



Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 17th, 2019

CONTACT: Corinna Turbes
corinna.turbes@copafs.org

Stakeholder Concerns Remain Unaddressed as USDA moves forward with relocation plans.

Last week, the USDA announced Kansas City as the new site for the Economic Research Service (ERS) in its plan to relocate the agency, one of the United States' thirteen principal statistical agencies, outside of the D.C. area. The USDA also announced that the department will abandon its plan to realign ERS from the Research, Education and Economics (REE) Mission Area to the Chief Economist's office, citing concerns from stakeholders.

The USDA announced plans to realign ERS to the Office of the Chief Economist, in addition to relocating ERS outside of the Washington, DC area last August. The proposal faces strong opposition from advocates and experts, including 56 former USDA and federal statistical agency officials who [wrote to Congress](#) last October outlining concerns over the move. Secretary Perdue appears to have listened to one of those concerns, while ignoring others.

Removing ERS from its position in the REE mission area to the Office of the Chief Economist, a policy office, would jeopardize the independence and credibility a statistical agency needs to function objectively. "We are glad the Secretary heard stakeholders' concerns about risks to a statistical agency and decided to keep ERS out of Chief Economist's Office," says Cynthia Clark, Executive Director of COPAFS. "But our concerns about retaining staff expertise, maintaining visibility with policymakers, and collaborating with other statistical and program agencies have not been meaningfully addressed."

The loss of specialized staff already is already materializing, according to [reporting by Politico](#) and there appears to be no plan to manage how ERS will continue to respond efficiently and effectively to requests from Congress and other agencies once it is removed from the D.C. area. "National policy is made in Washington, D.C.," said American Statistical Association Executive Director and COPAFS board member, Ron Wasserstein. "It is common sense that the ERS and NIFA, so vital to informing food and agriculture policy, should be located where national policy is made."

In addition to policy and research concerns, ERS is an important part of our federal statistical system. Taking ERS out of the D.C. area puts the valuable interagency collaborations at risk. "Statistical agencies have the incredible task of modernizing data and analysis for the 21st century. These agencies are working together diligently so that lawmakers can use evidence to make the best possible policies," Clark continues. "Relocating ERS out of the DC area takes away this leading agency's seat at the table. That will hurt our national data infrastructure and set back evidence-based policymaking."

###

COPAFS was founded in 1980 to act as an advocate for the development and dissemination of high-quality Federal statistics, to increase the level and scope of knowledge about developments affecting



COPAFS

Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics

Federal statistics, and to encourage dialogue between its member associations and organizations and the Federal statistical agencies. For further information, visit the COPAFS website at <http://www.copafs.org/>.