



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

MAY 30 2018

The Honorable Cheri Bustos
U.S. House of Representatives
1009 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Bustos:

Thank you for your letter, cosigned by Congressman Darin LaHood, regarding vacancies at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS), National Center for Agriculture Utilization Research (NCAUR) in Peoria, Illinois.

When the Secretary was sworn into office last April, he laid out his strategic plan for USDA and gave direction to take an enterprise approach in managing all the Department's resources, including its employees.

All of USDA's mission areas, agencies, and staff offices are required to develop Human Capital Action Plans (HCAP) that align with the Department's strategic plan and goals. The plans incorporate human capital goals; identify strategies and actions to achieve those goals; and outline the performance measures defining the success criteria of the action items. The plans also contain workforce hiring data and staffing requirements needed to meet the strategic goals and management initiatives.

It has been USDA's and ARS's policy not to permanently fill positions in research laboratories that are targeted for closure in the Administration's budget proposals until Congress has taken action. However, we have authorized the hiring of post-doctoral scientists and the use of temporary hiring authorities to fill critical positions.

ARS's recent HCAP showed that NCAUR had 15 permanent positions vacant, including 9 scientists and 6 support staff. ARS has been approved to utilize the authorities described above to hire 7 scientists and 5 support staff positions that were deemed critical at the NCAUR facility.

Again, thank you for your letter. If you have any questions, please have a member of your staff contact the Office of Congressional Relations at (202) 720-7095. A similar letter is being sent to Congressman Darin LaHood.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen L. Censky", written over a horizontal line.

Stephen L. Censky
Deputy Secretary