



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

March 13, 2025

THE HONORABLE CHRIS VAN HOLLEN
United States Senate
730 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Van Hollen,

Thank you for your August 22, 2025, letter regarding the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) proposed reorganization plan, spotlighting the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC), and raising concerns about the plan for BARC. I appreciate your interest in ensuring USDA has the investments necessary for state-of-the-art research facilities that help safeguard our Nation from animal and plant health challenges.

Regarding the current state of 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, it would cost over \$300 million to eliminate deferred maintenance and over \$500 million to modernize just 11 buildings. Please note the Reorganization Plan includes retaining the National Agricultural Library, as this structure has been properly maintained.

In 2022, under the Biden Administration, pipes burst and flooded one of the 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 water intrusions, mold, and a lack of potable water.

Employees at BARC hosted the members of the Maryland congressional delegation on September 22, 2025, for a tour of the buildings. I note you had an opportunity to see first-hand and photograph the current state of the facility. I also note you chose 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.

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.

On September 29, 2025, I took the exact tour provided to the Maryland congressional delegation, seeing all you 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 others that may not have seen the condition of BARC to tour the facility.

The current condition of BARC could have been averted had funding requests to Congress over several decades not been ignored. Former Senator Barbara Mikulski and current Representative Steny Hoyer — both from the State of Maryland — have held leadership positions on their respective 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.

President Trump supports science and agricultural innovation, amid USDA’s effort to improve efficiencies to better serve American farmers, ranchers, producers, and foresters. 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. Further, USDA has experience relocating work outside of the National Capital Region without impacting mission critical work as evidenced by the relocation of the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). Throughout this relocation, USDA will take a similar methodical approach to ensure the research occurring at BARC continues.

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.