

USDA reposts some animal welfare records after criticism

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The federal Department of Agriculture has reposted inspection reports on certain animal testing labs on its website after a decision two weeks ago to remove a large online database of animal welfare records prompted complaints.

The agency announced its decision to put the reports online Friday and said more reports could be added as it continues a review of what types of information it puts online.

The reposted documents include annual reports of animal research institutions and inspection reports for certain federal research labs. Still missing from the [database](#) are inspection reports for other facilities, such as dog and horse breeding centers and zoos. All told the agency inspects about 9,000 facilities annually.

The decision to remove the database angered animal rights groups and prompted a letter Friday from U.S. Sens. Charles Schumer of New York and Bob Menendez of New Jersey. The two Democrats urged the agency to reconsider.

Schumer, the Senate's top Democrat, said that the database helped expose puppy mills and other inhumane facilities and that its removal put animals at risk.

"When it comes to protecting animals and potential pets, the Trump administration's USDA has just dropped the ball by doing away with

access to information that safeguards vulnerable animals and out abusive puppy mills," Schumer said.

According to a statement on the USDA website Friday, the entire database was taken down as part of an ongoing review of the agency's online publications. In addition, the agency had said previously it was seeking to balance the need for transparency with personal privacy.

"The agency will continue to review records and determine which information is appropriate for reposting," the agency said, adding that the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is "committed to ensuring the welfare of [animals](#)."

The Humane Society of the United States called the decision to repost some of the reports "a step in the right direction."

"This is an important turnaround and a good start, but the USDA has a lot more to do here," said Humane Society President and CEO Wayne Pacelle. "Lawmakers, the press, animal advocates, and even the regulated community want transparency and accessible records."

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, which is part of a legal challenge to the USDA's decision to remove the database, said it is not satisfied with the agency's actions on Friday.

"Under duress, the USDA is now attempting to get away with reposting only a tiny fraction of the animal welfare records it suddenly and indefensibly deleted from its website two weeks ago," said Brittany Peet, director of captive animal law enforcement at the PETA Foundation.

The Associated Press first reported on the USDA removing the inspection reports earlier this month.

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