

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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Budget cuts claim Alaska agricultural stations

by Jeff Richardson / jr Richardson@newsminer.com

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FAIRBANKS — Budget cuts are forcing the closure in spring of Alaska's federal agriculture research station, including a newly built \$1.2 million greenhouse and research complex in Fairbanks.

A roughly \$40 million cut to the Agricultural Research Service is resulting in the elimination of 10 stations throughout the country, said ARS spokeswoman Sandy Miller Hays. That includes all work under way at the Subarctic ARS station in Alaska, including projects in Fairbanks, Palmer and Kodiak.

The planned ARS closures stem from a spending bill passed by Congress in November that included a cut to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The cut came with some warning — President Obama proposed the elimination of the stations in his budget proposal early this year.

About 10 federal employees throughout the state will be affected by the closure, USDA spokesman Matt Herrick said in an email. A number of University of Alaska Fairbanks students working and studying at the ARS station will also be out of work, said Carol Lewis, dean of the School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Science.

Lewis said the transfer of the five Fairbanks ARS employees to other stations in the Western United States could take effect as early as March but that the employees will have the option of retiring or leaving the service. While research would be able to continue until spring, she said, no additional field work will take place.

The Subarctic ARS station specialized in agricultural pest management, Lewis said, and a focus on insects, weeds and pesticides was largely avoided by UAF to prevent duplication. The Palmer station focuses on collecting northern plant samples, while the Kodiak office has studied techniques for using fish waste for agriculture.

"We tend to count on the ARS to fill positions that UAF doesn't have the funding to fill," Lewis said.

Herrick said ARS is still considering options for the use of its Alaska buildings after the closure. That includes the new greenhouse facility on Geist Road that opened last year to provide a year-round growing environment in Fairbanks.

Lewis said UAF will have a chance to acquire the building, but will first need to evaluate how it would be used and whether its operating costs can be absorbed. Equipment at the stations could be claimed by UAF if it isn't transferred to another ARS site.

Lewis said administrators also need to decide whether UAF should take over some of the research being done by ARS in Alaska.

"We're going to have to look at the whole package," she said. "Certainly, we're going to get together and see what can be done, but budgets are really, really tight at the university."

Lewis said she hopes the research service can eventually come back to Alaska. She said there's a precedent for a return, since its stations in Alaska were previously shut down in 1993 before being revived in 2000.



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Lewis said there's a strong argument for ARS to maintain a research presence in Alaska, which has growing conditions unlike those seen anywhere else in the country.

"It leaves a huge hole," she said. "Not just from UAF, but from the farming community in general."

Contact staff writer Jeff Richardson at 459-7518.

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JusticeSleeps | Less Than A Minute Ago

As Alaska's only Agricultural Research Service (ARS) outpost, the unit should never have been closed. But then again, the supervisor was allowed to unlawfully harass the women research scientists for many years. Everybody knew, but most people just looked the other way. The women spent years trying to educate the agency about U.S. Civil Rights laws, but the ARS Administrator just ruled that a "hostile environment for women" and "discriminatory treatment" by an ARS supervisor are "nongrievable matters".

Yes, Alaska needs more funding for research, but send it to the university. We deserve better than the ARS, which took the art of discrimination to a science.

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Crap.

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Nice greenhouse, anyway. The SoA/UAF should take over the program. Lots of people in Fairbanks garden and would be happy to see this facility being used.

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