



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

# Agricultural Marketing Service

## **Equity Action Plan**

July 2023

Marketing and Regulatory Programs

[WWW.USDA.GOV/EQUITY/ACTION-PLAN](http://WWW.USDA.GOV/EQUITY/ACTION-PLAN)

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## Message From the Under Secretary



*Under Secretary Jenny Lester Moffitt*

At USDA, we take pride in supporting the farmers, farmworkers, ranchers, growers, and foresters who manage our natural resources and provide our country with its food, feed, fuel, fiber, and flora. Our programs provide these agricultural leaders with the resources they need to offer our country and the world a diverse supply of crops and commodities. Within the Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) mission area, we fulfill a range of functions, from securing America’s plant and animal health to creating more, new, and better marketing opportunities for producers. We even ensure the quality and availability of wholesome, nutritious food for consumers, school students, and our underserved communities. Our work touches every corner of this country every day and we take seriously the task of delivering our programs equitably, efficiently, and effectively.

Our Equity Action Plans outline the ways our agencies—the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)—are working to ensure that true diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility continue to be the foundation of everything we do at the “People’s Department.” That is important not only for our employees and customers, but for all whose lives and livelihoods are impacted by the work that they do. By reducing barriers that prevent individuals from entering and flourishing in the agricultural sector and at USDA and by promoting an agricultural industry that is robust, resilient, and fair, MRP can play a vital role in the continued leadership of rural and agricultural communities.

This is ongoing work that requires us to constantly and meaningfully engage with our stakeholders, employees, and other partners. Feedback is the heartbeat of collaboration, and it is crucial that the development of our programs and our workforce be informed by and composed of a diverse set of voices that reflect our nation. As a mission area and as a Department, we remain committed to centering equity in everything we do. I look forward to continuing to engage in these important conversations and actions.

– Jenny Lester Moffitt  
Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs

## Message From the Administrator



*Administrator Bruce Summers*

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is committed to a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, in response to President Biden’s day-one Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, and the February 2023 Executive Order 14091, Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government. AMS has laid the foundation to remove barriers to equal opportunity and deliver resources equitably to all agricultural stakeholders.

The AMS mission is to create domestic and international marketing opportunities for U.S. producers of food, fiber, and specialty crops. AMS also provides the agriculture industry with valuable services to ensure the quality and availability of wholesome food for consumers across the country and around the world. Delivering AMS’s mission in a purposefully equitable manner requires changing traditional perspectives, actions, processes, and performance measures to ensure that the full suite of benefits, outcomes, and opportunities to participate are made available to all. The foundation for the agency’s success depends on having a high-performing, representative, and service-focused workforce.

AMS has taken important steps to address historic inequities in accessing agency programs and services, but more needs to be done. This plan highlights some of AMS’s early accomplishments in building more equitable programs, details AMS’s plan to advance equity in the selected program areas, and sets forth AMS’s commitment to continuous improvements to best serve our customers and fulfill our critical mission. The actions outlined in this plan fall under three focus areas: increase targeted investments, reduce barriers to AMS programs, and advance equity in procurement. These actions are highlighted because of their potential high impact for underserved farmers and ranchers, families and children, and rural communities.

When the first equity Executive Order was issued, AMS took actions to analyze data, consider diverse stakeholder input, and prioritize activities that were immediately responsive to the urgent needs of those who have historically had difficulty accessing AMS programs and services. AMS is committed to advancing justice, equity, and opportunity for all. This Equity Action Plan is our roadmap for ensuring our programs and services are accessible, especially to underserved communities and to those who need them most.

– Bruce Summers  
Administrator

## Introduction

“Equity” means the consistent and systematic treatment of all individuals in a fair, just, and impartial manner, including individuals who belong to communities that often have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, Indigenous and Native American, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander persons and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; women and girls; LGBTQI+ persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; persons who live in United States Territories; persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality; and individuals who belong to multiple such communities. AMS relies on our customers to be a successful and accomplished federal entity; therefore, AMS must provide all our customers with the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive, regardless of their circumstances.

Released in January 2021, [Executive Order 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#), directed federal agencies to examine the services they provide and develop a plan for addressing:

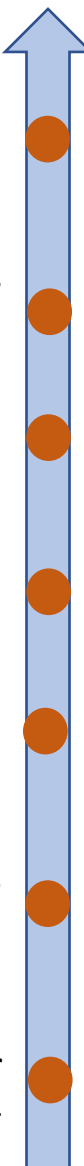
- (1) any barriers to full and equal participation in federal programs, and
- (2) any barriers to full and equal participation in agency procurement and contracting opportunities.

Released in February 2023, [Executive Order 14091: Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#), directed federal agencies to establish equity teams, and built upon the Administration’s previous equity-related Executive Orders by extending and strengthening equity-advancing requirements for agencies, and continuing to pursue ambitious goals to build a strong, fair, and inclusive workforce and economy.

By advancing equity, we can create opportunities for the improvement of communities that have been underserved. We know that each of us has unique talents and abilities that can contribute to the success of AMS. We will celebrate the diversity of our community and take steps to ensure everyone is included and respected when designing and implementing our programs. We invite you to join us in this journey and continue to be a part of our efforts as we march forward in advancing equity at AMS.

## Accomplishments

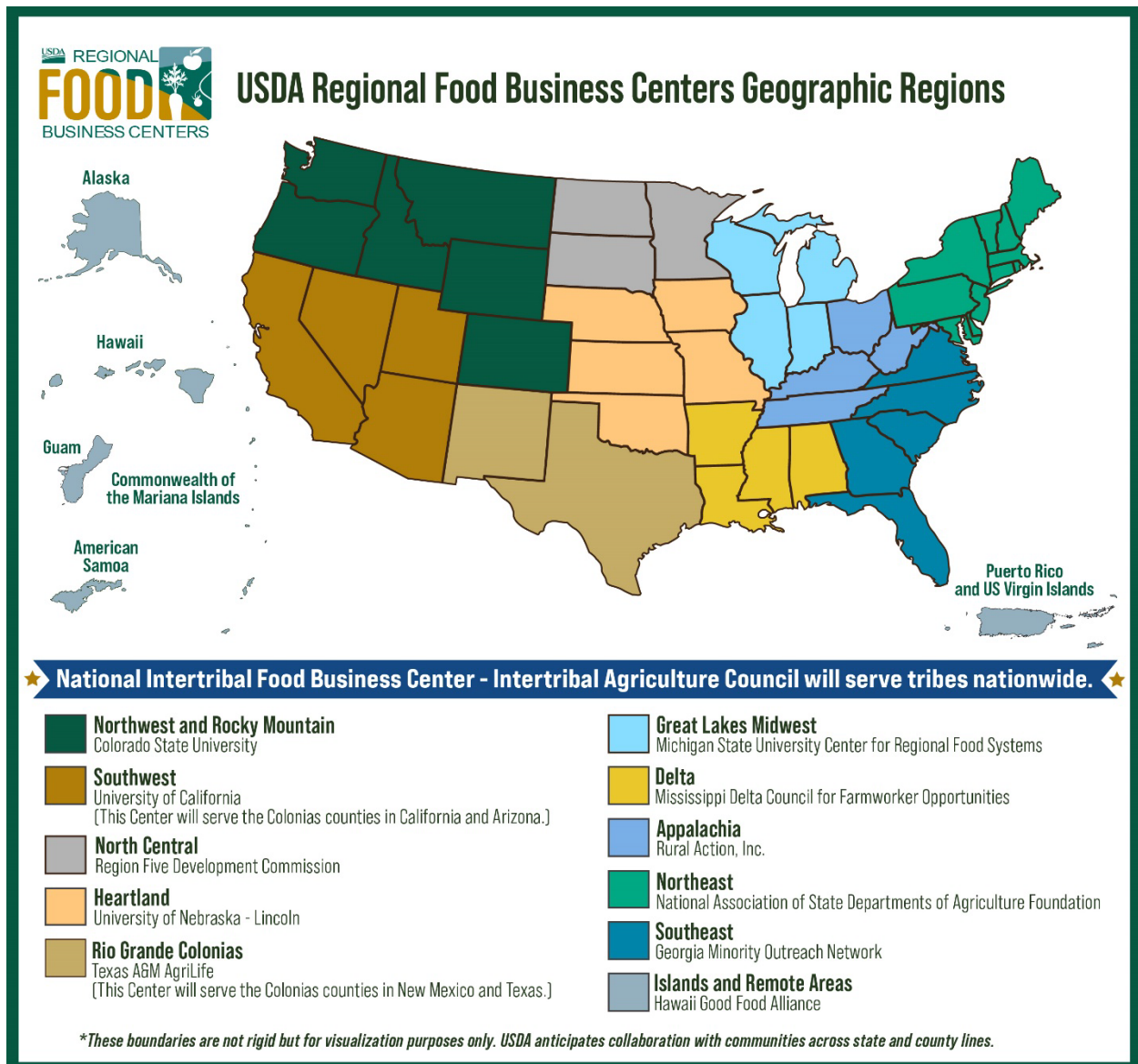


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- May 2023** Announced the creation of 12 new [USDA Regional Food Business Centers](#) that will provide technical assistance needed to access new markets, access to federal, state, and local resources, and will assist small and mid-sized producers in overcoming barriers to market access, with a focus on underserved farmers, ranchers, and food businesses.
  - December 2022** Began partnering with the Farmers Market Coalition to support [establishment of farmers markets](#) at 1890 land-grant universities.
  - October 2022** Announced the establishment of cooperative agreements in six regions across the U.S. for the Organic Transition Initiative: [Transition to Organic Partnership Program](#).
  - March 2022** Began accepting applications for the [Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program](#), which provides funding for states to purchase local food for school meal programs.
  - March 2022** Identified seven organizations to serve as Technical Assistance Providers for the [Meat and Poultry Processing Capacity – Technical Assistance Program](#).
  - December 2021** Established the [Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program](#), which provides funding to state, territorial and tribal governments for emergency food assistance purchases of domestic local foods.
  - November 2021** Began partnering with two 1890 land-grant universities to [evaluate the accessibility of AMS grant programs](#) to all U.S. agricultural farmers, ranchers, fishers and businesses, with a focus on underserved individuals and communities.

## Regional Food Business Centers Finalists Announced

On May 3, 2023, the finalists for 12 new USDA Regional Food Business Centers were announced. AMS awarded a total of \$360 million across the Regional Food Business Centers, which will assist small- and mid-sized producers in overcoming barriers to market access, with a focus on underserved farmers, ranchers, and food businesses. In addition, the Centers will provide technical assistance needed to access new markets, and access to federal, state, and local resources. By strengthening connections between rural and urban areas, the Regional Food Business Centers will drive economic opportunities across the region, creating a more diversified and resilient food system.

The figure below shows the coverage of the 12 Regional Food Business Centers:



## Partnering with Farmers Market Coalition to Support Establishment of Farmers Markets at 1890 Land-grant Universities

In December 2022, AMS and the Farmers Market Coalition announced a cooperative agreement partnership to support the establishment of farmers markets at 1890 land-grant universities. The first phase of this project includes partnering with Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Tennessee State University in Nashville, Tennessee, and Virginia State University in Petersburg, Virginia, to develop on-campus farmers markets. A key objective is to help address food insecurity at these three universities by increasing student access to fresh, locally produced foods. Phase one of the project focuses on education, data gathering, design, and operating procedures, and will convene the three universities in a community of practice with the Farmers Market Coalition and AMS. Phase two will take the information gathered from phase one to perform prototyping and implementation of market activities. The goal is for each university to execute a farmers market launch on or near their campus by fall 2023.



## Organic Transition Initiative: Transition to Organic Partnership Program

The Organic Transition Initiative (OTI) was launched in August 2022 as part of USDA's food system transformation effort to support local and regional food systems, expand access to markets to more producers, and increase the affordable food supply for more Americans, while promoting climate-smart agriculture and ensuring equity for all producers. The Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP) is a network of organizations partnering to provide technical assistance and wrap-around support for transitioning and existing organic farmers.

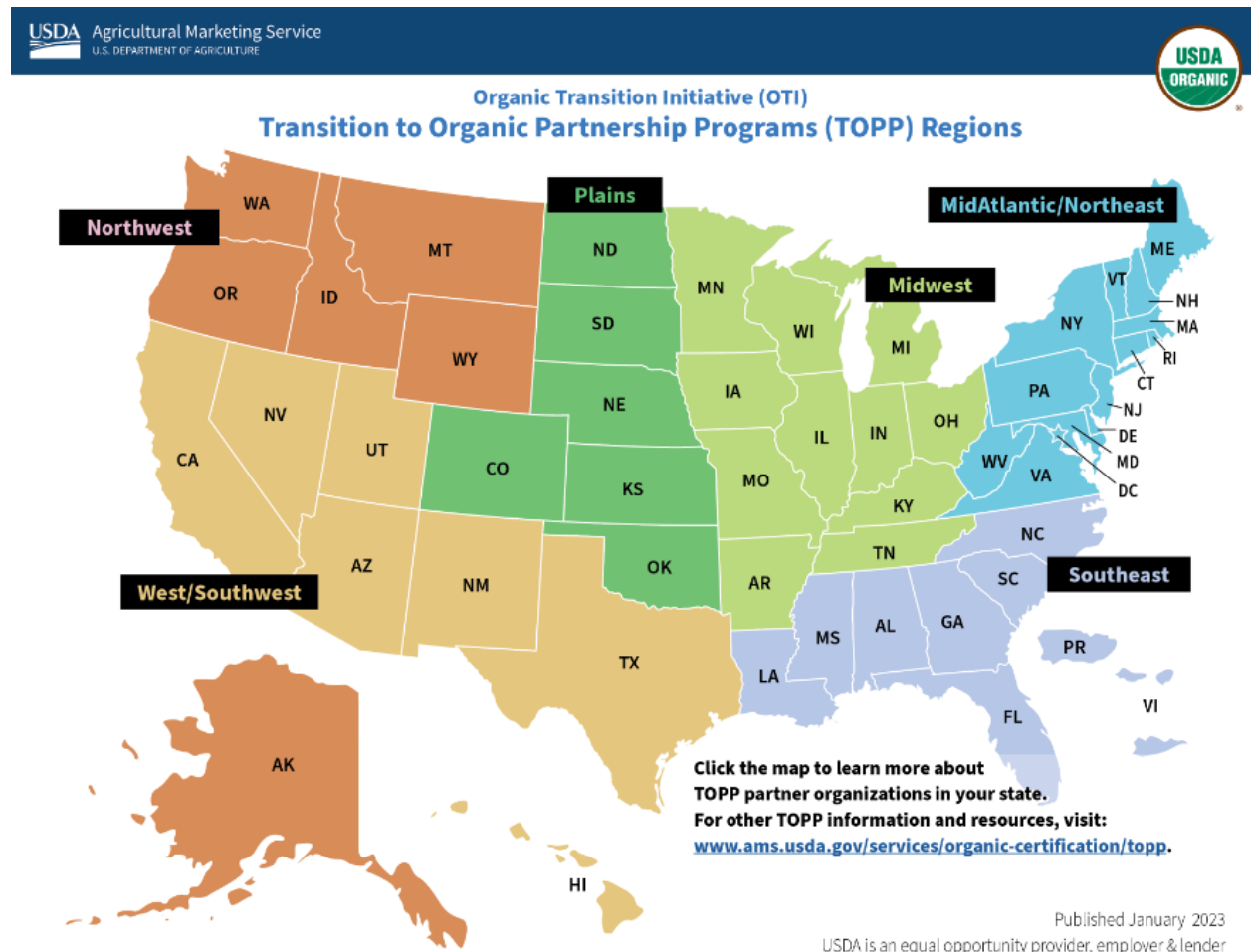
The partner organizations:

- Connect transitioning farmers with mentors for at least one year after certification.
- Build paid mentoring networks to share practical insights and advice.
- Provide community building opportunities to include:
  - Train-the-mentor support
  - Technical assistance



- Workshops and field days covering topics including organic production practices, certification, conservation planning, business development (including navigating the supply chain), regulations, and marketing
- Help producers overcome technical, cultural, and financial shifts during and following certification.
- Engage educational and training institutions (including crop advisors and extension agents) on organic workforce training and education, and future human capital planning.

The TOPP partnership network covers six regions: (1) the Mid-Atlantic/Northeast, (2) Southeast, (3) Midwest, (4) Plains, (5) Northwest, and (6) West/Southwest. Organizations in these regions are actively forming partnerships to serve transitioning and existing organic farmers. TOPP regions are set geographically and form a mix of states that are well-represented in organic and states that are currently underserved (refer to map below).



## Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program

As of July 2023, AMS has signed 42 agreements totaling \$177 million under the Local Food for Schools (LFS) Cooperative Agreement Program that is designed to strengthen the food system for schools by helping to build a fair, competitive, and resilient local food chain, and expand local and regional markets with an emphasis on purchasing from historically underserved producers and processors. The cooperative agreements allow states to buy and distribute local and regional foods and beverages that are healthy, nutritious, and unique to their geographic area. In addition to increasing local food consumption, funds help build and expand economic opportunity for local, small, and underserved producers, and support schools as they transition away from pandemic operations and develop solutions to the continuing economic impacts of the pandemic. A list of entities that have signed LFS agreements with AMS can be found [here](#).

## Meat and Poultry Processing Capacity – Technical Assistance Program

In March 2022, AMS identified seven organizations to serve as Technical Assistance Providers for the Meat and Poultry Processing Capacity – Technical Assistance (MPPTA) Program, which ensures that participants in USDA’s Meat and Poultry Supply Chain initiatives, including the Local Meat Capacity Grant Program and the Indigenous Animals Grant Program, have full-range technical assistance access to support their project development and success. AMS established a nationwide MPPTA network of support focusing on four key areas:

- **Federal Grant Application Management:** Navigating federal grants processes and procedures, from pre-award application processes through post-award grant management compliance.
- **Business Development and Financial Planning:** Business and financial planning resources, market intelligence, and project/concept feasibility analyses.
- **Meat and Poultry Processing Technical and Operation Support:** Advice and resources to support the operational needs, including workforce development of processing plant development and utilization.
- **Supply Chain Development:** Support for the development and maintenance of successful supply chain and marketing relationships between suppliers, processors, distributors, and customers.

One of the Technical Assistance Providers, the Intertribal Agriculture Council, provides valuable resources and support across Indian Country through its Technical Assistance Network. The MPPTA program also provides USDA stakeholders with access to the many experts and expertise embodied at the American Association of Meat Processors, the American Meat Science Association, the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute, and the Niche Meat Processors Assistance Network. Most recently, AMS signed an agreement with Tuskegee University to join the MPPTA network and augment USDA’s efforts to support meat and poultry processing capacity building across the South and Southeast, particularly involving minority and underutilized/underserved agricultural producers and processors.

Another Technical Assistance Provider, the Flower Hill Institute (FHI), is the lead Technical Assistance Coordinator for the diverse nationwide MPPTA network that operates out of the Jemez Pueblo of New Mexico. FHI has expanded the MPPTA reach even further by establishing arrangements with other industry-serving organizations and interest groups including the Farmer Veteran Coalition, the Rural Advancement Fund, Women in Ranching, and many others. The MPPTA network cross-pollinates resources and support for USDA stakeholders by engaging with USDA's American Rescue Plan Technical Assistance Initiative grantees and USDA's [2501 Program](#), organizations focused on underserved and veteran farmers, ranchers, and foresters.

An MPPTA Program Fact Sheet is available in [Spanish](#), and interested stakeholders can be connected with Spanish-speaking technical support upon request.

### Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program

In December 2021, AMS announced the first round of funding for the Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) Cooperative Agreement Program to provide funding to state, territorial and tribal governments for emergency food assistance purchases of domestic local foods. As of July 2023, AMS has awarded 82 of the 84 agreements. States, territories, and tribal governments who participated in the first round of funding may apply for LFPA Plus, which provides up to \$464 million, to expand their current cooperative agreements. Tribal governments and territories who did not participate in the first round of funding may submit applications to participate in LFPA Plus. A total of 24 current tribal participants have submitted applications for LFPA Plus. These food assistance purchases help to transform the food system by expanding local and regional markets, and placing an emphasis on purchasing from historically underserved farmers and ranchers. The food serves feeding programs, including food banks, schools and organizations that reach underserved communities. A list of entities that have signed LFPA agreements with AMS can be found [here](#).



*Under Secretary Jenny Moffitt joined the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin to discuss how LFPA funds will be used to procure indigenous foods (white fish, bison, beef, wild rice, and apples) for the Tribal Elder Food Box Program and additional purchases to distribute among other communities.*

## Evaluating the Accessibility of AMS Grant Programs to U.S. Farmers, Ranchers, Fishers, and Businesses

In November 2021, AMS began partnering with Florida A&M University and University of Maryland Eastern Shore on a project to evaluate the accessibility of AMS grant programs to all U.S. agricultural farmers, ranchers, fishers, and businesses, with a focus on underserved individuals and communities. The goals of the project include:

- evaluating barriers to AMS grant opportunities for underserved communities;
- investing in building trust and confidence between these communities and the USDA; and
- taking action to rectify inequalities in program access through targeted outreach, training, and technical assistance.

The University of Maryland Eastern Shore hosted a series of [Local Agriculture Market Program \(LAMP\) technical assistance workshops](#) between March and April 2023. This workshop series covered LAMP grant requirements, key changes from last year, and navigating the grant writing process and the application website. The overarching goal for the partnership is to build strong relationships and broaden AMS' ability to serve diverse communities, ensuring inclusive access to vital programs.



## Equity Actions

AMS's equity actions are divided into three areas of focus:

- (1) increasing targeted investments,
- (2) reducing barriers to AMS programs, and
- (3) advancing equity in procurement.

All of the accomplishments noted in the previous section are ongoing programs and activities that will continue to be implemented by AMS in the next few years.

### (1) Increasing Targeted Investments

AMS will continue to partner with 1890 historically Black land-grant colleges and universities to conduct an analysis of barriers to accessing AMS grant funding in underserved communities, with the goal of rectifying potential inequalities in program access. The project centers the voices of these communities through listening session conducted in cooperation with a nationwide network of community organizations and food system practitioners. Participants share their experiences and discuss their needs along with any barriers they have faced. The knowledge gained from these discussions will be used to develop training materials, technical assistance programs, and other resources.

In addition, AMS will continue to implement the 3-year cooperative agreement with the Farmers Market Coalition with the goal of building capacity among diverse stakeholders to increase access to produce within their local communities and to educate consumers about the benefits of local food. Partnership includes ongoing collaborations with 1890 land-grant colleges and universities to start or further develop farmers markets on or around their campuses.



### (2) Reducing Barriers to AMS Programs

The requirement for vendors to provide certified financial statements has long been a barrier keeping both small and large businesses from participating with USDA as approved vendors. To streamline the new vendor process and increase vendor participation, in December 2022, AMS removed the need for vendors to provide audited or reviewed financial statements. Instead, to

determine financial capability, AMS obtains a Contractor Responsibility Assessment Report that is generated via robotic process automation that includes a vendor's responses in the System for Award Management and any pertinent records in the procurement databases. This new process enables more market opportunities and more profit for American producers.

In addition, beginning July 1, 2023, suppliers of food purchase programs administered by AMS will no longer be required to use high security seals on trucks, railcars, vessels, and other transports when transporting food products purchased to support those programs; they will be allowed to use traceable, tamper evident, flat metal, wire or plastic commercial security seals. AMS' Commodity Procurement Program recently made the change to align with current industry standard practices and reduce barriers to vendor participation in USDA food purchase programs. By aligning USDA requirements with commercial standards, USDA continues promoting competition by expanding the vendor pool and creating opportunities for smaller and minority-owned businesses.

AMS will continue to partner with non-profit organizations to provide technical assistance and wrap-around support for transitioning and existing organic farmers. TOPP provides a unique opportunity for USDA to support the organic sector in engaging underserved farmers who may be interested in the organic option. TOPP is a collaborative effort involving many partners working together towards a common goal. Understanding and removing barriers to organic certification through mentoring, technical assistance, community building, and organic workforce development, directly contribute to USDA's goals of increasing diversity and access in the organic market.



### (3) Advancing Equity in Procurement

AMS is expanding outreach efforts to suppliers of kosher and halal agricultural products to determine availability for USDA nutrition assistance programs. AMS will also partner with USDA's Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships to expand outreach beyond current suppliers to gather feedback on products and capacity available for USDA procurement programs. Results of this outreach will be shared with USDA's Food and Nutrition Service to determine products that program operators are interested in USDA purchasing and begin the acquisition process.

AMS will continue to implement the Local Food Purchase Assistance and Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Programs, and provide technical assistance to states and tribal governments to identify and develop procurement practices to support underserved farmers and producers within their states, and conduct outreach.



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For more information on equity at AMS, and all of USDA, see [usda.gov/equity](https://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)
- 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 | \(En Español\)](#) (Febrero 2023)
- [USDA Environmental Justice Scorecard](#)
- [USDA Advisory Committees](#)
- [Get Started! A Guide to USDA Resources for Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers](#) (July 2022)

### 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](#) (January 2021)
- [Executive Order 14091, Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#) (February 2023)
- [Executive Order 14096, Revitalizing our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All](#) (April 2023)
- [Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments](#) (November 2000)
- [Presidential Memorandum on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships](#)
- [The Path to Achieving Justice40](#)

### AMS Equity-Related Resources

- [Regional Food Business Centers Program](#)
- [Transition to Organic Partnership Program](#)
- [Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program](#)
- [Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program](#)
- [Removing Barriers to Becoming a USDA Food Vendor](#)
- [Meat and Poultry Processing Capacity – Technical Assistance Program](#)



## 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.