

Union of Concerned Scientists

Science for a Healthy Planet and Safer World

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USDA Buries Sweeping Plan Prioritizing Climate Science



What happened: The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) prevented the release of a plan for how the agency can effectively respond to the impacts of climate change, such as by reducing greenhouse gas emissions through practices like increasing carbon storage in crops and soils. The plan was finalized in the early days of the Trump administration, but a senior USDA official had stopped its release.

Why it matters: Science is one of the most powerful tools we have to deal with real-world problems. By burying this climate change plan, the USDA is failing to provide the nation with the best available science on climate change related threats to food, agriculture, and natural resources. The agency is also sending a chilling message, that senior leadership refuses to prioritize climate change research and refuses to assure the American people that this research needs to continue.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) buried a science-based strategic plan addressing the threats of climate change to food, agriculture, and natural resources. The USDA's [climate resilience science plan](#) was not released despite being finalized, thereby failing to provide the agency with a comprehensive synthesis of climate-related information from the USDA's research wing and a path forward to ensure that adequate resources are directed towards the most pressing climate-related science. The stated goal of the science plan was to map out "the science that USDA needs to pursue over the next five to eight years for the department to meet the needs of the nation." However, during the internal clearance process, a senior official had stopped the release of the science plan. The science plan, [a copy of which](#) was shared with Politico, was supposed to be an update to a similar [2010 plan](#) on climate science, which was publicly released during the Obama administration.

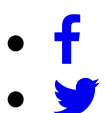
Strategic plans are important documents that guide the focus of an agency and detail how an agency can achieve these aims. The 33-page plan had set several goals to address a broad range of climate change effects, such by as reducing greenhouse gas emissions through practices like increasing carbon storage in crops and soils. The document acknowledged that climate change is already affecting farmers and ranchers as well as natural ecosystems. It suggested that farmers can make money by cutting greenhouse gas emissions and adopting practices that promote carbon sequestration. The science plan proposed making climate change "an explicit and functional component" of "all USDA mission areas through the timely development, delivery, and application of relevant science," and said that the USDA should be working to "increase public awareness of climate change" and how it is likely to affect agriculture and forestry.

Recently, the USDA under the Trump administration has carried out a number of anti-science actions that seem designed to diminish the good work of their researchers. The agency forced its researchers to label their peer-reviewed work as "[preliminary](#)" and refused to [publicize the work](#) of USDA scientists that had studied climate change impacts. The Trump administration is [relocating](#) the Economic Research Service and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture – two research sub-agencies that were cited as important partners in carrying out the science plan – from Washington DC to Kansas City, an action that is causing the scientists to quit conducting research for the USDA.

When agencies bury scientific work, the public loses out on valuable information that could lead to more effective government decisions. In this case, by nixing the climate resilience science plan, the USDA is failing to elevate the importance of climate change as an agency priority. They are also refusing to provide a strategy going forward that would allow federal scientists to continue researching the effects of climate change on agriculture. This ultimately provides a disservice to all Americans, especially to farmers and ranchers, as it restricts the ability of the public to obtain science-based information on the harmful effects of climate change.

Last Revised Date: August 29, 2019

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