JAN 2 6 2015

SUBJECT: EOP – Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Civil Rights Policy Statement

TO: NRCS Employees File Code: 230-15

NRCS employees are its greatest asset for enabling people to be good stewards of the Nation's soil, water, and related natural resources on non-Federal lands – in other words, in "Helping People Help the Land." To fulfill our mission and to better provide service throughout the Nation, NRCS employees, and the public we serve, must always be treated in a fair, nondiscriminatory, and equitable manner.

It is important to periodically renew and emphasize our commitment and support to civil rights and equal opportunity. Prohibited discrimination is against the law and violates title VI and title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. It is Department of Agriculture and NRCS policy to treat all customers and employees fairly and equitably, with dignity and respect, regardless of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and expression), religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital or familial status, parental status and protected genetic information, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from public assistance. Retaliation and reprisal against customers or employees for opposition to discrimination of any kind in contravention of this policy will not be tolerated. NRCS will ensure that the appropriate corrective or disciplinary action will be taken against violators who engage in discriminatory behavior.

Accountability is key and must start from the top. As the Chief of NRCS, I continue to hold our senior leaders, managers, and supervisors accountable for their support to civil rights, equal employment opportunity, alternative dispute resolution (ADR), and the Secretary's Cultural Transformation Initiatives. I encourage all managers and employees to explore ways to collaborate with our partners and other recipient organizations to underscore the importance of civil rights laws regarding nondiscrimination and promote best practices in providing equal access and opportunities in programs and employment practices.

Every NRCS employee has a duty to uphold the civil rights of customers and employees. In the course of identifying and eliminating discrimination in the workplace, complainants, representatives, and witnesses involved in complaint related activities must be free from restraint, coercion, or retaliation. Thus, it is not unusual for there to be an occasional dispute, disagreement, or misunderstanding. NRCS promotes the greatest use of the ADR program to address conflict resolution. Managers, when participating in the ADR program, are expected to demonstrate a good-faith effort to address the concerns or resolve the disputes.

All employees representative of NRCS are to model appropriate behavior and lead by example. We must work to demonstrate an elevated regard by supporting civil rights and ensuring equal opportunity in the workplace. I am confident that as we do our part, we will affect a positive cultural change in NRCS. The responsibility belongs to all of us.

Jason A. Weller
Chief