

NRCS Equity Division



What is Equity?

Equity is the consistent and systematic treatment of all individuals in a fair, just, and impartial manner, including people who belong to communities that have been denied such treatment. NRCS customers are the most important visitors to the agency. The staff relies on our customers to remain a successful and accomplished federal entity. For such a profound situation, NRCS must provide all our customers with the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive, regardless of their circumstances. Program history does not reflect continuous recognition and awarding to underserved farmers and ranchers. Without **Equity**, the systemic recognition and awarding of resources have too often fallen to those who are already set up for success...with **Equity**, NRCS will change this.

We must first understand and be able to identify the equity dimension and its impact.

Although the terms “equality” and “equity” are sometimes used interchangeably, the two convey significantly different ideas. Equity is about fairness, while equality is about resemblance.

Released in January 2021, Executive Order 13985, “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government,” directs federal agencies to examine the services it provides and develop a plan for addressing:

- any barriers to full and equal participation in programs identified pursuant to section 5(a) of this order; and
- any barriers to full and equal participation in agency procurement and contracting opportunities identified pursuant to section 5(b) of this order.

Released in February 2023, EO 14091, “Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government”, builds upon EO 13985 and other executive orders and directives to target specific barriers still faced by under-served communities by requiring federal agencies to integrate equity into planning and decision-making.



NRCS collaboration with agency partnerships is vital to examine our services. It is necessary to identify and define roles of NRCS partners, stakeholders, Tribal entities, Community Based Organizations, and other underserved communities and relevant institutions at National, Regional, State, and local levels. Transformation requires that the people experiencing problems are at the center of determining the solutions to inequities, rather than experts deciding for them. Local boots on the ground, regional, and national equity work is prudent, but it requires partnership, association, alliance, and cooperation with communities to achieve equity.

Mission, Vision and Core Values

MISSION – Advocate for and better align institutional Equity into the work and practices of NRCS to ensure that every USDA-NRCS customer is put in a position to succeed in a diverse government world and notably feel inclusiveness to agency programs and services.

VISION – Diversity and inclusion for every customer through our programs.

CORE VALUES – Believing that NRCS customers’ opportunity and benefits of agency programs are strengthened when working towards the common good and goals by improving agency program outreach; NRCS improves customers Equity and equality of life through conservation opportunities and benefits.

Foundational Information

[Executive Order 13985](#)

[Executive Order 14091](#)

[USDA Equity Commission](#)

[USDA Equity Action Plan](#)

[NRCS Equity Action Plan](#)

[NRCS Equity Policy Statement and Poster](#)



Equity Focus

Justice40

NRCS aims to increase program participation by 10 percent each year until the agency meets, or exceeds, the Justice40 goals outlined in President Biden's commitment.

Equity in Implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Of 2022 is an historic investment in climate and conservation agriculture.

Equity through Collaboration with Partners

Collaboration with internal and external partners, stakeholders, and various communities is paramount to the success of advancing equity and removing inequities in NRCS programs, policies, and services.

Equity and the Technical Service Providers Program

NRCS is utilizing a multi-pronged approach to improve technical assistance to underserved communities. We are continually working to expand the number of conservation technical experts who can offer technical assistance and one-on-one conservation advice to historically underserved producers.

Limited English Proficiency

Limited English Proficiency refers to people who do not speak English as their primary language and who have limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. Laws and regulations prohibit exclusion from participation in, denial of benefits of, and discrimination under Federal programs.

Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreements

The Equity in Conservation outreach cooperative agreements fund two-year projects to expand the delivery of conservation assistance to producers who are new to farming, are low-income, identify as one or more marginalized race or ethnicity, and/or are military veterans.

Equity Key Terms

Bias: prejudice in favor of or against a person or group, usually considered unfair.

Discrimination: unfavorable or unfair treatment of a person or class of persons.

Diversity: the practice of including the many communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, and beliefs of the people, including underserved communities.

Equality: each individual or group of people is given the same resources or treatment.

Equity: the consistent and systematic treatment of all individuals in a fair, just, and impartial manner, including people who belong to communities that have been denied such treatment.



Inequity: lack of fairness or justice; occurs when everyone does not have the same access to opportunities and resources.

Justice: the systematic, proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, and attitudes that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment, and outcomes for all.

Prejudice: an unfair belief or feeling of dislike for a person or group because of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or other interpersonal differences.

Racism: a belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race.

Underserved Communities: populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life.

Why Achieving Equity is a priority

Achieving Equity is an NRCS priority because this Administration has identified Equity as a priority for all levels of federal government. From the White House to USDA to NRCS, we will achieve Equity in our programs and services.

Equity is not only dividing resources fairly and equally, but also factoring in differences among people or communities.

Equality is dividing resources equally but does not factor differences in need and ability.

The route to achieving Equity will not be accomplished through treating everyone equally. It will be achieved by treating everyone equitably, not just according to circumstances.

All NRCS Employees will be responsible for achieving equity in everything we do, at all levels—from programs to employment to technical assistance to customer service—we will provide equal opportunity for all!

For More Information

Equity homepage: nrcs.usda.gov/about/priorities/equity.

