



USDA Equity Commission to promote racial equity in agriculture

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Source: USDA.

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In February, the USDA advanced its work to address historical inequities in agriculture. The USDA Equity Commission and its Subcommittee on Agriculture is tasked with providing recommendations to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack on policies, programs, and actions needed to address equity issues, including racial equity issues, within the the agency and its programs, including strengthening accountability and providing recommendations on broader and more systemic equity issues at the USDA.

The commission is led by USDA Deputy Director Jewel Bronaugh and Arturo S. Rodriguez, United Farm Workers President Emeritus. As part of the application and selection process for commission members, the USDA sought members who can share the voice and experiences of farmers, ranchers, and farmworker groups; people of

color; women; tribal and Indigenous communities; individuals with disabilities; individuals with limited English proficiency; rural communities; and LGBTQI+ communities. The full list of members can be found at www.usda.gov/equity-commission/members.

Opportunities to Engage

The Equity Commission will deliver an interim report and provide actionable recommendations in early 2023 and generate a final report within a two-year time frame. Throughout this period, ASA, CSSA, and SSSA members and the public will have opportunities to provide input by submitting suggestions during commission meetings. The Societies provided comments for the first commission meeting, which took place on 28 February.

Based on our Societies' diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) research efforts, we provided the USDA several recommendations to consider when analyzing current organizational programs, policies, systems, structures, and practices. We encouraged the Equity Commission to take the time and resources necessary to hear the needs of farmers and ranchers, as well as USDA employees, understanding that reducing barriers will not be the same for all underrepresented people. We also encouraged the Equity Commission to expand upon the [Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#) to include equity for all underrepresented groups.

ASA, CSSA, and SSSA made the following suggestions to the USDA Equity Commission to improve equity in the agricultural research ecosystem.

1. Support accessible exchange of knowledge in agricultural sciences
2. Bolster the student pipeline

3. Expand USDA's educational programs
4. Support mentoring and sponsorship through USDA
5. Expand resources for early career researchers
6. Encourage diverse collaborations

Full comments can be viewed at <https://bit.ly/3IKYXy7>.

Our Societies have made the commitment to enhancing the experiences, opportunities, and safety of all members through creating a diverse, inclusive, and equitable environment in our scientific fields of study and throughout the Societies. We applaud USDA for taking this important step forward to address inequities through the formation of the USDA Equity Commission. We will continue to keep our members inf

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