

ALERT

# USDA Announces Relocation and Reorganization Measures for Food Safety and Research Functions

---

April 28, 2026

On April 23, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced a relocation and reorganization of its Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and Research, Education, and Economics Mission Area. These announcements follow USDA's recent moves to restructure the Forest Service and relocate its headquarters to Salt Lake City, UT. Together, these actions reflect part of USDA's broader initiative to relocate a substantial portion of its workforce in the metropolitan Washington, DC area to locations across the country. In July 2025, USDA reported having approximately 4,600 employees in the National Capital Region, with the rest of its employees located in numerous other areas throughout the United States and a few international locations.[1] USDA's workforce has decreased from approximately 91,000 employees in FY2025 to around 71,000 as of February 2026, according to an April 14, 2026 Congressional Research Service report.[2]

These relocation and reorganization measures are actions initiated by Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins' July 24, 2025 reorganization memo.[3]

## ***Food Safety and Inspection Service***

Through these actions, USDA will relocate about 200 positions – two-thirds of its National Capital Region FSIS positions – to Urbandale, IA; Athens, GA; and Fort Collins, CO. About 100 FSIS positions will stay in Washington, DC, and these positions will focus on interagency coordination, policy development, and congressional engagement.

## Authors

---

Ann M. Begley  
Partner  
202.719.4585  
abegley@wiley.law  
Mary Beth Schultz  
Partner  
202.719.3471  
mschultz@wiley.law  
Emma Howard  
Associate  
202.719.3399  
eghoward@wiley.law

## Practice Areas

---

FDA and USDA Regulatory Compliance  
Food & Drug

USDA will establish a new National Food Safety Center (NFSC) in Urbandale, IA to serve as the primary hub for FSIS administrative and support functions, including resource management, financial operations, and food safety education and training. This center will become FSIS's largest office, housing approximately 200 employees.

FSIS will also open a Science Center in Athens, GA to expand microbiology, chemistry, and epidemiology work. FSIS will additionally set up operations in Fort Collins, CO to support international activities.

USDA's press release stated that the reorganization will not impact FSIS frontline inspectors, who make up about 85% of FSIS's employees.

### ***Research, Education, and Economics Mission Area***

USDA further announced plans to significantly relocate and restructure the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) Mission Area. The REE is comprised of four agencies within USDA and is tasked with advancing U.S. agriculture through scientific research, economic data, statistical analysis, and education.

Two of these agencies, the Economic Research Service (ERS) and National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), will relocate certain National Capital Region positions, and positions currently in other parts of the country, to Kansas City, MO.

The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) will move some positions based in the National Capital Region and elsewhere to St. Louis and other NASS offices. NASS will continue to maintain a field presence outside of the National Capital Region for research collection purposes.

Lastly, the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) will "decommission" the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC), located in the National Capital Region, and spread research programs across the country. USDA stated that BARC research programs will be relocated to other ARS locations and has published a list of 27 cities where research projects will be distributed. BARC employees reportedly received emails on April 27 informing them whether their research projects are slated for relocation.[4]

USDA's press release did not state how many positions would be moved under this initiative. In the first Trump Administration, USDA relocated most of NIFA's and ERS's employees to Kansas City, MO. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported that in FY2019, 278 employees - over half of the NIFA and ERS staff - terminated their employment instead of relocating.[5]

### ***U.S. Forest Service***

The restructuring of the Forest Service will begin with the relocation of its national headquarters from Washington, DC to Salt Lake City. The Service will transition from its current regional management model to a state-based one, organized around 15 offices led by state directors. As part of this transition, all nine of the Forest Service's regional offices will close. The responsibilities and functions of the regional offices will be subsumed by operational service centers that USDA plans to establish around the country. The Forest Service's research activities will additionally be consolidated under a single national research facility based in Fort

Collins, CO.

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR USDA STAKEHOLDERS

These announcements are part of USDA's larger reorganization and relocation initiative. While USDA's stated goal of the reorganization is to streamline operations and bring services closer to those who rely on them, stakeholders raised concerns that the reorganization as proposed in the Secretary's July 25, 2025 memo will lead to short-term disruptions in USDA's ability to deliver essential services. Stakeholders additionally voiced concerns that relocation and consolidation may result in additional staff departures and loss of institutional knowledge and subject matter expertise, leading to reduced operational capacity.[6]

USDA stakeholders should be prepared for shifting points of contact and potential administrative delays as agency leadership and personnel change as functions are relocated around the country. It is unknown at this time how many current USDA employees will choose to relocate. The agency already lost approximately 20,000 of 91,000 employees since fiscal year 2025. The GAO found that after the relocation of NIFA and ERS in 2019, ERS put out fewer reports and NIFA grant processes took longer. Two years after the relocation, GAO found that the number of employees and productivity had mostly gone back to pre-2019 levels. The workforce, however, was primarily composed of new employees with less experience than the workforce before the relocation.

Wiley will continue to provide ongoing analysis regarding USDA's reorganization plan. For more information on how the reorganization could impact your business, please reach out to our team of interdisciplinary attorneys.

[1] Zachary Neuhofer, *U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Structure and Proposed Changes*, (April 14, 2026).

[2] *Id.*

[3] Brooke Rollins, Secretary Memorandum SM 1078-0015, *Department of Agriculture Reorganization Plan*, (July 24, 2025).

[4] Grace Yarrow and Rachel Shin, *Morning Agriculture*, Politico Pro (April 28, 2026).

[5] U.S. Gov't Accountability Off., *Following Leading Practice Will Better Position USDA to Mitigate the Ongoing Impacts on Its Workforce*, GAO-23-104709 (2022).

[6] U.S. Dep't of Agriculture, *USDA Reorganization Summary and Analysis of Feedback* (Dec. 8, 2025).