

**Testimony of Dr. Jack Payne**  
**Senior Vice President for Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Florida, and Administrative Head, UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences**

**Before the House Committee on Agriculture's Subcommittee on Biotechnology, Horticulture and Research Hearing: Examining the Impacts Relocating USDA Research Agencies on Agriculture Research**

**June 5, 2019**

Good morning, Chair Plaskett, Ranking Member Dunn, and members of the committee. Thank you for holding this important hearing. I'm Jack Payne, the University of Florida's senior vice president for agriculture and natural resources and administrative head of UF's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, or UF/IFAS. However, I come before you on behalf of myself and am not representing the university.

The nation's winter fruit and vegetable supply depends on the support of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture and the Economic Research Service for UF/IFAS innovation and discovery. Florida farmers, fishers, foresters, and ranchers succeed in part because of what NIFA and ERS do. And they succeed because of where NIFA and ERS do it.... Right here, not 250, 600, or even 1,000 miles from here.

Relocation moves NIFA away from its primary partners – federal science agencies, leading scientists, policymakers, and experts. The move risks impeding NIFA's core mission to be a vital contributor to science policy decision-making and an integral part of the federal effort to address the most pressing local and global agricultural problems of our day.

We've solved the easy problems in agriculture. In today's world, we're working on complex challenges that require multiple disciplines working together on solutions.

You get the best science when you can bring different disciplines together to examine a problem from many angles. The federal government can incentivize this interdisciplinary work by combining funding from multiple agencies.

Bringing diverse scientific expertise together is extremely difficult, even among departments that share a building in Gainesville. It would be so much harder if those departments were in different states.

The nation's *capital* is the best place to address the nation's *agricultural research needs*. There's no place better for NIFA to coordinate with other funding agencies, call attention to the national need for more agricultural research, and to meet with representatives of what its website calls its "chief partner" – the nation's land-grant universities.

Farmers are among the ultimate beneficiaries of NIFA-funded science. USDA has an efficient network of land-grant university Extension agents and research stations to provide information to those farmers in their communities and across the country. It's a proven model that can instantaneously disperse vital scientific discoveries and new methods to farmers who can use it. To say ERS and NIFA need to be geographically closer to farmers is to miss how effective this network is in delivering innovation to farmers nationwide.

Furthermore, NIFA and ERS have other important customers – USDA, land-grants, Congress, and other federal science agencies. Relocation would put the agencies farther from these more direct customers.

I have dedicated most of my professional life to land-grant universities. I'm a product of one. That set me on a career course of public service, producing and disseminating science that improves people's lives. I have worked at five land-grant universities and served as the policy chair for the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities Board on Agricultural Assembly. In that role, I was able to contribute to the creation of NIFA in the 2008 Farm Bill.

Today I have the privilege of leading UF/IFAS. We have a budget of more than \$400 million to operate a College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, an Extension service with offices in all 67 Florida counties, and a network of 17 research stations. All of this supports the \$160 billion-a-year enterprise that is Florida agriculture.

With NIFA's support, we discover and disseminate knowledge for Florida's farmers, foresters, fishers, and ranchers. Land-grant universities are the bridge between farmers and NIFA, which funds agricultural research and sets the national research agenda.

It's puzzling that land-grant leaders were not consulted a year ago when USDA was conceiving a plan to relocate NIFA and ERS.

Since we've only been given a chance to react, not participate, all that land-grant leaders have been able to use our voice for is to oppose the move. We've done so in letters to the House Agriculture Committee, in visits with congressional staff, in op-eds, and in meetings with our commodity leaders.

The Washington Capital Region has a highly educated workforce and a vibrant employment sector that is attractive to two-career families. That gives NIFA and ERS a large talent pool to draw upon to fill mission-critical vacancies.

The proposal to relocate NIFA and ERS is already doing harm before it's even implemented. We're witnessing a brain drain as federal employees faced with the prospect of suddenly moving their families to Kansas City, North Carolina, or Indiana are choosing to leave NIFA or ERS instead. My understanding is that more than 100 positions are vacant, and we can expect vacancies will accelerate after the location of

the move is announced. What has been presented as a way to *attract* talent is doing just the opposite.

The Washington Capital Region is a hub for so many agencies, associations, non-profits, higher education institutions, and private firms. It is a dynamic interaction with all of these scientific and policy-making partners that feeds our cycle of innovation and discovery.

Innovation keeps us globally competitive in agriculture. Anything that slows the pace of discovery and dissemination will hurt farmers served by land-grants and give additional advantage to our competitors.

A good example is citrus greening. One of our most promising lines of inquiry into stopping citrus greening is funded jointly by NIFA and the National Science Foundation. The two agencies' cooperation is accelerating our scientists' work on using CRISPR to edit the citrus genome to create more disease-tolerant fruit.

If the loss of so much expertise at NIFA delays consideration and distribution of research grants, that could spell further doom for Florida orange juice. NIFA funding is essential to the beat-the-clock effort to curb a disease that threatens to bring down my state's iconic citrus industry.

Such grants will be much more difficult to arrange with NIFA located far away from potential co-funders. Less coordination could also result in duplication of efforts. All this will play out at more than 100 land-grant universities across the nation.

I appreciate the House Appropriations Committee including bill language for FY 2020 blocking the relocation proposal.

I ask for your continuing help so that I can get back to working with USDA instead of delivering testimony like today's.

In conclusion, I thank the committee for examining the critical role of NIFA in support of agriculture innovation and resiliency, and for taking the time to hear directly from NIFA's primary partners, the scientific and educational community, about the impact of the relocation of NIFA outside the greater Washington area. I appreciate your leadership on this important issue, and I am pleased to respond to any questions from the committee.