



*Secretary Brooke L. Rollins*

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250**

**SECRETARY'S MEMORANDUM 1078-020**

**December 30, 2025**

**DIRECTIVE ON DEPARTMENTAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES**

**1. PURPOSE**

It is the policy of the U.S. Department of Agriculture ("USDA" or "Department") to establish a return to American principles and realign the Department's focus towards its original objectives of maximizing and promoting American agriculture; ensuring a safe, nutritious, and secure food supply; enhancing rural prosperity; and protecting our National Forests and Grasslands. To achieve this purpose, this memorandum establishes priorities for the research and development activities of the Department.

**2. BACKGROUND**

When President Abraham Lincoln established USDA in 1862, his vision for the Department was rooted in agricultural research and education, with the primary directive being "to acquire and to diffuse among the people of the United States useful information on subjects connected with agriculture." President Lincoln often referred to USDA as "The People's Department," recognizing that working to improve agriculture and secure the nation's food supply would prove beneficial to every citizen of our great country.

Just a few short months after establishing USDA, President Lincoln reiterated this commitment to agricultural research and education when he signed the Morrill Act of 1862. This Act granted land to each State to create institutions of higher education for training Americans in the agricultural and mechanical arts, creating what we know today as the land-grant system. The land-grant mission was later expanded to include the Cooperative Extension System via the Smith-Lever Act so that agricultural research and education could be disseminated well beyond the walls of laboratories and classrooms on campus.

From the development of conservation practices during the Dust Bowl to the successful eradication of multiple pests that threatened the viability of crops and livestock, the research coming from USDA and our land-grant system over the past 163 years has resulted in innovations that put American agriculture at the forefront of productivity.

However, the challenges of the last four years compromised American agriculture. Rising input costs from policies that drove up inflation, no new markets for commodities due to a weak trade

agenda, crippling overregulation, and the growing threat of pests and diseases—like New World Screwworm and Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza—have all resulted in increased pressure on an already fragile agricultural economy.

Further, misguided policies focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and environmental justice in USDA's programs—especially agricultural research, extension, and education activities—diverted resources away from solving the serious challenges facing American agriculture.

The United States has repeatedly proven that complex agricultural problems can be addressed and solved through bold innovation. And with growing recognition that farm security is national security, protecting and improving agricultural abundance is critically important now more than ever.

To address the wide range of current challenges facing American agriculture and enhance national security, this memorandum puts forth a focused effort to establish new priorities for research and development activities—one that clearly puts American Farmers First.

### 3. POLICY

Effective immediately, all USDA agencies and staff offices shall, to the maximum extent permitted by law and in accordance with any applicable regulations and notice and procedural requirements, focus new research and development activities on projects that prioritize:

- 1. Increasing Profitability of Farmers and Ranchers:** While research to increase productivity has allowed American farmers and ranchers to provide the safest, most abundant, and most affordable food and fiber supply, the volatility in profitability of American agriculture leads to significant uncertainty for producers. Research and development that results in increased profitability—such as reducing inputs or increasing mechanization and automation—will benefit American farmers and ranchers.
- 2. Expanding Markets and Creating New Uses of U.S. Agricultural Products:** With many producers experiencing record yields this growing season, it is more important than ever to ensure USDA is expanding markets and creating new uses for these American-grown commodities. Research and development that seeks to open new markets—such as generating science and data to resolve longstanding sanitary and phytosanitary trade barriers—or expand the utilization of these commodities in novel biobased products and bioenergy (including biofuels) will result in increased demand.
- 3. Protecting the Integrity of American Agriculture from Invasive Species:** The resurgence of New World Screwworm in Mexico, continued westward expansion of the Spotted Lanternfly, persistence of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in poultry flocks, and decimation of our domestic citrus industry due to citrus greening are just a few examples of how invasive pests and diseases threaten American agriculture and natural resources. Research and development focused on new and effective methods for

preventing, detecting, controlling, and eradicating these threats is a top priority for USDA and the security of U.S. agriculture.

- 4. Promoting Soil Health to Regenerate Long-Term Productivity of Land:** American farmers and ranchers are the original conservationists as no one stewards their land more than those whose entire livelihood, and that of their successive generations, depend on it. Research and development that promotes soil health practices, increases water-use efficiency, and reduces inputs will ensure farms and ranches remain productive for generations to come.
- 5. Improving Human Health through Precision Nutrition and Food Quality:** Substantial and increasingly robust evidence shows that a healthy diet can help people achieve and maintain good health and reduce the risk of chronic diseases throughout all stages of life. Rigorous research on precision nutrition is needed to better understand how healthy dietary patterns impact people at the individual level with the goal of more targeted nutritional recommendations to encourage healthy choices, healthy outcomes, and healthy families. Additionally, research and development on increasing the nutritional content and quality of foods will lead to increased demand for American agricultural products.

Other Federal partners also invest a significant number of resources in research that supports American agriculture. The Office of the Chief Scientist shall not only coordinate on these priorities within USDA but should also work with key partners across the Federal government to help solve the most pressing challenges facing American agriculture.

#### 4. IMPLEMENTATION

Each agency or office engaging in research and development shall be responsible for implementing and ensuring compliance with all aspects of this memorandum. As the Chief Scientist of the Department, the Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics shall advise and assist all USDA agencies and staff offices to ensure proper implementation and compliance of the priorities contained within this memorandum.

This memorandum is not a final agency action under chapter 5 of title 5, U.S. Code. This memorandum is not intended to, and does not create, any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or equity by a party against the United States, its departments, agencies, instrumentalities or entities, its officers or employees, or any other person. To the extent there is any inconsistency between the provisions of this memorandum and any Federal laws or regulations, the laws or regulations will control.

This Memorandum is effective immediately.



/s/ Brooke L. Rollins  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture