

July 31, 2025

The Honorable Brooke Rollins  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Re: America First Memorandum for USDA Arrangements and Research Security

Dear Secretary Rollins,

On behalf of COGR and our member institutions, I write seeking clarification on USDA's research security initiative outlined in the July 8 memorandum, "[America First Memorandum for USDA Arrangements and Research Security](#)."

COGR is the national authority on federal policies and regulations affecting U.S. research institutions. We provide a unified voice for over 228 research universities and affiliated academic medical centers and research institutes. Our member institutions perform cutting-edge research that keeps America at the forefront of scientific and technological advancement and trains the next generation of scientists and engineers. Our work strengthens the research partnership between the federal government and research institutions and furthers the frontiers of science, technology, and knowledge. We advocate for effective and efficient research policies and regulations that maximize and safeguard research investments and minimize administrative and cost burdens.

COGR and its members value the longstanding partnership with USDA. Our member institutions conduct critical agricultural and related research that supports the resilience and success of American agriculture. We share your commitment to protecting U.S. research from foreign interference and appreciate efforts to align the Department's research security policies with those of other federal agencies to promote a consistent and coordinated approach to research security. We also recognize the importance of maintaining both the integrity and openness of the U.S. research enterprise, and we stand ready to work constructively with USDA to implement effective policies that strengthen research security while promoting responsible open collaborations.

Several of our institutions have reported that the initial implementation of the memorandum is already affecting ongoing research activities. To support effective compliance, we seek clarification on several aspects of the memorandum, outlined in the attached addendum. We welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues and encourage the USDA to issue guidance and FAQs to assist USDA partner organizations in navigating the new policy.

We appreciate USDA's continued support for the academic research community and look forward to working together to ensure that the research security policies are implemented in a manner that sustains the strength and global competitiveness of the U.S. agricultural research enterprise.



We are grateful for your leadership and look forward to continued collaboration in advancing our shared goals. Please contact me or Kevin Wozniak, COGR's Director for Research Security & Intellectual Property, at [kwozniak@cogr.edu](mailto:kwozniak@cogr.edu) with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M. Owens". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "M." and the last name "Owens" clearly distinguishable.

Matt Owens  
President

Cc: Dr. Spiro Stefanu, Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics  
Dr. Deirdra Chester, Director, Office of the Chief Scientist

## ADDENDUM

### Requests for Clarifications

As the implementation of the USDA's research security memorandum begins, several COGR member institutions have reported early impacts on ongoing research activities. To promote consistent and effective compliance across the research community, we respectfully request clarification on specific provisions of the memorandum, as outlined below. We also welcome the opportunity for further dialogue with the USDA to better understand the process and timing for the review of existing arrangements so we may provide guidance to our members in an effort to minimize the unintended consequences on critical research collaborations.

**Arrangements and Sub-arrangements:** The memorandum references “arrangement” and “sub-arrangement” without defining either term. We seek confirmation on whether USDA intends for these terms to include cooperative agreements, research awards, and sub-awards to universities and non-profit research institutions. Understanding what qualifies as an arrangement or sub-arrangement will provide clarity on the scope of the memo's directives to our members.

**Foreign Ownership, Control, or Influence:** The memorandum adopts the definition “foreign ownership, control, or influence” (FOCI) from 32 C.F.R. §117.11 and §2004.34. However, both §117.11 and §2004.34 limit an entity from being considered under FOCI to situations in which a foreign interest influences the U.S. entity's management or operations in a manner that (i) results in the unauthorized access to classified information or (ii) adversely affects the performance of a contract or agreement requiring access to classified information. Is it the intent of the USDA to limit FOCI determination to arrangements and sub-arrangements involving classified information or more broadly to all USDA-funded activities? If the latter, clarification on the statutory basis expanding the definition beyond controlled research and on how the definition would apply to entities not performing controlled research will help institutions evaluate the applicability and scope of the FOCI standard under this memorandum.

**Research Security Training:** The memorandum requires that “each applicant” complete research security training within one year prior to the application and annually thereafter. Will USDA accept completion of the NSF SECURE Center's Consolidated Training Module as sufficient to fulfill this requirement? Additionally, we request clarification on whether this training mandate applies only to the individual applicant or also to senior/key personnel associated with the award.

**Foreign Talent Recruitment Programs:** The memorandum requires that the entity employing the recipient must “prohibit applicants who...have in the past 10 years participated in malign FTRPs from working on projects...” This requirement appears to exceed the statutory language in 42 U.S.C. §19231, which prohibits current participation and requires, only “to the extent practicable”, that recipient institutions prohibit covered individuals participating in malign foreign talent recruitment programs from working on projects supported by research and development awards.” We respectfully request clarification on USDA's authority to impose this broader prohibition and whether USDA will issue guidance on assessing past participation.

**Access to USDA Facilities and Resources:** Member institutions have already reported instances of researchers being denied access to USDA facilities or databases without prior notice, including a previously approved work location. These actions are already disrupting collaborative research. We ask that USDA clarify the circumstances under which access may be denied and provide guidance on a formal notification and review process for affected researchers and institutions.

**Co-Authorship of Publications:** At least one member institution has reported that co-authors have been removed from scientific publications because of this new policy. We request clarification on how this policy aligns with established academic norms and USDA's Public Access Policy.

**Country of Citizenship:** At least one member institution has reported having been asked to provide lists of all participants and their citizenship status on current projects. We seek clarification of the timing and applicability of the requirement for applicants to provide an annual disclosure of all personnel who have worked or are working on projects supported by the USDA-funded R&D or S&T award.