

This material is part of a collection that documents the harassment, discrimination, and retaliation perpetrated against Alaska's women research scientists by their supervisor, with full knowledge (and arguably, "tacit approval") of their federal employer, the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS)

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Funding for Alaska agriculture stations slashed from federal budget

by Jeff Richardson / jrichardson@newsminer.com

Mar 03, 2011 | 1456 views | 10 | 6 | |

FAIRBANKS — President Obama's budget proposal for the coming fiscal year eliminates funding for the federal agricultural research station in Alaska, including a Fairbanks office that employs 19 people.

The proposal calls for a cut of \$42 million to the Agricultural Research Service, a branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That cut would eliminate 10 offices around the country, including the Subarctic ARS station headquartered in Fairbanks.

The funding cut would also close smaller ARS sites in Palmer and Kodiak. Fairbanks research leader Alberto Pantoja said the closures would eliminate 24 jobs in the state, along with several positions for graduate students.

Meredith Kenny, the spokeswoman for Rep. Don Young, cautioned that Obama's proposal should be viewed as a "suggestion," since only Congress has the power to appropriate money. If the funding isn't added, however, the local ARS office will close on Sept. 30.

Aides for both U.S. Sens. Lisa Murkowski and Mark Begich said the senators are concerned by the closure proposal but that the current budget-cutting focus in Washington makes such moves a sign of the times.

"Sen. Murkowski will work to see that Alaska is treated fairly as the budget process moves forward," spokesman Mike Brumas said.

The Subarctic ARS office must be restored with an earmark, according to Begich spokeswoman Julie Hasquet, and the ongoing earmark ban in Congress will make it difficult to find those funds.

"It's a different game in D.C. now with the earmark ban," Hasquet stated in an e-mail. "Although Sen. Begich has stated many times he does not support the ban, it's the new reality."

Hasquet said Begich will argue that Alaska agriculture is so unique that research done in other parts of the country won't be able to replace it.

If the Fairbanks ARS station does close, the work that is under way would either be transferred to the University of Alaska Fairbanks or to another ARS location.

The agency does a variety of research, with roles that vary depending on location. The Fairbanks office studies invasive plants and insects in Alaska, while the Palmer station focuses on collecting plant samples that are important to Alaska. The Kodiak office has studied ways of using fish waste for agriculture.

Steve Sparrow, the associate dean at the UAF School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences, said his department has structured its staff to avoid duplication with ARS personnel. For example, it doesn't have weed or pest specialists because those areas are being studied by the local ARS office. Because of that, he said UAF couldn't easily pick up some ARS research such as an ongoing project to study what potato varieties grow best in Alaska.

"Some things we could take over," Sparrow said. "A lot of things we'd probably just have to stop doing."

The proposal to cut local ARS funding comes less than a year after the Fairbanks office began work on a new \$1.2 million research greenhouse complex on Geist Road. ARS staff will move into offices in the unfinished building in a few weeks. Construction on a pair of adjoining 50-by-25-foot greenhouses will still proceed in April, Pantoja said.

The greenhouse complex is designed to allow year-round research of invasive plant and insect species, letting scientists expand their work beyond projects suitable only for Interior Alaska's brief summer.

Pantoja said he has no choice but to proceed as if the local ARS work will continue.

"We're moving forward," he said. "We're assuming the funding will be there and we'll still be in this position next year."

Contact staff writer Jeff Richardson at 459-7518.

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« [JusticeSleeps](#) wrote on Thursday, Mar 03 at 11:30 AM »

It's unfortunate to see the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) unit in Alaska on the closure list (again). However, the unit's supervisor was personally responsible for four EEOC (discrimination) complaints in the last two years alone, resulting in the loss of all three women research scientists that he supervised. As you might have already guessed, the settlements (\$\$\$) came from federal tax dollars (to "buy off" the women and keep the male supervisor in power). It appears that the unit is being closed by the ARS to cover up the history of what happened here in Alaska. If you fight to keep the unit open, you're supporting harassment, discrimination, and retaliation against women. If you fight to close the unit, then the high-ranked personnel will be transferred elsewhere and the people who didn't break U.S. anti-discrimination laws will lose their jobs. In either case, nobody wins but the bad guys.

« [oldowl](#) wrote on Thursday, Mar 03 at 10:46 AM »

I don't think Alaska could become a farming state in our lifetime but more could be done with the agricultural areas. For example, the ag area where I used to own property. The state refused to give any help whatsoever to residents to improve the road and in breakup it was a series of lakes and the deepest mud you ever saw. I tried to get assistance through grants, etc. I was assured by a DNR official

were available - they were not. How were people supposed to move farm equipment around? Yet they will spend billions on a road to Nome? There are some things that can be grown in Alaska like potatoes, etc. that could benefit the state economically. Not to mention hemp.

But the budget cuts have to do something. Yes, Pearl it is not all the Republicans - some of the Dems too.

« **TeaPartyPatriot** wrote on Thursday, Mar 03 at 10:28 AM »

Alaska is not a farming state and never will be. Good riddance to a waste of money. The Delta area collects over a million dollars a year in farm subsidies. They too should be cut.

The military also should be cut. Why are we fighting a war to build a nation in Afghanistan? After 9 years of fighting and pending we still have not completed the job, and will never complete the job. The Russians were there for 15 years and finally gave up and they live next door. Iraq and Afghanistan are the biggest federal waste of money we have!

« **Pearl=W** wrote on Thursday, Mar 03 at 10:21 AM »

I don't really think the overall trend is 'party' oriented, though of course both major political parties would like you to think that [it makes stereotyping and finger pointing so much easier]. I would agree that it's largely about the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', and that can't really be divided out along party affiliation lines.

Certainly I DO think the D of Ag budget could more effectively be cut by far more money [with less loss of useful work] by eliminating farm subsidies. And I think it equally certain that the reason this program is seeing the cuts instead, is because of identity and position of many receiving large 'farm' subsidies. There has been some pretty scandalous exposures about who receives these, and for what supposed purpose, but very little action taken to correct the situation.

And I would predict that the scream for less gov't and more budget cuts at the present time, will only see more of the same - cutting programs that are generally useful to most/many, and preserving programs that are most susceptible to misuse by the well-heeled. Because that's the way our political system has come to work - the more money one has, the louder the voice in the working out of the many small details of how a public 'scream' can be placated.

« **oldowl** wrote on Thursday, Mar 03 at 10:05 AM »

No I am sure our President probably does not want to cut any of this, particularly something that affects jobs, but he is responding to the call for budget cuts and has to do something to be responsive to the American people he serves. He also has to get a bill through Congress and is responding to the Republican call for more cuts. Unfortunately it will affect even those members' districts, like House member John Boehner who is supporting a project in his district that the Dept. of Defense says is unnecessary.

« **blue5011** wrote on Thursday, Mar 03 at 09:04 AM »

"Gutting research, but is the US Dept. of Agriculture still paying farmers like Joe Miller not to farm on the land the Ag land purchased for their private "hunting ranch.""

Check out Ewg.org and see how much Robert Edward "Ted" Turner III is paid to "not" farm. The guy is the largest single private land owner in the US. Plus Ted has tried to get buffalo from Yellowstone NP for little of nothing. So much for

"looking out for" the little guy.

« **Dogwatcher** wrote on Thursday, Mar 03 at 07:32 AM »

Gutting research, but is the US Dept. of Agriculture still paying farmers like Joe Miller not to farm on the land the Ag land purchased for their private "hunting ranch." And Representative Backman's \$1.00/ gallon Federal Dairy Price Support Subsidy?

I don't think anyone is dumb enough to believe Don Young's spin that this is "Obama's Bill". It is the Tea Party who wishes to gut America. Remember Don just gave a tax vacation to the Richest of the Rich, the 1% who own 95% of America. The guys that were bailed out and then paid huge bonuses to themselves.

This is the Republican Party gutting the working class, the middle class, and this is just 25 Fairbanks paychecks.

You want to object? Attend the Fairbanks Lincoln Day Dinner tomorrow Night with Mrs. Gingrich something or other. Let Newt Know! Let Don know! Let Ralph Seekins know!

This is not yet Yemen or Libya. But when 1% own 95% and get a tax vacation it sure seems like it will be soon.

« **blather** wrote on Thursday, Mar 03 at 06:02 AM »

They should grow pot in the greenhouses and give any student with a GPA greater than 2.0 a quarter pound per semester as a reward. It would double enrollment immediately and take the edge off the angst of going to college to graduate in a state with no industry, jobs or prospects beyond working for a foreign oil company, foreign cruise line or foreign fish processor. We're going to build a gasline to Canada that will provide 12 full times in Alaska when completed. Maybe one of our college graduates could get one of those 12 jobs. Anyone in first grade now will possibly be graduating about then

« **blue5011** wrote on Thursday, Mar 03 at 06:00 AM »

IF, agricultural research is so important to the state, let the state pay for it.

« **FMay** wrote on Thursday, Mar 03 at 04:10 AM »

Who cares? It's just gubmint money. Somebody else paid for it so why worry. We don't need oil development or mining. We'll just whine for more federal money. It's all debt so why worry. Just keep running those credit cards up!

Seriously, has this operation contributed to the local economy other than providing beer and pizza money for it's employees? Is Fairbanks an agricultural hotbed, pardon the pun?

« **just-saying** wrote on Thursday, Mar 03 at 02:28 AM »

So, if ARC is, indeed, defunded, what will become of the new greenhouses? Any chance the greenhouse that is being dislocated by the new Science Bldg on West Ridge could use these brand-new greenhouses on Geist Road?

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