plaskett [Chair of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Members present: Representatives Plaskett, Delgado, Cox, Harder, Brindisi, Schrier, Pingree, Carbajal, Panetta, Peterson (*ex officio*), Dunn, Hartzler, LaMalfa, Davis, Bost, Comer, and Baird.

Staff present: Kellie Adesina, Malikha Daniels, Brandon Honeycutt, Ricki Schroeder, Patricia Straughn, Jeremy White, Dana Sandman, and Jennifer Yezak.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. STACEY E. PLASKETT, A DELEGATE IN CONGRESS FROM VIRGIN ISLANDS

The CHAIR. This hearing of the Subcommittee on Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research entitled, *Hearing To Review Implementation of USDA Farm Bill Research Programs*, will come to order. Thank you very much to Dr. Scott Hutchins who is here with us this morning, and I also want to thank the Chairman of the full Committee on Agriculture, Collin Peterson, who is also with us as we begin.

Before we get started, I would just like to take a moment, as a Member of Congress, as an American citizen, to reflect on the passing of Elijah Cummings. Elijah Cummings was, of course, as we all know, not only a Member of Congress, but the Chair of the Oversight and Reform Committee here in this 116th Congress. He came to Congress many years ago, representing his beloved district of Baltimore. But I believe that he was much more than that to most of us here on this dais and here in this Congress; whether they be Members of Congress, staff, lobbyists, Federal employees, anyone who came in contact with Mr. Cummings. He was a gentleman. He was an angel among many of us, oftentimes who maybe wanted to be not such an angel. He always operated with fairness, was always very thoughtful in his deliberations, always tried to find common ground, even in one of the most contentious and partisan committees that this Congress has. He worked across the aisle with individuals that people were flabbergasted at how he had come to have personal relationships with those individuals on the other

side. And even among some of the Members of his own caucus who didn't agree with him oftentimes in the manner in which he attempted to keep his committee above the rancor of what is happening here in Washington. He was really a mentor for me. This is my third term on the Oversight Committee. This last term, I waived on to the Committee and sat right below him on the dais. And in sitting below him, I told him, you are a good guy. I will be the bad guy for you. Because he was just always so kind. Many of us felt that oftentimes that may have been taken advantage of, because he wanted to do the right thing all the time.

But we know that the father above is happy to have him with him now, and we pray for Maya, his wife, and for his three children, and for his family, and especially for the people of Baltimore, as I know they are grieving as well, because he always represented his hometown first of all.

And with that, let us just take a moment to reflect on him.

Again, thank you for joining us as we review the USDA's implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill research programs with Deputy Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics, Scott Hutchins.

Strong investments in public agriculture research have historically allowed our farmers, ranchers, and rural communities to remain competitive and increase their overall productivity. These investments are more critical now than ever, with the agriculture sector attempting to adapt to a changing climate and manage for increasingly volatile markets.

In June, I hosted a hearing in which Members of this Subcommittee heard directly from farmers and researchers about the need for continued scientific advancements. Their message was clear: farmers and ranchers benefit from investments in public agricultural research and strong extension services. I believe that this Subcommittee and the full House Agriculture Committee understands the value of trusted science. The 2018 Farm Bill emphasized our commitment to this cause, and ensured that U.S. farmers and ranchers will have the tools necessary to deal with future challenges. This can be seen in the increased support for the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative, continued support for programs like the Specialty Crop Research Initiative, and the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative, and the creation of new programs to support urban agriculture and students at 1890 institutions.

My district has benefitted from sustained investment in local researchers. Last year, the University of the Virgin Islands received over \$3 million from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, NIFA. These funds have been critical in helping my farmers and ranchers overcome challenges associated with climate change, tropical pest pressures, and resource management.

Following passage of the 2018 Farm Bill, this Subcommittee has turned its focus to USDA's implementation efforts. It is my goal to ensure USDA is swiftly and efficiently getting resources into the hands of researchers. At a time of continued farm stress, it should be USDA's top priority to support research efforts that directly benefit farmers.

We cannot discuss farm bill implementation; however, without addressing what I believe will be a major impediment to USDA's ability to effectively administer programs and complete timely economic studies, the relocation of NIFA and ERS outside the capitol region.

In a previous hearing, we heard farmers and researchers express apprehension about the relocation proposal. They cited a lack of stakeholder engagement and strong concerns over program continuity as reasons for their opposition to Secretary Perdue's proposal. Chair Marcia Fudge of the Nutrition Subcommittee and I sent a letter to the Secretary raising these concerns, and I can honestly say, I was disappointed in his response and failure to outline a clear, robust plan for how these agencies would prevent gaps in services.

Unfortunately, I believe my fears are becoming true. This week, I received updates on staffing levels and status of Fiscal Year 2019 funding. ERS has appropriated funding to support 329 employees, but currently a total of 214 positions are vacant, a vacancy rate of 65 percent. NIFA is in even worse shape, it appears. Out of 344 appropriated positions, 264 of those 344 are currently vacant, a vacancy rate of over 76 percent. I was told these extreme staff shortages mean some grant recipients will not receive their funds until March of 2020. These gaps in service reinforce the notion that this relocation was hurried, misguided, and mismanaged. ERS and NIFA have been undermined at the very time these agencies require knowledgeable staff to implement farm bill changes, administer grants, and complete critical economic reports. Our farmers and ranchers deserve better, and so do the valued career public servants who left their positions within ERS and NIFA for other opportunities.

As Subcommittee Chair, I expect ERS and NIFA to quickly be restored to their former prominence. Dr. Hutchins, the Members of this Subcommittee are looking to you and Secretary Perdue to work expeditiously and deliberately to prevent further gaps in service. This must be a top priority for you and Secretary Perdue, and I expect to see tangible results, rather than hear of plans and other types of lip service. If results are not delivered and programs continue to suffer, we will continue this discussion in the future.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Plaskett follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. STACEY E. PLASKETT, A DELEGATE IN CONGRESS
FROM VIRGIN ISLANDS

Good morning, and thank you for joining us today as we review USDA's implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill research programs with Deputy Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics Scott Hutchins.

Strong investments in public agriculture research have historically allowed our farmers, ranchers, and rural communities to remain competitive and increase their overall productivity. These investments are more critical now than ever, with the agriculture sector attempting to adapt to a changing climate and manage for increasingly volatile markets.

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necessary to deal with future challenges. This can be seen in the increased support for the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative, continued support for programs like the Specialty Crop Research Initiative and the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative, and the creation of new programs to support urban agriculture and students at 1890 institutions.

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However, we cannot discuss farm bill implementation without addressing what I believe will be a major impediment to USDA's ability to effectively administer programs and complete timely economic studies—the relocation of NIFA and ERS outside the National Capitol Region.

In a previous hearing, we heard farmers and researchers express apprehension about the relocation proposal. They cited a lack of stakeholder engagement and strong concerns over program continuity as reasons for their opposition to Secretary Perdue's proposal. Chair Marcia Fudge and I sent a letter to the Secretary raising these concerns, and I can honestly say I was disappointed in his response and failure to outline a clear, robust plan for how these agencies would prevent gaps in services.

Unfortunately, I believe my fears are becoming true. This week, I received updates on staffing levels and the status of Fiscal Year 2019 funding. ERS has appropriated funding to support 329 employees, but currently, a total of 214 positions are vacant—a vacancy rate of 65%. To put it bluntly, NIFA is in even worse shape. Out of 344 appropriated positions, 264 are currently vacant—a vacancy rate over 76%. I was told these extreme staff shortages mean some grant recipients will not receive their funds until March 2020.

These gaps in service reinforce the notion that this relocation was hurried, misguided, and mismanaged. ERS and NIFA have been undermined at the very time these agencies require knowledgeable staff to implement farm bill changes, administer grants, and complete critical economic reports. Our farmers and ranchers deserve better, and so do the valued career public servants who have left their positions within ERS and NIFA for other opportunities.

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Now, I'd like to recognize the distinguished Ranking Member, Mr. Dunn of Florida, for any opening remarks he would like to make.

The CHAIR. Now I would like to recognize the distinguished Ranking Member, Mr. Dunn of Florida, for any opening remarks he would like to make.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. NEAL P. DUNN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM FLORIDA

Mr. DUNN. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I wish to associate myself with your very gracious comments concerning Congressman Cummings.

Good morning, and welcome, Dr. Hutchins. Thank you for your service and spending some of your valuable time with us today. I look forward to your testimony, and for the chance to hear an update on your progress implementing the 2018 Farm Bill.

Those of us representing rural areas know that times are still tough for agricultural producers, farmers, and ranchers, and they

face unbelievable risks from devastating weather events and market uncertainty, and everything in between.

It is important that we have a strong agricultural research infrastructure. We crafted the 2018 Farm Bill with this in mind. While we faced significant budget pressures, I am proud that the research title was an area that saw an increase in funding and several positive updates to keep programs that our producers rely on.

Of particular importance to my State of Florida, the Citrus Disease Research and Extension Program, was reauthorized and funded, continuing our commitment to fighting the citrus greening disease that is still devastating the Florida industry and threatening Texas and California as well.

I am also proud that we secured important priorities for land-grant universities, including a new program to fund long-deferred maintenance projects and language streamlining some of the onerous reporting requirements.

The farm bill reauthorized the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network, reestablishing an important program that will direct behavioral health resources to our farmers and ranchers who are in need.

Finally, I am proud that the farm bill adopts several provisions to continue to provide resources and make a level playing field for the 1890 land-grant universities.

Dr. Hutchins, I am also interested in hearing an update on the relocation of the NIFA project, and the Economic Research Service. Perhaps you can put some granular information in there about money saved and whatnot.

As you know, we had a hearing on this subject just before you announced the Secretary's selection of Kansas City, and the work done by those agencies is important to the future success of the agricultural industry nationwide. As such, I am sure you will keep us informed about how that is unwinding.

It is unfortunate we still see some efforts to derail the Secretary's decision in this regard. I am afraid presidential politics has crept into even this, which is usually a very bipartisan issue. I look forward to working with you to help fulfill the USDA's research mission, and will do my part to ensure that you have resources necessary.

Madam Chair, I yield back.

The CHAIR. Thank you.

I would like to welcome the USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics, Dr. Scott Hutchins. In this role, Dr. Hutchins has oversight over the Office of the Chief Scientist, the Agricultural Research Service, Economic Research Service, National Agricultural Statistics Service, and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Dr. Hutchins received a B.S. in entomology from Auburn University, an M.S. in entomology from Mississippi State University, and a Ph.D. in entomology from Iowa State University. Thank you for being here with us.

We will now proceed to hearing your testimony. You will have 5 minutes. When 1 minute is left, the light will turn yellow as a signal for you to start wrapping up your testimony.

Dr. Hutchins, please begin when you are ready.

**STATEMENT OF SCOTT HUTCHINS, Ph.D., DEPUTY UNDER
SECRETARY FOR RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND ECONOMICS,
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Dr. HUTCHINS. Good morning, Chair Plaskett, Ranking Member Dunn, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today to discuss agriculture research and implementation of related provisions in the 2018 Farm Bill.

The Research, Education, and Economics Mission Area at the United States Department of Agriculture is an incredible team and powerful force for the good of U.S. agriculture. We have fantastic success stories to tell and a mission that is really never-ending: to ensure the long-term well-being of the American agriculture system, as a provider of the most affordable, abundant, and safe supply of food and fiber in the world.

The REE Mission Area is comprised of the Office of the Chief Scientist and four agencies as indicated: the Agricultural Research Service, the Economic Research Service, the National Agricultural Statistics Service, and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Each of these entities provides unique products and services to U.S. agriculture, and work as a team within REE.

The Agricultural Research Service is USDA's primary intramural research agency. ARS has approximately 2,000 scientists and post-doctoral researchers, and 6,000 additional staff supporting over 690 research projects at over 90 locations across the United States. These researchers produce an immense amount of scientific and technical knowledge in support of national agricultural priorities, and without a doubt, ARS has and continues to produce a wide range of scientific breakthroughs that benefit U.S. agricultural producers and consumers.

The Economic Research Service continues to be a trusted source of high quality and objective economic research to inform and enhance public- and private-sector decision-making. ERS reports provide information to decision makers across the Federal Government and external stakeholders that create significant insights on agricultural markets.

The mission of the National Agricultural Statistics Service is to provide timely, accurate, and useful statistics for U.S. agriculture. They conduct hundreds of surveys every year and produce reports on the entire agricultural sector, including production and supplies of food and fiber, prices paid and received by farmers, farm labor and wages, farm finances, chemical usage, and changes in the demographics of U.S. agriculture.

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture is USDA's extramural research agency, providing funding and leadership to support research, education, and extension programs that address national agriculture priorities. NIFA primarily does this through competitive and formula grants. The competitive grants are comprised of different grant programs, with the largest being the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative, or AFRI. With AFRI grants, researchers across the country conduct research and find solutions to problems that face producers and consumers. Formula grants go to land-grant universities to support them in conducting agriculture research and extension.

In addition to serving as Deputy Under Secretary, I oversee the Office of the Chief Scientist. The Office supports scientific prioritization and coordination across the entire department, and convenes the USDA Science Council. The Council facilitates cross departmental scientific coordination and collaboration, and ensures that the Department and its stakeholders are held to the very highest standards of intellectual rigor and scientific integrity.

Across the REE mission, we are fully committed to supporting research that ensures U.S. producers will be able to adapt to changes in climate and continue to develop and advocate for a wide range of sustainable intensification practices.

For example, ERS researchers recently published a study that examined the potential effects of climate change on risk management, and ARS published over 500 scientific articles related to climate change just last year alone.

So, to be clear, USDA openly supports and strongly encourages the work done by our scientists in all the agencies in these critical areas of our research.

Pertaining to the implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill, each of the four REE agencies and the Office of the Chief Scientist were included in the farm bill, but the vast majority of the provisions pertained to NIFA. And some notable accomplishments in NIFA so far include publishing and updating matching requirements, charts, and indirect cost charts for stakeholders to inform changes from the 2018 Farm Bill made to NIFA's many grant program requirements. They have published the RFA for beginning farmer and rancher program development, and I am pleased to say those awards were just announced yesterday. They published the RFA for the 1890 scholarship program, which was championed by Representative Scott, with commitment to ensure that these funds were available for 1890 land-grant institutions.

I am also pleased to report that we recently completed the relocation of ERS and NIFA to the Kansas City region on September 30. As you recall, in August of 2018 Secretary Perdue announced that the Department would be relocating a portion of these agencies outside of the National Capitol Region, whilst maintaining their headquarters in D.C. We are confident this relocation will improve USDA's ability to attract and retain highly qualified staff with training and interest in agriculture, placing these important USDA agencies closer to many of our stakeholders, and provide a more efficient long-term operating model.

At present, both agencies are focused on hiring for vacant positions, and have already had success. Be assured that we are committed to both and that ERS and NIFA will thrive in their new location and continue their service to U.S. agriculture.

In conclusion, thank you for your continued support of agricultural research, education, and economics at USDA. We do truly strive to fulfill Secretary Perdue's mantra of: "Do right and feed everyone," and I look forward to answering your questions today about the 2018 Farm Bill. Thank you, ma'am.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Hutchins follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SCOTT HUTCHINS, PH.D., DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY FOR RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND ECONOMICS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Agricultural Research and 2018 Farm Bill Implementation

Good morning, Chair Plaskett, Ranking Member Dunn, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you all today to discuss agricultural research and implementation of related provisions in the 2018 Farm Bill. The Research, Education, & Economics (REE) Mission Area at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is an incredible team and powerful force for the good of U.S. Agriculture—we have fantastic success stories to tell. I appreciate the opportunity to share a few of those with you today, as well as inform you on the progress we have made in the implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill.

The REE Mission Area is comprised of the Office of the Chief Scientist (OCS) and four agencies: the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the Economic Research Service (ERS), the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). Each of these entities provides services that are critical to the well-being of the American agriculture system—provider of the most affordable, abundant, and safe supply of food and fiber in the world.

ARS

The Agricultural Research Service is USDA's primary intramural research agency. ARS has approximately 2,000 scientists and post-doctoral researchers and 6,000 additional staff supporting around 690 research projects at over 90 locations. These researchers produce an immense output of scientific and technical knowledge. ARS scientists produced over 4,500 peer-reviewed journal articles in 2018 alone. Without a doubt, ARS has and continues to produce a wide range of scientific breakthroughs that benefit U.S. agricultural producers and consumers. Recent innovations from ARS scientists include non-woven cotton gauze that could usher in next-generation wound dressings that quickly stanch bleeding and promote healing, a rotating cross-arm trellis and cane-training system for the florican-fruiting blackberry to help growers overcome environmental challenges, produce more fruit, and reduce labor costs, and a test strip for major foodborne pathogens that reduces testing time from 24–72 hours to about 30 minutes.

ERS

The Economic Research Service continues to be a trusted source of high-quality and objective economic research to inform and enhance public- and private-sector decision making. ERS research covers a range of topics which fit generally into six buckets: Agricultural Economy, Food and Nutrition, Food Safety, Global Markets and Trade, Resources and Environment, and Rural Economy. ERS reports provide information to decision makers across the Federal Government and external stakeholders.

ERS reports provide significant insight on agricultural markets. Notably, these include in-depth analyses of commodity markets such as the outlook of livestock, dairy, and poultry and the outlook for sugar and sweeteners, both of which will be released today. Upcoming reports will provide information on food prices, livestock and meat domestic production, and an annual report on fruit and tree nuts.

NASS

The mission of the National Agricultural Statistics Service is to provide timely, accurate, and useful statistics for U.S. [a]griculture. They conduct hundreds of surveys every year and produce reports on the entire agricultural sector, including production and supplies of food and fiber, prices paid and received by farmers, farm labor and wages, farm finances, chemical use, and changes in the demographics of U.S. agriculture.

Earlier this year, we were proud to have the opportunity to provide NASS's largest and most visible report, the Census of Agriculture. Conducted every 5 years, the Census provides a complete count of U.S. farms, ranches, and the people who operate them. The Census also looks at ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, income, and expenditures. Highlights from the 2017 Census include:

- One in four producers is a beginning farmer with 10 or fewer years of experience;
- 36 percent of all producers are female, and 56 percent of all farms have at least one female decision maker;
- 96 percent of farms and ranches are family owned; and

- Farms with Internet access rose from 69.6 percent in 2012 to 75.4 percent in 2017.

NIFA

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture is USDA's extramural research agency, providing funding and leadership to support research, education, and extension programs that address national agricultural priorities. NIFA primarily does this through competitive and formula grants.

Competitive grants are comprised of different grant programs with the largest being the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). With AFRI grants, researchers across the country are able to conduct research and find solutions to problems that face producers. For instance:

- Clemson University researchers are using new nutrient-management drone and camera technology to save up to \$54 per acre on cotton production;
- Researchers at the University of Missouri have found that zinc plays a key role in promoting fertility in male livestock. In addition to improving *in vitro* fertilization and artificial insemination in livestock, the research provides a quick and accurate evaluation of livestock fertility;
- Fellow entomologists at my Alma Mater, Auburn University, have discovered a wasp that may help soybean producers and other farmers in the Southeast rid their fields of the invasive pest known as the kudzu bug, enabling them to produce more crops and see higher yields; and
- Researchers at Kansas State University are using the gene editing tool CRISPR to improve the wheat genes that control several yield component traits, such as seed size and the number of seeds per plant.

Formula grants go to land-grant universities to support them in conducting agricultural research and extension. While much of this funding is used to support research projects that address critical areas of need, formula funding is also used to support the basic research and extension infrastructure needed to disseminate knowledge and provide training to individuals in a variety of ways.

One example of this is at North Carolina State University, where extension professionals and volunteers provided 13,000 educational programs to 1.9 million residents. Their efforts improved the health and well-being of 115,000 North Carolinians through food and nutrition programs, prepared more than 263,000 youth through 4-H programs, and provided \$300 million of economic impact to the state.

NIFA's extension work also provides help to millions of family caregivers, more than 80 percent of whom feel they don't have the information or training they need. With a NIFA formula grant, Family & Consumer Sciences educators from Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension have developed a comprehensive health education curriculum that includes lessons in proper nutrition, aging and finances, and prevention of elder abuse and exploitation.

NIFA also supports workforce development, including the 4-H organization. In 2018, NIFA-funded programs supported 104,149 students through recruitment, retention, curriculum development, and faculty development. Through 4-H, NIFA supports a new generation of community and agricultural leaders.

Office of the Chief Scientist

In addition to serving as Deputy Under Secretary, I oversee the Office of the Chief Scientist. The Office of the Chief Scientist supports scientific prioritization and coordination across the entire Department and convenes the USDA Science Council. The council facilitates cross-Departmental scientific coordination and collaboration and ensures that research supported by and scientific advice provided to the Department and its stakeholders are held to the highest standards of intellectual rigor and scientific integrity.

We are fully committed to supporting research that ensures U.S. producers will be able to adapt to changes in climate and continue to develop and advocate for a wide range of sustainable intensification practices. For example, ERS researchers recently published a study that examined the potential effects of climate change on risk management. USDA has no policy, no practice, and no intent to minimize, discredit, de-emphasize, or otherwise influence the rigorous climate-based science of any agency or partner institution. We support the work done by our scientists in this area of our research. Tools such as USDA's Climate Hubs and the Long-Term Agroecosystem Research (LTAR) Network communicate climate research *directly* to the producers these changes most directly impact. Additionally, the National Climate Hub Coordinator compiles a quarterly report that provides information on publications, outreach events, and technical support.

2018 Farm Bill Implementation

REE held a stakeholder listening session on March 21, 2019, to begin the process of farm bill implementation with all REE leadership present. While each of the four REE agencies and the Office of the Chief Scientist were included in the farm bill, the vast majority of the provisions pertain to NIFA. Thus far, NIFA has:

- Published the Request for Applications (RFA) for the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) and is in the process of finalizing awards;
- Published the updated matching requirements chart and indirect cost chart on its website and sent an update to stakeholders so that they are informed of the changes the 2018 Farm Bill made to NIFA's many grant program requirements;
- Published the RFA for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) component of the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach and is in the process of finalizing awards;
- Published a *Federal Register* Notice regarding new Non-Land-Grant Colleges of the Agriculture certification process. NIFA currently has certified 39 Non-Land-Grant Colleges of Agriculture using the updated definition;
- Published the RFA for the 1890s scholarship program, which was championed by Representative Scott, with applications due on November 2019. NIFA's goal is to ensure that these funds are available for 1890 land-grant institutions to begin awarding scholarships for the next academic school year; and
- Provided guidance to 1890 land-grant institutions regarding the change to carry-over of funds for extension at these institutions.

ERS/NIFA

In August 2018, Secretary Perdue announced that the Department would be relocating the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute [of] Food and Agriculture (NIFA) outside of the National Capitol Region. The relocation to the Kansas City region was principally completed on September 30, 2019. We believe this decision ultimately will improve USDA's ability to attract and consistently retain highly qualified staff with training and interests in agriculture, as well as place these important USDA resources closer to many of our stakeholders. A short driving distance from multiple land-grant and research universities, Kansas City is a vibrant urban center in the heartland of America and a growing agricultural hub. It is also already home to a considerable Federal workforce, including a significant presence of USDA employees and the Kansas City 'Ag Bank' Federal Reserve. Anticipated savings from this move over the long-term will allow more funding for research of critical needs, like rural prosperity and agricultural competitiveness, and for programs and employees to be retained in the long run, even in the face of tightening budgets. It is important to note that the headquarters of both agencies will remain in the National Capitol Region.

As a part of this move, all employees were offered the ability to retain their position, were offered relocation assistance, and are receiving the same base pay as before in tandem with the locality pay for the new location. Additionally, the Department has utilized available resources and authorities to assist with transition for those who declined to relocate with their roles. For example, 149 employees have found new employment within the Federal Government in the National Capitol Region and, of these, 123 are remaining within USDA.

The work of NIFA and ERS is essential, and ERS and NIFA leadership, under the direction of the REE Mission Area, are working diligently to finalize this transition efficiently and with minimal disruption to our employees and mission critical work.

Both agencies have utilized a robust set of continuity tools, including detailees, re-employed annuitants, and temporary extensions of relocation dates and both agencies are focused on hiring for vacant positions. Together, these agencies have over 100 active recruitments in process and continue to onboard new talent in Kansas City. With the talent pool in the Kansas City region and our aggressive hiring strategy, we fully anticipate that our new employees, along with the expertise of our relocating employees, will provide the same excellent level of work for which ERS and NIFA have been known.

We are confident that we will be successful, exceeding even the high benchmarks previously established for both ERS and NIFA.

In conclusion, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to highlight some of the fantastic research being done in the Research, Education, & Economics mission area, provide an update on the status of REE farm bill implementation and address some specific topics of interest. Thank you for your continued support of this vital

aspect of the services USDA provides in our quest to “*Do Right and Feed Everyone*.” I look forward to answering your questions, and I thank you for the support that this Committee has always shown for [a]griculture research and innovation.

The CHAIR. Thank you so much for your testimony and for being here again, and again for being here with us to answer these questions.

I do believe in—when you say that you are committed to these areas and that you want to have efficient and well-run research for our farmers and ranchers. I do have a question for you about some of the statements that you have made here.

You said despite USDA’s assertion of the cost savings, the Agriculture and Applied Economics Association states that the relocation of ERS and NIFA will cost taxpayers between \$83 million and \$182 million. Can you explain when calculating your cost-benefit analysis, how did you consider the value of lost research from employees who chose to resign or retire? And did you consider the value of the resulting brain drain and loss of institutional knowledge when calculating that cost-benefit analysis?

I know those are softer, more difficult costs to kind of recognize.

Dr. HUTCHINS. Yes, thank you for the question.

The USDA, to be completely transparent and to be able to be objective, utilized the cost-benefit approach where we used really only the facts-based information that we had. The costs that were associated here in the D.C. area, the costs associated in the new area opportunities, and really developed that in terms of a straightforward cost-benefit analysis.

While it is true that we have lost some excellent talent in both of those agencies, we have every confidence that we will be able to replace that and we have made exceptional activities to be able to continue with some of those individuals that were not able to do, that had elected to retire and so forth. And so, it is very difficult for us to put a subjective value on those kinds of considerations. And so, to be transparent and fair and data-driven, we elected not to do that.

We do believe that we will be able to build those agencies to not only to where they were, but beyond where they were in terms of capacity and capability, and some of the considerable cost savings, over \$300 million in nominal fees, will be reinvested in those agencies in order to ensure that that occurs.

The CHAIR. And can you give us just an outline, the top level objectives, how you plan to do that? At this point, I understand that there are significant gaps in personnel in some of those areas. How do you plan to ramp up as quickly as possible to continue to meet the objectives?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you for the question.

I have stated previously in the past, two primary objectives I have had since we have been involved in this project. One was to take care of the employees as best we could, and make the transition for those as feasible and as easy as possible. Both those relocating to Kansas City, as well as those who, for personal reasons or whatever reason, have elected not to do that. We have been very successful in both of those efforts.

And then the other side of that, which is what you are addressing, is a continuity of mission. In the context of continuity of mis-

sion, we have done several things in the short-term. We have worked with employees who were interested to return as retired annuitants. A number of individuals have elected to do that. These folks are very—whether they have gone to Kansas City or not, they are very, very committed to the mission of these agencies, and they wanted to have the opportunity to transfer their work, to finish their work, and to complete their work. So, we have done that.

The other thing that we have done is we have accelerated our hiring tremendously. We have had the benefit of having some opportunities for direct hiring authority. We have also had the opportunity to work with the Kansas City region to develop employment fairs and so forth to bring in candidates. And just as an example, some of the positions that we would typically recruit for, such as our program leaders in NIFA, we would normally have 50 to 60 applicants for that. We have those advertised now and we are having 400 to 500 applicants for those particular positions. It will take time to matriculate the government hiring process. You probably are aware of that. But we have no shortage of interest and no shortage of candidates, and we will work with all due speed in order to fulfill those gaps.

The CHAIR. And when you say you will work with all due speed to do that, that is related on the hiring and the staffing. Even in terms of the permanent principle office space, my understanding is that permanent office space has yet to be secured and the agencies are still dramatically—some staff in Washington are working on extensions, and there are delays in terms of getting that permanent office space secured. Why is that?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you for the questions.

Two clarifications on that. There are some individuals that are continuing to work that we extended their time period in Washington, D.C. They were working in some very specific areas that we wanted to make sure for continuity in mission that we maintained for a bit longer period of time. Not extensive, but 3 months to 6 months in order for those particular very specialized units in order to continue that work. That is not related at all to office space available in Kansas City. The folks in Kansas City have landed in the USDA Building, the Beacon Center. It is a fantastic facility. It is up and running. I visited there personally on day 1 and day 2 when they arrived, and so, they are very able to function in that capability. We have a lot of opportunity to expand within that center during this hiring process.

The CHAIR. Okay. I will ask my esteemed colleague, the Ranking Member, for his 5 minutes at this time.

Mr. DUNN. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Dr. Hutchins, again, thank you for being here today, and thank you for the updates on implementation.

In the farm bill, we secured language expanding the membership in the Citrus Disease Subcommittee and secured an additional \$125 million over the next 5 years for citrus research. Can you give us an update on the status of the Citrus Disease Research and Extension Program, briefly?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Yes, sir, I would be happy to.

The citrus greening disease obviously is a tremendous devastating disease and situation in Florida. As an entomologist, I am

familiar with the psyllid situation, and for years, we have been working to do everything we can to mitigate that loss. This research and that program will help that tremendously.

NIFA is ready to draft the RFA for this program. They have been working to finalize the subcommittee as part of the requirement, as part of the NAREEEE (National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics) Board in order to do that, and as soon as that is completed, which should be within days, we will put those two groups together in order to develop that plan and develop those RFAs.

I would also point out that while that is occurring, the research is continuing to occur. USDA has been supporting that in a tremendous area that the University of Florida has. Obviously, a lot of folks are working in this space.

Mr. DUNN. I assure you that we have a keen interest in that research, and anything that you can share with us, going forward, will be appreciated.

Switching gears to the relocation, you recently visited the new center in Kansas City and I would like to have a little bit about your experience there and the morale of the relocated and new employees.

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you.

It was a tremendous visit. I have been there several times at Kansas City, several times now, including the original site visits. And when I visited and arrived on day 1 and took time on day 2 as people were just getting settled in with their badges and those kinds of things, I took the time to visit every single work station that was there, everybody and visit with them personally. And what I was so enlightened to see and to hear was how happy everyone there was about two things. One is about the fact that they are there working on their mission and that they are moving forward on that mission; very eager to do the rebuilding that was referenced earlier and to do that and to take it to that next level.

The other thing that I was really interested in hearing and seeing that they shared with me without asking was how much they enjoyed the region. They were talking about commute times of 10 minutes *versus* an 1½ hours. They were showing us pictures of their homes that they would never have been able to purchase in this region. One individual had a 6 acre horse farm.

Everybody has a different story and everybody has a different living preference, whether it is urban or rural or what have you, but they were, all the ones that I spoke to, were very pleased with the region personally, and very eager and excited about the professional challenge that they have, including the new employees. And we do have several new ones in Kansas City.

Mr. DUNN. I am so very, very happy that our employees are happy, because happy scientists do better research.

Recent media reports have indicated that USDA research into the ways that farmers and ranchers adapt to the effects of climate change has been hampered by this Administration. Can you confirm that the USDA has no policy, practice, or intent to minimize or discredit or de-emphasize climate-related science carried out by the USDA?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Sir, thank you for that question.

I can absolutely confirm for this Committee that that is not the case. I have been with the USDA since January, and I have seen no evidence or no indication at any level under any circumstance.

Mr. DUNN. And you were a user of it before then. As a follow-up to that question, when the first media reports were coming out about this purported resistance of that, did you not send a memo to the leaders of the research agencies encouraging them to continue with the agency's research on this very topic?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Yes, sir, I did send a memo. But more importantly, my entire leadership team—the agency leads for all of the agencies—cosigned that, and we wanted our career scientists to understand that we are there to support them and that we support the research that they are doing.

Mr. DUNN. Excellent. I am glad to hear that.

I have one other comment rather than a question. We carried a provision in the 2018 Farm Bill to eliminate a disparity in the way the funds were handled in extension activities between the 1890 land-grant universities and the 1862 land-grant institutions. However, we are aware that these funds are still being controlled by different sets of rules, specifically, the 1862 extension programs are able to carry funds over for 5 years, and the 1890 programs are only allowed 2 years. Now, I know you are in touch with the land-grant institution stakeholders on the issue, but I would like you, going forward, to keep us informed here on this Committee about why those disparities continue to exist.

And with that, Madam Chair, I thank you and I will yield back.

The CHAIR. Thank you very much.

You mentioned something about the agency not having changes in terms of climate research. There was a report that said that .3 percent of USDA's budget was going towards assisting farmers in adapting to climate change. I don't know if you agree with that percentage or not, but what are you doing specifically in your mission statement to support climate research and getting information to farmers on the ground?

And after you answer that question, Mr. Cox of California will be next.

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you, ma'am. The .3, I can't say for sure where that number came from. I believe it was referencing specifically the climate hubs. But there is so much more going on within USDA, in addition to and in support of the climate hubs.

For example, within the REE mission area, we have identified our leadership team, five significant themes that we are focused on across the agencies. One of those is sustainable ag intensification, and that includes a lot of things in it. But most prominent within that would be soil health, for example, and the ability to sequester carbon and those kinds of activities. We have over 3,500 projects across our four agencies in R&D working just within sustainable intensification.

The other one is ag climate adaptation. We are committed to ensure that U.S. agriculture adapts to whatever climate scenarios present themselves, and we have over 580 projects across these four agencies that work in that space. We are 100 percent in on making sure that U.S. agriculture is resilient and able to adapt to climate opportunities that present themselves.

The CHAIR. Thank you.

Mr. COX. Thank you so much for being here, Deputy Under Secretary Hutchins.

Just to follow up on the Chair and Ranking Member's point, is that so there is an overall acceptance that climate change is real and a factor that is influencing U.S. agriculture?

Dr. HUTCHINS. I believe the body of work. I have been clear in other testimonies in the Senate that the body of work is pretty clear that the climate is changing over time, and so the focus for agriculture, as I have indicated, is a real positive opportunity for us to do two things. One is to be able to mitigate to the extent that we can. There are a number of best practices. As I understand the climate report, the last one that was published, U.S. agriculture represents about 8.9 percent of the emissions, and we can improve on that. We can do better with a lot of best practices.

Our focus in USDA is to work with and develop those technologies and those best practices to allow agriculture to mitigate.

But, as I indicated earlier, our real focus is to make sure that we adapt. We will mitigate as much as we can. There are a lot of factors within the U.S. and outside the U.S. that affect it, but we definitely need to adapt to it. And so, we have breeding programs, we have a number of activities that are specifically focused to support our farmers in that regard.

Mr. COX. Great, thanks so much.

And so, I come from California's 21st Congressional District, which is essentially the top ag district in the top ag state, and in a district that is as diverse as mine, as you can appreciate, farmers rely heavily on public research and advances made by this research creates revolutionary tools, technology to combat pests and disease, and that is why California's Central Valley reigns as the most agriculturally productive region in the country.

And one such group that is reliant on strong support and expedient actions by the USDA are my citrus growers, speaking to Mr. Dunn there. And in the 2018 Farm Bill, the Citrus Disease Subcommittee was expanded and reauthorized through 2023. The Secretary of Agriculture has not yet made appointments to this subcommittee. It is imperative that the Secretary make these soon in order to continue critical research to fight the HLB disease that currently threatens California and Florida citrus growers.

When will the Secretary announce these crucial board appointments?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Sir, just to follow up with that same question, we have that in process. It would be within days that that would be complete. I have already seen the draft, and then we will immediately move to have that completed. So, we are advancing that.

I would also add that USDA, NIFA is working with the Foundation for Food and Agriculture as well to convene a group to focus in this area as well. It is a top priority for us, and we will have that subcommittee named and operational here within a few days.

Mr. COX. Just so—certainly by the end of the month?

Dr. HUTCHINS. That would be my full expectation.

Mr. COX. Okay, great.

And then more generally, President Trump, through Executive Order, has ordered departments to cut these vital advisory commit-

tees and reduce the ways in which stakeholders are able to engage with Federal agencies. Can you commit to maintaining these vital committees, and elaborate on the Agency's plan for increasing engagement with the stakeholders?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Sir, I understand the Executive Order. I understand it, the Department has gone through a review of its various departments, and the ones including these will continue in force.

Mr. COX. Okay, great.

Well, thanks for that commitment to have that subcommittee named within a few days. We will look forward to that.

Dr. HUTCHINS. Yes, sir.

Mr. COX. With that, I will yield the balance of my time.

The CHAIR. Thank you. Mrs. Hartzler, you have 5 minutes.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Dr. Hutchins, you highlighted several benefits of relocation of the ERS and NIFA to Kansas City region in your testimony, and I just wanted to underscore your efforts here, and share our region's dedication to seeing that this is a continued success for these two agencies.

Being in the heartland, we are very excited about this move, and concur with you that we have the personnel that will be able to fill these positions. We are excited about it, and being there close to the stakeholders is really important. And so, our farmers and ranchers support it. I represent the University of Missouri and we are co-hosting a job fair there with you in November, and I am very excited not only for the cost savings that will be reinvested back into these agencies—that will be very helpful for the research—but also the quality of life and just the product that will be developed there. I commend you on your efforts. I stand ready to continue to support you, and would just certainly oppose any efforts to try to stop this forward progress that has been made. So, keep up the great work there.

I did have a question on another topic, though. Farm country is experiencing a lot of uncertainty, and the reestablished Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network is a really important tool for many of our producers. Could you please shed some light on the status of this program, and what impact you expect this to have moving forward?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you very much, and let me just also say in return that the University of Missouri, Kansas State, the whole region has just been fantastic to work with. They have been open arms. They invited myself and other members to join the Animal Health Corridor homecoming dinner, which we did, and I just had a great opportunity. And everyone in that region and everyone outside the broader region within that area is very excited about this.

With regard to the very important program of Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance, that program has been reauthorized until 2023 at \$10 million appropriations each of the Fiscal Years 2019 through 2023, and the 2019 appropriations Act included \$2 million for the assistance program.

A couple of important points here, it does allow Indian Tribes to be eligible for the grants, which is a very important aspect of this. The request for application was issued on June 25, and I am pleased to say—and with a deadline of July 25 of 2019, and I am

really pleased to say that we expect those awards to be made next week, and they will be implemented within our extension networks within that area immediately.

It is a critical program. We know it is a difficult time in the farming communities right now, and really applaud Congress for having the foresight to build this and appropriate these kinds of funds.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Great. Thank you very much.

I yield back.

The CHAIR. Thank you very much. Now Mr. Brindisi of the Empire State—I am a native New Yorker, so of course I always have to big up New York. Mr. Brindisi, 5 minutes.

Mr. BRINDISI. Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that. Welcome, Deputy Under Secretary Hutchins.

Like many Members on this panel, I am concerned that the land-grant university that serves my state, in this case, Cornell, has experienced significant delays receiving NIFA funding. Cornell has about \$5 million in projects that have been awarded, but the agency has been holding onto the funds pending processing. These are pretty important projects on pest and disease mitigation and improving organic dairy exports. The release of NIFA funds this year will be, on average, an additional 2 months later than previous years. Why is this?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Well, as has been indicated, we do have an opportunity—we do have a hill to climb in the short-term in order to ensure that we do fulfill and have everything out the door, as it were, with regard to NIFA. But we have committed to do that by March of 2020, and we have prioritized the process of doing that.

We have prioritized, for example, the 1890 and the 1994 groups that have less flexibility and leeway. As important, what we have done is we have great meetings and continuous contact with stakeholders like Cornell, as an example, to make sure that they understand what our situation is and that we can respond to any specific shortfalls or emergency issues that they have.

We are committed to really fulfilling the mission this year. I am not going to sugar coat the challenge that we have. I never have. We do have a hill to climb. We have done all that we can, as much as we can to intervene to bring in some temporary resources to help folks do it.

I have been very pleased from the land-grant institutions have contacted us to say, “How can we help you? We are in this for the long-term. How can we help you?” And so, we are taking advantage of that. We are going to do all we can to make sure that every university that has money that is part of this process receives their money as quickly as possible, and no later than March 2020. Some will actually receive it earlier than others, but we are going to make sure that that happens. And if there is a specific program or contact, we would encourage Cornell or whomever else to contact their NIFA representative or visit their website and find out how we can accelerate that situation.

Mr. BRINDISI. Okay. Going forward, we can expect that you are going to take actions to minimize these delays, moving forward?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Absolutely, yes, sir.

And let me just also add, if I can, that this is an opportunity for us with both of these agencies, but NIFA specifically to really step back and look at the process. We have also received lots of feedback about the administrative burden and this and that and the other thing. It is an opportunity for us to step back and say, "Can we do this better in the long-term?" As we rebuild the staff, we also want to rebuild the process within, of course, the Congressional rules to ensure that we can be more responsive, to ensure that we can reduce the burden of administration, and that we can be better servants to the land-grants, which we are here for.

While we are working through the short-term challenge, we have an eye on the endgame, which is to be a much better, more service-oriented functioning organization, and with the opportunity with the savings that we will have, we will also have the opportunity, we believe, to actually do more research and to build more capability. We are building those kinds of gold standards into where we go forward.

Mr. BRINDISI. Thank you. And I just want to follow up, too, on the Chair's question about that recent report about the 0.3 percent of USDA's budget regarding climate change. I know you said that you weren't sure where that particular number came from, but in that report, there was also mention that USDA has not actively promoted research related to climate change, and that the climate hubs have continued to operate with extremely limited staff and no dedicated resources. Do you agree with that report, and what do you have to say about that?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Sir, I do not agree with that report, *per se*.

The climate hubs themselves do have dedicated resources. They may not be Congressionally mandated resources, but they are dedicated and they have been in place ever since they were originated. But, I also want to emphasize the point that there is a lot more going on within USDA than just the climate hubs. They are fantastic, but we have a tremendous amount of work going on in that space.

In terms of the promotion, agriculture is one of those unique areas where every field, every situation is unique. And so, what we have is a network through our extension service, through these hubs, and through other places where we can work hand in hand with farmers and growers to adapt the practices that are best for them. Those kinds of communications, that kind of teaching, that kind of mentorship, that kind of program is not amenable to press releases and things like that.

Mr. BRINDISI. Sure.

Dr. HUTCHINS. We are focused on being successful and showing results, and that is where our focus is.

Mr. BRINDISI. How do you disseminate the information to farmers and ranchers?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Many, many ways. The hubs themselves have aspects. Our extension service that is funded by the states as well as by NIFA is, of course, a key aspect of that. We have all kinds of partnerships with NGOs and with other groups that we all work together. I met just yesterday with a coalition of soil health groups. There are multiple ways that we do that, and it is a key focus and priority for us.

Mr. BRINDISI. Thank you.

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you.

The CHAIR. Thank you. Mr. LaMalfa of California, your 5 minutes.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome today. I am, again, very pleased with the effort made by USDA to: "Go west, young man," as the saying goes. But, accessibility for people that are truly in the field is important. And I know from personal experience, \$500 plane tickets, \$50 cab rides from the airport, \$200 a night hotel rooms, and a cab ride everywhere around town, it is not cheap for regular folks to get back here and try to have their little 15 minutes of fame. And so, I commend the effort by USDA to move some of the operations.

Do you identify other areas where more of these operations could be moved farther west? You know that California is indeed a strong hub of agricultural activity and research, and so many things that are happening there. We had a great visit with the Secretary a few weeks ago out west in California. Can you see more effort that could be made in locating directly more USDA operations in California, in the West, or outside of Washington, D.C.?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Well, sir, thank you for the question. I have not done any kind of analysis in that regard. We are, of course, always looking, for example, within our ARS organization to see where we can strengthen, and we have a big major investment going into strengthen the Salinas research station in California. But I am not involved and there are no active plans that I am aware of at this point in time to look into any others.

But if I may, I would just want to point out that while we are moving significant portions of both of these agencies, I just want to remind the Committee that the headquarters for both of those agencies is staying in Washington, D.C. And what we did was a very deliberate process of trying to identify—actually, the agencies themselves did this. What are the most appropriate aspects that should stay here, and what would be the areas that we could move? And what I did the first week on the job was I contacted the director of the Centers for Disease Control, because I recognize that there are advantages to making sure that our agencies stay connected with the other science organizations. That has been a criticism. It has been a concern, and I recognize that. I visited with Dr. Redfield for some time and said, "Look, CDC is a very highly respected science organization. It is in Atlanta. How do you do that?" And so, he was very gracious in sharing a lot of practices, a lot of approaches, and we incorporated all of those into our design.

NIFA, for example, for the folks in D.C. will be spending virtually all of their time focused on those connections with NIH and with FDA and with EPA and those groups. We have thought through this very, very carefully.

In the case of ERS, $\frac{1}{3}$ of the agency will remain here, and so, that group will be working very closely with the Office of the Chief Economist and with other groups to make sure that their reports that are Congressionally mandated are done on time.

I just want this Committee to know that we have thought through this carefully in terms of the components that stay here

and the components that would be in a better position and be more operationally effective and closer to customers.

Mr. LAMALFA. Well certainly, you need to have a foothold here where many decisions are made, and it is a clearinghouse for a lot of that. But when you get right back down to research, the new technologies, and whether responding to changes in weather and we have been for decades in agriculture on my own farm, *et cetera*.

I also want to emphasize the forestry aspect, as obviously U.S. Forest Service is a department within USDA, and the extreme importance that the issues we have in the West are completely different with whatever holdings there is east of the Mississippi. I know you are aware of that as we burn so many hundreds of thousands of acres every year, unfortunately. We need much more action by the Forest Service to be inclined to do more on forest management, and to continue to research what are the best ways. We have a pretty good idea of what needs to be done out there, but that has to also reach through the bureaucracy to get the work on the ground, *et cetera*. Can you see that we have an opportunity to do more within forestry, because again, I have had entire communities burn in my district, and the threat of that is still ongoing all over the West. What more can we be doing in the Forest Service with this research or with the possibly relocating more of our resources in the West instead of here on the forestry side?

Dr. HUTCHINS. From a research standpoint, some of the steps that I have taken is I invited Dr. Friend, who is the R&D leader for the Forest Service, because they do have their own R&D organization, to be part of our leadership staff in REE, so he is an adjunct member, and we work to coordinate in that regard. He has been a very great contributor in that way.

I can't speak to personally anything in terms of the fire suppression or the fire aspect. What I can say is that forestry is a critical component of the overall climate aspect of things. One of the factoids I learned when I came here, which is very exciting, is that every year about a million acres of farmland is converted into forestry land. And that is huge in terms of carbon sequestration. As we are able to sustainably intensify ag production, it opens up the opportunity for us to increase forestry and to increase that opportunity to further mitigate climate impact.

Mr. LAMALFA. Well certainly it is a great store of carbon, if you want to play that carbon game there. But, I think that when we are looking at the inventory of trees we have per acre in our already overgrown forests, it doesn't just mean more trees are the answer. It means they have to be managed in such a way that there is the right ratio per acre, *et cetera*.

Madam Chair, I am over my time, so I will gladly yield back. Thank you.

The CHAIR. Thank you. Ms. Schrier of Washington State, you are next.

Ms. SCHRIER. First of all, thank you for coming today and joining us, Dr. Hutchins. I have to tell you, it is very refreshing to hear from a scientist, so thank you. I appreciate it.

I also want to say how much I appreciate that we are having this hearing today, because in the face of climate change and competition in trade and increasing population growth, it is more impor-

tant than ever that we have a strong, functioning, federally-funded ag research arm in the United States. And I really appreciate also your comments about adaptation and carbon sequestration.

I also wanted to share that I am really proud to partner with Representative Bustos and other Members of this Committee to introduce H.R. 4714, America Grows Act of 2019 today. This bill will dedicate a consistent source of funding to ensure our world-class institutions can continue their work in leading edge agricultural research uninterrupted.

I also wanted to talk about staffing issues at ARS, and this time, not just in Kansas. I ultimately don't agree with the relocation of NIFA and ERS, but I was pleased to read in your testimony that you have an aggressive hiring strategy, it sounds like, together with universities in place to address vacancies in Kansas City.

But, staffing shortages are a pervasive issue affecting local ARS operations throughout the country, and there are reports that as of the end of the most recent governmental shutdown, there were 270 open ARS positions in the Pacific West region, which includes my State of Washington, and nationwide, there are reports of 700 vacant positions, which include both scientific and support staff. And so, there are a multitude of open and already Congressionally-funded positions nationwide that are caught up in this HR backlog. In our district, this includes a tree fruit geneticist position that has been open since this past February, as well as a chemical ecologist position that served both the tree fruit and potato farms, and has been open since December of 2017 at the Temperate Tree Fruit and Vegetable Research Unit laboratory in Wapato, Washington.

I was wondering if you could update me, how many funded scientist positions at ARS remain vacant both nationally and within the Pacific West region?

Dr. HUTCHINS. That is a great question. First of all—and thank you for that question. I don't have those specific numbers in front of me. I would be more than happy to get back with you on that, but I can address the question more broadly, if it is okay.

First of all, we recognize that we have had and for several years actually have had a number of vacancies within ARS, and we are working diligently now to work on that. Specifically, trying to rework our HR model so that we have the HR talent and capability to do that, and we are bringing on contractors and dispersing, if you will, some of that HR talent outside of Washington where we have a hard time retaining HR professionals.

Having said that, I did meet personally with the President of Washington State University, as well the Dean, on these topics, and assured them that we were prioritizing and focused in that area, the Wenatchee system and so forth, the ARS partnership we have with Washington is perhaps the strongest we have in the country, and so, we are very committed to that.

One of the positions they asked about specifically that I can update is a plant pathology position. We have interviewed—we had 40 applicants. We have four finalists. We are interviewing next week, and we expect to bring that person on hopefully by—whoever the winning candidate is by the end of the year.

The government hiring process is a fairly lengthy process, and so we are working and navigating through that as best we can. But,

we are committed to filling those positions, and in fact, as I have been working with my leadership team on this, we have identified a number of what I refer to as top ten priorities, operational priorities, not so much strategic. And the one for ARS really is to develop and execute that hiring strategy so we fill these positions. So, thank you for asking that question.

Ms. SCHRIER. I very much appreciate that, and am happy to know that you are working closely with WSU. Do you have any sense of how many funded scientist positions have been cleared? We know about that one in 2019 to be filled.

Dr. HUTCHINS. To my understanding—and again, I would want to get back to you because I want to make sure I don't mislead you or give you incorrect information. There are a number of positions that have been approved to fill, and we are working through that process. Again, these positions, these highly technical positions, we work through a process of not just the candidates, but through seminars and interviews and things like that. It is very similar to hiring a faculty member at Washington State. It is not a quick process, but we are committed to doing it and doing it as quickly as we can.

Ms. SCHRIER. Thank you. I appreciate that.

And just with the rest of my time, I meet regularly with farmers and with Washington State University researchers, and they are deeply missing these partnerships. I look at it as my job in a non-farm bill year to be the best supporter of our farmers that I can possibly be, and so, going to bat for them and getting the researchers that they need to help our farmers succeed and adapt to climate change, grow sustainable, increase their yields, and sequester carbon would be my dream. Thank you for working to fill these positions.

Dr. HUTCHINS. We are in that together.

Ms. SCHRIER. Thank you.

The CHAIR. Thank you. At this time, my good friend, Mr. Davis of Illinois, you have 5 minutes.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, and also to the Ranking Member Mr. Dunn for your leadership on this Committee. I appreciate it and my colleague, Ms. Schrier's comments on carbon sequestration. I would welcome you to come to my district where we have a carbon sequestration project that is funded in conjunction with the Department of Energy, and also Richland Community College and a public-private partnership with Archer Daniels Midland, and also at the University of Illinois, which is very crucial to the ag research title in this that we are talking about in this hearing. We have a Carbon Sequestration Center of Excellence where we actually—I got a chance to hold the Mt. Simon sandstone where carbon is sequestered. It is just a great educational experience. I invite you out anytime, and I will have my staff reach out to yours. But thank you.

Ms. SCHRIER. Thank you. I appreciate it.

Mr. DAVIS. Dr. Hutchins, thank you for coming here today, and I had a quick question on cooperative extension. I believe in my rural district that includes a land-grant university and three other public universities, four private universities that our cooperative extension service is one our nation's greatest resources. It is unfor-

tunate, though, that many states across the country extension has seen significant budget cuts that have really hampered its ability to assist farmers and ranchers.

In recent years, Congress has given extension some modest increases, but in your opinion, should we be doing more?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you for the question. Extension is really a hallmark, in many ways, of the success that U.S. agriculture has had. The tripartite mission of the land-grant universities of research, teaching, and extension are all three critical.

In a general sense, I would love to see us expand on the extension model. I have had many great friends at the University of Illinois as extension specialists, and I know that that particular system has had some declines in terms of specialists because of funding and the rest of it, but yet still does a great job of serving its customers. I would love to see us build up. And what we should be doing at the same time, just as any situation, is we should be exploring as things have changed, as we become more digitally oriented, and these kinds of things, can we approach extension in a different way? Can we ensure that we are delivering that information?

The land-grant colleges, through their education mission, are doing a great job of developing some really tech savvy individuals, and so precision agriculture, as an example, or digital farming, is going to be tremendous. It is already there, but it is going to expand exponentially. To have people that have the ability and are not afraid of those kinds of technologies, if you want to think of it that way, and really embrace them and experiment with them and have extension there to work with them to make sure that they know the newest and the latest, and build a science into their practice is tremendous.

Mr. DAVIS. Is there anything that you believe your research agencies at USDA can do to more effectively partner with them to save resources and still get a better product?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Well, there are a number of things that we could do, and we will explore that more completely. But specifically, what we would do is, first, to make sure that we focus on a couple and several key themes that we work with across agriculture. I have already mentioned a couple in terms of sustainable intensification and an ag climate adaptation. But the opportunity to ensure that the four agencies of the REE mission area are working together and developing a common set of practices, and then working specifically to deliver those to the farmer, and working hand in hand.

As I alluded to earlier, one of the great things about agriculture is every farm is a unique scenario. And so, every farmer has the opportunity to do some experimentation, and to understand how these technologies best fit with them, without—pardon the pun—betting the farm on any particular new technology or any particular new area. I think there is tremendous opportunity there for us to improve the delivery of tools, and we will certainly explore that.

Mr. DAVIS. Well thank you.

Real quick on another subject. In regard to the Specialty Crop Research Initiative and the Citrus Disease Research and Extension Program, it is one of the few programs that does not give the Sec-

retary the authority to waive the match requirement. I know that we in a bipartisan way addressed some of these issues in the past Congress to allow that to happen. We secured that language in the recent CR that gives you that waiver authority. I am hopeful that this language will continue until we can correct it in the next farm bill. But if this language continues through the next grant cycle for the SCRI and the citrus program, how do you anticipate USDA will implement that waiver and implementation?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you for the question.

Certainly we heard from a number of stakeholders about the matching scenario, as I know you have, Congress has. And so, we worked as best we could with Congress and everyone to make sure of two things. There were some grants that were caught up in kind of the shutdown period, as it were, that we were able to have released, and then fortunately, thank you very much for having the, if you would, the legislative fix put into the recent continuing resolution.

It is our intent in USDA to continue and grant those waivers and those exceptions, so that with that exception, important specialty crop research can continue. Their scenario is one where they don't always have a great pool of matching fund opportunities, check-off funds, and the like, so it is very important that that research occur.

Mr. DAVIS. Well thank you, and I see my time is up.

Madam Chair, thank you. You are doing a great job, especially compared to the last Chairman of this Subcommittee.

The CHAIR. That is not hard to do. Thank you for that.

Ms. Pingree of Maine.

Ms. PINGREE. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you so much for being with us here today. I appreciate your testimony, and I appreciate your communicating with the Committee.

I have been in strong opposition of the relocation of NIFA ERS, and I have had the opportunity to be in several discussions about that, also serving on the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee and also talking it over with Secretary Perdue. Many of my concerns about this have been voiced. And while I totally appreciate Mrs. Hartzler and why those Members who are having it come to their district should be very excited, I only look at this right now as bringing a lot of chaos to a very important Department.

I don't need to go through everything that has already been said, but the staff vacancies are extremely high and there is just no way of sugarcoating this. I am glad you have new applicants, but it is clear that whether it is putting out grants or the reports, they are being delayed.

I just wanted to mention, when we talk about these 38 reports that are currently known for being delayed, these are things like consolidation in the dairy industry, food security among veterans, international agriculture market access. Some will be delayed and even discontinued, such as price spread, which calculates the percentage of food dollars that goes to farmers.

I am just deeply concerned about the delayed reports, about ones that could be discontinued, about just general chaos. We had multiple former leaders of NIFA ERS that came before the Appropriations Committee to talk about how devastating this was going to be. And while, as I said, much of that has already been discussed

today, I just want to continue to express my displeasure at this, and my deep concern that this has added voices to this question: is the Department of Agriculture still behind serious research, and that is some of what leads us to these climate change questions.

I may submit some questions for the record, just to make sure that I can verify some of the numbers about the vacancies and the other things that you have been mentioning to us, because I continue to hear that there is still a lot of uncertainty.

I do appreciate in your testimony you stated that the USDA has no policy, no practice, no intent to minimize, discredit, de-emphasize, or otherwise influence the rigorous climate-based science of any agency, partner, or institution. I am just really pleased you have come in this room and say climate change, because often that is just not even said in the midst of the challenges that we are going through. I appreciate you saying that you are not minimizing the science and you are prioritizing it, but I do have to question some of these numbers around the climate hubs.

I have spent a lot of time both visiting climate hubs and looking into the numbers, and I just want to quote a few for the Committee's benefit. In 2016, \$1.2 billion was devoted to climate hubs within the Department. This is aggregated from several different departments. There is no line item fund. And in 2019, the estimate is \$512 million. That is cut in half. The bulk of that funding comes from the Department of Forestry, and most of it goes to forest resilience. And I am a forested state. I care deeply about that, but if you take out the forestry money, in 2016, \$11 million went to the climate hubs and in 2019, it is \$9.8 million. Whether it is .3 or point almost nothing, infinitesimal, that is not a lot of money devoted to climate change, climate resilience, helping our farmers prepare for this, things that are already happening to them, extreme weather, better ways to sequester carbon in the soil.

I meet with farmers and scientists all the time who are hungry for information, support, technical assistance, and there is no way to sugarcoat it. The Department is falling down on this, and the research isn't getting done. It is not getting out to the farmers. And while, you may say we are not neglecting it, I do not think it could possibly be seen as a priority with these minor funding figures, and frankly, a very difficult journey to even find what reports have been produced, where they are on a website, how they are available.

I am going to give you my minute to answer me, but I also would like to see in writing what climate reports have been put out, how are they being made accessible, and how are you reaching out to farmers to get this technical assistance they need?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you for the questions.

First of all, I would just reiterate that the Department is doing a lot more with respect to climate than simply the climate hubs. The climate hubs was a great jumpstart and it is a great system, and I have nothing but positive things to say about it. But I don't want to diminish the fact that this mission area in particular and other mission areas are doing a tremendous amount of work in support of and in partnership and in addition to those climate hubs. The resources that are being dedicated to this are much

higher than that number that you stated. We would be happy to share that in greater detail.

[The information referred to is located on p. 35.]

Dr. HUTCHINS. If you want to see the kinds of output that are coming from this, if you just, for example, go to Google Scholar and put in NIFA and climate, you will get over 4,000 reports and 4,000 hits of things that have happened just since 2016. So, there is a lot of work out there.

Now, that kind of information, as I indicated earlier, is best transmitted person to person. I know that you would appreciate that. Person to person, extension to farm, and so forth. But we are—there is no attempt or no effort whatsoever to diminish that, and we are aggressively pursuing the research, but also the use of the research for practical improvement.

Ms. PINGREE. I apologize because I am completely out of time, but I will follow up with you and will be happy to see some sort of written document that shows what many of these reports are. I completely agree with you. Being able to deliver that information farmer to farmer is important, but I also hear about huge staff vacancies in the cooperative extension service and NRCS, and many of the vehicles where this would be delivered, it also belongs on the website in a comprehensive way. Farmers are searching the web just like everybody else, and they shouldn't have to go to Google. We have the USDA. This should be readily available information for them.

I really apologize. I am a minute over, but I will personally contact you and give you much more time to follow up with me directly. Thank you for being here today, and thank you, Madam Chair, for indulging me in my extra minute.

The CHAIR. Thank you. Mr. Comer?

Mr. COMER. Yes. Dr. Hutchins, I am going to begin my questioning talking about hemp. Hemp is something that I have worked very hard on over the past 5 years, and something that has become a major crop in Kentucky now.

In August, EPA announced they are working on approving ten pesticide applications for industrial hemp, in hopes of getting them through the approval process before the next growing season. My question is, has USDA been involved with the EPA in conversations during this process?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you, sir, for the question. Actually, NIFA has funded the IR-4 program, and it includes hemp. And so, they have conducted or they are in the process of conducting studies to incorporate hemp within its priorities for IR-4, which is considered a specialty minor crop. At this point it is a unique crop. There are five projects to deal with residues, and five deal with efficacy associated with pesticide use, and appropriate pesticide use within hemp.

Mr. COMER. Well hopefully we can get those approved before the next growing season. I know it is a new crop. We are learning a lot about it, but there are still a lot of questions and a lot of challenges for our farmers growing it. I wanted to throw that in there.

Next question, the 2018 Farm Bill under the Critical Agricultural Materials Act, hemp became an eligible study crop for certain

grants and required USDA to report on the economic viability of hemp production. Can you provide a status of this?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Yes, sir, I can. The industrial hemp research study conducted by the Economic Research Service has developed a cooperative research agreement with the University of Kentucky, actually, for the completion of the study, and it is in the early draft at this point, going through review and peer review. We will have information on that.

The other thing I would report to you is that NIFA has solicited applications for national research needs and extension assessment, and has granted that with Colorado State and are developing a research conference.

The other thing I would add to that is USDA ourselves, our mission area developed a symposium within USDA to begin to teach our own organization about hemp and about the opportunity, so we brought in experts on pest control, on agronomics, on genetics, on all those kinds of things, so that we can start to ramp up our own internal knowledge in this crop so we can best support our producing community.

Mr. COMER. Great. I represent Murray State University, which is a non-land-grant university in my district. It has a great agriculture program. I will put that ag program up against any land-grant university in America. They have over 1,100 agriculture students at Murray State, and they are leading the way in reinventing agriculture hemp, and really a driving force in economic development in western Kentucky with so many hemp companies that have domiciled in that area because of the research that Murray State is doing with hemp.

USDA through the NIFA has many different funding appropriations. One such appropriation is the non-land-grant college of agriculture capacity building grants for \$5 million annually. Murray State has received seven of these grants over the past few years. An important fact is that this funding is competitive among 58 qualifying institutions. Comparatively, the land-grant university budgets are massive compared to this, and the 1890 colleges receive \$19 million in education grants, and \$58 million in research grants divided among 19 institutions. Yet each year since I have been here, I have supported this initiative, but the House Agriculture Committee and/or Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee must add back in this comparatively small amount of funding for these non-land-grant colleges since it is left out of the OMB, USDA President's budget. What can we do to get it in the budget request, and how can we get more support for this very important agriculture program at the non-land-grant universities?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Well sir, I am not sure I know how to talk about the advocacy, but what I would say, I will say it more generally, is while the land-grant system is a tremendous system, and it has served us extremely well and will continue to do so, what we are learning today is a lot of the discoveries, a lot of the things in agriculture in the future are coming from places that we would not have predicted previously.

Mr. COMER. Right.

Dr. HUTCHINS. And the science of agriculture is much broader than perhaps it was 20 or 30 years ago. The general notion that we should have more of an abundance mentality on where some of the discoveries and where some of the research and so forth can do, we can make a compelling case in that regard. Or certainly universities like Murray State can do that.

Mr. COMER. Well, I will conclude by saying that, again, Murray State is just on the cutting edge of hemp research. More and more private companies are locating in that area to do partnerships with Murray State. And I just think that if we look at our budget that we appropriate for the land-grant universities, it would be okay to reevaluate some of the work and have a little bit more accountability from some of the land-grant universities, and see if they are actually providing a good return on the investment. Because I know that Murray State and some other non-land-grant universities are really making a difference in agriculture today. And the discrepancy in funding that they get compared to the land-grants is really mind boggling.

But thank you for being here today. I look forward to working with you in the future.

I yield back, Madam Chair.

The CHAIR. Thank you. Mr. Carbajal?

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Madam Chair, and Under Secretary Hutchins, thank you for coming here today.

I must say, I am extremely pleased to hear you being true to your science background and acknowledge climate change and the challenges that agriculture is enduring as a result of weather changing.

California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo, also known as Cal Poly SLO, located in my district, is home to one of the nation's leading agricultural programs. I recently had the pleasure of visiting it, visiting the Cal Poly College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Science, where nearly 6,000 acres of agriculture production, processing, and research land and facilities are available to students. During my visit, I spoke with their staff and faculty, and toured a number of centers of excellence. These centers are able to continue their impressive work in part due to the critical partnership with NIFA and ERS. What stakeholders, if any, were consulted for the move that NIFA made?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you, sir, for the question.

Secretary Perdue announced the move of NIFA in August of 2018, and I joined the Department in January of 2019, so I honestly do not know of that consultation process that occurred. I do know it was a deliberate process and it was one that they felt like fulfilled a strong value proposition overall. But I can't speak personally to the exact consultation process.

Mr. CARBAJAL. I would appreciate it if you could get back to me in writing to share with me what that process entailed, and if any California stakeholders were included, that would be helpful to understand.

Dr. HUTCHINS. Certainly.

[The information referred to is located on p. 35.]

Mr. CARBAJAL. On another issue, following the legalization of commercial scale cannabis cultivation in California, there has been

significant development of medium- and large-scale cannabis cultivation operations within my district in Santa Barbara County. Many of these operations have replaced traditional agriculture production, both within greenhouses and open field settings. In many cases, this cannabis cultivation is immediately adjacent to continued traditional agriculture production, and a number of concerns have been raised about impacts such as the potential taint of adjacent crops, such as wine grapes, as well as issues related to direct and indirect pesticide exposure. It is clear that more research is needed to allow both the cannabis growers and their neighbors in traditional agriculture production to adjust to this evolving industry and make sound science-based decisions.

Given the disconnect between Federal and state laws regarding cannabis, are there ways that USDA can help and support research in this critical area?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you for the question.

You have raised several fair technical hypotheses that could be tested in terms of is there an adverse effect one way or the other from the proximity of a new crop like this to that, and those can be tested. We can certainly explore the possibility of that and try to understand that and those concerns more directly, and so we can follow up on that.

Mr. CARBAJAL. I would appreciate it if we could follow up on this issue together.

Dr. HUTCHINS. Okay.

[The information referred to is located on p. 35.]

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you so much.

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Madam Chair, I yield back.

The CHAIR. Thank you. Mr. Baird, you have the next 5 minutes.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you, Madam Chair. I would just say to Under Secretary Hutchins, thank you very much for being here.

Purdue University is my alma mater, and it also is within my district back home. And so, we appreciate the agricultural community very much. A major share of my district is agricultural oriented, and certainly Purdue and the research that is conducted there and the research that is done by the Agricultural Research Service is extremely important to helping our producers turn out the kind of crops that we do.

I might just mention to you we are heavy into the harvest season. We are having yields better than anticipated. We had a wet spring and so, we have worked through that.

I guess my question is to give you an opportunity to talk about the relationship between the Agricultural Research Service and all of the other entities that are the National Agricultural Statistics Service and all of those, NIFA, and that relationship with universities, land-grant universities like Purdue University. I will just give you an opportunity to comment on that, and in that conversation, if you would relate your impression of the significance of the cooperative extension service. We have that all across the United States, and they do a great job in the education arena. If you would care to do that, I would appreciate it.

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you, sir. I am happy to do that.

First of all, I am very familiar with Purdue University. My youngest daughter is a Boilermaker, so I know that institute.

Mr. BAIRD. Now we are making progress.

Dr. HUTCHINS. Yes, it is a great institution, and the folks who are leading it, Dean Plaut and President Daniels and so forth are fantastic leaders. I really enjoy working with them.

What we have in the United States is a very special situation. We have a situation where the Federal Government, through the USDA, and the states, through the land-grants and the non-land-grants, to the earlier point, all work together with a common focus on producers and consumers. And it is an extraordinary system, and it is exemplified within this mission area where the Agricultural Research Service has scientists and laboratories embedded within a number of universities where the entire NIFA organization is really focused on the success of land-grants and getting the best from them in terms of research and extension and so forth. And then certainly, the states work very closely with the National Agricultural Statistics Service, and the Economic Research Service is really—rounds out just a fantastic mission area and partnership with that. I rarely see dissent or disagreements or conflict across that ecosystem of agriculture research and development, and it is just something that we should all be very proud of in the United States, regardless of party or side, in terms of how well it works and how well it has been supported. I can't say enough about how important that infrastructure is. I know I have heard Secretary Perdue say several times that if other industries had been forethoughtful enough to establish systems like the land-grant institutions and extension and that kind of built in progressive approach with progress always being on the front end, that we would be in a different place in a lot of these industries that are losing jobs overseas and so forth.

I can't say enough good things about it, and again, it is a tripartite mission. You had mentioned extension. It is a critical one, and without that, the teaching and the research really don't have an outlet. And so, that is why that particular area is critical. I do think, as I said, as things change in terms of digital ag and connectivity and all these kinds of things, and the way farming is going to be not just now, but the way it is going to be in the next 20 years, the extension model—the principles are forever, but the model in terms of how we communicate, how we deliver, will perhaps be changing or adapting.

Mr. BAIRD. I yield back.

The CHAIR. Thank you. Mr. Panetta, you have the last 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. PANETTA. Outstanding. Thank you.

The CHAIR. Make it good.

Mr. PANETTA. I am sure everybody will appreciate that. Thank you, Madam Chair, thank you, Ranking Member Dunn, and also, thank you, Deputy Under Secretary Hutchins. I appreciate you being here and I appreciate the preparation that you have taken to be here, as well as all of the work that you have been doing. And yes, the work that you will continue to do. Thank you very much. I wanted to thank you personally for the meeting that I had with the Economic Research Service staff to discuss specialty crop mech-

anization review. They came to my office after we called them, and I appreciate that, just to let you know. But we had a talk about the specialty crop mechanization review mandated by Section 7610 of the 2018 Farm Bill that I was a part of, and trying to push them along to get the report. They were very motivated, I found, after that meeting to do the report. That gives me confidence and I am sure gives you confidence in your staff, as it should. It doesn't take me to tell you that, I am sure.

But, I just wanted to make sure that as we move forward in that type of report, especially dealing with something that is so important to my specialty crops out there on the Central Coast of California, otherwise known as the Salad Bowl of the world that everybody in this room has heard me say a number of times. Are you working with members of the specialty crop industry to ensure that the efforts on this review match up with the ongoing work to mechanize and automate as we go forward? Obviously with our specialty crops, it takes—we can't just get at this point. We don't have the machinery to send it through, and we rely on people to come to this country, because no domestic workers will do that to harvest our crops. Unfortunately with the rhetoric around immigration and the lack of immigration reform at this point, we don't have that, so we are turning to mechanization, not to replace labor, but to replace the lack of labor. Let's make that clear. Obviously, we want USDA to play a big part in that. And so, I want to make sure that you coordinate with private industry as much as you can so that everything matches up when we go forward to have this kind of report.

Dr. HUTCHINS. Yes, sir. I certainly support that. Having spent my first career within the private-sector, I fully recognize the importance of having the public- and the private-sector work together in this to solve the biggest challenges that we have in agriculture, and certainly, labor availability is one of those challenges.

Mr. PANETTA. That is correct. And now, are you working with not just labor availability, but in regards to the mechanization report, you were going to work with them on what type of mechanization and investments are necessary?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Yes. With the report and the information from that, we certainly will utilize that information as a way to kind of steer our direction and do the best that we can with the resources that we have.

Mr. PANETTA. Outstanding. Now, obviously I wanted to show our appreciation in regards to the announcement yesterday by NIFA in regards to the 32 grants totaling \$14.3 million—excuse me, 30 grants totaling \$24.1 million through the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative, OREI, which I am sure you have heard about today, as well and the Organic Transitions Program. A couple of organizations in my district are going to benefit from them: the Organic Farming Research Foundation, as well as our Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association, otherwise known as ALBA. They obviously rely on these grants, and they have taken a few steps because of that reliance, and some investments that they have already made because of those grants. And so, they are awaiting those grants.

Now obviously, there is a delay that you know about when it comes to those grants that was mentioned, and I was wondering if you can elaborate a little bit more for the reason for the delay on those grants?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Sorry, I don't have the specifics on those individual grants, but I can certainly come back to you on that.

[The information referred to is located on p. 36.]

Mr. PANETTA. I would appreciate that.

Dr. HUTCHINS. I am more than happy to do that. What I can do is follow up, of course, with NIFA. I know that they have prioritized that area as a high area of interest and focus, and we certainly are aware of your interests and your stakeholders' interests. I will commit to do that.

Mr. PANETTA. Thank you very much. I appreciate that. Like I said, I found the response from you and from the employees underneath you very good and very responsive, and I hope that we can continue this type of relationship, especially as you move forward with the transition to Kansas City, unfortunately, as I may add, but also knowing that as long as there are people there that pick up the phone and continue to do the work that we need them to do, especially when it comes to agriculture research. There will be appreciation shown by us in Congress, but also hold you accountable as well.

Dr. HUTCHINS. Yes, sir, I would expect that.

Mr. PANETTA. Thank you, sir. I appreciate it.

I yield back.

The CHAIR. Thank you. Before we adjourn, I would invite the Ranking Member, if he would like to, to make any closing remarks.

Mr. DUNN. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just want to say thank you to you for calling this hearing. It has been very enjoyable to have a chance to hear from our experts, and as always, I enjoy serving with you on this Committee. Thank you so much.

The CHAIR. Thank you, Mr. Dunn.

Thank you so much, Dr. Hutchins, for being here with us and for your testimony and your willingness to answer questions. I do believe, and as you have seen here, that we all want the best for the Department of Agriculture. I am grateful for your willingness to be very transparent with this Committee and talk about the issues that you have had and your attempts and what you are doing to create a road forward for the agency and particularly for the departments that you have oversight over.

I am concerned, and I think the numbers speak for themselves. ERS has a 65 percent vacancy rate. NIFA has a 76 percent vacancy rate. There are 478 total positions vacant, and grants will be several months delayed. In that, however, you have heard from Members on both sides, and I believe you as well on this—as the Members of this Committee are trying to do what is right for farmers, fishermen, ranchers, and the people who rely on the goods and the services that they bring into the market. We didn't agree with the move, but the Department of Agriculture, Secretary Perdue has moved forward.

And so, what this Committee is asking for is not only just a plan from you on how you intend to meet the needs of those agencies,

but also to hear directly from you about how we can assist and how we can help and make that happen.

I am not sure—and I haven't been able to ascertain from your answers whether or not this was really a well thought-out plan, or this was something that came about and you all had to really put this together and make it work. But be that as it may, it is what it is. And at this point, I, as the Chair of this Subcommittee, really offer ourselves to give you as much support as you need to make sure that the research and the work that is done by that agency and by those departments really moves forward expeditiously.

With that invitation to you and your staff to meet with us as Members and the more than able staff of this Subcommittee, this hearing—I just want all of the Members to know that under the Rules of the Committee, the record of today's hearing will remain open for 10 calendar days to receive additional material and supplementary written responses from the witness to any questions posed by the Members. There were a lot of questions that people had, and some information that you as well said that you would get back to us, and we look forward to that.

At this time, this hearing of the Subcommittee on Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research stands adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:31 a.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[Material submitted for inclusion in the record follows:]

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL SUBMITTED BY SCOTT HUTCHINS, PH.D., DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY FOR RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND ECONOMICS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Insert 1

Ms. PINGREE.

I am going to give you my minute to answer me, but I also would like to see in writing what climate reports have been put out, how are they being made accessible, and how are you reaching out to farmers to get this technical assistance they need?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you for the questions.

First of all, I would just reiterate that the Department is doing a lot more with respect to climate than simply the climate hubs. The climate hubs was a great jumpstart and it is a great system, and I have nothing but positive things to say about it. But I don't want to diminish the fact that this mission area in particular and other mission areas are doing a tremendous amount of work in support of and in partnership and in addition to those climate hubs. The resources that are being dedicated to this are much higher than that number that you stated. We would be happy to share that in greater detail.

REE conducts or funds hundreds of studies on climate change every year. That research is disseminated through our Regional Climate Hubs and other communications channels, which allows for the most relevant information for producers in a particular area to be more easily located. Information relating to research on the affects you describe can be found here: <https://www.climatehubs.usda.gov/>.

Ensuring the latest research gets into the hands of farmers is a priority. Formal press releases are only one of several forms of communications. REE agencies use workshops, events, and conferences, list-serves, newsletters, our website, blogs, webinars, cooperative extension partnering, land-grant university networks, and social media to highlight and publicize USDA research on climate variability and change.

Insert 2

Mr. CARBAJAL. . . .

California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo, also known as Cal Poly SLO, located in my district, is home to one of the nation's leading agricultural programs. I recently had the pleasure of visiting it, visiting the Cal Poly College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Science, where nearly 6,000 acres of agriculture production, processing, and research land and facilities are available to students. During my visit, I spoke with their staff and faculty, and toured a number of centers of excellence. These centers are able to continue their impressive work in part due to the critical partnership with NIFA and ERS. What stakeholders, if any, were consulted for the move that NIFA made?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you, sir, for the question.

Secretary Perdue announced the move of NIFA in August of 2018, and I joined the Department in January of 2019, so I honestly do not know of that consultation process that occurred. I do know it was a deliberate process and it was one that they felt like fulfilled a strong value proposition overall. But I can't speak personally to the exact consultation process.

Mr. CARBAJAL. I would appreciate it if you could get back to me in writing to share with me what that process entailed, and if any California stakeholders were included, that would be helpful to understand.

Dr. HUTCHINS. Certainly.

Stakeholder engagement was part of the process at the Secretary, Deputy Secretary and Mission Area levels. Upon the announcement the Department conducted a call with stakeholders. Stakeholders included economic and academic organizations and members that represent national interests, therefore California was included.

Insert 3

Mr. CARBAJAL. On another issue, following the legalization of commercial scale cannabis cultivation in California, there has been significant development of medium- and large-scale cannabis cultivation operations within my district in Santa Barbara County. Many of these operations have replaced traditional agriculture production, both within greenhouses and open field settings. In many cases, this cannabis cultivation is immediately adjacent to continued traditional agriculture production, and a number of concerns have been raised about impacts such as the potential taint of adjacent crops, such as wine grapes,

as well as issues related to direct and indirect pesticide exposure. It is clear that more research is needed to allow both the cannabis growers and their neighbors in traditional agriculture production to adjust to this evolving industry and make sound science-based decisions.

Given the disconnect between Federal and state laws regarding cannabis, are there ways that USDA can help and support research in this critical area?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Thank you for the question.

You have raised several fair technical hypotheses that could be tested in terms of is there an adverse effect one way or the other from the proximity of a new crop like this to that, and those can be tested. We can certainly explore the possibility of that and try to understand that and those concerns more directly, and so we can follow up on that.

Mr. CARBAJAL. I would appreciate it if we could follow up on this issue together.

Dr. HUTCHINS. Okay.

The 2018 Farm Bill legalized hemp, but not all forms of cannabis. Because marijuana production and other activities, including research, remains subject to the Federal Controlled Substances Act, USDA cannot fund or otherwise support cannabis research generally, but can only do so with respect to hemp; *i.e.*, cannabis that is known by USDA to have tetrahydrocannabinols (THC) levels of .3 percent or lower.

Insert 4

Mr. PANETTA. Outstanding. Now, obviously I wanted to show our appreciation in regards to the announcement yesterday by NIFA in regards to the 32 grants totaling \$14.3 million—excuse me, 30 grants totaling \$24.1 million through the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative, OREL, which I am sure you have heard about today, as well and the Organic Transitions Program. A couple of organizations in my district are going to benefit from them. The Organic Farming Research Foundation, as well as our Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association, otherwise known as ALBA. They obviously rely on these grants, and they have taken a few steps because of that reliance, and some investments that they have already made because of those grants. And so, they are awaiting those grants.

Now obviously, there is a delay that you know about when it comes to those grants that was mentioned, and I was wondering if you can elaborate a little bit more for the reason for the delay on those grants?

Dr. HUTCHINS. Sorry, I don't have the specifics on those individual grants, but I can certainly come back to you on that.

NIFA is working diligently to complete the administrative review of Fiscal Year 2019 awards and process the final release of funds. The release of capacity and competitive annual funds typically occurs 1 to 2 months after the beginning of each fiscal year. The release of funds this year will be, on average, an additional 2 months later than previous years. NIFA will prioritize final fund releases and post-award actions, as needed.

SUBMITTED QUESTIONS

Response from Scott Hutchins, Ph.D., Deputy Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics Mission, U.S. Department of Agriculture

Questions Submitted by Hon. Stacey E. Plaskett, a Delegate in Congress from Virgin Islands

Question 1. As I mentioned in my opening statement, my constituents in the U.S. Virgin Islands are directly impacted by USDA research efforts. The University of the Virgin Islands received over \$3 million from NIFA last year, and Dr. Robert Godfrey, the Director of the local Agricultural Experiment Station, directly told this Subcommittee how USDA-supported work is helping my farmer and communities deal with drought and hurricane response.

Unfortunately, your efforts to relocate ERS and NIFA threaten this work and the work of researchers across this country. As of October 15, 2019, NIFA had 264 vacancies and ERS had 214 vacancies. Your staff indicated that FY19 funds will not be completely dispersed until March 2020, and FY20 funds will only be dispersed on time if you can meet your aggressive hiring goals. You are currently rehiring employees who just retired last month as re-employed annuitants to simply maintain

critical mission functions, and you do not even have permanent office space secured in Kansas City.

Taking all this into consideration—was this all a part of the plan? Did Secretary Perdue anticipate missed deadlines, gaps in service, and major staff shortages when he announced plans to relocate these agencies?

Answer. At present, ERS and NIFA continue to deliver the same high-quality work product and perform mission critical functions. Some degree of attrition is anticipated with any re-location, which is why ERS and NIFA have both taken steps to ensure mission continuity throughout the transition and now as we rehire at these agencies.

Question 2. When did you first become aware that ERS and NIFA would lose over ½ their staff and would delay the full availability of FY19 funds until March 2020?

Answer. I was aware of the attrition rate as employees either accepted or declined their directed reassignment letters. I was informed by NIFA in the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2020 that some grantees would see a delay in accessing their funding until March, while others such as the 1890s, 1994s, and nonprofit institutions would be prioritized and have access to their funding potentially earlier than would be typical.

Question 3. I sent Secretary Perdue a letter requesting a plan that would prevent gaps in service. His response was less than satisfactory, only saying the agencies would “ramp up hiring” with nearly “100 positions and job announcements in the hiring pipeline.” There are 478 total vacancies. What is your specific, detailed plan for how these agencies will reach their appropriated staffing levels with clear deadlines?

Answer. NIFA and ERS are diligently focused on hiring for vacant positions in both the National Capitol Region (NCR) and Kansas City (KC). As of January 15, 2020, NIFA has 79 total recruitments in process and ERS has 92 total recruitments in process. Both Agencies plan to continue hiring at an expedited pace. NIFA has received an average of 78 applications and ERS received an average of 46 applications for each position posted.

In addition to full time employees, NIFA and ERS have leveraged multiple short-term resources to assist in mission delivery. Those resources include re-employed annuitants, employee extensions for mission critical work, employee details from elsewhere in the Department and short-term contractor support.

Questions Submitted by Hon. Collin C. Peterson, a Representative in Congress from Minnesota

Question 1. I am concerned that program delays will impact the operations of key stakeholders such as 1890 institutions and 1994 Tribal colleges. In the hearing, it was noted that FY19 funding from NIFA will not be fully available to grantees until March 2020. What is the anticipated delay for subgrantees who are awaiting funds?

Answer. NIFA’s target is to have all FY 2019 annual funding released by March 2020. It is not within NIFA’s purview to control, dictate or administer funds to subgrantees.

Question 2. How is USDA prioritizing funding availability? Will priority be given to groups who will face financial challenges due to this delay?

Answer. Priority has been given to 1890s, 1994s, and nonprofit organizations. Additionally, NIFA has communicated with stakeholders that it will work with stakeholders to re-prioritize programs and projects based on critical stakeholder needs.

Question 3. What outreach has USDA done to stakeholders who will be impacted by these emerging gaps in service, particularly stakeholders who will be most severely impacted like nonprofits, 1890 institutions, and 1994 Tribal colleges?

Answer. NIFA has been in constant communication with these organizations as well as groups such as APLU to keep them apprised of the status of their access to funds.

Questions Submitted by Hon. Anthony Brindisi, a Representative in Congress from New York

Question 1. Under Secretary Hutchins—I appreciate your comments about reexamining agency processes and streamlining regulatory burdens in your grant-making processes. Going forward, how does NIFA anticipate it will manage the next cycle (or two) of proposals, with so few staff left to administer the process? In Fiscal Year 2019 and Fiscal Year 2020 Congress has worked hard to increase funding for AFRI, as funding for agriculture research has lagged far behind the other sciences—and I’m very concerned that just at the time that we’re starting to see real growth in the agency’s resources, NIFA won’t be adequately staffed to set priorities, admin-

ister programs, and provide the guidance and oversight that our land-grant universities need to develop their research programs.

Answer. NIFA has been holding panels for FY20 as well as AFRI since the start of the fiscal year. At this point in time NIFA is not anticipating delays in administering grant programs this year.

Question 2. Under Secretary Hutchins—The continuing resolution we passed at the end of September has a provision in it that gives the Secretary authority to waive the matching requirement of the Specialty Crop Research Initiative. I'm disappointed that USDA has interpreted that provision to expire on November 21, but I've been working with my colleagues here and on the Appropriations Committee to ensure that that waiver provision is extended through the rest of FY20 and beyond. A 100 percent match is very difficult threshold for the smaller, very diverse specialty crop industries in New York to meet, which is why Cornell University pulled several projects that had advanced through the pre-proposal stage from consideration. These are very important projects—addressing downy mildew control in horticultural crops, post-harvest storage improvements for apples, and berry production methods, among others—that will not be considered in this round of funding because of the higher matching requirement. Going forward, how will NIFA work with specialty crop stakeholders to ensure that the SCRI does not disadvantage small—but essential—specialty crop industries in New York and the Northeast?

Answer. On January 15, 2020, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture informed SCRI applicants that for FY 2020, in accordance with General Provision 762 of the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (Pub. L. 116-94), NIFA will waive the match requirement for recipients of grants under SCRI. This provision also applies to the Emergency Citrus Disease Research and Extension (ECDRE) program. This means that no matching funds will be required of FY 2020 applicants or awardees, and applicants will not need to submit a waiver request with their application. The deadline for SCRI full applications remains the same of March 13, 2020.

Questions Submitted by Hon. Kim Schrier, a Representative in Congress from Washington

Question 1. How many funded scientist positions at ARS remain vacant, both nationally and in the Pacific West region?

Answer. 399 vacant Staff Years in ARS, 85 vacant Staff Years in Pacific West Area.

Question 2. What is USDA's plan to fill these positions, and under what timeline?

Answer. Our goal is to fill as many as possible by the end of the fiscal year (September 30, 2020). We are planning to use internal resources and contractor support to reduce our hiring backlog.

Question 3. What is USDA's long-term plan to ensure we have scientists/leaders in place for consistent research?

Answer. Once we reduce the hiring back log, we will be in a position to fill vacancies due to attrition in a timely manner. We are also expanding resources to handle the specialized recruitment requirements for scientists.

Question 4. What is the process to expedite the hiring of the leadership positions in Washington State?

Answer. ARS recently had two leadership vacancies in Pullman, WA. One position has been filled in the Sustainable Agroecosystems Research Unit. The other position will be re-advertised as the initial interview panel did not identify a suitable candidate. In general, once a vacancy occurs, individual research units submit their vacancies to the Area Office for approval. Once approved, the recruitment work commences. We recently expanded our recruitment capacity by providing specialized training to contractors so that they can more efficiently assist with scientific recruitments.

Question 5. What is your process for ensuring that ARS stakeholders are kept up to date as it relates the filling of these vacant positions?

Answer. The Area Director in Albany, CA regularly keeps stakeholders up to date. Additionally, many of the National Program Leaders in ARS often communicate with stakeholders regarding the status of vacancies. Vacant position postings are publicly available on [USAJobs.gov](https://www.usajobs.gov).

Questions Submitted by Hon. Chellie Pingree, a Representative in Congress from Maine

Question 1. A recent *Politico* article reported that at least 38 ERS reports will be delayed and possibly even discontinued. Is that accurate? How many ERS reports will be limited, delayed, or discontinued? Please explain in detail what your plans

are to ensure that there are no delays of reports or grants under ERS and NIFA's purview.

Answer. The reports referenced represent a snapshot of the entire ERS product pipeline as of August 2019. As is standard ERS practice, many of those items remain at various stages in the pipeline with no set date for publication. Several items on that snapshot have been published, including the Examination of Veterans Diet Quality, and ERS has published all calendared reports on time. ERS has published all calendared work products on schedule.

Question 2. Please provide a detailed report on what the staffing levels are at NIFA and ERS. Please include monthly totals for how many NIFA and ERS employees are based in Washington, D.C. for each month of 2019, as well as monthly totals for how many NIFA and ERS employees are based in Kansas City for each month of 2019. Given the incredible reduction in agency staff capacity, what is USDA's specific hiring plan for all the positions that have been vacated due to the relocation?

Answer. As of the pay period ending January 4, 2020, NIFA has 102 full time employees (FTEs) with 18 based in D.C. and 84 based in Kansas City (KC). Below is data for each pay period after the direct reassignment report date for employees relocating to KC:

NIFA	Positions Occupied		
Pay Period Ending Date	Total	D.C.	KC
10.12.19	88	18	70
10.26.19	92	18	74
11.9.19	95	18	77
11.23.19	93	18	75
12.7.19	92	18	74
12.21.19	102	18	84
1.4.20	102	18	84

NIFA is diligently focused on hiring for vacant positions in both D.C. and KC. As of January 15, 2020, NIFA has 79 total recruitments in process and plans to continue hiring at an expedited pace. NIFA has received an average of 78 applications for each position posted.

ERS	Positions Occupied		
Pay Period Ending Date	Total	D.C.	KC
10.12.19	118	69	49
10.26.19	122	69	53
11.9.19	122	69	53
11.23.19	125	68	57
12.7.19	123	68	55
12.21.19	123	68	55
1.4.20	123	68	55

ERS is diligently focused on hiring for vacant positions in both D.C. and KC. As of January 15, 2020, ERS has 111 total recruitments in process and plans to continue hiring at an expedited pace. ERS has received an average of 46 applications for each position posted.

In addition to FTEs, NIFA and ERS have leveraged multiple short-term resources to assist in mission delivery. Those resources include re-employed annuitants, employee extensions for mission critical work, employee details from elsewhere in the Department and contractors.

Question 3. Do you believe that USDA needs \$25 million of taxpayer money for a relocation that has already happened? If yes, why? Please provide specific breakdown of what USDA needs additional funding for.

Answer. NIFA and ERS will operate under their appropriation for Fiscal Year 2020.

Question Submitted by Hon. Jimmy Panetta, a Representative in Congress from California

Question. Background: There is a concern in the agriculture research community about the public-private partnerships required matching funds. Currently, the Organic Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) requires 100% matching of private funds for all projects that benefit a single commodity. Exemptions exist for projects that will benefit the organic industry as a whole, span across multiple crop study systems, or study a minor commodity. Organic stakeholders have interpreted these qualifications to include organic production, since “organic” itself is considered a minor commodity. However, in the official wording (below), this is not made explicit and potentially left up for interpretation by the program officer.

Official wording from the RFA: The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (H.R. 2) removed the matching requirements for some NIFA competitive grants imposed by the Agricultural Act of 2014. Therefore, there are changes to the matching requirements for some funds awarded in 2019.

For FY 2019, for the OREI program, if a grant provides a particular benefit to a specific agricultural commodity, the grant recipient is required to match the USDA funds awarded on a dollar-for-dollar basis from non-Federal sources with cash and/or in-kind contributions. (See Part IV, B., 6. for details.)

NIFA may waive the matching funds requirement for a grant if NIFA determines that: (1) the results of the project, while of particular benefit to a specific agricultural commodity, are likely to be applicable to agricultural commodities generally; or (2) the project involves a minor commodity, the project deals with scientifically important research, and the grant recipient is unable to satisfy the matching funds requirement.

Question: The current private funding matching requirements allow for exemptions for studies related to a minor commodity. Organic is considered a commodity class and projects funded under OREI have received waivers for the matching requirements. Can you confirm that organic crops are considered a minor commodity and therefore exempt from the matching requirements?

Answer. The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 removed the matching requirements for some National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) competitive grants imposed by the Agricultural Act of 2014. Therefore, there are changes to the matching requirements for some funds awarded in 2019, and thereafter. In FY 2020, for the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) program, if a grant provides a particular benefit to a specific agricultural commodity, the grant recipient is required to match the USDA funds awarded on a dollar-for-dollar basis from non-Federal sources with cash and/or in-kind contributions. There isn’t an exemption for a minor commodity, however, NIFA may waive the matching funds requirement for an OREI grant if NIFA determines that: (1) the results of the project, while of particular benefit to a specific agricultural commodity, are likely to be applicable to agricultural commodities generally; or (2) the project involves a minor commodity, the project deals with scientifically important research, and the grant recipient is unable to satisfy the matching funds requirement. Should applicants pursue the number two waiver, they need to submit a justification at the time of application on how they meet the waiver request by defining why they are a minor commodity, proving the scientific importance of the proposed project, and showing an inability to satisfy the match requirement. The deadline for FY 2020 OREI applications is January 30, 2020.

Question Submitted by Hon. Neal P. Dunn, a Representative in Congress from Florida

Question. There continues to be deceiving rhetoric describing the relocation as a way to gut the agricultural research being done by these agencies. What is your long-term vision for these agencies and how this relocation will ultimately be beneficial for agricultural research?

Answer. The relocation of ERS and NIFA will strengthen the agencies in the long-term. The relocation has and will continue to allow us to hire and retain highly qualified staff and bring Federal resources closer to stakeholders. Additionally, the relocation will allow the agencies an opportunity to evaluate their business processes and become more effective, efficient, and responsive to stakeholders.

* **Editor’s note:** The *Fiscal Year 2020 Request for Applications* is retained in Committee file and available at: <https://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/rfa/FY2020-OAREI-RFA-20191206.pdf>.

Question Submitted by Hon. K. Michael Conaway, a Representative in Congress from Texas

Question. Sections 7612 and 7613 of the 2018 Farm Bill direct USDA to streamline reporting requirements in the annual Plan of Work report and the Time and Effort reports. The farm bill language specifically directs USDA to work with land-grant university stakeholders to get this done. What is the status of implementing these two sections? Please describe your coordination efforts with land-grant stakeholders to implement these two sections.

Answer. Regarding Section 7612, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture's (NIFA) Plan of Work (POW) and REEport integration project has been working to implement the 2015 Plan of Work Panel of Experts recommendations to consolidate the Plan of Work (POW) system into REEport. NIFA plans to continue to work together with land-grant university (LGU) partners to find innovative solutions for meeting the legislative requirements of Agricultural Research, Education, and Extension Reform Act, improve data quality, and lessen reporting burden.

Regarding Section 7613, NIFA has met with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and held their first stakeholder input session at the annual National Extension and Research Administrative Officers Conference in April 2019, attended by over 200 land-grant university representatives. NIFA plans on holding additional stakeholder input sessions, and then will develop draft guidance. After review by OMB, NIFA will gather stakeholder input on the draft guidance before making the guidance final.

Question Submitted by Hon. Mike Bost, a Representative in Congress from Illinois

Question. The 2018 Farm Bill expanded the Farm and Rancher Stress Assistance Network program, which is a vital tool to ensure our producers are getting the help they need. As the Ranking Member of the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee for the Veterans Affairs Committee, I've worked firsthand to reduce veterans' suicide, including veteran farmers. Given the state of the ag economy, difficult planting conditions, and stress about the markets, we need to make sure that our producers are being looked after. What is the status of the implementation of this program? Other than FRISAN, what other ways does your mission area provide mental health resources to America's farmers and ranchers?

Answer. On October 22, 2019, USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) announced \$1.92 million for four competitive grants supporting projects to provide stress assistance programs to individuals engaged in farming, ranching, and other agriculture-related occupations. These Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRISAN) program projects were awarded to four regional entities to help launch FRISAN. The long-term expectation is that agriculture producers and their families will have greater opportunities to find help in their communities and states through outreach and the Cooperative Extension System. The FY 2020 FRISAN Request for Applications should be published within the next few months.

USDA has tools and options within its programs that county offices can leverage to help a producer achieve financial success on their farm. In addition, USDA has access to resources and referral services as a result of collaborations with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The following efforts at USDA are currently dedicated to supporting the behavioral and mental health needs of individuals in the agricultural sector:

- *AgrAbility* program building service capacity on national, regional, state, and local levels through;
 - *Direct Assistance* aimed at accommodating disabilities in individuals who engage in farming and farm-related occupations;
 - *Farm Safety Education*;
 - *Marketing* direct to public initiatives in AgrAbility-related education, and assistance;
 - *Networking* to increase sharing of resources and sustainability of projects past NIFA funding. The National AgrAbility Project has been involved with Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) for several years and has a trained instructor involved in conducting programs. The MHFA training has been offered at the National AgrAbility Training Workshops in both 2018 and 2019.

In addition to FRISAN, NIFA has the following specific programs that have components that may increase understanding of suicide risk, and thus promote its prevention and greater overall behavioral health include:

- *Rural Health and Safety Education (RHSE)* research shows that suicide is the leading cause of death among people with substance use disorders (SUDs). RHSE is a competitive grant program that seeks to address the needs of rural Americans by providing individual and family health education programs. Per Congressional guidance in FYs 2017–2019, proposals emphasized the prevention and/or reduction of opioid misuse and abuse.
- *Agricultural Risk Management Education Program (ARME)* is a competitive grant program that educates agricultural producers on the full range of risk management strategies. It provides funding for result- and outcome-based risk management education projects to help producers learn and use tools and approaches that can reduce the adverse effects of the uncertainties of weather, yields, prices, credit, government policies, global markets, and other factors including human resources and legal issues.

NIFA and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) have an interagency agreement in which they are working on the development of training, resources, and outreach materials that support USDA FSA field employees that work with farmers and ranchers. FSA's priority is to adequately support field employees with training on how to serve stressed customers by supporting them with their mental and physical health. FSA has more than 10,000 employees who engage with producers daily through farm and office visits in more than 2,000 county offices throughout the United States.

