

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 7, 2025

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins,

We write to convey our deep concern regarding the Administration's efforts to reduce federal employees at the Department of Agriculture's National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research (NCAUR) in Peoria, Illinois. The Center's important work drives the discovery of new uses for homegrown agricultural products, supporting American farmers and global competitiveness. We strongly urge the Administration to refrain from any efforts to reduce NCAUR's workforce, including through the reduction in force (RIF) process.

Famous for discovering the method to mass produce penicillin, NCAUR continues to be at the forefront in developing value-added agricultural products for 78 years. Also known as the Ag Lab, the federal scientific research operation has yielded significant discoveries that impact Americans daily. The lab developed the thickening agent xanthan gum found in numerous food and industrial products. They created dextran, a plasma extender that restores blood volume in situations like severe bleeding or trauma. Lab scientists invented a super-absorbent starch that can hold 1,000 times its weight—commonly used in operating rooms to soak up large amounts of fluid. They've successfully converted lactose, a byproduct of the dairy industry, into plastics suitable for industrial and consumer use. To this day, penicillin remains the most widely used antibiotic in the world, a testament to the lab's impact.

Farmers benefit from the Ag Lab's cutting-edge research to protect crops from pests, disease, and extreme weather conditions. A key area of the lab's work focuses on enhancing crop resilience, improving food quality, and overall crop health through innovative smart practices. Their research ensures that the American food supply remains safe, nutritious, and benefits consumers nationwide. Beyond their beneficial impact on farming, the lab's agricultural scientists also inspire the next generation of STEM research, ensuring continued progress in agricultural advancements to help our producers remain competitive globally.

The Ag Lab is the largest federal employer in the Greater Peoria area. Layoffs from the lab will have an immediate impact on the regional economy. Given the unique expertise required to work there, the lab recruits its talented workforce from outside the region. These neighbors and colleagues pay taxes, buy groceries and are vital contributors to the local economy. The loss of their jobs will have ripple effects throughout the entire region as displaced workers seek opportunities in other cities.

The reduction of highly talented technical experts whose work is vital for the development of new markets for commodities and the expansion of biomanufacturing would significantly impact farmers and ranchers as they continue to face economic challenges and worsening natural disasters. Equally critical to the functioning of the Ag Lab are the support staff who ensure these scientific discoveries are realized. The lab's post-doctoral candidates, whose research is foundational for advancing their careers, would face disruptions in their efforts to develop solutions for our agriculture and food systems if terminated. Many probationary employees are backfilling for recent retirees, providing a continuation of important work that now risks being halted if they are let go.

The dismissal of brilliant lab technicians, research scientists, and plant pathologists threatens to cripple an incredible institution and our regional economy. Their termination would undermine their groundbreaking work of national importance and the Ag Lab's ability to serve farmers, ranchers, and the agriculture community across Illinois and the country. Given the invaluable contributions these men and women have had in agricultural advancement, it's difficult to envision how reductions in the labs distinctively skilled workforce would improve government efficiency. We strongly urge the Administration to refrain from any efforts to reduce the Ag Lab's workforce, including through the RIF process.

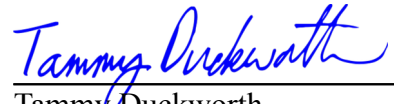
Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your prompt response.

CC: Dr. Rosalind James, Midwest Area Director, Agriculture Research Service

Sincerely,



Eric Sorensen
Member of Congress



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



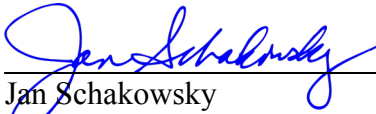
Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress



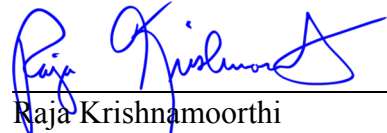
Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress

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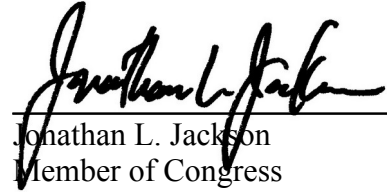
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



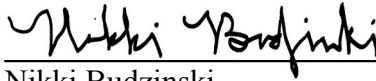
Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress



Delia C. Ramirez
Member of Congress



Jonathan L. Jackson
Member of Congress



Nikki Budzinski
Member of Congress



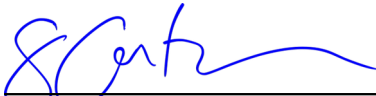
Bill Foster
Member of Congress



Lauren Underwood
Member of Congress



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



Sean Casten
Member of Congress