



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

January 8, 2026

THE HONORABLE PETER WELCH
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
115 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Welch,

Thank you for your September 19, 2025, letter regarding the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) planned reorganization efforts. The Department is dedicated to refocusing its core operations to better align with its founding mission of supporting American farming, ranching, and forestry. I appreciate your feedback during this process.

Your correspondence underscores the vital work carried out by Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) employees. However, this important work should be performed where it can have the greatest impact. As a State-administered program, USDA aims to deliver more resources and target technical assistance directly to State programs. Concentrating the Food and Nutrition Service in Alexandria, Virginia, has not reduced SNAP error rates or improved application timeliness.

Over the past four years, USDA's workforce has grown by approximately eight percent, while employee salaries have increased by 14.5 percent. Much of this growth has been supported by temporary funding, including for FNS staff. Notably, in Fiscal Year 2023, funding allowed FNS to expand to 1,844 personnel. Within eight months, the agency set a goal to close its vacancy gap by hiring more than 400 staff, doing so in just four months. For one five-day period alone, 350 suitability determinations were conducted. Such rapid hiring does not reflect the deliberate, careful selection taxpayers expect, nor does it ensure the program secures the highest-quality staff. It is essential the Department maintain a workforce it can sustainably afford, while preserving the Secretary's authority to fill critically necessary positions when appropriate.

Secretary Rollins made it clear the Department will be transparent and use a common-sense process in the reorganization effort. The Secretary also directed me, in Secretarial

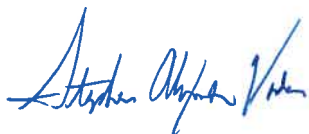
Memorandum 1078-015,¹ (“Secretary’s Memorandum”) to lead the implementation of the USDA Reorganization Plan, and where appropriate, make changes or adjustments to the Plan.

As I stated before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry at the end of July, the Secretary’s Memorandum is the first step, not the final step, in this process. On August 1, USDA announced a 30-day public comment period for stakeholders to provide feedback on the Department’s planned reorganization efforts, which was extended to September 30 to provide additional time for interested parties. All stakeholders – including USDA employees, Capitol Hill offices, and members of the agricultural community – were encouraged to share their input during the open comment period. The analysis of the over 40,000 comments is publicly available. I also have attached it for your convenience.

Many of your questions have been addressed by my responses to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry’s “Questions for the Record.” A copy is attached for your convenience. Meanwhile, I continue to meet with and consult Members of Congress on the Department’s planned reorganization efforts. I have also been traveling and meeting with stakeholders around the country, including in proposed hub locations.

Thank you, again, for your letter and commitment to agricultural stakeholders. If you have further questions, please contact USDA’s Office of Congressional Relations at (202) 720-7095 or ocr@usda.gov. Please also note, a copy of this response letter has been sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



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

Enclosure

¹ Secretarial Memorandum SM 1078-015 (July 24, 2025), available here: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/sm-1078-015.pdf>.