

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** All USDA Employees  
**FROM:** Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
**DATE:** January 08, 2026  
**SUBJECT:** *The Golden Age of Civil Rights*

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### Overview

The Golden Age of Civil Rights is here.

Throughout its history, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has served as both a steward of American agriculture and a leader in advancing the nation's core values. From addressing discrimination in farm lending to ensuring equal access to nutrition programs, USDA's civil rights mission stands at the forefront of those values and affects millions of Americans daily. This profound responsibility requires us to ground our civil rights work firmly in constitutional principles and legal mandates that ensure everyone who does business with USDA, regardless of background, is treated equally under the law.

In recent years, "diversity, equity, and inclusion" (DEI) and similar initiatives shifted the focus of too many away from individual rights and equal treatment under the law, and toward group-based preferences. That era has ended. As Secretary Rollins announced, under her leadership USDA has "canceled \$200 million in grants so far" related to these activities. This decisive course correction focuses our attention on the days ahead, not those behind us, and toward advancing the fundamental American values of unity, equality, meritocracy, and colorblind policies.

USDA's civil rights program enforces well-established federal laws that prohibit discriminatory treatment in both employment and programs. Secretary Rollins has led the way in demonstrating that, in this administration, civil rights enforcement means applying these laws evenhandedly and as written. In furtherance of the Secretary's principled leadership in advancing President Trump's civil rights agenda, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR) announces today the following four (4) pillars that will guide the USDA civil rights program:

#### **I. Combat Unlawful Discrimination**

USDA will enforce civil rights laws to eliminate discriminatory DEI and "diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility" (DEIA) mandates, and restore merit-based, colorblind policies across all programs and mission areas. President Trump's Executive Order 14,173 affirms that "it is the policy of the United States to protect the civil rights of all Americans and to promote individual initiative, excellence, and hard work." [\*Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity\*](#), 90 Fed. Reg. 8633 (Jan. 21, 2025). Indeed, the Executive Order makes clear that the federal government shall "terminate all discriminatory and illegal preferences" and "enforce our longstanding civil-rights laws."

Moreover, pursuant to Secretary Rollins' Day One memorandum rescinding all DEIA programs, all USDA agencies are directed to "reprioritize unity, equality, meritocracy, and color-blind policies." Memorandum from Secretary of Agriculture, [\*Prioritizing Unity, Equality, Meritocracy, and Color-Blind Policies in the United States Department of\*](#)

Agriculture, (Feb. 13, 2025). As Secretary Rollins has emphasized, “[a]ll Americans deserve equal dignity, and at this Department they will receive it.”

For a more thorough explanation of this priority area, please refer to both the Memorandum from Attorney General, Guidance for Recipients of Federal Funding Regarding Unlawful Discrimination, (July 29, 2025), and two technical assistance documents released jointly on March 19, 2025 by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) regarding Unlawful DEI-Related Discrimination in the workplace.

## **II. Protect Women and Children**

USDA will take all actions available to it to protect women and children in programs and activities receiving federal funding, and within the USDA workforce. In recognition of the biological reality that differences between the sexes sometimes, but importantly, require differentiation in policies and protections, President Trump declared it the “policy of the United States to recognize two sexes, male and female.” Executive Order 14,168, Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government, 90 Fed. Reg. 8615 (Jan. 30, 2025).

USDA will vigorously enforce the laws governing sex-based rights, protections, opportunities, and accommodations to protect employees and program participants. USDA will safeguard women and children in all programs under its jurisdiction and within its workforce, ensuring that biological sex remains the basis for protections in federally supported activities and youth programs.

## **III. Defend Religious Freedom**

USDA will rigorously enforce laws that protect its employees and customers from religious and ethnic persecution. President Trump has directed agencies to “ensure that any unlawful and improper conduct, policies, or practices that target Christians are identified, terminated, and rectified” in Executive Order 14,202, Eradicating Anti-Christian Bias, 90 Fed. Reg. 9365 (Feb. 6, 2025), and to “prosecute, remove, or otherwise hold accountable the perpetrators of unlawful anti-Semitic harassment and violence” in Executive Order 14,188, Additional Measures to Combat Anti-Semitism, 90 Fed. Reg. 8847 (Feb. 3, 2025).

Consistent with these directives, Secretary Rollins issued USDA Guidance on Federally Protected Religious Expression and Accommodations Rights, (Nov. 20, 2025), ensuring employees can exercise their faith without retaliation while maintaining a respectful and effective workplace. This guidance aligns with the U.S. Office of Personnel Management’s memorandum Protecting Religious Expression in the Federal Workplace, (July 28, 2025), which affirms each federal employee’s right to engage in religious expression consistent with the Constitution, Title VII, and other applicable law. USDA will investigate complaints of religious discrimination and harassment and will maintain a zero-tolerance policy for such behavior, ensuring that all Americans are free to participate in USDA programs without fear of persecution or bias.

#### IV. America and Americans First

USDA will prioritize American citizens in all programs and eliminate discriminatory preferences for non-citizens, consistent with the national priorities of Secretary Rollins and the guidance issued by the EEOC and the DOJ.

USDA will support the EEOC's pledge "to rigorously enforce the law to protect American workers from national origin discrimination." Press release, [\*EEOC Acting Chair Vows to Protect American Workers from Anti-American Bias\*](#), (Feb 19, 2025). In support of that pledge, the EEOC has released educational materials "to advance robust enforcement and awareness around national origin discrimination and Anti-American bias" grounded in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Press release, [\*EEOC Releases New and Updated Educational Materials on National Origin Discrimination\*](#), (Nov. 19, 2025).

Additionally, following President Trump's Executive Order 14,224, [\*Designating English as the Official Language of the United States\*](#), 90 Fed. Reg. 11363 (March 1, 2025), the DOJ announced "a coordinated effort to minimize non-essential multilingual services, redirect resources toward English-language education and assimilation, and ensure compliance with legal obligations through targeted measures where necessary." Memorandum from Attorney General, [\*Implementation of Executive Order No. 14,224: Designating English as the Official Language of the United States of America\*](#), (July 14, 2025). The OASCR will conduct reviews to determine the appropriate allocation of resources and to identify policies imposing burdensome requirements on American citizens or that otherwise sow division contrary to this administration's national assimilation goals. USDA will always put America and Americans first.

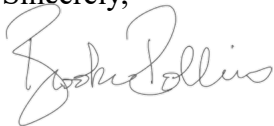
#### Conclusion

This memorandum outlines a vision for a civil rights program worthy of the People's Department and our great nation. It also chronicles some of the enormous and consequential progress this administration has already made to promote President Trump's civil rights agenda to advance equal opportunity, nondiscrimination, and meritocracy. We will continue to build on this historic success.

I call on every USDA employee to embrace this vision with conviction and courage, and to work collaboratively to implement these four pillars across all mission areas. I commit to you that our civil rights program will not be reactive or merely ceremonial in nature; it will be active and principled. Together, we will build a legacy of respect for the individual rights of all Americans.

The Golden Age is our opportunity to lead a course correction for our country in many respects. I am deeply honored to serve alongside all of you as we seize this opportunity to advance fundamental American values at USDA.

Sincerely,



Brooke L. Rollins  
Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture



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