



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

January 8, 2025

THE HONORABLE AMY KLOBUCHAR
United States Senate
425 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Klobuchar,

Thank you for your October 21, 2025, letter regarding the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) proposed reorganization plan, spotlighting the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC), and raising concerns with effectively addressing New World Screwworm (NWS) and Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). I appreciate your interest in ensuring USDA has the investments necessary for state-of-the-art research facilities that help safeguard the Nation from animal and plant health challenges.

Regarding HPAI, the Department is pleased the comprehensive approach to addressing this animal disease threat is working, with wholesale egg prices having fallen by 78 percent from late February 2025, when the plan was implemented. Similarly, USDA has also seen progress in effectively addressing NWS threats to the country, which includes the use of sterile flies south of the United States border to ensure northern progression of the pest is stopped.

With respect to BARC – a facility that contains over 400 buildings, of which 250 of these structures have been deemed blighted and slated for demolition – the investments needed to bring this facility back to state-of-the-art are cost prohibitive. Using conservative estimates, there is currently over \$300 million in deferred maintenance at BARC and over \$500 million would be needed to modernize just 11 buildings.

Further, in 2022, under the Biden Administration, pipes burst and flooded one of these buildings, causing significant water damage to scientific equipment and spurring mold growth. As a result, BARC employees filed grievances with the U.S. Office of Special Counsel. The whistleblowers' allegations were referred to former Secretary of Agriculture Thomas J. Vilsack for investigation pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 1213(c) and (d). The investigation largely substantiated¹ the whistleblowers' allegations, finding pervasive safety deficiencies in many of the facilities and structures at BARC, including, but not limited to, water intrusions, mold, and a lack of potable water.

¹ OSC File Nos. DI-23-000706, DI-23-000708, and DI-23-000719 (June 25, 2025), U.S. OFFICE OF SPECIAL COUNSEL, available at: https://osc.gov/Documents/Public%20Files/FY25/DI-23-000706,%20DI-23-000708,%20DI-23-000719/Letter%20to%20the%20President%20-%20DI-23-000706;%20708;%20719_Redacted%202.pdf.

Employees at BARC hosted the members of the Maryland congressional delegation on September 22, 2025, for a tour of the buildings. I note two of your co-signers had an opportunity to see and photograph the current state of the facility, with Senator Chris Van Hollen choosing not to show pictures of the facility at a press conference held immediately after the tour. Senator Angela Alsobrooks opted to only join the press conference, missing the tour of BARC.

On September 29, 2025, I took the exact tour provided to the Maryland congressional delegation, seeing all they were shown. I posted a video of the tour on X and the Department's Reorganization webpage.² Apart from viewing what I have posted, I invite you and others that have co-signed the letter to see the condition of BARC first-hand, especially as the facility is a short drive from the United States Capitol.

The current condition of BARC could have been averted had funding requests to Congress over several decades not been ignored. Notably, former Senator Barbara Mikulski and current Representative Steny Hoyer – both from the State of Maryland – have held leadership positions on the respective Senate and House Committees on Appropriations and could have directed sufficient money to restore BARC. Unfortunately, as noted by the Office of Special Counsel, “many of the problems at BARC have accumulated over decades due to inadequate funding from Congress,”³ and the research facility is now derelict.

Thankfully, the USDA Agricultural Research Service has over 90 other research facilities where employees and research projects currently at BARC will be relocated so that it can continue to safeguard the Nation from pests and threats to American agriculture. If you have additional questions, please have your staff contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at (202) 720-7095 or ocr@usda.gov. A similar letter has been sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



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

² X posting (December 5, 2025), available here: <https://x.com/DepSecVaden/status/1996981289119863067?s=20>; USDA Reorganization webpage, available here: <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/reorganization>.

³ OSC File Nos. DI-23-000706, DI-23-000708, and DI-23-000719 (June 25, 2025), U.S. OFFICE OF SPECIAL COUNSEL, available at: https://osc.gov/Documents/Public%20Files/FY25/DI-23-000706,%20DI-23-000708,%20DI-23-000719/Letter%20to%20the%20President%20-%20DI-23-000706;%20708;%20719_Redacted%202.pdf.