



United States Department of Agriculture

USDA Accomplishments 2009-2011

Secretary Tom Vilsack

Civil Rights

Secretary Vilsack made it priority to build a new era for civil rights at USDA and to ensure that all our customers get a fair shake, no matter their race, color, sex, or age. Over three years, 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 and again in 2011, USDA's Farm Service Agency recorded the fewest number of customer civil rights complaints since the Department began keeping track.
- For the first time ever, 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, our office of civil rights recommended important changes on about 20% of all policies they considered.
- USDA has reported the three lowest years of equal employment opportunity complaints by employees since the 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 during 2010.

- 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.
- Provided 17,300 minority farmers and ranchers with direct and guaranteed loans to help them build strong, profitable operations.
- Helped rural minority families buy or refinance a home. Currently, USDA has more than 185,000 active home loans with minority borrowers, representing 22% of our total loan portfolio.

Correcting Past Mistakes

- Announced the Pigford II settlement with black farmers, and helped pass legislation that will provide \$1.15 billion in funding for this settlement.
- 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.

- We announced 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.
- 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.
- Secretary Vilsack and other senior leaders have taken an active role in reaching out to traditionally underserved groups in personal meetings, speeches, visits to conferences, and other methods.

Improved Outreach Efforts

- We commissioned an independent assessment of civil rights in USDA's program delivery. We are working to implement the recommendations of this Cultural Transformation Assessment to help USDA improve field-based service delivery to minority and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, and communities that have historically not participated in USDA programs.
- 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. Over the past three years, nearly 14% of USDA's procurement dollars – \$2.3 billion – have been spent on products and services from socially and economically disadvantaged small businesses. That is up from 11% of procurement spending in 2008 and more than double the federal average.

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. We reached out to get input from employees across the country, and are implementing a plan 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.