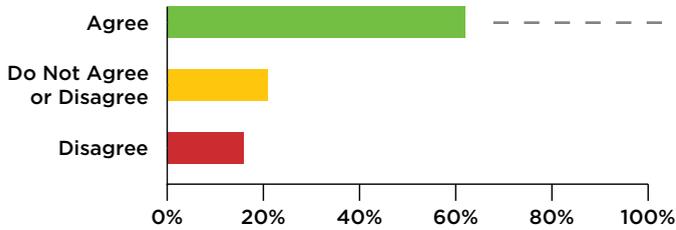
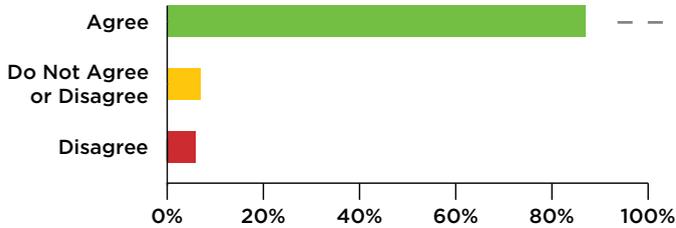


Surveying the US Department of Agriculture

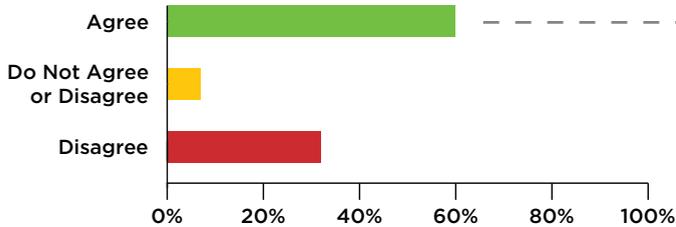
Scientist Voices under President Biden



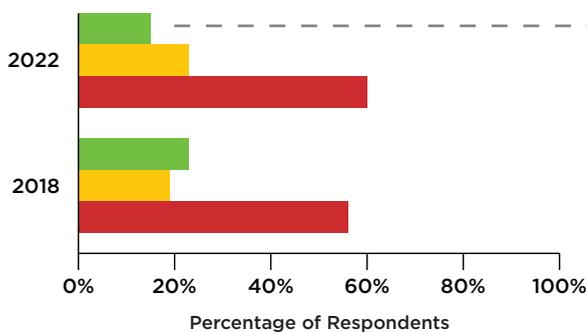
160 out of 258 USDA scientists said they can express concerns about the agency's work without fear of retaliation.



207 out of 238 USDA scientists said the agency adhered to its scientific integrity policy.



147 out of 245 USDA scientists said there had been scientific workforce reductions in the past two years.



38 out of 256 USDA scientists reported being asked to omit from their scientific work certain words viewed as politically contentious, fewer than during the Trump administration (67 out of 291), but the difference was minimal.

See reverse for more information on this survey. For the purposes of this fact sheet, "Agree" includes both "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" response categories, and "Disagree" includes both "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree." For detailed breakdowns of responses and exact survey questions, please visit www.ucsusa.org/resources/scientists-survey-2022.

Our nation relies on government science and scientists to protect public health, public safety, and the environment. To that end, scientific integrity safeguards are necessary for ensuring that political, ideological, and financial interests do not undermine the use of science in federal decisionmaking, harming the public good in the process.

In September and October of 2022, the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) and the University of New Hampshire Survey Center administered a survey to over 46,000 federal scientists across six government agencies, including the US Department of

Agriculture (USDA). We received survey responses from 268 USDA scientists and experts, for a total response rate of 5.33 percent. We surveyed four USDA subagencies, and they had varying response rates: the Agricultural Research Service (4.64 percent), the National Agricultural Statistics Services (3.63 percent), the Economic Research Service (12.84 percent), and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (5.56 percent). The results shed light on how USDA scientists and experts perceive their current working environment and ability for science to inform agency decisionmaking without political interference.

USDA Scientists Speak Out

Anonymous USDA survey respondents provided their views on scientific integrity, environmental justice efforts, and evidence-based decisionmaking.

Funding levels follow traditional approaches . . . we lose even the opportunity to recruit the best talent, while maintaining the talent we have, due to poor budgets for research, non-competitive salaries, and poor research facilities.

“Actions under the Biden administration are a great improvement to those under the Trump administration. However, there are still problems within USDA related to influence of outside organizations affecting science-based decisions.”

“[The] Biden administration has reinforced commitments to policies that support agriculture’s engagement in science-based processes to address climate change. This helps justify the research in which my colleagues and I engage. It has given us confidence in expressing science-based information and decisions pertaining to helping agriculture manage stressors for climate change. In fact, we can use the words ‘climate change’ without fear.”

Codifying Scientific Integrity Principles

The USDA uses science to inform nationwide policies on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition, and related issues. Its research affects people’s lives directly, from providing farmers with the resources needed to grow crops to ensuring food safety and protecting farmworkers. Survey results indicated that USDA respondents perceived the agency to have a strong culture of scientific integrity, enabling them to be effective at their jobs. However, the USDA still needs to do more to ensure that its scientists can do their best work. Some scientists still reported direct censorship of their work. Management should be made aware of the agency’s scientific integrity policy and reminded that they should not tolerate this kind of political interference. Additionally, most USDA scientists surveyed said that they had noticed workforce reductions at the agency and that this affected their ability to fulfill their agency’s mission.

Congress should pass the Scientific Integrity Act to strengthen its scientific integrity protections. Agency leadership should remind management and staff of the definition of political interference and continue to train staff on processes for bringing forward scientific integrity allegations. The agency should strengthen its scientific integrity policy in accordance with guidance from the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and its Scientific Integrity Taskforce.

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