



U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of Inspector General





OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

United States Department of Agriculture



DATE: March 13, 2025

TO: Joon Park
Acting Administrator
Agricultural Research Service

ATTN: Brandon Levin
Acting Associate Deputy Administrator
Agricultural Research Service

FROM: Steve Rickrode
Acting Assistant Inspector General for Audit

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RICKRODE

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Date: 2025.03.13
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SUBJECT: Prior OIG Engagements Relevant to the Agricultural Research Service's Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Funding Provided under the American Relief Act, 2025.

The American Relief Act, 2025, Pub. L. No. 118-158, signed on December 21, 2024, provided more than \$39.8 billion to the USDA to carry out projects and activities related to agricultural disaster assistance. Of this amount, the Act provided more than \$42.5 million to the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) for buildings and facilities. ARS is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's chief scientific in-house research agency, which currently includes 95 research locations.

As part of the Office of Inspector General's (OIG) oversight responsibility, we reviewed the results of prior OIG and Government Accountability Office (GAO) engagements that were relevant to the supplemental disaster funding provided by the American Relief Act, 2025.¹ We identified areas with reported past weaknesses and recommendations that may provide ARS insight when disbursing funds allotted by the American Relief Act, 2025. These results will help ARS determine whether to maintain or further strengthen existing controls for activities related to its supplemental disaster funding. By maintaining strong controls, agencies are better suited to provide the supplemental funds to those most impacted by disasters, while helping reduce or prevent potential fraud, waste, and abuse.

Based on our review, we identified the following findings and recommendations that ARS may consider to help ensure its activities operate effectively with the proper control environment. These engagements are listed in chronological order (most recent first). According to information maintained by the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO), as of March 10, 2025, some of the recommendations associated with these prior engagements have not yet been implemented. These outstanding recommendations are noted as applicable. In addition, we have undertaken a series of projects to evaluate the physical security and maintenance of ARS facilities. Accordingly, we identified two ongoing engagements that are also relevant to ARS'

¹ We included in our review recent related engagements with recommendations tracked by the Office of the Chief Financial Officer.

supplemental disaster funding and the results and corresponding recommendations, when issued, may provide ARS with additional insight.

Relevant OIG Reports

- *USDA's Implementation of the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility:*² OIG currently has an ongoing audit of USDA's National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF), which is USDA's highest biosafety level animal research laboratory. To conduct the audit, we interviewed ARS and laboratory officials, and reviewed documentation related to implementation of physical security controls at NBAF. We also conducted site visits to evaluate NBAF's implementation of physical security controls. This report is planned for issuance by May 2025.
- *Agricultural Research Service Northeast Area Facility's Condition and Security:*³ OIG currently has an ongoing inspection of a facility in ARS' Northeast Area. To conduct this inspection, we interviewed ARS officials and reviewed documentation to gain an understanding of the facility's physical and biosecurity levels, plans, procedures, and practices. We also conducted a site visit to observe if the facility's conditions and physical security were in compliance with the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Agriculture guidance. This report is planned for issuance by May 2025.
- [*Agricultural Research Service Midwest Area Facility Condition and Security:*](#)⁴ OIG performed an evaluation of an ARS facility's physical condition and security. To conduct our evaluation, we performed a site visit and toured the facility and grounds, with a focus on observing if the facility's conditions and physical security were in compliance with the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Agriculture guidance. OIG's report contained sensitive content, so it was withheld from public release due to concerns about the risk of circumvention of law. According to OCFO, as of March 10, 2025, the six recommendations remain open.

Related GAO Reports

We also noted the following GAO reports that ARS may want to consider, which include findings and recommendations relevant to the funding provided by the American Relief Act, 2025:

- [*Federal Real Property: Congress and Agencies Have Acted to Address Key High-Risk Issues but Challenges Remain;*](#)⁵
- [*High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness;*](#)⁶ and

² Engagement 50601-0001-31.

³ Engagement 02801-0002-21.

⁴ Inspection Report 02801-0001-21, *Agricultural Research Service Midwest Area Facility Condition and Security*, Nov. 2024.

⁵ GAO-25-108028, *Federal Real Property: Congress and Agencies Have Acted to Address Key High-Risk Issues but Challenges Remain*, Mar. 2025.

⁶ GAO-25-107743, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, Feb. 2025.

- [*Federal Real Property: Agencies Should Provide More Information about Increases in Deferred Maintenance and Repair.*](#)⁷

This memorandum contains publicly available information and will be posted in its entirety to our website (<https://usdaoig.oversight.gov>).

⁷ GAO-24-105485, *Agencies Should Provide More Information about Increases in Deferred Maintenance and Repair*, Nov. 2023.



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