

Summary Equal Opportunity for Religious Organizations Final Rule

USDA- Rural Development
Last Updated 10.17.05

“This final rule implements executive branch policy that, within the framework of constitutional church-state guidelines, religiously affiliated (or “faith-based”) organizations should be able to compete on an equal footing with other organizations for United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) assistance. The final rule revises USDA regulations to remove barriers to the participation of faith-based organizations in USDA programs and to ensure that these programs are implemented in a manner consistent with the requirements of the Constitution, including the religion clauses of the first amendment.”

-Official Summary, Equal Opportunity for Religious Organizations Final Rule

Summary:

On December 12, 2002, President Bush signed Executive Order 13279 directing Federal agencies to ensure that faith-based organizations are given equal treatment in competing for Federal financial assistance. The EO also guarantees that those organizations do not need to forfeit their religious identity to partner with the Federal government

On July 9th, 2004, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) published the “Equal Opportunity for Religious Organizations” final rule. It ensures that faith-based and religious organizations can compete on an equal footing for USDA assistance without changing their identity or compromising their beliefs to do so. The final rule sets forth non-discriminatory standards for the implementation of all USDA activities and programs by establishing the proper uses of USDA financial assistance consistent with Constitutional parameters, and by establishing conditions for receipt of financial assistance.

Defined within the framework of the Constitutional church-state guidelines, the final rule ensures that USDA funds are open to all qualified organizations, regardless of their religious character or affiliation.