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August 8, 2017

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

I write concerning a recent news report in the *Guardian* regarding a series of internal USDA communications showing that USDA leadership officials are seeking to remove mentions of phrases such as “climate change,” “reduce greenhouse gases,” and “sequester carbon,” among others, and replace those terms with other terminology such as “weather extremes.”¹

As a firm believer in the science that underpins the urgent imperative to address climate change, the content of these emails is of great concern to me. USDA ought to be unequivocal in pursuing policies that uphold scientific integrity, yet these emails from senior USDA staff appear to run directly counter to such a pursuit. USDA should be open and transparent regarding the findings of agency research and the components of agency program activities that involve the topic of climate change. Thoroughly peer-reviewed science has routinely chronicled the significant risks that unchecked climate change poses to our producers and the broader domestic agricultural and forest products industry. While the impacts of climate change can and often do result in “weather extremes,” and a focus on “building soil organic matter” and “increasing nutrient use efficiency” are important goals for producers, it is also important that producers understand the science behind why these changes are occurring and why adaptation to climate change is necessary.

Censoring the agency’s scientists and natural resource professionals as they try to communicate these risks and help producers adapt to a changing climate does a great disservice to the men and women who grow the food, fuel, and fiber that drive our economy, not to mention the agency’s civil servants themselves. This censorship makes the United States less competitive, less food secure, and puts our rural families and their communities at risk. Because of the significant implications of the emails reported in the *Guardian* story, and perhaps others like them, I request that you promptly respond to the following questions.

- 1) Other than the emails reported in the *Guardian*, has any other USDA official or employee issued a directive, written or verbal, concerning the removal of the terms “climate change,” “reduce greenhouse gases,” “sequester carbon,” or any other terms related to climate change? If yes, please provide copies of any such directive(s) and names of individuals who verbally provided any such directives.

¹ US federal department is censoring use of the term ‘climate change’, emails reveal. The Guardian, August 7, 2017.

- 2) Why is USDA making this change to its terminology regarding climate change?
- 3) What impact is the change of terminology having on USDA's implementation of its programs and associated activities?
- 4) Will this change in terminology impact what projects, activities and research proposals are funded in areas related to climate change?
- 5) Does USDA intend to pursue a formal rulemaking, or a separate public process, to accompany this significant change in executive branch policy?
- 6) Given this change in terminology, please describe any other changes USDA is making regarding its work on climate change under the Trump Administration.
- 7) Are the USDA Climate Hubs poised to receive a new name without the word "climate" in the title?
- 8) Do you plan to eliminate USDA's Climate Hubs?
- 9) Is USDA still requiring agencies to report on activities related to the Department's Building Blocks for Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry?
- 10) Are USDA staff still allowed to participate in events and conferences related to climate change and conduct research on the impacts of climate change for American agriculture and forestry?
- 11) Please provide all documents, including emails, regarding any agency discussions or consideration regarding the use or nonuse of the terms "climate change," "reduce greenhouse gases," and "sequester carbon" or any other related terms, in USDA work or communications.
- 12) Is this change of terminology regarding climate change being coordinated or worked on with any persons in other federal agencies, with the White House, or with any persons outside the federal government? If yes, please identify any such individuals involved.

Please provide responses to the above questions no later than August 23, 2017. Thank you for your consideration and timely response to this letter.

Sincerely,



Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member