



May 3, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We deeply appreciate your strong support for the land-grant universities in this country with their robust programs in education, research, and extension. Moreover, we appreciate your willingness to listen to a range of views important to the agricultural community. In that spirit, I write today about the possible relocation of National Institute of Food and Agriculture outside of the Washington, DC region.

As you know, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities has a long history with NIFA. The deans of the land-grant colleges of agriculture and a broader community worked thoughtfully with Congress during the crafting of the 2008 Farm Bill to create NIFA based at USDA in Washington, DC. A primary reason we worked to help create NIFA was to strengthen science at USDA and increase interaction with other science agencies, including NIH, NSF, DOE, DOD, and OSTP, to more effectively and comprehensively solve problems and to strengthen the science-based decisions at regulatory agencies. This is a benefit to USDA, but also is important for the other science agencies.

As you know, science and technology more than ever are the drivers of increased food production and all related matters. Traditional food production issues cannot be siloed from the science of nutrition and health, the environment, energy production and disease prevention just to mention a few. Science does not fit into neat boxes. No doubt technology greatly facilitates interaction, but face-to-face relationships and proximity of key people across the government are critical for dealing with the cross-cutting research and science policy issues we face.

We have been concerned about the very real potential for the significant loss of dedicated staff and institutional memory if a relocation were to move forward. There are challenges for individual employees in a relocation and we hope that those problems would be minimized. However, the big and long-term question for APLU has always been whether or how that relocation can be done while maintaining NIFA's effectiveness and work for science across the federal science agencies.



Certainly, if NIFA were to be moved, choosing a location close to a research university with programs in agriculture and other pertinent areas is key for science given the proximity to other scientists. But it is also important that a viable and strong science capacity presence remain here in Washington, not just a small number of leaders. It is unclear that even these steps would allow NIFA to reach its potential, but we ask that effective science be a central factor in whatever decisions are reached.

Thank you for considering these views.



Sincerely,
Peter McPherson
President, Association of Public and Land-grant Universities

cc: Dr. Scott Hutchins, USDA Deputy Under Secretary, Research, Education, and Economics
Dr. J. Scott Angle, Director, National Institute of Food and Agriculture