**USDA STAFFING CUTS REDUCE LOCAL PRESENCE IN COMMUNITIES NATIONWIDE**

**ANALYSIS BY**
**DR. REBECCA SCHEWE, NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION**
**AND**
**BERNIE KLUGER, PROSPECT PARTNERS, LLC**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The past sixteen months have seen an unprecedented staffing crisis unfurl across the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). This paper offers an expanded look at the depth and breadth of that ongoing staffing crisis using previously unpublished data on Farm Service Agency (FSA) County employee cuts, as well as updates on previously reported nationwide cuts to staff across other USDA agencies.

Through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, the authors have confirmed that over one third of FSA local offices with FSA County employees at the beginning of 2025 experienced a net loss of staff by year's end, with 42 offices ending the year with no FSA County employees.[1] Losses of FSA County employees compound previously reported cuts to locally stationed federal employees of the Farm Service Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) who also provide direct support to America's farmers and ranchers.[2]

Further analysis of federal personnel data from the US Office of Personnel Management confirms widespread headcount reductions across all USDA agencies, with the exception of staffing increases in the immediate office of the Agriculture Secretary, which grew by 18% in 2025.

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[1] USDA has historically staffed local FSA offices with a combination of FSA Federal and FSA County employees, the former being locally stationed staff who are employed directly by the Farm Service Agency. The latter are employed by a local county committee under FSA authority.
[2] All other data in this paper were sourced from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management website data.opm.gov on April 9, 2026.

SPOTLIGHT ON FSA AND NRCS

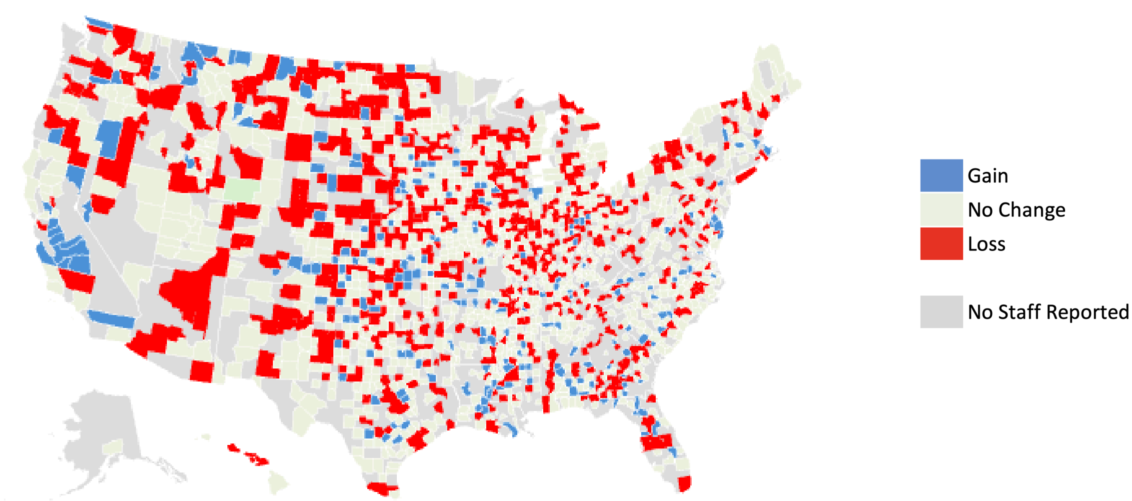
***Farmer Serving Agencies Were Not Spared***

While every USDA agency lost staff, staff losses in direct farmer-facing service offices are particularly concerning as farmers face an ongoing crisis of economic and natural disasters. Staff in the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) work directly with farmers providing technical assistance, financial support, and guidance to navigate the complex web of government programs. Losses in these direct farmer-serving agencies means that US farmers, ranchers, and landowners have fewer experts in their communities to turn to for assistance.

***Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Data Reveals Losses to FSA County Staff***

USDA reduced the number of front line staff at the US Farm Service Agency (FSA) by 8% in 2025, according to data recently obtained through the authors' Freedom of Information Act Request. Over one third of FSA local offices lost FSA County employees by year's end, with 42 offices ending 2025 with no FSA County staff. Cuts to FSA County staff were USDA's largest termination of community presence in over a decade. These findings build on federal data released in March 2026 showing widespread loss of FSA Federal personnel in 2025.

***Figure 1: FSA County Staffing Losses (Jan 2025-Jan 2026)***




*Source: FSA County staff provided via FOIA on April 8, 2026*

***FSA's Heritage of Local Presence and Control***

Many federal agencies, including the US Postal Service and US Small Business Administration, maintain local presence in the communities they serve. Among such agencies, the Farm Service Agency has a unique heritage of local presence, with over 2,000 reported offices nationwide in 2025 and a commitment to local input over who staffs those offices in each county.

Every FSA office in the country is required by law to have an advisory board, called a County Committee, made up of locally elected farmers and ranchers. Since the 1930's, County Committees have provided grassroots input on FSA programs and hiring. Historically, approximately two-thirds of the FSA workforce have served as employees of these local committees, not the federal government. FSA's locally employed staff are commonly referred to as FSA County Office (FSACO) employees.

In this analysis, we focus primarily on changes in headcount among FSACO employees, who have primary responsibility for FSA frontline services and are relied upon by local farmers and ranchers to navigate an array of federal agricultural programs.

***Top Findings***

US farmers and ranchers ended January 2025 with access to 7,672 FSACO staff stationed across 2,037 in offices in 2,012 counties. By the end of January 2026, staffing dropped to 7,022 FSACO staff, an 8% decline, across 2,018 offices in 1,992 counties.

- 89% of the FSA County staff lost between January 2025 and December 2025 were full-time, permanent employees.

- The positions with the steepest losses are County Program Analysts, a direct farmer-facing role where staff help with "interpreting and explaining procedures, program regulations and forms to producers." FSA lost 614 County Program Analysts between January 2025 and December 2025, the staff farmers and ranchers rely on most to navigate programs and paperwork.

- Local leadership took a significant hit as well, with 122 positions lost among County Executive Directors and 47 County Executive Directors in Training between January 2025 and December 2025. These experienced local leaders manage county office service centers and provide essential outreach to producers, "working closely with farmers and ranchers to promote environmental and economic growth and sustainability." Major losses in farmer-facing and local leadership positions remove a vital conduit between local communities and federal staff, leaving county offices less equipped to deliver the programs and support that American farmers depend on.

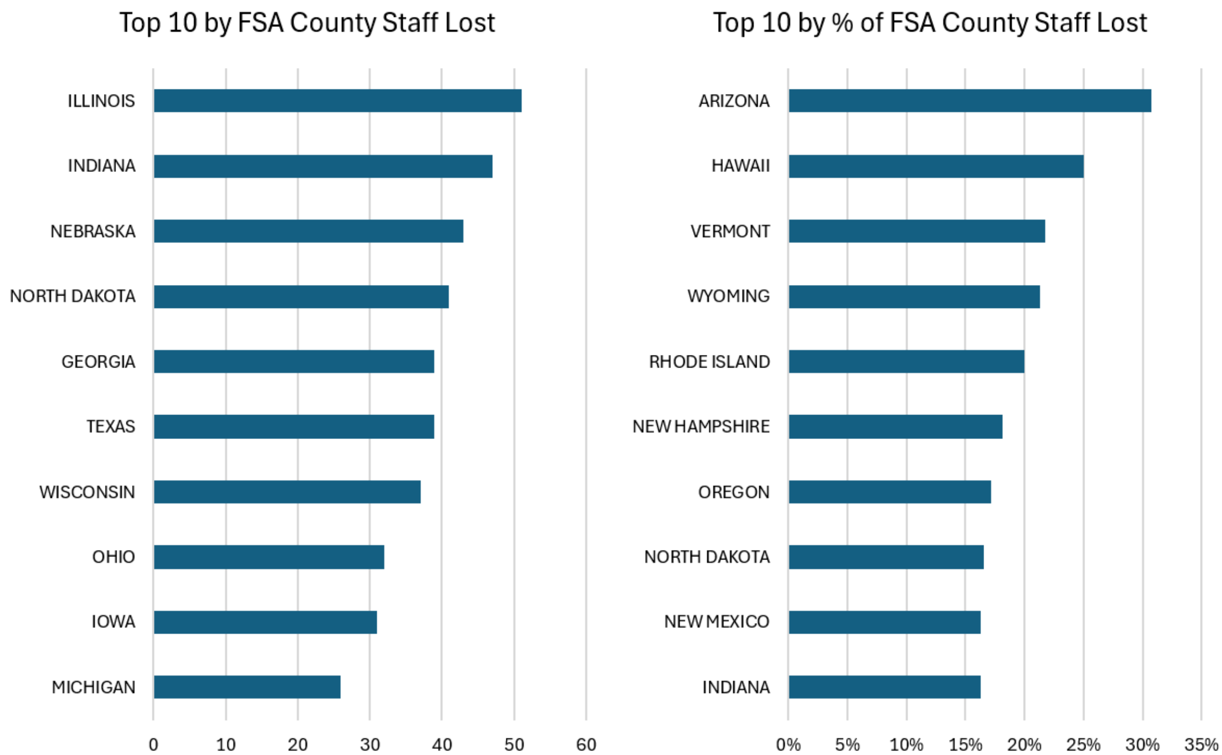
***FSA County Employees: Local Impact of Staffing Reductions***

Net staffing reductions among FSACO employees were widely distributed across rural America. Among counties that started the year with FSA County staff, federal data shows a net reduction of FSA County employees in 704 (34%) counties in the United States and territories. Staffing was flat in 1,122 (54%) counties, with only 232 (11%) showing a net increase. Among counties that started the year with FSA County staff, 38 (2%) counties ended 2025 with no FSA County staff, including three counties unstaffed in Florida and four in Texas.

***FSA County Employees: Regional Highlights***

Major agricultural states in the Midwest and Southeast lost the most FSA County staff during 2025. The largest staffing losses were in Illinois (51), Indiana (48), Nebraska (43), North Dakota (41) and Georgia and Texas (39 each). Smaller states saw steeper percentage declines, with the largest in Arizona (31%), Hawaii (25%), Vermont (22%), Wyoming (21%), and Rhode Island (20%). Minnesota lost 7% of its FSA County staff. Two states–Indiana and North Dakota–appear on both lists, meaning they lost both large numbers of staff and a substantial share of their total FSA County workforce.

*Figure 2: Top 10 States with FSA County Staff Losses (Jan 2025-Jan 2026)*



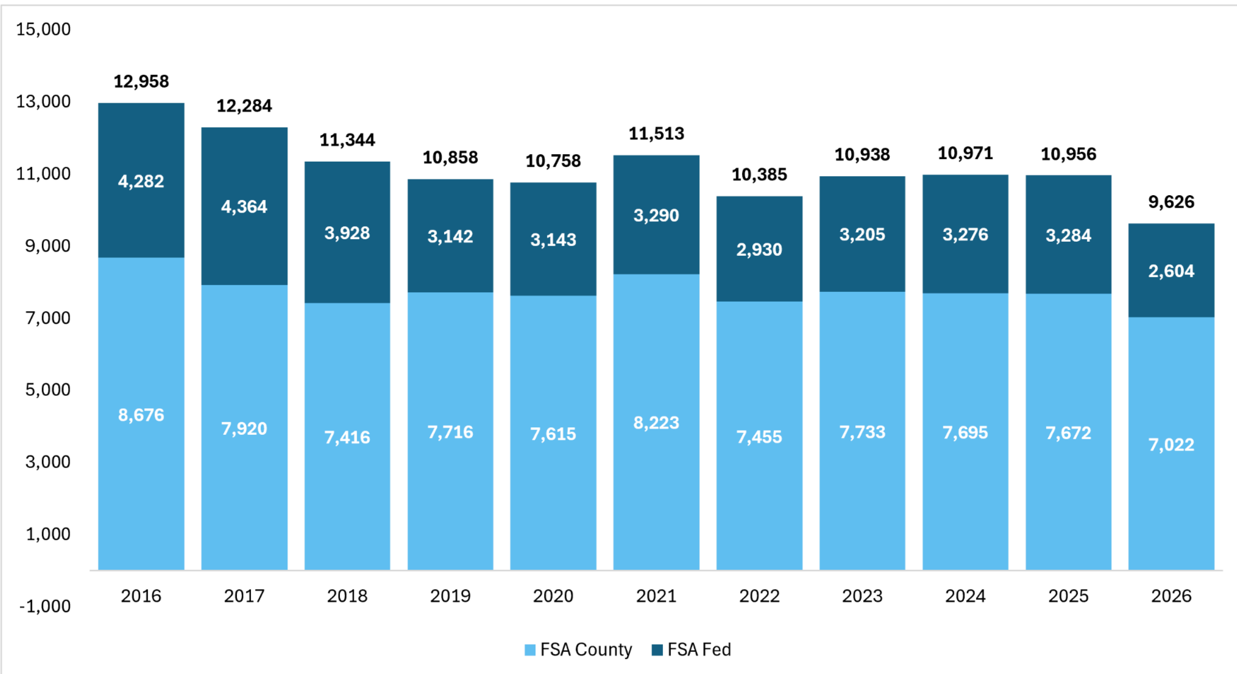

*Source: FSA County staff provided via FOIA on April 8, 2026*

The formerly staffed county offices that ended 2025 with zero FSA County staff are spread widely across the West, Midwest, and Southeast.

***FSA Federal Employees: Compounding the Impact of FSA County Staffing Reductions***

USDA has historically staffed local FSA offices with a combination of FSA Federal and FSA County employees, the former being locally stationed staff who are employed directly by the Farm Service Agency. FSA Federal employee data, which the federal government published at [data.opm.gov](data.opm.gov) on March 4, 2026, shows that headcount declined among FSA Federal employees at more than double the rate of FSA County employees. Headcount among FSA Federal employees fell by 21% in 2025, compared to 8% for FSA County employees.

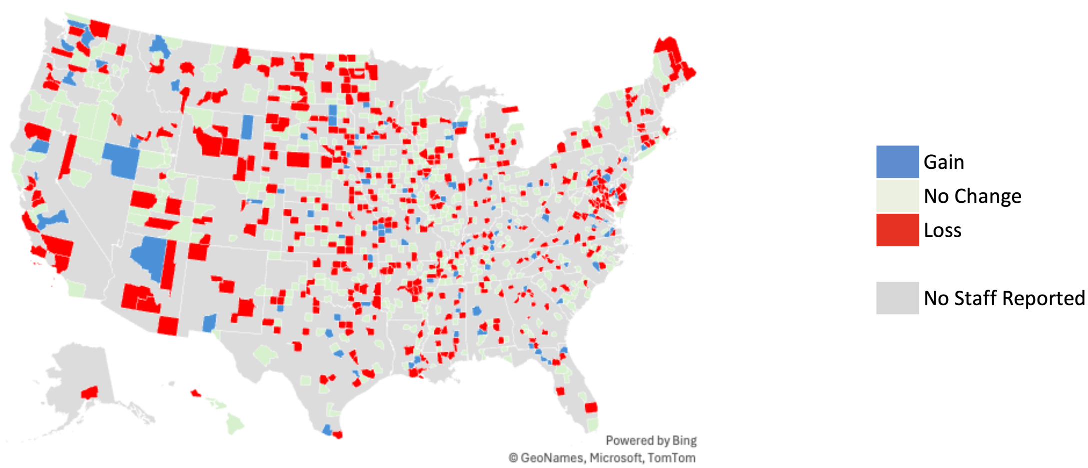
**Figure 3: Count of FSA County and FSA Federal Employees (Feb 2016- Jan 2026)**




*Source: Analysis by National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and Prospect Partners, LLC, based on federal data. FSA County data provided on April 8, 2026 by the Farm Service Agency through a Freedom of Information Act request. FSA federal data obtained on April 9, 2026 from the US Office of Personnel Management through http://data.opm.gov.*

FSA Federal employee staffing levels declined in 45% of counties and were flat in 44% of counties. In that same period, 11% of counties experienced a net increase in FSA Federal staff. Nationwide, 127 counties lost all of their FSA Federal employees in 2025, reducing the number of counties with FSA Federal staff from 932 to 805.

*Figure 4: Net Staffing Change Among FSA Federal Employees in US Counties (Jan 2025-Jan 2026)*




*Source: Office of Personnel Management*

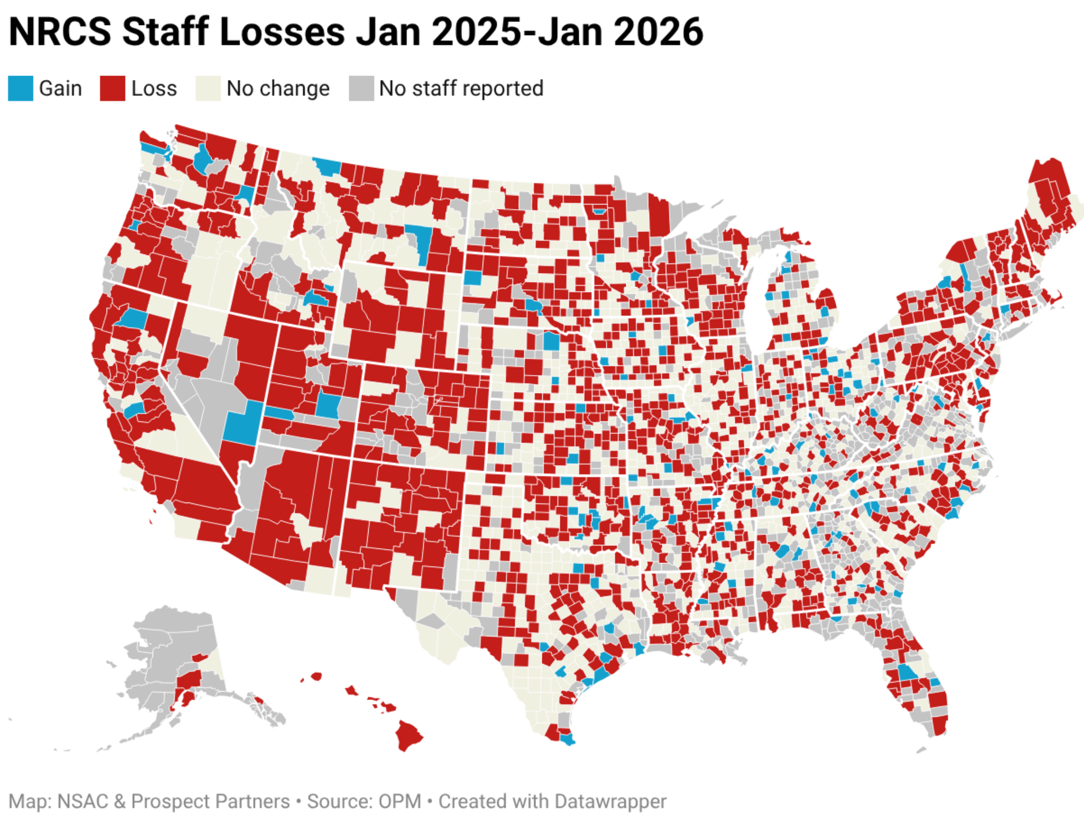
***Conservation Staff Depleted***

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) lost 23% of its staff between January 2025 and January 2026. NRCS staff work directly with farmers and landowners to identify conservation practices that are well-suited to their needs and local natural resource concerns. They provide vital technical assistance for farmers and landowners and help them apply for and manage contracts with conservation programs that help share the cost of conservation practices. The NRCS staff position that experienced the largest losses was Soil Conservationists, with a loss of 711 Soil Conservationists during the time period and an additional 283 Soil Conservation Technicians. Soil Conservationists are the primary field staff who work directly with landowners on conservation planning and implementation and Technicians provide field-level support for conservation work, often handling site assessments, measurements, and installation oversight alongside Soil Conservationists.

Examining NRCS staff losses at the county level shows more clearly how many US farmers, ranchers, and landowners now lack access to local NRCS staff in their counties. In January 2025, 2,386 counties across the US had NRCS staff working in their local county office. By January 2026, 141 of those counties had lost 100% of their NRCS staff. This means that farmers and landowners in those counties lost staff with local relationships and local knowledge and that the remaining NRCS staff are now stretched thin over larger geographic areas.

The map below shows the NRCS staffing levels for every county and the change from January 2025 to January 2026, using data from the Office of Personnel Management.

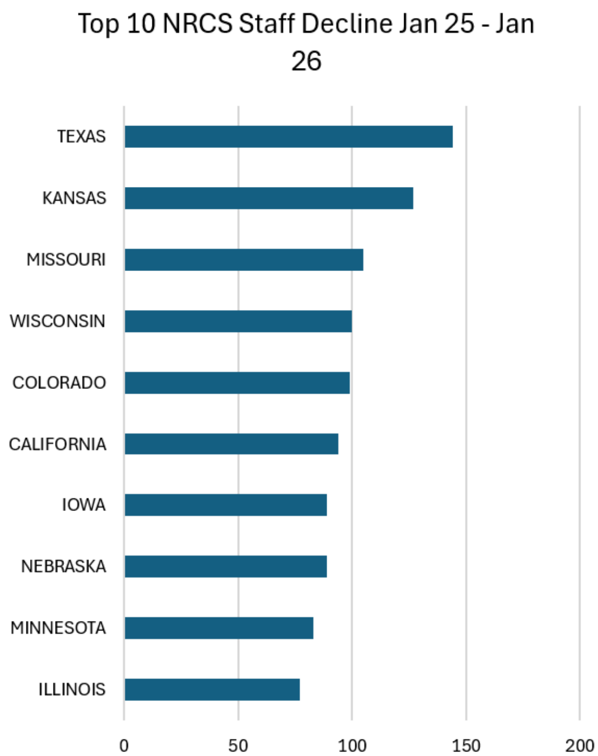
***Figure 5: County-Level NRCS Staffing Losses (Jan 2025-Jan 2026)***

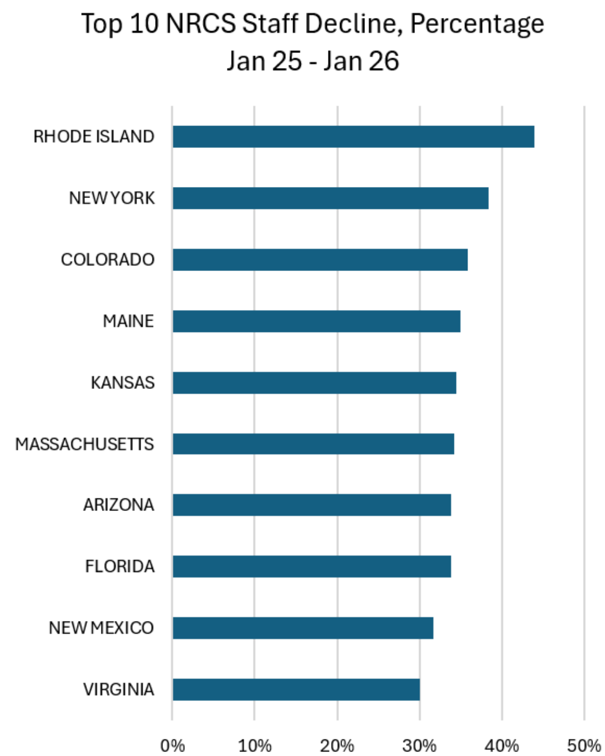



*Source: Office of Personnel Management (OPM)*

Major agricultural states in the Midwest and West lost the most NRCS staff during 2025. The largest staffing losses were in Texas (144), Kansas (127), Missouri (105), Wisconsin (100), and Colorado (99). States with smaller starting NRCS staff saw deeper percentage declines, with the largest in Rhode Island (44%), New York (38%), Colorado (36%), and Maine (35%). Kansas, Massachusetts, Arizona, and Florida all lost 34% of their NRCS staff.

***Figure 6: Top 10 States with NRCS Staff Losses (Jan 2025-Jan 2026)***



## ALL USDA AGENCIES:

***Staffing Decline Across All USDA Agencies, Staffing Increase in the Immediate Office of the Secretary***

Between January 2025 and January 2026, the USDA lost approximately 20,000 employees according to staffing data published by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. Every USDA agency was affected and staff losses were spread across the entire nation. The only exception to the trend was the Immediate Office of the Secretary, which experienced an 18% increase in staff.

Our analysis attributes the majority of staff losses (~15,000) to the so-called Deferred Resignation Program, a program run by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) to encourage federal employees to voluntarily leave their positions. However, continuing announcements from US Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins suggest that additional cuts should be expected nationwide and across all USDA agencies.

On July 24, 2025, Secretary Rollins released a memo (SM-1078-015) announcing a planned reorganization of the USDA. Drafted without consultation with farmers, Congress, or other stakeholders, the public responded with widespread concern. Secretary Rollins subsequently announced an ad hoc, informal opportunity to comment on the reorganization, which generated 46,845 responses. According to the USDA's own analysis, 82% of comments were negative, expressing serious concerns with the reorganization. Major themes of concern included the loss of local oversight and expertise, reduction in personnel and resources, and a desire for adequate staffing in every county.

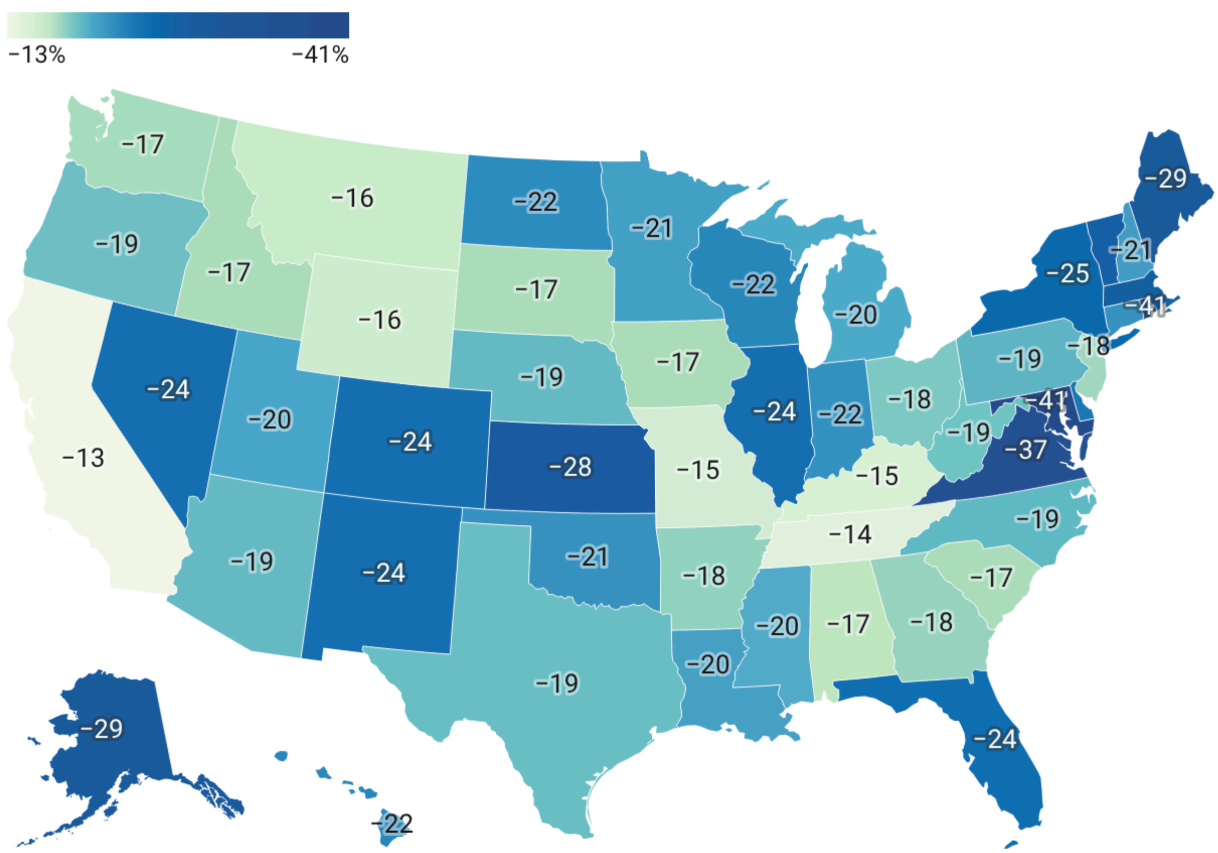
Despite these overwhelmingly negative responses and continued concern from stakeholders about local presence, the Secretary has continued to move forward with reorganization plans to relocate agency headquarters and leadership. Thus far, the USDA has released agency level plans for the Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services; Food Safety and Inspection Service; Research, Education, and Economics; and the USDA Forest Service. Reporting on employee reactions to the reorganization plan suggests that relocation will lead to further staff losses, exacerbating the existing USDA staffing crisis with negative consequences on farmer and rancher facing services: a recent survey by the American Federation of Government Employees, for example, found that 76% of its members do not plan to relocate when required by the reorganization plan and would instead leave their positions.

***Staff Losses Are Nationwide***

While the USDA and Secretary Rollins have attempted to frame their reorganization as a move out of the nation's capital and closer to farmers and ranchers, the reality is that 97% of USDA staff worked outside of the District of Columbia at the beginning of Secretary Rollins' appointment. After massive staff losses, by January 2026 the percentage of staffing outside DC fell by one quarter of a percent. Meanwhile, 98% of the USDA staff lost between January 2025 and January 2026 were outside of Washington, DC (19,259 employees).

The map below shows the percentage and number of USDA staff lost in each state between January 2025 and January 2026.

***Figure 7: USDA Staff Percent Losses January 2025-January 2026***



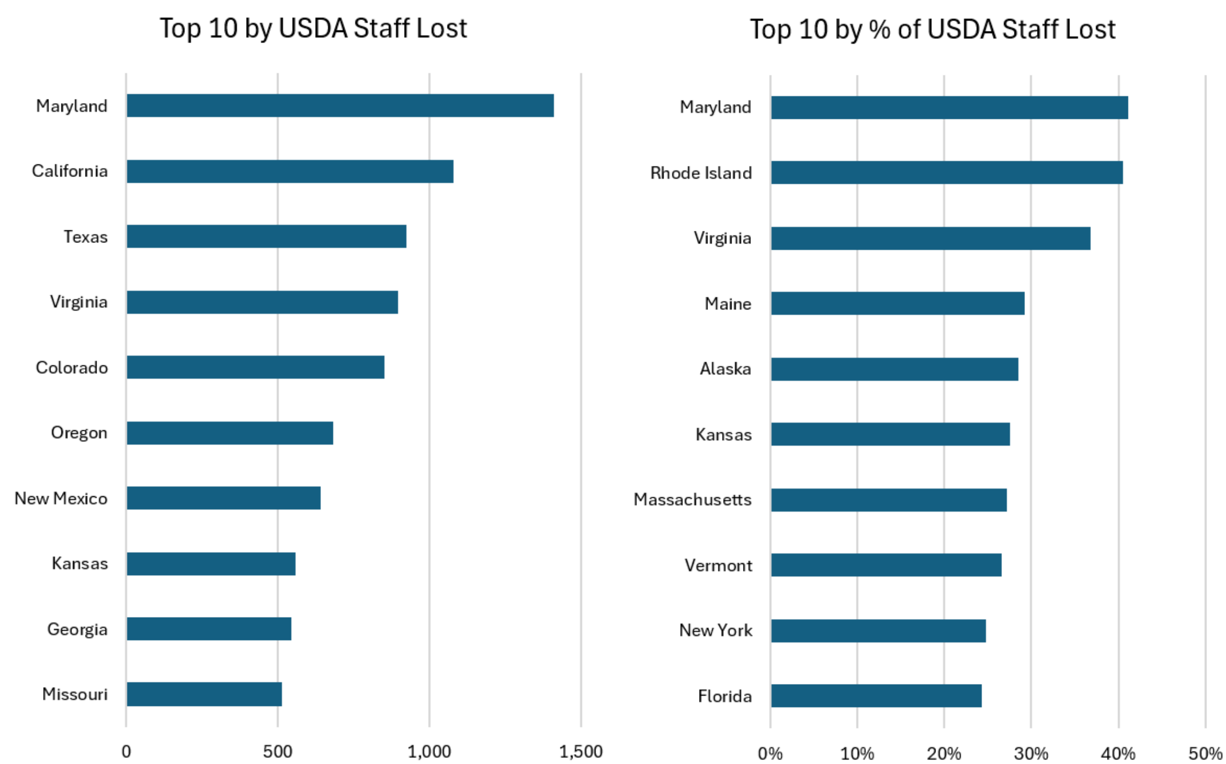

Map: NSAC & Prospect Partners • Source: OPM, FOIA • Created with Datawrapper

*Source: Office of Personnel Management (OPM), FSA County staff provided via FOIA on April 8, 2026*

Every state and territory lost USDA staff during this time period. The states that lost the highest number of staff were Maryland (1,411), California (1,080), Texas (925), Virginia (896), Colorado (850), Oregon (682), New Mexico (640), Kansas (559), Georgia (546), and Missouri (514).

The relative impact of staffing losses was unevenly spread, with multiple states losing over 20% of staff. The 10 states experiencing the largest percentage staff losses include: Maryland (41%), Rhode Island (41%), Virginia (37%), Maine (29%), Alaska (29%), Kansas (28%), Massachusetts (27%), Vermont (27%), New York (25%), and Florida (24%).

***Figure 8: Top 10 States with USDA Staff Losses (Jan 2025-Jan 2026)***




*Source: Office of Personnel Management (OPM), FSA County staff provided via FOIA on April 8, 2026*

USDA also experienced a dramatic loss of highly experienced and skilled staff. Between January 2025 and January 2026, the number of staff with more than ten years of service declined by nearly 7,000 (from 45,247 in 2025 to just 38,291 in 2026). These experienced mid and late-career staff carry irreplaceable institutional knowledge that supports the functioning of the department.

***Every USDA Agency Lost Staff***

While the overall loss of 1 in 5 USDA employees is already staggering, some USDA agencies had even more significant staffing losses. The Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement (OPPE) lost more than half of their staff (55%), the Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA) lost 41%, National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) 40%, Rural Development (RD) 36%, and National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) 36%. Staff losses at NIFA are particularly troubling as the agency was still struggling to rebuild after losing more than half of its staff during a relocation in 2019 that the Government Accountability Office reported was poorly managed.

***Table 1: USDA Staff Losses by Agency (Jan 2025-Jan 2026)***

| USDA Agency | Jan-25 | Jan-26 | % Staff Loss |
|---|---:|---:|---:|
| **Office Of Partnerships And Public Engagement** | **53** | **24** | **-55%** |
| **Office Of Budget And Program Analysis** | **59** | **35** | **-41%** |
| **National Institute Of Food And Agriculture** | **473** | **284** | **-40%** |
| **Rural Development** | **4,873** | **3,097** | **-36%** |
| **National Agricultural Statistics Service** | **781** | **498** | **-36%** |
| **FPAC Business Center** | **1,594** | **1,030** | **-35%** |
| **Departmental Administration** | **507** | **330** | **-35%** |
| **Food And Nutrition Service** | **1,834** | **1,202** | **-34%** |
| **Civil Rights** | **148** | **97** | **-34%** |
| **Economic Research Service** | **292** | **198** | **-32%** |
| **Agricultural Research Service** | **7,109** | **4,916** | **-31%** |

| USDA Agency | Jan-25 | Jan-26 | % Staff Loss |
|---|---|---|---|
| Office Of Communications | 40 | 29 | -28% |
| National Appeals Division | 66 | 48 | -27% |
| Office Of The Chief Financial Officer | 989 | 730 | -26% |
| Office Of The Chief Economist | 67 | 50 | -25% |
| Office Of The Chief Information Officer | 1,585 | 1,191 | -25% |
| Foreign Agricultural Service | 713 | 543 | -24% |
| Office Of The General Counsel | 275 | 210 | -24% |
| Natural Resources Conservation Service | 11,861 | 9,078 | -23% |
| Animal And Plant Health Inspection Se.. | 8,672 | 6,663 | -23% |
| Farm Service Agency (Federal) | 3,284 | 2,604 | -21% |
| Homeland Security Staff | 57 | 46 | -19% |
| Risk Management Agency | 418 | 351 | -16% |
| Forest Service | 31,257 | 26,260 | -16% |
| Office Of The Inspector General | 422 | 359 | -15% |
| Agricultural Marketing Service | 4,478 | 3,890 | -13% |
| Food Safety And Inspection Service | 8,310 | 7,444 | -10% |
| Farm Service Agency (County) | 7672 | 7022 | -8% |
| Office Of The Secretary Of Agriculture | 97 | 114 | 18% |
| Total | 97,986 | 78,343 | -20% |

*Source: Office of Personnel Management (OPM), FSA County staff provided via FOIA on April 8, 2026*

## METHODOLOGY

The number and employment details of FSA County staff are not regularly reported by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) since county staff are non-federal employees and technically employees of the local elected FSA County committees. To obtain data on FSA County staff changes, we filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the FSA requesting monthly snapshots of FSA County employees from January 2016 to January 2026. On April 8, 2026, FSA responded to our FOIA request with aggregate counts of employees for each office, county, and state as well as aggregate counts of positions, grades, and tenure.

All other data was obtained by the authors from U.S. Office of Personnel Management website data.opm.gov on April 9, 2026.

*We wish to express our appreciation to staff at the US Office of Personnel Management and the USDA Farm Service Agency whose efforts benefit the lives of farmers and ranchers and improve the accessibility of federal data. They have made our work both meaningful and possible.*

## AUTHORS

This paper is a joint initiative of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and Prospect Partners, LLC.

**Becky Schewe, Ph.D.**
Research and Policy Analysis
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Becky has spent nearly twenty years researching agriculture, rural communities, and the environment. She holds an M.S. in Rural Sociology and a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is a passionate advocate for a sustainable agricultural and food system and evidence-based policy. She comes to NSAC from the Maxwell School for Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University where she has researched agricultural and food system policy impacts, conservation behaviors, and their connection with social systems like labor equity.

**Bernie Kluger**
Managing Partner
Prospect Partners, LLC
Bernie has led strategic realignments, crisis recoveries, and major capacity-building initiatives in government, higher education, and the private sector. Prior to joining Prospect Partners, Bernie served as enterprise lead for organizational effectiveness and workforce development at the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). At USDA, Bernie tackled complex multi-stakeholder negotiations that delivered results for the public, including a nationwide hiring surge that powered a $40 billion expansion in operational capacity. Bernie holds a B.S. in Political Economy from Williams College and an M.B.A. from Columbia University. He lives in Washington, DC.