



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Local Meat Capacity Grant Program

December 20, 2023

On behalf of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and Environmental Activities Division of the Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) Business Center, and in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), I prepared a Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) to evaluate the environmental consequences anticipated to result from implementing the Local Meat Capacity Grant (Local MCap). The Local MCap Program is authorized by Section 1001(b)(4) of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) (Pub. L. No. 117-2), which funds “loans and grants and other assistance to maintain and improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency.”

The USDA AMS has proposed to fund grants to support independently owned meat and poultry processing businesses. These grants will allow AMS to provide additional and more efficient processing options for local livestock producers by modernizing, increasing, diversifying, and decentralizing meat and poultry processing capacity, including support for rendering.

Since The Local MCap Program is a national program, the geographic scope of this PEA covers the entire U.S., Given the broad nature of the program, the Environmental Assessment (EA) is programmatic (PEA) and is intended to provide full NEPA coverage for activities clearly within the scope of the PEA. This PEA also serves as the basis for tiered, site-specific NEPA analysis, when additional documentation is required, that will occur prior to implementation of activities with possible resource impacts. The PEA was available for public review and comment from October 31st, 2023, through November 30th, 2023, and was announced through a Notice of Availability published in The Federal Register ([88 FR 74402](#)). One comment was received and can be found in Appendix C of the final PEA. The comment was found to be outside the scope of the environmental review. As such, no changes were made to the document based on that comment.

The Notice of Availability of the final PEA and signed FONSI will be published in the Federal Register and will be available for public viewing following the announcement at: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/localmcap> for a period of 30 calendar days.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action Alternative will implement the Local MCap Program as outlined in the RFA issued on May 8, 2023. AMS will grant about \$75 million to eligible applicants who are involved in meat and poultry processing, including rendering animal carcasses or byproducts. Eligible applicants are Tribes and Tribal Entities, for-profit, non-profit, and State or local government entities. The

applicants' facilities must be in any of the 50 States, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, or the Republic of the Marshall Islands. These facilities must be independently and domestically owned, and applicants or their designees must hold all required permits, plans and be in compliance with all relevant environmental requirements.

Reasons for Finding of No Significant Impact

Programmatic environmental documents analyze impacts on a broad scale, in this case the introduction of a new program that will result in subsequent specific actions. Because of the large geographic scope and the innovative nature of the Local MCap Grant Program, it is not possible to meaningfully predict the location of the site-specific access and improvement activities, nor the environmental conditions that exist on those lands. Thus, before implementing projects with possible protected resource impacts, a site-specific environmental review will be completed to demonstrate that actions are within the scope of the PEA and do not have impacts not already analyzed.

In consideration of the analysis documented in the PEA and the reasons outlined in this FONSI, the Proposed Action would not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly affect the human environment; therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared. The determination is based on the following:

1. All potential beneficial and adverse impacts of implementing the Proposed Action have been fully considered within the PEA; no significant adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative effects were identified based on this analysis.
2. All projects with potential resource impacts will undergo site-specific environmental reviews. The analysis will assess these impacts based on the conditions of each site, including the following factors: Cultural Resources, Threatened and Endangered Species, Coastal Barriers, Coastal Zone Management Act Areas, Wilderness Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers and Nationwide Rivers Inventory, National Natural Landmarks, Sole Source Aquifers, Wetlands, Floodplains, Important Land Resources, and Environmental Justice.
3. As detailed in the analysis presented in the PEA, the Proposed Action would not significantly affect water quality, soils, wetlands, vegetation or wildlife, air quality, climate change, socioeconomics, and environmental justice, or other important resources.
4. The Proposed Action would not involve effects to the quality of the human environment that are likely to be highly controversial.
5. The Proposed Action would not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.
6. The Proposed Action does not result in cumulative significant impacts when considered with other actions that also individually have insignificant impacts.
7. The Proposed Action does not threaten a violation of Federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.
8. Comments received on the PEA did not warrant substantive changes to the alternatives or impact analyses, and no controversies were identified.

Determination

In accordance with the NEPA, which implement the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality found at 40 CFR parts 1500-1508, I find the Proposed Action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment; therefore, no Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared.

Melissa Bailey
Agricultural Marketing Service
Associate Administrator



Agricultural Marketing Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Agricultural Marketing Service

FINAL PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Local Meat Capacity Grant Program

**Prepared by the USDA Farm Production and Conservation Business Center
Environmental Activities Division and the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service**

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December 20, 2023

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

COVER SHEET

Proposed Action: The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has proposed to fund grants to support independently owned meat and poultry processing businesses. These grants will help them provide additional and more efficient processing options for local livestock producers by modernizing, increasing, diversifying, and decentralizing meat and poultry processing capacity, including support for rendering.

This program will expand processing capacity for small and mid-sized meat and poultry processors, which are particularly vulnerable to disruption. It will also increase capacity and promote competition in the meat and poultry processing sector. Based on public input, USDA identified an urgent need to expand and diversify meat and poultry processing capacity.

The Local MCap Program is authorized by Section 1001 (b)(4) of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) (Pub. L. No. 117-2), which funds “loans and grants and other assistance to maintain and improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency”.

Type of Document: Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA)

Lead Agency: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

Cooperating Agencies: None

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Comments: This PEA was prepared in accordance with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1970, Public Law 91-140, 42 US Code 4321-4347, as amended.

AMS accepted public comments regarding the Draft Programmatic Environmental Assessment from October 31st to November 30th. Comments were accepted via email to LocalMCAp@usda.gov.

The Notice of Availability (NOA) received a single comment, which was outside the scope of the NEPA review. The comment addressed the economic and fiscal aspects of the program and its benefits for corporations. The comment can be reviewed in Appendix C below.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AMS	Agricultural Marketing Service
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CWA	Clean Water Act
CZMA	Coastal Zone Management Act
EA	Environmental Assessment
ESW	Environmental Screening Worksheet
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EO	Executive Order
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
FPPA	Farmland Protection Policy Act
FWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
GHG	Green House Gases
IPaC	Information Planning and Conservation
Local MCap	Local Meat Capacity
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
OO	Office of Outreach
PEA	Programmatic Environmental Assessment
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Officer
THPO	Tribal Historic Preservation Officer
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USACE	United States Army Corps of Engineers

Purpose of and Need for Action

1.1 Introduction

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is an agency within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). AMS' mission is to administer programs that 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. The AMS Transportation and Marketing Program currently oversees 20 grant and agreement programs, providing federal financial assistance to support rural America and the Nation's agricultural sector.

This document is a programmatic environmental assessment (PEA) for the Local Meat Capacity Grant Program (Local MCap grants), a new program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). It describes the planned actions of the Local MCap grants and potential environmental impacts resulting from those actions. The Local MCap grants will support independently owned meat and poultry processing businesses with funds to provide more and better processing options for local livestock producers by modernizing, increasing, diversifying, and decentralizing meat and poultry processing capacity, including support for rendering. This program is anticipated as a one-time funding opportunity which will not recur annually.

This PEA has been prepared to streamline the overall Local MCap grant review process. AMS anticipates using this PEA to guide decision-making for site-specific actions over the next two to three years. Each proposed grant and any associated site-specific actions would be evaluated to determine if its potential environmental impacts have been addressed in this PEA. Any activities that fall out the scope of this review or have extraordinary circumstance may be further evaluated using a Site-Specific Environmental Review Form. The review would be conducted by USDA [Agricultural Marketing Service \(AMS\)](#).

1.1.1 Background

The Local MCap grants are funded through Section 1001(b)(4) of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) (Pub. L. No. 117—2), consistent with the purpose of providing “loans and grants and other assistance to maintain and improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency.” Approximately \$75 million is available under this grant program, subject to appropriations and funds availability. Local MCap is administered by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS).

Through the funds provided by Section 1001 (b)(4) of ARPA, AMS would award competitive grants to eligible applicants that submit high quality proposals that would provide more and better processing options for local livestock producers by modernizing, increasing, and diversifying and decentralizing meat and poultry processing capacity, including support for rendering.

As stated in the [Request for Applications](#), AMS will prioritize applications from applicants that engage with underserved producers. AMS also encouraged applications that support smaller farms and ranches in the region, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, veteran producers and/or underserved communities.

USDA promotes climate-resilient landscapes and rural economic systems, including tools to support agriculture, forests, grazing lands, and rural communities. AMS encouraged applicants to consider including goals and activities related to mitigating or adapting to climate change in their project's design and implementation.

1.1.2 Program Administration

Local MCap grants will be administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). Funding will be prioritized by applications that demonstrate engagement with and benefit to local livestock producers, including underserved producers.

There are two project types available through Local MCap Grants:

Processing Expansion Projects will fund grants from \$100,000 up to \$5 million to increase the processing and/or rendering capacity of privately, cooperatively, non-profit, or Tribally held processing facilities as described in this PEA. Applications in this project type may request funding for equipment-only projects over \$250,000 or projects that include equipment purchases and facilities upgrades that create new and/or expanded markets for local livestock producers. For funding requests that include building and facility upgrades, those can include improvements, re-arrangements, and/or alterations to a facility that are required to use a space more effectively and to accommodate new or upgraded equipment and processes.

Simplified Equipment-Only Projects will fund smaller grants between \$10,000 and \$250,000 for equipment purchases for meat and poultry processors. The Simplified Equipment-Only option is a Fixed Price Grant, meaning it will fund only equipment purchases (and not associated facility upgrades, staffing, or other costs), and the amount awarded will be equal to the cost of the equipment up to \$250,000. No match is required for this grant.

AMS may prioritize applications based on diversity in applicants funded in geographic regions and across a variety of species, size of the operation, or (for Processing Expansion Projects only) leveraging significant non-Federal financial and technical resources. AMS may also prioritize projects which are located within communities that have distressed or at-risk scores on the Distressed Communities Index (DCI) developed by the Economic Innovation Group, enhance worker and/or farmer voice through cooperative ownership, payment of living wages, the provision of worker training, and/or promotion of safe working conditions, and/or enhance local and regional environmental stewardship and climate benefits.

1.2 NEPA Compliance

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as amended (42 U.S.C. §§ 4321, et seq.), was enacted in 1970 to establish a national policy for the protection of the environment. It applies to Federal agency actions that have the potential to affect the quality of the human environment. It requires Federal agencies to conduct a review considering potential environmental impacts through a systematic and interdisciplinary approach, including consideration of the natural and social sciences in planning, evaluation, and decision-making. Federal agencies are obligated to comply with NEPA regulations coordinated by the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) (40 C.F.R. Parts 1500-1508).

These regulations outline the Federal agency's requirements under NEPA and provide specific procedures for preparing environmental documentation to comply with NEPA.

If the action is subject to NEPA review, then the environmental impacts must be documented at one of three levels of NEPA analysis:

1. Applying a categorical exclusion (CE); *(AMS does not have a NEPA implementing regulation with CEs)*
2. Preparing an environmental assessment (EA), and, if appropriate, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI); or
3. Preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) and Record of Decision (ROD).

1.2.1 Purpose of Using a Programmatic Environmental Assessment

Generally, Federal agencies prepare an EA to determine whether an action would have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment (40 C.F.R. 1508.27). One of the overall goals is to provide decision makers and the public with information about the potential for impacts due to AMS's proposed action before a final decision is made. Once this process is final, AMS has performed the necessary analysis to determine if the effects may be significant. If there is potential for significant impacts, then an EIS is prepared. If the impacts are not expected to be significant, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is prepared.

A PEA is necessary because AMS does not have a NEPA regulation with categorical exclusions and is a higher, national programmatic level of NEPA compliance. PEAs are broad in scope and may address several related actions or projects, an entire program, a broad action, or Federal Financial Assistance activities. A PEA is intended to accomplish NEPA compliance by:

1. summarizing the current environmental situation;
2. describing the purpose and need for the activities;
3. identifying alternative actions; and
4. assessing the potential environmental impacts of all alternatives.

Before a Federal agency implements policies, programs, plans, and projects, NEPA requires documented, analysis of a hard look at major Federal actions and potential impacts associated with alternatives to the action.

A PEA allows AMS to reduce paperwork and streamline site-specific or project level NEPA reviews to the extent an assessment of potential impacts have already been addressed in the PEA. Programmatic environmental impact statements and environmental assessments and tiering from other analyses can reduce or eliminate redundant and duplicative efforts and effectively address cumulative effects. In this case, a PEA may be used to address the impacts of actions, or project types that are similar in nature or broad in scope, including cases where cumulative impacts are of concern. For consideration of potential impacts from specific actions and/or individual projects, tiering allows an agency to rely largely on the analysis of the programmatic NEPA document to address the impacts (Canter, 1996).

If the project type or impacts are not adequately covered in this PEA, the proposed project would require additional NEPA review. Depending upon the degree of the project's potential impacts, this review could involve the preparation of a site-specific environmental review documenting consistency with the PEAs FONSI or additional support for a categorical exclusion, a supplemental EA tiered from this PEA, a new EA, or an EIS. This PEA addresses NEPA compliance at the program level. Evaluation of site-specific impacts would be addressed during the planning and selection process for each project to ensure that any significant environmental issues are identified; that consultation among agencies, other area programs, and the public occurs; and that a decision may be made on whether the FONSI, EA, or EIS is the appropriate level of analysis. This process is further documented in the implementation chapter below (see Chapter 6).

1.3.1 Purpose of the Action

The purpose of this program is to support independently owned meat and poultry processing businesses with funds to provide additional and more efficient processing options for local livestock producers by modernizing, increasing, diversifying, and decentralizing meat and poultry processing capacity, including support for rendering.

1.3.2 The Need

This program will expand processing capacity for small and mid-sized meat and poultry processors. Given that the meat and poultry processing sector is particularly vulnerable to disruption, increasing capacity and promoting competition is a high priority for USDA. Based on public input, USDA identified an urgent need to expand and diversify meat and poultry processing capacity; increase producer income; provide producers an opportunity to have ownership in processing facilities; create stable, well-paying jobs in rural regions; improve worker health, safety, training, and wages for meatpacking jobs; spur collaboration among producers and workers; prompt State, Tribal, and private co-investment; and provide consumers with more choices.

USDA promotes climate-resilient landscapes and rural economic systems, including tools to support agriculture, forests, grazing lands, and rural communities. AMS encouraged applicants to consider including goals and activities related to mitigating or adapting to climate change in their project's design and implementation. This program shall assist in accommodating climate-driven shifts for production and decrease the vulnerabilities in potential food loss, waste, and diminished food safety.

The proposed action is consistent with the goals and objectives of the [USDA Strategic Plan 2023-2027](#), which include:

- Increasing agricultural opportunities by expanding markets and supporting a competitive agricultural system that creates greater access for producers.
- Fostering rural prosperity by investing in rural infrastructure, businesses, services, and housing
- Ensuring USDA programs are delivered efficiently, effectively, with integrity and a focus on customer service.
- Building a modern workforce with a culture of service by enhancing employee engagement, diversity, inclusion, and performance

1.4 Decision To Be Made

AMS must decide if the proposed action affects the quality of the human environment. If AMS determines it would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, then a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be prepared and signed. Projects entered under Local MCap Grants Program would be analyzed individually to determine the need for site-specific environmental reviews.

1.5 Regulatory Compliance

This PEA has been prepared to satisfy the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (Public Law 91-190, 42 United States Code 4321 et seq.); Whitehouse Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] §§ 1500–1508); and AMS Local MCap Grant Program (AMS, 2023). The intent of NEPA is to protect, restore, and enhance the human environment through well-informed Federal decisions. The following non-exclusive list laws and Executive Orders (EOs) apply to actions undertaken by Federal agencies and form the basis of the analysis presented in this PEA:

- Clean Air Act (42 USC 85 parts 7401 et seq., 1999)
- Clean Water Act (33 USC 26 parts 1251 et seq., 2000)
- Endangered Species Act [ESA] of 1973, as amended (16 USC 35 parts 1531 et seq., 1988)
- EO 11514, Protection and Enhancement of Environmental Quality (35 Federal Register [FR] 4247, 1977)
- EO 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations (59 FR 32, 1995)
- National Historic Preservation Act (54 USC 300101 et seq., 2014) and associated Section 106 process (54 USC 306108, 2014)
- EO 13985 Executive Order on Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government
- EO 14008 Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad (86 FR 19, 2021)
- EO 14017 Executive Order on America’s Supply Chains
- EO 14036 Executive Order on Promoting Competition in the American Economy
- Implementing the Build America, Buy America (BABA) Act.

1.6 Public Involvement and Consultation

Scoping is a process that seeks opinions and consultation from the interested public, affected parties, and any agency with interests or legal jurisdiction. Scoping occurs early and is an open process allow for input on issues to be addressed in the environmental document. Among other tasks, scoping eliminates non-significant issues and focuses on the significant issues for analysis.

This document was made available for public review and comment on October 31st at the <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/localmcap> webpage. A notice of the availability of the document was published in a Notice to Trade by the USDA on the same day. An additional notification of availability to comment was published in the Federal Register on October 31st.

1.7 Organization of PEA

This PEA assesses the potential impacts of the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative on potentially affected environmental and economic resources.

- **Chapter 1** provides background information, defines the Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action, and identifies the scoping process for this PEA.
- **Chapter 2** defines the two alternatives, the No Action and the Proposed Action, as well as those alternatives considered but not fully evaluated.
- **Chapter 3** includes the Affected Environment (i.e., existing conditions) and defines the Environmental Consequences (i.e., direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts) anticipated to result from the implementation of each alternative.
- **Chapter 4** describes the cumulative impacts of the action.
- **Chapter 5** describes Federal environmental laws and regulations that are likely to apply to proposed projects, as well as a description of compliance by the Local MCap Grants Program.
- **Chapter 6** outlines how the Local MCap Grant Program would use this PEA for site-specific actions.
- **Chapter 7** provides the list of individuals and agencies who collaborated to complete the PEA.
- **Chapter 8** includes the references utilized in this PEA's preparation.

Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

This PEA considers two options: The No Action Option, and the Preferred Option (Proposed Action). No significant effects on important resources were found during the scoping process. The panel review is examining if individual projects are viable, meet the Local MCap Grant Program goals, and address environmental compliance needs. More NEPA documentation would be prepared for specific projects if they have extraordinary circumstances or are found to be beyond the scope of this programmatic review. These documents would be done when the projects are ready for evaluation.

1.8 Alternative A - No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, AMS will not implement or support any programs or initiatives to assist independent meat and poultry processors in upgrading their equipment and facilities. This alternative would result in the continuation of the current conditions, where many small and medium-sized processors face challenges such as low capacity, high operating costs, outdated technology, and limited market access.

1.9 Alternative B – Proposed Action Alternative (Preferred)

Under the Proposed Action Alternative AMS will implement the [Local Meat Capacity Grant \(Local MCap\)](#) program as described in the Request for Applications (RFA) published on May 8, 2023. Under this alternative, AMS would award approximately \$75 million in grants to eligible applicants, which include business entities (regardless of legal structure) engaged in meat and poultry processing, including rendering animal carcasses or byproducts. Eligible entities include Tribes and Tribal Entities, for-profit entities, non-profit entities, and State or local government entities. Private entities must be independently owned and operated, and all applicants must be domestically owned. Additionally, applicants' facilities must be physically located within the 50 States of the United States, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

The program has two types of projects:

Processing Expansion Projects: These projects will include equipment purchases and facilities upgrades that create new and/or expanded markets for local livestock producers. For funding requests that include building and facility upgrades, those can include improvements, re-arrangements, and/or alterations to a facility that are required to use a space more effectively and to accommodate new or upgraded equipment and processes. The maximum amount of funding for these projects will be \$5 million per applicant.

Examples of Processing Expansion Projects include but are not limited to:

- Expanding processing capacities to increase production volumes, process additional meat and poultry species, or add new value-added product types;
- Upgrading processing and manufacturing equipment;
- Increasing packaging and labeling capacity;
- Increasing cold storage capacity;
- Improving slaughter and humane handling infrastructure;
- Installation of holding pens or wastewater management systems, or other improvements that do not require breaking new ground or constructing new facilities.

Simplified Equipment-Only Projects: These projects will fund only equipment purchases up to \$250,000 per applicant. The equipment must be directly related to increasing the processing capacity or efficiency of the facility.

Examples of Simplified Equipment Projects include but are not limited to:

- Smokers
- Sausage makers
- Breaders

The average grant amount is expected to be about \$500,000 for Processing Expansion Projects and \$50,000 for Simplified Equipment-Only Projects.

Affected Environment and Environmental Impacts

This chapter describes the existing environmental conditions for resources potentially affected by the implementation of the Local MCap Grant Program, as well as the potential environmental consequences.

As a programmatic EA (PEA); this document evaluates the effects of implementing changes to a nationwide voluntary program. As such, the geographic scope of the program is extensive and not fully defined at this stage of program implementation. Therefore, the utility and availability of modeling and quantitative analysis is limited. The potential impacts of implementing the program changes will be discussed on a national or regional level, as appropriate. Site-specific environmental reviews would occur prior to the implementation of on-the-ground activities, such as facility improvement activities. This PEA and any supplemental site-specific environmental reviews will provide the full NEPA coverage for activities under Local MCap Grant program.

Applicants from all states, territories, and freely associated states of the United States can apply for the Local MCap program, However, the specific locations of the proposed projects are not yet determined, as AMS is still in the process of reviewing the applications. Therefore, this PEA only gives a general description of the environmental setting based on the kinds of projects that qualify for funding under the program.

The environmental setting for Processing Expansion Projects is assumed to be primarily rural or semi-rural areas, where most meat and poultry processing facilities are located. These areas typically have low population density, agricultural land use, and natural or semi-natural vegetation cover. The environmental setting for Simplified Equipment-Only Projects is similar to that of Processing Expansion Projects, except that some equipment-only projects may be located in urban or suburban areas, where some small-scale or niche meat and poultry processors operate. The program will not fund new construction which disturbs soil and is restricted to modifications of existing facilities only.

The environmental analysis for projects that may be funded include the following resources or features:

- Air quality
- Water Quality
- Wetlands
- Floodplains
- Coastal zones
- Groundwater
- Soils
- Vegetation
- Wildlife
- Endangered and threatened species
- Cultural resources
- Socioeconomic conditions and Environmental justice

The baseline conditions and potential impacts of these resources or features are discussed in Chapter 3 of this PEA.

1.10 Resources Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

CEQ regulations (40 CFR 1501.7(a)(3)) indicate that the lead agency should identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues that are not important or that have been covered by prior environmental review, narrowing the discussion of these issues in the document to a brief presentation of why they will not have a significant effect on the human or natural environment.

Vegetation and Wildlife. The proposed activities under the AMS Local MCap Grant program will occur either indoors or in previously disturbed areas adjacent to existing structures where there is little chance of encountering wildlife or vegetation. Therefore, the potential for significant adverse impacts on wildlife, vegetation, migratory birds from the proposed activities are expected to be negligible. No federally listed threatened or endangered species or critical habitats are likely to be affected by the proposed activities. The proposed activities will not introduce or spread invasive species or pests. The proposed activities will comply with all applicable Federal, state, local laws, and regulations regarding wildlife and vegetation protection.

The AMS Local MCap Grant program will not have any cumulative impacts on wildlife and vegetation beyond those already occurring from existing meat and poultry processing operations in the project areas. The program will not result in any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources related to wildlife and vegetation. The program will not conflict with any plans, policies, or programs for the conservation of wildlife and vegetation. A site-specific review process for Local MCap Grant Program activities that may impact species, or their critical habitat will be followed according to chapter 6 of this PEA.

Cultural Resources. The proposed activities under the AMS Local MCap Grant program will occur either indoors or in previously disturbed areas adjacent to existing structures where there is little chance of encountering cultural resources. Therefore, the potential impacts on cultural resources from the proposed activities will be negligible. No historic properties or traditional cultural properties are likely to be affected by the proposed activities. No significant adverse effects on archaeological resources, historic buildings or structures, historic landscapes, or other cultural features are anticipated. The proposed activities will comply with all applicable Federal, state, local laws, and regulations regarding cultural resource protection.

The AMS Local MCap Grant program will not have any cumulative impacts on cultural resources beyond those already occurring from existing meat and poultry processing operations in the project areas. The program will not result in any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources related to cultural resources. The program will not conflict with any plans, policies, or programs for the preservation of cultural resources.

Based on the analysis above, the AMS Local MCap Grant program will have no significant impact on cultural resources. No mitigation measures are required or recommended for this resource area. However, if any inadvertent discoveries of cultural resources are encountered during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific review process will be followed according to chapter 6 of this PEA.

Coastal Barriers and Coastal Zones. The proposed activities under the AMS Local MCap Grant program will occur either indoors or in previously disturbed areas adjacent to existing structures where there is little chance of impacts to coastal zones or coastal barriers. Therefore, the potential impacts on coastal zones or coastal barriers from the proposed activities will be negligible. No significant adverse effects on coastal ecosystems, habitats, species, or processes are anticipated. The proposed activities will comply with all applicable federal, state, local laws, and regulations regarding coastal zone and coastal barrier protection.

The AMS Local MCap Grant program will not have any cumulative impacts on coastal zones or coastal barriers beyond those already occurring from existing meat and poultry processing operations in the project areas. The program will not result in any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources related to coastal zones or coastal barriers. The program will not conflict with any plans, policies, or programs for the conservation or management of coastal zones or coastal barriers.

Based on the analysis above, the AMS Local MCap Grant program will have no significant impact on coastal zones or coastal barriers. No mitigation measures are required or recommended for this resource area. However, if any inadvertent impacts on coastal zones or coastal barriers are encountered during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific review process will be followed according to chapter 6 of this PEA.

Wild and Scenic Rivers and Nationwide Rivers Inventory. The proposed activities under the AMS Local MCap Grant program will occur either indoors or in previously disturbed areas adjacent to existing structures where there is little chance of impacts to wild and scenic rivers or nationwide rivers inventory. Therefore, the potential impacts on wild and scenic rivers or nationwide rivers inventory from the proposed activities will be negligible. No significant adverse effects on river-related values, such as scenery, recreation, fish, and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values are anticipated. The proposed activities will comply with all applicable federal, state, local laws, and regulations regarding wild and scenic river and nationwide river inventory protection.

The AMS Local MCap Grant program will not have any cumulative impacts on wild and scenic rivers or nationwide rivers inventory beyond those already occurring from existing meat and poultry processing operations in the project areas. The program would not result in any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources related to wild and scenic rivers or nationwide rivers inventory. The program will not conflict with any plans, policies, or programs for the preservation or management of wild and scenic rivers or nationwide rivers inventory.

Based on the analysis above, the AMS Local MCap Grant program will have no significant impact on wild and scenic rivers or nationwide rivers inventory. No mitigation measures are required or recommended for this resource area. However, if any inadvertent impacts on wild and scenic rivers or nationwide rivers inventory are encountered during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific review process will be followed according to chapter 6 of this PEA.

Wilderness Areas and National Natural Landmarks. The proposed activities under the AMS Local MCap Grant program will occur either indoors or in previously disturbed areas adjacent to existing structures where there is little chance of impacts to wilderness areas or national natural landmarks. Therefore, the potential impacts on wilderness areas or national natural landmarks from the proposed activities will be negligible. No significant adverse effects on wilderness character traits or on biological and geological

resources (such as scenery, habitats, species, or processes) are anticipated. The proposed activities will comply with all applicable federal, state, local laws, and regulations regarding wilderness area and national natural landmark protection.

The AMS Local MCap Grant program will not have any cumulative impacts on wilderness areas and national natural landmarks beyond those already occurring from existing meat and poultry processing operations in the project areas. The program will not result in any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources related to wilderness areas and national natural landmarks. The program will not conflict with any plans, policies, or programs for the preservation or management of wilderness areas and national natural landmarks.

Based on the analysis above, the AMS Local MCap Grant program will have no significant impact on wilderness areas and national natural landmarks. No mitigation measures are required or recommended for this resource area. However, if any inadvertent impacts on wilderness areas and national natural landmarks are encountered during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific review process will be followed according to chapter 6 of the PEA.

Floodplains and Wetlands. The proposed activities under the AMS Local MCap Grant program will occur either indoors or in previously disturbed areas adjacent to existing structures where there is little chance of impacts to floodplains and wetlands. Therefore, the potential impacts on floodplains and wetlands from the proposed activities will be negligible. No significant adverse effects on hydrology, soils, vegetation, wildlife, or other resources associated with floodplains and wetlands are anticipated. The proposed activities will comply with all applicable federal, state, local laws, and regulations regarding floodplain and wetland protection.

The AMS Local MCap Grant program will not have any cumulative impacts on floodplains and wetlands beyond those already occurring from existing meat and poultry processing operations in the project areas. The program will not result in any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources related to floodplains and wetlands. The program would not conflict with any plans, policies, or programs for the conservation or management of floodplains and wetlands.

Based on the analysis above, the AMS Local MCap Grant program will have no significant impact on floodplains and wetlands. No mitigation measures are required or recommended for this resource area. However, if any inadvertent impacts on floodplains and wetlands are encountered during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific review process will be followed including required permits according to chapter 6 of this PEA.

Soils and Other Important Land Resources. The proposed activities under the AMS Local MCap grant program will occur either indoors or in previously disturbed areas adjacent to existing structures that are properly permitted where there is little chance of impacts to soils and other important land resources. Therefore, the potential impacts on soils and other important land resources from the proposed activities will be negligible. No significant adverse effects on soil quality, quantity, or productivity are anticipated. The proposed activities will comply with all applicable federal, state, local laws, and regulations regarding soil and land resource protection.

The AMS Local MCap Grant program will not have any cumulative impacts on soils and other important land resources beyond those already occurring from existing meat and poultry processing operations in the project areas. The program will not result in any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources related to soils and other important land resources. The program will not conflict with any plans, policies, or programs for the conservation or management of soils and other important land resources.

Based on the analysis above, the AMS Local MCap Grant program will have no significant impact on soils and other important land resources. No mitigation measures are required or recommended for this resource area. However, if any inadvertent impacts on soils and other important land resources are encountered during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific review process will be followed according to chapter 6 of this PEA.

1.11 Resources Considered with Detailed Analysis

This section describes the environment that could be affected by implementing the alternatives described in Chapter 2. Aspects of the affected environment described in this section focus on the relevant major resources or issues. Under the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action would not be implemented. The No Action Alternative would result in the continuation of the current land and resource uses in the project area.

1.11.1 Water Quality

Definition of Resource

Surface waters, as defined by The Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Army Corps of Engineers, are U.S. waters, including streams, lakes, rivers, estuaries, coastal waters, and wetlands. The principal law governing pollution of the nation's surface water resources is the Clean Water Act (CWA). The CWA aims to prevent, reduce, and eliminate pollution in the nation's water to "restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation's waters", CWA Section 101 (a).

The Clean Water Act was designed to eliminate the discharge of pollutants into U.S. waters and protect water quality. There is a permitting process in place to mitigate any negative impacts to water quality.

Affected Environment

The environmental setting for Processing Expansion Projects is primarily rural or semi-rural areas, where most large-scale meat and poultry processing facilities are located. These areas typically have low population density, agricultural land use, and natural or semi-natural vegetation cover. The environmental setting for Simplified Equipment-Only Projects is similar to that of Processing Expansion Projects, except that some equipment-only projects may be located in urban or suburban areas, where some small-scale or niche meat and poultry processors operate.

While the Local MCap program will only fund existing meat and poultry processing plant enhancements, and therefore will not add new processing facilities; the meat processing industry can generate wastewater that contains organic matter, blood, fat, grease, pathogens, and other pollutants that can harm the environment and human health if not properly treated. AMS' RFA stated that all eligible

applicants are required to have the necessary permits in place, including but not limited to National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits to regulate their wastewater discharges to surface waters or municipal sewer systems.

The type and number of NPDES permits that slaughterhouses need depend on several factors, such as the size and location of the facility, the type and amount of wastewater generated, the method and destination of discharge, and the applicable state and Federal regulations. Most states issue NPDES permits under primacy for EPA. The EPA retains oversight of the NPDES program and can review, comment on, and object to permits issued by primacy states. Some examples of NPDES permits that slaughterhouses may need are:

- **Direct Discharge Permits:** These are permits for facilities that discharge their wastewater directly to a water of the United States, such as a stream, lake, or ocean. Direct dischargers must comply with the effluent limitations and standards established by the EPA for the Meat and Poultry Products (MPP) category under 40 CFR Part 4321. These standards vary depending on the type of animal processed (e.g., beef, pork, poultry) and the type of process used (e.g., slaughter, further processing, rendering). Direct dischargers must also meet any additional requirements imposed by the state or local authorities where they operate.
- **Indirect Discharge Permits:** These are permits for facilities that discharge their wastewater to a publicly owned treatment works (POTW), which is a municipal sewer system that treats wastewater before discharging it to a water of the United States. Indirect dischargers must comply with the pretreatment standards established by the EPA for the MPP category under 40 CFR Part 4321. These standards are designed to prevent pollutants from interfering with or passing through the POTW. Indirect dischargers must also meet any additional requirements imposed by the POTW or the state or local authorities where they operate.
- **Stormwater Permits:** These are permits for facilities that discharge stormwater runoff from their industrial activities to a water of the United States or a POTW. Stormwater runoff may contain pollutants such as sediment, nutrients, metals, bacteria, and oil that can degrade water quality and harm aquatic life. Stormwater dischargers must comply with the requirements of the NPDES stormwater program under 40 CFR Part 1222. These requirements include developing and implementing a stormwater pollution prevention plan (SWPPP) that identifies potential sources of pollution and best management practices (BMPs) to reduce or eliminate them. Stormwater dischargers must also meet any additional requirements imposed by the state or local authorities where they operate.

Environmental Consequences

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, AMS would not make funds available under the Local MCap Grant Program.

Under the No Action Alternative, AMS would not undertake or fund grants for the purpose of expanding independently owned meat and poultry processing business. This could hamper their ability to upgrade equipment and facilities, where those investments could result in more efficient technologies with fewer impacts on air and water quality. The alternative would also eliminate USDA's efforts to target

investments toward meat and poultry processors with smaller-scale projects, with a goal of increasing processing availability and variety for local livestock producers. This alternative would not satisfy the purpose and need but will be carried forward in the analysis to serve as a baseline against which impacts of the Preferred Alternative can be assessed.

Without the access to the Local MCap Grants designed to update existing production facilities to create more efficient operations, the possible long-term adverse impacts to water quality exists on a wider scope.

Proposed Action Alternative

Under this alternative there will be increased processing availability and variety for local and regional livestock producers. The investments funded through this program are expected to expand and diversify meat and poultry processing capacity; therefore, they could contribute to efficient and cost-effective measures to successfully comply with EPA effluent regulations while also providing consumers with more options. AMS also encouraged applications which enhance worker health, safety, and training. This grant opportunity will allow facilities to invest in updated equipment and infrastructure improvements, some of which may decrease effluent discharge.

The proposed activities under the AMS Local MCap grant program may result in the discharge of pollutants from point sources into waters of the United States. Existing facilities have already obtained the necessary permits and proposed projects will require updating those permits, if applicable, consistent with the Clean Water Act to address any water quality issues. The NPDES permit program aims to protect water resources by addressing point source water pollution. Initiated by the Clean Water Act in 1972, the NPDES permit program controls the discharge of pollutants into surface waters by imposing effluent limitations to protect water quality. The NPDES permits are issued by states that have obtained EPA approval to issue permits or by EPA Regions in states without such approval. The NPDES permits specify an acceptable level of a pollutant or pollutant parameter in a discharge (for example, a certain level of bacteria), monitoring and reporting requirements, and other provisions to ensure that the discharge does not hurt water quality or people's health.

The proposed activities would adhere to the NPDES permitting and the associated requirements, minimizing the potential impacts on water quality from the proposed activities. The water quality standards, criteria, and designated uses would not be adversely affected. The activities would also comply with all relevant laws and regulations that protect water quality at the Federal, state, and local levels.

The program would not cause any additional impacts on water quality beyond those that already occur from the existing meat and poultry processing operations in the project areas. The program would not involve any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources related to water quality. The program anticipates no significant adverse effects on water quality. The activities would conform to all applicable laws and regulations that pertain to water quality and have the necessary permits. However, if any unforeseen impacts on water quality are detected during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific environmental evaluation process will be conducted according to chapter 6 of this PEA.

1.11.2 Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice

Definition of Resource

Socioeconomics is a branch of economics that studies how social processes affect and are affected by economic activity. Socioeconomics considers factors such as income, education, occupation, place of residence, ethnicity, and religion, and how they influence the well-being, opportunities, and choices of individuals and groups. Socioeconomics also examines how economic policies and practices impact the distribution of wealth, power, and resources among different segments of society. A USDA programmatic Environmental Assessment should analyze the socioeconomic impacts of the proposed actions and alternatives on the affected communities, such as changes in employment, income, production, consumption, public services, and quality of life.

Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Environmental justice aims to ensure that no population bears a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or from the execution of federal, state, and local laws; regulations; and policies. Environmental justice also requires effective access to decision makers for all, and the ability in all communities to make informed decisions and take positive actions to produce environmental justice for themselves. A USDA Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) should evaluate the environmental justice impacts of the proposed actions and alternatives on the affected communities, such as potential effects on health, safety, culture, subsistence, and human rights.

Affected Environment

The Local Meat Capacity Grant program will expand and diversify meat and poultry processing capacity; increase producer income; provide producers an opportunity to have ownership in processing facilities; create stable, well-paying jobs in rural regions; improve worker health, safety, training, and wages for meatpacking jobs; spur collaboration among producers and workers; prompt State, Tribal, and private co-investment; and provide consumers with more choices.

In its Request for Applications, AMS stated that it may prioritize projects that are in distressed community, as defined by the Distressed Communities Index (DCI). The DCI is a tool for measuring the comparative well-being of U.S. communities and helps illuminate ground level disparities across the country. The seven components of the index are: no high school diploma, housing vacancy rate, adults not working, poverty rate, median income ratio, change in employment and change in establishments.

Figure 1 shows that 14.8% of the United States qualifies as a distressed community based upon the U.S. Census reports.

Figure 1. Distressed Communities in the U.S.

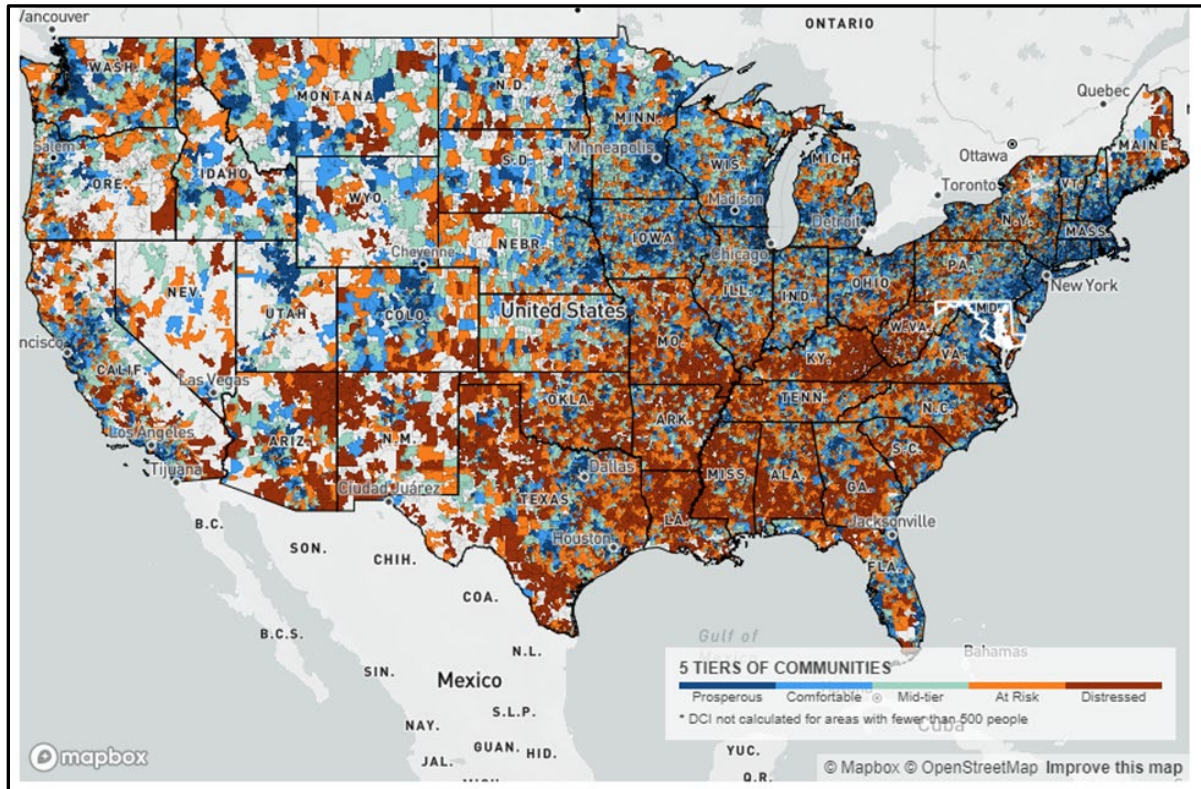
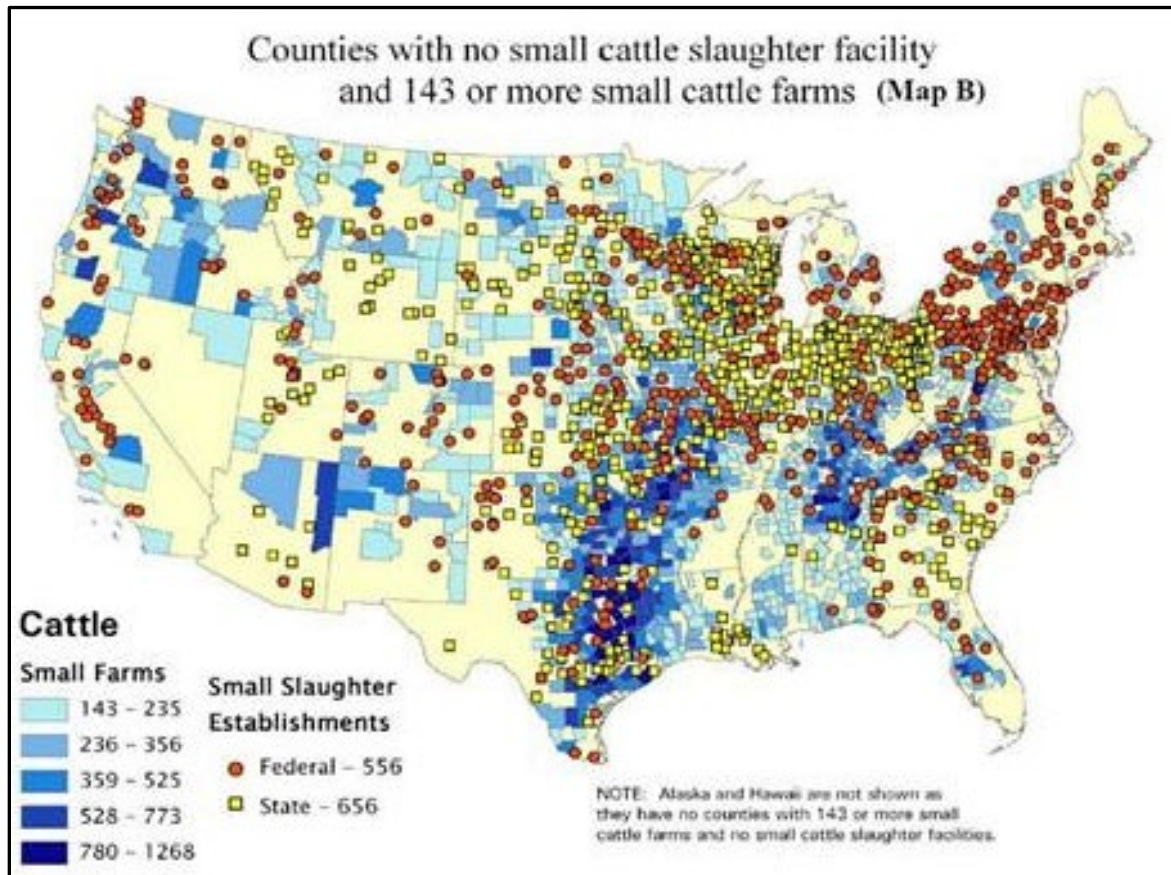


Figure 2 shows the slaughterhouses available throughout the United States per the USDA Food Safety Inspection Service. With the availability of the Local MCap Grant program, there may be an increase in stable, well-paying jobs created in rural regions that may improve the economic success of the community. This grant may also improve existing worker health, safety, training, and wages for meatpacking jobs.

Figure 2. Lack of Small Cattle Slaughter Facilities in the U.S.



Environmental Consequences

No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative would eliminate the potential for positive socioeconomic impacts on the small and medium-sized meat and poultry processing businesses and the communities they depend on. Here examples of impacts:

- Under the No Action Alternative, AMS would not provide Local MCap Grant program funds to help the small and medium-sized meat and poultry processing businesses upgrade their facilities, equipment, technology, and operations. This would limit their ability to improve their efficiency, productivity, quality, safety, and profitability, and to meet the increasing demand for local and niche meat products.

- Without the Local MCap Grant program funds, the independently owned meat and poultry processing businesses would face more challenges and competition from the larger and more consolidated processing plants that have more resources, capacity, and market power. This could result in reduced revenues, increased costs, lower profits, and higher risks for the small and medium-sized processors.
- The No Action Alternative would also miss the opportunity to create positive socioeconomic impacts that could result from implementing the Local MCap Grant program. The program could enhance the viability and sustainability of the independently owned meat and poultry processing businesses by helping them improve their infrastructure, technology, and practices. The program could also increase the availability and affordability of local and niche meat products for the consumers, especially those in underserved areas or markets. The program could also foster more economic development, resilience, diversity, and equity in the rural communities that depend on the meat and poultry processing industry.

Proposed Action Alternative

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, AMS would make funds available through the Local MCap Grant Program. Because the program aims to support more and better markets for local and regional livestock producers, AMS encouraged processor applicants to engage with such producers, especially small and underserved farmers, and ranchers. AMS requested project plans based on the needs of small, underserved, and/or local and regional producers, and thoughtful projections of markets for the processed products. The goal for this program is to expand and diversify meat and poultry processing capacity; increase producer income; provide producers an opportunity to have ownership in processing facilities; create stable, well-paying jobs in rural regions; improve worker health, safety, training, and wages for meatpacking jobs; spur collaboration among producers and workers; prompt State, Tribal, and private co-investment; and provide consumers with more choices.

The Local Meat Capacity Grant (Local MCap) is a program that supports independently owned meat and poultry processing businesses. The program provides funds to modernize, increase, diversify, and decentralize meat and poultry processing capacity, including support for rendering. In terms of socioeconomic justice, the program aims to provide more and better processing options for local livestock producers. This could potentially lead to an increase in local employment opportunities and economic growth. The Local MCap program does not explicitly address environmental justice, but it may help reduce the environmental burden on vulnerable communities by supporting more efficient and sustainable meat and poultry processing. The program funds activities such as upgrading equipment, facilities, and technology, or implementing best practices for food safety and quality, which could lead to less resource consumption, waste generation, and pollution.

The Local MCap Grant program encouraged applications which demonstrated positive socioeconomic and environmental justice impacts on the independently owned meat and poultry processing businesses and the communities they serve. Here are examples of possible impacts:

- The Local MCap Grant program would provide financial assistance to help the small and medium-sized meat and poultry processing businesses upgrade their facilities, equipment, technology, and operations. This would enable them to improve their efficiency, productivity, quality, safety, and profitability, and to meet the increasing demand for local and niche meat products.

- The Local MCap Grant program would also help the independently owned meat and poultry processing businesses to compete more effectively with the larger and more consolidated processing plants that have more resources, capacity, and market power. This would result in increased revenues, reduced costs, higher profits, and lower risks for the small and medium-sized processors.
- The improvement of the independently owned meat and poultry processing businesses would have beneficial effects on the communities they serve, especially given AMS' funding priority for projects that are located within the Distressed Communities Index, which are either distressed or considered to be at-risk. These communities could gain an important source of employment, income, tax revenue, and economic activity that supports the local farmers, ranchers, retailers, consumers, and other businesses. They would also gain access to fresh, local, and diverse meat products that meet their preferences and needs.
- The Local MCap Grant program could also promote socioeconomic and environmental justice in the rural communities that depend on the meat and poultry processing industry. The program would target the locations that have high levels of poverty, unemployment, or economic distress, and that have been historically underserved or marginalized by the federal policies or programs. The program could therefore enhance the opportunities and choices for the low-income, minority, tribal, or vulnerable populations that face disproportionate environmental or health burdens from the meat and poultry processing activities. The program would also foster more public participation and engagement in the decision-making publication of the Environmental Assessment.

The program anticipates no significant adverse effects and positive impacts are predicted to be slightly beneficial for Socioeconomic and Environmental Justice beyond those that already occur from the existing meat and poultry processing operations in the project areas. However, if any unforeseen impacts on Socioeconomic and Environmental Justice are detected during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific environmental evaluation process will be conducted according to chapter 6 of this PEA.

1.11.3 Air Quality

Definition of Resource

Air quality is a vital resource for both the environment and human health. It refers to the condition of the air within our surroundings. Good air quality pertains to the degree which the air is clean, clear, and free from pollutants such as smoke, dust, and smog among others. But when the air contains these pollutants in large amounts, it is of poor quality.

Air quality is monitored by measuring a variety of pollutants known to harm human health and the environment, such as nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, ozone, and particulate matter. The Air Quality Index (AQI) is a tool used to communicate the health risks posed by air pollution levels in a simple and understandable way.

Affected Environment

Poor air quality has a significant impact on public health and can lead to increased hospital admissions and a range of serious health conditions including heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, and both chronic and acute respiratory diseases including asthma.

Meat processing factories are susceptible to the spread of airborne viruses and microbes due to the temperature humidity requirements. This means that airborne viruses can survive longer in the air than in other facilities (Nicola Walshe 2021).

Ambient air monitoring in meat processing facilities is a critical aspect of maintaining food safety and quality. Ambient air monitoring is the systematic, long-term assessment of pollutant levels by measuring the quantity and types of certain pollutants in the surrounding, outdoor air. It is an integral part of an effective air quality management system.

Common air quality problems include HVAC filtration, and low air change rates. High levels of particulates can be a reason that airborne microbes such as viruses can survive in the air longer. Using low-quality air filters can cause a rise in particulate levels which in turn can increase the spread of viruses.

An air change rate is the changing of an air volume in a room over a specific time-period. Often an increased number of air changes is recommended to help dilute the number of airborne microbes in the air.

Environmental Consequences

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, AMS would not provide Local MCap Grant program funds to help the independently owned meat and poultry processing businesses improve their air quality performance. This would eliminate funding incentives to improve the air quality of the areas where these businesses operate, as well as on the health and well-being of the workers and the residents. Here are possible impacts of failing to implement the Local MCap grant program:

- Without the Local MCap Grant program funds, the small and medium-sized meat and poultry processing businesses would have less incentive and capacity to adopt best management practices and technologies that can reduce their emissions of air pollutants.
- The existing air quality due to the emissions from the meat and poultry processing activities and its concomitant risks for the health and safety of the workers and the residents in the vicinity of these facilities would remain unchanged. Exposure to these pollutants can cause respiratory problems, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and premature death.
- The No Action Alternative would also miss the opportunity to create positive impacts on the air quality that could result from implementing the Local MCap Grant program. The program could help the independently owned meat and poultry processing businesses to comply with the Federal and state air quality standards and regulations that apply to their industry, such as the EPA's Meat and Poultry Products Effluent Guidelines and the Clean Air Act. The program could also encourage the adoption of more sustainable and efficient practices and technologies that can lower the emissions of air pollutants and greenhouse gases from the meat and poultry processing operations.

Under the no action alternative, the trajectory of air pollution from small and medium meat and poultry processing facilities would remain unchanged.

Proposed Action Alternative

The AMS Local MCap grant program would have slightly positive impacts on the air quality of the areas where the small and medium meat and poultry processing businesses operate, as well as on the health and well-being of the workers and the residents. The agency encouraged proposals to develop or install equipment that improves air quality and worker safety. Here are examples of these potential impacts:

- The AMS Local MCap grant program would provide financial assistance to help the small and medium-sized meat and poultry processing businesses upgrade their facilities, equipment, technology, and operations. This would enable them to adopt best management practices and technologies that can reduce their emissions of air pollutants, such as particulate matter, ammonia, volatile organic compounds, nitrogen oxides, and greenhouse gases. These pollutants can impair the air quality and contribute to smog, acid rain, climate change, and ozone depletion.
- An improvement of the air quality due to the reduction of emissions from the meat and poultry processing activities would benefit the health and safety of the workers and the residents in the vicinity of these facilities. Exposure to these pollutants can cause respiratory problems, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and premature death.
- The AMS Local MCap grant program would also help the small and medium-sized meat and poultry processing businesses to comply with the federal and state air quality standards and regulations that apply to their industry, such as the EPA's Meat and Poultry Products Effluent Guidelines and the Clean Air Act. The program would also encourage the adoption of more sustainable and efficient practices and technologies that can lower the emissions of air pollutants and greenhouse gases from the meat and poultry processing operations.

The program anticipates no significant adverse effects and positive impacts are predicted to be slightly beneficial for air quality beyond those that already occur from the existing meat and poultry processing operations in the project areas. However, if any unforeseen impacts on air quality are detected during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific environmental evaluation process will be conducted according to chapter 6 of this PEA.

1.11.4 Climate Change

Definition of Resource

According to the EPA, "climate change refers to changes in global or regional climate patterns attributed largely to human-caused increased levels of atmospheric greenhouse gases. Greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and certain synthetic chemicals, trap some of the Earth's outgoing energy, thus retaining heat in the atmosphere." (EPA, 2023)

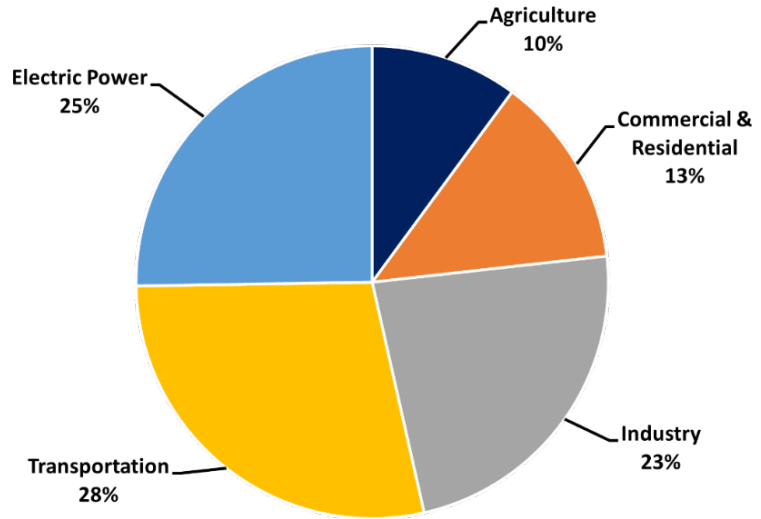
The changes of the earth's climate can be seen in changing temperatures and precipitation patterns, increases in ocean temperatures, sea level and acidity, melting glaciers and sea ice as well as changes in the frequency, intensity, and duration of extreme weather events.

Climate change involves longer-term trends, such as shifts toward warmer, wetter, or drier conditions. These trends can be caused by natural variability in climate over time, as well as human activities that add greenhouse gases to the atmosphere like burning fossil fuels for energy" (EPA, 2022).

Affected Environment

Climate change presents real threats to U.S. agricultural production, forest resources, and rural economies. These challenges are complex as agriculture generates 10% of GHG emissions in the U.S. (Figure 3) through sources such as the operation of internal combustion engines, enteric fermentation by livestock, agricultural soil management, manure management, field burning, and other practices. Agricultural activities contribute directly to emissions of GHGs including carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), and nitrous oxide (N₂O).

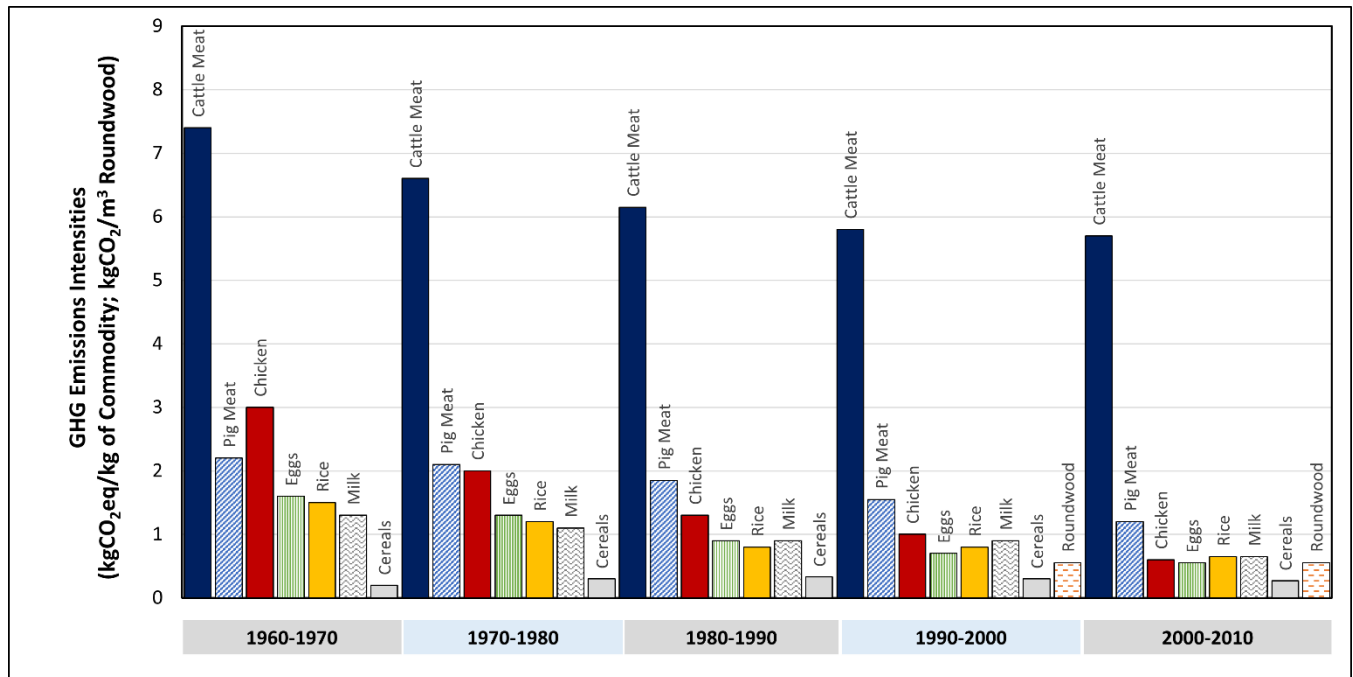
Figure 3. Sources of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions in 2021



Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2023).
Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2021

The meat production industry has been reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions over the past 5 decades (Figure 4) and this Local MCap Grant program is expected to continue this trend at an economically feasible rate for small and distressed communities.

Figure 4. Agriculture Forestry and Other Land Use



Environmental Consequences

USDA promotes climate-resilient landscapes and rural economic systems, including tools to support agriculture, forests, grazing lands, and rural communities. AMS encouraged applicants to consider including goals and activities related to mitigating or adapting to climate change in their project's design and implementation.

No Action Alternative

Not implementing the AMS Local MCap grant program to small and medium meat and poultry processing businesses could have negative impacts on climate change, as these businesses would not receive funding to develop or install equipment that reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Here are examples of possible impacts of failing to implement the Local MCap grant program:

- Without the AMS Local MCap grant program funds, the small and medium-sized meat and poultry processing businesses would have less incentive and capacity to adopt best management practices and technologies that can reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide. These gases trap heat in the atmosphere and cause the Earth's temperature to rise.
- The No Action Alternative would also miss the opportunity to create positive impacts on climate change that could result from implementing the AMS Local MCap grant program. The program could help the small and medium-sized meat and poultry processing businesses to comply with the federal and state climate change policies and regulations that apply to their industry, such as the EPA's Meat and Poultry Products Effluent Guidelines and the Clean Air Act. The program as proposed encourages the adoption of more sustainable and efficient practices and technologies that can lower the emissions of greenhouse gases from the meat and poultry processing operations.

Proposed Action Alternative

Implementing the AMS Local MCap grant program to small and medium meat and poultry processing businesses could have positive impacts on climate change, as these businesses may opt to use funds for activities which reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. Here are examples of positive impacts:

- The AMS Local MCap grant program would provide financial assistance to help the small and medium-sized meat and poultry processing businesses upgrade their facilities, equipment, technology, and operations. This funding could enable them to adopt best management practices and technologies that can reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide. These gases trap heat in the atmosphere and cause the Earth's temperature to rise.
- Where meat and poultry processing facilities invest in such improved technologies, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions would mitigate the effects of climate change on the environment and society. Climate change can cause more frequent and intense extreme weather events, such as droughts, floods, heat waves, and storms, that can damage crops, infrastructure, and human health. Climate change can also alter the patterns of precipitation, temperature, and seasons, that can affect the availability and quality of water, soil, and biodiversity. Climate change can also pose risks for food security, as it can reduce the productivity and profitability of agriculture and livestock systems.

- The AMS Local MCap grant program would also help the small and medium-sized meat and poultry processing businesses to comply with the Federal and state climate change policies and regulations that apply to their industry, such as the EPA's Meat and Poultry Products Effluent Guidelines and the Clean Air Act. The program also encouraged proposals which developed or installed equipment that can lower the emissions of greenhouse gases from the meat and poultry processing operations, as well as meeting other USDA climate action goals.

The program anticipates no significant adverse effects and positive impacts are predicted to be slightly beneficial for climate change beyond those that already occur from the existing meat and poultry processing operations in the project areas. However, if any unforeseen impacts on climate change are detected during the implementation of the program activities, a site-specific environmental evaluation process will be conducted according to chapter 6 of this PEA.

Cumulative Impacts

1.12 Definition

CEQ regulations stipulate that a cumulative effects analysis be conducted to consider the potential environmental impacts resulting from “the incremental impacts of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions.” Cumulative effects most likely arise when a relationship exists between a proposed action and other actions expected to occur in a similar location or during a similar period. An action which overlaps with or is in proximity to other proposed actions would be expected to have more potential for a cumulative effect on the same resources than actions that are more geographically separated. Similarly, actions that coincide, even partially, in time tend to have potential for cumulative effects.

1.13 Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions

The affected environment for this cumulative impact analysis includes renovation of existing structures with no additional ground disturbance.

1.14 Cumulative Impacts of the Proposed Action

The cumulative total of environmental impacts associated with implementation of the Local MCap Grant Program is not anticipated to have any cumulative negative impact to the environment, as the activities are in the renovation category. The Local MCap Grant Program is likely to have a cumulative positive impact on the environment since the upgrades to existing facilities could result in more energy efficient systems and/or systems that reduce effluent discharge. This program has been given approximately \$75 million to support a wide range of activities to purchase equipment and upgrade facilities.

1.15 Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

NEPA requires that environmental analysis include identification of any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources which would be involved should an action be implemented. Irreversible and irretrievable resource commitments are related to the use of nonrenewable resources and the effects that the use of these resources has on future generations. Irreversible effects primarily result from the use or destruction

of a specific resource that cannot be replaced within a reasonable time frame. Irretrievable resource commitments involve the loss in value of an affected resource that cannot be restored because of the action. The implementation of the Local MCap Grant Program would result in no irreversible or irretrievable resource commitments.

Compliance with Environmental Laws and Regulations

AMS is responsible for ensuring that projects comply with all relevant authorities. Compliance with these authorities would result in few, if any, negative environmental, social, and/or economic impacts. Consultation, permits, authorities, and actions relative to water quality, endangered, threatened, and protected species, historic and cultural resources, environmental justice, and wetland protections are described in Chapter 5 below, and would be required as applicable.

1.16 Clean Water Act

The Clean Water Act (CWA) was established with the goal of restoring and maintaining the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation's waters. Pursuant to this goal, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) regulates the discharge of dredged or fill material in waters of the United States (WOTUS) under Section 404 of the CWA, which includes adjacent wetlands. Work and structures located in, or that affect, WOTUS, including work below the ordinary high-water mark in non-tidal waters, also are regulated by USACE and require permits.

Section 402 of the CWA established the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) which sets forth conditions and permitting requirements for point source discharges into WOTUS, including wetlands. In most cases, EPA has delegated NPDES authority to the States and Tribes. Point sources of pollution are primarily defined as direct discharges into surface waters from pipes, ditches, and channels, but also include CAFO's and construction sites. Nonpoint sources of pollution, such as runoff from an agricultural field, are defined as an exclusion to the NPDES program under CWA and are not considered a point source of pollution according to CWA.

There are several CWA provisions that address non-point source pollution which are administered by the states and Tribes. Section 319 of the CWA requires states and Tribes to identify waters impaired by non-point source pollution and adopt a management program. States and Tribes are also required to establish water quality standards under Section 303(d) of the CWA and allowable Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) that meet water quality standards. Section 401 of the CWA requires states to certify that Federal permits, such as Section 404 CWA permits issued by USACE, are not in violation of any state water quality standards.

Major impacts on water quality are not anticipated, given the individual project funding levels and program limitations. Activities performed under the Local MCap Grant Program with extraordinary circumstances may require consultation with the USACE and a Section 404 permit or require a Section 402 NPDES permit from the state or Tribal authority and undergo an additional level of regulatory review.

1.17 Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA)

The Coastal Zone Management Act encourages coastal states, Great Lake states, and U.S. territories and Commonwealths (collectively referred to as "coastal states" or "states") to be proactive in managing natural resources for their benefit and the benefit of the Nation. The CZMA Federal consistency provision (16 U.S.C. § 1456 and 15 C.F.R. part 930) provides states with an important tool to manage coastal uses and resources and to

facilitate cooperation and coordination with Federal agencies. Under the CZMA, Federal agency activities that have coastal effects must be consistent to the maximum extent practicable with federally approved enforceable policies of a state's NOAA-approved coastal management program. In addition, the CZMA requires non-federal applicants for federal authorizations and funding to be consistent with enforceable policies of state coastal management programs.

Activities performed under the Local MCap Grant Program with extraordinary circumstances may require a federal consistency review for activities taking place within a state-designated coastal zone management area. Each project will be evaluated for consistency with the CZMA, and additional regulatory review will be performed on a case-by-case basis.

1.18 Coastal Barrier Resources Act (CBRA)

The Coastal Barrier Resource Act (CBRA) provides landscape-level conservation benefits for fish, wildlife, and plant resources by reducing the intensity of development. CBRA does this by restricting federal funding and financial assistance within designated System Units. The CBRS includes 588 System Units, which comprise nearly 1.4 million acres of land and associated aquatic habitat. There are also 282 "Otherwise Protected Areas," a category of coastal barriers that are mostly held for conservation and/or recreation purposes that include an additional 2.1 million acres of land and associated aquatic habitat. Section 6 of the CBRA permits certain federal expenditures and financial assistance within the Coastal Barrier Resources System (CBRS), but only after consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Activities performed under the Local MCap Grant Program with extraordinary circumstances may require a consultation with EPA for activities taking place within a state-designated coastal barrier resource area. Each project will be evaluated in accordance with the CBRA, and additional regulatory review will be performed on a case-by-case basis.

1.19 Endangered Species Act (ESA)

Section 9 of the ESA, as amended, and Federal regulations pursuant to section 4(d) of the ESA prohibit the take of endangered and threatened species, respectively, without special exemption such as by a permit.

Section 7 requires Federal agencies to use their authorities in furtherance of the purposes of the ESA by carrying out programs for the conservation of endangered and threatened species. Agencies are further required to ensure that any action authorized, funded, or carried out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any threatened or endangered species or result in destruction or adverse modification of habitat for such species. If AMS proposes to fund or undertake an action that may affect ESA-listed species, it must initiate a Section 7 consultation with the Department of the Interior (US Fish and Wildlife Service – FWS) or Commerce (NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service - NMFS). Regulations specify the procedural requirements for these consultations (50 Part C.F.R. 402). Federal agencies must determine whether their proposed actions will have no effect on threatened and endangered species or whether informal or formal consultations is required with the FWS or NMFS. Informal consultation requires that the action agency prepare a Biological Assessment for concurrence by the FWS or NMFS.

A formal section 7 consultation results in a Biological Opinion (BO) prepared by the NMFS or FWS. If unintentional but not unexpected take of ESA-listed species may result from the action, and it is determined that

the take would not jeopardize the continued existence of the species, the BO may include an incidental take statement. The incidental take statement specifies the amount or extent of anticipated take that is allowable due to the Federal action. It also outlines reasonable and prudent measures to minimize the take, and terms and conditions that must be observed when implementing those measures.

AMS has made a no effects determinations regarding ESA species. However, if extraordinary circumstances are identified, consultations would be initiated at the earliest planning stage for site-specific environmental evaluation consistent with chapter 6 below.

1.20 Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA)

The FPPA, implemented by NRCS, aims to minimize the impacts Federal programs have on the irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. For FPPA, farmland includes prime farmland, unique farmland, and land of statewide or local importance. Farmland subject to FPPA requirements does not have to be currently used for cropland. It can be forest land, pastureland, cropland, or other land, but not water or urban built-up land.

Activities under the Local MCap Grant Program are already converted and therefore not subject to the FPPA.

1.21 Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA)

The MBTA protects over 1,000 species of migratory bird species from any attempt at hunting, pursuing, wounding, killing, possessing, or transporting any migratory bird, nest, egg, or part thereof, unless permitted by regulations (i.e., for hunting and subsistence activities). Additional protection is allotted under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act for the identified species. Compliance with the MBTA does not usually require a permit or authorization; however, the FWS is currently working on proposed rulemaking that may impact whether permits for certain Federal activities is required.

Generally, activities under the Local MCap are expected to have no adverse impacts on migratory bird species.

1.22 National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

The NHPA of 1966, amended in 1992, requires that responsible agencies taking action that may potentially affect any property with historic, architectural, archeological, or cultural value that is listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) comply with the procedures for consultation and comment issued by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP). The responsible agency also must identify properties affected by the action that are listed on or potentially eligible for listing on the NRHP, usually through consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and/or Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO).

The Local MCap Grant Program, while unlikely to affect cultural resources, requires associated site-specific projects to comply with the NHPA by coordinating with the SHPO, THPOs, or relevant Tribes, when necessary, in accordance with Chapter 6 of this PEA.

1.23 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA)

The WSRA established the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System to preserve rivers deemed to have outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values. The National Wild and Scenic River System consists of a river or river segments that are in free-flowing condition which have been categorized as wild, scenic, or recreational. The National Wild and Scenic River System is administered by various land management agencies. To ensure continued protection of these waterways, Federal agencies may not provide financial assistance for projects which would have a direct and adverse effect on the values for which a river was designated.

AMS has made a no effects determinations regarding a river or river segments listed under the WSRA, AMS. However, if extraordinary circumstances are identified, consultations would be initiated at the earliest planning stage for site-specific environmental evaluation consistent with chapter 6 below.

1.24 Wilderness Act

The Wilderness Act established the Wilderness Preservation System to protect and preserve the wilderness character of designated areas by prohibiting certain uses, such as timber harvest, new grazing and mining activity, or any other kind of development. The Wilderness Preservation System is administered by various land management agencies. To ensure the continued wilderness character of designated wilderness areas, Federal agencies must consider whether proposed actions will result in an adverse impact on wilderness areas within the action area.

As areas designated as part of the Wilderness Preservation System are Federal lands, it is not anticipated that any available Local MCap Grant Program projects would occur within wilderness areas. However, if extraordinary circumstances are identified, consultations would be initiated at the earliest planning stage for site-specific environmental evaluation consistent with chapter 6 below.

1.25 Executive Order 11990: Protection of Wetlands

The purpose of Executive Order (EO) 11990 is to minimize the destruction, loss, or degradation of wetlands and to preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of wetlands. To meet these objectives, the order requires Federal agencies, in planning their actions, to consider alternatives to wetland sites and limit potential damage if an activity affecting a wetland cannot be avoided.

There should be no Local MCap Grant Program activities that will impact a wetland. Should there be any existing facility upgrades that are within a wetland area, proper USACE permits will be required prior to project activities. Improvement activities under the Local MCap Grant Program are not expected to have more than short-term minor adverse impacts on wetlands and can sometimes result in longer term beneficial impacts as individual projects may help decrease effluent discharge.

1.26 Executive Order 11998: Floodplain Management

The purpose of Executive Order (EO) 11998 is to avoid the long- and short-term adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains and to avoid direct or indirect support of floodplain development wherever there is a practicable alternative. It requires each Federal agency take action to reduce the risk of flood loss, to minimize the impact of floods on human safety, health, and welfare, and to restore and preserve the

natural and beneficial values served by floodplains. Each agency should determine if any actions undertaken would occur in a floodplain and evaluate the potential effects of any actions. If an agency has determined to, or proposes to, conduct, support, or allow an action to be in a floodplain, then the agency shall consider alternatives to avoid adverse effects and incompatible development in the floodplains.

When a Local MCap Grant Program project involves access or improvement activities impacting a floodplain, AMS will ensure a floodplain development permit, is obtained.

1.27 Executive Order 12898: Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations

The purpose of Executive Order (E.O.) 12898 is to focus Federal attention on the environmental and human health effects of Federal actions on minority and low-income populations with the goal of achieving environmental protection for all communities. It directs Federal agencies to identify and address the disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their actions on minority and low-income populations, to the greatest extent practicable and permitted by law. AMS complies with EO 12898 by reviewing a proposed project to identify the presence of low-income and/or minority populations that could be affected by the project. AMS then analyzes if those populations/communities would bear any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects from the project's implementation. If AMS determines that the proposed project could cause disproportionately high and adverse effects for low-income or minority populations, measures to minimize, mitigate, or avoid those impacts would be implemented.

Activities under the Local MCap Grant Program are not expected to result in disproportionate adverse impacts to minority and low-income populations, as an adverse impact would defy the purpose of the program. Further, the RFA states AMS will prioritize applications from applicants that engage with underserved producers. AMS also encouraged applications that support smaller farms and ranches in the region, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, veteran producers, and/or underserved communities. Therefore, it is expected that the Local MCap Grant Program will have beneficial long-term and short-term impacts to communities with environmental justice concerns.

1.28 Executive Order 14008: Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad

The purpose of (E.O.) 14008 builds on and reaffirms actions already taken to place the climate crisis at the forefront of this Nation's foreign policy and national security planning, including submitting the United States instrument of acceptance to rejoin the Paris Agreement. In implementing — and building upon — the Paris Agreement's three overarching objectives (a safe global temperature, increased climate resilience, and financial flows aligned with a pathway toward low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development), the United States will exercise its leadership to promote a significant increase in global climate ambition to meet the climate challenge.

The Local MCap Grant Program is designed to encourage smaller meat production facilities to upgrade equipment, technology, and create more efficient buildings to increase production capacity. These upgrades could have the potential to limit GHG emissions and lower effluent discharge.

1.29 Executive Order 14017: Executive Order on America's Supply Chains

Executive Order EO 14017 was issued to strengthen the resilience of America's supply chains for critical products and sectors, such as semiconductors, batteries, pharmaceuticals, and minerals. The order directed each department in the administration to assess potential supply-chain risks within their jurisdiction and come up with strategies to mitigate or overcome these. The order also sought to revitalize the U.S. manufacturing base, promote innovation and research, create well-paying jobs, and cooperate with allies and partners who share our values.

In response, USDA published a [report](#) outlining the risks and resilience of the U.S. agri-food supply chains, as well as identifying potential solutions to address vulnerabilities. This report was informed by public comments solicited through the Federal Register. Among other vulnerabilities, the report noted that the growing concentration of ownership in meat and poultry processing industries has given rise to concerns about market power and the potential for excessive price spreads (differences in prices received by farmers for animals and paid by consumers for meat products). USDA's recommendations included diversify critical supply chain infrastructure, expanding local and regional programs, and enable more and better markets for producers and consumers. The Local MCap Grant Program implements this recommendation in the meat and poultry supply chain by funding upgrades to independently owned and operated facilities.

Implementation

Site-specific actions are projects undertaken or funded by AMS through the Local MCap Grant Program that are consistent with the categories identified in Section 1.1.3 and the Proposed Action Alternative. AMS anticipates using this PEA to guide decision-making for site-specific actions for applications received in response to the FY2023 Request for Applications for Local Meat Capacity Grants. For any future funding opportunities considered substantially similar, AMS would review the PEA, and relevant environmental concerns, to determine whether the PEA's scope and analysis remain applicable to the program. If the program's mandate or focus shifts substantially during that time, a new PEA may be prepared, or this PEA may require additional environmental evaluation to allow evaluation under the existing FONSI.

As site-specific actions are being considered under the Local MCap Grant Program, this PEA would be reviewed to determine whether they are within the scope of its analysis. If additional NEPA analysis is warranted for a specific decision, it may be tiered from this PEA as appropriate. Consistent with CEQ regulations at 40 C.F.R. 1508.28, the tiered NEPA documents would incorporate by reference the applicable general discussions in this PEA and concentrate solely on the issues specific to the analysis being prepared.

Site specific environmental analysis would be prepared consistent with CEQ regulations at 40 C.F.R. 1500-1508 if:

- The Local MCap Grant Program is considering an action that is substantially different from the proposed action and the changes are relevant to environmental concerns; or
- There are significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action or its impacts.

1.30 Process for Screening Site-Specific Projects

A PEA cannot be used to avoid or defer the consideration of extraordinary circumstances that may arise from individual actions within the program.

Most projects eligible for the Local MCap program funding are unlikely to affect any protected resources, and they can be assessed under the Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA). However, some extraordinary cases may need more review.

When it is found that the PEA does not cover the scope or impacts of the proposed action, these are called extraordinary circumstances. The agency must do a site-specific analysis that fills in the gaps of this PEA. This way, the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) can be valid for the specific site.

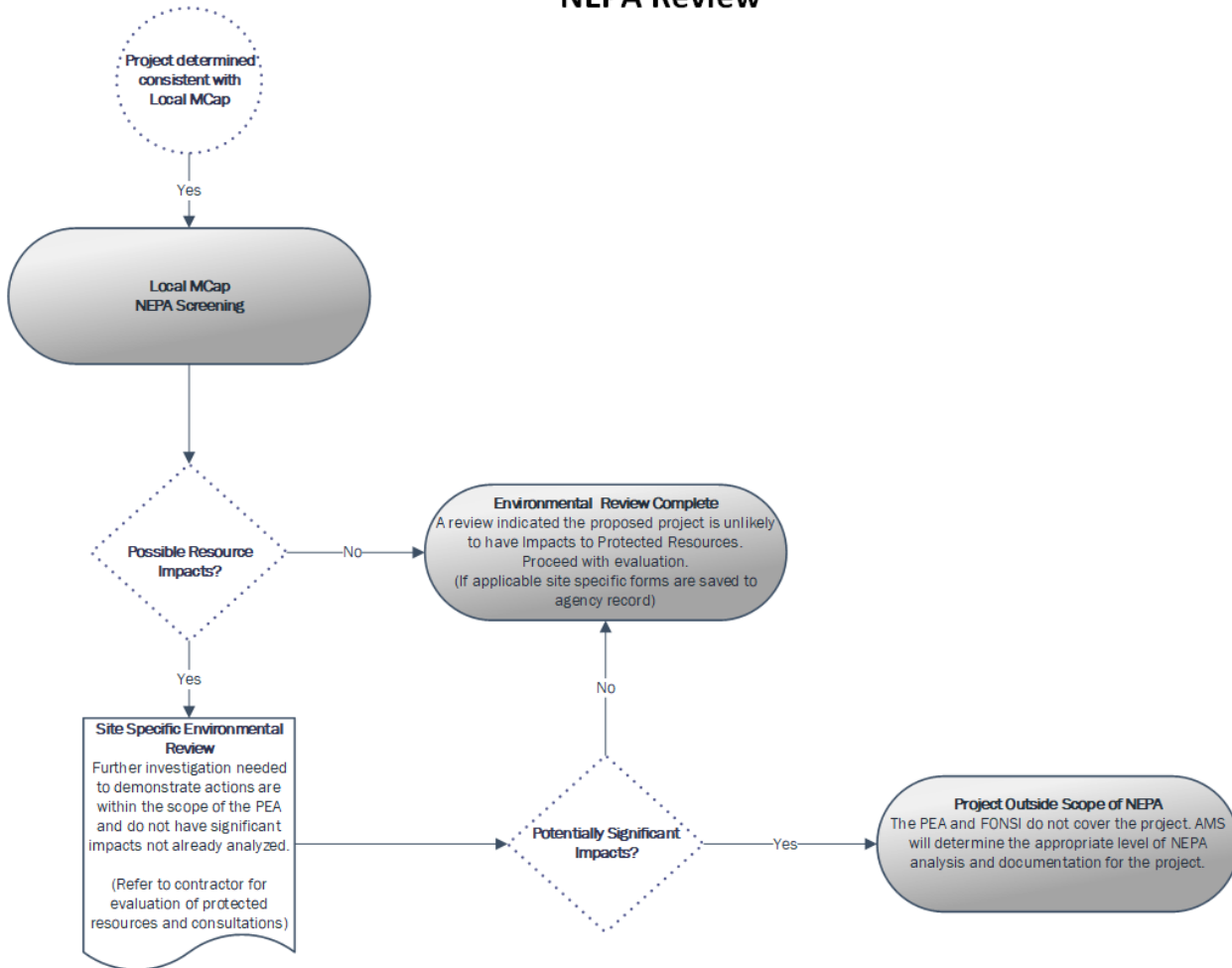
Some examples of extraordinary circumstances are:

- Actions that have significant impacts on a resource or issue that were not analyzed in the PEA, such as endangered species residing in structures targeted for remodeling, cultural resources discovered in previously disturbed areas, or human health concerns not considered.
- Actions to replace waste treatment or septic systems that, due to unforeseen or other circumstances, require relocation to areas not previously disturbed to the extent that they will be now.
- Actions that involve new technologies, methods, or locations that were not considered in the PEA.
- Actions that have cumulative effects that were not accounted for in the PEA, such as multiple projects in the same area or region over time.
- Actions that have changed substantially since the PEA was completed, such as new information, regulations, or public input.

If an extraordinary circumstance is identified, the agency should document the rationale for why the PEA does not apply and what level of NEPA analysis is required for the action. The Agency should also consult with relevant stakeholders, such as other agencies, Tribes, Fish and Wildlife Service, or the public, to ensure that the environmental impacts of the action are adequately addressed in the site-specific environmental evaluation in accordance with Chapter 6 of this PEA.

1.30.1 NEPA Screening Flowchart

**Local Meat Capacity Grant Program
NEPA Review**



List of Preparers and Reviewers and Persons and Agencies Contacted

List of Preparers

Name and Title	Education and Experience
Jason E. McMillin, Natural Resource Specialist, FPAC BC, Environmental Activities Division	MS Certificate in Energy and Environmental Law, Texas A&M University, MS Agriculture Economics, Texas A & M University BS Agriculture Business & Management, Texas State University 21 Years of experience in preparing environmental documents for USDA
Adriana Alcorn, Agricultural Program Specialist, Iowa SEC	Compliance Specialist BA in Criminal Justice, Loras College State Environmental Coordinator 7 years of experience in preparing environmental documents for USDA

List of Reviewers

Name and Title	Education and Experience
Robyn Rose, FPAC BC, Deputy Director	Deputy Director for USDA Farm Production and Conservation Business Center Environmental Activities Division with 27 years of Federal government experience. Ph.D. Entomology.
Betsy Rakola, Associate Deputy Administrator	USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, Transportation and Marketing Program Master of Science in Agriculture, Food, and Environment; Tufts University
Mark Abbott, Producer Processor Support Branch Chief	Producer Processor Support Branch Chief, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, Transportation and Marketing Program
Emily West, Grants Management Specialist	USDA Agricultural Marketing Services, Transportation and Marketing Program Bachelor of Technology; Animal Science, State University of New York at Cobleskill

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How do I get information about air quality where I live? | Air | CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/air/infographics/information-about-local-air-quality.htm>.

Air Quality | Air | CDC - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/air/default.htm>.

(Agency, Managing Air Quality- Ambient Air Monitoring 2023)

Appendix

Appendix A - AMS ENV-A – Environmental Prescreening Worksheet

This form is available electronically.

AMS-ENV-A U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (12-13-2023) Agricultural Marketing Service		1. GENERAL INFORMATION 1A. Applicant Name and Application Number	
ENVIRONMENTAL PRE-SCREENING WORKSHEET			
1B. Grant Program <input type="checkbox"/> Local Meat Capacity Grant <input type="checkbox"/> Organic Market Development Grant <input type="checkbox"/> Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program		1C. Brief Description of Proposed Action	
2. PRE-SCREENING QUESTIONS		YES	NO
A. Does the project involve any ground disturbing activities?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Does the project involve any vegetation or habitat removal?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Will the project alter a structure greater than 50-years of age or the general aesthetic of the property (i.e., new interior or exterior configuration)?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D. Is there an adjacent river, stream, or water body?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E. Will there be a permanent increase in noise, odor, or traffic as a result of the project?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
F. Will the project increase the emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, and/or nitrous oxide (increased use of internal combustion engines, manure management, etc.)?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
IF ANY "YES" BOX IS SELECTED IN SECTION 2, A SITE-SPECIFIC ENVIRONMENTAL SCREENING WILL BE REQUIRED.			
3. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 			
4. PRE-SCREENING DETERMINATION Based on the results of the screening checklist above, the preparer recommends (check which applies): <input type="checkbox"/> The proposed project fits within the scope of the FONSI and triggers no extraordinary circumstances. This screening checklist is sufficient to document the potential impacts of the project, and they are considered insignificant to the environment and/or human health. <input type="checkbox"/> The project information reviewed may be outside the scope of the PEA and will require a site-specific environmental review. More information is required to show consistency with the PEA on the level of environmental documentation required before funding the project in conformance with NEPA.			
5. PREPARER INFORMATION AND SIGNATURE			
A. NAME OF PREPARER		B. TITLE OF PREPARER	
C. SIGNATURE OF PREPARER		D. DATE DOCUMENT WAS PREPARED (MM-DD-YYYY)	
6. RESPONSIBLE FEDERAL OFFICIAL SIGNATURE:			
A. NAME OF APPROVAL OFFICIAL		B. TITLE OF APPROVAL OFFICIAL	
C. SIGNATURE OF APPROVAL OFFICIAL		D. DATE OF APPROVAL SIGNATURE (MM-DD-YYYY)	

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Appendix B - AMS ENV-B – Environmental Screening Worksheet

This form is available electronically.

AMS-ENV-B U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (12-13-2023) Agricultural Marketing Service		1. GENERAL INFORMATION 1A. Producer or Applicant Name and Application Number		
ENVIRONMENTAL SCREENING WORKSHEET				
1B. Location of Proposed Action (<i>Farm, Tract, GPS location, etc.</i>)		1C. Description of Proposed Action (<i>approximate acreage, connected actions, etc.</i>)		
2. ENVIRONMENTAL LAW AND POLICY REVIEW				
	A. Is the resource located within the area of potential effect?		B. Does the proposed action have the potential to impact the resource?	
	YES	NO	YES	NO
T&E Species or Critical Habitat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Migratory Birds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cultural or Historic Resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
				C. EFFECT DETERMINATION
				Choose an item.
				Choose an item.
				Choose an item.
				C. EXPECTED IMPACT
Coastal Barrier Resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Coastal Zone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wilderness Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wild and Scenic River	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nationwide River Inventory	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
National Natural Landmarks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sole Source Aquifer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Floodplains	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wetlands	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Highly Erodible Land	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
303(d) Listed Waterway	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prime & Unique Farmlands	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental Justice Communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
				No Impact
				No Impact
3. CONSULTATIONS AND COORDINATION <i>For any resource where 2B was answered "YES", select and attach the appropriate documentation below.</i>				
<input type="checkbox"/>	SHPO Section 106 Consultation*	<input type="checkbox"/>	Floodplain Development Permit	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	THPO Section 106 Consultation*	<input type="checkbox"/>	FEMA Letter of Map Change	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tribal Consultation*	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan Permit (Construction)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	USFWS Official Species Report	<input type="checkbox"/>	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit (Operating)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	USFWS Section 7 Consultation*	<input type="checkbox"/>	Coastal Zone Consistency Review	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	NMFS Section 7 Consultation*	<input type="checkbox"/>	State Agency Section 401 Certification	<input type="checkbox"/>
				USACE Jurisdictional Determination
				USACE Section 404 Permit
				Determination of Section 404 Exemption
				Other Agency Coordination
				Outreach to Affected Parties
				Other State or Local Permitting
<i>* These consultation or coordination efforts must be completed by the Responsible Federal Official.</i>				
4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS				
5. PREPARER INFORMATION AND SIGNATURE				
A. NAME OF PREPARER			B. TITLE OF PREPARER	
C. SIGNATURE OF PREPARER			D. DATE DOCUMENT WAS PREPARED (MM-DD-YYYY)	

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS TO BE APPROVED BY THE RESPONSIBLE FEDERAL OFFICIAL OR DESIGNEE.		
6. EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES REVIEW	YES	NO
A. Is the proposed action expected to cause significant effects on public health or safety?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. Is the proposed action expected to significantly affect unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, listed species, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C. Are the effects of the proposed action on the quality of the human environment likely to be highly controversial?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
D. Does the proposed action have highly uncertain effects or involve unique or unknown risks on the human environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E. Does the proposed action establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
F. Is the proposed action known or reasonably expected to have potentially significant environment impacts to the quality of the human environment either individually or cumulatively over time?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
G. Is the proposed action likely to have a significant adverse effect on ANY of the resources analyzed in the Environmental Law and Policy Review?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
H. Will the proposed action threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements for the protection of the environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. NEPA COMPLIANCE FINDING I have reviewed and considered the types and degrees of adverse environmental impacts identified by this evaluation. I have also analyzed the proposed action for its consistency with the National Environmental Policy Act and have considered the potential benefits of the proposal. Based upon this consideration and balancing of these factors, I recommend one of the following:		
<input type="checkbox"/>	This proposed action has been sufficiently analyzed in an existing Programmatic Environmental Assessment with a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and there are no predicted significant adverse environmental effects or extraordinary circumstances. This document is being tiered from:	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Programmatic Environmental Assessment for Local Meat Capacity Grant (FONSI) <input type="checkbox"/> Programmatic Environmental Assessment for Organic Market Development Grant (FONSI) <input type="checkbox"/> Programmatic Environmental Assessment for Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program (FONSI)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	This proposed action includes activities that do not fit within the Scope of the Programmatic Environmental Assessment or has the potential to significantly impact a protected resource. A Site-Specific Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement should be completed to provide further and more complete analysis of any adverse impacts and approval of the action must be delayed pending the outcome of the analysis.	
8. RESPONSIBLE FEDERAL OFFICIAL SIGNATURE:		
A. NAME OF APPROVAL OFFICIAL		B. TITLE OF APPROVAL OFFICIAL
C. SIGNATURE OF APPROVAL OFFICIAL		D. DATE OF APPROVAL SIGNATURE (MM-DD-YYYY)

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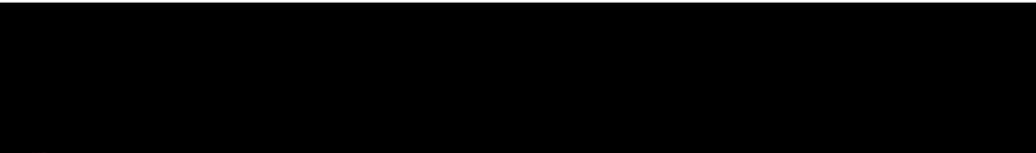
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Appendix C - Comment Summary

McMillin, Jason - FPAC-FSA, TX

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, November 4, 2023 7:47 PM
To: Bailey, Melissa - MRP-AMS; MRP AMS Local MCap; info@aarp.org;
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: [External Email]Fwd: fyi



public comment on federal register

i am against taxpayers being taxed to the hilt so that this agency can spend our money in paying out grants to meat companies that slaughter animals. i am not in favor of being taxed for that purpose. it makes no sense to me. these companies make profits. maybe they should not pay their owners billions of dollars in profits each year. why are taxpayers secretly being taxed higher so that corporations can escape making sure they run their company reliably. they can operate unsuccessfully and then we are taxed to pay them more for an unsuccessful company. that makes no sense in a capitalist society. are you turning this into socialism or what?

i do not see any reason for this high taxation so a company doesn't have to run reliably. this is the company's success fund. rip off the taxpayers when a company can't operate successfully. that is not part of the way we should be running govt. to tax citizens for an unsuccessful company. the companies have plenty of money. no way should this program of grants go forward. shut it down. defund it. this comment is for the public record. please receipt. [REDACTED]

[Federal Register Volume 88, Number 209 (Tuesday, October 31, 2023)]
[Notices]
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[FR Doc No: 2023-23936]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Marketing Service

[Doc. No. AMS-TM-23-0066]

Notice of Availability of the Programmatic Environmental Assessment for AMS Local Meat Capacity Grant Program

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of availability; request for public comments.

SUMMARY: The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) announces that the Draft Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) for the Local Meat Capacity Grant Program (Local MCap) is available for public review and comments.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before November 30, 2023 to be assured consideration.

ADDRESSES: Interested persons are invited to submit written comments concerning this notice. Comments may be submitted electronically by Email: LocalMCap@usda.gov. Comments should reference the document number and the date and page number of this issue of the Federal Register. AMS will address comments received on the draft PEA in the final PEA.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Betsy Rakola, Associate Deputy Administrator, Transportation and Marketing Program; Telephone: (202)-690-1300; Email: LocalMCap@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The Draft PEA analyzes and discloses the potential environmental impacts associated with the establishment of the Local Meat Capacity Grant Program (Local MCap). AMS has proposed to fund grants to support independently owned meat and poultry processing businesses. These grants will help them provide additional and more efficient processing options for local livestock producers by modernizing, increasing, diversifying, and decentralizing meat and poultry processing capacity, including support for rendering.

This program will expand processing capacity for small and mid-sized meat and poultry processors, which are particularly vulnerable to disruption. It will also increase capacity and promote competition in the meat and poultry processing sector. Based on public input, USDA identified an urgent need to expand and diversify meat and poultry processing capacity.

The Local MCap Program is authorized by section 1001 (b)(4) of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) (Pub. L. 117-2), which funds ``loans and grants and other assistance to maintain and improve food and agricultural supply chain resiliency.'' Recipients of funding from this proposed program would be allowed 36 months to complete work funded by the grant awards.

The environmental impacts of funding projects to enhance existing meat and poultry processing facilities have been considered in a manner consistent with the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, Public Law 91-190, 42 U.S.C. 4321-4347, as amended.

A Draft PEA has been prepared, and based on this analysis, AMS has preliminarily determined there will not be a significant impact to the human environment. As a result, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has not been initiated (40 CFR 1501.6). AMS intends for this PEA to create efficiencies by establishing a framework that can be used for ``tiering,'' where appropriate, to project-specific actions that require additional analysis. As decisions on specific applications are made, to the extent additional NEPA analysis is required, environmental review will be conducted to supplement the analysis set forth in this PEA.

The Draft PEA is available for review online at the program website: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/localmcap>.

Comments Invited

Interested stakeholders are invited to submit comments on the Draft PEA, as specified in the ADDRESSES section of this Notice. The most helpful comments reference a specific recommendation for changing AMS' proposed approach to assessing environmental impacts, explain the reason for any recommended change, and include supporting information. AMS will consider all comments received on or before the closing date.

Melissa Bailey,
Associate Administrator, Agricultural Marketing Service.
[FR Doc. 2023-23936 Filed 10-30-23; 8:45 am]
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