



United States Department of Agriculture
Office of Inspector General
Washington, D.C. 20250



OCT 21 2019

The Honorable Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senate
713 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Hirono and Members of the Senate:

Thank you for your letter dated June 25, 2019, requesting the Office of Inspector General (OIG) investigate potential instances of suppression and alteration of scientific reports, documents, or communications, on topics such as climate change, produced by the Department of Agriculture (USDA). In your letter, you expressed concerns regarding instances of retaliation and political decision-making impacting USDA's ability to fulfill its mission to produce scientific products used to inform a wide range of practical and policy decisions. Additionally, you asked us to investigate the loss of capacity generally, including through reduction in resources, staff, and experience levels of staff, to complete research and science at USDA. On July 3, 2019, we met with your staff to discuss these concerns and our plan to conduct an inspection regarding these matters.


In response to your concerns, the OIG's Office of Audit has initiated an inspection to address the issues raised in your request. Our objective is to determine how USDA research agencies fulfill the USDA mission to produce scientific research products. Specifically, we will determine whether changes in policy and/or process impacted the publication of scientific reports, documents, and/or communication of USDA's research results during Fiscal Years 2017–2019. In addition, we will analyze the impact of any changes in resources, staff, and staff experience levels on the publication of research results during this period.

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If your staff has any questions, please have them contact Deltrick Johnson, Deputy Counsel, at (202) 720-9110.

Sincerely,



Phyllis K. Fong
Inspector General

Cc:

The Honorable Richard A. Blumenthal, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Cory Booker, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Sherrod Brown, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Tom Carper, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Chris Coons, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Dianne Feinstein, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Kamala Harris, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Tim Kaine, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Patrick Leahy, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Bob Menendez, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Jeff Merkley, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Patty Murray, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Tom Udall, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Chris Van Hollen, U.S. Senator