

The Honorable Stephen Alexander Vaden
Deputy Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

August 25, 2025

Dear Deputy Secretary Vaden:

On behalf of AmericanHort, thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) recently announced reorganization. AmericanHort represents more than 20,000 members and affiliated businesses across the horticulture supply chain, including breeders, growers, retailers, landscapers, and manufacturers. Nursery and greenhouse crops account for 15 percent of the total value of U.S. crop agriculture, and programs at USDA, particularly those supporting research, plant pest prevention, and mitigation—form the foundation of the critical infrastructure our industry relies on to thrive.

We recognize and appreciate USDA's intent to streamline operations, strengthen service delivery, and modernize agency functions through this reorganization. As these changes progress, we would like to share observations from the horticulture sector, along with ideas on how USDA and the industry can collaborate to ensure a smooth transition and continued success.

Key Areas for Collaboration

1. Building 580 and Pest Diagnostics

The National Plant Germplasm Quarantine Lab, National Clean Plant Network, and molecular diagnostics located at Building 580 are vital to rapid response efforts against pests and diseases. Disruption in these services could compromise USDA's ability to respond swiftly to threats such as *Phytophthora austrocedri* and *Ralstonia*. Ensuring continuity of these services will help USDA maintain strong safeguards for plant health. We welcome opportunities to partner on strategies or locations that protect diagnostic capacity and ensure readiness for emerging threats.

2. Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) and the U.S. National Arboretum

BARC and the National Arboretum provide unique capabilities in research, breeding, and public engagement. Many scientists at the Arboretum are based at Beltsville, and their work is highly valued by our industry. As USDA evaluates

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future structures, we encourage continued support for these programs and stand ready to highlight their importance to horticulture and the public.

3. Regional Coordination and Tailored Support

ARS Area Offices and other regionally based services have played an important role in addressing localized challenges—from invasive pests to climate and soil variability. As functions are streamlined, we encourage USDA to maintain mechanisms for regional input and responsiveness so that research and funding decisions remain closely aligned with on-the-ground needs.

4. Workforce Transitions

We understand that reorganization may involve relocations and workforce changes. To help preserve USDA's scientific leadership, it will be important to retain expertise and institutional knowledge. AmericanHort would welcome discussion on how the industry can help support knowledge transfer, staff retention, and continuity of research projects during this transition.

5. Student Programs and Research Capacity

Realignment of student and partnership programs presents an opportunity to strengthen pipelines for future agricultural researchers. We encourage USDA to maintain a strong emphasis on training, internships, and recruitment efforts, and we are eager to explore ways to connect students with opportunities in horticultural research and industry careers.

Moving Forward

AmericanHort values USDA's commitment to efficiency and modernization and believes that, with thoughtful planning and stakeholder engagement, this reorganization can strengthen the Department's capacity to serve U.S. agriculture. We look forward to working collaboratively to ensure that critical research, plant health, and workforce development programs remain robust and continue to serve the needs of specialty crop producers and the broader horticultural community.

Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to contribute to this important conversation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Matthew D. Mika". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Matthew" being more prominent and the last name "Mika" following in a similar style.

Matthew D. Mika
Vice President, Advocacy and Government Affairs
AmericanHort