**United States Department of Agriculture**

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights

1400 Independence Avenue SW

Washington, DC 20250

**TO:** Agency Heads

**FROM:** Joe Leonard, Jr., Ph.D.
Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights

DEC 4 2014

**SUBJECT:** Civil Rights Policy Statement

The Civil Rights Policy Statement was signed on November 12, 2014, by the Secretary of Agriculture, affirming his policy of zero tolerance for discrimination in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs and activities. I expect all Civil Rights Directors, managers and employees to model appropriate behavior and ensure the policy is adhered to within your respective Agencies.

In addition, USDA Agencies and Staff Offices are required to display the Civil Rights Policy Statement in strategic areas so all applicants, employees, customers and stakeholders are able to view the policy. Working together we will make USDA the top model employer in the Federal government.

Attachment

cc: Agency Civil Rights Directors

USDA

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Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

# Civil Rights Policy Statement

As Secretary, I have made it my priority to ensure that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has a comprehensive civil rights program, one which not only makes us a model employer, but also a premier service provider to our millions of customers. This year, we have made many strides toward moving USDA in this direction. Our non-discrimination regulation for our conducted programs now adds protection from discrimination with respect to two new protected bases: political beliefs and gender identity. In addition, we have issued a Departmental Regulation that prohibits national origin discrimination affecting Persons with Limited English Proficiency in Programs and Activities Conducted by USDA. Further, the total number of equal employment opportunity complaints filed by USDA employees has dropped significantly. These accomplishments alone demonstrate our commitment and progress, but we will not stop here.

I challenge all USDA employees to dedicate themselves to improving civil rights in a transparent and ethical manner, and by doing so, we will turn the challenges of the past into opportunities for the future.

Our policy at USDA is zero tolerance for any form of discrimination, and we must ensure that this standard is maintained throughout the Department. This standard is applicable to every employee and manager and to every action taken at USDA. I expect all employees to demonstrate respect for and adherence to USDA civil rights and diversity policies. Moving USDA into the future has required a cultural transformation within the Department. For this reason, I have continually communicated this goal to all USDA employees.

I will continue to 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 all 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 have corrected past errors and will continue to move forward to maintain 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

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