



United States Department of Agriculture

USDA Accomplishments 2009-2012

Secretary Tom Vilsack

Civil Rights

Secretary Vilsack made it a priority to build a new era for civil rights at USDA and to ensure that all our customers and employees are treated fairly, no matter their race, color, sex, national origin, religion, disability, or age. Since 2009, we have corrected past errors, learned from mistakes, and charted a stronger path for the future where all Americans are treated with dignity and respect by USDA employees.

Providing Better Service to USDA's Customers

- In 2010, 2011 and 2012, USDA's Farm Service Agency recorded the fewest number of customer civil rights complaints since the Department began keeping track (24, 37, and 25 respectively). This was a result of Secretary Vilsack's initiative to focus civil rights trainings in agencies with large program complaint filings.
- For the first time ever since 2009, USDA conducted training to Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Rural Development leadership and staff at state offices in more than a dozen select states that have a history of civil rights problems.
- To improve USDA programs' ability to serve minority farmers, we analyze the potential for new policies, rules and decisions to impact civil rights. Over three years, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights recommended important changes on about 20% of all policies reviewed.
- USDA has reported the four lowest years of equal employment opportunity complaints by employees since Department began keeping track – well below the

government average of complaints per 1,000 employees. And we are aggressively pursuing bad actors – with the highest number of findings of complaints by any Department in the federal government in 2010, 2011 and 2012.

- Created a single, USDA-wide form that USDA customers and program participants can use to file a civil rights complaint. By capturing all of the information needed to accept a complaint, the form will reduce the time it takes to process complaints. The form helps to simplify and expedite the process for those who believe they have been discriminated against. Previously, writing a letter was the only way to file a complaint.
- Realigned the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Civil Rights to report directly to the Office of the Secretary, in accordance with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regulations.

Correcting Past Mistakes

- USDA and the Department of Justice jointly announced the historic \$1.25 billion Pigford II settlement with African American farmers.
- Announced a historic settlement agreement with Native American farmers who claim to have faced discrimination by USDA in past decades. To improve relations with Native American Tribes, USDA named – for the first time – a Senior Advisor on Tribal Relations, and all USDA agencies are working to engage with and be thoughtful about tribal issues.
- USDA is currently carrying out a unified claims process to provide a path to justice for Hispanic and women farmers and ranchers who claim to have faced discrimination by USDA in past decades.

- In 2009, we discovered more than 14,000 documents that had been classified as civil rights program complaints filed against the Department between 2001 and 2008 that had barely been looked into. USDA has worked to review all the relevant cases, determined that about 3,800 of those could have merit, and closed or reached resolution in all the cases where the statute of limitations had not expired. To handle those for which the statute of limitations had expired we have proposed draft language to U.S. Congress that would allow us to work to resolve them.
- Reduced the typical processing time for new civil rights program complaints from four years to 18 months.
- In August 2012, the Government Accountability Office issued a final report on its October 2008 audit in which GAO reported on management deficiencies in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR), and included six recommendations. USDA has taken action to address the recommendations and further strengthen the Department's Civil Rights operation.
- disadvantaged small businesses. That is up from 11% of procurement spending in 2008 and more than double the federal average.
- USDA established the Office of Advocacy and Outreach to improve access to USDA programs and enhance the viability and profitability of small farms and ranches, beginning farmers and ranchers, and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.
- USDA created a Minority Farmer Advisory Committee to advise the Department on outreach strategies.
- As part of a new Strike Force Initiative, USDA has directed additional outreach and resources to poverty-stricken areas of the United States to help grow more opportunity and strengthen program outreach.
- FSA has made significant modifications to the County committee structure by annually reviewing local administrative area boundaries to ensure a fair representation of minority and women producers in county or multi-county jurisdictions are elected. In addition to elected members, FSA county committees may also include advisors who are appointed to county committees in counties or multi-county jurisdictions that have significant numbers of minority or women producers and lack such members on the committees.
- USDA's Rural Development and FSA have constructed microlending programs to provide financial assistance to beginning and small farmers and ranchers.

Improved Outreach Efforts

- We commissioned an independent assessment of civil rights in USDA's program delivery. USDA agencies are working to implement the recommendations of the assessment to help improve field-based service delivery to minority and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, and communities that have historically not participated in USDA programs.
- In May 2012, we established an historic Memorandum of Understanding to increase cooperation on groundbreaking research between the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA), and the eighteen 1890 Land-grant Universities.
- We more than doubled the number of internal compliance reviews of USDA agencies to evaluate their civil rights and equal opportunity policies, procedures and practices.
- USDA is committed to actively reaching out to and identifying small and minority owned businesses that can provide goods and services that meet USDA's mission requirements. From 2009-2011, nearly 14% of USDA's procurement dollars – \$2.3 billion – were spent on products and services from socially and economically

Cultivating a Diverse and Inclusive Workforce

- To create an environment for USDA employees that fosters growth and helps us become a top-notch service provider, Secretary Vilsack launched a 'Cultural Transformation' effort to transform the Department's culture.
- USDA has reached out to get input from employees across the country, and we are working to build a more diverse USDA, empower employees and recruit the next generation.

To learn more about USDA and our work for American people, visit us at www.USDA.gov or follow us on Twitter at @USDA

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.