



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

TO: All USDA Employees

FROM: Mike Johanns
Secretary

SUBJECT: Standards of Ethical Conduct

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Johanns".

Maintaining high ethical standards is essential to fostering the public's trust. Everyone who enters into public service for the United States has a duty to the American public to maintain the highest standards of integrity in government. The faith and confidence of the American public in the integrity of its government rests not only on what we do, but how we do it. During my tenure as Secretary of Agriculture, I have noted that the vast majority of all Federal employees, particularly those with whom I have the pleasure of serving at the Department of Agriculture, meet both the letter and spirit of the ethics laws and regulations. Their and your sense of integrity and commitment to good government is something in which the American public can take pride.

This integrity, however, is based not just upon our personal standards of integrity, but also upon adherence to specific time-tested ethical laws, regulations, and principles that govern our participation in official matters where those matters intersect with our personal interests. Accordingly, all employees of the Department of Agriculture need to be familiar with, and should faithfully observe, all applicable ethics laws and regulations, including the Federal conflicts of interest statutes and applicable regulations, namely, the *Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch* and the *Supplemental Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Department of Agriculture*. While these laws and regulations are detailed and can be quite technical, employees can always focus on the following 14 core principles:

1. Public service is a public trust, requiring employees to place loyalty to the Constitution, the laws and ethical principles above private gain.
2. Employees shall not hold financial interests that conflict with the conscientious performance of duty.
3. Employees shall not engage in financial transactions using nonpublic Government information or allow the improper use of such information to further any private interest.
4. An employee shall not, except pursuant to such reasonable exceptions as are provided by regulation, solicit or accept any gift or other item of monetary value from any person or entity seeking official action from, doing business

with, or conducting activities regulated by the employee's agency, or whose interests may be substantially affected by the performance or nonperformance of the employee's duties.

5. Employees shall put forth honest effort in the performance of their duties.
6. Employees shall make no unauthorized commitments or promises of any kind purporting to bind the Government.
7. Employees shall not use public office for private gain.
8. Employees shall act impartially and not give preferential treatment to any private organization or individual.
9. Employees shall protect and conserve Federal property and shall not use it for other than authorized activities.
10. Employees shall not engage in outside employment or activities, including seeking or negotiating for employment, that conflict with official Government duties and responsibilities.
11. Employees shall disclose waste, fraud, abuse, and corruption to appropriate authorities.
12. Employees shall satisfy in good faith their obligations as citizens, including all just financial obligations, especially those -- such as Federal, State, or local taxes--that are imposed by law.
13. Employees shall adhere to all laws and regulations that provide equal opportunity for all Americans regardless of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or handicap.
14. Employees shall endeavor to avoid any actions creating the appearance that they are violating the law or the ethical standards promulgated pursuant to this order.

Additionally, in furtherance of my goal of faithful employee adherence to ethics laws and regulations:

1. All financial disclosure filers in USDA (whether public, confidential, or alternative form filers) shall file their reports within the time limits prescribed by regulation, or obtain an extension prior to that date, and shall cooperate fully with ethics personnel in obtaining certification of their reports as soon as possible.

2. All employees shall take ethics training during CY2006. An effective way to obtain training is to utilize the training modules created by the Office of Ethics which are now available on AgLearn.
3. Finally, all financial disclosure report filers who are considering leaving the Federal government in CY 2006, as well as any other USDA employees who wish to do so, should meet with their ethics advisors to assure full understanding of the rules governing the process of seeking outside employment and Federal post-employment restrictions.

Our goal is worthy, our people caring, and by working together, we will make the USDA Ethics Program a model for the Federal Government and increase the public's confidence in the integrity and effectiveness of our programs.