

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 27, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Stephen Vaden
Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins and Deputy Secretary Vaden,

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) proposal to decommission the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) is illegal and deeply harmful to American farmers and the nation's food security. BARC is among the largest and most influential agricultural research facilities in the world, and its research has helped enhance the productivity of American agriculture, stop the spread of harmful pests and diseases, and improve human nutrition. In addition to nationally oriented research, BARC also provides regionally specific agricultural research that benefits the 83,000 farms located throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed; the loss of BARC jeopardizes \$10 billion in agricultural productivity in this region alone. Congressional intent to keep BARC open is clear and received bipartisan support in the Fiscal Year 2026 Agriculture Appropriations Act. Additionally, of the public comments USDA received about BARC, including from Maryland Farm Bureau, 92% expressed strong opposition to closure of this critical agricultural research facility, illustrating the overwhelming support for the continued operation of BARC.^{1,2}

The April 23rd proposal to shutter BARC is not only deeply unwise; it is illegal. By moving forward with decommissioning BARC, USDA is violating a number of provisions laid out in the Fiscal Year 2026 Agriculture Appropriations Act, enacted into law on November 12, 2025, including a clear directive to USDA to keep BARC open.³ More specifically, in this law Congress:

¹ Maryland Farm Bureau, "Letter to Secretary Brooke Rollins Opposing the Closure of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center," September 26, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1389610093171056&set=a.731927578939314>.

² U.S. Department of Agriculture. USDA Reorganization: Summary and Analysis of Feedback. December 8, 2025. <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda-reorg-comments-analysis-12082025.pdf>.

³ United States, Congress. Public Law 119-37, Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026. 12 Nov. 2025. *GovInfo*, www.govinfo.gov/app/details/PLAW-119publ37.

- Made clear its intent for BARC to continue to operate by including the following language in the report accompanying the bill: “the agreement supports the continued operation of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center.”⁴
- Further clarified this intent by providing USDA with \$6 million in funding to spend on construction and facilities improvements at BARC to implement building and infrastructure updates that support BARC’s continued operation.^{5,6}
- Prohibited closure or consolidation of the resources or locations of any existing USDA Agricultural Research Service labs and facilities without the prior notification and approval of the Appropriations Committees of the House and Senate – approval which has not been obtained by USDA.⁷
- Barred USDA from reorganizing or relocating an office or employees without the prior notification and approval of the Appropriations Committees of the House and Senate – approval which has not been obtained by USDA.⁸

It is extremely troubling that, instead of working with Congress on a sensible plan to modernize BARC, the Department is pursuing an abrupt, politically-motivated, and short-sighted effort to shutter a facility of critical importance to U.S. agriculture and food security. Since 2016, USDA has invested at least \$174 million in BARC facility upgrades and repairs,⁹ and was in the process of a strategic consolidation effort laid out in the 2024 BARC Master Plan. In this plan shared with our offices, USDA laid out a strategy to centralize BARC’s work in eleven main laboratories and office facilities while other facilities would be decommissioned.

The Department has also failed to provide evidence that the benefits of decommissioning BARC outweigh the costs. For example, the Department lacks legal authority to dispose of BARC land, which limits the ability to recoup any cost through selling or leasing the land,¹⁰ which means that costs will continue to accrue at BARC even if employees and labs are relocated. In addition, this

⁴ United States, Congress. *Explanatory Statement Submitted by Ms. Collins, Chair of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, Regarding H.R. 5371, the Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026*. *Congressional Record*, vol. 171, no. 189, 9 Nov. 2025, p. S8045, Division B, Title I, Agricultural Research Service, Buildings and Facilities. Congress.gov, www.congress.gov/congressional-record/volume-171/issue-189/senate-section/article/S8043-2.

⁵ United States, Congress. *Public Law 119-37, Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026*. 12 Nov. 2025. 139 Stat. 512–513, Division B, Title I, Agricultural Research Service, Buildings and Facilities. GovInfo, www.govinfo.gov/app/details/PLAW-119publ37.

⁶ United States, Congress. *Explanatory Statement Submitted by Ms. Collins, Chair of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, Regarding H.R. 5371, the Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026*. *Congressional Record*, vol. 171, no. 189, 9 Nov. 2025, p. S8053, Division B, Agricultural Research Service, Buildings and Facilities, Community Project Funding/Congressionally Directed Spending Table, "Beltsville Agricultural Research Center Infrastructure." Congress.gov, www.congress.gov/congressional-record/volume-171/issue-189/senate-section/article/S8043-2.

⁷ United States, Congress. *Public Law 119-37, Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026*. 12 Nov. 2025. 139 Stat. 555, Division B, Title VII, Sec. 771. GovInfo, www.govinfo.gov/app/details/PLAW-119publ37.

⁸ United States, Congress. *Public Law 119-37, Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026*. 12 Nov. 2025. 139 Stat. 544, Division B, Title VII, Sec. 716(a)(4)-(5). GovInfo, www.govinfo.gov/app/details/PLAW-119publ37.

⁹ 2026 USDA Explanatory Notes – Agricultural Research Service. Table ARS-21. Status of Construction. <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/20-2026-CJ-ARS.pdf>

¹⁰ Pub. L. No. 100-202, § 523, 101 Stat. 1329, 1329-417 (1987). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-101/pdf/STATUTE-101-Pg1329.pdf#page=1>

Administration knows that relocations are costly -- resulting in productivity declines, the loss of talented staff, and the undermining the agency's ability to effectively carry out its core mission.¹¹

¹² These losses translate to further economic costs for taxpayers as every dollar invested in USDA research delivers less benefit.

USDA must conduct an Inspector General-reviewed cost-benefit analysis of the proposed decommissioning of BARC that compares the net benefit of proposed decommissioning to moving forward with the BARC 2024 Master Plan that would consolidate BARC operations on the current site. This analysis should include an assessment of the costs associated with the relocation of BARC research activities – including relocating or acquiring new research materials and equipment, as well as the costs of relocating personnel. The analysis should also include the costs of any upgrades that would be needed at the facilities slated to receive BARC research activities in order to accommodate BARC projects. In addition, before any relocation decisions about BARC research are made, USDA must conduct viability studies to ensure that the facilities receiving BARC research projects have the appropriate capacity, equipment, and expertise to successfully carry out the projects. This is the bare minimum level of transparency that US taxpayers are owed for a proposal that is meant to enhance government efficiency.

Please provide the requested information and answers to the questions below by May 1, 2026:

1. Please provide a detailed cost estimate for the decommissioning of BARC, including employee and equipment relocation costs, and the cost of any upgrades that will occur at other facilities in order to accommodate relocated BARC research.
2. Please provide a detailed timeline of proposed decommissioning activities and a detailed description of the plans for relocating each research activity currently conducted at BARC.
3. Have you conducted viability studies that assess, for each BARC research project that will be relocated, whether the USDA facility receiving a given BARC research project will be able to successfully accommodate the research?
 - a. If so, please provide detailed information about those assessments.
 - b. If not, will you commit to doing so before making any decisions about relocating BARC research activities?
4. Please provide a detailed spend plan for the FY26 appropriations made to BARC.
5. Has USDA meaningfully consulted with staff and union representatives about this decommissioning plan? If so, how many staff does USDA expect to lose as a result of this plan?
6. Will any BARC employees be terminated as part of the proposed decommissioning?
7. Are there plans to offer relocation assistance or other retention benefits in order to retain employees at other USDA facilities?

¹¹ Government Accountability Office. (2021) Report to the Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources, House of Representatives. *Bureau of Land Management: Better Workforce Planning and Data Would Help Mitigate the Effects of Recent Staff Vacancies*. (GAO Publication 22-104247). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-104247.pdf>

¹² Government Accountability Office. (2022) Report to the Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources, House of Representatives. *Agency Relocations: Following Leading Practices Will Better Position USDA to Mitigate the Ongoing Impacts on Its Workforce*. (GAO Publication 23-104709). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-104709>

8. How will long-term, place-based research, such as the Lower Chesapeake Bay Long Term Agricultural Research Network, continue if BARC is decommissioned?
9. How will the USDA Agricultural Research Service support the 83,000 Chesapeake Bay watershed farms if BARC is decommissioned?
10. Has USDA assessed the impact that BARC decommissioning will have on USDA's agricultural research work? If so, please provide a detailed analysis of that assessment.

As the significant public comment the USDA received on this plan indicates, closure of BARC would have catastrophic consequences for farmers across the country and particularly in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The USDA must comply with clear Congressional directives and work with Congress on the long-term future of BARC and its vital mission.

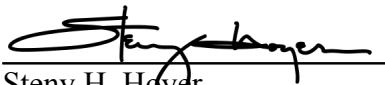
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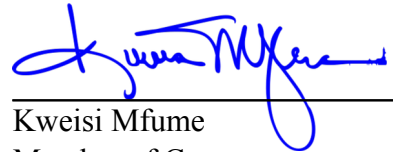
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator




Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress



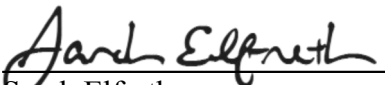
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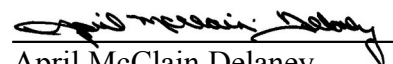
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