The Demise and (Hopeful) Rise of the Economic Research Service

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What is the Economic Research Service (ERS)?

- The policy analytical and economic research arm of the Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- One of the 13 designated Official Statistical Agencies of the U.S.
Major ERS Programs

- Commodity, Farm, and Trade Economics
- Farm and Household Income (ARMS data)
- Food Markets, Food Safety, Nutrition Assistance Programs (FoodAps survey; Admin. Data)
- Natural Resources and Agrienvironmental Quality
- Rural Economy and Development, Intersectoral Dynamics
Examples of ERS Audiences

- International Trade Negotiators
- Natural Resource Program Designers and Policy Decision Makers
- Administrators of National Food Assistance Programs (e.g., SNAP, WIC, School Lunch)
- Rural County Governments
- U.S. Congressional Decision Makers
ERS, 2018-2020
Suggestions of ERS Politicization

- The President’s Budget Proposals
  - President’s Proposed year-over-year budget cuts of 11.6% in 2018; 48% in 2019; 26.8% in 2020. (Though Congressional appropriations over-ruled the cuts)

- Relocation: In August 2018, Secretary announced that a portion of ERS would be moved to a location outside of the DC Metropolitan Area

- Choice of Kansas City made in July 2019; Employees given 9 mos. to decide whether to move or resign.
Consequences of Announcement of Relocation and Actual Relocation

- Reduced Staff Levels
- Particularly high loss of managerial and supervisory expertise
- Loss of Productivity
  - Fewer reports in an absolute sense
  - Fewer reports on a per capita basis
- Shift in relative subject matter of research reported
- Loss of gender diversity & diversity of experience
The Future of ERS

- Looks bright due to:
  - Selection of an ERS Administrator
  - A data and research supportive Biden/Harris Administration

- But...
  - It is likely to take years and great wisdom to rebuild ERS capacity as well as its reputation among a variety of stakeholder groups