

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 9, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Stephen Vaden
Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins and Deputy Secretary Vaden:

We write to express serious concerns with the significant erosion of U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) staff across the nation. In particular, we call attention to the implications for the Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS), and the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), (collectively the Services). Whether it's the combat of emerging threats and diseases, food-borne illnesses, or vulnerabilities affecting food supply chain resiliency, the Services play vital, and often underappreciated roles. The reemergence of the New World screwworm in the U.S. highlights the urgent need to fully staff the USDA's Services, which are on the frontlines of disease outbreak detection and rapid response to dangerous threats to agricultural security. Further, in addition to providing critical public safety and food security functions, the Services are powerful drivers of economic opportunity for local economies in and affecting rural America.

For example, APHIS's veterinarians and scientists — most of which are located in the field — rapidly respond to crises such as the recent hantavirus outbreak or resurgence of new world screwworm. Similarly, FSIS staff across the country stand at the center, literally, of meat processing plants, to guard against problems that undermine the public's trust in our nation's meat supply, not to mention sicken millions of Americans. AMS's graders, promotional staff, and market news reporters, along with its expert transportation and marketing technical and analytic staff and fair trade practices inspectors, support local and regional producers, processors, and food businesses across the country. Together, these Services work to enable America's food and agriculture system to contribute billions of dollars to local economies, and support Main Streets across rural America.

Unfortunately, we continue to hear about the harmful impacts of the significant staffing reductions at APHIS, FSIS, and AMS due to retirements and other resignations which affected both national and local staff. APHIS, for example, began 2025 with employees stationed in 1374 counties. By year's end, headcount had fallen to zero in 241 of those counties,¹ depriving farmers, ranchers, and producers of their localized federal resources and access to USDA's expertise.² In Multnomah County, Oregon, 20% of local APHIS staff were lost in 2025, and the county lost 2 of its 5 food safety staff; Crook County now has no food safety staff at all.³ Further, by the end of

¹ Bernie Kluger. *Consumer Food Safety Complaints Rose 40% in 2025. Are Federal Staffing Cuts to Blame?* Substack.com. Prospect Partners Insights. May 15, 2026.

<https://bkprospectpartners.substack.com/p/consumer-food-safety-complaints-rose?back=%2Fpublish%2Fposts%2Fdrafts>.

² Bernie Kluger. *Consumer Food Safety Complaints Rose 40% in 2025. Are Federal Staffing Cuts to Blame?* Substack.com. Prospect Partners Insights. May 15, 2026.

<https://bkprospectpartners.substack.com/p/consumer-food-safety-complaints-rose?back=%2Fpublish%2Fposts%2Fdrafts>.

2025, 59 US counties no longer had a FSIS veterinarian stationed locally.⁴ AMS too has seen significant reductions across key grading, market news, and other functions. This phenomenon is not unique to Oregon and the nationwide loss of these resources and functions threaten America's ability to respond to emerging challenges.

We are also very concerned by the ongoing discussion and expressed intention to reorganize and disperse career leadership and staff away from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) national headquarters in Washington, D.C. We appreciate this Administration's expressed desire for USDA to better serve producers, but national capital command and control functions, senior career expertise, and accountability to Congress must be preserved in our nation's capital to enable USDA to serve our shared constituents.

To succeed, USDA needs *both* resources in the field *and* centralized senior command and control expertise in Washington. The Services need to have career leadership and headquarters staff accessible and accountable to the nation's political leadership and other key departments and agencies, including both Congress and The White House.

The USDA's animal and health and food safety agencies need to maintain senior career expertise that already exists in Washington—which, based on the past experience of moving research agencies to Kansas City, highlights the very serious risk of loss, upwards of 75 percent of staff.⁵ In crises, these agencies have vital roles to play in the interagency coordination of national security and public health functions. Indeed, when hantavirus, New World screwworm, or e-coli hits our shores or our shelves, nothing replaces getting in the room physically with the leadership of other federal agencies— including the Food and Drug Administration, the Homeland Security Department, and the Defense Department—to effectively protect our nation's food supply and public health.

Similarly, AMS requires strong, centralized leadership in order to deliver highly efficient and effective fee-driven services. Farmers, the food sector, and working family consumers also benefit greatly from having AMS career staff present in discussions about national policy decisions. For example, whether its cattle producers' engaging on Market News or dealer trust matters, specialty crop producers engaging with grantmakers and inspection staff, grain interests seeking to ensure thorough inspections for export, or transportation experts advocating on behalf of agricultural shippers with federal transportation entities, having AMS's career leadership able to respond to farmers—and to Congress—can make the difference between effective service and critically lost time and effort.

Farmers and rural businesses want their public servants close to and accountable to them, but they also need effective public servants in our nation's capital. To the extent that there are policy differences from one administration to the next, the responsibility for that should fall to the political leadership—career staff capacity is there to serve. We'd welcome exploring ways for USDA's career leadership and staff to garner more feedback from, and be more accountable to, voices in the field. Ideas could include roundtables, public consultations, local

³ Axios Portland. *Multnomah County Budget Proposal Could Cut More than 100 Staff*. Axios. April 25, 2025. <https://www.axios.com/local/portland/2025/04/25/multnomah-county-budget-proposal-could-cut-more-than-100-staff>.

⁴ Bernie Kluger. *Consumer Food Safety Complaints Rose 40% in 2025. Are Federal Staffing Cuts to Blame?* Substack.com. Prospect Partners Insights. May 15, 2026. <https://bkprospectpartners.substack.com/p/consumer-food-safety-complaints-rose?back=%2Fpublish%2Fposts%2Fdrafts>.

⁵ Jory Heckman. *Three-Quarters of USDA Researchers Tapped to Relocate Tell Union They're Not Going*. Federal News Network. May 7, 2026. <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2026/05/three-quarters-of-usda-researchers-tapped-to-relocate-tell-union-theyre-not-going/>.

trainings, leadership development, and other engagement opportunities with farmers and rural communities across America.

Accordingly, we request answers to the following questions by June 15, 2026:

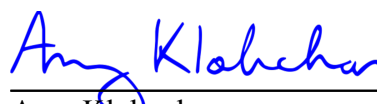
1. Please provide the number of FTE career staff members employed by USDA as APHIS, FSIS, and AMS as of end of year 2024 and end of year 2025.
2. Please provide a list of counties served by local offices of APHIS, FSIS, and AMS that have faced a 10% or greater loss of staff. Please provide the economic output of agricultural producers from those counties.
3. Please provide the number of and location of counties within 500 miles of the last reported new world screwworm citing. Please describe the staffing changes at APHIS in those affected counties between end of year 2024 and end of year 2025. Please also describe the USDA's plan to address the threat of the new world screwworm.
4. Please provide a list of counties where one or more meat processing facilities is located, that was affected by a reduction in FSIS local staff of 10% or greater.
5. Please provide the number of veterinarians employed by APHIS as of end of year 2024, the number of veterinarians employed by APHIS as of end of 2025, and the number of openings for veterinarians current or expected to be scheduled before the end of 2026. Please describe the Administration's plan with respect to the National Veterinary Accreditation Program (NVAP), to ensure that the nation has a sufficient workforce of veterinarians needed to address animals and plant health risks?
6. Please outline a strategy for enhancing how APHIS, FSIS, and AMS leadership can enhance their connections with farmers and rural communities, in light of the staff losses seen in 2025 and the reemergence of New World screwworm in the United States.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and we look forward to your response.

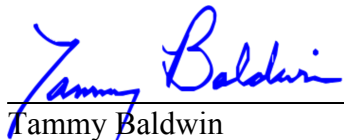
Sincerely,




Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



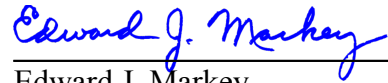
Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



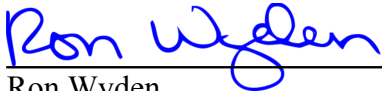
Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Ruben Gallego
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator