United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

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. We can turn our challenges into opportunities to strengthen our service.

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 (including gender identity and expression), sexual orientation, disability, marital or familial status, political beliefs, parental status, receipt of public assistance, or protected genetic information. Our policy at USDA is not only to understand that there will be zero tolerance for any form of discrimination, but to ensure that this standard is maintained throughout the Department. This standard is *applicable to every employee and manager* at USDA and to every action taken at USDA.

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." Strengthening "The People's Department" is my commitment to you. I expect every employee and manager to demonstrate respect for and adherence to USDA civil rights, equal employment opportunity, and diversity policies and our program civil rights responsibilities.

To this end, accountability is key. I will hold all employees and managers accountable for doing their part to ensure that all USDA applicants, customers, constituents, and stakeholders 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. As we approach the 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, USDA must continue to ensure that the civil rights of USDA constituents and employees are respected and protected. We have corrected past errors, learned from past mistakes, and moved into a new era of equitable service and access for all. 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
July 24, 2013