

USDA Equity Commission and Agriculture Subcommittee Public Meeting #4: Meeting Minutes

January 31st, February 1st, and 2nd, 2023

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Equity Commission was convened for its fourth meeting on January 31st, 10am Eastern Standard Time, at the Sidney R. Yates Building, Washington D.C. Co-Chairs Dr. Jewel Bronaugh and Arturo S. Rodriguez presided over the meeting along with Designated Federal Officer, Cecilia Hernandez.

In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 92-463, the meeting was open to the public from 10:00am to 4:30pm EST on January 31st 10:30am to 4:30pm EST on February 1st, and 10:00am to 5:00pm EST on February 2nd.

Day One – January 31, 2023

Equity Commission Members			
Co-Chair Bronaugh	✓	Dr. Mireya Loza (Virtual)	✓
Co-Chair Rodriguez	✓	Charlie Rawls	✓
Shorlette Ammons	✓	Dr. Ronald Rainey	✓
Todd Corley	✓	Dr. Hazell Reed (Virtual)	✓
Ertharin Cousin	✓	Shirley Sherrod	✓
Derrick Johnson	✓	Poppy Sias-Hernandez	✓
Yvonne Lee	✓	Rick Smith	✓
Elizabeth Lower-Basch	✓	Toni Stanger-McLaughlin	✓
Rural Community & Economic Development Subcommittee Members			
Cheryal Hills	✓	Curtis Wynn (Virtual)	✓
David Carrasquillo-Medrano	✓	Terry Rambler	X
Calvin Allen	✓	Larry Holland (Virtual)	✓
Lakota Vogel (Virtual)	✓	Nils Christoffersen	✓
Valerie (Mann) Beel (Virtual)	✓	Shonterria Charleston	✓
LaTonya Keaton	✓	Doug O'Brien	✓
USDA Staff in Attendance			
Cecilia Hernandez, Designated Federal Officer		Homer Wilkes, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment	
Rick Gibson, Senior Council		Leen Jones, Executive Director of the Rural Partners Network	
Andrew Berke, Administrator of the Rural Utilities Service		Farah Ahmad Deputy Under Secretary of Rural Development	

*Attendance list for members of the public can be found here.

1. Opening of the Meeting

- **Designated Federal Officer (DFO) Hernandez** called to order the 4th Public Meeting of the Equity Commission and took attendance.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** welcomed the Members and thanked USDA's Forest Service for hosting the meeting. She addressed her departure from USDA and noted that a new Co-Chair will be identified and announced prior to her final day.
- **Co-Chair Rodriguez** shared his pride in the work of the Members in developing and refining the recommendations that will impact all constituents served by USDA.

2. Introduction

Homer Wilkes (Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment) provided an overview of the recent advancements toward equity in Forest Services and welcomed the Equity Commission to the Forest Service building.

3. Presentation: Rural Development Modernization

- **Farah Ahmad (Deputy Under Secretary, Rural Development)** presented on Rural Development's progress to modernizing its service delivery efforts, Information Technology (IT) infrastructure, and staffing capacity.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** inquired about Rural Development's field office presence in the communities it is designed to serve.
- **Deputy Undersecretary Ahmad** responded that Rural Development works closely with the 47 State Directors to prioritize its capacity needs based on the community served and develops a plan for staffing structure.
- **Member Lee** requested a review of the Rural Development's demographic data of current staff and suggests a succession plan for employees who are currently eligible for retirement that ensures the workforce is reflective of today's cultural and ethnic groups.
- **Deputy Undersecretary Ahmad** acknowledged the importance of capturing the data on employee demographics and having a diverse staff serving local communities. She confirmed that Rural Development can follow up with the Commission with current staff demographics.
- **Member Holland** shared his experience with Rural Development's services as a resident of rural Mississippi, noting that the staff is hardworking. He encouraged USDA to support both new technology and staffing capacity.
- **Deputy Undersecretary Ahmad** agreed that there must be a balance between staff and technology in servicing rural communities.
- **Member Corley** asked if there has been coordination with the private sector in meeting the technology needs of the Agency.
- **Deputy Undersecretary Ahmad** responded by detailing the procurement process for competitive contracts and the extent of the current support provided by the private sector.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** discussed the challenge of aligning the work and needs of Rural Development with what private companies are able and willing to do.
- **Member Carrasquillo-Medrano** asked how USDA can engage U.S. territories in gathering data to help agencies understand what funds and resources are needed.
- **Deputy Undersecretary Ahmad** noted that exceptions have been made to the framework that is used by Rural Development that allows territories like Puerto Rico to gather their own data to ensure it is updated and inclusive for their communities.
- **DFO Hernandez** stated that USDA will send a list of contacts to Member Carrasquillo-Medrano to work with USDA data-gathering offices located in Puerto Rico.
- **Member Rainey** inquired if USDA has explored opportunities to use automated systems to enhance the quality of customer service and equity.

- **Deputy Undersecretary Ahmad** responded that the current goal of technology investments is to enhance equitable customer service that will serve as the future guidelines for Rural Development.
- **Member Allen** asked for information on Rural Development’s staffing and training needs and if these needs have changed over time.
- **Deputy Undersecretary Ahmad** responded that a training plan is put together each year and includes training requests from all offices and can be designed based on requests sent in and the needs of communities.
- **Member Cousin** asked what the opportunity is for alignment with other agencies that are customer facing and if there is any potential to bring services together under one system and staff for efficiency.
- **Deputy Undersecretary Ahmad** responded that Rural Development has a community development model that prioritizes training staff with information on programs at other agencies to connect customers to better opportunities or bring other agencies into the conversation.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** noted that resources are limited and that this provides a challenge to meeting Rural Development’s staffing needs but that there are opportunities to collaborate and partner.
- **Member Lower-Basch** suggested that, as new IT systems are designed, USDA consider integrating a feature that captures and stores all data, so people are not asked to repeatedly provide their information.

4. Presentation: Place-Based Initiatives

- **Lee Jones (Executive Director of the Rural Partners Network)** and **Andrew Berke (Rural Utilities Service Administrator)** presented on two of Rural Development’s current place-based initiatives, the Rural Partners Network and Closing the Wastewater Access gap.
- **Member Hills** asked how success will be defined for this program.
- **Director Jones** noted key performance indicators include an uptick in applications and broad level federal participation, new partnerships, and considering all members of the community in the project and their needs, and how barriers are overcome.
- **Member Cousin** asked for clarity on how the Rural Partners Network measures the outcomes of their efforts.
- **Director Jones** responded by highlighting how the Rural Partners Network measures success through its ability to get projects funded.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** clarified that determining the program’s impact is important.
- **Member Holland** asked if scaling the program can be streamlined.
- **Administrator Berke** noted the agency feels the need to scale up but must maximize their staff without additional funding.

- **Member Ammons** asked how culturally competent training can be sustained while implementing new models.
- **Director Jones** notes that staff get to know the community on a more intimate level to ensure cultural components are considered. Additionally, most staff tend to be from the communities itself and act as validators at the ground level and connectors with local people.
- **Administrator Berke** responded that partnering with people in the communities is important to ensuring rural communities maintain their way of life.
- **Member Sherrod** shared her concern in the hiring of staff in the local offices and asked how barriers are addressed when looking to advance equity priorities at the local level.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** responded that accountability is a priority from the management level down to local staff to ensure barriers are minimized to equitable service.

5. Public Comments

- The Commission Members heard comments from:
 - Natalie Maxwell
 - Sommer Sibilly-Brown
 - Wan Smith
- DFO Hernandez reminded members of the public they could submit written public comments to equitycommission@usda.gov and in future meetings they can register to provide an oral comment by visiting <https://www.usda.gov/equity-commission>.

6. Presentation: Rural Community and Economic Development Focus Areas

- **DFO Hernandez** provided an overview of the RCED’s goals and the process the Subcommittee took to establish initial focus areas.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** encouraged the RCED to share any questions or requests for additional information and offered her commitment to answer these requests.

Rural Communities in Context

- **Member O’Brien** provided context on the state of rural communities and the importance of rural communities in advancing equity in the United States.
- **Member Wynn** discussed the role rural communities play in all aspects of the economy and emphasized the need to support these communities.
- **Member Holland** shared data on the demographics and poverty status of residents in rural communities. He drew attention to the rapid growth of diversity in rural America over the past decade.

Transformational Capacity Building and Access

- **Member Charleston** presented an overview of the Subcommittee’s focus area, “Transformational Capacity Building and Access.” She shared five sub-topics within this focus area, including staffing, technology, access to programs, program delivery and organizational change, and definitions of success and data monitoring.
- **Member Christofferson** emphasized the importance of ensuring USDA programs reach rural communities.
- **Member Hills** discussed the sub-topic titled “defining success and data monitoring.” She mentioned this topic is intended to identify the communities most in need of additional resources and support.
- **Member Keaton** presented the sub-topic titled “fund loans and grants.” She emphasized the opportunities this topic could create for rural businesses and community facilities through emulating the success of the Farm Credit System.

Rural Housing and Infrastructure

- **Member Charleston** introduced the “Rural Housing and Infrastructure” focus area. She emphasized the need to consider housing and infrastructure in the same focus areas because both are required for quality living in rural communities. She presented several emerging sub-topics, including addressing disparities in the quality of community facilities and affordable housing.
- **Member Christoffersen** discussed the challenges of constructing affordable housing and the creating a full community to better attract economic development to rural communities.
- **Member Holland** shared his observations that USDA programs have moved away from multi-family housing to individual home ownership. He expressed the need for long term solutions to ensuring quality housing.

Community Facilities

- **Member Keaton** introduced the “Community Facilities” focus area. She emphasized the importance of building more effective and widespread public-private partnerships to reach underserved communities.
- **Member Christoffersen** drew from personal experiences to emphasize the need for more flexibility in USDA’s programs to allow for multi-use community facilities.

Rural Business

- **Member O’Brien** introduced the “Rural Business” focus area. He discussed the success of rural cooperatives in allowing rural communities to connect into the modern economy. He suggested utilizing the cooperative system to address additional needs in rural communities, including childcare and healthcare.
- **Member Hills** drew from her experience to show the success of incentivizing the cooperative model through favorable lending terms for cooperative businesses.

Rural Utilities

- **Member Wynn** introduced the “Rural Utilities” focus area by discussing the opportunities to improve the electric cooperatives in rural communities. He discussed the need to expand the electric cooperative model to rural broadband.
- **Member Beel** discussed the subcommittee’s focus on the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP). She shared that the Inflation Reduction Act increased the overall funding for REAP. She suggested that USDA needs to conduct more comprehensive outreach to stakeholders to connect them to REAP funds.
- **Member Holland** discussed the subcommittee’s focus on rural water. He discussed the need for more oversight of Rural Water Associations to ensure these organizations distribute funds equitably.

7. Dialogue on Potential Recommendations

- **DFO Hernandez** commended the RCED Members for their progress and opened the floor for Equity Commission Members to ask questions and discussed the RCED’s presentation.
- **Co-Char Rodriguez** shared his observations that smaller rural hospitals are being pushed out of rural communities by larger medical systems. He asked if the RCED had any ideas on how to sustain these hospitals.
- **Member Hills** shared that, in central Minnesota, several communities used funding from the USDA’s community facilities programs to build and sustain hospitals in rural communities.
- **Member O’Brien** added that USDA programs often are successful in saving existing facilities as well. However, he emphasized the challenges in sustaining health facilities that serve small populations.
- **Member Holland** responded that, in his experience, rural communities are struggling to find staffing for hospitals and clinics.
- **Member Lee** emphasized the lack of culturally and linguistically competent services in rural communities. She expressed her concerns that the immigration status of rural residents is a barrier for migrant workers to access USDA housing.
- **Member Cousin** encouraged the RCED Members to identify the differences between changes that need to be made legislatively versus regulatory changes. She added that, regarding housing, the RCED consider the different needs of individual rural communities.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** recognized the progress the RCED has made and challenged the Members to consider the inequities that have historically not been fixed. She encouraged the Members to think systemically to solve inequities that have been around for years.
- **Member Carrasquillo-Medrano** shared the challenges he faces with programs siloed by agencies across the federal government.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** encouraged Members to draw from solutions that tribal communities have already undertaken. She stated that tribes have successfully developed

and staffed healthcare facilities in rural areas that often see significant numbers of non-tribal patients.

- **Member Johnson** emphasized the lack of diversity and uniform standards for elections to cooperative boards. He stated that electric cooperatives have intentionally discouraged economic development in rural communities in order to keep wages down. He suggested that the way cooperatives are governed should be a priority for USDA to address.
- **Member Wynn** agreed with Member Johnson's comments and added that a diverse cooperative board is necessary to ensure underserved communities benefit from USDA grants and loans.
- **Member Holland** shared his personal challenges in getting elected and serving on his community's rural water board. He shared that cooperative boards may not make the necessary decisions to benefit underserved communities without more accountability.
- **Member Johnson** expressed his frustrations about the underrepresentation of African Americans on rural utility cooperative boards. He shared that these cooperative boards have perpetuated inequities by disproportionately charging underserved groups for utilities.
- **Member Sherrod** emphasized the people that need this information the most do not have time to understand this process. She encouraged the use of community-based organizations to support efforts to organize and make changes.
- **Member Carrasquillo-Medrano** discussed the challenges Puerto Rico has faced with electric and utility companies. He emphasized that energy infrastructure has resulted in the displacement of underserved rural communities as a result of the development that follows new infrastructure.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** shared her encouragement that the partnerships forming through the Equity Commission are resulting in innovative ideas to address longstanding issues.
- **Member O'Brien** stated that, at times, USDA has successfully helped develop governance processes in rural communities and that the Subcommittee should pull from these success stories when moving forward.
- **Member Ammons** encouraged Members to consider that underserved communities associate public-private partnerships with for-profit prisons.
- **Member Lower-Basch** asked the Commission Members to discuss how to ensure Inflation Reduction Act funds reach underserved communities.
- **Member Keaton** responded to Member Ammons' comments through highlighting opportunities for communities to utilize partnerships with private developers to expedite the development of infrastructure and community facilities.
- **Member Charleston** discussed the need to use consistent language when discussing these types of partnerships.
- **Member Christofferson** discussed the challenges faced by rural communities facing natural disasters. He stated that many rural communities will require assistance to implement programs and that the nature of land markets is changing rapidly.

- **Member Sias-Hernandez** encouraged the RCED Members to identify and correct the historical and systemic inequities impacting rural communities.
- **Member Hills** echoed Member Sias Hernandez’s comment and stated that the focus on transparent data and waiving the loan matching requirement aims to address historical inequities.
- **Member Holland** added that the data presented in the introduction of their presentation served as the driving force for many of their recommendations. He stated that he hopes to better articulate and integrate equity into any future recommendations from the RCED.
- **Member Rawls** discussed the possibility of supporting community development financial institutions (CDFIs) to bolster rural development.
- **Member Charleston** shared that a small USDA housing program, the Rural Community Development Initiative, utilizes the CDFI model, however the program is underfunded.
- **Member Hills** discussed the availability of technical assistance funds for CDFIs. She mentioned that the lack of accountability on where these funds go continues to be a problem in these programs.
- **Member Allen** encouraged Members to consider how to better communicate with local communities and capture their voices in real time.
- **Member Rawls** encouraged Members to consider how USDA could partner with the Department of Treasury to increase accountability.
- **Member Carrasquillo-Medrano** asked how USDA can best balance flexibility with accountability when changing programs.
- **Member Corley** emphasized the possibility of partnering with other equity-related commissions in other agencies.
- **Member Allen** discussed the need to the need to address barriers both in local communities and in the federal government.

Co-Chair Rodriguez and **Co-Chair Bronaugh** provided closing remarks for the first day.

DAY 1 MEETING AJOURNED

Day Two – February 1, 2023

Equity Commission Members			
Co-Chair Bronaugh	✓	Dr. Mireya Loza (Virtual)	✓
Co-Chair Rodriguez	✓	Charlie Rawls	✓
Shorlette Ammons	✓	Dr. Ronald Rainey	✓
Todd Corley	✓	Dr. Hazell Reed (Virtual)	✓
Ertharin Cousin	✓	Shirley Sherrod	✓
Derrick Johnson	✓	Poppy Sias-Hernandez	✓
Yvonne Lee	✓	Rick Smith	✓
Elizabeth Lower-Basch	✓	Toni Stanger-McLaughlin	✓
Agriculture Subcommittee Members			
Dr. Gina Eubanks	✓	Gary Matteson	✓
Janssen Hang	✓	Dr. Alexis Racelis	✓
PJ Haynie III	✓	Russell Redding	✓
Savi Horne	✓	Shari Rogge-Fidler	✓
Michelle Hughes	✓	Dr. Jennie Stephens	✓
Kari Jo Lawrence	✓	Sarah Vogel	✓
Erica Lomeli Corcoran	✓		
Rural Community & Economic Development Subcommittee Members			
Cheryal Hills	✓	Curtis Wynn (Virtual)	✓
David Carrasquillo-Medrano	✓	Terry Rambler	X
Calvin Allen	✓	Larry Holland (Virtual)	✓
Lakota Vogel (Virtual)	✓	Nils Christoffersen	✓
Valerie (Mann) Beel (Virtual)	✓	Shonterria Charleston	✓
LaTonya Keaton	✓	Doug O'Brien	✓
USDA Staff in Attendance			
Cecilia Hernandez, Designated Federal Officer			
Rick Gibson, Senior Council			

*Attendance list for members of the public can be found here.

1. Opening of the Meeting

- **Designated Federal Officer (DFO) Hernandez** called to order day two of the 4th Public Meeting of the Equity Commission meeting and took attendance.
- **Co-Chair Rodriquez** welcomed the Members and expressed excitement for discussing the interim recommendations.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** welcomed the Members and thanked the public for joining the meeting.

2. Presentation: History of U.S. Farm Policy and its Implications to Achieving Equity

- **Jonathan Coppess (Associate Professor, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign)** presented an overview of farm policy, including the history, funding, and impacts of USDA Base Acres.
- **Member Matteson** asked for further information on the importance of base acres.
- **Jonathan Coppess** responded that base acres is important because it is the policy that allows farmers to receive direct assistance payments from USDA if they grow commodity crops.
- **Scott Marlow (Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs, Farm Service Agency)** explained that Base Acres payments are tied to agricultural land and not to individual producers. In turn, the land becomes more valuable based on its historical Base Acres.
- **Member Hainey** shared his lived experience with the disparities the Base Acres policy has caused in the South.
- **Member Holland** explained that farmers who didn't initially enroll in Base Acres are at a severe disadvantage. He also stated that farmers experience significant challenges navigating this policy. He then asked for clarification on the significance of the 1996 Farm Bill.
- **Jonathan Coppess** responded that the 1996 Farm Bill was a key moment when Congress de-coupled Base Acres payments. In turn, the payments were tied to historical production rather than current production.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** requested an overview of past equity-related recommendations that were made regarding Base Acres, why the recommendations did not work, and how the Equity Commission can propose an effective solution.
- **DFO Hernandez** responded that USDA would reshare a fact sheet outlining past Base Acre recommendations.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** requested further information on solutions to this problem from the perspectives of Jonathan Coppess and other experts in this topic.
- **Jonathan Coppess** said another challenge to Base Acres is that producers can plant different crops on the same land and still receive payments for historical crops. He clarified that a producer cannot switch to fruit or vegetable farming, only other commodities or conservation land.

- **Member Keaton** clarified that the de-coupling of payments to the base acres puts a “collar” and a “cap” on the return while farmers still can take market advantage of the crops that are in production. She stated that this policy does not address farmers who aren’t participating in the market.
- **Jonathan Coppess** reminded that the base acre payments are very small compared to the value of the current corn crop in production. However, these payments could be important if the farmer is operating in the margins. He also stated that base acres are highly sought after by farmers looking to buy land because these farmers will have a more competitive advantage.
- **Deputy Administrator Marlow** reminded Equity Commission Members that Base Acres is tied to agricultural land, which increases the asset. Therefore, farmers benefit from Base Acres before they start production because it provides you assets against what you can borrow. In turn, producers can borrow more money from banks to expand operations or increase technology.
- **Jonathan Coppess** stated that additional funding is critical to the success of a smaller farms.
- **Member Hainey** shared that producers will buy land for a higher price if Base Acres is attached, knowing they will make it up in payments the following year. He emphasized that Base Acres is one of the root causes in the decline of Black farmers nationwide.
- **Member Sias-Hernandez** asked how the price per Base Acre is determined.
- **Jonathan Coppess** answered that it is based on the programs calculation and varies by crop.
- **Member Matteson** explained how net profit margins and Base Acres can impact financials for farmers.
- **Member Carrasquillo-Medrano** stated that there are many other ways to trigger Base Acres besides just the reference prices of a crop. He asked for clarification on why USDA does not factor in anything else other than reference prices.
- **Jonathan Coppess** affirmed that USDA only uses reference prices to trigger payments. USDA has considered using the cost of production instead of reference prices, but this change would require significant legislation.
- **Deputy Administrator Marlow** explained that the reason commodities can receive payments, and not fruits and vegetables, is because they are non-perishable and able to be held in storage, shipped globally, etc. Therefore, the market can be better regulated.
- **Member Rainey** invited the Commission Members to consider the cumulative impact on a farmer of an extra \$100 per acre each year. Farms and ranches owned by Black producers today are smaller on average than farms owned by white producers. He stated much of this is the result of disparities in Base Acres.
- **Member Loza** shared historical context on Base Acres and how the policy has been weaponized to push Black farmers out in the South.

- **Deputy Administrator Marlow** stated that one positive aspect of this policy is the extensive collection of data on the types of crops grown in each county. This data is used for crop insurance and other risk management programs.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** stated that there are many aspects of Base Acres that need to be addressed, such as its budget and sources of funding.
- **Member Corley** asked for data on the demographics of farmers participating in Base Acres.
- **Dr. Dewayne Goldmon (Senior Advisor for Racial Equity at USDA)** shared additional information on the impacts of Base Acres on the demographics of farmers in the South.
- **Member Loza** shared more historical context and suggested the Commission Members focus on the re-entry of minority farmers/ranchers into agriculture.
- **Member Holland** shared his personal experience farming. He spoke about his family not participating in USDA programs because they were unaware these programs existed. He encouraged Members to think about farmers who haven't benefited from USDA programs for decades. Many of these farmers have been driven out of agriculture altogether.
- **Member Ammons** highlighted the importance of ensuring farmers can understand the Farm Bill and other policy language.
- **Member Hainey** reminded the Members that the County Committees set the reference prices for the Base Acre payments.
- **Member Lee** expressed that reconciliation can be done at a national level and highlighted a successful reconciliation initiative in California for Japanese and Black Americans.
- **Member Sherrod** stated that the recommendations the Equity Commission put forth must have the backing of all minority groups.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** reminded the Members that Tribes do not own their own land, the Federal government does. In turn, tribal producers do not benefit from Base Acres.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** suggested the Equity Commission commence a "tiger team" to further discuss solutions to this issue.

3. Presentation: Equity in Procurement

- **Oscar Gonzales (Assistant Secretary for Administration)** presented on procurement and how it can be used as a tool to bolster equity at USDA.
- **Member Hainey** shared that, as a row crop producer, it is very challenging to navigate USDA's procurement system. He stated that minority producers need technical assistance and support to allow for fair competition in commodity markets. He suggested that the Farm Service Agency, Rural Development, and the Agriculture Marketing Service form a partnership to help create sustainable, vertically integrated systems for rural communities.

- **Assistant Secretary Gonzales** shared that USDA is conducting ongoing outreach sessions with the hope to learn more about what improvements are needed. He acknowledged that his office has heard that short contract due dates can be burdensome.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** shared that the Secretary’s “transform the food system” initiative is utilizing bipartisan infrastructure funding to expand the processing capabilities for some commodities. She stated that USDA could explore expanding this initiative to include rice.
- **Member Hainey** stated that this could be a good learning opportunity for USDA staff because it would allow them to visit farms and help minority farmers identify opportunities to access new markets.
- **Assistant Secretary Gonzales** stated that writing equitable procurement into USDA employees’ performance plans, especially for senior executives, could lead to further progress.
- **Member Beel** asked if the Procurement Office works with cooperatives. She stated that she is in the beginning stages of developing a Native American cooperative of ranchers and the group has identified places where ranchers can market their cattle at a much higher premium than what they would normally receive with traditional marketing methods. She asked if the Procurement Office could work with other cooperatives to help them identify similar markets.
- **Assistant Secretary Gonzales** responded that the Office would gladly work with cooperatives.
- **Member Holland** echoed Member Hainey’s comment and added that livestock should be included. The same issues exist in the processing and selling of livestock.
- **Member Hainey** stated that Black farmers may have debts that will not allow them to go to a traditional bank. Therefore, as Member Beel highlighted, cooperatives are a great avenue for many farmers.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** shared examples of the ways USDA has worked with tribes for procurement in the past. She stated that tribes have benefited from the creation of the Office of Tribal Relations. She stated that other minority groups may not have this same level of support. She suggested that the procurement office use non-profits to help with technical assistance to underserved communities.
- **Member Christofferson** shared that competition in procurement contracts in communities with national forests creates another barrier. He asked for more clarification about procurement in the Forest Service.
- **Assistant Secretary Gonzales** responded that progress has been made and the Forest Service is re-evaluating how they operate. The Forest Service now conducts outreach to small businesses with procurement opportunities first as a result of the Great American Outdoors Act.
- **Member Racelis** asked if there are any ongoing small business programs for school food procurement.

- **Assistant Secretary Gonzales** stated that he agrees that there is a need to put together more manageable procurement packages for small producers.
- **Member Racelis** shared that, through his discussions with Child Nutrition Program operators, low reimbursement rates for the meals served and regulations that require purchasing from the lowest bidder serve as challenges for local producers.
- **Assistant Secretary Gonzales** thanked Member Racelis for sharing and said he would follow up with Food and Nutrition Service about those issues.
- **Member Hang** spoke about non-profits not being informed of procurement processes for small entities and encouraged USDA to provide a training. He asked how USDA is holding business accountable to work with small, underserved producers.
- **Assistant Secretary Gonzales** we are now seeing businesses adding BIPOC producers and businesses as a “sub” on IT contracts. The office needs to do more work however, with commodity purchasing. He stated that USDA recently updated their agricultural procurement regulations to include more accountability to large companies. The Secretary is committed to implementing these regulations.
- **Member Hainey** asked if there is a liaison in the procurement office that specifically works with underserved communities.
- **Assistant Secretary Gonzales** responded that, in his office, the role of the Assistant Secretary is to act as a liaison.
- **Member Hainey** stated that he believes there should be designated career staff in the office that specifically works with underserved communities and acts as a liaison.
- **Assistant Secretary Gonzales** agreed and said stakeholders also want 2-3 procurement officials that help with unions in the procurement office.
- **Member Sherrod** stated that the office should not forget about the role of community-based organizations in helping producers access procurement opportunities.

4. Presentation: USDA Budget Overview

- **John Rapp (Director, Office of Budget and Program Analysis)** presented on USDA’s budget process.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** stated that it is important for underserved producers’ voices to be heard during the budget process. She asked how USDA can bring their voices to the table.
- **Member Sias-Hernandez** agreed with Member Stanger-McLaughlin’s comments.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** responded that the Equity Commission’s recommendations are already helping to inform the fiscal year 2024 budget and USDA’s Equity Action Plans.
- **Member Rawls** stated that the Deputy Secretary’s involvement in the budget is process is the reason why the Commission’s recommendations aim to align more responsibilities to the office.

- **Member Keaton** asked what persistent issues arise during the budget process due to a lack of funding. She asked how USDA can institutionalize equity in the budget.
- **Director Rapp** answered that both changing the budget and consistent program evaluation can support institutionalizing equity.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** stated that political appointees are only at USDA for a short time. USDA is working with the career staff to further institutionalize equity.
- **Member Hainey** spoke about the need to set aside funds for historically underserved producers to make improvements on their farm in the budget process.
- **Member Carrasquillo-Medrano** discussed discrimination in Puerto Rico. He stated that requirements in the Jones Act to use only U.S. shipping for goods and foods to the island causes food prices to be 27% higher on average. He also spoke about the disparities in food assistance given to Puerto Ricans.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** thanked Member Carrasquillo-Medrano for his comment and committed to further exploring solutions to disparities facing Puerto Rico in nutrition programs.
- **Director Rapp** stated that nutrition security has been a big focus at USDA and suggested that Member Carrasquillo-Medrano connect with the Deputy Undersecretary for Food and Nutrition Service.
- **Member Lower-Basch** shared that, in the draft interim recommendations, Puerto Rico is specifically addressed in the nutrition recommendations to help with current disparities. The implementation of this recommendation would require changes to the Farm Bill.
- **Member Hills** requested information on where the historically underserved dollars are going by program, grants/loans, and if it's for planning or implementation.
- **Director Rapp** said that the Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA) could gather and share this information.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** discussed the current Administration's commitment to funding equity initiatives at USDA, such as the Equity Commission.
- **Director Rapp** spoke about the need to communicate why funding is needed and what impact the funding will have during the budget process. He encouraged Members to consider this when advocating for program funding. He also shared more about the budget process and how data fits into the process.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** stated that some of the recommendations from the Equity Commission will require regulatory change.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** asked if OBPA is involved when funding that is passed in the Farm Bill is held up due to administrative processes.
- **Director Rapp** stated that some things are held up in the regulatory process because of Administration priorities. He then finished his presentation by speaking about the budget process timeline.

5. Presentation: Equity Commission Interim Recommendations

- **DFO Hernandez** introduced the interim recommendation presentations.

Recommendation #16

Move discrimination complaints to National Appeals Division (NAD) and out of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR).

- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** presented on recommendation and said that the recommendation should be changed to “allow discrimination complaints to be heard with NAD and OASCR.” She stated that the customer should be able to choose whether they want their case to be heard by NAD or OASCR. She believes NAD could be trained in civil rights and therefore, be able to address discrimination complaints.
- **Member Corley** asked for clarification on if the recommendation would allow for customers to choose between NAD or OASCR and how that choice will be communicated.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** responded that NAD already has regional representation and that she believes communication will not be an issue. Additionally, she said that USDA could fund non-profits to provide technical assistance on which office to file with and subsequent paperwork.
- **Member Rainey** asked if they spoke with OASCR and NAD and what their feedback was.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** responded that she has not spoken to NAD and have heard from OASCR.
- **Member Vogel** reiterated that this recommendation is about letting the customer choose between going to NAD or OASCR to file a complaint.
- **Member Sherrod** stated that OASCR has never had full funding. She stated that, in order for OASCR to be effective, the Commission should focus on ensuring OASCR has a full budget and are hiring more staff.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** stated that the Department has challenges disseminating information to all customers. She encouraged the Commission to think about how confusing choosing between NAD and OASCR could be for customers.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** clarified that she supports additional funding and efforts to improve OASCR alongside this recommendation.
- **Member Sherrod** stated that, if USDA includes NAD in the discrimination complaint process, then funding and resources will be split between the two.
- **Member Carrasquillo-Medrano** suggested that the Commission take additional steps, such as figuring out the definition of discrimination in the context of USDA, before recommending this change.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** stated that she hopes the Equity Commission will table this recommendation today to allow for additional time to speak with NAD.

- **Member Sias-Hernandez** agreed that we need to hear from NAD first to ensure that Civil Rights’ role is not minimized.
- **Member Carrasquillo-Medrano** stated that the Commission needs to consider the community members who are not customers of USDA or recipients of relief.
- **Member Rainey** stated that he would like to hear from NAD and OASCR before he can decide on this recommendation.
- **Member Hainey** echoed Member Sherrod’s comments and added that this issue could also use a “tiger team.”
- **Member Keaton** asked if there is a two-step solution to simultaneously address the backlog of complaints while also making improvements to the Civil Rights office, such as hiring more staff.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** responded through outlining how OASCR will address the backlog of cases within the next two years.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** emphasized that, in contrast to OASCR, NAD staff will meet with customers face-to-face and pay for attorney fees.
- **Member Sherrod** stated that, if USDA reduces OASCR’s role, then funding OASCR will become even less of a priority.
- **Member Horne** shared her concerns about navigating the complaint process if stakeholders have the ability to choose between NAD and OASCR. She suggested USDA fund and support a Farmer Advocacy Network to help customers file complaints.
- **Member Holland** agreed that the application systems are complicated and difficult to navigate. He suggested the Commission avoid adding more complexity for the user.
- **Member Matteson** stated that he needs to hear from OASCR and NAD before making a decision on this issue.
- **Member Sherrod** provided more historical context on the lack of funding in OASCR and encouraged the Commission to focus on supporting OASCR.
- **Member Keaton** asked if there is equitable relief for farmers who have not had their cases resolved in the past two or three years.
- **Rick Gibson (Senior Counsel, Office of the General Counsel)** stated that, in current law, there is no process or funding relief while the Civil Rights complaints process is ongoing.
- **Member Hainey** expressed his belief that farmers need as many tools as possible to address civil rights issues.

Recommendation #17

Transform and adequately fund the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)

- **Member Sherrod** presented recommendation 17.
- **Member Sias-Hernandez** stated she needs more information on how this recommendation fits into USDA’s current efforts to enhance OASCR.

- **Member Corley** suggested that the Commission should vote on this recommendation and not table it for next meeting.
- **Member Vogel** encouraged members to look at the resources provided by NAD on their website. She spoke about the differences in the timelines between NAD and OASCR.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** committed to having OASCR and NAD speak the next morning to provide more information.
- **Member Stanger- McLaughlin** said that she looks forward to hearing from NAD and OASCR to discuss the recommendation.

Recommendation #8

Address historical and present-day inequitable services by making County Committees more equitable.

- **Member Hainey and Member Eubanks** presented recommendation 8.
- **Member Rainey** stated that, even though some power has been taken away from County Committees, they remain influential. He stated the committees need oversight and accountability.
- **Member Sherrod** spoke about her years of experience with County Committees and the difficulty in organizing Black producers. She stated that there needs to be a person of color on the Committee that understands what is going on, can talk to other farmers about programs, and report back to the Secretary.
- **Member Eubanks** suggested adding “African American” and “Asian” into the recommendation under the “training” section.
- **Co-Chair Rodriguez** also suggested adding “Hispanic”.
- **Member Hainey** spoke about the need for diverse representation on County Committees.
- **Member Rogge-Fidler** suggested adding clarifying language into the recommendation.
- **Member Rainey** emphasized the need for the minority advisor on each County Committee to be a voting member.
- **Latrice Hill (Director for Outreach, Farm Service Agency)** clarified that the appointment of a voting Socially Disadvantaged member to the County Committee is made when there is not a Socially Disadvantaged member elected in a county that has been deemed underrepresented. She stated that the Census of Agriculture informs which counties are underrepresented.
- **Member Hainey** asked if the Commission can give the minority advisors voting rights.
- **Rick Gibson (OGC)** responded that the Secretary can make a minority advisor a voting member if there is no Socially Disadvantaged representation on the County Committee. However, this appoint is not the same as a minority advisor.
- **Member Holland** asked what benchmark in a county enables the Secretary to make an appointment.
- **Rick Gibson (OGC)** replied that that if more than 10% of the eligible population is from a Socially Disadvantaged group, the Secretary can make an appointment to the Committee.

- **Member Holland** shared his concerns that USDA is undercounting minority farmers. He said that there are other minority farmers that are not eligible voting members in the County Committee system because they do not use USDA services or have approved farm plans.
- **Member Lawrence** stated that tribal reservations extend into multiple counties and asked if ballots are sent out to everyone on the reservations or just who are producers.
- **Zach Ducheneaux (Administrator, Farm Service Agency)** replied that a challenge to including tribal producers is obtaining a list from the tribes.
- **Member Racelis** suggested that minority advisors should also have a longer term than one year.
- **Member Matteson** emphasized that the Commission is not trying to remove County Committees but rather to make them more equitable and improve representation.
- **Member Eubanks** spoke about the need for accountability and transparency in County Committees.
- **Member Sias-Hernandez** asked the workgroup if they are confident in this recommendation as it stands.
- **Member Eubanks** responded that she is confident in the recommendation as it stands.
- **Member Sias-Hernandez** said that she feels comfortable voting on this.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** stated that the Commission needs to recognize that County Committees work for the majority of farmers. However, she emphasized that USDA needs a system that works for all farmers.
- **Member Hainey** recapped the changes suggested during the discussion.
- **Administrator Ducheneaux** stated that he agrees with the idea of starting a coalition to reach out to small and minority farmers and see if they would be willing to serve on the County Committees.
- **Member Racelis** stated that there should be additional hiring requirements for the County Executive Director (CED).
- **Member Carrasquillo-Medrano** said that in addition to clarification of County Committees on tribal lands, there should also be clarification for territories.
- **Member Hang** agreed to elevating the CED to General-Scale (federal pay) level. He spoke about the need to translate these documents to different languages.
- **Member Hainey** asked how many members are on each County Committee.
- **Latrice Hill (FSA)** replied that each County Committee has three to five members.
- **Member Hainey** spoke about other entities that could qualify as a minority voting member.
- **Member Hughes** stated that the Commission should also add “young farmer” language to the recommendation.
- **Member Corley** agreed that age should be added.
- **Member Loza** agreed that we should close all the holes in the loop.

Co-Chair Bronaugh and DFO Hernandez provided closing remarks.

DAY 2 MEETING AJOURNED

Day Three – February 2, 2023

Equity Commission Members			
Co-Chair Bronaugh	✓	Dr. Mireya Loza (Virtual)	✓
Co-Chair Rodriguez	✓	Charlie Rawls	✓
Shorlette Ammons	✓	Dr. Ronald Rainey	✓
Todd Corley	✓	Dr. Hazell Reed (Virtual)	✓
Ertharin Cousin	✓	Shirley Sherrod	✓
Derrick Johnson	✓	Poppy Sias-Hernandez	✓
Yvonne Lee	✓	Rick Smith	✓
Elizabeth Lower-Basch	✓	Toni Stanger-McLaughlin	✓
Agriculture Subcommittee Members			
Dr. Gina Eubanks	✓	Gary Matteson	✓
Janssen Hang	✓	Dr. Alexis Racelis	✓
PJ Haynie III	✓	Russell Redding	✓
Savi Horne	✓	Shari Rogge-Fidler	✓
Michelle Hughes	✓	Dr. Jennie Stephens	✓
Kari Jo Lawrence	✓	Sarah Vogel	✓
Erica Lomeli Corcoran	✓		
USDA Staff in Attendance			
Cecilia Hernandez, Designated Federal Officer		Dr. Dewayne Goldmon (Senior Advisor for Racial Equity)	
Rick Gibson, Senior Council			

*Attendance list for members of the public can be found [here](#).

1. Opening of the Meeting

- **Designated Federal Officer (DFO) Hernandez** called to order day three of the 4th Public Meeting of the Equity Commission and took attendance.
- **Co-Chair Rodriguez** provided opening remarks and expressed his gratitude for Co-Chair Bronaugh's commitment to the Equity Commission.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** welcomed the Equity Commission Members and commended the Commission's leadership in bringing forward a set of interim recommendations.

2. Public Comments

- The Commission Members heard comments from:
 - Lorette Picciano
 - Ryan Pressley
 - Mary Sanders*
- **DFO Hernandez** reminded members of the public they could submit written public comments to equitycommission@usda.gov and in future meetings they can register to provide an oral comment by visiting <https://www.usda.gov/equity-commission>.
- **Member Matteson** shared that the Commission has reviewed the written comments as well.

*Some members from the public provided oral comments later in the day.

3. Presentation: Civil Rights and the National Appeals Division

- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** introduced Deputy Assistant Secretary Monica Rainge, Civil Rights and Deputy Assistant Secretary Dr. Penny Brown Reynolds, Civil Rights, Management and Operations.
- **DFO Hernandez** introduced Director Frank M. Wood, National Appeals Division and Deputy Director Jennifer Nicholson, National Appeals Division. DFO Hernandez shared that the intention of this deviation from the original agenda is to provide expertise and answer any questions the Members have on the Civil Rights and National Appeals Division recommendations discussed the previous day.
- **Frank M. Wood (Director, National Appeals Division)** shared his concerns regarding the capacity of the National Appeals Division to assist in resolving civil rights complaints. He clarified that the National Appeals Division is a small organization that aims to independently and apolitically adjudicate complaints on program decisions.
- **Dr. Penny Brown Reynolds (Deputy Assistant Secretary for Operations in Civil Rights)** discussed the importance and needs of the Office of Civil Rights at USDA. She shared how Civil Rights is working to improve the complaints process.
- **Monica Rainge (Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights)** recognized the need to expedite the Civil Rights complaint process. She emphasized the differences between the National Appeals Division and Civil Rights including Civil Rights' capacity to investigate complaints.
- **Member Vogel** explained that the National Appeals Division provides a critical lifeline to farmers and ranchers due to the speed of adjudication relative to Civil Rights. However, farmers and ranchers cannot make claims of discrimination in a National Appeals Division complaint.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** called on USDA to consider how Civil Rights and the National Appeals Division can work together to improve processes for USDA's customers.

- **Member Rainey** asked if allowing the National Appeals Division to hear Civil Rights cases would unintentionally reduce funding for Civil Rights?
- **Deputy Assistant Secretary Rainge** discussed potential unintended consequences, including creating barriers for resource-restricted producers who require Civil Rights’ assistance to navigate the process.
- **Member Sias-Hernandez** shared her concern of a scarcity mindset – both the National Appeals Division and Civil Rights are funded now, and any addition to their capacity would not reduce their current capacity.
- **Member Sherrod** expressed her belief that the Commission should focus on supporting Civil Rights in improving the complaints process rather than bring the National Appeals Division into the process.
- **Member Horne** emphasized the need for an advocates’ network to assist producers in navigating the Civil Rights process and for independent audits from the Office of the Inspector General.
- **Deputy Assistant Secretary Dr. Brown Reynolds** reaffirmed Civil Rights’ commitment to improving the process for all customers.

4. Presentation: Equity Commission Interim Recommendations (Cont.)

Recommendation #25

Seek increased funding for the Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP) and remove the competitive nature of the current application process to allow for more collaboration across Tribal extensions.

- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** provided support for the need for additional funding to FRTEP. She emphasized the need to remove the competitive nature FRTEP funding by using a formula, rather than competitive applications.
- **Member Rawls** asked what changes occurred to this recommendation since the last public meeting.
- **DFO Hernandez** responded that only minor changes to the language were made.

Recommendation #26

Address disparities and difficulties with 1:1 matching requirement for 1890s land grant universities.

- **Member Rainey** expressed the intention of this recommendation is to move the burden of requesting 1:1 matching waivers to the state.
- **Member Lower-Basch** asked for clarification on the importance of shifting this burden to the governor of a state specifically.
- **Member Rainey** answered that the intent is to remove the requirement for 1890s to consistently justify their funding in order to receive a matching waiver.

- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** added that states currently match the federal funding for 1890s in varying degrees. While some states match all the federal dollars, others only match up to half, putting a disparate burden on the universities.
- **Member Racelis** discussed the discrepancies in formula funding at the state level and at the federal level. He emphasized that utilizing non-federal funding matches, like private donations, could be one solution to addressing disparities in funding.
- **Member Reed** stated that only a few states provide 1:1 matching and expressed his support for ensuring that the 1:1 match comes from the state.

Recommendation #27

Enhance funding and support to expand Cooperative Extension Service programming to marginalized communities through cooperative agreements. Provide more descriptive language within Requests for Applications (RFAs) for competitive funding to facilitate collaboration with minority serving agricultural colleges and universities.

- **Member Rainey** emphasized the goals of recommendation #27 including to expand cooperative agreements and enhance requirements to collaborate with minority serving institutions.
- **Member Hang** asked for clarification on whether the recommendation intended to expand the eligibility of extension to new institutions or to enhance agreements for institutions with eligibility already?
- **Member Rainey** responded that the recommendation seeks to provide additional funding and support for existing eligible institutions to engage marginalized groups through cooperative agreements.
- **Member Racelis** emphasized that increases in funding for extension services should require institutions to reach out to and collaborate with underserved communities.

Recommendation #28

Increase financial support (in the form of cooperative agreements and competitive grants) and allocate equitable funding to federally designated minority serving institutions (including 1890 Land Grant colleges, 1994 TCUs, and HSACUs and community-based organizations.)

- **Member Rainey** presented recommendation #28.
- **Members Stephens and Hang** expressed their support for the inclusion of community-based organizations in this recommendation.

Recommendation #29

Recognize minority serving agricultural institutions who are making important contributions towards equitable access to information, education, and capacity to underserved (minority) students, farmers, ranchers, etc. The distinction should allow access to endowments and annual appropriations (Smith-Lever and Hatch funds, etc.) available to other land grant universities--



- **Member Corley** concurred with the original recommendation’s language.
- **Member Sias-Hernandez** reminded Equity Commission Members that this is not the only recommendation addressing Civil Rights.
- **Equity Commission Members** voted unanimously to recommend recommendation #17 in its original form.

Recommendation #18: Enhance private-public partnership authorities that empower program leaders across thousands of offices and in HQ to pursue innovation independently and rapidly, but with a central mechanism to manage funding, monitor results, and disseminate/scale best practices to create a shared responsibility. Such an authority can be established as a new program through Congress and Secretarial authority, and/or by leveraging existing authorities.

- Equity Commission Members made no changes to recommendation #18.
- Equity Commission Members unanimously voted in favor of recommending recommendation #18.

Recommendation #19: Establish a team focused on procurement and supplier diversity specifically to work with the underserved and underrepresented agriculture communities to build the capacity and experience necessary to gain equitable access to USDA’s supplier, contracting, and procurement programs.

- **Member Lower-Basch** suggested that sub-recommendation “g” replace sub-recommendation “c” to emphasize the need for FNS to pilot a project rather than a nation-wide program to make this recommendation more implementable.
- **Member Lee** responded that she believed there were opportunities to provide additional support to organizations competing for procurement contracts.
- **Member Lower-Basch** responded that this recommendation is focused on incentivizing school districts and other localities to work with local, smaller suppliers.
- **Member Lee** asked if it was possible to include efforts to provide technical assistance to encourage smaller suppliers to participate in this pilot.
- **Member Lower-Basch** expressed her concerns with this addition because USDA does not have a direct role in procurement at the local level.
- Equity Commission Members continued to debate the language for this recommendation and agreed to a series of edits to allow for more flexibility.
- Equity Commission Members unanimously voted in favor of recommending recommendation #19.

Recommendation #20: Institutionalize equity compliance and culture change across all of USDA by appointing a senior official with dedicated staff (career or political) with decision-making authority and access to senior level officials and the resources needed to serve farmworkers, their families, and the organizations that serve them. The senior official would serve as the USDA representative to interagency workgroups regarding farmworkers and associated issues.

- Equity Commission Members made no changes to recommendation #20.
- Equity Commission Members unanimously voted in favor of recommending recommendation #20.

Recommendation #21: Issue a recommendation from the Secretary that the White House pursue the establishment of an Interagency Farmworker Service Council for infrastructure coordination on intergovernmental work processes. The Council should be convened by USDA and include the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Labor, the Department of Education, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice, the Department of Treasury, and private sector partners.

- Equity Commission Members made no changes to recommendation #21.
- Equity Commission Members unanimously voted in favor of recommending recommendation #21.

Recommendation #22: Ensure farmworkers and their families have access to all USDA food and nutrition programs.

- Equity Commission Members made no changes to recommendation #22.
- Equity Commission Members unanimously voted in favor of recommending recommendation #22.

Recommendation #23: Direct the USDA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) to conduct a report or a joint report from USDA and Department of Labor (DOL) on farmworker living and working conditions that are essential to understanding the needs of farmworker populations. The report shall also look at farmworker access to USDA programs. OIG and DOL should consult with farmworker organizations and farmworkers themselves and they must use innovative research methods to ensure anonymity, accurate data, and protection against retaliation.

- Equity Commission Members made no changes to recommendation #23.
- Equity Commission Members unanimously voted in favor of recommending recommendation #23.

Recommendation #24: Pursue legislation and utilize existing authority to ensure funding that benefits farmworkers and their families.

- Equity Commission Members minor changes to recommendation #24
- Equity Commission Members unanimously voted in favor of recommending recommendation #24.

Recommendation #25: Seek increased funding for the Federally Recognized Tribal Extension Program (FRTEP) and remove the competitive nature of the current application process to allow for more collaboration across Tribal extensions.

- Equity Commission Members made no changes to recommendation #25.

- Equity Commission Members unanimously voted in favor of recommending recommendation #25.

Recommendation #26: Address disparities and difficulties with 1:1 matching requirement for 1890s land grant universities.

- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** asked for clarification if private donations or endowments are not already eligible for matching funds and where to identify where this change would need to be.
- **Member Reed** responded that the 1:1 matching from the state and not from private donations was originally designed in the Morrill Act.
- Equity Commission Members made no changes to recommendation #26.
- Equity Commission Members unanimously voted in favor of recommending recommendation #26.

Recommendation #27: Increase funding and support to expand Cooperative Extension Service programming to marginalized communities through cooperative agreements and more descriptive language within Requests for Applications (RFAs) for competitive funding to facilitate collaboration with minority serving agricultural colleges and universities.

- Equity Commission Members made no changes to recommendation #27.
- Equity Commission Members unanimously voted in favor of recommending recommendation #27.

Recommendation #28: Increase financial support (in the form of cooperative agreements and competitive grants) and allocate equitable funding to federally designated minority serving institutions (including 1890 Land Grant colleges, 1994 TCUs, HSACUs, and community-based organizations).

- **Member Reed** asked whether HSACUs only cover agriculturally focused institutions.
- **DFO Hernandez** confirmed this is correct.
- Equity Commission Members made no changes to recommendation #28 at this point in the meeting, however Commission Members did return to this recommendation to add new language later in the meeting.
- Equity Commission Members unanimously voted in favor of recommending recommendation #28.

Recommendation #29: Recognize minority serving agricultural institutions who are making important contributions towards equitable access to information, education, and capacity to underserved (minority) students, farmers, ranchers, etc. The distinction should allow access to endowments and annual appropriations available to other land grant universities—resources intended to support and enhance regionally relevant research, access to education and other capacity building, and community engagement (extension).

- **Member Reed** suggested the Equity Commission consider adding a sub-recommendation that calls for a 20% increase in funding for extension services to minority-serving, land-grant institutions.
- Equity Commission Members agreed to this edit, however, felt that this edit would be better suited in recommendation #28.
- **Member Sias-Hernandez** motioned to add this language to recommendation #28, which was unanimously approved by the Equity Commission.
- Equity Commission Members made no changes to recommendation #29.
- Equity Commission Members unanimously voted in favor of recommending recommendation #29.

Recommendation #30: Support legislative action to remove eligibility restrictions on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) that disproportionately limit access to nutrition supports by BIPOC.

- Equity Commission Members made no changes to recommendation #30.
- Equity Commission Members unanimously voted in favor of recommending recommendation #30.

Recommendation #31: Continue to revise the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) to reflect the needs of today's consumers, explore options for boosting the minimum benefit and increasing benefits more than annually during periods of high inflation, and consider basing SNAP benefit levels on the Low-Cost Food Plan.

- Equity Commission Members made no changes to recommendation #31.
- Equity Commission Members unanimously voted in favor of recommending recommendation #31.

Recommendation #32: Monitor state SNAP agencies to ensure that SNAP is administered in a way that treats applicants and participants with dignity and respect. USDA should seek legislative authority to hold states accountable for barriers to access and require states to develop processes for beneficiaries to be involved in program and systems design and evaluation. USDA should report SNAP participation data among eligible individuals disaggregated by race and ethnicity.

- Equity Commission Members made no changes to recommendation #32.
- Equity Commission Members unanimously voted in favor of recommending recommendation #32.

Recommendation #33: Review the nutrition programs at the federal, state, and local levels to identify barriers to vendor and procurement opportunities for disadvantaged and underrepresented communities; remove barriers within federal control and provide technical assistance to states and localities on best practices.

- Equity Commission Members made no changes to recommendation #33.

- Equity Commission Members unanimously voted in favor of recommending recommendation #33.

DFO Hernandez provided closing remarks and outlined the next steps for these recommendations, including the publishing of the interim report with these recommendations.

MEETING ADJOURNED

I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing minutes are accurate and complete.

Arturo S. Rodriguez

Signed Electronically on April 27, 2023, 3:45PM ET

Arturo S. Rodriguez

Co-Chair USDA Equity Commission

APPENDIX

Members of the Public: Attendance List

First Name	Last Name	First Name	Last Name	First Name	Last Name	First Name	Last Name
Benu	Amun-Ra	Jill	Harlow	Eric	Hilton	Brandi	Johnson
Floria	Oates-Williams	Caroline	Li	DENISE	Jamerson	winona	lake scott
Donald.Green		Rachel	Jenkins	Tamara	Veal	Justin	Rhee
Annie	Contractor	anneke	dunbar-gronke	Eboni	Thomas	Gwen	Edmonson
Adam	Cole	Anusuya	Rangarajan	Carolyn	Jones	Kelli	Reynolds
Representative Regina	Lewis-Ward	Clint	Bain	Colbert	Lovett	Nyatta	
Dorothy	Allbritton	Linda	Loubert	FannieMarie	JacksonGibbs	Christopher	Sacchetti
Markus	Holliday	Philip	Brasher	Beulah	Hilton	Catherine	Fleming
Natalie	Maxwell	Del	Riley	Dawn	Ovesen	denise	banks
Rekha	Balu	Walter	Edwards	Bruce	Harrell	Crystal	Gist
Karen	Hardigg	Tara	Chadwick	Tandelyn	Daniel	Geraldine West	Hudley
Gbenga	Ajilore	Isabel	Fiore	BONITA	CLEMONS	Maya	Crooks
Rebecca	Kaufman	Carine	Meyer-Rodrigues	Samuel	Fairley	Shantia	Warren
Ny	Whitaker	Connor	Simons	Malcolm	Adams	Edward S	Reynolds
Aallyah	Wright	David	Youngblood	Freddie	Bynum	Dianne	Brown
Annette	Hiatt	Portia	White	Kashava	Holt	Jeanette	Williams
tessa	thraves	Jessica	Medina	Gilmer	Turner	Audrey	Haskin
Daysi	Sweaney	Steve	Davies	Derick	Muhammad	Nisha	Galione
Keon	Lewis	Erin	King	Bobby L.	Wilson	Rafeal	Boyd
Andrea	Loudd	Scott	Marlow	S. Aisha	Steplight Johnson	Jeff	Knishkowy
Monique	Bethell	Kenya	Nicholas	Phyllis E	Turner	Kate	Lancaster Tash
Katrina	Johnson	Michael	Schmidt	Yawah	AWOLOWO	Marsheela	Hines

First Name	Last Name	First Name	Last Name	First Name	Last Name	First Name	Last Name
Melissa	Pang Ching	Richard	Gibson	JAMES	BURCH	Heather	Peterson
Rachel	Rush-Marlowe	Janie	Hipp	Antonio	Tovar	Rochelle	Blackman
David	Jimenez	Simchah	SuveykeBogin	Marie	A McGruder	Sae Mi	Kim
Tambra	Stevenson	Conisha T Hackett	Brumfield	PJ	Haynie	Sequana	Janifer
Elaine	Waxman	Farah	Ahmad	Willard	Tillman	Ken	Baisden
Veronica	Watson	Dewayne	Goldmon	Amber	Bell	Jesse	Hernandez
Joy	Banner	Andy	Berke	Pamela	Madzima	Fenyang	Stewart
Lisa	Nelson	Melissa	H	Charles	Rawls	Fonshelle	Johnson-Osborne
Wande	Okunoren-Meadows	Simone	Morrison	Marquis	Harris	Michele	Hawkins
Paige	Organick-Lee	Lee	Jones	Dãnia	Davy	Semira	Bullock
Courtney	Niegocki	Hailey	Patton	Erica	Lomeli-Corcoran	Allyson	Sneed
DeShawn	Blanding	Margaret	Graves	Sha'Von	Terrell	Jacaranda	Fiigg
Thomas	Gray	Steve	Cleveland	Karen	Lawrence	Mayra	Cora
Katherine	Stewart	Tharun	Vemulapalli	Jan	Holland	Priscilla	Brown
Glenda	Yoder	Beibhinn	Steiner	Cheryal	Hills	Carla	Webb
emily	german	Patrick	Mason	erika	shelaey	Carla	Quincy
Sommer	Sibilly-Brown	Kimberly	Ratcliff	Maria Dominique	Villanueva	Cecilia	Ndounda
Patricia	Carrillo	Amanda	Dell	erika	shelaey	Kenneth	Tapp
Robi	Fauser Fink	Equity Commission Main Room Backup		Kimberly	Benion	Angela	Moss
Amanda	Ahrens	Penny	Brown Reynolds	Kelly	Young	jeffrey	chandler
Laurel	Harkness	Ehasuyi	Gomes	Denise	Hannon	Benjamin	McFarlane
Christina	Rice	Tomasina Brown		Felicia	Burke	Latoya	Kess
Leonardo	Wassilie	nabiu	hailemariam	cheryl	Johnson	Geraldine West	Hudley
Nancy	Kohn	Amy	Tamayo	Brenda	Futch	Florence	Duchantier-Diaz

First Name	Last Name	First Name	Last Name	First Name	Last Name	First Name	Last Name
Prianka	Sharma	J. Latrice Hill		Semaj	Rashad	William	Henry
Brandon	Ahrens	Chris	Woolery	FSC	LAF	Monique	Simmons
Patrick	Ahrens	Eston	Williams	Terence	Courtney	Keith	Callwood
Winona	Bynum	Travis	Johnson	Frank	Taylor	STEHEN	SERGON
Marla	Keethler	Holly	Hardin	Revelyn	Coleman	VAQAR	AHMED
Charla		Eyang	Garrison	Will	Muhammad	Crystal	Wilson
Sarah	Houin	John	Parker	Frank	Mrema	Karen	Gibson
Mary Sanders		RJ	Cabrera	RR	JOHNSON	Shirlette	Ammons
Molly	Carey	Shalonda	Guy-Kangah	Jeff	Chapl	Shondell	McDowney
carolyn	mugar	Krista	Candela	Lonnie	Sigler	Tracy	Singletery
Lorette	PICCIANO	Dana	Thompson	FSC	LAF	christopher	holley
Samantha	Guerrero	Marcus	Graham	Lisa	Broadway	Michael	Dykes
Laura	Crowell	Alexandra	Deges	Britannica	Peterson	Cornelius	Blanding
Phyliss	Craig-Taylor	Wan	Smith	Timothy	Sykes	Sederis	Fields
Brittany	Ochoa	Elaine	Zhang	Karen	Timmons	Jessica	proctor
David	Howard	AL	Anderson-Lazo	Andrew	Hogans	Shera	Phillips
Navina	Khanna	Victoria	Van de Vate	Paul	Jones	Ashton	Norwood
Heidi Jackson	Everett	John	Rapp	Brittany	Meyers	Archie	Crawford
Gail	White	Alexis	Racelis	coz	lamore	Tia	Parker
Gail	White	maria	dianco	Amin	Ojuok	Jacqueline	Lenzy
RYAN	PRESSLEY	Savi	Horne	Julius	Fernandez	james	parker
slot88	slot88	Clint Bain	Bain	jerry	pennick	Jannette	Evans
Lyna	Badibanga	Anne	Knapke	Julian	Marcus	Keith	Smith
Jessica	Yuska	LO		melissa	marquis	Ken	Baisden
Carrie	Johnson	Kayla	Mattson	Ernest trice		DARRYL	JOHNSON
Katherine	McKinney	Candace	Glover	Mary	Cooper	Anita	Pitchford

First Name	Last Name	First Name	Last Name	First Name	Last Name	First Name	Last Name
Herman	Pryor Jr	Jaklyn	Van Manen	Akila	Fontenot	Eldren	Irvin
Keiana	Scott	Marc	Grignon	Camryn	Edwards	Cherraye	Oats
Maya	Zamek	Margo	Schlanger	Veronica	Briceno	Paula.Graham	
Marisa	Rudolph	Doris	washington	Kenesha	Reynolds	Edward	Profit
Gray	Norton	Carina	Saavedra	Frank		Nancy	McNamara
Demond	Timberlake	Derrick	Johnson	Shaday	Towns	Deborah	Davis
Raven	Proctor	charles	smith	Belinda Morrow Stinson-Head		Freddie Davis	
Jeanette Smith		Henrietta	Isaboke	Professor	Silence	Latrechia	Shaw
Kayle	Lauck	Frank	Wood	James	Jackson	Chief Andre	Mathews
PAULARIE	KNOX	Jennifer	Nicholson	Edward	Gaston	James	Jefferson
Nicole	DelMastro- Jeffery	Liz	O'Gilvie	wilbert	walker	Cinnamon	Butler
Dr. Loutrina	Staley	ALPHONSO	WALKER	Katherine	Larsha	Milah	Renee
Gray	Harris	Eshé	Armah	Brandon Smith		Minh	Pham
Noah	Ranells	Floran	Woods	Cornelius	Key	Raji	Vela
Neil	Burnette	Andre	Carter	Elmarie	Brooks	Roger	Alexander
David	Senter	John Francis	Ficara	MARY	STREIFFERT	Logan	McGhee
Ariana	Barth	Darnella	Winston	ron	hantz	Valerie	Smith
G Logan	Vega	Roderick	Collins	lytanya	brown	Ras	El
Sue Frieden		Rena	Harrell	Ebony	Woodruff	Kimathi (Daryn)	White
Darrell	Hughes	John	Frazier	Ramonda	Reed	Sauni	Daniel
Julie	Kurtz	Pamela	Hodge	Joelle	Bowers	Mollie	Beavers
Alberto	Gonzalez	Ozell	White	Michelle	Hart	Richard	Shinhoster
Damali	Wynter	Lytanya	Brown	Kim	Marcelle	claude	Gordon
Natalie	Howe	Lisa T		jonathan	clark	Sandra	Jones
Carl	Etsitty	Shantia	Warren	Adrian	Outlaw	Velisha	Jackson

First Name	Last Name	First Name	Last Name	First Name	Last Name	First Name	Last Name
Jill	Howard	Ryan	Locke	Carmen	Bettis	Edward	Gorman
Karla	Hollis	Deborah	Hendrix	Kelvin	Muhammad	Tiffany	Franklin
Maria	Goldberg	Orlando	Trainer	Natasha	Lyles	Peggy	Wolf
Ximena	Bustillo	Omolola	Turner-McCoy	Reginal	BRumfield	Emary	Smith
Allison	Johnson	Omolola	Turner-McCoy	Derrick	Burton	Allison	Johnson
Angela	Guyton						