

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 20, 2025

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

Mr. Stephen Ehikian
Acting Administrator
U.S. General Services Administration
1800 F Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20405

Dear Secretary Rollins and Acting Administrator Ehikian,

We are writing to express our concerns regarding reports of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) plans to close the statewide offices for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), and USDA Rural Development (RD) in Syracuse, New York.¹ Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has touted \$498,273 in savings by terminating the lease through the General Services Administration (GSA) for the 33,548-square-foot space, which houses three critical USDA agencies for New Yorkers.² However, this disastrous course of action imperils all three agencies' ability to assist rural New York communities and our state's farmers.

It is our understanding that NRCS was the primary lease holder for the Syracuse office space, and by terminating this lease, DOGE has also recklessly harmed the work of FSA and RD throughout New York State. In recent weeks, these agencies have lost staff at the Syracuse offices and statewide to the buyout, layoffs, and paid administrative leave, which wastes taxpayer money and forces valuable employees to sit on the sidelines.

These USDA agencies provide vital services to agricultural producers, scientists, and rural communities across New York. The Farm Service Agency offers financial assistance and loans to farmers and ranchers for conservation needs, post-disaster recovery, and income support. The NRCS manages and provides technical assistance to farmers, ranchers and

¹ <https://www.syracuse.com/politics/cny/2025/03/trump-aims-to-close-syracuse-office-that-helps-farmers-leaving-dozens-of-scientists-in-limbo.html>

² <https://doge.gov/savings>

landowners in New York for key conservation programs that mitigate the impacts of natural disasters, enhance water quality, safeguard wildlife habitats, and reduce soil erosion. USDA RD offers important loans, grants, loan guarantees, and technical assistance to residents, farmers, businesses, non-profits, and municipalities across rural areas in New York. Its programs create jobs, advance economic development, and support essential services, ranging from water, communications infrastructure, health care, and housing. The planned termination of the lease for the Syracuse office space, as well as the recent staffing cuts in New York, could severely hamper rural New Yorkers' ability to access crucial federal resources and assistance from the USDA.

Apart from the impact that this closure could have on those who are serviced by the Syracuse office, we are also concerned about the employees who work for NRCS, FSA, and RD throughout New York. This closure would affect—and recent terminations have affected—the USDA staff who have remained dedicated to providing New Yorkers with valuable information and high-quality services.

Therefore, we urge you to not only keep the USDA's NRCS, FSA, and RD office space in Syracuse open but to also ensure that the agencies have adequate staffing at their service centers to meet rural New Yorkers' and farmers' needs. We request a written response by March 31, 2025, to address the following questions and concerns:

1. Please share why the proposed closure of the USDA's Syracuse office space is under consideration.
 - a. How would the potential closure of the Syracuse offices impact USDA's capacity to serve New Yorkers?
 - b. Additionally, how would the closure of the statewide Syracuse offices impact the coordination and collaboration across the USDA and with local service centers?
 - c. In light of the Trump administration's return-to-work requirements, where would employees at the Syracuse offices be relocated to? Does the administration have plans to close any of the local service centers across the state?
2. We have received multiple reports that constituents have had difficulty reaching New York-based staff at the USDA over the phone. Please share current USDA staffing arrangements for New York. What plans does the administration have to restore staffing capacity in-state and ensure that New Yorkers continue to have access to the essential resources and programs overseen by FSA, NRCS, and USDA RD?

Sincerely,

Kirsten Gillibrand

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Charles E. Schumer

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator

John W. Mannion

John W. Mannion
Member of Congress