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## News Release

Release No. 0014.16  
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### USDA Seeks Public Comment on 2016-2020 Environmental Justice Strategic Plan

WASHINGTON, Jan. 15, 2016 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture invites public comment on the draft update of the Department's Environmental Justice Strategic Plan. The four-year plan establishes goals to increase outreach and participation by historically underserved communities for the years 2016-2020 and outlines the ways each USDA agency plans to accomplish them.

"This revised environmental justice strategy builds on the existing USDA plan by addressing resilience in the context of climate change, improving access to USDA financial and technical assistance programs through the StrikeForce Initiative for Rural Growth and Opportunity, and other outreach to underserved communities," said USDA Deputy Undersecretary Arthur 'Butch' Blazer. "We encourage feedback on this USDA Environmental Justice Strategy and look forward to hearing from the people impacted by our policy decisions."

USDA works to meet the needs of historically underserved communities by reducing environmental burdens and increasing access to environmental benefits that help make all communities safe, vibrant, and healthy places to live and work. USDA is committed to achieving environmental justice throughout every community in America.

To meet its goals and deliver measurable results, USDA staff periodically update the strategic plan outlining key priorities and tactics to increase capacity building, public participation, and opportunities for minority, low-income, American Indian and Alaska Native Communities, and Tribal governments.

The draft USDA Environmental Justice Strategic Plan is available here: [USDA Environmental Strategic Plan](#).

Comments on the Plan may be submitted via email to [EJStrategy@usda.gov](mailto:EJStrategy@usda.gov) beginning January 15, 2016. Comments are due by February 14, 2016.

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Last Date Modified: 01/15/2016



**Environmental Justice Strategic Plan:  
2016–2020**

**U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Washington, D.C.**



## Message from the Secretary

At the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), we are committed to achieving environmental justice throughout every community in America. We strive to create opportunities to improve the environment and human health in all communities that may be affected by our work, while ensuring that environmental burdens do not disproportionately affect any communities.

This goal is more challenging because environmental justice communities are often more heavily affected by the impacts of climate change than any other sector of our Nation. Given that USDA programs touch almost every American every day, the Department is well positioned to help environmental justice communities build resilience and adaptation strategies to help them address the impacts of climate change.

To effectively and efficiently meet its goals and deliver results, USDA developed this Environmental Justice Strategic Plan (Plan) to outline key priorities and strategies. This Plan provides an overarching vision that is reflected in our environmental justice goals for 2016-2020. We identified key priorities—to increase capacity-building, public participation, and opportunities for minority, low-income, American Indians, Alaska Native communities and Tribal governments—as well as the best ways to achieve results. USDA purposely developed broad goals to guide its agencies in the development of their work plans, with specific and measureable targets adapted to appropriate responsibilities and priorities. I believe this approach is necessary to address the complexity of environmental justice challenges in a timely, deliberate, and coordinated manner.

The Department is committed to active participation with the Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice and collaboration with other Federal agencies on joint efforts to achieve environmental justice. Our Plan for 2016-2020 represents a dynamic process within USDA to ensure best results. Through this process, the Department will continually assess the quality of its services to the public and seek ways to improve its performance.

To implement this Plan and better serve our customers, I directed each USDA agency to designate a point of contact on environmental justice at the Senior Executive Service level. I also directed each agency to develop environmental justice strategies based on six goals outlined in this document, and to begin implementation of these strategies as soon as possible.

USDA thanks the many organizations and individuals who submitted comments on the Department's previous environmental justice strategic plan. We value your input and would appreciate your ongoing feedback, comments, and suggestions on our environmental justice efforts and on this Plan revision, as well. In addition to comments on the Plan itself, please identify USDA programs that have been the most beneficial to your community. Kindly send your written comments to [EJStrategy@usda.gov](mailto:EJStrategy@usda.gov).

Thank you for your participation in our work together to enhance environmental justice.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture

## A. Overview

Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-income Populations (February 11, 1994), requires each Federal agency to achieve environmental justice as part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations (hereinafter “environmental justice communities”). At the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), environmental justice refers to meeting the needs of these underserved communities by reducing disparate environmental burdens, removing barriers to participation in decisionmaking, increasing access to environmental benefits that help make all communities safe, vibrant, and healthy places to live and work, and ensuring all populations are allowed to share in the benefits of Government programs and activities. (See page 26 for definitions of commonly used terms.)

The Executive Order required each Federal agency to prepare a strategy for environmental justice. In the latter part of 1994, USDA formulated an environmental justice strategy to ensure that environmental justice principles and initiatives were incorporated into Departmental programs, policies, planning, public participation processes, enforcement, and rulemaking. The USDA strategy guided each USDA agency in addressing environmental justice in the areas of research, data collection, analysis, interagency coordination, and development of model projects, as well as broader public participation, planning, outreach, communication, partnerships, sharing of information, education, and training.

The strategy outlined three goals to achieve environmental justice within the Department. The first goal was to issue a Departmental Regulation establishing USDA’s environmental justice plan. The second was to incorporate environmental justice principles and objectives into all relevant USDA programs, policies, and systems. The third goal was to ensure effective implementation of USDA’s environmental justice strategy. This approach helped to ensure that environmental justice principles and objectives became part of the day-to-day activities of USDA operations.

By integrating environmental justice into Departmental programs rather than creating new and costly programs and systems, USDA was able to effectively and efficiently meet many of the principles and objectives of environmental justice. Key accomplishments since 1994 include establishment of the USDA Civil Rights Assessment and Implementation teams, development of the Environmental Justice Department Regulation, and environmental justice investments implemented through USDA programs and investment activities. In addition, USDA embarked on a department-wide cultural transformation, including a commitment by employees to improve USDA's record on Civil Rights with expanded outreach efforts to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, while remaining respectful of and responsive to the diversity of our many constituencies. Furthermore, USDA launched a Women in Agriculture Mentoring Network after a White House discussion with farmers, agribusiness, academics, and youth leaders about the opportunities for advancement by women in agricultural enterprises. And, USDA made headway in disseminating critical information on the effects of climate change to producers across the country. During 2012, USDA established seven climate hubs and three sub-hubs to

deliver science-based, region-specific information and technologies to help producers make informed decisions in the face of a changing climate, especially to underserved and vulnerable communities, Tribes, and individuals.

Rural areas continue to experience population loss, higher poverty rates, and lower educational attainment than urban areas. USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) research focuses on the economic, social, spatial, and demographic factors that affect the income and poverty status of rural residents and their participation in Federal assistance programs. See: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-poverty-well-being.aspx>. Applying the findings of ERS research, USDA launched the StrikeForce Initiative for Rural Growth and Opportunity to address the specific challenges associated with persistent rural poverty. Since then, StrikeForce teams have collaborated with more than 1500 community partners and public and private entities to bring targeted assistance to rural areas experiencing chronic poverty. StrikeForce efforts have helped direct over \$23.8 billion in investments to create jobs, build homes, feed children, assist farmers, and conserve natural resources in the Nation's most economically challenged rural areas. USDA StrikeForce teams operate in 970 counties, parishes and census areas in 25 states and Puerto Rico. Each StrikeForce project is a commitment to America's economic future.

Still, USDA recognizes that our work in addressing environmental justice remains an ongoing endeavor.

USDA joined with other Federal agency members in signing the 2011 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and 2014 Charter for the Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice under Executive Order 12898. This MOU reaffirms the Federal Government's commitment to environmental justice. A part of the MOU calls on each Federal agency to review and update existing environmental justice strategic plans where applicable and as appropriate. Last published in early 2012, we are today releasing this draft revision of USDA's Environmental Justice Strategic Plan. This revision acknowledges prior USDA accomplishments and sets a higher standard for challenges where USDA possesses authority and resources to further environmental justice. For example, this revised strategy integrates environmental justice efforts with priority goals in the USDA Strategic Plan to create greater economic prosperity and sustainability in rural America. In addition, this revised environmental justice strategy integrates USDA efforts to improve community adaptation and resilience to climate change risks.

## **B. Relationship of Environmental Justice to Agency Mission and Agency Strategic Plan**

USDA provides leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition, and related issues based on sound public policy, the best available science, and efficient management. USDA's overall environmental justice goal is not only to institutionalize environmental justice principles at USDA, but also to continuously make a positive difference in the lives of the American people. To this end, USDA is committed to integrating the best

education, research, outreach, and technical assistance across USDA agencies into programs that meet the needs of its customers in environmental justice communities. USDA is committed to working collaboratively with Federal, State, Tribal, and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and private individuals to address the underlying conditions that put people at risk and to assist families across the Nation in striving to achieve environmentally suitable living conditions and healthier lives.

### **C. Environmental Justice Goals**

USDA's environmental justice goals provide overall direction for continued integration of environmental justice at the Department. The goals were developed with the input of the USDA Environmental Justice Working Group, comprised of key staff and leadership from each of the Department's mission areas. USDA purposely developed broad goals to guide its agencies in the development of work plans, with specific and measurable targets adapted to agency responsibilities and priorities. We identified six goals involving opportunities, capacity-building, public participation, civil rights, employee training, and updating regulations.

#### **Goal 1: Ensure USDA programs provide opportunities for environmental justice communities.**

In support of this goal, USDA will provide targeted technical and financial assistance to aid and empower environmental justice communities in their efforts to build and sustain environmentally, economically, and climate-change resilient communities.

#### **Objectives**

The objectives for this goal are to:

- Fully integrate environmental justice into existing technical and financial assistance program strategies and evaluations.
- Provide financial and technical assistance to support environmental justice communities at risk for flooding, including coastal flooding.
- Provide technical and financial assistance to help environmental justice communities prepare for, respond to, and recover from drought conditions.
- Establish a National Soil Moisture Network, with an emphasis on expanding monitoring into underserved regions and vulnerable populations, to help improve monitoring capabilities, plan for drought, and support drought and climate change risk-management strategies.
- Ensure USDA agency accountability by tracking participation of environmental justice communities in agency programs.

- Increase USDA-wide program accessibility and investments in StrikeForce areas that will lead to the creation and retention of businesses and agricultural endeavors.
- Increase the number of historically underserved producers that access USDA funding.

Agency Performance Measures	Target Date
Each USDA agency will set appropriate baseline measurements to ascertain participation in new technical and financial assistance programs, and agencies will continue the evaluation of existing program participation by environmental justice communities.	On or before September 30, 2016.
Increase USDA program access and leverage public and private-sector resources for investments in rural, high poverty areas.	By September 30, 2017, USDA will increase the funding in StrikeForce areas by 10 percent from the 2009 baseline of \$4 billion.
Increase percentage of targeted USDA Rural Development investments in high-poverty areas that leverage private-sector contributions.	Increase to 10 percent by 2018 from 4.5 percent in 2013.
Increase percentage of beginning, racial and ethnic minority and women farmers receiving financial assistance from USDA.	Increase to 41 percent by 2018.

Examples of agency-specific programs, activities, or policies that support or contribute to this strategic goal include:

- The Department deployed a cross-agency StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity Initiative composed of USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Farm Service Agency (FSA); Rural Development (RD); Food and Nutrition Service (FNS); Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP); and National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to better serve Americans residing in persistent poverty counties. The StrikeForce initiative coordinates activities among all USDA agencies, its sister agencies, institutions of higher learning, and community-based organizations to increase Federal program access and investment and break the cycle of poverty in these areas. StrikeForce is currently identifying and addressing disproportionate environmental impacts and adverse human health or environmental effects occurring in 970 persistent-poverty counties, parishes, Colonias, boroughs, and Tribal reservations across 25 States and Puerto Rico. See: [http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=STRIKE\\_FORCE](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=STRIKE_FORCE).
- USDA and the Intertribal Agriculture Council collaborated on the deployment of the Technical Assistance Network (Network) to ensure Tribal governments, communities, and individuals receive technical assistance to improve their access to USDA programs



and services. The Network helps USDA deliver its programs and services to farmers and ranchers who are focusing on providing local and traditional food to Tribal members and improving the market access for Tribally-produced foods. The Network supports members of Tribes across the United States, potentially benefitting 55 million acres of reservation lands and the communities located on those lands. See: <http://www.iactechhelp.com/about/>. See also: <http://www.iactechhelp.com/>.

- FNS operates 15 nutrition assistance programs in cooperation with State agencies and local community organizations. These programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the school meals programs, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, form a nationwide safety net that helps low-income families and individuals, including those in environmental justice communities, put food on the table in times of need, while ensuring access to healthful meals for children and seniors in settings outside the home. For general program information, see <http://www.fns.usda.gov/>.
- RD's Water and Environmental Programs provide loans, grants, and loan guarantees for clean drinking water and for sanitary solid waste and storm drainage in rural areas. These programs help meet the basic infrastructure needs of many environmental justice communities, including Tribal lands, and Colonias. See: <http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/all-programs/water-environmental-programs>.
- FNS promotes access to information about the nutrition benefits of USDA programs and nutrition education among the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community in partnership with the State agencies that operate these programs. In September of 2011, FNS launched the WIC Prescreening Tool, a Web-based application intended to help potential WIC applicants determine if they are likely to be eligible for WIC benefits. The WIC Prescreening Tool (WIC PT) was updated on April 10, 2014, to include six new languages. Users could complete WIC PT in English, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Arabic, Haitian Creole, Korean, Russian, Somali, and Vietnamese. See: <http://wic.fns.usda.gov/wps/pages/start.jsf>.
- USDA is an active leader in the Urban Waters Federal Partnership, an interagency initiative dedicated to restoring the health of urban waters and revitalizing the underserved neighborhoods that surround them, transforming overlooked assets into treasured centerpieces and drivers of urban revival. USDA's U.S. Forest Service (USFS) contributes staff time to lead the national interagency initiative and coordinates seven of the 19 pilot sites, and provides funding to support "Ambassadors" at several locations. Through this ongoing coordination at the national, regional, and local levels, the Forest Service and other interagency members documented "lessons learned" from 19 pilot sites engaged in urban watershed restoration and community revitalization in underserved communities. See: <http://www2.epa.gov/urbanwaterspartners>.
- The Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention Project, a partnership between the USFS, NRCS, and the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities,

assists African American landowners in obtaining formal forest management plans and provides professional advice on Government assistance programs. The goal is to encourage retention of African American land ownership and healthy forests, as well as increase profitability and asset value of African American owned forests.  
<http://www.heirsproperty.org>.

- USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is implementing the Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Programs with special emphasis on low-food access/low-income areas (i.e., where low-income communities have limited access to local grocery stores) to support America's underserved communities in their pursuit of improved access to fresh, healthy food. For general program information, see <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/fmpp> and <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/lfpp>.
- USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) financial assistance programs are almost exclusively aimed at promoting U.S. agricultural exports, and its technical assistance programs are predominately focused on providing technical assistance to foreign governments or entities to increase their capacity to trade agricultural products. FAS Market Access Program partners with U.S. agricultural trade associations, cooperatives, State regional trade groups and small businesses to share the costs of overseas marketing and promotional activities that help build commercial export markets for U.S. agricultural products and commodities. For example, financial assistance to the Ginseng Board of Wisconsin promotes export of ginseng grown by producers of Hmong, Laotian, and Cambodian descent. Financial assistance to the Intertribal Agriculture Council promotes export sales of American Indian and Alaska Native agricultural and food products through international food trade shows. See: <http://www.fas.usda.gov/programs/market-access-program-map>.
- The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) provides technical assistance and resources, customer service, and outreach to small and very small plant operations in a variety of languages through print, online, and a telephonic help desk. FSIS also shares safe food handling information with consumers and organizations nationwide in order to prevent foodborne illness. FSIS also informs consumers about risks of various ethnic and cultural food traditions in an effort to reduce the likelihood of food poisoning.
- USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) creates and participates in a wide variety of outreach programs that educate and serve the needs of members of low-income, minority, and Tribal communities. In 2014, APHIS participated in a wide range of events designed to meet the needs of poor rural farming communities by educating people on provisions in the Farm Bill (Agricultural Act of 2014, Sec. 10007). On Tribal lands, APHIS outreach also focused on Farm Bill provisions while developing partnerships for plant pest control, enhancing educational opportunities, and promoting APHIS' mission as a career option. See: APHIS Civil Rights Small Farm Outreach and <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wps/portal/aphis/ourfocus/tribalrelations>.

### Highlights of USDA actions since the prior Strategic Plan:

- During FY 2014, NRCS obligated more than \$286 million through nearly 11,900 conservation practice system financial assistance contracts in designated StrikeForce areas. Demand in StrikeForce areas far exceeded assistance, with almost 30,000 applications received by NRCS in FY 2014, or a 61-percent increase over FY 2013.
- Using financial assistance from Farm Bill conservation programs, the NRCS Michigan State Office has worked with two Anishinaabe Tribes to increase the number of wild rice beds. Wild rice, or manoomin, serves as a staple of the Anishinaabe diet and is culturally and spiritually important to them. See: <http://blogs.usda.gov/2013/11/20/natural-resources-conservation-service-helps-michigan-tribes-with-wild-rice-production/>.
- FNS and USDA's Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships implemented La Mesa Completa, the Department's initiative to reduce hunger among Latinos through technical assistance focused on Federal nutrition programs in targeted Latino communities experiencing high rates of food insecurity. See: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/get-involved/la-mesa-completa>.
- Additional access to agricultural resource conservation is provided for socially disadvantaged, limited resource and beginning farmers and ranchers by NRCS program funding, for up to 90 percent of conservation practice costs, depending on producer eligibility. A 5 percent program set-aside for Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) payments and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) acres has been established to target such agricultural producers. Up to 50 percent advance payments are afforded to socially disadvantaged, and beginning, limited-resource, and veteran farmers and ranchers under the 2014 Farm Bill. These efforts increase incentives for members of environmental justice communities to participate through greater upfront expense coverage for conservation practice installations. See: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/>.
- The NRCS Washington State Office launched the Puget Sound Habitat Partnership, obligating nearly \$2 million in conservation program funding during FY 2012 for riparian buffer establishment, the decommissioning of structurally unsound waste storage ponds near salmon habitat, and the removal of aquatic organism barriers to restore access to 19 miles for stream habitat. Salmon habitat restoration in the Pacific Northwest supports Federal treaty obligations to ensure salmon harvest for Tribal nations.
- In FY 2014, FSIS provided technical information to more than 21 Tribes, Tribal organizations, and Tribal members that requested information on meat and poultry slaughter, processing, and inspection services. In FY 2015, FSIS generated more than 2 billion impressions for safe food handling information that reached consumers through social media, online chat and telephonic Meat and Poultry Hotline smartphone apps, media interviews, and through a partnership with the Ad Council that included radio and television advertisements, as well as billboards and bus station posters.

- The National Agricultural Statistic Service (NASS) developed and made available county and state demographic and economic profiles based on race, ethnicity, and gender using data from the 2012 Census of Agriculture. These profiles aid USDA and other agencies in identifying environmental justice communities and incorporating outreach to their members during agency decisionmaking processes, and technical and financial assistance program delivery. See: [http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online\\_Resources/Race,\\_Ethnicity\\_and\\_Gender\\_Profiles/](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/Race,_Ethnicity_and_Gender_Profiles/).

**Goal 2: Increase capacity-building within environmental justice communities.**

In support of this goal, USDA will provide targeted training and capacity-building within environmental justice communities to better enable them to achieve environmental justice.

**Objectives**

The objectives for this goal are to:

- Assist rural communities to create new markets and prosperity so they are self-sustaining, repopulating, and economically thriving.
- Develop, implement, and promote communication strategies with USDA public affairs offices so they can disseminate information about USDA resources to environmental justice communities.
- Conduct public meetings, listening sessions, training, and forums to inform, engage, and involve environmental justice communities in agency decisionmaking.
- Collaborate with environmental justice communities and other partners to train residents, enhance community capacity, and establish and attain environmental justice priorities, including climate change resilience and adaptation strategies.
- Collaborate with environmental justice communities and other partners to develop career and leadership opportunities for community members.
- Prepare guidance on technical and financial assistance for farmers in environmental justice communities, including practices for sustainable agriculture and conservation.
- Collaborate with partners to address forest health, wildfire risk, and wildfire recovery affecting environmental justice communities.
- Collaborate with partners to address other climate change risks, including flooding, drought, heat stress, sea-level rise, and invasive species pressure.

- Establish Tribal natural resource climate change resilience projects in collaboration with other Federal agencies and partners.
- Contribute to expansion of the bio-economy by supporting development, production, and consumption of renewable energy and bio-based products.
- Provide coordinated technical support to supplement USDA agriculture and land management program delivery, especially to underserved and vulnerable communities, Tribes, and individuals through USDA's Climate Hubs.

Agency Performance Measures	Target Date
Increase the number of capacity-building projects held within environmental justice communities.	Annual agency increases
Develop outreach materials on USDA programs for use within environmental justice communities.	Ongoing – with particular emphasis on each agency's Farm Bill programs, and including a Web page for each USDA agency before September 30, 2016.
In collaboration with partners, provide opportunities for training, skills development, and education within environmental justice communities, particularly focusing on career and leadership development for youth and college-age residents.	With new projects launching by September 30, 2016.
Partner with 1994 Land-Grant and Federally Recognized Tribes Extension Program institutions to facilitate outreach to Indian Tribes for assessment and planning assistance, and dissemination of USDA climate resilience strategies, practices, and financial assistance.	By September 30, 2016.
Establish partnerships with Tribal governments and other environmental justice communities in close proximity to National Forests to manage the health of watersheds and larger forest landscapes.	By September 30, 2016.
Increase alternative energy generation in rural America.	3,123 million kWh by 2018 (an increase of 1,619 mkWh over the 2009 goal of 1,504 mkWh).
Increase new local and regional food systems supported annually by USDA investments.	423 by 2018 (an increase of 253 over the 2103 goal of 170).
Create rural jobs through investments in business, entrepreneurship, cooperatives, and industry.	86,000 by 2018 (an increase of 11,000 over the 2012 goal of 75,000).

Increase number of certified organic agricultural operations	20,000 by 2018 (an increase of 2,250 over the 2012 goal of 17,750).
Establish at least one U.S. Forest Service Tribal Adaptation Partnership in each Forest Service Region to integrate traditional knowledge with scientific information into actions that build ecological, social, and economic resilience.	By September 30, 2016.

Examples of agency-specific programs, activities, or policies that support or contribute to this strategic goal include:

- USDA has a long tradition of conducting effective research, outreach, and education efforts aimed at improving participation by and access to decisionmaking for minority populations and Tribes at national, regional, State, and local levels, including cooperative efforts with:
  1. 1890 Land Grant Institutions, and other historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs);
  2. The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities;
  3. Tribal Nations, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and the 1994 Tribal Land Grant institutions, as well as the Tribal governments they represent, and the Bureau of Indian Education-
    - a. <http://nifa.usda.gov/topic/minority-serving-institutions>
    - b. <http://www.outreach.usda.gov/education/index.htm>
    - c. <http://sustainabledevelopmentinstitute.org/education-outreach-and-technical-assistance/>
  4. Support for USDA Employee Organization Groups (African American, Hispanic, Asian American and Pacific Islander, Native American);
  5. Stakeholder groups and USDA county and advisory committees-
    - a. USDA Advisory Committees:  
[http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentid=advisory\\_committees.xml](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentid=advisory_committees.xml)
    - b. FSA County Committees:  
<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=newsroom&subject=landing&topic=cce>
    - c. USDA Tribal, veteran, and socially-disadvantaged producer outreach partnerships: <http://blogs.usda.gov/2014/12/05/secretarys-column-usda-partners-with-native-americans/>
  6. Non-profit organizations, including faith-based organizations;  
<http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=fbnp>

7. Engaging Tribal nations in Federal research that may affect their communities. For instance, the FS is implementing the Research and Development Tribal Engagement Roadmap, which outlines an agenda for FS staff regarding services to, engagement with, and learning from Indian Tribes and other indigenous groups. <http://www.fs.fed.us/research/tribal-engagement/roadmap.php>.
- AgrAbility is a consumer-driven, USDA-funded program that provides vital education, assistance, and support to farmers and ranchers with disabilities. Through the combined dedication and expertise of the Cooperative Extension System and nonprofit disability organizations, AgrAbility helps thousands of determined individuals overcome the barriers to continuing their chosen professions in agriculture. See: <http://nifa.usda.gov/program/agrability>.
  - The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program provides grants to organizations for education, mentoring, and technical assistance initiatives for beginning farmers or ranchers. According to the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service's most recent Census of Agriculture data, the number of young people entering farming continues to decline, but the number of new farmers and ranchers over the age of 35 rises, as does the number of smaller farms and ranches nationwide. Ensuring there will be a "new generation" of beginning farmers and ranchers—regardless of age or production choice—is especially important to the continuation of agricultural production in the United States. See: <http://nifa.usda.gov/program/beginning-farmer-and-rancher-development-program>.
  - NRCS and the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation are providing grants and technical support to agricultural water users for more water-efficient practices in the face of drought and long-term climate change, including \$2.7 million in Emergency Community Water Assistance Grant funds for eight California communities and \$1.98 million to the Coyote Band of Pomo Indians of California in 2015. See: [http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/newsroom/releases/?cid=NRCS\\_EPRD367418](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/newsroom/releases/?cid=NRCS_EPRD367418).
  - The California Consortium program was established in 2006 through expansion of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Pacific Southwest Region's Central California Consortium environmental education, outreach, and recruitment program for students. The mission of the program is to diversify the Forest Service's workforce by encouraging careers in natural resources, higher education, and employment through mentoring, leadership, and community outreach efforts. See: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/ncc/>.
  - Helping American Indians develop profitable farming and ranching businesses, engaging Tribal youth in 4-H, enhancing natural resources on reservations, and reaching out to Tribal communities about topics that are of interest to them are just some of the activities supported by the Federally-Recognized Tribes Extension Program (FRTEP). In February 2014, APHIS met with FRTEP extension agents to discuss grasshopper control, animal disease traceability, and wildlife management. See: <http://blogs.usda.gov/2014/02/21/aphis-reaches-out-to-tribal-extension-agents/>.

- The USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach coordinates with USDA agencies to enhance access to USDA programs. This office administers the Outreach and Technical Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program (the Farm Bill Section 2501 Program). Through the 2501 Program, support is distributed to entities that work with minority or veteran farmers and ranchers -- 1890 Land Grant Institutions, 1994 Land Grant Institutions, American Indian Tribal community colleges and Alaska Native cooperative colleges, Hispanic-serving and other institutions of higher education, Tribal governments and organizations, or community-based organizations. The 2501 Program, administered by the USDA's Office of Advocacy and Outreach, has distributed over \$57 million to 188 partners since 2010. The 2014 Farm Bill reauthorized the program and expanded targeted communities to include military veterans. See: <http://www.outreach.usda.gov/sdfr/>.
- APHIS develops many Cooperative Agreements with entities to benefit environmental justice communities by increasing capacity and providing technical support. In 2014, APHIS funding for these programs exceeded \$1.7 million. APHIS frequently partners with communities to build their emergency preparedness capacity, create internship opportunities, and conduct outreach including the AgDiscovery Program to help students explore careers in animal science, veterinary medicine, agribusiness, plant pathology, and much more. See also: [http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wps/portal/banner/careers?1dmy&urile=wcm:path:/aphis\\_content\\_library/sa\\_careers/sa\\_students](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wps/portal/banner/careers?1dmy&urile=wcm:path:/aphis_content_library/sa_careers/sa_students).

#### **Highlights of USDA actions since the prior Strategic Plan:**

- During FY 2014, RD Programs invested \$5.2 billion in StrikeForce areas through 28,578 loans, grants, combos, and contracts. More than 7,500 jobs were created, saved, and/or retained through RD's Rural Business Service and approximately 126,000 homeowners and tenants have been served through RD housing programs.
- At the 2nd Annual Intertribal Agriculture Council Membership Meeting in Nevada, APHIS endorsed the 2014 theme, "Perseverance + Sustainability = Security," and the agency encouraged Tribes to participate in and submit suggestions for funding opportunities under the latest Farm Bill provisions. APHIS used monies designated for Farm Bill Pest and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention Programs to fund 11 programs on Tribal lands aimed to safeguard natural resources from invasive weeds, plant pests, and diseases.
- During FY 2014, the AMS Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) awarded about \$67 million for 838 projects in the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Of the \$67 million awarded, \$1.8 million was allocated to 22 projects benefitting underserved



communities and \$3.9 million to 62 projects aiding beginning, socially disadvantaged, and limited resource farmers.

- During FY 2014, RD funded a \$200,000 grant to the Coastal Communities Consulting (CCC), in Gretna, LA. This nonprofit provides technical assistance to commercial fishers and other small rural entrepreneurs. CCC also provided multilingual technical assistance to the small, socially disadvantaged producers, and commercial fishermen. The assistance covers financial planning, computer and technology classes, U.S. immigration preparation, and tax assessments for Cambodian- and Vietnamese-origin fishers who are working along the coast.
- The AMS Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) awarded about \$27 million to establish, improve, and support over 370 local food system projects (farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), food hubs, etc.) within the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Eligible entities under FMLFPP include agricultural cooperatives, agribusinesses, cooperatives, CSA networks, CSA associations, producer networks and associations, local and Tribal governments, nonprofit corporations, public benefit corporations, economic development corporations, and regional farmers' market authorities. Of the 370 AMS awarded projects, 64 percent were awarded to projects in low food access communities, with over \$21 million in investments benefitting these priority areas.

**Goal 3: Expand public participation in program operations, planning activities, and decision-making processes to benefit environmental justice communities.**

In support of this goal, USDA will continue to make public participation, outreach, and collaboration fundamental components of all program operations, planning, and decisionmaking activities.

**Objectives**

The objectives for this goal are to:

- Ensure public access to data and other information necessary for meaningful participation at the local level.
- Integrate environmental justice into USDA agencies' public participation guidelines.
- Establish relationships with the range of environmental justice communities through USDA's Office of Advocacy and Outreach.
- Engage the public to identify, avoid, minimize, and mitigate potential environmental justice concerns as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures are developed based upon input received through various mechanisms, such as public meetings, comment periods, and Tribal consultation.

- Through USDA's Office of Tribal Relations, continue the improvement of USDA's recognition of and support for its government-to-government relationship with Tribal governments, which will in turn provide improved support for Tribal communities and individuals.
- Participate in Tribal consultation and coordination efforts as required by Executive Order 13175.
- Maintain a database of national and community-based organizations and networks concerned with environmental justice, and integrate this information with existing mailing lists held by agencies and offices.
- Identify media through which announcements and other information may be disseminated to improve communication with environmental justice communities.
- Expand collaborations with environmental justice partners to leverage USDA initiatives with other public, private, and Tribal resources.
- Develop environmental justice outreach materials, including information on climate change, for dissemination on USDA Web pages, through the USDA Climate Hubs, through environmental justice outreach projects, and in coordination with environmental justice partners.
- Ensure that the composition of USDA's advisory boards and groups reflects the communities they represent by using specific outreach and candidate-recruitment plans.
- Engage in place-based partnerships to enhance the health and prosperity of environmental justice communities.
- Ensure all outreach, public forums, printed materials, and forms of communication to effect public participation in environmental justice comply with requirements for providing services and activities to persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

Agency Performance Measures	Target Date
Update USDA agency public participation guidelines to include environmental justice.	Ongoing, with agency completion by September 30, 2016.
Encourage environmental justice communities to become involved in the public participation process for Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Statements.	Ongoing, with no missed opportunities by agencies by September 30, 2016.

Encourage environmental justice communities to become involved in the public participation process for development of new and revised rules and policies.	Ongoing, with no missed opportunities by agencies by September 30, 2016.
Develop and distribute USDA portfolio of financial and technical assistance programs for consideration by environmental justice communities.	By September 30, 2016.
Invite other members of the Federal environmental justice interagency working group to participate in USDA initiatives and Service First agreements, including StrikeForce priority areas.	By September 30, 2016.
Use existing methods for the reporting of Tribal consultations and activities as described in DR 1350-002, to streamline the compilation of environmental justice reports.	Ongoing, beginning December 31, 2016.

Examples of agency-specific activities that support or contribute to this strategic goal include:

- USFS' Descubre el Bosque (DEB) – The “Discover the Forest” program uses Spanish language social media to promote individual and family participation on National Forests & Grasslands. Over 100,000 page views each month between Facebook and Twitter reach Spanish-speaking audiences, helping them to utilize and enjoy National Public Lands. Successful cross postings with the Ad Council's Descubre el Bosque Web site direct individuals to more information and guide them to recreational opportunities on National Forests near their residences. See: <http://www.descubreelebosque.org/>.
- The USFS Land Management Planning Rule guides the development of land management plans for the National Forest System. The process for engaging the public in developing the proposed planning rule was one of the most extensive in history and included unprecedented efforts to engage diverse people with a wide range of interests and concerns. The final rule and recently published directives include requirements to provide meaningful opportunities for public participation and require managers to take accessibility of the process and information into account when providing opportunities for public participation. The final rule and directives specifically require planning efforts to include outreach to youth, low-income, and minority populations during the assessment, plan development, and NEPA phases of the land management planning process. See: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/planningrule/home/?cid=stelprdb5359471>.
- USFS partnered with the Hispanic Communications Network (HCN) to deliver a national Spanish-language public natural resource conservation education and awareness radio campaign for the Forest Service that encourages Spanish speakers to “explore, recreate in and enjoy the services provided by the National Forests.” The Forest Service partnered with HCN to produce four 60-second public service announcements (PSAs) that carry environmental education messages to Spanish-language listeners nationwide. The spots promote a connection to nature and national forests and instill a conservation and stewardship ethic, while promoting natural resource careers. The advertisements will be

broadcasted on more than 120 frequencies during a month-long period, and they will be featured on Planeta Azul (the Blue Planet), the only nationally broadcasted Spanish-language radio show that focuses on the environment. Listeners can hear the PSAs on an HCN-affiliate station, or they can listen to them on the Spanish-language Discover the Forest site: <http://www.descubreelbosque.org/>.

- USDA agencies are developing or have in place plans to meet the needs of individuals with LEP and ensure access to programs and services. RD's LEP plan received approval from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR) on May 6, 2014. The USFS LEP Plan was signed by Chief Tidwell on June 16, 2014.
- USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) Regional Offices have updated their 2014 Limited English Proficiency/Language Assistance Plans (LEP/LAP) to identify AAPI populations and farms in their regions. U.S. Census and USDA Census of Agriculture demographics were utilized in identifying AAPI producers and beginning AAPI farmers that have not been reached. The RMA AAPI Profile provides several translation services for AAPI customers and potential customers. RMA has facts sheets in Hmong. RMA has a data base that identifies crop insurance agents who speak AAPI languages (Panjabi, Japanese and Korean) to possibly assist in the translation or interpretation of program materials. RMA has employees who speak Mien, Hmong and Laotian.

#### **Highlights of USDA actions since the Prior Strategic Plan:**

- USFS published a proposed policy for Tribal relations, which is designed to expand the mutually beneficial work it conducts with American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes, and Alaska Native Corporations. The proposed policy would expand agency work beyond consultation to encourage staff to work closely with Native Hawaiians, American Indian and Alaska Native individuals, communities, intertribal organizations, enterprises, and educational institutions. See: <http://www.fs.fed.us/news/releases/forest-service-seeks-comments-proposed-policies-guiding-agencys-working-relationship>.
- A variety of APHIS programs were supported by combined virtual and in-person stakeholder meetings during FY 2014. For example, underserved stakeholders were invited to Farm Bill listening sessions, conference calls on Draft Environmental Impact Statements, and stakeholder meetings to discuss aspects of the regulation of genetically engineered organisms. This provision of multiple ways to access public meetings without necessitating travel allows increased participation and directly enhances the ability of members of environmental justice communities to comment.

**Goal 4: Ensure USDA's activities do not have disproportionately high and adverse human health impacts on environmental justice communities and resolve environmental justice issues and complaints.**

In support of this goal, USDA will integrate environmental justice strategies with its enforcement responsibilities under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, especially with regard to recipients of Federal financial assistance. USDA will also endeavor to resolve issues and complaints relative to discrimination by working with environmental justice communities.

**Objectives**

The objectives for this goal are to:

- Ensure agency programs seek to identify and avoid or mitigate any disproportionately high and adverse impacts to environmental justice communities, including increased vulnerabilities to climate change, as they arise during delivery of program activities.
- Ensure that, through NEPA, Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), and other processes, potential USDA actions adequately identify and avoid or mitigate any disparate impacts on environmental justice communities, including increased vulnerabilities to climate change.
- Seek to effectively resolve or adjudicate all environmental justice-related Title VI complaints.
- Include environmental justice as a key component of civil rights compliance reviews.
- Provide technical assistance and training on environmental justice to recipients of Federal financial assistance from USDA.

<b>Agency Performance Measures</b>	<b>Target Date</b>
Identify and review Title VI complaints related to environmental justice and seek resolution.	Annually, before September 30.
Include environmental justice in Civil Rights Compliance Reviews and Civil Rights Impact Analyses.	Ongoing, with no missed opportunities.
Identify and address, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations.	Ongoing, with no missed opportunities.
Incorporate environmental justice evaluations into Environmental Assessments and Environmental Impact Statements, as appropriate, along with potential avoidance, minimization and mitigation options, and agencies will provide any necessary outreach.	Ongoing, with no missed opportunities.
Continue research on diet and nutrition impacts on human health.	Ongoing reports through 2020.
Review proposed or existing USDA regulations to assess environmental justice impacts (DR-5600-2 will be reviewed separately).	By September 30, 2016.

Examples of agency-specific programs, activities, or policies that support or contribute to this strategic goal include:

- USDA utilizes a variety of methods to reach out to environmental justice communities prior to conducting a CERCLA related cleanup on lands under USDA's jurisdiction, custody, and control. Engagement tools included distribution of pollution reports, community updates, fact sheets, and published local newspaper stories to reach out to local residents, Tribes, and remote communities. As an example, Forest Service environmental engineers met with residents, concerned citizens, and organized interest groups of the border town of Patagonia, Arizona, to inform them of CERCLA cleanup plans for hazardous waste recently released at Lead Queen Mine drainages and from past mining activities. Forest Service environmental engineers also engaged local residents and communities of the small town of Red River, New Mexico, in another CERCLA cleanup effort of hazardous waste left behind from historic mine sites and littered in nearby watersheds and drainages.
- APHIS' outreach plans and Civil Rights Impact Analyses (CRIA) include consideration of low-income, minority, and Tribal communities. CRIA efforts identify the scope, intensity, direction, duration, and significance of civil rights effects to identify whether a decision has an adverse impact on any protected class of persons, or member(s) of any protected class, who would be subject to the regulation. Each CRIA also includes an Outreach Plan to ensure information about the regulation is provided to underserved groups.

**Highlights of USDA actions since the prior Strategic Plan:**

- In 2014, APHIS used its "Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Policy and Program Development's Review of Agency Regulatory Work Plans for Environmental Justice Concerns" to determine 48 regulatory work plans were potential candidates for an environmental justice review, and the remaining 30 were administrative actions that did not trigger an environmental justice analysis. As a SOP, this review process identifies whether or not environmental justice impacts are anticipated, and it provides a process for further review, including when warranted, creation of a plan to address anticipated environmental justice impacts.
- The RD Civil Rights office worked with the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights on the review and concurrence of a Civil Rights Impact Analysis to ensure that the 2014 Farm Bill regulations and program changes considered and implemented necessary measures to mitigate environmental impacts. Furthermore, RD Civil Rights completed 13 compliance reviews in 13 states. RD State offices completed 578 pre-award and 3,351 post-award compliance reviews.

**Goal 5: Increase the awareness, skills, and abilities of USDA employees regarding environmental justice.**

In support of this goal, USDA ensures that Responsible Officials are aware of the provisions of Executive Order 12898 and are enabled to identify and amend programs, policies, and activities under their purview that may provide targeted grants or technical or financial assistance to environmental justice communities. Additionally, officials should be able to identify and amend programs, policies, and activities that have disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on environmental justice communities.

**Objectives**

The objectives for this goal are to:

- Develop environmental justice training for Responsible Officials, including training for SES-level employees designated by each agency to be the agency’s point of contact on environmental justice.
- Use existing committees, working groups, and forums to champion environmental justice throughout the Department.
- Place USDA agency employees in interagency working groups charged with developing environmental justice training materials for use throughout the Federal Government.
- Place USDA agency employees on Federal Environmental Justice Interagency Working Group committees and focus areas to build expertise and collaborations across the Federal Government.

Agency Performance Measures	Target Date
Establish training program for all Responsible Officials at USDA.	On or before September 30, 2016.
Provide training for USDA environmental justice SES-level points of contact.	On or before September 30, 2017.
Train Responsible Officials (includes Office or Program Managers)—e.g., Cultural Transformation and environmental justice Web training.	On or before September 30, 2017.
Provide an environmental justice briefing (course through AgLearn) for all USDA employees. The course would familiarize employees with environmental justice concepts and affirm the Department’s commitment to achieving environmental justice in all programs and activities.	On or before September 30, 2017.
Develop and maintain an environmental justice Web page for USDA Employees and the public.	On or before September 30, 2016, and ongoing.

Identify agency programs that can impact or benefit environmental justice communities in order to target current and future training for environmental justice communities.	On or before September 30, 2016.
Incorporate environmental justice content into agency handbooks and manuals as appropriate.	On or before April 15, 2017.
Facilitate placement of USDA sub-agency staff on environmental justice intergovernmental working group standing committees and focus area teams.	Ongoing, beginning December 31, 2015.
Encourage employee participation in the development of environmental justice training materials by interagency working groups.	On or before September 30, 2016.
Include environmental justice metrics in internal USDA performance assessments.	On or before September 30, 2016.

Examples of agency-specific programs, activities, or policies that support or contribute to this strategic goal include:

- APHIS staff served on the EPA Interagency Working Group (IWG), NEPA Committee and its Education sub-committee that are developing a collection of agency “Best Practices” describing both guiding principles and specific steps used in environmental justice analyses throughout the Federal Government. The IWG Education subcommittee is preparing a “National Training Product” presentation for agencies to use to enhance environmental justice awareness in the NEPA context.

**Highlights of USDA actions since the prior Strategic Plan:**

- USDA launched a Cultural Transformation initiative to ensure that USDA is a place where there is equity of opportunity for all employees and everyone who works here is empowered to reach their full potential. Only then can USDA provide its customers with exceptional service in an equitable manner.

Successful transformation includes:

- a. A commitment by USDA employees to improve USDA's past and future record on civil rights, including expanded outreach efforts to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers;
- b. Systems of accountability that encourage all employees to achieve high standards of performance and customer service;
- c. A renewed commitment to create diversity in the workforce and succession planning;
- d. Striving to make USDA a premier organization and model employer. We will be open, responsive, collaborative, transparent, and highly effective in implementing our many missions; and
- e. Employees being respectful of the diversity of our workforce and constituencies. And, the workforce will be engaged and motivated, empowered to succeed, and trained to meet future challenges.



- NRCS developed a Webinar to assist conservation planners, partners, and technical service providers in understanding the importance of environmental justice, and methods to properly analyze and document existing conditions and the effects of planned conservation actions for NEPA compliance. Primary topics included: legal foundations, information/data sources, tools, mitigation measures, and documentation requirements. To date, 132 participants have viewed the Webinar, and a recording is available to meet ongoing training needs. See: <http://www.conservationwebinars.net/webinars/environmental-evaluation-series-planning-for-clean-air-and-environmental-justice-special-environmental-concerns/>.
- The Office of Tribal Relations and staff from across the Department participated on the White House Council for Native American Affairs interagency working groups, focusing on Federal outreach and policy for climate change, economic development, energy, health and wellness, and sacred sites, as well as the interagency Arctic Executive Steering Committee working groups on coastal erosion, energy, and Tribal consultation.

**Goal 6: Review, Update and/or Develop Departmental and Agency Policies and/or Regulations to Address Environmental Justice**

In support of this goal, the Department and its agencies will formulate, review, and/or update their environmental justice regulations, directives, and policy documents.

**Objectives**

The objectives for this goal are to:

- Review and update agency regulations, directives, and /or policies on environmental justice.
- Review, prepare and publish new, revised, and updated regulations, directives, and/or policies on environmental justice for public review and comment.
- Ensure the seamless integration of aspects of environmental justice by appropriately incorporating them into existing regulations, directives, and /or policies.
- Ensure compliance with Civil Rights Impact Analysis process.

Agency Performance Measures	Target Date
Review and consider issuing new and/or revised regulations, and/or policies on environmental justice.	On or before September 30, 2016.
Amend, as appropriate, other regulations, directives, manuals, handbooks, and/or policies where aspects of environmental justice can or should be accomplished.	On or before September 30, 2018.

### Highlights of USDA actions since the prior Strategic Plan:

- In furtherance of Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments, USDA issued Departmental Rule 1350-002 on January 18, 2013, establishing direction for regular and meaningful consultation and collaboration with Tribal officials in the development of laws, regulations, and policies that have Tribal implications. The draft Forest Service Tribal Consultation Directives were posted for comment on July 24, 2015. See: <http://www.fs.fed.us/news/releases/forest-service-seeks-comments-proposed-policies-guiding-agencys-working-relationship>.
- USFS' final directives for the 2012 Planning Rule were published with direction for outreach to low-income and minority populations and to engage diverse, often underserved stakeholders in innovative ways. To help forests successfully outreach to environmental justice populations, an implementation guide - Environmental Justice & the 2012 Planning Rule - was developed. This guide provides more detail on how to provide outreach to environmental justice populations and how to incorporate environmental justice concerns into forest planning processes. See: <http://www.fs.fed.us/rmrs/docs/webinar-series/human-restoration/environmental-justice/planning-rule.pdf>.

**NOTE: This Strategic Plan does not confer any legal right and is not a rule requiring notice and comment under the Administrative Procedure Act (Public Law 89-554). It is intended only to improve the internal management of the USDA. It does not create any substantive or procedural right or benefit enforceable at law or equity by a party against USDA, its agencies, instrumentalities, officers, employees, or any other person.**

## Appendix A: Definitions

These definitions are listed for purposes of environmental justice at USDA.

**Beginning Farmer or Rancher.** In many cases, USDA's agency definitions of new and beginning farmers and ranchers are established by law. However, USDA has affirmed a "working definition" of new and beginning farmer across the Department – operating a farm or ranch for 10 years or fewer.

**Civil Rights Compliance Review.** A process to evaluate employment and program delivery process, policies and functions to determine civil rights compliance. It also provides direction, guidance, and technical assistance to managers and supervisors to correct any civil rights compliance deficiencies.

**Civil Rights Impact Analysis.** An evaluation to determine whether an agency action may adversely and disproportionately impact employees or program beneficiaries based on their membership in a protected class (race, color, gender, etc.).

**Climate Change.** A change in the state of the climate that can be identified (e.g., by using statistical tests) by changes in the mean and/or the variability of its properties, and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer. Climate change may be due to natural processes or to persistent anthropogenic changes in the composition of the atmosphere or in land use. (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – IPCC: [https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4\\_syr\\_appendix.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr_appendix.pdf)). Changes in average weather conditions that persist over multiple decades or longer. Climate change encompasses both increases and decreases in temperature, as well as shifts in precipitation, changing risk of certain types of severe weather events, and changes to other features of the climate system. (<http://www.globalchange.gov/climate-change/glossary>).

**Colonia.** Any identifiable community designated in writing by the State or county in which it is located; determined to be a Colonia on the basis of objective criteria including lack of potable water supply, lack of adequate sewage systems, and lack of decent, safe, and sanitary housing, inadequate roads and drainage; and existed, and was generally recognized, as a Colonia before October 1, 1989. (7 CFR 1777.4).

**Environmental Justice.** To the greatest extent practicable and permitted by law, all populations are provided the opportunity to comment before decisions are rendered on, are allowed to share in the benefits of, are not excluded from, and are not affected in a disproportionately high and adverse manner by Government programs and activities affecting the environment and its impact on human health. (USDA Departmental Regulation 5600-002). Assistance to communities to create prosperity so they are self-sustaining, repopulating, and economically thriving. 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. (<http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/>). Meeting the needs of these underserved communities by reducing disparate environmental burdens, removing barriers to participation in decision-making, increasing access to environmental benefits that help

make all communities safe, vibrant, and healthy places to live and work, and ensuring all populations are allowed to share in the benefits of Government programs and activities.

**Environmental justice communities.** Includes minority and low-income populations, American Indians, Alaska Natives, and sovereign Tribal governments, high persistent-poverty regions, and communities that are disproportionately and adversely burdened by environmental risks and hazards.

**Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher.** A program applicant: (a) with direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than the current indexed value in each of the previous 2 years, and (b) who has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous 2 years. An entity or joint operation can be a Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher if all individual members independently qualify.

(<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/people/outreach/slbfr/>).

**Minority.** A person who is a member of one of the following population groups: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian or Pacific Islander; Black, not of Hispanic origin; or Hispanic. (USDA Departmental Regulation 5600-002).

**Low-income population.** Any readily identifiable group of low-income persons who live in geographic proximity, and, if circumstances warrant, migrant farm workers and other geographically dispersed/transient persons who will be similarly affected by USDA programs or activities. Low-income populations may be identified using data collected, maintained, and analyzed by an agency or from analytical tools, such as the annual statistical poverty thresholds from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Reports, Series P60, Consumer Income and Poverty. (See USDA Departmental Regulation 5600-002).

**Outreach.** The use of formal and informal educational and training presentations, materials, Web site materials, etc., which are designed to inform an audience about a relevant subject in a linguistically appropriate manner in order to effect some change.

(<http://www.outreach.usda.gov/grants/oasdfir/definitions.htm>).

**Responsible Official.** The agency employee who has the authority to make and implement a decision on a proposed action. (36 CFR 220.3).

**Socially disadvantaged group.** A group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities. (7 USC 2003(e)(1)).

**Socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher.** A farmer or rancher who is a member of a socially disadvantaged group. (7 USC 2003(e)(2)).

## **Appendix B: Background on Title VI and EO 12898**

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (“Title VI”) prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs and activities receiving Federal financial assistance. See 42 U.S.C. § 2000d. Title VI is also the model for several subsequent statutes that prohibit discrimination on other grounds in federally assisted programs or activities, including Title IX (discrimination in education programs prohibited on the basis of sex) and Section 504 (discrimination prohibited on the basis of disability).

Under Title VI, Federal assistance is not just limited to an award or grant of money. It may occur in nonmonetary forms such as the use or rent of Federal land or property at below market value, Federal training, a loan of Federal personnel, subsidies, and other arrangements with the intention of providing assistance. Title VI provides that if a recipient of Federal assistance is found to have discriminated, and voluntary compliance cannot be achieved, the Federal agency providing the assistance should either initiate fund termination proceedings or refer the matter to the Department of Justice (Civil Rights Division) for appropriate legal action. Aggrieved individuals may file administrative complaints with the Federal agency that provides assistance to a recipient.

Title VI itself prohibits intentional discrimination. However, most funding agencies have implementing regulations for Title VI that prohibit recipient practices that have the effect of discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin.

In 1994, Executive Order 12898 was born out of a need to address concerns that the high and adverse environmental impacts of private or governmental actions were falling disproportionately on populations protected by laws such as Title VI (also sometimes referred to as “environmental justice” concerns).

In a Presidential memorandum accompanying EO 12898, President Clinton identified Title VI as one of several Federal laws already in existence that can help “to prevent minority communities and low-income communities from being subject to disproportionately high and adverse environmental effects” (President’s Memorandum for the Heads of All Departments and Agencies, 30 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 279, 280, February 11, 1994). Executive Order 12898 amplifies Title VI by providing that each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on environmental justice communities.

Although not all Title VI complaints involve environmental justice and not all environmental justice complaints involve violations of Title VI, there is typically a body of environmental justice issues that are raised in the context of complaints alleging Title VI violations. Federal agencies need to be aware of this intersection and incorporate it appropriately into their environmental justice strategies.