

July 9, 2026

The Honorable Andy Harris
Chair, Subcommittee on Agriculture
House Committee on Appropriations
1536 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture
House Committee on Appropriations
2407 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chair, Subcommittee on Agriculture
Senate Committee on Appropriations
338 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture
Senate Committee on Appropriations
506 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Congressional Oversight of the Relocation of USDA Scientific Collections

Dear Chair Harris, Ranking Member Bishop, Chair Hoeven, and Ranking Member Shaheen:

We write on behalf of the undersigned organizations to share our concerns about the fate of several critical agricultural scientific collections as the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) ongoing reorganization proceeds. These collections—housed at the Henry A. Wallace Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) in Maryland and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) in Illinois—represent irreplaceable scientific infrastructure essential to American food security, biosecurity, and agricultural research. We urge Congress to exercise its oversight role to help ensure these collections are properly protected, staffed, and cared for before, during, and after any carefully planned relocation, and respectfully request that the relevant authorizing and appropriations committees hold hearings on this matter. Should hearings be held, we would welcome the opportunity to provide scientific expertise from our communities.

The Collections at Stake

U.S. National Fungus Collection (BARC, Beltsville, Maryland)

The U.S. National Fungus Collection is the second largest fungal collection in the world and the largest repository of agriculturally important fungi. Founded in 1869, this collection holds nearly one million specimens representing more than 65,000 species, including more than 25,000 type specimens—the definitive scientific reference for fungal nomenclature used by researchers, regulators, and courts worldwide. The collection also anchors the Fungus-Host Database, a biosecurity resource used by USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and port inspectors to identify foreign fungal pathogens and prevent their introduction into the United States. Nearly three-quarters of known plant diseases are caused by fungi, and recent [estimates](#) put the economic impact of fungi at nearly \$54 trillion USD; the importance of this collection to American agricultural security cannot be overstated. The collection is accompanied by the J.A. Stevenson Mycological Library—a non-lending research library of more than 4,000 books (including nearly 800 rare titles dating to 1675), 450 mycological journals, and an

estimated 80,000 reprints focused on the systematics of agriculturally important fungi. Together, the specimens and the library form an integrated scientific resource whose value would be significantly diminished if the two were separated during relocation.

USDA Nematode Collection (BARC, Beltsville, Maryland)

The USDA Nematode Collection is one of the world's most significant resources for understanding nematodes—microscopic organisms responsible for billions of dollars in annual U.S. crop losses. Housing more than 49,200 permanent slides and vials—including some donated from private collections to USDA for safekeeping—with a total repository of several million specimens, the collection serves as the global reference for nematode type specimens and archives critical data on host associations, geographic distributions, disease impacts, and genomic sequences. The curators who maintain this collection carry decades of specialized expertise in nematode taxonomy and pathology that directly supports farmers and policymakers in managing parasitic nematode threats to American agriculture. The collection is also critical in ensuring and demonstrating the safety of hundreds of billions of dollars of U.S. agricultural exports.

Maize Genetics Cooperation Stock Center (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign)

The Maize Genetics Cooperation Stock Center at UIUC holds 100,000 corn stocks representing genetic mutants, some collected as long as 100 years ago and now irreplaceable. This seed bank supports researchers worldwide studying crop yield, disease resistance, and genetic diversity. USDA has proposed moving this collection to Ames, Iowa. Experts have raised concerns that proposed receiving sites may lack the physical infrastructure and experienced personnel to properly care for these materials, and that any extended period during which the collection is unavailable during the transition could result in permanent loss.

National Soybean Germplasm Collection (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign)

The National Soybean Germplasm Collection is the only public soybean seed bank in the country and holds nearly the entire genetic diversity of the soybean crop. USDA has proposed moving this collection to Columbia, Missouri. Experts note that the UIUC campus provides environmental conditions—spanning multiple Midwest growing zones—that are essential for replenishing seed stocks, and that Columbia does not offer the same range. Illinois was the nation's top soybean-producing state in 2025, with more than 600 million bushels. The integrity of this collection bears directly on American farm productivity and food security.

Other USDA Collections

In addition to the major collections listed above, individual research groups at BARC maintain resources such as germplasm, pathogen, and cell culture collections that support US agricultural development, biosecurity, and future research. USDA units including US Forest Service regional offices, research stations, and labs likewise house comparative collections that are important resources for scientists and land managers. The effect of closing or moving these delicate collections, and their intended future in the USDA reorganization, is not clear.

The urgency of preserving all of these USDA collections extends beyond their historical and agricultural value to America's future competitiveness in biotechnology. The bipartisan America's Living Library Act (S. 4023/H.R. 7832), introduced in March 2026, would direct the sequencing and cataloguing of genomic information from animals, plants, fungi, and microbes on U.S. public lands, explicitly designating USDA as a key collaborator for sample collection and storage. This initiative, which grew directly from the [National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology's finding](#) that America's biological collections represent an untapped strategic resource, depends on a robust USDA collections infrastructure to function. The USDA collections described above all serve as essential scientific reference resources for identifying, validating, and contextualizing the new genomic data this initiative seeks to generate. Disrupting these collections at this moment, without adequate planning or expertise in place, would undermine the very foundation that the America's Living Library Act seeks to build upon.

Key Concerns

Our organizations are concerned about several aspects of how these relocations are proceeding.

Timeline. BARC staff have reportedly been asked to vacate the facility by September 30, 2026. Moving nearly one million fungal specimens and several million nematode specimens—each requiring careful documentation, appropriate packaging, precise environmental controls throughout transport, and verification upon receipt—is an extraordinarily complex undertaking. We are concerned that the complexity and difficulty have not been fully considered, and that the current timeline may not allow adequate time for planning and execution.

Expert curatorial staff. The scientists and curators who maintain these collections are as important to their integrity as the specimens themselves. Their deep, specialized knowledge of taxonomy, specimen care, and collection management took decades to develop. USDA's experience relocating the Economic Research Service and National Institute of Food and Agriculture to Kansas City in 2019—during which 40 to 60 percent of staff departed rather than relocated—illustrates how organizational disruption can lead to significant expertise loss that takes years to rebuild. We urge USDA to make every effort to retain collection staff through the transition and beyond.

Receiving infrastructure. Scientists and independent experts have raised concerns that proposed receiving locations may lack the physical infrastructure, environmental controls, and specialist personnel required to properly house these collections. Adequate temperature, humidity, lighting, and pest monitoring are not trivial requirements, and retrofitting or constructing new facilities takes time and resources. We encourage Congress to ask USDA to document that receiving facilities will meet established standards before transfers are finalized.

Congressional intent. The Fiscal Year 2026 Agriculture Appropriations Act included language supporting the continued operation of BARC and appropriated \$6 million for BARC construction and infrastructure improvements. The Act also requires prior notification and approval from the Appropriations Committees before USDA closes or relocates ARS laboratories and facilities. We encourage the committees to clarify USDA's compliance plans and the status of that required consultation.

Our Request

We respectfully urge the committees to take the following actions to help ensure these collections are protected:

1. **Hold oversight hearings** on the USDA reorganization that address the fate of critical scientific collections, including the U.S. National Fungus Collection, USDA Nematode Collection, Maize Genetics Cooperation Stock Center, and National Soybean Germplasm Collection, with testimony from USDA officials, collection curators, and independent scientific experts.
2. **Direct USDA to provide detailed relocation plans** for each collection, including an inventory of specimens to be moved, documentation that receiving facilities meet established standards for long-term preservation, a staffing plan ensuring that curatorial expertise will accompany and remain with the collections, and a cost-benefit analysis.
3. **Encourage USDA to allow adequate time** for careful planning and execution before transfers proceed, given the irreversible nature of potential harm to these one-of-a-kind collections.
4. **Ensure long-term funding commitments** for curatorial staffing, environmental infrastructure, and ongoing maintenance at receiving locations, and that collections are kept intact rather than split across multiple sites.

The U.S. National Fungus Collection is comparable in importance to national museums like the Smithsonian or the Library of Congress—an irreplaceable national repository built over a century and a half of scientific work. The USDA Nematode Collection is equally irreplaceable, representing decades of accumulated specimens and the specialized expertise needed to interpret them. These BARC collections have developed deep expertise in partnership with other federal scientific resources in the region, including the National Arboretum, National Agricultural Library, and Systematic Entomology Laboratory. While these facilities are planned to remain in Washington, their work is nonetheless threatened by the loss of expertise and collaborative relationships that the BARC reorganization will bring. The seed collections at UIUC represent the genetic heritage of the crops that underpin American farm productivity and food security. Together, these collections and their associated experts make the United States a world leader in scientific research that safeguards the future of American and global agriculture. We are confident that with appropriate oversight and planning, these transitions can be managed in a way that preserves these extraordinary resources for future generations.

Our organizations stand ready to provide technical expertise, facilitate meetings with collection curators and scientists, and support the committees' oversight efforts in any way we can. Please do not hesitate to contact Jyotsna Pandey at the American Institute of Biological Sciences (jpandey@aibs.org) with any questions or to arrange a meeting with representatives of the undersigned organizations.

Respectfully submitted,

American Alliance of Museums
American Institute of Biological Sciences
American Phytopathological Society

American Society of Parasitologists
American Society of Plant Biologists
American Society of Plant Taxonomists
Botanical Society of America
Ecological Society of America
Helminthological Society of Washington
Maize Genetics Cooperation
Mycological Society of America
Natural Science Collections Alliance
Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology
Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections
Society of Herbarium Curators
Society of Nematologists
Society of Systematic Biologists