AMERICAN OVERSIGHT

August 20, 2025

VIA FOIA.GOV

U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Room 4039-A
Washington, DC 20250-0706
Via FOIA.gov

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear FOIA Officer(s):

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and the implementing regulations of your agency, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

On July 11, 2025, NPR reported that a U.S. Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) Service staffer, Jordan Wick, had access to sensitive data at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), such as the National Payment Service (NPS).[1] Other sources report on Mr. Wick's involvement in other agencies, including the National Labor Relations Board, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the General Services Administration, and the Federal Communications Commission.[2] American Oversight is seeking records that may shed light on these matters.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that your agency produce the following records within twenty business days:

1. Records sufficient to identify any components, agencies, offices, teams or other entities outside of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) that have accessed National

[1] *See* Jenna McLaughlin, *DOGE Keeps Gaining Access to Sensitive Data. Now, It Can Cut off Billions to Farmers*, NPR (July 11, 2025, 9:37 AM), https://www.npr.org/2025/07/10/nx-s1-5455779/doge-usda-farmers-data.
[2] *See, e.g.*, Jenna McLaughlin, *A Whistleblower's Disclosure Details How DOGE May Have Taken Sensitive Labor Data*, NPR (April 15, 2025, 5:00 AM), https://www.npr.org/2025/04/15/nx-s1-5355896/doge-nlrb-elon-musk-spacex-security; *The People Carrying Out Musk's Plans at DOGE*, New York Times (June 16, 2025), https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/02/27/us/politics/doge-staff-list.html; Lauren Feiner, *DOGE Staffers are Listed in the FCC Directory*, The Verge (April 4, 2025, 8:42 PM), https://www.theverge.com/news/644031/doge-federal-communications-commission-directory.

Payment Service (NPS) systems, software, hardware, and/or data. This includes, but is not limited to, records sufficient to identify the dates of this access, the official involved in that access, and what kind of NPS data was accessed. To be clear, American Oversight is not asking for any data itself, but records pertaining to the accessing of that data.

2. All official and unofficial dissent memoranda and complaints (such as formal memoranda, ethics complaints, or informal email communications) submitted to your office regarding Jordan Wick, the USDA's DOGE Team, "Efficiency Team", "E Team, "E-Team", access to the National Payment Service, and/or access to Farm Service Agency data and/or software.

   For part 2 of this request, American Oversight requests all such documents received from employees, appointees, board members, or contractors of the USDA. To be clear, American Oversight is not asking your agency to release the names of any individuals who have submitted responsive documents and does not object to withholding the name of any individual expressing dissent.

3. All formal and informal final directives (including informal email communications), guidance, protocols, or policies created by, issued to, or otherwise provided to the USDA regarding the accessing of systems, data, software, and/or hardware of the FSA and/or the NPS. Such records include, but are not limited to, those identifying permission granted by USDA leadership to individuals in or outside the agency to access FSA or NPS data.

   American Oversight believes your office is in the best position to identify where responsive records are likely to reside, but believes a reasonable search should include, at a minimum, the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, the Farm Service Agency, the offices of any DOGE teams (to include "Efficiency Teams", "E-Teams", and/or "E Teams") with access to the USDA, and any offices handling NPS systems, data, and/or software.

   For all parts of this request, please provide all responsive records from January 20, 2025, to the date the search is conducted.

Fee Waiver Request

In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) and your agency's regulations, American Oversight requests a waiver of fees associated with processing this request for records. The subject of this request concerns the operations of the federal government, and the disclosures will likely contribute to a better understanding of relevant government procedures by the general public in a significant way. Moreover, the request is for non-commercial purposes.

American Oversight requests a waiver of fees because disclosure of the requested information is "in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to

public understanding of operations or activities of the government."[3] The public has a significant interest in which entities may access or have accessed sensitive data.[4] Records with the potential to shed light on this matter would contribute significantly to public understanding of operations of the federal government, including internal protocols for handling sensitive data. American Oversight is committed to transparency and makes the responses agencies provide to FOIA requests publicly available, and the public's understanding of the government's activities would be enhanced through American Oversight's analysis and publication of these records.

This request "is not primarily in the commercial interest of the requester."[5] In fact, as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, American Oversight does not have a commercial purpose, and the release of the information requested is not in American Oversight's commercial interest. American Oversight's mission is to promote transparency in government, to educate the public about government activities, and to ensure the accountability of government officials. American Oversight uses the information gathered, and its analysis of it, to educate the public through reports, press releases, or other media. American Oversight also makes materials it gathers available on its public website and promotes their availability on social media platforms, such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter).[6]

American Oversight has also demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content through regular substantive analyses posted to its website.[7] Examples reflecting this commitment include the posting of records related to the first Trump Administration's contacts with Ukraine and analyses of those contacts;[8] posting records and editorial content about the federal government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic;[9] posting records received as part of American Oversight's "Audit the Wall" project to gather and analyze information related to the first Trump administration's proposed construction of a barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border, and

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[3] 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).
[4] *See* supra, note 1.
[5] 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).
[6] American Oversight currently has approximately 16,000 followers on Facebook and 94,500 followers on X (formerly Twitter). American Oversight, Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/ (last visited Aug. 20, 2025); American Oversight (@weareoversight), X (formerly Twitter), https://x.com/weareoversight (last visited Aug. 20, 2025).
[7] *See generally Our Latest*, American Oversight, https://www.americanoversight.org/blog.
[8] *The Trump Administration's Contacts with Ukraine*, American Oversight, https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/the-trump-administrations-contacts-with-ukraine.
[9] *See generally The Trump Administration's Response to Coronavirus*, American Oversight, https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/the-trump-administrations-response-to-coronavirus; *see, e.g.*, *CDC Calendars from 2018 and 2019: Pandemic-Related Briefings and Meetings*, American Oversight, https://www.americanoversight.org/cdc-calendars-from-2018-and-2019-pandemic-related-briefings-and-meetings.

analyses of what those records reveal;[10] the posting of records related to an ethics waiver received by a senior Department of Justice attorney and an analysis of what those records demonstrated regarding the Department's process for issuing such waivers;[11] and posting records and analysis of federal officials' use of taxpayer dollars to charter private aircraft or use government planes for unofficial business.[12]

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver.

Guidance Regarding the Search & Processing of Requested Records

In connection with its request for records, American Oversight provides the following guidance regarding the scope of the records sought and the search and processing of records:

- Please search all locations and systems likely to have responsive records, regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics.

- In conducting your search, please understand the terms "record," "document," and "information" in their broadest sense, to include any written, typed, recorded, graphic, printed, or audio material of any kind. We seek records of any kind, including electronic records, audiotapes, videotapes, and photographs, as well as letters, emails, facsimiles, telephone messages, voice mail messages, and transcripts, notes, or minutes of any meetings, telephone conversations, or discussions.

- Our request for records includes any attachments to those records or other materials enclosed with those records when they were previously transmitted. To the extent that an email is responsive to our request, our request includes all prior messages sent or received in that email chain, as well as any attachments to the email.

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[10] *See generally Audit the Wall*, American Oversight, https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall; *see, e.g.*, *Audit the Wall: No Plans, No Funding, No Timeline, No Wall*, American Oversight, https://americanoversight.org/audit-the-wall-no-plans-funding-or-timeline-and-no-wall/.

[11] *DOJ Records Relating to Solicitor General Noel Francisco's Recusal*, American Oversight, https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/25544090-doj-records-relating-to-solicitor-general-noel-franciscos-recusal-american-oversight; *Francisco & the Travel Ban: What We Learned from the DOJ Documents*, American Oversight, https://www.americanoversight.org/francisco-the-travel-ban-what-we-learned-from-the-doj-documents.

[12] *See generally Swamp Airlines: Chartered Jets at Taxpayer Expense*, American Oversight, https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/swamp-airlines-private-jets-taxpayer-expense; *see, e.g.*, *New Information on Pompeo's 2017 Trips to His Home State*, American Oversight, https://www.americanoversight.org/new-information-on-pompeos-2017-trips-to-his-home-state.

- Please search all relevant records or systems containing records regarding agency business. Do not exclude records regarding agency business contained in files, email accounts, or devices in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts or text messages. Records of official business conducted using unofficial systems or stored outside of official files are subject to the Federal Records Act and FOIA.[13] It is not adequate to rely on policies and procedures that require officials to move such information to official systems within a certain period of time; American Oversight has a right to records contained in those files even if material has not yet been moved to official systems or if officials have, by intent or through negligence, failed to meet their obligations.[14]

- Please use all tools available to your agency to conduct a complete and efficient search for potentially responsive records. Agencies are subject to government-wide requirements to manage agency information electronically,[15] and many agencies have adopted the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Capstone program, or similar policies. These systems provide options for searching emails and other electronic records in a manner that is reasonably likely to be more complete than just searching individual custodian files. For example, a custodian may have deleted a responsive email from his or her email program, but your agency's archiving tools may capture that email under Capstone. At the same time, custodian searches are still necessary; agencies may not have direct access to files stored in .PST files, outside of network drives, in paper format, or in personal email accounts.

- In the event some portions of the requested records are properly exempt from disclosure, please disclose any reasonably segregable non-exempt portions of the requested records. If a request is denied in whole, please state specifically why it is not reasonable to segregate portions of the record for release.

- Please take appropriate steps to ensure that records responsive to this request are not deleted by the agency before the completion of processing for this request. If records potentially responsive to this request are likely to be located on systems where they are subject to potential deletion, including on a scheduled

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[13] *See Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, 827 F.3d 145, 149–50 (D.C. Cir. 2016); *cf. Judicial Watch, Inc. v. Kerry*, 844 F.3d 952, 955–56 (D.C. Cir. 2016).
[14] *See Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, No. 14-cv-765, slip op. at 8 (D.D.C. Dec. 12, 2016).
[15] Presidential Memorandum—Managing Government Records, 76 Fed. Reg. 75,423 (Nov. 28, 2011), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/28/presidential-memorandum-managing-government-records; Office of Mgmt. & Budget, Exec. Office of the President, Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments & Independent Agencies, "Managing Government Records Directive," M-12-18 (Aug. 24, 2012), https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/m-12-18.pdf.

basis, please take steps to prevent that deletion, including, as appropriate, by instituting a litigation hold on those records.

Conclusion

If you have any questions regarding how to construe this request for records or believe that further discussions regarding search and processing would facilitate a more efficient production of records of interest to American Oversight, please do not hesitate to contact American Oversight. American Oversight welcomes an opportunity to discuss its request with you before you undertake your search or incur search or duplication costs. By working together at the outset, American Oversight and your agency can decrease the likelihood of costly and time-consuming litigation in the future.

Where possible, please provide responsive material in an electronic format by email. Alternatively, please provide responsive material in native format or in PDF format on a USB drive. Please send any responsive material being sent by mail to American Oversight, 1030 15th Street NW, Suite B255, Washington, DC 20005. If it will accelerate release of responsive records to American Oversight, please also provide responsive material on a rolling basis.

We share a common mission to promote transparency in government. American Oversight looks forward to working with your agency on this request. If you do not understand any part of this request, please contact Elizabeth Haddix at foia@americanoversight.org or (252) 359-7424. Also, if American Oversight's request for a fee waiver is not granted in full, please contact us immediately upon making such a determination.

Sincerely,

/s/ Elizabeth Haddix
Elizabeth Haddix
on behalf of
American Oversight