



OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

September 8, 2026

THE HONORABLE EUGENE S. VINDMAN
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Vindman,

Thank you and your colleagues for the July 31, 2026, correspondence concerning the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) announcement regarding the decommissioning of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC).

As the Department has clearly communicated,¹ the BARC facility is inadequate to support USDA's long-term research mission. Decades of insufficient funding by Congress and deferred maintenance have severely degraded the condition of the campus. The Beltsville Agricultural Research Center currently carries more than \$300 million in deferred maintenance liabilities and would require a one-time investment exceeding \$500 million, in addition to more than \$40 million annually, to fully modernize and sustain the campus. Despite longstanding concerns regarding the condition of BARC, Congress appropriated only approximately \$129.5 million for infrastructure improvements during the last ten years, including approximately \$36 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 appropriations. That amount represents a small fraction of the estimated costs to fully modernize and sustain BARC's campus. At current funding levels, full modernization would take decades to complete while employees continue working in deteriorating facilities with known infrastructure and safety deficiencies.²

Research at BARC will be relocated to facilities in closer proximity to the agricultural regions, commodities, producers, and stakeholders it serves. Rather than continuing to concentrate taxpayer-funded research activities in severely outdated facilities with significant infrastructure and safety deficiencies, the Department is focused on ensuring research is conducted in locations capable of delivering results for American farmers, ranchers, foresters, and consumers for decades to come.

¹ USDA Reorganization website, available at: <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/reorganization>.

² U.S. Office of Special Council Letter to Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack (Jun. 29, 2023), available at: https://www.osc.gov/~assets/cases/di-23-000706-708-719-referral_redacted.pdf; Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack's Letter to Special Counsel Hampton Y. Dellinger (Mar. 29, 2024), available at: <https://www.osc.gov/~assets/cases/redacted-agency-report-di-23-000706-708-719.pdf>; Office of U.S. Special Council Letter to the President of the United States (Jun. 25, 2025), available at: https://www.osc.gov/~assets/cases/letter-to-the-president-di-23-000706-708-719_redacted-2.pdf.

While the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) does not maintain a research location in Virginia, ARS has longstanding research partnerships with Virginia colleges and universities that will continue. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2025, ARS maintained 10 active extramural agreements with Virginia Tech, spanning food composition, sustainable crop and pest management, precision agriculture, advanced breeding, microbiome science, and aquaculture economics. The Agricultural Research Service also maintained agreements with the College of William and Mary to study the effects of pulse consumption on human health, diet cost, and environmental sustainability, and with George Mason University to develop remote sensing metrics of ecosystem health for grazing management. The agency also conducts eastern oyster research in partnership with the Virginia Institute of Marine Science and other university partners, with a focus on genetic improvement through genome-enabled selective breeding. These collaborations support innovative technologies, databases, and management strategies that strengthen food quality, agricultural resilience, and science-based decision-making for producers and stakeholders.

The decommissioning of BARC will not end these partnerships. Agreements funded through BARC projects will be realigned to the projects' new ARS locations, and agreements associated with fully funded BARC projects will not be impacted.

Importantly, ARS research supporting the Delmarva region will continue, including the Lower Chesapeake Bay Long-Term Agroecosystem Research (LTAR) effort. The Agricultural Research Service will preserve decades of existing data and samples and continue this research. As additional data or samples are needed, ARS will work with collaborators to ensure their collection and continued support for this important research.

We look forward to continued collaboration as we assess options for ensuring the long-term strength of USDA's research enterprise. If you have additional questions, please have a member of your staff contact the USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at (202) 720-7095 or ocr@usda.gov.

Sincerely,



Stephen Alexander Vaden
Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture