

Thank you Mr. Chairman for giving me the opportunity to appear before your committee this morning and to share some of my thoughts on the proposal by the USDA to relocate NIFA and ERS out of the nation's capital region and to realign the reporting line for ERS to the office of the chief economist. While this might appear to be a simple administrative change, it is a major fundamental change that will have far-reaching implications for our agricultural research programs in the future.

Frankly, when I heard about the department's proposal to relocate NIFA and ERS outside of the nation's capital region, I was stunned. I began talking to colleagues. Many, in fact most, felt as I did. We put together a letter outlining our concern. It has now been signed by over 75 agricultural leaders from the agricultural research community. As of this date, I'm not aware of any supporter for the USDA proposal that is not from a group, institution or organization trying to host the agencies.

I would like to share some of my concerns. For the past half-century, many agricultural research leaders have been working to more fully integrate agricultural science into the greater science community. Such integration is key to sustaining the knowledge-based productivity gains we have made. Much progress has been made already, but we still have a long way to go to be considered equal players in the research community in the Washington, DC area. Both as a researcher and especially as an agricultural administrator, I've made many visits with NIFA and ERS in Washington. Usually, my visits were coupled with visits to other agricultural agencies, other federal agencies such as EPA, NIH, NSF, or with the state's congressional delegation.

Agricultural research programs benefit greatly from funds contributed by other departments, agencies, and organizations. Funds for co-funded projects reached almost 2½ billion dollars above that provided by NIFA. Research policy is made in Washington, therefore for maximum effectiveness these agencies should be in close proximity.

Relocating NIFA and ERS outside of the national capital region would be a handicap for agricultural scientists and administrators and a step back for the progress in the integration of agricultural science into the greater science community in Washington. Aligning ERS with other research components of USDA is far more logical than simply making them answer to a staff person in the USDA administration

Many would agree, at least I strongly agree, we have a remarkably successful agricultural support system that includes teaching, research, and extension functions in agriculture. Starting with the passage of the Morrill Act, now known as the Land-grant Act that was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862. In my opinion, this is among the greatest piece of legislation ever conceived by men and women. Across the years, the U.S. Congress has made numerous changes – always with much debate and consideration of multiple options and approaches.

Many who have not “grown up” in our “System” don’t realize that our greatest strength is in the unity of our relationships. We clearly see that both state and federal sides are true partners. In fact, during the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the land-grant legislation, USDA and the LGU’s issued a statement about principles of partnership for the future strength of the system. The beneficiary of this relationship is the American people.

The research component was ushered in with the Hatch Act of 1887 and extension with the Smith-Lever Act of 1914. Even after passage of the Hatch Act of 1887, there were numerous changes in research programs brought about by the Adams Act of 1906, the Purnell Act of 1925, the Bankhead Jones Act of 1935, Research and Marketing Act of 1946, and the New Hatch Act of 1955. However, work was not complete on the Morrill Act of 1862. The people recognized that the African-American community was not included in the 1862 legislation. The U.S. Congress recognized and proposed legislation creating the second Morrill Act that we now know as the 1890 legislation. But this did not fix the research component for the 1890 institutions. There was some progress made in the 1960s to provide some support for research by the 1890 institutions; however, it was left to the U.S. Congress led by Sen. Jim Allen of Alabama to formalize a research mission for the 1890 institutions. It is, indeed, fortunate because these institutions today contribute substantially to the agricultural research mission for the country.

The 1994 Department of Agriculture reorganization Act provided for land-grant status for Native American tribally-controlled colleges and universities.

Finally, the 2008 Farm Bill reorganized and changed the name of the Cooperative States Research Education and Extension Service (CSREES) to the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). Also, this bill provided for a USDA, Chief Scientist. I would emphasize all

of these changes were made after extensive discussion by Congress with great input by stakeholders.

I share this background information to illustrate how such progress has been made in our agricultural research and education system across the years. Most fundamental changes have always been brought about by the legislative process that provides an opportunity for all sides to share input, thoughts, and ideas. Changes are usually based on two criteria, (1) to fix a problem, or (2) to make the system better. The department has proposed some items to be fixed, (1) the high cost of rent, (2) recruitment of staff, (3) working conditions for personnel and (4) be closer to farmers. Each of these could be addressed more easily than simply by moving and relocating the agencies to someplace outside the national capital region. For example, relocating NIFA and ERS outside of the area to less expensive property would be a possible solution. The idea of being “closer to farmers” makes absolutely no sense. NIFA’s primary clientele are the scientists and administrators of the national agricultural research programs. They work primarily with other scientists and administrators, not farmers. Soon after passage of the Hatch Act of 1887, it was realized there needed some means of coordinating the effort of the State Experiment Stations. Hence was born the Office of Experiment Stations. In a sense this was the beginning of NIFA. The need to foster collaboration among the State Experiment Station has not changed.

The department does not offer any rationale for making the research system better. I suspect this is because I do not see how this relocation and realignment will improve our System. In view of this, I cannot see any value in expending any research resources for this until such time as Congress receives, reviews and approves a cost-benefit analysis.

Our agricultural research system is far too important to be fundamentally changed without careful study and thoroughly investigating all options. Such change should clearly fix an identifiable problem or, clearly, make the system better. Thank you.