United States Department of Agriculture
Office of the General Counsel
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VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

INFORMATIONAL MEMORANDUM FOR AGENCY HEADS

FROM: Jeffrey M. Prieto
Acting General Counsel

SUBJECT: USDA Launches the Office of the Ombudsperson

The Secretary is launching the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Office of the Ombudsperson as part of his ongoing commitment to civil rights concerns at USDA, and to ensure that all customers and employees are treated fairly, regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family and parental status. The Secretary's commitment to fairness extends to all persons and should not be based on whether the individual's income is derived from a public assistance program, their political beliefs, or gender identity. The creation of this new independent, neutral, and confidential office is part of the *Keepseagle v. Vilsack* settlement agreement that will report systemic issues regarding program access to USDA senior leaders.

The Ombudsperson's responsibilities include collecting program information from internal and external sources. The Ombudsperson will review the information to identify recurring and systemic concerns. The Ombudsperson will report the information, generate periodic reports and recommendations, and work collaboratively with the appropriate program agencies.

In my role as the Secretary's designee to the Office of the Ombudsperson, I ask for your ongoing support to Joanne Dea, Ombudsperson. As a first step, she is rolling out this effort to Native American producers in the following states: Arizona, California, Oklahoma, Montana, New Mexico, South Dakota, and Texas regarding access to programs provided by the following agencies:

- Farm Service Agency
- Rural Development Programs
- Natural Resources Conservation Service

See www.usda.gov/ombudsperson for more information. The Ombudsperson, Joanne Dea, can be reached at 202.205-1000 or by email at ombudsperson@usda.gov.

I want to thank all of you for your continued support.