Office of Information Affairs

June 8, 2025

Delivered via Electronic Mail
Elizabeth Haddix
American Oversight
1030 15th Street, NW
Suite B255
Washington, DC 20005
foia@americanoversight.org

Re: Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request No. 2025-OSEC-07030-F
Final Response

Dear Elizabeth Haddix:

This is the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Office of Information Affairs' (OIA) final response to the above-referenced FOIA request, which sought:

1. All email communications (including emails, email attachments, complete email chains, calendar invitations, and calendar invitation attachments) between any political appointee at your agency and any employee or representative of Ballard Partners, including, but not limited to, any of the following individuals:

   Ballard Partners Individuals:
   a. Anyone communicating from an email address ending in ballardpartners.com
   b. Brian Ballard
   c. Sylvester Luki
   d. Dan McFaul
   e. Ana Cruz
   f. Jordan Elsbury
   g. Dane Eagle
   h. Robert Wexler
   i. Adam Goodman
   j. Justin Sayfie
   k. Tola Thompson
   l. G. John O'Hanlon
   m. Brad Burleson
   n. Courtney Coppola
   o. Courtney Whitney
   p. Jeff Miller

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

q. Alison Anway
r. Scott Wagner
s. Jenny Busby
t. Lenny Curry
u. Jasmine Zaki
v. Michael LaRosa
w. Hunter Morgen
x. Patrick Kilcur
y. William Russell
z. Tracie Pough

For the purposes of this request, please consider all employees in a PAS position, a presidentially appointed position, a non-career SES position, a Schedule C position, or any administratively determined political appointee position.

2. All work product — including memoranda, one-pagers, and/or proposals — in the possession of any political appointees at your agency and provided by any employee or representative of Ballard Partners.

You asked that responsive records for both parts of this request cover the time period between January 20, 2025, through the date of the search.

On June 4, 2025, you agreed to narrow the scope of your request from "email communications . . . between any political appointee" at USDA and any employee or representative of Ballard Partners to email communications between the Secretary of Agriculture, the Chief of Staff of the Secretary of Agriculture, the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, the Chief of Staff of the Deputy Secretary, and the USDA Senior Team Leader on Government Efficiency and any employee or representative of Ballard Partners.

Your request has been processed under the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

The USDA's Client Experience Center (CEC) conducted a search for responsive records. 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 CEC searched the email accounts associated with the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary's Chief of Staff, the Deputy Secretary's Chief of Staff, and the Senior Team Leader on Government Efficiency. The Deputy Secretary was not included in the search since the USDA does not yet have anyone confirmed by the Senate in that position. Responsive records totaling two (2) pages were identified.

The OIA considered the foreseeable harm standard when reviewing the records and applying any relevant FOIA exemptions and has determined that certain information contained therein should

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

be withheld pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(6) (FOIA Exemption 6). Below is an explanation of the information that has been withheld.

FOIA Exemption 6

Exemption 6 generally is referred to as the "personal privacy" exemption. It provides that the disclosure requirements of the FOIA do not apply to "personnel and medical files and similar files the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy." Application of the exemption involves balancing the public's interest in disclosure against individuals' privacy interests.

The information withheld under Exemption 6 consists of a mobile phone number and a direct phone number. This information qualifies as "similar files" because it is information in which an individual has a privacy interest. Releasing the individual's contact information could subject the individual to unwarranted or unsolicited communications. Because there is a viable privacy interest that would be threatened by disclosure, Exemption 6 authorizes this office to withhold the information. Accordingly, we have determined that the public interest in the information's release does not outweigh the overriding privacy interests in keeping it confidential.

You may appeal this response by email at USDAFOIA@usda.gov. Your appeal must be in writing, and it must be received electronically no later than 90 calendar days from the date of this letter. The OIA will not consider appeals received after the 90 calendar-day limit. Appeals received after 5:00 p.m. EST will be considered received the next business day. The appeal letter should include the FOIA tracking number, a copy of the original request, the OIA's response to your original request, and a statement explaining the basis of your appeal. For quickest possible handling, the subject line of your email and the appeal letter should be marked "Freedom of Information Act Appeal" and reference FOIA No. 2025-OSEC-07030-F.

You may seek dispute resolution services from the OIA's FOIA Public Liaison, Ms. Melanie Enciso. Ms. Enciso may be contacted by telephone at (202) 720-9462, or electronically at Melanie.Enciso@usda.gov or USDAFOIA@usda.gov.

You also have the option to seek assistance from the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS). Please visit Request OGIS Assistance | National Archives for information about how to request OGIS assistance in relation to a FOIA request.

Provisions of the FOIA allow us to recover part of the cost of processing your request. In this instance, no fees will be charged.

If you have any questions regarding the processing of this request, please contact Susan Ruppel at 202-690-5220 or electronically at susan.ruppel@usda.gov or USDAFOIA@usda.gov.

For additional information regarding USDA FOIA regulations and processes, please refer to the information available online at Freedom of Information Act Division | USDA.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

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

Sincerely,

Alexis R. Graves
Director
Office of Information Affairs

Enclosure: Responsive Records (2 pages)

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

From: Jeff Miller
To: Buller, Kailee - OSEC, DC
Subject: [External Email]Fw: Congratulations
Date: Thursday, February 27, 2025 3:30:55 PM
Attachments: Outlook-image001.p.png
CA avocado growers petition to USDA to restore Mx inspections 1-28-25.pdf
CA Avocado Commission to Sec of Ag Rollins 2-14-25.pdf
USDA inspections brief 1-28-25.pdf

https://www.californiaavocadogrowers.com/sites/default/files/2025-02/CA-avocado-growers-petition-to-USDA-to-restore-Mx-inspections.pdf

https://www.californiaavocadogrowers.com/sites/default/files/2025-01/CAC-to-Sec-of-Ag-Designate-Rollins-1-20-25.pdf

Attachment #3: See page 4: https://www.californiaavocadogrowers.com/sites/default/files/2025-05/FTG-Spring-2025.pdf

You don't often get email from miller@ballardpartners.com. Learn why this is important

[External Email]
If this message comes from an **unexpected sender** or references a **vague/unexpected topic;**
Use caution before clicking links or opening attachments.
Please send any concerns or suspicious messages to: Spam.Abuse@usda.gov

Kailee,

I know it has been a busy first week. I wanted to push this back to the top of your inbox in case you missed it.

We are looking for the correct person to speak with.

Thank you,

Jeff

Jeff Miller
U.S. Congressman
2001-2017
BALLARD | PARTNERS
Partner
601 Thirteenth St, NW, Ste 250S
Washington, DC 20005
C: (b) (6)
P: (b) (6)
F: 202.800.5623
E: miller@ballardpartners.com

From: Jeff Miller <miller@ballardpartners.com>
Sent: Friday, February 14, 2025 11:25 AM
To: Kailee.tkacz@usda.gov <Kailee.tkacz@usda.gov>
Subject: Congratulations

Kailee,
Congratulations! It is a great day for American agriculture. As a former Florida FFA State Officer, anytime I see the Blue and Gold Jacket rise to a high office it makes me proud.
I represent the California Avocado Association. They are having a serious problem from the Biden Administration last days. They have changed the inspection requirements for Mexican Avocado inspection that will potentially lead to a pest infestation that would crush the US avocado industry.
Could you help us to connect with someone that has APHIS in their current portfolio.

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

I have attached a letter to Secretary Rollins that explains the problem.
Thank and congratulations again.
All the best,
Jeff Miller
US House of Representatives
2001-2017

AMERICAN OVERSIGHT