



SMALL PROCESSORS

ACTION PLAN



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My Fellow Patriots:

Small and very small meat and poultry processors are vital to rural communities, local economies, and the resilience of America's food supply. These businesses create jobs, expand market opportunities for producers, and help ensure families across the country have access to safe, affordable food. Their success strengthens our nation.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Small Processors Action Plan reflects our commitment to supporting these processors with clarity, consistency, and strong customer service while maintaining the highest food safety standards. This focused effort aligns people, policy, and process in the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) to drive meaningful improvement.

We are strengthening engagement so processors can connect more directly with expertise and support, improving policy clarity to ensure expectations are understandable and predictable, and enhancing how USDA delivers service in the field.

This is not about changing our standards. It is about improving how we serve. By reducing unnecessary complexity and increasing transparency, we are helping small processors focus on compliance, growth, and long-term resilience. USDA remains committed to listening, improving, and delivering practical solutions that protect public health while supporting rural America.



Bruce L. Harlow

Strengthen Direct Support for Small Processors

Small and very small processors often operate with limited staff while navigating complex regulatory requirements. USDA is taking on this challenge by strengthening engagement and expanding access to expertise so businesses can receive timely, practical support. By improving communication and coordination, we are making it easier for small processors to connect with the right resources.

1

Action:

Provided \$60M for a fourth round of grant funding for the Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program (MPPEP) to support small and very small processors.

2

Action:

Delivered \$20M in FY2026 to reduce overtime and holiday inspection fees and provide relief for small and very small plants.



3

Action:

Continue expanding direct access to FSIS subject matter experts through structured engagement and improved communication channels.

4

Action:

Continue enhancing “AskFSIS” and Small Plant Help Desk resources to provide clearer, more comprehensive responses.



5

Action:

Strengthen coordination with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), workforce programs, state partners, and other USDA agencies to connect processors with available resources.

Outcome:

Small processors and state partners can access information more quickly, reduce time spent navigating complexity, and focus on operating and growing their businesses.

Improve Policy Clarity and Predictability

Clear expectations are essential for small processors with limited administrative capacity. USDA is modernizing processes and clarifying guidance to reduce unnecessary friction while maintaining strong food safety protections. These improvements increase transparency and shorten resolution timelines.

Outcome:

Processors benefit from clearer expectations, faster resolution of issues, and strong food safety standards delivered with less regulatory friction.



1 **Action:** Published an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to gather input on establishment size categorizations. This will more accurately serve small and very small processors.

2 **Action:** Modernize the appeals process, including development of an electronic tracking system to improve visibility and accountability.

3 **Action:** Create an accessible web-based appeals submission option to broaden access.

4 **Action:** Continue improving availability of appeals information for all regulated establishments.

5 **Action:** Provide plain-language explanations in notices and directives.



Improve How USDA Delivers Service

Consistent, responsive service strengthens trust and improves compliance. USDA is enhancing how it operates in the field and across mission areas to ensure interactions are transparent, coordinated, and accessible for small processors.

- 1 **Action:** Added Nevada to the State Meat and Poultry Inspection Program in November 2025, bringing the total number of States participating to 30, and will continue working with additional States to continue expansion.
- 2 **Action:** Continue expanding in-person engagement and mobile leadership efforts to bring resources closer to small processors.
- 3 **Action:** Continue increasing proactive communication and modernize outreach tools.
- 4 **Action:** Update small plant communications platforms to improve access to timely information.
- 5 **Action:** Continue strengthening coordination across USDA Mission Areas to ensure aligned support.
- 6 **Action:** Partnering with the USDA Agricultural Research Service to support research needs for small and very small establishments.

Outcome:

Processors experience more direct interaction, more consistent policy application, and a regulatory environment that supports both compliance and long-term viability

USDA is fully committed to delivering clear, consistent, high-quality support to small processors by aligning people, policy, and process to strengthen engagement, improve clarity, elevate field service, and uphold the highest standards of food safety.

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