



Farm Production and Conservation – Business Center
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Equity Action Plan

(July 2023)



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Message from the FPAC Under Secretary

The central aim of USDA's Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) mission area is to support all American agricultural producers by providing financing, risk management tools, disaster aid, conservation assistance and a range of other services. The doors to every USDA county service center and every office must be open to everyone. The FPAC Business Center, Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Risk Management Agency have all adopted Equity Action Plans that detail key actions and initiatives to improve FPAC for our existing customers while ensuring our agencies are welcoming and accessible to future customers as well. These Agency plans describe specific steps we are taking to eliminate historic barriers to our programs, to improve program implementation, and to help farmers and ranchers grow and improve their agricultural operations.

We recognize that agriculture is composed of a diversity of crops, farm and ranch sizes, production systems, locations, individuals, and families—and that our efforts to support farmers, ranchers, and forest owners must consider and reflect that diversity. Implementation of these Equity Action Plans will guide each FPAC agency as we strive to serve all producers and foster a more prosperous, resilient, and sustainable agricultural economy.



Under Secretary Robert Bonnie

Message from the FPAC-BC Chief Operating Officer

The FPAC Business Center helps move USDA's farm program agencies' mission forward. While the Business Center is not farmer-facing, we have a unique opportunity to advance equity. Our 15 business lines provide operational support to the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Risk Management Agency (RMA).

The Business Center is taking steps to identify and reduce barriers to USDA programs, advancing equity in Federal procurement, and directing USDA programs to the people who need them the most. Business Center staff are working tirelessly and creatively to improve equity in all that we do.

We know that each of us has unique talents and abilities that contribute to the success of the Business Center. We are celebrating the diversity of our community and taking steps to ensure everyone is included and respected when we design and implement our programs.



Chief Operating Officer Robert Ibarra

Robert Ibarra
FPAC Chief Operating Officer

Robert Bonnie

Undersecretary for Farm Production and Conservation



Introduction

The FPAC Business Center provides centralized operational and enterprise-wide support for the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Risk Management Agency (RMA), USDA's three agencies that administer farm programs. The Business Center provides mission support across 15 business lines, from human resources to customer experience and from acquisitions to environmental activities.

The Business Center is well positioned to help advance equity for the farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who participate in FPAC programs, as well as for the people with whom FPAC does business. This is because the Business Center directs the administrative operations for multiple agencies, which ensures equitable access to agency programs and provides a consistent implementation of USDA diversity, equity, and inclusion goals and objectives. The Business Center also coordinates environmental activities, which helps with remediation of pollution.

The Business Center—like all USDA agencies—will continue to integrate civil rights and equity in the design of its policies and programs. More specifically, the Business Center is contributing to these USDA strategies:

- ◆ Reducing barriers to USDA programs
- ◆ Advancing equity in Federal procurement
- ◆ Upholding Federal trust and treaty responsibilities to Indian Tribes
- ◆ Directing USDA programs to those who need them most.



Accomplishments

Since 2022, the Business Center has made strides in advancing equity. Accomplishments include.

Improving Language Access

In the FPAC mission area, more than 200 new Spanish-language webpages were built in the last year alone on farmers.gov, highlighting priority programs, deadlines, and opportunities and customers can request Spanish translation services for documents through farmers.gov. In addition, FPAC shared Spanish translations of the farm loan discovery and service center locator tools. FPAC is also expanding financial partnerships with several groups to increase the number and type of service providers who can help farmers and ranchers in the language they prefer. In FY 2022, FPAC filled 150 limited English proficiency requests, resulting in more than 730 products spanning 30 separate languages. FPAC has established a centralized and streamlined intake process to ensure customer-facing employees have easy access to timely language access services while maximizing efficiencies and minimizing costs. FPAC currently has multiple language support contracts and a partnership agreement in place to provide a full range of translation, interpretation, and language cultural sensitivity support to its agencies. Employees can request document translations, schedule onsite interpreters, and provide feedback on Limited English Proficiency (LEP) services and products received. FPAC is leveraging technology by using video remote interpretation services to reach the broadest possible audience. Starting in July 2023, FPAC employees will be able to interact through video with a live interpreter and LEP farmers and producers over desktop or mobile devices anywhere.

Supporting Small Businesses

FPAC's Acquisitions Division has a small business coordinator who works with small businesses, including those that are socially or economically disadvantaged, to identify potential contracting opportunities. These include opportunities available through existing statutory programs that authorize various types of competitive small business set-asides, as well as sole-source contracting authorities, such as the Section 8(a) Business Development Program. The coordinator makes thousands of contacts with small businesses, participates in numerous internal and external outreach events, and hosts multiple FPAC outreach events each year. Because of these and other efforts, in FY 2022, 48.8 percent of FPAC's contracting was with firms in the Small and Disadvantaged Business category. As of June 2023, the Small Business Program:

- ◆ Held its first ever IT Industry Day to engage small businesses for FPAC IT services. The event was attended by 389 small businesses;
- ◆ Increased the FPAC Small Business database entries from just over 800 in FY 2022 to 1,143 thus far in FY 2023.
- ◆ Conducted more than 8,000 interactions with small businesses from various socioeconomic backgrounds;
- ◆ Added several Native American outreach events this year that are new to the FPAC Small Business Program

Tribal Consultations

The Environmental Activities Division has an ongoing effort to provide Tribal consultation training to State environmental coordinators and county FSA staff, with more than 345 FSA staff trained so far in FY 2023. Under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), Federal agencies must take into account the effects of their actions on historic properties. We are currently working on a Section 106 Consultation Training Webinar which will be made available as a training video to increase staff access to this resource. Six programmatic agreements between FSA and State historic preservation offices are currently being drafted and reviewed and an additional five are in the initial stages of development. During the development of these agreements, Tribal Nations are actively participating in consultations, and all feedback received is being addressed. FSA handbook reviews and revisions are underway to bring clarity regarding program processes and to remove barriers for Tribal participation in FSA programs.

Equity Actions

The Business Center's actions going forward will build on the accomplishments from 2022, specifically:

Action 1: Enable timely, quality language assistance services to foster more equitable access for customers with language access needs.

In addition to its 14-point Limited English Proficiency (LEP) program enhancement plan, FPAC's equity goals for FY 2023 are to establish an FPAC Stakeholders Advisory Council, conduct an inventory of FPAC vital documents, and translate 10 percent of the highest-priority vital documents into the top five languages.

Action 2: Continue to prioritize contracting with small businesses.

FPAC's FY 2023 goal is for at least 38.02 percent of contracts to be with Small Disadvantaged Businesses (SDBs), 3 percent with HUBZone Businesses, 5 percent to Women-Owned Small Business (WOSBs), and 3 percent to Socially Disadvantaged Veteran-Owned Businesses (SDVOSB), with a total goal of 55 percent to small businesses. FPAC focuses on improving outreach to firms within the different small business categories through continuation of the Small Business Spotlight Outreach Program which allows underserved business owners the opportunity to present their capabilities to FPAC's Program Office Representatives. Through the quarterly spotlight events, representatives from all small business socio-economic categories have presented with over 300 in attendance.

Action 3: Implement consultation training across FSA and streamline the Tribal consultation process to ensure Tribal Trust responsibilities and legal mandates are met while reducing barriers for program participation by disadvantaged communities and Tribal Nations.

In FYI 2023, all 86 FSA State environmental coordinators will be trained in Section 106 Tribal consultation requirements, and 10 programmatic agreements, which include Tribal consultations, will be successfully initiated to reduce barriers for program participation by disadvantaged communities and Tribal Nations.

Action 4: Implement Section 22007 of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

IRA Section 22007 provides \$2.2 billion in financial assistance for farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who experienced discrimination in USDA's farm lending programs prior to January 1, 2021. The law requires that a non-government entity administer the program; FPAC-BC is USDA's host agency. Through implementation of this Discrimination Financial Assistance Program, USDA hopes to recognize and acknowledge the discrimination suffered by individuals, take steps to rebuild trust with communities, and create a better and stronger U.S. agriculture that is more diverse and resilient. This is one piece of a much broader effort at USDA to improve equity and access and eliminate barriers to its programs for all individuals and communities.

For more information on equity at FPAC BC, and all of USDA, see usda.gov/equity.



Selected Equity Resources and Information

USDA Equity-Related Summary Reports and Guidance

Programmatic Equity at USDA

- ◆ [Equity Website](#)
- ◆ [Equity Accomplishments](#)
- ◆ Equity Action Plan: [Full Plan | Summary](#) (February 2022)
- ◆ [USDA Environmental Justice Scorecard](#)
- ◆ [USDA Advisory Committees](#)
- ◆ [Get Started! A Guide to USDA Resources for Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers](#) (July 2022)

Equity Commission

- ◆ [Equity Commission Website](#)
- ◆ [2023 Interim Report | USDA Response \(English\)](#) (February 2023)
- ◆ [Informe Interino 2023 | Respuesta al Informe Interino de la Comisión de Equidad del USDA](#) (Febrero 2023)

FPAC Business Center Equity Related Resources

- ◆ [Doing Business with FPAC Agencies](#)
- ◆ [Funding Opportunities](#)
- ◆ [FPAC Student and Graduate Programs](#)
- ◆ [Career Opportunities at FPAC](#)
- ◆ IRA Section 22007 Discrimination Financial Assistance Program
 - Program website: 22007apply.gov
 - Farmers.gov information: farmers.gov/22007

Selected Equity-Related Executive Orders and White House Resources

- ◆ [White House Equity Page](#)
- ◆ [Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#)
- ◆ [Executive Order 14091, Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#)
- ◆ [Executive Order 14096, Revitalizing our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All](#)
- ◆ [Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments](#)
- ◆ [Presidential Memorandum on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships](#)
- ◆ [The Path to Achieving Justice40](#)

USDA Mission Statement

“To serve all Americans by providing effective, innovative, science-based public policy leadership in agriculture, food and nutrition, natural resource protection and management, rural development, and related issues with a commitment to delivering equitable and climate-smart opportunities that inspire and help America thrive.”

Department Equity Action Plan Goals

1. Reducing Barriers to USDA Programs

USDA is reducing barriers to programs and improving support to underserved farmers, ranchers, landowners, businesses, and communities, including by providing ways for stakeholders to share their experiences, insights, and needs and by incorporating that input into policy development and implementation improvement.

2. Partnering with Trusted Technical Assistance Providers

USDA is partnering with trusted technical assistance providers to ensure that underserved producers and communities have the support they need to access USDA programs.

3. Directing USDA Programs to Those Who Need Them the Most

USDA programs are targeting those who need them the most, including by increasing infrastructure investments that benefit underserved communities.

4. Expanding Equitable Access to USDA Nutrition Assistance Programs

USDA is expanding equitable access to USDA nutrition assistance programs to ensure that those who qualify are able to participate, those who participate get benefits that are meaningful, and those who receive those benefits can use them conveniently and in ways that promote improvements in their health and well-being.

5. Advancing Equity in Federal Procurement

USDA is advancing equity in Federal procurement, by providing underserved and disadvantaged businesses, tools and resources to increase access to funding opportunities and expand their network to develop critical local, State, regional, and National relationships.

6. Upholding Federal Trust and Treaty Responsibilities to Indian Tribes

USDA is upholding general Federal trust and treaty responsibilities to Indian Tribes, removing barriers to access USDA programs, embracing Tribal self-determination principles, and incorporating indigenous values and perspectives in program design and delivery.

7. Committing Unwaveringly to Civil Rights

USDA has committed unwaveringly to civil rights, working to equip its civil rights offices with the tools, skills, capacity, and processes essential to enforce and uphold civil rights effectively and efficiently.

8. Operating with Transparency and Accountability

USDA is operating transparently and accountably, providing information on Department programs that Congress, stakeholders, and the general public need to hold us to account on our equity agenda, and working systematically to collect and take account of public feedback.



USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.