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May 11, 2026

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chair
Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Hoeven and Ranking Member Shaheen:

As the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) plans to decommission the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) and relocate its programs and personnel to facilities across the country¹, the American Society for Nutrition (ASN) urges Congress to protect vital nutrition research tools and infrastructure. Established in 1928, ASN is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the mission of advancing the science, education, and practice of nutrition. ASN has more than 8,000 members around the world, working throughout government, clinical practice, academia, and industry, to conduct research to achieve the ASN vision of “A Healthier World Through Evidence-Based Nutrition.” ASN members include USDA staff, as well as recipients of USDA research grants, USDA and Extension educators, and participants on USDA grant review panels. ASN is extremely appreciative of USDA’s support for human nutrition research.

BARC houses the Beltsville Human Nutrition Research Center (BHNRC), the oldest and most comprehensive of six human nutrition research centers within the Agricultural Research Service (ARS). A research group within the BHNRC produces FoodData Central, a comprehensive source of food composition data with multiple distinct data types, that is very valuable to the work of nutrition researchers. The BHNRC also houses the Food Surveys Research Group (FSRG), which monitors and assesses food consumption and related behavior of the U.S. population and provides essential information for food and nutrition programs and public policy decisions. The FSRG is responsible for several essential nutrition research tools and databases, including:

- **What We Eat in America (WWEIA)** – the two-day dietary intake component of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). A unique and critically important surveillance function in which dietary intake, nutritional status, and health

¹ <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ars-reorg-factsheet.pdf>

status are evaluated in a rigorous and standardized manner. FSRG has long been recognized by stakeholders as excelling in this surveillance function of dietary data integrity. Collaboration with HHS is a core requirement of this work and demands close proximity. WWEIA data has informed major federal nutrition policies, including:

- Assesses dietary intakes in relation to Dietary Guidelines for Americans and food components of concern, such as pesticide residues, additives, and flavorings
- The Thrifty Food Plan
- Updates to the Nutrition Facts label
- Development of Dietary Reference Intakes
- **USDA Automated Multiple-Pass Method (AMPM)** – dietary intake collection method used in WWEIA.
- **USDA Food and Nutrient Database for Dietary Studies (FNDDS)** – AMPM companion component that contains data to convert reported foods and beverages and their amounts into nutrient values.
- **Food Patterns Equivalents Database (FPED)** – contains data to assess WWEIA dietary intakes in relation to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- **Food Intakes Converted to Retail Commodities Databases (FICRCD)** – contains data to assess WWEIA dietary intakes in relation to retail commodities.

These databases are extensively utilized by nutrition researchers and are critical components of the nation's nutrition infrastructure. Of particular concern to ASN is ongoing maintenance and support for these databases during the relocation.

While USDA has stated that all critical functions of the Department will continue uninterrupted², ASN has grave concerns that the ability of BHNRC staff to maintain and update these databases without interruption will be significantly challenged throughout the relocation. Given the demographics of existing scientists, few will opt to relocate – just as 75% of previously reassigned Economic Research Service (ERS) and National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) senior staff chose not to leave the D.C.-area in 2019 when USDA relocated ERS and NIFA to Kansas City³. Additionally, the BHNRC consists of six laboratories that conduct multi-disciplinary basic science and applied human nutrition research, including the Methods and Application of Food Composition Laboratory. Four of the six BHNRC laboratories require specialized infrastructure, including:

- Dedicated laboratory space
- Animal facilities
- A metabolic kitchen
- Clinical outpatient capacity

These facilities are not currently available at the other ARS locations outside the D.C.-area where USDA intends to move BHNRC research projects. In addition, the cost to replicate existing facilities may require more funds than what would be needed to modernize the BARC.

² <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/07/24/secretary-rollins-announces-usda-reorganization-restoring-departments-core-mission-supporting>

³ Congressional Research Service. 2020. Relocation of the USDA Research Agencies: NIFA and ERS. https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/IF/PDF/IF11527/IF11527.1.pdf

Following the relocation of NIFA and ERS from Washington, D.C. to Kansas City, Missouri in 2019, the agencies experienced:

- Loss of more than half of staff
- Vacancies in key positions
- Loss of talent, institutional knowledge and unique expertise
- Significantly reduced capacity and productivity
- Delays in grant processing
- Increased costs to U.S. taxpayers

NIFA and ERS' workforce size and productivity took years, until September 2021, to recover⁴. Once the workforce size had recovered, it was made up of largely new hires that lacked experience and institutional knowledge. ASN believes the same fate may fall on the BARC and BHRNC during the planned relocation and urges Congress to protect USDA's important nutrition data and monitoring programs to ensure that this foundational pillar for nutrition research remains.

ASN suggests that the USDA make a concerted effort to maintain personnel and expertise, so the reorganization does not undermine critical areas of nutrition research. USDA should not let the important nutrition tools provided by BARC and the BHRNC lose continuity and support as USDA relocates its headquarters and staff. The United States must maintain and enhance the potential for innovations and future scientific breakthroughs in agriculture, including within the scientific fields that directly benefit agriculture, such as nutrition, and not suffer from a loss in productivity due to the planned relocation.

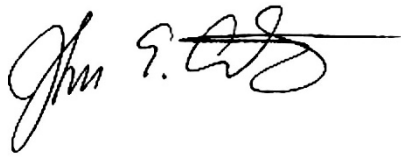
USDA should be required to follow the recommendations from a 2022 GAO report⁴ on agency relocations with key steps to maintain and rebuild workforce following relocations, including:

- Documenting performance measures
- Enhancing employee engagement
- Developing a strategic workforce plan
- Creating agency succession plans
- Planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating workforce training and development programs.

Thank you for considering the comments and information provided by ASN related to USDA's plans to decommission the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) and relocate its programs and personnel to facilities across the country. Please contact Sarah Ohlhorst, MS, RD, ASN Chief Science Policy Officer (240-428-3647; sohlhorst@nutrition.org) if ASN may provide additional information.

Sincerely,

⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office. 2022. Agency Relocations: Following Leading Practices Will Better Position USDA to Mitigate the Ongoing Impacts on Its Workforce (GAO-23-104709). U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) (.gov) <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-104709>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John E. Courtney", followed by a horizontal line.

John E. Courtney, PhD
ASN Chief Executive Officer