



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Office of the General Counsel
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250-1400

April 16, 2020

Delivered via Electronic Mail

Austin R. Evers
American Oversight
1030 15th Street NW
Suite B255
Washington, District of Columbia 20005
Email: foia@americanoversight.org

Ricardo J. Salvador
Union of Concerned Scientists
1825 K Street NW
Suite 800
Washington, District of Columbia 20006

**Re: Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request No. 2020-DA-02829-F
First Interim Response**

Dear Mr. Evers and Mr. Salvador:

This is the first interim response to the March 4, 2020, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request you submitted to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Departmental FOIA Office (DFO). Your request sought the following records:

All electronic communications (including emails, email attachments, calendar invitations, calendar invitation attachments, or text messages) between (a) the USDA officials listed in Column A, and (b) any of the external individuals listed in Column B, below.

Column A: USDA Officials	Column B: External Individuals
i. Sonny Perdue, Secretary, and anyone communicating on his behalf, such as executive assistants, personal assistants, or schedulers	i. Michael Merriman
ii. Former Chief of Staff Heidi Green	ii. Edward Merriman
iii. Former Chief of Staff Ray Starling	iii. Dennis Walsh
iv. Chief of Staff Joby Young	iv. Kit Bond
v. Stephen Censky, Deputy Secretary	v. Vincent P. Dasta
	vi. Frank J. Joseph
	vii. Patrick J. Pedonti
	viii. Jay Shuman
	ix. Any employees or representatives of Americo Life Insurance Company, including Michael Merriman, and anyone communicating

vi. Donald Bice, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration	with an email address ending in americo.com
vii. Scott Hutchins, Deputy Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics	x. Any employees or representatives of Kit Bond Strategies, including Matthew Roney, Kenny Hulshof, Julie Murphy, and anyone communicating with an email address ending in kitbond.com
viii. Robert Johansson, Chief Economist	xi. Any employees or representatives of SS&C Technologies, including anyone communicating with an email address ending in ssctech.com
ix. Chris Hartley, Acting Administrator of the Economic Research Service	xii. Any employees or representatives of DST Systems, Inc.
x. Michelle Esch, Executive Director of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education & Economics Advisory Board	xiii. Any employees or representatives of DST Realty, Inc.
xi. J. Scott Angle, Director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture	xiv. Any employees or representatives of Broadway Square Partners
xii. Lillie Brady, Director of External and Intergovernmental Affairs	xv. Any employees or representatives of Penn Seven, LLC
xiii. Robert MacGregor, former Director of Intergovernmental and External Affairs and current Senior Advisor	xvi. Any employee or representatives of SCOL, Inc.
xiv. Kristi Boswell, Senior Advisor	xvii. Any employees or representatives of Project Leavitt
xv. Mary Dee Beal, Senior Advisor	xviii. Anyone communicating with an email address ending in jjmkc.com
xvi. Courtney Knupp, Chief of Staff for Research, Education, and Economics	
xvii. Brock Densel, Policy Advisor for Research, Education, and Economics	
xviii. Benny Young, Associate General Counsel	
xix. Anyone serving in the role of White House Liaison, including Sam Clovis	
xx. Former Senior Advisor Brian Klippenstein	

xxi. Any other USDA employees who participated in one or more site visits as part of the process to identify a new location for the Economic Research Service and National Institute of Food and Agriculture	
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Following American Oversight's (AO) submission of its initial request, the DFO asked AO, on March 11, 2020, for supplemental email information associated with the individuals and entities listed above in Column B in order to facilitate the agency's search efforts. On March 23, 2020, AO responded by providing email domains that USDA search to "identify communications with the individuals listed in [their] request."

@americo.com
@ipfs.com
@ficgroup.com
@kitbond.com
@protiviti.com
@ssctech.com
@sscinc.com
@dstsystems.com
@dsthealthsolutions.com
@jjmkc.com
@mcrealtyus.com

On March 23, 2020, pursuant to USDA regulation 7 C.F.R. § 1.4(c), the DFO routed parts of your request, specifically Items vii, ix, x, xi, xvi, and xvii in Column A, to the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area for processing and direct response to you.

Your request is being processed under the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

A search for responsive records was conducted by the DFO's telecommunications provider, the Client Experience Center (CEC). The CEC provides comprehensive, fee-for-service information technology (IT) associated operations, security, and technical support services to USDA end users. The CEC also implements and manages enterprise IT solutions for users Department-wide. The email accounts associated with individuals listed in your request were searched, from January 20, 2017 to December 31, 2019. The CEC search for emails, email attachments, calendar invitations, and calendar invitation attachments did not locate any records that are responsive to your FOIA request.

The DFO is continuing to process your request, specifically the text message portion, and will issue a final response once that is complete.

You have the right to appeal the DFO's determinations. Due to the need to issue more than one release of records to fully resolve your request, your appeal rights for this request will be provided to you in the DFO's final response letter.

You may seek dispute resolution services from the DFO's FOIA Public Liaison, Ms. Camille Aponte. Ms. Aponte may be contacted by telephone at (202) 505-0271, or electronically at Camille.Aponte@usda.gov or USDAFOIA@usda.gov.

You also have the option to seek assistance from the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS). Please visit <https://www.archives.gov/ogis/mediation-program/request-assistance> for information about how to request OGIS assistance in relation to a FOIA request.

If you have any questions regarding the processing of this request, please contact Ms. Melanie Enciso at (202) 694-5982, or electronically at melanie.enciso@usda.gov or USDAFOIA@usda.gov.

For additional information regarding USDA FOIA regulations and processes, please refer to the information available online at www.dm.usda.gov/foia.

The DFO appreciates the opportunity to assist you with this matter.

Sincerely,

Alexis R. Graves

Alexis R. Graves
Departmental FOIA Officer
Office of the General Counsel