



**First Public Meeting:  
Equity Commission and  
Agriculture Subcommittee**

February 28, 2022

Call to Order

# **CECILIA HERNADEZ**

Designated Federal Officer



Opening Remarks

# SECRETARY VILSACK



Welcome

# EQUITY COMMISSION CO-CHAIRS

Dr. Jewel Bronaugh and Arturo S. Rodriguez



# Equity Commission Members



Dr. Hazell Reed



Toni Stanger-McLaughlin



Derrick Johnson



Dr. Ronald Rainey



Dr. Mireya Loza



Charlie Rawls



Shorlette Ammons



Poppy Sias-Hernandez



Todd Corley



Yvonne Lee



Elizabeth Lower-Basch



Shirley Sherrod



Ertharin Cousin



Rick Smith

# Agriculture Subcommittee Members



Shari Rogge-Fidler



Savi Horne



Dr. Alexis Racelis



Dr. Gina Eubanks



Michelle Hughes



Kari Jo Lawrence



PJ Haynie



Russell Redding



Janssen Hang



Erica Lomeli Corcoran



Sarah Vogel



Gary Matteson



Jennie Stephens

# Summary of Orientation

- Equity Commission is governed by the Federal Advisory Board Act (FACA).
- Members received their ethics training and filed their financial disclosures, if applicable.
- Members received background material on USDA programs.

# Overview of Governance

## Agenda

- Roles and Responsibilities
  - DFO, Co-Chairs, Members
- Background, Definitions, Legislation, and Authority
- Review and Validate Equity Commission Purpose, Goals, Roles and Responsibilities, & Timeline
- Q&A



## Designated Federal Officer (DFO): Roles and Responsibilities

- Ensure compliance with FACA, and any other applicable laws and regulations
- Call, attend, and adjourn committee meetings
- Approve agendas
- Maintain required records on costs and memberships
- Ensure efficient operations
- Maintain records for availability to the public

# Role of the Co-Chairs

- Understand FACA and ethics requirements, bylaws, and key issues
- Know the agenda and agency needs
- Help identify fact-finding needs
- Document the committee's advice
- Promote contribution from each member
- Collaborate with DFO if there is a problem with the committee/members

# Role of Committee Members

- Have an active role in the final recommendations.
- Publicly known as being qualified and eligible to serve on the committee.
- Only the committee participates in the development of recommendations.

# Background

of racial  
equity.

USDA civil rights  
and court actions  
in the 1960s have  
documented a long history of discrimination  
against farmers and farmworkers from  
underserved groups, particularly Black,  
Native, and Hispanic farmers, through  
institutional practices and the administration  
of credit programs.



# Definitions

- **Equity** means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment.
- **Racial equity** includes underserved communities such as Black, Latino, Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, Alaska Natives and other persons of color.
- The Equity Commission is instructed to also address systemic equity so that underserved communities such as members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality are proactively and consistently included.

# Legislation and Authority

## Executive Order 19385 *Advancing Racial Equity*

- Enacted on January 20, 2021
- Signed into law by President Biden to advance racial equity and support for underserved communities through the federal government
- Provides a commitment to closing the racial wealth gap and more direction to the Equity Commission on the scope of work

## American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Section 1006

- Enacted on March 11, 2021
- Signed into law by President Biden to speed up the country's recovery from the economic and health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Section 1006 of the Act directed USDA to create the Equity Commission and provided funds sufficient to ensure the Commission is well staffed

# Legislation and Authority

## Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) 5 U.S.C. Appendix 2 (1972)

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- Governs the operation of federal advisory committees and emphasizes public involvement through open meetings and reporting
- Except in certain statutorily defined circumstances, all FACA committee meetings must be open to the public
- Reports, transcripts, working papers, and other materials made available to or prepared for or by the committees must be made available to the public
- A discretionary committee is terminated after two years unless the agency renews the committee's charter prior to the two-year expiration date.

# Equity Commission

## Purpose

To provide recommendations to the Secretary on policies, programs, and actions needed to address racial equity issues within the Department of Agriculture and its programs, including strengthening accountability at USDA and to provide recommendations to the Secretary on broader and more systemic equity issues at USDA.



# Equity Commission: Goals

1. Identify and recommend actions to remove barriers to equitable access and use of USDA programs, policies, systems, structures, and practices, including impediments that are internal, external, discretionary, or statutory.
2. Recommend actions and solutions that address racial equity issues, expand assistance, and provide support for historically underserved customers and communities needed for equitable access to USDA programs and services.
3. Recommend actions and solutions that address broader and more systemic equity issues at USDA.
4. Recommend actions that will ensure USDA is a modern, competitive workplace with an organizational culture that prioritizes diversity, equity, inclusion, and access for its staff and customers alike.

# Equity Commission: Roles and Responsibilities

1. Charge and oversee a series of Subcommittees to achieve the goals with the first being the Agriculture Subcommittee.
2. Establish a Subcommittee on Rural Community and Economic Development (CED) at a later date to provide recommendations on issues and concerns related to rural development, economic health and well-being.
3. Based on recommendations from the Agriculture Subcommittee and subsequent subcommittees, provide a final report to the Secretary with prioritized set of short-term and long-term recommendations for how action can be taken to reduce barriers to access and advance equity for underserved producers and communities.

# Timeline and Deliverables

- The first Equity Commission members are appointed for 2 years and will provide deliverables according to the following timelines:
  - Feb 2022: Launch of the Equity Commission and Ag Subcommittee
  - Sep 2022: Interim Report from Agriculture Subcommittee
  - Nov 2022: Interim Report from Rural Community and Economic Development (CED) Subcommittee
  - Feb 2023: Final Report from Agriculture Subcommittee
  - May 2023: Final Report from Subcommittee for Rural CED
  - Summer 2023: Consolidated Final Report from Equity Commission

Equity Commission

# Q&A SESSION

Take 15

**BREAK – BACK AT 1:45PM EST**



USDA Equity Perspectives

# **DR. DEWAYNE GOLDMON**

USDA Senior Advisor for Racial Equity

Equity Commission

# ORAL PUBLIC COMMENTS

Take 15

**BREAK – BACK AT 3:15PM EST**



# Agriculture Subcommittee Charge

## Agenda

- Purpose
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Goals
- Q&A

# Agriculture Subcommittee: Purpose

The Agriculture Subcommittee will be charged with providing recommendations on issues and concerns related to agriculture and on how to optimize USDA programs to advance equity.

# Agriculture Subcommittee: Roles and Responsibilities

1. In consultation and with support from the DFO, convene to achieve the goals directed by the Equity Commission.
2. Leverage the diversity of expertise, perspectives, and ideas within the Subcommittee membership to meaningfully drive the right conversation, analyze issues, and prioritize short and long-term recommendations.
3. Identify the primary and systemic barriers that underserved producers (farmers, ranchers, forest landowners and operators, cooperatives, and farmworkers) face today.
4. In conjunction with the Deputy Secretary, DFO, and other USDA resources, determine if these barriers require administrative, discretionary, regulatory, or statutory remedies.
5. Develop and provide a report to the Equity Commission for consideration.

# Agriculture Subcommittee: Goals

Based on stakeholder input and ongoing equity efforts within USDA, the following are recommended as important goals to consider:

1. Improving technical assistance necessary for navigating USDA programs and services;
2. Improving access to capital;
3. Improving access to programs and services related to agriculture and land use;
4. Implementing programs and services to mitigate effects of climate change, including improvements in risk management, conservation, and forestry programs;
5. Addressing access to land, including financing programs and addressing unique issues related to heirs' property, fractionated land, and other land access/retention issues;
6. Increasing market access to facilitate expanded access for value added opportunities (e.g., processing, trade, marketing);
7. Enhancing customer service via improved USDA staffing, training, and transformation of the organizational culture within USDA;
8. Reviewing supporting functions such as county committees, conservation districts, and advisory boards;
9. Improving use of data and technology both to ensure access and to increase accountability;
10. Improving USDA performance measurement and program evaluation so that implemented recommendations can be monitored, tracked, and reported with real outcomes; and,
11. Making recommendations for ways to hold USDA accountable by requesting an implementation strategy and an action plan on recommendations.

Agriculture Subcommittee

# Q&A SESSION

Member Open Discussion

# REFLECTIONS AND VISION FOR IMPACT

# Resources

- **USDA Equity Commission Website**
  - [www.usda.gov/equity-commission](http://www.usda.gov/equity-commission)
- **Points of Contact**
  - DFO Cecilia Hernandez
- **Equity Commission Email**
  - [Equitycommission@usda.gov](mailto:Equitycommission@usda.gov)