



United States Department of Agriculture



Introduction to the Office of the Ombudsperson



Topics

- What is an Ombudsman?
- Organizational Ombudsman Definitions
- What are the International Ombudsman Association Principles?
- What does an Ombudsman mean for USDA and you?



What is an Ombudsman?

“The word “Ombudsman” comes from a Swedish term now used worldwide to designate independent, impartial and confidential offices that receive inquiries and complaints from individuals and designated groups, and facilitate fair and equitable resolutions...”

Source: Red Cross Annual Ombudsman Report



Organizational Ombudsman Definition

“An Organizational Ombudsman is an individual who serves as a designated neutral within a specific organization and provides conflict resolution and problem-solving services to members of the organization (internal ombudsman) and/or for clients or customers of the organization (external ombudsman)... Some may serve both internal and external constituencies.”

Source: International Ombudsman Association

Organizational Ombudsman Definition

“Organizational Ombuds serve as a **confidential, independent, neutral** and **informal** dispute resolution resource for a specific entity. They are **accessible** to a defined population and can **advocate for fairness**. These unique characteristics distinguish Organizational Ombuds from Classical Ombuds, mediators, arbitrators, and other alternative dispute resolution professionals. The term “Ombuds” is shorthand for “Ombudsman,” “Ombudsperson” and “Ombuds Officer,” which also are used widely.”

Source: Ombuds Blog

International Ombudsman Association (IOA) Principles

- Neutral/Impartial
 - advocates for fair process
 - considers the rights and interests of all parties
 - does not take sides
- Confidential
 - off-the-record resource
 - will protect and honor confidentiality within federal limitations

IOA Principles (Continued)

- Independence
 - no interference
 - organizational independence

- Informal
 - voluntary
 - does not replace formal avenues such as filing a complaint or requesting an investigation
 - no managerial authority/cannot compel action or compliance
 - does not follow a rigid sequence of steps in how the work is done



Who does the Office of the Ombudsperson Serve?

- The Office helps minority farmers and ranchers raise new and future issues and shared concerns about access to USDA programs.
- As a first step, the Ombudsperson will focus on surfacing new issues and concerns on accessibility to USDA programs in the following four states: CA, MO, NM, TX.
- The Ombudsperson will provide a fair process for all involved parties.
- USDA employees may contact the Ombudsperson too.



How Will the Ombudsperson do the Work?

- Listen intently, reframe, ask questions, and identify various perspectives
- Help connect the farmers and ranchers with others within USDA
- Look at information and data to help inform what is occurring
- Bring core issues of concern to USDA leaders while maintaining confidentiality



Benefits

- Identify issues that may prevent the USDA from serving minority farmers or ranchers
- Work with the program staff and senior leaders to resolve issues as early as possible



Other Resources

See IOA Standards of Practice:

http://www.ombudsassociation.org/IOA_Main/media/SiteFiles/IOA_Standards_of_Practice_Oct09.pdf

See the Coalition of Federal Ombudsman FAQs:

http://federalombuds.ed.gov/federalombuds/ombuds_FAQs.html



Contact Information

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