



United States Department of Agriculture



USDA Strategic Plan



FY 2018 – 2022



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Message From the Secretary



It's my honor to serve with each and every one of you here at USDA. Our mission to "do right and feed everyone" is no easy task, but together as one USDA family we can accomplish so much.

I am outlining our FY2018-2022 Strategic Plan, made up of seven strategic goals, which will guide us as we work to support American farmers, ranchers, foresters, producers, and consumers in the years to come. This Plan serves as a roadmap for everything the USDA family and I will do to remain accountable to each other and to the people who rely on us across the country.

First and foremost, we will work to prioritize customer service every day for our customers – the American taxpayers. Our customers expect – and have every right to demand – their Government to conduct the people's business efficiently, effectively, and with the utmost integrity.

We will promote the ability of America's agricultural sector to produce and sell the food and fiber that feeds and clothes the world and to reap the earned reward of their labor. By promoting American agricultural products, we will work to remove obstacles and give farmers, ranchers, foresters, and producers every opportunity to prosper and thrive.

Here at USDA, we will facilitate rural prosperity through the expansion of rural business opportunities, access to capital, improved infrastructure, and support for workforce development.

We will also work to preserve the land. Stewardship is not optional for farmers and ranchers. American agriculture's bounty comes directly from the natural resources used to produce food and fiber. Today, America's natural resources sustain more than 320 million Americans and countless others around the globe. We will work to manage the natural resources entrusted directly to the Department – including our National Forests – with a sharp focus on the sustainable use of these resources.

Last but not least, USDA will continue to ensure that all Americans have access to a safe and secure food supply.

Our FY2018-2022 Strategic Plan will guide the work of all of us at USDA in the coming years to ensure our efforts best serve the American public. So, let's roll up our sleeves and continue to "do right and feed everyone."

Sincerely,

Sonny Perdue
Secretary



Mission Statement

Provide leadership on agriculture, food, natural resources, rural infrastructure, nutrition, and related issues through fact-based, data-driven, and customer-focused decisions.

Vision Statement

Do right and feed everyone

Core Values

We expect and require complete honesty and integrity in all we do.

We make commitments with care and live up to them.

We own up to problems and are always responsive.

We provide service to our customers on time, every time.

We guard, conserve, and preserve USDA resources the taxpayers have entrusted to us.

Stakeholder Engagement

USDA regularly consults with external stakeholders, including Congress, USDA's customers, partners, landowners, policy experts, and industry and consumer groups regarding our programs' effectiveness. Recent examples include the Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity Roundtables and the Back to Our Roots Listening Tour. These consultations have been used to validate the strategic goals, objectives, and performance measures outlined in the plan.





Strategic Goal 1:

Ensure USDA Programs Are Delivered Efficiently, Effectively,
With Integrity and a Focus on Customer Service

The Department will modernize and consolidate Information Technology (IT) infrastructure and services, as well as strengthen management and oversight of procurement, property, and finances to ensure our resources are deployed as effectively and efficiently as possible. We will create a safe and modern space within which employees can work and feel empowered to find innovative solutions to serve our customers' needs, and will promote accountability and professional development. USDA will leverage the strength and talent of our employees and reduce regulatory and administrative burdens to allow agencies to focus on our customers. Improved customer service and employee engagement will create a more effective and accessible USDA for all our stakeholders.

Objective 1.1:

Modernize Information Technology Infrastructure, Facilities, and Support Services to Improve the Customer Experience

The vast breadth of USDA's mission enables us to impact each and every American citizen. Providing our employees and customers with modern, agile, efficient, and easy-to-use technology, spaces, and services is always our core focus. Every time a family sits down to eat or someone walks into a USDA field office, visits a National Forest, or plants a seed, that person is relying on more than 100,000 USDA employees to do their jobs well. In order to make that happen, we must leverage technology to streamline communication and use data to identify opportunities for efficiencies in our services.

Successful management of USDA's building, administrative, and IT infrastructure requires a practice of regular assessment and improvement. USDA recognizes and champions the need for a fully integrated, cost-efficient, and streamlined administrative infrastructure, and we will continue to use lessons learned, employee and stakeholder engagement, and best business practices in modernization efforts. USDA will continue to be dedicated to data-driven, enterprise solutions through collaborative governance and human capital management strategies.

Strategies

Modernize and Consolidate IT Infrastructure and Services: USDA will enhance the internal and external customer experience by modernizing and improving the security of IT infrastructure and services. This may be achieved through consolidation in some cases, while in other cases, specialized systems or services may be more efficient in achieving USDA agencies' diverse missions. Through these efforts, IT leadership in each USDA Mission Area will be positioned to more directly focus on their Mission Area's systems, data collection and analysis, and risk management. USDA will: (1) Strengthen strategic IT governance by having a single USDA Chief Information Officer (CIO) and one Assistant CIO for each mission area, who will focus on improving IT for their mission specific services and programs. This will reduce the number of CIOs within USDA from 22 down to one CIO and 9 assistant CIOs. (2) Consolidate end-user services and data centers from 39 USDA data centers to a single data center and a back-up. This move will provide a cost-effective, high-quality Department-wide helpdesk and reduce cybersecurity vulnerabilities. (3) Enable a strategic approach to data management and introduce data-driven capabilities by implementing executive dashboard solutions with USDA-wide data. And (4) improve the USDA customer experience by establishing an effective framework to serve customers in-person and online and creating online service portals that are easy to use, include additional self-service capabilities, and integrate data for common customers. This strategy is also supported by USDA's FY 2018-2019 Agency Priority Goals. The Department will highlight the IT modernization work as one of the Goals to ensure achievement of this strategy.

Modernize Facilities Management: USDA will take a holistic approach to facilities modernization to ensure employees are best positioned to serve the public and deliver the mission. We will evaluate space allocation and

building modernization through a phased and prioritized approach, ensuring the health, safety, and continued performance excellence of our employees, while making responsible use of the taxpayer dollar.

Improve Support Services: Effective USDA mission delivery requires sound support services at the enterprise level. USDA will be consolidating mission support delivery at the Mission Area level to improve the delivery of support services including IT, procurement, human resources, and financial operations. Reduced redundancies and a focus on ensuring strategic and enterprise approaches to mission support services by creating mission area business centers will increase efficiency, reduce costs, improve the customer experience, and lead to better data-driven decision making. Consolidating mission support services frees up agencies to focus on delivering better service to our customers.

Continuity of USDA programs: USDA programs must be delivered under all conditions. Although the Nation faces a wide array of hazards, threats, emergencies, and disruptions created by natural or man-made events, USDA will ensure the continuation of agriculture-related programs and sustain these through the identification of essential functions. These essential functions are the prioritized activities directly related to USDA's mission that the Department must execute throughout disruptions. Continuity plans and elements will be integrated in all USDA activities to ensure viable delivery platform and programs continue to exist irrespective of circumstance to sustain USDA's global agricultural leadership.

Outcomes

Through our strategies, we will improve customer and employee satisfaction with technology-dependent USDA services. A unified network that meets the connectivity needs of a widely geographically distributed and mobile workforce will improve collaboration and data sharing across USDA. The network will enable agencies

to increase bandwidth based on demand, for example, during peak reporting periods to meet mission needs. By moving to Department-wide end-user enterprise services, USDA will reduce costs, improve cybersecurity operations and boost employee and customer confidence in USDA's ability to secure their information, and enhance employee IT capabilities integral to serving the public. Furthermore, by centralizing IT operational services, individual agencies will be freed up to focus on modernizing and improving programmatic business processes that directly interface with customers.

We will maximize utilization of space to provide employees with modernized, safe, collaborative work areas that support their ability to deliver the USDA mission. USDA will consider both the integrity, safety, and layout of the physical space where employees work, as well as the cost impact of their geographical location, to provide a full view of our mission delivery capabilities.

Evidence Building

USDA relies on an extensive range of industry standard performance and operational metrics to ensure customer satisfaction and operational effectiveness in the areas of information technology operations, data management, cybersecurity, space management, and procurement. In addition to creating new enterprise IT services, USDA will establish new standards based on specific metrics that measure USDA-wide performance. USDA will collaborate with other Federal agencies, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the General Services Administration (GSA) to review and assess leading practices that meet or exceed established administrative efficiency and performance goals in multiple areas, including: help-desk problem resolution; per unit and per ticket cost-savings; space allocation and utilization; overall customer satisfaction; modernized collaborative work spaces; and IT devices per employee.

Objective 1.2:

Maintain a High-Performing Workforce Through Employee Engagement and Empowerment

Each USDA employee contributes directly to our mission success. To maintain a high-performing, customer-centric workforce, USDA will continue to foster a work environment that maximizes employee performance. Research indicates that the level of employee engagement is a key predictor of organizational productivity and profitability. An employee's performance is directly tied to his or her level of engagement and empowerment. Engaged and empowered employees are more dedicated, persistent, and passionate about their jobs and service delivery, and are more willing to invest personally to support the mission. A measure used across the Federal Government to demonstrate employee engagement is the Best Places to Work rankings, which are based on the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) results. The rankings are a measure provided by the Partnership for Public Service, a non-profit organization. USDA's goal is to remain in the Top 10 Best Places to Work in the Federal Government for large agencies.

Strategies

Ensure Effective Performance Management: Performance plans for every employee are linked to USDA's mission so each employee can personally connect how his or her work contributes to USDA's strategic goals. Employee engagement is incorporated into the performance plans of all executives, managers, and supervisors. Executives will continue to be expected to champion employee engagement activities, and Performance Review Boards will rely on performance review results in the annual rating process. We will also ensure that poor performance is quickly addressed and that high-performing employees are recognized and rewarded.

Strategic Goal 1

Leverage Training and Employee Development Opportunities: All USDA employees will continue to be encouraged to work with their supervisors on an Individual Development Plan (IDP) that is updated annually. The IDP represents a commitment that leaders make to employee growth and development. Employee engagement will continue to be central to the way we do business at USDA, solidified through required training for supervisors on best practices to enhance the connection employees have to their mission and responsibilities. Our personal development training programs will foster an environment of support for continual learning which will drive an improved workplace and mission delivery.

Foster Collaboration Between Managers and Employees: The key to our success with engaging and empowering employees is effective collaboration between managers and employees through multi-directional communication and information sharing. Tools that have proven beneficial to improving connections between employees and managers, such as town hall meetings, listening sessions, brown bag lunch events, and informal visits between leadership and employees will be highlighted and replicated across headquarters and field offices. USDA will continue to implement creative mechanisms to celebrate employee achievements and innovation in mission delivery through performance tracking and strategies for public recognition.

Outcomes

Earning a high ranking in the Top 10 Best Places to Work in the Federal Government for large agencies by the Partnership for Public Service is not just a number to us. Achieving a high ranking will serve to validate the other indicators we expect to see from our efforts to continue to engage and empower our workforce. Through their mission delivery, engaged and empowered employees will find creative solutions to unexpected challenges; they will bring innovation to their customer service delivery; they will display curiosity and collaboration across agency and Mission Area lines; they will celebrate each other's thoughts and experiences; and they will serve as ambassadors to recruit and retain a talented workforce that will ensure USDA's continued future success and evolution.

Evidence Building

Employee engagement and empowerment are directly tied to mission delivery, thus USDA will continue to work with Mission Areas to celebrate, share, and learn from employee success and innovation. Departmental directives and policies will be refined to streamline personnel processes and emphasize employee engagement through performance management. USDA will collaborate with other Federal agencies that have high levels of employee engagement, and we will review studies from the public and private sector to continually improve our support of a high-performing workforce.

Objective 1.3:

Reduce the Regulatory Burden and Streamline Processes

USDA is committed to creating a culture of consistent, efficient service to our customers while easing regulatory burdens to make it easier to invest, produce, and build in rural America. USDA regulations will allow for the creation of jobs and economic prosperity while ensuring the safety of our food supply and protecting and safeguarding our land, water, and other natural resources for future generations.

On February 24, 2017, President Trump signed Executive Order (E.O.) 13777 – Enforcing the Regulatory Reform Agenda, which established a Federal policy to lower regulatory burdens on the American people by implementing and enforcing regulatory reform. It directed Federal agencies to name a Regulatory Reform Officer (RRO) and establish a Regulatory Reform Task Force (RRTF). The RRTF is comprised of senior managers representing all the major missions of the Department.

Strategies

The RRTF will continue to oversee the solicitation of input from industry stakeholders, the public, and USDA employees to identify existing regulations, orders, guidance documents, and policies that may be outmoded, ineffective, insufficient, or excessively burdensome, and identifying new ideas to modify, streamline, expand, or repeal such items. Internally, we will provide support for managers, clarity for employees, and enhance focus on customer service through reducing the burden of the *ad hoc* nature of internal USDA directives on USDA operations. As we move forward, USDA will continue to review comments to ensure they are considered by agencies as they prepare their regulatory agendas.

The Department will review its stock of existing regulations, orders, and related guidance documents by asking four questions intended to help determine if they are consistent with sound policy:

- How does it affect jobs? Does it eliminate jobs, or inhibit job creation?
- Does it make sense? Is it outdated, unnecessary, or ineffective?
- Is it worth it? Does it impose costs that exceed benefits?
- Is there a better way? Will it create an inconsistency or interfere with regulatory reform initiatives, policies, and priorities? Is it duplicative within the Federal Government? Is it the role of Federal Government rather than State/local government or private sector?

Outcome

The intended outcome is to ease the regulatory burden on the American people and improve service delivery to USDA customers, and it will be measured in terms of compliance with E.O. 13771 - Reducing Regulation and Controlling Regulatory Costs. The changes will be reflected in the upcoming regulatory agendas and future statements of regulatory priorities.

Evidence Building

USDA will employ three principles to guide its regulatory review and reform effort: scientific rigor, lawfulness, and sound policy. All evidence used by agencies in support of a regulation will be based upon sound science, data, information, or methods that are publicly available and sufficiently transparent to meet the standard for reproducibility. USDA’s regulatory review and reform exercise will ensure that the science and research underlying the Department’s decisions, policies, and regulations are held to the highest standards of intellectual rigor and scientific integrity. USDA will also ensure that agencies

follow current laws to assess and mitigate the impact of new and existing regulations on the American people, and we will examine the judicial standards by which the lawfulness of its regulations will be judged.

Objective 1.4:

Improve Stewardship of Resources and Utilize Data-Driven Analyses To Maximize the Return on Investment

USDA is a steward of the Nation's resources, public lands, and research and administrative facilities, and is responsible for supporting America's farms, ranches, forests, and rural communities. With more than \$200 billion in assets, \$145 billion in annual spending, and \$100 billion in loans to America's rural communities, the Department shepherds these resources while relying on legislative guidance, streamlined policies, and the best available science. A key piece of that science is determining the outcomes and impacts of our work through accurate and reliable data.

Using this information, USDA can make decisions, evaluate outcomes, improve programs, and share how we invest the public's resources. Returns on these investments can be quantitative, but they may not always be counted in dollars and cents. In these instances, we describe the impacts of our activities in clear and concise narratives that inform decision-makers and stakeholders both within and outside USDA. This will allow USDA to continue to improve our program delivery over time to better meet intended legislative and policy outcomes.

Similarly, our administrative policies must also be supported by data. As the second-largest Executive Agency landholder in the Federal Government, the Department's real property asset portfolio includes 20,645 owned buildings

totaling approximately 193 million acres of land; 15.2 million square feet of commercially leased building space with an annual rent of \$241 million; and approximately 1,100 General Service Administration (GSA) space assignments with \$228 million in annual rent. The land, facilities, and other real property play a critical role in the Department's ability to deliver programs and services. Centralizing common processes and enhancing standardization and accountability at all levels will allow USDA to more effectively serve its employees and stakeholders.

Strategies

Improve Data Collection and Utilization: USDA will explore opportunities to improve the collection and utilization of data and information on both the direct effects of its programs and the broader outcomes that those activities may be having across the country and around the world. Where appropriate, USDA will make its data publicly available, while also guarding the privacy of individuals and organizations that support USDA's data collection efforts. In all cases where appropriate, USDA will strive to collect, analyze, and release data in an efficient and timely manner. This will allow us to use the most up-to-date information to improve and build upon the delivery, effectiveness, and outcomes of our programs. Accurate and relevant data will also enable our partners to meet their goals and objectives more efficiently.

USDA will combine knowledge and expertise from across the programmatic, research, and administrative mission areas to identify innovative opportunities to streamline and strengthen its data collection, analysis, and dissemination. Where appropriate, we will work to connect program-level data with results from surveys administered by the National Agriculture Statistics Service, Economic Research Service, and other agencies to connect the direct impacts of USDA's programs with broader trends in agriculture, forests, and

rural communities. We will also explore new methods and technologies to more efficiently collect data on the process, output, and outcome indicators for USDA programs and activities, including: integrating databases across USDA agencies; incorporating rapid-response customer surveys; integrating mobile data entry; and utilizing satellite and other remote-sensing products.

Enhance Internal Data: USDA will also better utilize its internal data by developing administrative dashboards and tracking systems to better understand where efficiencies can be gained in the technology, human resources, fleet, procurement, and real property spaces. The development of these dashboards and tracking systems will provide the Department with enhanced capacity to collect accurate, reliable, complete, accessible, and consistent data. Through these efforts, USDA will be better positioned to conduct effective evaluations of administrative programs, and provide leaders access to the data necessary to make informed decisions.

Reduce the Real Property Footprint: USDA will continue to identify and target real property reductions. Reduction efforts will not only occur in the office and warehouse portfolios, but in all categories of real property where reductions are either warranted by a lack of mission need or underutilization. In such cases, USDA will be identifying properties that offer co-location or consolidation opportunities or disposal.

Outcome

USDA will use up-to-date information and data, and the best available science, on both the direct effects of its programs and the broader state of agriculture, forests, and rural communities across the United States. As stewards of public resources, we will be able to show the return on investment for our activities through quantitative and qualitative evaluations. USDA will also use the data and tools developed through this effort to

inform day-to-day and long-term decision-making, evaluating our actions against a variety of criteria, including the efficiency and equity of our programs and how well they meet legislative intent.

Internally, USDA will decrease the overall real property footprint through effective disposal and consolidation efforts to reduce overall square footage of building space by 1 percent annually. The reduced footprint will conserve energy and save money, enabling agencies to reinvest in improved mission delivery. Over time, a reduced footprint will improve the utilization of Government-owned buildings, lower the number of excess and underutilized properties, including fleet, and improve the cost effectiveness and efficiency of the portfolio. Consolidating properties and co-locating agency office space is not only cost effective, but can provide more convenient and cohesive access to the public and allow for upgraded, modern facilities that promote increased health, safety, and performance of USDA employees. Additionally, space reduction creates opportunities for modernization of existing spaces in USDA that promote the health, well-being, and performance of employees who serve customers.

Evidence Building

The strategies for this objective will help USDA make science-based, data-driven decisions and communicate the impacts of those decisions to our stakeholders. The outputs of a particular program are often the easiest to measure, in terms of money spent, number of individuals served, or acres of a specific conservation practice implemented. However, developing and evaluating robust measures of outcomes and impacts is more difficult. There are methods to monitor progress for these types of activities, including benchmarks toward achieving activity goals. In addition, tools such as logic models are useful for mapping the relationships between program activities, outputs, and short, medium, and long-term outcomes. Throughout this process, USDA will

recognize that various programs and activities may need different evaluation methods, and use varying temporal and spatial scales to best assess progress and outcomes. Coordination between programmatic and research agencies, as well as strategic engagement with land-grant universities and other external partners, can help USDA develop new and innovative methods to evaluate our programs and identify relationships between USDA's activities and broader outcomes across the country.

Human Capital Management

Success for this goal lies within the heart and minds of our workforce, as they are charged with delivering the mission every day. USDA remains dedicated to our employees by ensuring that they have the tools, space, and opportunities to deliver our mission and serve our Nation. We also must ensure that we improve, consolidate, or eliminate duplicative processes which impede our employees'

delivery of excellent service to their customers. We will achieve these goals using the employee-focused tools outlined in Objective 1.2.

In alignment with the Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act, USDA will increase focus on the certification of acquisition program and project managers, and we will work to create and develop specialized teams of contracting professionals and program managers who work closely together to improve contracting and management of USDA investments. USDA will analyze the benefits of implementing the use of special hiring authorities for cybersecurity personnel and other IT resources in high demand. Where additional specialized or highly technical expertise is not available through the Federal workforce, USDA will tap into public-private partnerships and contractor services to address these workforce gaps, all with an eye towards ultimately building relevant and necessary skillsets within our own employees.

Key Performance Measures

	Baseline Data FY 2017	FY 2018 Target	FY 2022 Target
Reduce the number of data centers across the Department.	39	20	2
Maintain ranking of the Top 10 Best Places to Work in the Federal Government for large agencies by the Partnership for Public Service.	7	Top 10	Top 10
Reduce the Department's overall real property footprint through effective disposal and consolidation efforts (Million Square Feet).	31.9	31.6	30.3
Reduce the Department's total number of light duty fleet vehicles (Thousand).	29.4	28.8	26.5



Strategic Goal 2:

Maximize the Ability of American Agricultural Producers To Prosper by Feeding and Clothing the World

A strong and prosperous agricultural sector is essential to the well-being of the U.S. economy. America's farmers and ranchers ensure a reliable food supply, support job growth, and promote economic development. To maintain a competitive agricultural sector, USDA will support farmers and ranchers' ability to start and maintain profitable businesses as well as offer financial support to producers affected by natural disasters. Furthermore, USDA's research agencies will continue to introduce high-performance plants, animals, and integrated management options that increase the efficiency of farming practices. Lastly, USDA will also provide tools to producers so that they are well-positioned to secure a share of a growing market for agricultural products.

Objective 2.1:

Provide an Effective Financial Safety Net for Farmers and Ranchers to Sustain Economically Viable Agricultural Production and Support Rural Jobs and Economic Growth

USDA is committed to providing an effective safety net to the more than 2 million agricultural producers who provide food and fiber to more than 320 million Americans and millions more around the globe. USDA works to strengthen the economic viability of the agricultural sector by providing eligible producers with income support payments, disaster assistance, marketing assistance loans, farm loans, and risk management tools through its extensive network of offices covering most rural counties. These programs help farmers and ranchers manage financial risks associated with commodity price fluctuations and recover from unpredictable weather events.

Farm loans provide farmers and ranchers access to credit when they are unable to obtain financing from commercial lenders at reasonable rates and terms. Through direct and guaranteed farm ownership and operating loans, USDA assists tens of thousands of family farmers each year with starting and maintaining profitable farm and ranch businesses. Disaster assistance programs offer financial support to crop and livestock producers affected by drought, floods, hurricanes, wildfires, and other natural disasters. USDA's income support options provide producers the flexibility to select the program that best fits their needs. For example, Marketing Assistance Loans (MALs) provide producers interim financing to

Strategic Goal 2

meet cash flow needs without having to sell their commodities when market prices are lower. USDA support of farmers and ranchers extends across rural America, supporting jobs and economic growth.

Federal crop insurance keeps many of our Nation's agricultural producers in business when adverse weather, pests, or low commodity prices cause financial hardships. Risks to these programs include ensuring the actuarial soundness of insurance policies (particularly after high-loss years), reducing improper payments, and maintaining the reputation of Federal crop insurance as the primary Federal financial safety net provided to farmers and ranchers. Other risks include changing market conditions (such as

periods of steep price declines) and widespread or prolonged natural disasters. USDA manages these and other risks through ongoing reviews of crop production information, analysis of actuarial data, analyzing weather and climate information, data mining for anomalies, and overseeing the private-sector insurance companies who sell and service the insurance policies to farmers to ensure that they meet financial and operational standards required to participate in the program.

Strategies

Provide a farm safety net that helps American farmers weather times of economic stress without distorting markets: USDA provides programs and services that support the economic stability of



American farmers and ranchers. The Department works to ensure that the American agriculture industry is competitive by providing farmers and ranchers with financial capital, risk management assistance through the Federal crop insurance program, and financial and other support in times of economic distress or disaster.

Evaluate and Monitor the Customer Experience: Understanding customer needs and expectations is essential to providing exceptional customer service. USDA will evaluate the current customer experience for farmers and ranchers, which will result in a better understanding of customer needs and expectations, identification of specific improvement projects that will have the greatest impact on the customer experience, and development of a set of key performance indicators to monitor the customer experience. These insights will allow USDA to prioritize investments with the customer in mind. This strategy is also supported by USDA's FY 2018-2019 Agency Priority Goals. The Department will highlight the work in the customer experience space as one of the goals to ensure achievement of this strategy.

Improve Program Delivery: The Department will enhance customer access to its farm loan, income support, and risk management programs through improved personnel education and training. The Department is also advancing the use of web-based technologies to expand and improve agriculture producers' access to USDA programs and decision tools.

Increase Analytic Capabilities: USDA will continue to improve its program analytics and reporting capabilities. These tools are critical to evaluate program effectiveness and accountability, and enhance delivery of these programs to farmers and ranchers.

Increase Farm Program Participation: A robust set of risk management, income support, and disaster assistance programs enables producers to be proactive in protecting their farm enterprises. Increasing participation in these programs contributes to economic stability and reduces short-term income volatility. The Department will continue to conduct education and outreach through its network of State and local offices, the Cooperative Extension Service, State Departments of Agriculture, land-grant university partners, nongovernmental organizations, nonprofits, community, and faith-based organizations.

Maintain Actuarial Soundness of the Federal Crop Insurance Program: An actuarially sound crop insurance program, as mandated by statute, is a critical component of an effective financial safety net for farmers and ranchers. USDA will regularly adjust premium rates to reflect accumulated loss experiences, commission periodic external reviews of premium rating methodologies, and monitor underwriting procedures and key program dates.

Expand Program and Practice Offerings for Federal Crop Insurance Enabling Farmers To Make Sound Production Decisions and To Manage Operational Risk: Access to crop insurance greatly increases the ability of farmers and ranchers to weather hard times and secure loans needed to cover input costs or expand their operations.

Encourage Entry Into Farming Through Increased Access to Land and Capital for Young, Beginning, and Underrepresented Farmers: New and beginning farmers and ranchers are a fundamental and growing part of the American and global agricultural marketplace. USDA continues to support new and beginning farmers to access capital and risk management tools, acquire land, and develop financially sustainable operations to promote the next generation of American agriculturalists.

Outcomes

USDA will continue to play a crucial role in supporting America's rural prosperity by providing a strong safety net for America's farmers and ranchers. In addition, the customer experience and program delivery will be improved.

Evidence Building

Several ongoing internal evaluations provide insights into the effectiveness of strategies to reach our objective of providing an effective financial safety net for farmers and ranchers to sustain viable agricultural production and support rural jobs. On an annual basis, USDA compares crop revenue with and without the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) program payments. Complementing this data is USDA's annual review of the financial security of the agricultural production sector. When combined, this data allows comparisons through time of the effectiveness of USDA's strategies in improving the performance of the farm safety net programs. The Farm Loan Program Risk Assessment (FLPRA) is the primary tool that USDA uses for ongoing review and oversight of field office farm loan program operations. FLPRA evaluates farm loan programs using a data-driven, risk-based approach and provides the framework for assessing program management and oversight of State Offices and program delivery by Service Centers. The Federal crop insurance program is periodically evaluated, and adjustments are made based upon evidence from these evaluations.

Objective 2.2:

Increase Agricultural Opportunities and Support Economic Growth by Creating New Markets and Supporting a Competitive Agricultural System

Each year, the Department's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) provides industry-specific services and grants to help agricultural food producers and businesses create and enhance their food marketing efforts. Through the National Farmers Market Directory, National Organic Database, and the Market Information Portal, USDA connects consumers and producers to more than 8,000 farmers markets, certified organic operations, and commodity pricing data. USDA also provides onsite assessment and design services for food market planners, managers, and community stakeholders to improve the efficiency of permanent food market facilities. These facilities include wholesale markets, farmers markets, public markets, and food hubs, all of which are important parts of the national food distribution network and provide important agricultural opportunities for producers.

Through its various grant programs, USDA works to support the economic growth of U.S. growers and producers, local and regional food systems, innovative production methodologies, and marketing strategies. These grants address issues that include increased access to fruits and vegetables, transportation, food safety, and sustainability.

To provide a common language for commodity buyers and sellers, USDA develops commodity standards that are widely used by the agricultural industry in trading, futures market contracts, and in purchase specifications in most private contracts. Utilizing these standards and other process-verified determinations, USDA provides grading and inspection, auditing, and accreditation services for more than \$150 billion worth of agricultural products on an annual

basis, ensuring the quality of domestic goods, and helping American farms and businesses export goods to at least 100 different countries.

USDA's collaborative work with industry ensures that we keep pace with trends and changing needs. The Agricultural Marketing Service's Research & Promotion programs conduct research that can assist in developing new markets and strengthening existing markets. AMS also analyzes and publishes market information to assist in the orderly marketing and distribution of agricultural commodities.

Through our efforts to support a competitive agriculture system, we have partnered with the other Federal Agencies and government entities as well as public associations on issues related to marketing, testing, inspection, technical assistance offerings, safety, and food procurement. Internally, we will continue to coordinate efforts across USDA agencies in support of our farmers and other stakeholders.

Strategies

Expand New Markets: As demand for market transparency and food access increases, USDA will continue to ensure that its programs have the tools necessary to address both current and future needs of consumers and industry. For example, USDA will assist in the establishment or expansion of new market opportunities through its various grant and data reporting programs. In addition to grant support, USDA will provide wholesale and farmers markets with targeted community-level trainings, site assessment, and architectural design services for food market planners, managers, and community stakeholders to improve the efficiency of local food systems and permanent food market facilities.

Develop and Maintain Market Data: USDA will develop and maintain vital market data for both Federal and industry partners. In response to the increasing demand for information, USDA will

utilize innovative methods to collect and report information. The Department will continue to assess, modernize, and restructure programs to provide services that meet customer needs and capitalize on opportunities to achieve greater efficiencies through streamlined processes and cross-leveraged internal resources.

Outcome

USDA will develop market opportunities while improving food access and market transparency by helping industry connect with consumers through our grants and market access programs. These programs will increase market interest and commodity value. Through industry-specific services and grants, agricultural food producers and businesses will create and enhance their food marketing abilities. USDA programs provide market intelligence and product integrity through reporting and standards development and application. Grant projects focus on the following priority areas: research, food safety, sustainability, market access, nutrition, and improving efficiency of distribution systems. These programs and services will benefit industry stakeholders throughout the food supply chain.

Evidence

Markets are being established or expanded by improving access to healthy, locally produced foods, with a focus on food production and distribution at both traditional and non-traditional retail options. Through these means, producers will be better equipped to distribute and market healthy foods and have access to market information that will provide a basis for good business decisions. This will be achieved through the development of systems and portals that provide customers with greater access and flexibility with market data. In addition, USDA's fee-for-service programs will continue to meet customer expectations through timely, objective, and valuable program delivery and develop commodity standards and programs which facilitate global trade and economic growth.

Objective 2.3:

Protect Agricultural Health by Preventing and Mitigating the Spread of Agricultural Pests and Disease

American agriculture continually faces threats arising from domestic and foreign pests and diseases, which have negative impacts on animal and plant agricultural production, commerce, and trade. USDA's animal health and specialty crop pests programs help protect these commodities, which are valued at \$193 billion.¹ Identifying these intentional and unintentional threats, risks, and conditions early enables USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to anticipate potential outbreaks and act appropriately to prevent damage. The threats posed by agricultural pests and diseases are also continually evolving. USDA responds to these threats by adjusting its strategies for the early and rapid identification of agricultural pests and diseases through surveillance and monitoring techniques, and applying pest mitigations as appropriate and necessary. Working collaboratively, the Department is able to address these threats by building and maintaining the capability and capacity to rapidly respond to an agricultural pest or disease outbreak.

USDA must balance keeping American agriculture safe against increasing requests for agricultural market access by our international trading partners. We make trade safe by examining disease and pest risks and inserting mitigation strategies into our international agreements and interstate movement protocols, which reduce the risk of unsafe agricultural imported products entering the United States and ensure that American agriculture is protected. Domestically, we employ emergency response activities that minimize threats and their impacts

on agricultural industries. However, there may be a pest or disease introduction that exceeds the Department's ability to effectively respond, and USDA adapts to changes in agricultural risk by adjusting available resources to address the threats. For example, we may take the most restrictive measure and stop movement of an at-risk commodity through a regulatory action. Alternatively, we may embark on a collaborative research effort to develop pest-resistant strains of crops, develop new animal-disease vaccines, or expedite the approval of new treatments.

Strategies

Surveillance and Early Detection: USDA's animal and plant health protection strategy begins by identifying high-risk pest and disease threats and monitoring for their potential appearance in the United States. APHIS prevents foreign pests and diseases from entering the United States through offshore programs and mitigating the pest risks associated with agricultural imports. Once a pest or disease becomes established or spreads, it can result in substantial costs to producers and consumers. Detecting a new pest or disease quickly is crucial to a quick and effective response. APHIS works with partners in State Departments of Agriculture and industry to expand the Agency's detection and emergency response capabilities. APHIS provides guidance on identifying high-risk threats, develops surveillance and monitoring tools and techniques, carries out nationwide surveys for plant pests and diseases, and conducts surveillance of foreign animal diseases with State partners. Each year, APHIS and partners conduct surveys for the pests and diseases that present the highest risk. APHIS also ensures that the United States has the diagnostic capability to identify the pests and diseases that are found through monitoring and surveillance efforts. The Agency supports diagnostic capability through animal and plant laboratory networks with State and university personnel.

¹ Derived from USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) reports and publications, including results and analysis of the Census of Agriculture conducted every 5 years.

Emergency Preparedness and Response: When a serious pest or disease outbreak occurs, APHIS activates its emergency response mechanisms to contain the outbreak. APHIS maintains the capacity to respond rapidly to a variety of agricultural emergencies, ranging from small-scale incidents to catastrophic events. The Agency carries out regular emergency preparedness and response activities to improve its ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from animal and plant health emergencies. This includes developing strategies and policies for incident management, and conducting exercises with Federal, State, and local partners to test and improve response plans. One key to effective responses is a strong network of people trained and prepared to respond to any of these emergencies. This network includes people from other USDA and Federal Agencies which are part of the National Response Plan, and the State and local government personnel as part of State-level response plans. Trained Agency personnel are the backbone of our emergency response capacity, and APHIS is working to increase the percentage of staff properly trained in the Incident Command System. These personnel will be able to deploy quickly when an emergency occurs and allow the Agency to sustain a response program over the course of the emergency. To be prepared for large-scale, animal health-related events, the Agency also maintains an animal health emergency reserve corps of approximately 3,000 private veterinarians, animal health technicians, and veterinary students. APHIS also facilitates planning sessions with major commodity groups to develop plans that would ensure the continuous movement of livestock products during an animal health emergency.

Control and Eradication: USDA works closely with State and industry partners to address ongoing agricultural pest and disease issues and to mitigate wildlife damage to agricultural resources. These cooperative programs target economically significant pests and diseases through a variety of methods and techniques. Additionally, APHIS works in conjunction with State, tribal, and

industry cooperators to eradicate harmful pests and diseases or, where eradication is not feasible, minimize their impact through management activities and facilitating the development of industry best practices. The Agency monitors endemic pests and diseases, and partners with State Departments of Agriculture to prevent spread to new areas. APHIS also continually improves and develops new methods of managing pests and diseases.

Outcomes

By employing prevention and mitigation strategies, USDA reduces or mitigates the impact of agricultural pests and diseases, as well as wildlife damage, ensuring that U.S. farms and ranches remain healthy and productive. The impacts of pests and diseases can be staggering. For example, highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) alone cost Federal taxpayers over \$950 million in just 1 year. To this end, the Department's work to protect the health of American agriculture begins by preventing harmful pests and diseases from entering the United States. Our efforts include quickly detecting foreign pests and diseases that may have evaded our prevention measures. To ensure this early detection, USDA works with its partners to conduct monitoring and surveillance efforts, including early detection surveys, throughout the country. This rapid response results in minimal impact to U.S. producers and disruptions to trade. One of the Department's targets is to conduct early detection surveys for 93 percent of the country's high-risk plant pests, as identified on the priority pest list. As for those pests and diseases already established in the country, USDA eradicates or controls the spread, minimizing the impacts to U.S. producers and customers.

To identify successes under this objective, APHIS will continue to use a variety of operational measures for key programs and initiatives and will routinely solicit feedback from partners and stakeholders to improve program performance.

APHIS also reviews a selection of business line processes on an annual basis to improve efficiencies with service delivery to customers, and in some cases, reduce the cost of providing these services to customers.

Evidence Building

To measure the effectiveness of our strategies, the Department meets annually with the National Plant Board and the United States Animal Health Association to discuss new and emerging threats, opportunities, and challenges related to existing program strategies. These discussions often lead to the creation of working groups to further explore issues and recommend changes or modifications to practices and/or policies related to animal and plant health. USDA also holds routine meetings with industry sectors to solicit feedback on high-priority programs and initiatives.

Human Capital Management

To ensure our workforce meets the objective of preventing and mitigating the spread of agricultural pests and diseases, we are developing new strategies and tools to improve managing talent across the Agency. To help create new markets and support a competitive agricultural system, our workforce is working closely with industry to identify marketing trends and data needs to equip our employees with the necessary skills to meet changing demands.

Key Performance Measures

	Baseline Data FY 2017	FY 2018 Target	FY 2022 Target
The annual normalized value of risk protection provided to agricultural producers through the Federal Crop Insurance program (\$ Billion)	\$62.1 (FY12)	\$64.0	\$65.2
Average number of days to process direct loans (Farm Service Agency)	31	31	31
New markets established or expanded through technical assistance	100	104	112
Percent of high-risk plant pests for which early detection surveys are conducted ²	92% (FY16)	93%	95%
Number of National Animal Health Laboratory Network participating labs able to electronically message animal disease testing results to USDA	31	35	53
Number of hours it takes to mobilize resources once it is determined that a Federal emergency response is needed to manage an agricultural outbreak	24	24	24

² A high-risk pest will have a high probability of causing significant impacts through crop lost, habitat modifications, and/or significant mitigation costs. A high-risk pest can be defined as one that is likely to enter the United States, establish a viable population, and spread in the environment, and in doing so, would cause serious economic, and/or environmental impacts.



Strategic Goal 3:

Promote American Agricultural Products and Exports

Expanding international marketing opportunities for U.S. farmers and exporters is critical to business and income growth across rural America. It is essential for USDA to continue its efforts to promote American agricultural products and exports through promotion activities, development of international standards, removal of trade barriers by monitoring and enforcing existing trade agreements, and negotiation of new trade agreements that benefit the U.S. agricultural economy. USDA will also partner with developing countries to move them along the agricultural market continuum from developing economies to developed economies with promising demand potential. Ultimately, this work will build the foundations for future markets and create long-term international relationships that further advance U.S. agriculture's export.

Objective 3.1:

Expand International Marketing Opportunities

USDA links U.S. agriculture to the world by promoting agricultural exports, which are vital to the American agricultural sector. USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) conducts export promotion activities, which help U.S. food and agricultural exporters take advantage of market opportunities created by removing barriers to U.S. exports and by capacity-building successes that increase demand for exports. USDA administers trade programs and activities, working in partnership with private-sector associations, land-grant universities, State regional trade groups, U.S. food and agricultural exporters, and U.S. and foreign financial institutions.

The Department expands international market opportunities in numerous ways. USDA connects agricultural exporters to customers and ensures a level playing field for U.S. farmers and ranchers. It provides timely information on agricultural and food markets in the United States and abroad, and it facilitates trade through the unique network of overseas offices around the world. It also facilitates the availability of finance, particularly in developing and emerging markets, which is essential for a healthy trading system.

External factors play a role in expanding international marketing opportunities. These factors include environmental conditions, such as variability in domestic and overseas crop production, natural disasters, disease outbreaks, pest infestations, and food contamination. Certain international macroeconomic factors

are important, including changes in the relative strength of the U.S. dollar to foreign currencies, the rate of growth of the global economic middle class, and political instability that undermines demand in key importing countries.

Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective by continuing to implement trade programs and activities that focus on assisting food and agricultural exporters. The Foreign Agricultural Service will provide timely and efficient delivery of foreign market development programs that leverage private-sector resources to expand U.S. exports by communicating the value of its export promotion programs and trade capacity-building programs to U.S. stakeholders.

USDA will increase public awareness of export opportunities through education and outreach efforts, including reaching out to new-to-export companies and new-to-market agriculture-related companies to encourage active participation in foreign trade shows and a wide variety of exporter-assistance education tools. These efforts could include providing credit guarantees to facilitate U.S. exports in developing markets and improving or establishing infrastructure that facilitates U.S. exports. Finally, USDA will strengthen the development of agricultural market information systems in emerging economies to provide U.S. exporters accurate and timely commodity data on potential market opportunities.

Outcome

An increase in food and agricultural exports remains a principal goal for USDA. The investments made with our market promotion programs and the work with small- and medium-sized enterprises will play an essential role in the overall goal of increased agricultural exports. The contributions from the market promotion programs will be used to help farmers, ranchers, and food and agricultural exporters succeed in new and old markets.

Evidence Building

The establishment of the Under Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs (TFAA), which is dedicated to the promotion and expansion of U.S. agricultural exports, is a crucial development in meeting the Department's trade goal. The TFAA mission area will develop and execute the strategies and priorities needed to expand U.S. agricultural and food exports. Measures will be identified or developed to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy. USDA conducts studies every few years to quantify the value of our trade promotion programs. For example, an Informa study released in 2016 concluded that market development programs (2002-2014) boosted agricultural export revenue, adding \$12.5 billion annually, supported farm income by \$2.1 billion annually, and increased economic output by \$39.3 billion annually, enhancing the overall economy. A new study is expected in 5 years.

Objective 3.2:

Prevent or Resolve Barriers to Trade That Hinder U.S. Food and Agricultural Exports

Agricultural exports are crucial to the economic viability of U.S. farmers and ranchers. USDA strives to ensure that U.S. exporters can sell safe, wholesome U.S. food and agricultural products around the world. To maintain a level playing field for U.S. food and agricultural exporters who compete internationally, USDA provides technical and scientific expertise to successfully address animal and plant health issues and prevent and resolve barriers to U.S. food and agricultural exports. USDA monitors and enforces trade agreements, uses its market development programs to support the trade-policy efforts of industry partners, and works with other government agencies, trade associations, and regional and international organizations to establish transparent, science-based standards for U.S. agricultural products. To foster fair and open trade, USDA officials ensure animal and plant health requirements put in place are proportional to the risk without being excessively restrictive. The Department will also ensure, through its monitoring and enforcement efforts, that we obtain the anticipated benefits when new agreements are implemented.

USDA relies on its worldwide network of agricultural attachés and scientists, frequent communication with private-sector stakeholders, and the formal World Trade Organization notification procedures to monitor foreign trade and regulatory actions that have the potential to affect exports. Removing existing barriers while ensuring new ones are not introduced will directly help U.S. food and agricultural producers thrive. When shipments are held up at foreign ports, USDA works with its agricultural counterparts in other countries to resolve the issues and secure the

release of the shipments. USDA works to ensure that the same rules apply to countries around the world through international standard setting, and it works to ensure scientific principles are the basis for international agricultural trade decisions.

Strategies

USDA will achieve this objective by negotiating, monitoring, and enforcing trade agreements and responding to barriers to U.S. exports; building and sustaining coalitions and partnerships; promoting and improving international standard setting; providing technical and regulatory expertise to support U.S. food and agricultural exports; and building technical and regulatory capacity in other countries.

Monitor and Enforce Trade Agreements: USDA will continue to strengthen its ability to monitor and enforce trade agreements, support trade-related technical assistance, and provide coordinated and rapid responses to urgent and emerging barriers to U.S. exports through the establishment of the Interagency Trade Policy Committee (ITPC), which will serve as a decision-making body on export issues and strategies. Coordination among policy and regulatory agencies will provide consistent and effective solutions to export issues, including U.S. import policies raised by trading partners. USDA will continue to protect international markets by



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negotiating bilateral, regional, and multilateral trade agreements.

Build and Sustain Coalitions and Partnerships: USDA will continue to build coalitions by cultivating bilateral and regional relationships to oppose unnecessary technical barriers to trade. We help developing country partners implement internationally recognized Sanitary or Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) standards and resolve specific trade issues through technical assistance, training, and exchanges.

Promote and Improve International Standard Setting: Through its leadership and involvement in international standard setting bodies, USDA will continue to help promote and improve

international animal and plant health standards that provide a basis for countries around the world to use in setting their import policies. By providing its technical and regulatory expertise in animal and plant health issues, USDA helps ensure that international standards are based on scientific information and adequately address risk while not being overly restrictive. The Department advocates globally for the development and adoption of science-based, international standards and policies, including those guiding the development of new and emerging technologies such as biotechnology.

Provide Technical and Regulatory Expertise To Support U.S. Agricultural Exports: USDA will continue to use its technical and regulatory expertise to provide information such as



pest and disease surveillance data and U.S. regulatory practices to address trading partners' concerns related to SPS issues that affect export opportunities for U.S. farmers and ranchers. The Department provides technical support to Federal partners negotiating for U.S. access to foreign markets through bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations. In addition to providing information related to animal and plant health concerns, USDA also assists in resolving SPS issues when individual shipments are held up at foreign ports of entry. The Department provides guidance and technical information to U.S. exporters as they implement measures to meet foreign animal and plant health requirements as well as certifies that shipments meet foreign countries' requirements as needed. These actions ensure that U.S. exports keep moving to global markets.

Build Technical and Regulatory Capacity: USDA will continue to strengthen the openness in emerging economies for agricultural trade with the United States through positive examples of technical collaboration and capacity-building programs. USDA works with many foreign countries that lack the capacity to conduct required risk assessments and other activities needed to engage in agricultural trade to build animal and plant health regulatory capacity. Helping other countries strengthen regulatory capacity allows them to participate in safe agricultural trade and prevent the spread of pests and diseases beyond their borders. Ultimately, these activities will help protect the United States from foreign pests and diseases as well as potentially lead to new export opportunities in the future.

Outcome

Ensuring access to international markets will be the main outcome of the objective, which will be achieved by negotiating, monitoring, and enforcing trade agreements that improve access to key markets and by providing technical and scientific expertise that address animal and plant

health issues associated with trade. In FY 2016, USDA preserved more than \$5 billion in trade by opening new markets or restarting ones that were shut down and assisting with individual commodity shipments that were held up at foreign ports of entry. USDA also issued more than 600,000 export certificates for agricultural shipments, with a total value in the billions of dollars.

USDA provides leadership in the international standard-setting organizations such as the World Organization for Animal Health and the International Plant Protection Convention. USDA's expertise in international standard setting, results in the promotion of safe trade and encourages reciprocities from the U.S. trading partners. These efforts led to the safe trade of agricultural products worth an estimated market value of \$2.6 billion. In addition, the USDA's capacity-building efforts in other countries promote safe agricultural trade and ultimately reduce the risks from these countries of pest and disease spread.

Evidence Building

The establishment of the Under Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs (TFAA), which is dedicated to the promotion and expansion of U.S. agricultural exports, is a crucial development in meeting the Department's trade strategic goal. The TFAA mission area will identify strategies and set clear priorities to minimize all factors that hinder trade and to maximize opportunities for U.S. ranchers, farmers, and processors. The TFAA will use the ITPC to develop a unified trade strategy. Improved coordination and strategic decision-making will generate export opportunities for producers and exporters and improve customer service. This effort responds directly to external stakeholders' concerns about getting rapid resolution on detained shipments, application of non-science-based trade barriers, and other urgent situations that affect U.S. exports.

USDA routinely monitors key program activities and initiatives, conducts program reviews, and works collaboratively with partners and stakeholders to solicit feedback on program operations and policies. For example, USDA holds routine meetings with industry sectors to solicit feedback on high-priority programs and initiatives. Stakeholders continually stress the importance of exports to their producers. USDA works closely with the office of the U.S. Trade Representative to maintain a coordinated, strategic approach to resolving SPS trade-barrier issues and other trade-policy challenges facing the Department. USDA's technical support is key to ensuring that U.S. agricultural exports can move around the world. The Department provides pest and disease analyses to document the status or absence of pests and diseases of concern to trading partners, works with exporters to ensure their products meet the requirements of trading partners, and certifies that individual shipments meet foreign countries' import requirements (as needed).

Objective 3.3:

Build Demand in Developing Countries Through Trade Capacity Building

USDA advances global trade and food security with food assistance, agricultural training, and technical assistance for developing economies worldwide. USDA programs foster market-based, economic growth along the full agricultural development spectrum, and they build the capacity of countries to integrate into the global economy and become trading partners with the United States. The adoption of import and regulatory policies aligned with international standards and the dissemination of new agricultural technologies are priorities. USDA works with these countries to move them along the agricultural market spectrum from developing economies to developed economies with promising demand potential. USDA's trade capacity-building and food-security programs aim

to build the foundations for future markets and create long-term international relationships that further advance U.S. agriculture's export interests in developing countries.

These services strive to strengthen the capacity of foreign countries to import and participate in international markets fully, which could expand demand for U.S. agricultural products and also enhance global food security. USDA works with U.S. agricultural industries, host-government officials, agricultural scientists, and overseas farmers and businesses in promoting long-term market growth, food security, and trade capacity building. USDA conducts trade and scientific exchange programs, notably the Cochran and Borlaug Fellowship Programs, to develop markets and achieve food-security objectives. The Cochran and Borlaug Fellowship Programs assist in opening markets, decreasing or eliminating trade barriers for U.S. agricultural exports.

USDA is just one partner in this objective. Initiatives are undertaken by many U.S. Government agencies, other governments, international financial institutions, and private development organizations, as well as the local governments. Natural disasters, political instability, and inconsistent economic and import policies have the potential to hamper the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Strategies

USDA looks to improve food security, nutrition, and literacy by providing food assistance to food-insecure countries and leveraging partnerships with U.S. Government agencies, land-grant universities, the private sector, and other institutions to conduct technical assistance and training for food insecure nations.

We support trade capacity building, research and technical training, and food assistance activities to expand economic growth and opportunities, to open markets and eliminate trade barriers to

help strengthen agricultural systems and markets in developing countries for U.S. agricultural and food exports. This will be done by working with other U.S. Government agencies and foreign counterparts to develop and adopt market-based policies and institutions to create demand for U.S. exports through trade capacity building in strategically targeted markets.

Outcome

Developing new markets is the main goal of the objective. USDA will continue to provide food assistance, training and technical assistance, and technical exchanges that build foreign country capacity to grow, buy, use, and process U.S. agricultural products. USDA’s trade capacity building and food security programs build the foundation for future markets and create long-term demand for U.S. agricultural and food products in developing countries. The adoption of U.S. trade and regulatory policies and new agricultural technologies will move the developing countries along the agricultural continuum from developing economies to developed economies, where market expansion is the primary focus.

Evidence Building

Improved coordination and strategic decision-making will generate export opportunities for producers and exporters and improve customer service. USDA had a Lean Six Sigma assessment to look at the review and award processes for the Food Assistance Programs. The goals included reducing the application timeframe and improving customer service. This effort responds directly to external stakeholders’ concerns about application, review, and the award process of the programs. USDA has included improvements in the review and award processes based on recommendations from this assessment.

Human Capital Management

USDA’s human capital efforts will focus on ensuring our workforce is prepared to assist our customers in an ever increasingly competitive market place. USDA will work to close competency and staffing gaps to meet customers’ demands, thus better positioning USDA to support a competitive agriculture system. Equipped with the proper knowledge, skills, and abilities, USDA employees will be well suited to work with its industry partners to advance agricultural trade opportunities.

Key Performance Measures

	Baseline Data FY 2017	FY 2018 Target	FY 2022 Target
Value of agricultural exports resulting from participation in foreign food and agricultural trade shows (\$ Billion).	\$1.52 (FY 15)	\$1.70	\$1.73
Value of trade preserved through resolution of foreign market access issues such as U.S. export detainment, restrictive SPS and TBT issues, and trade regulations (\$ Billion).	\$3.6 (FY 15)	\$4.0	\$6.0
Percentage of Food for Progress projects that increase a project participant’s value of sales by 9% or higher ³	33%	35%	43%

SPS – Sanitary and Phytosanitary
TBT – Technical Barriers to Trade

³ FY 2022 targets are based on the assumption that this program will continue to be appropriated at current levels. Measures and targets will be revisited and revised as Appropriations bills are drafted and enacted.



Strategic Goal 4:

Facilitate Rural Prosperity and Economic Development

USDA promotes rural prosperity and economic development by financing investments in rural utilities, housing, and businesses. When rural Americans share the same level of infrastructure services as the country's urban areas, rural communities can make even greater economic contributions with healthy businesses and families. Just as economic and social science research informs decision-makers regarding current trends in rural America and gaps in existing markets, USDA may then provide benefits to rural American businesses and citizens. USDA will leverage funds, stimulate private-public partnerships, and engage in collaboration to build rural infrastructure including: broadband, community facilities, safe and affordable housing, health services and facilities, and provide capacity building to help underserved communities become thriving communities.

Objective 4.1:

Expand Rural Business Opportunity and Rural Quality of Life With Access to Capital; Improved Infrastructure, Broadband Access, and Connectivity; and Support for Workforce Availability

USDA's Rural Development serves a leading role in facilitating rural prosperity and economic development by financing investments in rural utilities, housing, and business investments. Building and modernizing rural America's infrastructure will be a critical pillar of the Administration's efforts to create jobs and increase our country's productivity of vital goods and services. Likewise, communities that do not invest in critical infrastructure upgrades risk losing their ability to provide clean, safe, and reliable water; electric, broadband, health, other community services; and business growth.

A strategic economic development approach will be required for rural communities to succeed today, for tomorrow, and for these communities to become economic hubs of the future economy. Continued investment will be required to close infrastructure gaps and connect rural residents and businesses to nationwide and global commerce.

Infrastructure investment has historically been an appropriate and effective role for the Federal Government. Such investments expand the private sector's access to markets while enhancing opportunity for small businesses, which are the backbone of rural communities. Infrastructure investments strengthen the job market by making workforce participation more accessible through improved access to transportation, education,

health care, broadband, and other services essential to maintaining a robust commercial environment and labor force. USDA works to engage local leaders, business partnerships, and local and State governments to facilitate self-driven efforts to improve quality of life and economic prosperity.

Finally, these investments can help address significant challenges for rural economies, such as providing for the care and residential needs of an aging population. Building water treatment plants, hospitals, businesses, schools, homes, and other infrastructural components not only creates jobs but also increases long-term aggregate demand for goods and services within a community.

USDA is committed to ensuring small towns benefit from economic recovery. The Secretary is leading the President's initiatives, along with other Federal departments and agencies, to promote agriculture and rural prosperity through the Agriculture and Rural Prosperity Task Force. The strategies implemented by the Task Force will empower rural communities and help their economies to thrive.

USDA's Rural Development (RD) programs are delivered by a field-based workforce with program delivery system and back-office servicing operations that responds to the unique challenges and opportunities in rural areas. USDA's stewardship of taxpayer funds and historically low-cost programs enable robust rural investments in infrastructure for business success and quality of life.

Under Secretary Perdue's leadership, Rural Development has been tasked with finding opportunities to reform regulations and policies to improve program access and reduce administrative burden on rural customers. To further improve the customer experience, the Department is modernizing its technology and tools, as well

as developing system-wide outcomes-driven management structures to ensure optimal impact of Federal resources.

Strategies

The strategies below will position Rural Development for faster, friendlier, and easier Government service and improved rural prosperity through updated infrastructure, improved business opportunities, and enhanced quality of life.

Broadband Infrastructure: Working with private and public-sector partners, design and implement an integrated role for USDA in the Federal Government's strategy to facilitate access for all of rural America to modern data connectivity. A connected rural America enables global commerce for small businesses, precision agriculture, just-in-time manufacturing, efficient transportation, and multiple other productivity benefits. A connected rural America also ensures modern education, remote training for workforce development, and cost-efficient and effective healthcare.

Community Infrastructure: Facilitate and leverage direct investment in community and commercial infrastructure that supports rural economies. Investment in rural human-services transportation, utilities, and commercial infrastructure addresses primary business needs, fosters entrepreneurship, attracts corporate investment, and reduces unemployment. Much-needed investments in broadband high-speed internet connectivity for schools and libraries, healthcare and wellness facilities, as well as power, telecommunications, water, and waste management systems will be prioritized and measured for outcomes.

Housing Infrastructure: An increased workforce often requires increased support for rural housing infrastructure. These projects also help rural citizens build equity, improve quality of life, and supplement residential cost burdens for limited-income rural communities. Housing infrastructure

is also an important asset for economic development and agriculture production. Federal policies, programs, and partnerships can encourage cost-effective investments that will appropriately situate Federal investment in rural housing.

Health Infrastructure: Improve access to healthcare by assisting in the development of local response capacity for health challenges. Investment in community infrastructure can support health education, provision of specialty health care, as well as improve mental and behavioral health facilities.

Capacity-Building Infrastructure: Assist rural areas in developing the planning, leadership, technical, and professional expertise needed to sustain and grow rural economies, leverage multi-sector or multi-jurisdictional partnerships, and advance regional collaboration. When strategically targeted and leveraged, USDA's portfolio of programs can assist community leaders in pursuing their

economic development vision by providing the tools they need to build local capacity and improve the quality of life in their community.

Strategic Partnerships: Leverage strategic partnerships with other Federal agencies, State and local governments, non-profits, and the private sector to increase USDA efficiency and effectiveness at facilitating rural prosperity and promoting economic development and growth.

Program Delivery: Reform, innovate, and better align Rural Development operations to deliver more effective service to our customers, partners, and stakeholders. Rural Development can leverage technology and expand tools to enhance mission area services, and it will continue to implement enterprise risk management activities and effectively address internal and external risks that could impact the success of Rural Development programs.



Outcomes

The primary outcome is enhanced economic prosperity, supported by robust rural infrastructure. By financing the most effective rural infrastructure investments, USDA seeks to promote the sustainable growth and diversification of local rural economies, as well as their increased capacity to participate successfully in regional, national, and global economies. To achieve this outcome, USDA intends to build a body of work which will help us better understand the impact of the programs in rural communities.

Evidence

Understanding and documenting the impacts of USDA's economic development effort through community, telecommunications, water, transportation, energy, and residential infrastructure programs will be priorities of this Strategic Plan. Current program performance metrics are dependent on estimated data provided by the applicants on long-term projections of outcomes, pending funding approval. Since community needs vary widely, the speed to economic improvements may vary depending on applicants' capacity, industry sectors, data sharing, and performance reporting by program and/or community. Therefore, USDA staff will continue to collaborate with each applicant to determine customized project metrics.

Going forward, Rural Development will strive to develop outcome-based measures to improve data-driven investment selection and evaluate project performance. Additionally, new methodologies and institutional capabilities and capacities will be required to measure the aggregated success of projects within each agency, across multiple programs, and for the entire mission area.

USDA's Rural Development will explore economic indicators that could be used to

correlate USDA's contribution to the country's success and growth. Potential indicators include:

- **Broadband:** Increased access to new and improved broadband services to rural households, businesses, and farms
- **Community:** Increased local economic stimulus (as based upon changes in aggregate demand or other measures) and job creation from financing support of rural entrepreneurial, minority, and small business
- **Housing:** Affordable housing market in rural communities
- **Health:** Increased health care access (reduced average distance to health care facilities)
- **Capacity Building:** Improved employment rate, new business creation, and job growth
- **Program Delivery:** Attract more applicants to programs and improve procedures for lowering loan/grant processing times

Human Capital Management

USDA's commitment to the future of rural communities and our goal of increasing rural prosperity will be achieved by ensuring we have a skilled, well-trained, and customer-focused workforce. To assist in the identification of skills gap analysis, Rural Development will initiate a Training Needs Survey to assess applicable training needs and incorporate into organization training plans as appropriate. Rural Development will work to align employee development needs with key competencies to achieve success in meeting our goals of implementing multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional, and multi-sectoral activities to improve the delivery of services and programs for our customers in rural America. To meet this strategic goal, we will focus our work on three specific priorities: (1) infrastructure, (2) partnerships, and (3) innovation.

Key Performance Measures⁴

	Baseline Data FY 2017	FY 2018 Target	FY 2022 Target
Health Facilities: Percent of customers who are provided access to new and/or improved essential community facilities.	5.0%	6.8%	7.1%
Safety Facilities: Percent of customers who are provided access to new and/or improved essential community facilities.	3.7 (FY 14)%	4.5%	4.7%
Number of borrowers' subscribers receiving new and/or improved electric facilities (Million)	4.6 (FY 14)	5.1	5.3
Number of borrowers' subscribers receiving new and/or improved telecommunication services (Million, Non-cumulative)	0.158	0.175	0.182
Amount of targeted RD investments that leverage private-sector funding (Billion).	7.0	7.5	7.5

RD – Rural Development

⁴ The Secretary will update the performance measures used to manage the Rural Development programs based on the findings and guidance in the Agriculture and Rural Prosperity Task Force recommendations. This update will ensure that the performance metrics more accurately measure the efficiency, effectiveness, customer focus, and impact on rural prosperity of these programs. When outcome measures are further developed, USDA will add these to the Annual Performance Plans and future budget documents.



Strategic Goal 5:

Strengthen the Stewardship of Private Lands Through Technology and Research

The world population is expected to reach 9.6 billion by 2050. Feeding this population will require adoption of new science and technologies and the implementation of science-based conservation plans to sustainably increase agricultural production. To ensure U.S. private working lands and public agricultural landscapes are conserved, the Department will provide technical and financial assistance using the latest technology and research available. New and improved practices result from fundamental and applied research to understand the complex interactions between human systems and the environment, and transferring the resulting knowledge into the hands of producers and land managers through information, tools, and decision support.

Objective 5.1:

Enhance Conservation Planning With Science-Based Tools and Information

USDA is the world leader in delivering science-based conservation planning. The Department has a unique system of more than 3,000 service delivery points that offer technical and financial assistance to producers on their farms, ranches, and woodlands. The technical staff across the country provide assistance to clients on the adoption of the latest science and technology that is critical to help sustain economically sound operations.

Private-sector investment in natural resources conservation has grown significantly over the last few decades, and USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) continues to engage with private partners in carrying out conservation planning and activities. It is critical that such investments achieve the conservation outcomes that meet producer and societal expectations. USDA's conservation planning process results in conservation-system solutions based on the most recent science and technology standards. The quality criteria that underpin conservation systems based on USDA-assisted conservation plans will ensure conservation investments achieve desired outcomes while meeting consumer needs.

Strategy

Enhance Technical Assistance: The Department delivers conservation technical assistance to American producers that utilizes current science and technology, providing economically and environmentally sustainable solutions to natural resource issues. USDA will continue to develop and streamline its technical tools and assistance by partnering with scientific research institutions and private industry experts to enhance the conservation planning process and results.

Outcome

Accessible and relevant conservation tools and technologies deliver value to our customers through improved engagement and implementation of their customized, site-specific conservation plans. The short-term outcome is to have highly qualified and trained conservation planners that directly interact with customers. The long-term outcomes, after customers implement their science-based conservation systems, are reductions in soil erosion, improvements in air and water quality on the farm and downstream, and enhanced wildlife habitat as measured by programmatic trends and State, regional, and national conservation statistics. Additionally, NRCS hopes producers will leverage knowledge gained from conservation planning to change management practices and implement conservation improvements without the need for additional technical and financial assistance.

Evidence

In the coming years, USDA will utilize several avenues to ensure progress. One of those avenues will be to utilize the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP), which is a multi-agency effort to quantify the environmental effects of conservation systems and programs and further develop the science base for managing the agricultural landscape for environmental quality. Assessments in CEAP are carried out at national, regional, and watershed scales on

cropland, grazing lands, wetlands, and for wildlife. The three principal components of CEAP—the national assessments, the watershed assessment studies, and the bibliographies and literature reviews — all contribute to building the science base for conservation. That process includes research, modeling, assessment, monitoring and data collection, outreach, and education. Project findings will be made readily available in a timely manner so they can be used to guide USDA conservation policy and program development and help conservationists, farmers, ranchers, and forest managers to make more informed conservation decisions that will allow them to increase their production sustainably. Other datasets developed at USDA, including the Census of Agriculture, Agricultural Resource Management Survey, National Resources Inventory, and Forest Inventory and Analysis, can be used to quantify the adoption and outcomes of a variety of agricultural and forestry conservation practices.

Another avenue will be to utilize existing authorities, which provides USDA broad strategic assessment and planning authority for the conservation, protection, and enhancement of soil, water, and related natural resources. Through these authorities, USDA appraises the status and trends of soil, water, and related resources on non-Federal land and assesses its capability to meet present and future demands; evaluates current and needed programs, policies, and authorities; and develops a national soil and water conservation program to give direction to USDA soil and water conservation activities. USDA is currently exploring development of survey instruments to systematically gather information on factors that lead producers to adopt or to discontinue using conservation practices. Looking ahead, USDA will utilize these authorities to consistently report on trends in conservation and resource conditions. This will provide USDA with the capability to examine interrelated issues that have implications for U.S. agriculture and forestry, such as quality and availability of water, changing climate, and invasive species.

Objective 5.2:

Promote Productive Working Lands

Stewardship of private working lands and forests helps to conserve natural resources and sustain the health and vitality of rural America. The Department leads the public and private effort to ensure proven technologies and resources are available to foster productive working land through locally led conservation and direct customer service.

USDA's leadership is essential to develop and deliver science-based, conservation solutions in a timely, responsive manner. Conservation programs are continually evaluated to help private land owners and producers build greater resiliency in soils, cropping systems, and wooded landscapes through conservation systems that help them adapt to current and future environmental and market conditions. NRCS goals are to provide technical and financial assistance to improve conservation of natural resources and sustainably increase agricultural productivity and farm incomes. NRCS works with producers to help them understand the vulnerabilities posed to agricultural systems from variable natural conditions and implement conservation systems on private lands that build resilience to extreme weather and events.



Science-based conservation systems help working lands provide healthy, plentiful food and clean water and air. USDA provides the necessary technical and financial assistance in partnership with Conservation Districts and other local entities. USDA also helps to establish technical and programmatic criteria that ensure fair, efficient, effective, and timely customer service in a manner that best serves customer needs.

Strategy

Individualize Technical Assistance: USDA will continue to provide targeted voluntary conservation programs and individualized technical assistance to farmers, ranchers, and forest managers that facilitates the sustainability and economic viability of their operations while enhancing soil health, water resources, and habitat for fish and wildlife species. Agricultural production that includes resource conservation involves not only the voluntary participation of farmers, ranchers, and forest managers, but also diverse groups at the State and local level.

Outcome

Through voluntary conservation programs, the short-term results are that farmers, ranchers, and forest managers apply conservation practices that are custom-designed for their farm and facilitate operations and production. The medium to long-term outcomes are improvements in soil health, water resources, and critical wildlife habitat.

Evidence

Conservation programs are continually evaluated to ensure effectiveness, incorporate the latest science, and adapt to changing conditions. The Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) findings and other monitoring, assessment, and evaluation will be used to improve efficacy of programs by quantifying conservation effects and providing tools for understanding what suites of practices are most effective and where resources will have the greatest impact.

Updates to the soils and ecological site inventory provide farmers, ranchers, forest managers, and conservationists with the best available data for decision-making, enhancing the effectiveness of conservation systems and programs. A new, national inventory of soil health will further enhance our ability to assess the effectiveness of conservation programs in providing improved on and off-farm benefits.

Objective 5.3:

Enhance Productive Agricultural Landscapes

Productive working agricultural lands are critical to the vitality of rural communities where the majority of the economic opportunities are derived from land-based production such as forestry, livestock growing, cropping, as well as tourism and recreation. Balancing land-based production activities in rural communities requires a landscape approach to conservation. Productive agricultural landscapes that are also inviting for tourism and recreation include: clean and available water, healthy wetlands, streams and rivers, abundant fish and wildlife, and productive, healthy soils for crops, livestock, and forestry. In many cases, the economic drivers of production for one purpose may put pressure on the rural assets in another sector, which can be mitigated through USDA assistance. Sustainable forestry or grazing practices based on good conservation systems can enhance the local economy and continue to provide the landscape views that attract other opportunities. In some cases, there is an asset in the landscape that is an anchor for both economic and environmental vitality. When these key rural assets are conserved through prioritized and focused USDA program assistance, the entire agricultural landscape benefits, both in terms of land-based production activities in one sector and recreational activities in another.

Strategy

Promote Agricultural Landscapes: Using the landscape approach, NRCS programs and partnerships link the multiple resource concerns of both urban and rural societies. Holistic, landscape-based conservation focuses resources on the most critical areas to maximize conservation impact and allow producers to be natural resource stewards. The process combines landscape-scale data and community knowledge to drive decisions for implementation.

Outcomes

Through a landscape approach for delivering targeted conservation solutions, USDA leverages sound science and partner capacities to support meaningful and measurable outcomes. In the short term, these efforts result in evidence-based strategies to address natural resource challenges. Based on local needs, the medium and long-term outcomes of this landscape strategy can be measured or quantified through cleaner water for drinking and increasing the abundance of indicator species.

Evidence

Like the previously mentioned Promotion of Productive Working Lands evidence techniques under this strategic goal, NRCS will use the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) findings and other monitoring, assessment, and evaluation tools to improve efficacy of programs. These tools will allow NRCS to quantify conservation effects to understand what suites of practices are most effective and where resources will have the greatest impact.

Human Capital Management

To achieve these objectives, NRCS will develop staffing plans based on the operational demands of delivering science-based conservation planning and implementation of planned conservation systems. Moreover, USDA will conduct a workforce competency gap analysis to establish specific priorities to recruit, retain, and train

the workforce so critical skill gaps are addressed. Specific strategies, actions, and performance measures will be outlined in the USDA Human Capital Operating Plan and USDA's Human Capital Action Plans. These actions will be evaluated on a quarterly basis to ensure effective and efficient management of the efforts to address critical skill gaps.

Key Performance Measures⁵

		Baseline Data FY 2017	FY 2018 Target	FY 2022 Target
Soil carbon retained on cropland to improve yields and sequester carbon (Tons)		140,000 (FY16)	140,000	140,000
Cropland with conservation applied to improve soil quality (Million Acres)	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	3.0	3.0	3.0
	Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)	5.9	5.9	5.9
Tons of sediment prevented from leaving cropland and entering waterbodies (Million Tons)		4.6 (FY16)	4.6	4.6
Working land protected by conservation easements (Thousand Acres)		60.7	80.0	80.0
Acreage enrolled in Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) riparian and grass buffers (Cumulative, Million Acres)		1.6	1.6	1.6
CRP restored wetland acreage (Million Acres)		1.9 (FY15)	1.9	1.9

⁵ The Agricultural Act of 2014 authorizes all of these programs until the end of 2018 (except the CTA program, which is not a Farm Bill program). FY 2022 targets are based on the assumption that the programs will be reauthorized at current levels. Measures and targets will be revisited once the next Farm Bill is signed into law.



Strategic Goal 6:

Ensure Productive and Sustainable Use of our National Forest System Lands

The Nation's forests and grasslands are a fundamental part of the American landscape and are a legacy that the USDA Forest Service holds in trust for present and future generations. Forests provide clean air and water, forest and rangeland products, mineral and energy resources, jobs, quality habitat for fish and wildlife, recreational opportunities, and memorable experiences. The Forest Service plays a critical role in making America's forests and grasslands resilient to threats and disturbances while mitigating wildfire risk. The Department also manages the National Forests and grasslands to ensure that they are healthy and sustainable – while also allowing rural communities to access and benefit from economic opportunities that our Nation's forests offer. This work is complemented with USDA's research in forestry, ecology, and economics to ensure world-class science guides effective policies and management practices.

Objective 6.1:

Contribute to the Economic Health of Rural Communities Through Use and Access Opportunities

The USDA mission includes serving the American people who live in and around national forests and helping these communities thrive economically. The agency manages approximately 193 million acres of public land, much of it rural and remote. Land management activities can influence rural economies, and USDA is in a unique position to help enable economic recovery and growth on multiple fronts. Analysis shows that in FY 2014, Forest Service programs and projects contributed nearly 360,000 jobs and more than \$30 billion in gross domestic product. Timber sales from National Forests benefit forest health and provide raw material for local timber industries, sustaining local jobs. National Forest System lands include the Nation's largest trail system, more than 5,000 campgrounds, 30,000 recreation areas, 2 million acres of lakes, 200,000 miles of fishable streams, and 120 downhill ski areas – some of the most diverse outdoor recreation opportunities in the world. Outfitters and guides support recreation activities on the National Forests, contributing to local economies across the country and helping millions of forest visitors enjoy their experience. The agency permits over 7,000 outfitter and guide businesses – many of these special-use permittees are small and family-owned businesses with deep ties to the land.

Strategies

Improve Customer Experience: Complex and potentially competing demands on the land require USDA to work collaboratively and practice shared stewardship to sustain the benefits that people receive from these natural areas—maintaining local cultures and traditions, connecting people to the land, and contributing to quality of life. The agency maintains strong community relationships and works to improve the customer experience on national forests and grasslands.

Streamline Permitting Process: As the public's recreation preferences change, USDA adapts to provide high-quality recreation access. USDA is streamlining the recreation special-use permitting process to improve accessibility and customer service, including piloting an online permitting system to expedite permit processing and expanding the suite of available recreation opportunities. This could encourage new businesses to support these outdoor activities, which could drive rural economic growth.

Increase Recreational Opportunities: Studies have shown that rural counties near Federal land fare better on several key measures of economic growth than counties far from Federal land, and USDA is

using this insight to maximize benefits and reduce risks to rural economies. For example, the agency is working with many winter recreation-dependent communities to enable year-round recreation-related income to mitigate risks from being reliant on one season. Helping skiing communities add low-snow and off-season recreation opportunities, like zip lines, mountain bike terrain parks and trails, disc golf courses, and rope courses, provide more ways for an increasingly urbanized and demographically diverse population to connect with nature and help the communities become more economically resilient.

Streamline Environmental Analysis and Decision-Making Processes: USDA is working to streamline its environmental analysis and decision-making processes. This will help the agency upgrade staff capacity toward improving the condition of forests and rangelands, reduce the time to process minerals permits, and allow projects to proceed more quickly. This work will also restore ecosystem function, deliver dependable energy, and provide jobs and economic benefits for rural communities. The Agency is also identifying ways to improve and modernize our policies, practices, and tools that produce forest products to more effectively address forest health conditions, create sustainable landscapes, and increase the amount of forest products coming from National Forests.



Outcome

More people will visit National Forest lands as customer service and facilities improve, increasing our economic contribution to rural communities.

Evidence Building

Robust socio-economic research helps the agency understand the contribution of public lands to community well-being and rural revitalization and helps the agency assess community needs and expectations. There are three key research areas. First, USDA research explores traditional and emerging economic opportunities on National Forests and grasslands that may reinvigorate local communities while ensuring environmental sustainability. USDA also examines barriers to accessing economic opportunities, and methods for facilitating participation.

Second, research can help the agency understand how to create, sustain, and monitor effective collaborative processes and partnerships that engage local community members in planning and management efforts. Building rural community capacity to access and participate in these processes, and shape their future, is central to developing partnerships that support profitability of resource-based livelihoods and environmental sustainability.

The third stream of research focuses on developing meaningful ways to measure public benefits. Locally significant indicators identify and capture the social and economic outcomes of management decisions, and help the agency understand the impacts of our engagement efforts. These indicators also help calculate the return on public funds invested in research for better management and partnerships. Ongoing monitoring of recreational visitor use analyzes public satisfaction with recreation resources and helps the agency assess visitor contributions to local economies.

Objective 6.2:

Ensure Lands and Watersheds Are Sustainable, Healthy, and Productive

USDA manages about 20 percent of the Nation's forests and nearly 10 percent of the Nation's rangelands. These forests and grasslands are essential to the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the country. However, these lands are suffering increasingly adverse impacts from severe wildfires, insects and disease infestations, human influences, and extreme weather events, leaving them unable to provide critical natural resources and recreation opportunities for the public. The Forest Service's ongoing objective is to improve forest and grassland conditions to make them healthier and more resilient to extreme events, be responsive to public needs, and ensure that lands and watersheds are sustainable, healthy, and productive so current and future generations can continue to use and enjoy these lands.

Strategies

Increase Partnerships: The Forest Service is pursuing several strategies to restore forests and grasslands in the most efficient and effective way. First, USDA is emphasizing landscape-scale restoration objectives that achieve multiple restoration goals at once – restoring watersheds, improving wildlife habitat, and combating invasive insects and disease while reducing wildfire risk and providing a steady supply of timber to the American economy. Second, the Forest Service is relying on lessons learned from collaborative pilot efforts and working with partners across disciplines and boundaries. Collaborating with partners to address the large-scale landscape restoration needs allows the Forest Service to focus on high-priority work, address unexpected challenges, conduct larger projects, leverage resources, reduce litigation risk, and enter into multi-year contracts.

Modernize Policies and Practices: The Forest Service is also streamlining environmental review and decision-making processes to be more effective and efficient, allowing the agency to upgrade staff capacity toward improving the condition of forests and rangelands. The Agency is also identifying ways to improve and modernize our policies, practices, and tools, such as using the following expanded authorities from the 2014 Farm Bill to increase flexibility, get work done efficiently and effectively, reduce risk, and promote enduring relationships with Federal, State, local, tribal, and private-sector partners:

- (1) Good Neighbor Authority, which allows the agency to enter into agreements with States to restore watersheds and manage forests on Federal and non-Federal lands;
- (2) Stewardship contracting, which helps the Forest Service achieve the objective while promoting closer public-private working relationships by using the value of timber or other forest products to offset the cost of restoration activities;
- (3) Designation by prescription, where USDA designates trees for removal by describing the desired end result of the treatment and allows the contractor to select the trees to be cut or left, saving the agency the time and labor of marking trees for a timber sale; and,
- (4) Streamlined environmental review procedures for treatments mitigating risk in designated insect and disease infestation areas.

Outcome

The Forest Service's ecological restoration projects will improve the condition of forests and grasslands and support the growth and development of healthy ecosystems and vibrant, resilient communities. By focusing restoration efforts on maintaining functional ecosystems,

USDA protects water quality; reduces the adverse impacts from insects, diseases, and wildfires; and increases USDA's capacity to sustain rural communities. Long-term conservation enhances the natural functions of the land and helps maintain healthy, resilient, and productive forests and grasslands for future generations.

Evidence Building

USDA prioritizes restoring the areas of greatest concern as it works to improve the resilience of all forests and grasslands amidst ongoing stresses and disturbances. To support their decisions, land managers use the best available science to show how forests provide clean, secure water supplies, and how environmental disturbances and climate influence water resources. USDA also evaluates "best management practices" to determine their effectiveness in reducing impacts to water quality while threat assessment centers monitor the outbreaks and spread of insects and disease.

USDA has multiple strategies and decision tools to characterize current ecological conditions, monitor ecological trends over time, evaluate the effectiveness of restoration efforts, and measure success amidst changing environmental conditions. These tools help land managers incorporate climate science into real world natural resource management and conservation projects and address the ecological, social, and economic demands on the landscape. Successes include the Adaptation Workbook; Watershed Condition Framework; USDA Climate Hubs; Threat Assessment Centers; and the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership. In addition, the agency researches how international competition, global economic development, and changing economic and societal values define and impact emerging technologies, products and markets, and the goods and ecological services forests provide.

Objective 6.3:

Mitigate Wildfire Risk

As the premier firefighting organization in the country, the Forest Service is uniquely qualified to mitigate wildfire risk. Wildfires can threaten public safety, destroy property, and damage natural resources, especially in the vulnerable wildland-urban interface where developed lands mix with fire-prone forests. Wildfires often cross the boundaries of Federal, State, local, and private lands. The risk of uncharacteristically severe wildfires rises when fuels like dense vegetation and dead trees accumulate in forests and coincide with drought conditions. The agency's priority is to proactively reduce risk of uncharacteristically severe wildfire. When a wildfire response is necessary to protect life, property, or forest health, the agency works with partners to control fires in a safe, efficient, cost-effective, and coordinated manner.

Wildfires often play a natural and beneficial role in ecosystems and can help the agency maintain healthy forests and grasslands. Applying the best available science and land management techniques, the agency works closely with landowners and partners to assess the various risks and means to restore the natural role of fire in sustaining a healthy forest ecosystem. The agency uses the latest technologies to decide whether to suppress a wildfire or use the fire to achieve long-term objectives for ecosystem health and resilience. The agency also provides education to reduce the incidence of human-caused wildfire and assists at-risk communities in adapting to and minimizing wildfire hazards.

Strategies

Increase Collaboration: The National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy guides collaborative wildfire management among stakeholders and across landscapes, working together towards common goals. This long-term strategy, developed and implemented in partnership with Federal, State, and local governments, has three main components: (1) restoring fire-adapted ecosystems; (2) helping communities become safer when threatened by wildfire; and (3) responding appropriately to wildfire. The agency promotes the Cohesive Strategy as a national priority, and continues broad educational and awareness efforts targeted towards communities, potential partners, and internal and external fire personnel.

USDA, in collaboration with multiple partners, will continue ongoing reduction of the risk of catastrophic wildfires in priority areas near communities, often through hazardous fuels reduction, which is an effective way to protect community values, restore forest and grassland health, improve firefighter and public safety, and negate the need for costly fire response operations. USDA also strives to educate people on ways to reduce the incidence of human-caused fires through programs like Firewise.

Strategic Goal 6



Strengthen Initial Wildfire Response: Effective, timely, and safe initial response to wildfire threatening priority areas near communities protects human lives. By working with States to increase local capacity for the prevention and suppression of wildfires, the Forest Service strengthens the Nation's capacity to respond because the first responders on almost 75 percent of wildfires nationwide are local fire departments or State agencies. The Forest Service commits responders where and when they can be successful and under conditions where property can be protected with minimal exposure. State and local firefighters also provide critical capacity on Incident Management Teams that respond to fires on Federal lands, including National Forests.

Outcome

The agency defines success as healthy and resilient forests and communities that are prepared for wildfire and that minimize exposure to our firefighters and first responders while still protecting important values. USDA will work with partners to respond to wildfires in ways that protect human life, property, and prosperity. The agency will control fires in a coordinated manner that is safe, efficient, and cost effective, resulting in healthy, resilient forests and grasslands while bolstering thriving communities.

Evidence Building

USDA develops and uses tools and assessments that help reduce risks to communities, the land, and most importantly, human life and safety. USDA works to understand how complex patterns of landscape ownership influence risk, how communities organize around adoption of Firewise home and community fire prevention principles, and how to collaboratively plan forest restoration strategies that are more implementable and cost-effective.

Agency researchers coordinate their efforts with landowners and managers to be more responsive to stakeholder needs. For example, in the Pacific Northwest, the transmission of fire from National Forests to the wildland-urban interface is a common problem. Mapping risk transmission uncovered conflicts and opportunities that led to improved Federal policies regarding restoration, resilience, and wildfire protection opportunities.

Forecasting risks from wildfires is critical to the success of reducing wildfire impacts. The Prescribed Fire Combustion and Atmospheric Dynamics Research Experiment (RxCADRE) models predictions of fire and smoke behavior to support decision-making to fight wildfires and to reduce the air quality impacts of prescribed burns. Researchers have developed short-term assessments of wildfire risk, ranging from next-day fire danger ratings to 28-day wildfire potential risks. A new model, Fire and Smoke Model Evaluation Experiment, will augment RxCADRE, focusing on additional parameters at larger spatial and temporal scales.

The Forest Service continues to develop tools and models for longer term forecasting of wildfire risk that help in decision-making and evaluating how decisions are made. USDA is developing mid-term (months to a year) forecasts that may inform strategic planning of large prescribed fire events and prioritization of wildfire-suppression resources. The agency has also developed a wildfire Risk Index based on the probability and intensity of wildfire, and the exposure and susceptibility of highly valued resources and assets. The Risk Index will track changes in risk over time and will be used at a national scale to help monitor outcomes related to mitigating wildfire risk. Application of these tools before, during, and after the fire season will increase preparedness, reduce hazards, improve sustainability, and promote partnerships with the public and other land-managing entities.

Human Capital Management

The Forest Service will position itself to ensure the productive and sustainable use of our National Forest System lands by using quantitative and qualitative analysis to support and develop its workforce. Workforce demographics, hiring trends, attrition, and retirement influence human capital strategies and actions. Streamlined human resource process-improvement strategies will enable USDA to fill mission-critical positions. USDA recognizes the need for a trained and

skilled workforce of timber sale administrators, fire planning specialists, fire management officers, forestry technicians, rangeland management specialists, natural resource specialists, foresters, ecologists, and recreation specialists, among others. Externally, engaging with State and local partners provides opportunities for recruitment of new talent and allows us to share our knowledge and expertise. Revamping and strengthening our educational programs will help increase interest in mission-critical career fields.

Key Performance Measures

	Baseline Data FY 2017	FY 2018 Target	FY 2022 Target
Percent of customers satisfied with recreation facilities, services, and settings on National Forests	95%	95%	95%
Timber volume sold (Billion Board feet)	2.9	3.4	5.0
Percent of National Forest Systems (NFS) watersheds in a functioning condition	53%	53%	53%
Annual acreage of NFS lands where final treatment effectively mitigates wildfire risk	741,765	1,100,000	1,300,000
Annual acreage treated to reduce or maintain fuel conditions on NFS and non-Federal lands	2,776,486	3,000,000	3,400,000



Strategic Goal 7:

Provide All Americans Access to a Safe, Nutritious, and Secure Food Supply

USDA has critical roles in preventing foodborne illness and protecting public health while also ensuring Americans have access to food, a healthful diet, and nutrition education in a manner that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence. The Department will take a number of actions to achieve this goal. First, to ensure the food supply is safe the Department will continue to prevent contamination and limit foodborne illness by expanding its modernization of food inspection systems, and USDA's research, education, and extension programs will continue to provide information, tools, and technologies about the causes of foodborne illness and its prevention. Second, USDA will continue to develop partnerships that support best practices in implementing effective programs to ensure that eligible populations have access to programs that support their food needs. This includes research on nutritional quality of American's food and diets, as well continuing to discover the drivers of poor diets and nutritional choices. Lastly, USDA will collaborate with partners and stakeholders on strategies to reduce foodborne illness and childhood obesity and to improve diets. USDA ensures agriculture production incorporates the best available science into its modernization efforts to produce food that is safer, more nutritious, and secure.

Objective 7.1:

Prevent Foodborne Illness and Protect Public Health

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service is committed to protecting public health by ensuring the safety of the Nation's commercial supply of meat, poultry, and processed egg products. Thousands of inspectors across the United States work to achieve this mission every day by carrying out tasks to verify industry compliance with applicable U.S. food safety regulations. As of the end of fiscal year 2017, USDA ensured food safety requirements were met in establishments that slaughtered or processed 155 million head of livestock and 9.45 billion poultry carcasses, as well as 3.1 billion pounds of processed egg products. USDA's regulatory oversight and enforcement extends to both imported and domestically produced food products and assures consistent application of regulations and statutes. To verify compliance with U.S. regulatory requirements prior to distribution in commerce, USDA also re-inspected more than 300,000 lots representing 4.1 billion pounds of imported meat and poultry products and 22.5 million pounds of imported processed egg products.

The U.S. food safety system is one of the most reliable and well documented in the world, and USDA continues to invest in modernizing its approaches to inspection so ultimately fewer people in the United States become ill from foodborne pathogens such as *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, *Escherichia coli*, and *Listeria monocytogenes*. To further efforts to prevent contamination and limit illness from the

250,000 food products that USDA regulates, the Department will expand its modernization of food inspection systems, which was initiated with the new poultry inspection system, to include other product categories, such as market hogs and processed eggs, as the food industry landscape evolves. USDA's diverse workforce dedicated to food safety continues to use data-driven, science-based approaches to target and tighten food safety requirements for establishments, where necessary, to enhance consumer and partner engagement and foster innovation.

Strategies

Prevent Contamination: A core mission of USDA is preventing illnesses attributed to the foods produced in the approximately 6,400 domestic meat, poultry, and egg products establishments that USDA regulates. USDA continues to drive greater industry compliance to keep food safe and reduce the risk of contaminated food from reaching consumers. For example, USDA is using updated methods to assess how domestic establishments are implementing their food safety programs and maintaining process control that facilitates the identification and mitigation of potential hazards before food is sold and consumed by the public. USDA is using pathogen-reduction performance standards for *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* to drive down the occurrence of these pathogens across the food product processing cycle, and it is expanding its sampling programs to cover more products and to test samples for a broader spectrum of microbiological and chemical residues. To reduce the risk of intentional or non-intentional adulteration of food products, USDA is also continuing to promote and assess the adoption and implementation of food defense practices and preparedness at establishments. All of these key strategy components can help influence establishments to decrease the presence of hazards in food and further improve their food safety systems and programs.

Limit Illness From Regulated Products: In addition to the daily work of its food safety inspectors,

USDA proactively conducts investigation and compliance activities at in-commerce facilities, including warehouses, distributors, food transporters, and retail delicatessens. When illnesses associated with USDA-regulated products do occur, these investigations work to limit the impact of any outbreaks and reduce the number of people who may be exposed to a contaminated product. USDA will continue to rely on and improve its strategic and operational partnering and communication with Federal, State, local, and industry partners to quickly and accurately identify the contaminated products, the source establishment from which the product was produced, and if possible, the contributing causes of the outbreak to prevent recurrence of a similar event in the future. In coordination with our Federal and State partners, USDA works continuously to respond to outbreaks more effectively and efficiently. USDA also engages in public education and outreach to ensure awareness of recalls and to increase safe food-handling practices by providing targeted and general information through a broad range of communications channels, including with Federal partners, to educate consumers and to share best practices with industry.

Modernizing Scientific Techniques and Inspection Procedures: USDA will continue to focus on how to best use and adapt innovative scientific techniques, and modernize inspection practices and methods to protect public health. For example, USDA is increasingly employing Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS), which characterizes bacterial genomes with greater precision and granularity than previous methods. This will aid USDA agencies and their partners in outbreak response, trace back,⁶ and studying the environmental harborage and movement of pathogens—and facilitate an in-depth understanding of harmful traits, such as bacterial

⁶ "Trace back" is a method used to determine the source and scope of the product/processes associated with the outbreak and document the distribution and production chain of the product that has been implicated in a foodborne illness or outbreak.

virulence and antimicrobial resistance, to aid in making inspection decisions and driving future policy development. Over the next 5 years, USDA also aims to deploy tools for inspectors and to update its inspection analysis and reporting to more quickly alert inspectors and the industry of trends of noncompliance or loss of process control. These steps will further reduce the risk of contaminated product leaving establishments and entering into commerce.

Enhancing Access to Food Safety Data and Information: Over the past decade, the Department has increasingly relied on science, data, and risk analysis to develop well-supported and implementable food safety regulations, policies, and procedures. USDA is accomplishing this, in part, by increasing the amount of data collected and analyzed and by developing new reporting and analytical tools for analysts to disseminate timely and actionable information to food inspectors and establishment personnel so they can mitigate risks and issues that arise. Similarly, to help ensure that the right information gets in the right hands at the right time to inform day-to-day inspection decisions through to headquarters decision-making, USDA is making improvements to increase and improve data and information flow across the food safety enterprise. As the volume and quality of available data increases, USDA will increasingly use advanced analytics and tools to provide more targeted, real-time information for use in both operational and policymaking activities, in a manner that is easier to access, understand, monitor, and act on by internal and external stakeholders.

Outcomes

The Department uses several measures that collectively work toward preventing contamination and foodborne illness from USDA-regulated products. Key performance measures to assess outcomes are adherence to pathogen-reduction performance standards, and responses to early warning alerts related to establishment

performance. These are among the most central indicators for ensuring contaminated product does not enter commerce, leading to fewer people getting sick from USDA-regulated products.

Evidence Building

USDA engages in a range of analytic and evaluation activities to support operational effectiveness, rulemaking, performance measurement, and agency decision-making on food safety. USDA will continue to explore methods for identifying higher risk establishments and products that may require greater attention and resources, including using the Public Health Regulations approach that USDA recently implemented to prioritize Public Health Risk Evaluations and Food Safety Assessments. USDA will also conduct risk assessments and economic impact assessments to support FSIS's regulatory agenda and rule-making process.

The Department will also continue to conduct numerous analyses to assess the effectiveness of FSIS notices and directives, monitor for adverse trends in agency inspection and sampling data, inform agency decision-making, and to evaluate outcomes of those decisions. Similarly, USDA continues to identify areas where conducting internal evaluations would be useful to program and process efficacy. USDA partner agencies will also continue to collaborate on crosscutting and specific planning and analysis projects together, as well as with other Federal partners, such as with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on achieving the national food safety/public health goals of Healthy People 2020 and 2030. This also includes collaborations such as the Interagency Food Safety Analytics Collaboration and with the National Institutes of Health National Center for Biotechnology Information through the Whole Genome Sequencing Workgroup to better inform our understanding of foodborne illness, strengthen our outbreak investigations, and many other activities.

Objective 7.2:

Provide Access to Safe and Nutritious Food for Low-Income People While Supporting a Pathway to Self-Sufficiency

For more than 70 years – beginning with the original Food Stamp program in the 1930s – the Nation has gradually built an array of nutrition assistance programs designed to help ensure that all Americans can meet their food needs. Taken together, these programs form a nationwide safety net supporting low-income families and individuals in their efforts to escape food insecurity and hunger; achieve healthy, nutritious diets; and improve the well-being of families. Currently, the programs administered by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) touch the lives of one in four Americans over the course of a year.

The Department is committed to making benefits accessible to those eligible to participate in the nutrition assistance programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Child Nutrition Programs, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), among others. At the same time, our ultimate objective is for strong economic opportunity to make nutrition assistance unnecessary for as many families as possible. We will focus on strategies that support and encourage work and self-sufficiency, while ensuring that in difficult times, food is available to all people in need.

This is a mission that no one agency can meet independently. USDA continues to partner with State and local agencies and Federal, public, and private partners to support best practices in implementing effective programs and ensuring eligible populations have access to programs that support their food needs. Risks include limited State budgets and constraints in administering the major Federal nutrition programs and access to benefits and services in rural areas. We are poised to mitigate these risks through a concerted effort

to maximize efficiencies and pursue opportunities to improve processes across the enterprise, including technical assistance for our State and local partners.

Strategies

Improve customer service in SNAP: States have struggled with the development, implementation, and overall management of new eligibility systems, leading to poor customer service and significant administrative challenges. USDA will proactively provide technical assistance to facilitate access to the program for eligible participants.

Increase Participation in SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) Programs: In partnership with State and local agencies and Federal, public, and private partners, E&T programs are designed to help able-bodied SNAP recipients find work or gain the skills, training, and experience that lead to employment. USDA will continue to work with State agencies to incorporate robust E&T components into SNAP State plans. In addition, USDA will disseminate best practices regarding skills-based training components to State agencies.

Provide Nutritious Food in the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) That Better Aligns With Client Choice: USDA will continue to develop relationships with current approved vendors to provide traditional foods (i.e., foods that are most desired and will not negatively impact the nutrition profile of the food package) to FDPIR participants. In addition, USDA will work with this community to identify additional vendors and provide them with information on becoming approved to provide traditional foods through the FDPIR. USDA will develop specifications for traditional foods and will partner with the FDPIR workgroup to establish priorities for procurement of traditional foods.

Support the Service of Nutritious and Appealing Meals to Children: The Federal Child Nutrition Programs administered by the Department will

continue to implement school meals, child and adult care feeding, and summer meals programs that are correlated with a long-term improvement in the nutritional content of American diets. USDA will also continue to encourage the serving of nutritious and appealing meals that encourage student participation in the meal programs by providing program operators with technical assistance, sample menus, recipes, and partnering with regional or local farms to incorporate locally produced foods. USDA will also explore various options that support State and local flexibility in menu planning.

Outcome

All efforts by USDA seek to ensure that nutrition assistance programs positively impact the communities they serve. The Department uses all available opportunities, including new communication mechanisms, to serve customers innovatively, offer flexibility to partners, and

administer programs as effectively as possible to serve targeted populations. Success will be measured in part by increases in the variety of healthful foods offered via nutrition assistance programs, participation rates among eligible populations, as well the annual measure of the proportion of households with ready and reliable access to the food they need.

Evidence Building

USDA uses a combination of administrative data and evaluation research to examine program performance toward stated goals. The Food and Nutrition Service tracks SNAP application processing through administrative data and will continue to do so to monitor States' progress toward improving customer service. Similarly, FDPIR food package and school meals data collected administratively and through evaluation research projects examine food package price, content, and alignment with nutrition standards.



Objective 7.3:

Support and Encourage Healthy Dietary Choices Through Data-Driven, Flexible, Customer-Focused Approaches

Science has established clear linkages between proper diet, adequate physical activity, children's ability to learn, and good health. Unfortunately, for too many in the United States, poor dietary habits and a lack of physical activity contribute to devastating health conditions, including overweight and obesity. The Department is committed to working collaboratively with other Federal agencies, State partners, and other interested stakeholders on a wide array of strategies to reduce childhood obesity and improve diets. The Department is working to ensure that schools and child care providers have the resources and flexibility to serve top-quality, healthy, and appealing meals. Through WIC, USDA is encouraging and supporting participating mothers to breastfeed their infants by strengthening breastfeeding policy and program activities. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is working with various partners to increase participants' access to healthy food choices.

The Food and Nutrition Service uses evidence-based nutrition guidance, based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA), and tools designed to give consumers the knowledge and motivation they need to choose a diet that supports a healthy future, including making such choices on a low income. USDA is also working to improve access to healthful, locally produced food, especially for nutrition-assistance clients. Americans' food choices are strongly influenced by the choices most easily available to them. Limited access to nutritious food and relatively easier access to less nutritious food may be linked to poor diets. The Department is also working to increase opportunities for farmers and food entrepreneurs to retail their produce in low-access areas.

There is a reporting risk that could threaten the achievement of this objective. We need information from a variety of stakeholders on current progress, needed support, and challenges to inform decision making and to meet expectations. We are actively mitigating this risk through our technical assistance efforts and by involving a myriad of stakeholders in the decision-making and solution-development processes.

Strategies

Encourage and Support WIC Mothers To Breastfeed Their Infants by Strengthening Breastfeeding Policy and Program Activities: For nearly all WIC families, breastfeeding can provide positive health benefits for both mother and her infant, as breastfeeding is linked to a lower risk of numerous health problems for both. It also may have a protective effect against pediatric overweight and obesity. Breast milk provides the best source of infant nutrition and helps infants get a healthy start in life. USDA will recognize and reward State achievements in promoting breastfeeding through performance awards, expand the availability of peer-counseling in WIC clinics, and continue its core promotion and support activities.

Work With Schools To Improve Meals: Eating healthy meals, at home or at school, is linked to better educational performance and classroom behavior and fewer visits to the school nurse. The Department is working to improve access to and the meal quality of these programs. These moves ensure that healthful and appealing food is available to every student to support growth and learning. USDA will work with schools to ensure flexibilities in menu planning so that they can serve nutritious and appealing meals and encourage student participation in the meal programs.

Ensure That SNAP Supports and Encourages Healthy Choices: USDA will continue to support Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) grants and other initiatives that incentivize clients to purchase fruits and vegetables. The Department will also work with local and private partners to increase redemptions at farmers' markets by SNAP participants.

Outcome

USDA shapes programs and policies and develops knowledge resources to give every consumer the tools, skills, and motivation he or she needs to choose a diet that supports a healthy future. The Department further uses these tools to promote fruit and vegetable consumption and other healthy eating behaviors through public-private partnerships and cutting-edge technologies. The Department is also working to improve access to healthful, locally produced food in underserved communities through a multifaceted strategy that focuses on food production, distribution, and both traditional and non-traditional retail options. USDA measures success in a variety of ways to include increases in breastfeeding rates and redemptions rates at farmers' markets.

Evidence Building

USDA is committed to evidence-based decision-making. The Food and Nutrition Service engages in evaluation research, surveillance studies to track indicators over time, and studies on program operations to better understand how nutrition assistance programs operate through our partnerships. The WIC Participant

Characteristics study provides biennial surveillance data on multiple WIC components, including breastfeeding rates over time. The School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study Series provides data over time on the nutritional quality and operational aspects of school meal service. The FINI evaluation will provide policy-relevant information for decision-makers at USDA on the best use of incentives to support healthy eating in SNAP.

Human Capital Management

USDA heavily relies on a diverse workforce across the country with a broad range of skillsets to accomplish the missions of its food safety and nutrition assistance programs. An increasingly vital part of our mission is to better equip employees with what they need to perform their jobs in an efficient and effective way. As such, USDA is working toward improving information technology (IT) systems to support its large field workforce. USDA is committed to ensuring the workforce is successful through recruitment and retention strategies for mission-critical positions; targeting separating veterans through an apprenticeship program; and enhancing training and development approaches. USDA will continue to work collaboratively with State and local agencies as well as Federal partners and organizations to accomplish its objectives. Intra-agency partnership will allow for strategic realignment of resources as appropriate to ensure the Department is poised to advance outcomes associated with providing Americans with access to a safe, nutritious, and secure food supply.

Key Performance Measures

	Baseline Data FY 2017	FY 2018 Target	FY 2022 Target
Percentage of establishments that meet pathogen reduction performance standards	75%	78%	85%
Percentage of establishments whose noncompliance rate decreases 120 days after receiving early warning alert	70%	71.4%	73.8%
Percentage of American households with consistent, dependable access to food	87.30% (2015)	87.70%	88.10%
Annual percentage of eligible children participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)	58%	59%	59%
Percentage of SNAP Employment & Training participants engaged in education and skills-based training ⁷	33% (2016)	35%	40%

⁷ States have flexibility to provide a wide range of E&T services but the most common are typically job search and workfare. This indicator will measure an increase in the portion of all E&T participants engaged in more intensive skill-based training, such as vocational and occupational training or on-the-job training.

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