

Good Morning USDA Family,

When we became aware that NIFA's lease was expiring, that caused us to look at areas outside of the National Capitol Region where from a value perspective we could sign a new lease. We began to look nationally for both ERS and NIFA leases that would help increase operations and efficiencies while also saving money.

We have worked hard over the past 10 months to undergo a thoughtful and diligent process regarding the relocation of ERS and NIFA. I know that this time, especially for the employees directly affected, has been personally and professionally challenging. I am grateful for your patience and your continued hard work.

Today, I am announcing that the Kansas City Region will be the new home for both ERS and NIFA. In addition, while we announced in August the realignment of ERS under the Office of the Chief Economist, after hearing feedback, USDA will not move forward with the realignment plans. The agency of ERS will remain under the REE mission area. It was important for me that employees were the first to hear of this news and that you heard from me personally.

Below this letter you will find a press release that will be issued publicly today at 10:00am ET. In addition, myself and our leadership team will be addressing ERS and NIFA employees today to discuss the decision, the process we underwent, and next steps.

I want you all to know that this decision was not entered into lightly. And having recently undergone a major relocation of my own, I understand that this decision creates personal disruption for some of our colleagues and their families. But I want to make sure that this transition and the coming months are as smooth and as minimally disruptive as possible.

None of this reflects on the jobs being done by our ERS or NIFA employees, and in fact, I frequently tell my Cabinet colleagues that USDA has the best workforce in the federal government. These changes are more steps down the path to better service to our customers and will help us fulfill our informal motto to "do right and feed everyone."

As you all know, we have evaluated 136 expressions of interest from parties in 35 states, based upon objective criteria and mission operational needs, and conducted site visits to three areas – Kansas City, North Carolina, and Indiana. The Kansas City Region takes into account the expectations that employees wanted in a new location.

The Kansas City Region has proven itself to be a hub for all things agriculture and is a booming city in America's heartland. There is already a significant presence of USDA and federal government employees in the region. Boasting not only a low cost of living, with high-quality, affordable housing, it has an excellent public school system and a community filled with family-oriented activities. The city itself is extremely livable, with access to arts, culture, and a thriving food scene. Our belief is that this relocation will give USDA the opportunity to attract a staff with training and interest in agriculture.

Finally, taxpayers stand to receive significant savings as we will generate nearly \$300 million nominally over a 15-year lease term on employment costs and rent. This will allow us to redirect more funding for our research of critical needs like rural prosperity and agricultural competitiveness, and for programs and employees to be retained in the long run, even in the face of tightening budgets.

On top of those savings, state and local governments have offered generous relocation incentives packages totaling more than \$26 million, which will help offset relocation expenses. All of this makes the Kansas City Region an excellent home for ERS and NIFA and our employees. The move will place important USDA resources closer to many stakeholders, most of whom live and work far from the Washington, D.C. area. You've heard me say it time and again, that our goal is to make USDA the most effective, efficient and customer-focused department in the entire federal government. I believe that this decision will only improve the great work that we've done in both agencies.

I want you to know it's an honor to serve alongside each of you and to be a part of this great USDA family.

Sincerely,
Secretary Sonny