

February 22, 2019

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write to express our support for H.R. 1221, the Agriculture Research Integrity Act of 2019. The Agriculture Research Integrity Act would preserve the independence of research and statistical agencies within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), safeguarding the integrity of research dedicated to food security and nutrition. As the Secretary considers plans to relocate research agencies outside of the National Capital Region and reorganize the Economic Research Service (ERS) under the Office of the Chief Economist, the Act is a vital step toward reaffirming Congress' intent for USDA to conduct critical research in an independent and nonpartisan manner.

USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) and National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) both contribute to substantive research efforts that inform decision-making related to a host of USDA priorities – from crop production and sustainable agriculture to food quality and obesity prevention. Both agencies conduct research on nutrition standards and access to food, including through nutrition assistance programs. These agencies – particularly ERS – analyze food consumption trends, informing USDA's policy decisions with respect to nutrition labeling and dietary patterns. **The Act is a necessary step to preserving the independence of nutrition research as USDA considers revisions to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans** and, for the first time, articulates dietary guidelines for pregnant women and children under the age of two.

These agencies also conduct research into nutrition assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). These reports provide independent analysis of program efficiency, informing Congressional and USDA efforts to streamline processes and contain costs in federal programs. For example, ERS currently has eight pending studies related to WIC, which would help guide program staff with continued efforts to efficiently manage federal resources to deliver targeted nutrition assistance to pregnant women, infants, and young children.

The Act also preserves the location of ERS and NIFA within the National Capital Region. The placement of these agencies within the National Capital Region serves a deliberate purpose, providing critical access to key stakeholders, from federal partners to non-profits and important think tanks. The Secretary's efforts to relocate these agencies in another part of the country will lead to disruptive staff turnover, depriving the agencies of longstanding expertise in the midst of ongoing research. The Act rightly specifies that these agencies should remain within the National Capital Region.

The Agriculture Research Integrity Act is an important step toward preserving the independence of USDA's nutrition research and analysis. We urge you to support and advance this legislation in a timely manner, to swiftly ensure that there is no disruption to the agencies' pending work or credibility.

Sincerely,

1,000 Days

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

American Heart Association

American Public Health Association

Asian Services in Action, Inc.

Center for Science in the Public Interest

Child Care Aware® of America

First Focus Campaign for Children

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

MomsRising

National Partnership for Women & Families

National WIC Association

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior

The Criminalization of Poverty Project at the Institute for Policy Studies