USDA

United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

FEB 25 2009

Civil Rights Policy Statement

As Secretary of Agriculture, I fully support the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) civil rights, equal employment opportunity, and diversity policies and programs. Improving civil rights throughout USDA is one of my top priorities, and by pursuing this goal together in a transparent and ethical manner we can lead the way in making USDA a model organization.

The success of today's "People's Department" requires the steadfast support and commitment of every USDA employee. We will have zero tolerance for any form of discrimination or reprisal. There exists *no reason to discriminate* based on race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, marital or familial status, political beliefs, parental status, receipt of public assistance, or protected genetic information. Our policy at USDA is simply to understand that there will be zero tolerance for any form of discrimination. This standard is *applicable to every employee* at USDA and to every action taken at USDA.

To realize our vision of a modern workforce working in a modern workplace, USDA must become a model department of tolerance and inclusion. Only then will we live up to President Lincoln's description of USDA as "The People's Department." This is my commitment to you, and I expect every employee to demonstrate respect for and adherence to USDA civil rights, equal employment opportunity, and diversity policies.

To this end, accountability is key. USDA employees will be held accountable for doing their part to ensure that all USDA applicants, customers, constituents, and stakeholders as well as other USDA employees are provided equal access to the opportunities, programs, and services available through "The People's Department." Accordingly, I am counting on all senior leaders, managers, and supervisors to model appropriate behavior and to lead by example.

We must all strive to create an inclusive environment in which every employee is respected, trusted, and valued. Let us continue to cultivate and reap the benefits of a diverse USDA workforce that is rich in talent, ideas, background, and experience. The USDA mission depends on it.

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary