

## Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee

30 July 2024

### **Review of the USDA Reorganization Proposal**

Intro: U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee hearing on the proposed [USDA Reorganization and Consolidation Plan](#) announced in late July 2025.

#### **Highlights:**

- Senators expressed surprise over the July 24 Secretary Memorandum outlining USDA relocations and consolidations, seeking clarity on potential job losses, regional impacts and service delivery disruptions.
- Deputy Undersecretary Steven Vaden emphasized budget constraints and workforce affordability, especially for younger employees, while confirming that Tribal Affairs responsibilities would be centralized under the Office of Tribal Relations without detailing specific impacts.
- Facility closures and relocations were a major focus, with 90 of 94 agricultural research centers slated for closure, with the new hubs focusing on picking up regional offices existing duties.

#### **Consulting officials/Congressional Witnesses:**

- Steven Vaden – USDA Deputy Secretary of Agriculture: [Written testimony](#)

Senators by and large reported a general feeling of being caught off guard by the [July 24 Secretary Memorandum: SM 1078-015](#), and had specific questions about what relocations and consolidations would impact their respective states. While some applauded the sizing of departmental personnel numbers, many asked for greater clarity on the department's perception of what job losses might occur and how that might impact service delivery to producers across the country.

Deputy Undersecretary Vaden noted the priority for the department was to meet its budgetary guardrails, and to also provide affordable living opportunities to young and future USDA employees who are priced out of the D.C. National Capital Region (NCR).

Responding to a question about Tribal Affairs, the deputy undersecretary reiterated the memorandum's direction that all Tribal-relations responsibilities would be consolidated under the Office of Tribal Relations for statutorily-required responsibilities. He did not elaborate on what that might mean or how regional staff across USDA Mission Areas, agencies, and offices who are currently carrying out Tribal-facing duties would be reallocated or structured.

Concerning the closure of the USDA Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) building in Alexandria, Virginia, the Deputy Secretary echoed his prior statement of finding more affordable locations for new and future staff. He also reiterated that core headquarters staff would remain in D.C. at USDA HQ, but indicated that moving other staff to the new hubs would provide greater engagement and technical assistance to programs that are managed by the States. Tribes were not mentioned in this discussion, although Tribes do administer several federal nutrition programs in partnership with FNS.

On questions of timeline, Deputy Undersecretary Vaden said that the Secretary Memorandum of July 24 was the first step in the process, and that no firm decisions had been made. He noted that the release of

that July 24 memorandum begins a 30-day consultation process during which the Department will confer with many stakeholders, including Congress and Tribal Nations.

- He confirmed that the memorandum was the first step of the plan, outside of an internal notification given to the Office of Management and Budget, in order to avoid leaks that might harm internal communications to USDA employees.
- In terms of consulting with existing employees, he explained that the department would be discussing the plan with federal employees' unions.
- In response to another question on job losses, he cited the memorandum's lack of any future job cuts or losses, and that any separations of existing staff would be to their choice to leave rather than relocate, if assigned to the new hubs.

He noted that the memorandum did identify proposed relocation centers away from many USDA agencies' existing regional offices.

- The Deputy Undersecretary noted he would take any feedback from Senators on their ideas now that the proposal was public but declined to give specific timelines on the moves past what is in the secretarial memorandum.
- Asked if USDA had any plan or assessments for how job relations or job separations would impact disparate populations of existing staff, the Deputy Undersecretary noted that the department would treat all impacted employees equally.
- When asked about internal USDA estimates on job losses for those who cannot or will not relocate to the new hubs, the Deputy Undersecretary noted he did not have estimates on that at this time. He did note that given the lessons learned from the previous relocation of USDA's Economic Research Service and National Institute of Food and Agriculture to Kansas City, Missouri, they would implement best practices in this reorganization. He did not elaborate on these best practices in this hearing.
- On forestry-related issues, he reiterated the secretary's memorandum noting that the reorganization of the U.S. Forest Service would be done with respect to duties USFS is carrying out in the current wildfire season. He cited the two new hubs of Ft. Collins, Colorado and Salt Lake City, Utah as locales that will have a specialization in forestry staffing.
- Trade and related staff were likely to stay in the D.C. area, with the deputy undersecretary noting the unique international nature of their job responsibilities.

Concerning closures of facilities, the deputy undersecretary noted that 90 of 94 existing agricultural research facilities would be closed, and only four would be closed and transferred.

- The Deputy Undersecretary did get into some specifics in the questions from Senators, noting that USDA Rural Development county offices would remain open.
- For the USDA Albuquerque, New Mexico office, he indicated that only human resource-related staffing would remain and all other staff would be offered relocation to an appropriate hub.