

**Statement by  
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Department of Agriculture  
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Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs and Federal Management  
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Heitkamp and distinguished members of this Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the actions the Department of Agriculture (USDA) has taken, and will be taking, to implement the President's direction on improving the efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability of USDA. I have over 25 years invested in the Department, and a lifetime appreciation of the importance of its mission and the hard work needed to ensure American agriculture continues to be the envy of the world.

Arguably, no other Federal agency has more direct interface with Americans than does USDA. In the Food and Nutrition Services alone, we serve one in four Americans every year, including more than 30.6 million children per day who benefit from a healthy meal at school and the 42.8 million participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program each month. We touch millions of Americans through a host of other programs, as well. If we take into account our farm services, rural development, conservation, extension and education programs, we touch every single facet of American life. If we are to do the best for our producers and feed the world by 2050, we must not only continue to provide top rate customer service, but we must also develop strong partnerships so that we can face our challenges together. Together with our 100,000 plus employees spread across thousands of locations around the United States and the globe, the Secretary is committed to making USDA the best run agency in the Federal government.

### **Vision for Agriculture**

Though Secretary Perdue was one of the most recent cabinet members confirmed, he did not delay in communicating with employees, stakeholders and Congress his vision for USDA. The Secretary's motto is to "do right and feed everyone." In doing this, the Secretary has said he will be guided by four principles. First, he will maximize the ability of the men and women of

America's agriculture and agribusiness sector to create jobs, to produce and sell the foods and fiber that feed and clothe the world, and to reap the earned reward of their labor. It should be the aim of the American government to remove every obstacle and give farmers, ranchers, and producers every opportunity to prosper. Second, he will prioritize customer service every day for American taxpayers and consumers. They will expect, and have every right to demand, that their government conduct the people's business efficiently, effectively, and with the utmost integrity. Third, as Americans expect a safe and secure food supply, USDA will continue to serve in the critical role of ensuring the food we put on the table to feed our families meets the strict safety standards we've established. And, last but certainly not least, we must preserve the land—and we must pursue clean air and water. Stewardship is not optional for farmers, producers and ranchers. American agricultural bounty comes directly from all the resources used to produce food and fiber. Today, that land and those resources sustain more than 320 million Americans and countless millions more around the globe.

### **Organizing for Reform**

As a result of Executive Order (EO) 13781 and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) memorandum M-17-22, "Comprehensive Plan for Reforming the Federal Government and Reducing the Federal Civilian Workforce", USDA acted to ensure accountability for reform efforts. The Secretary established a reform task force consisting of representatives from each of the Department's program mission areas, and staff offices. This task force will be responsible for leading the development of USDA's reform plan and will be accountable directly to the Office of the Secretary for its implementation.

### **Reorganization Steps Underway**

In addition to not delaying in communicating his priorities, Secretary Perdue acted quickly to propose a reorganization of USDA to establish an Under Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs, consistent with direction from the 2014 Farm Bill. The newly established Under Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs will be responsible for coordinating agency efforts at opening new and protecting current markets. This new position will strengthen USDA's ability to ensure a level playing field for U.S. farmers and ranchers in the global marketplace. Moreover, the Under Secretary for Trade will bring new energy and

support to our interagency relationships with the Department of Commerce and the U.S. Trade Representative.

As part of that reorganization, and touching on the equally important priority of customer service, the Secretary also proposed to combine the critical functions in our Farm Service Agency, Risk Management Agency, and Natural Resources Conservation Service under a single umbrella to ensure our services to farmers and ranchers are efficient, streamlined, and deliver the results that our producers expect and need. Through the newly created Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation, our customers will have a one-stop shop, with common leadership and one voice, to provide the services they need. The Secretary has said that the walls are coming down, and our employees will be empowered to work together to serve USDA's customers. The reorganization also proposed to elevate our Rural Development programs to report directly to the Secretary in recognition of the need to help promote rural prosperity. The economic vitality of small towns across America is crucial to the future of the agriculture economy, and we will be leveraging USDA's expertise in rural development as the Administration works to increase investments in America's infrastructure. In addition, combining farm conservation programs with farm safety net programs will allow the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment to focus more attention on the crucial task of managing our national forests and to ensure federal land managers are good and helpful neighbors to surrounding private land-owners.

In addition to complying with the statutory requirement to inform the Appropriations Committees of the reorganization to establish an Under Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs, USDA is providing stakeholders an opportunity to comment on the proposed reorganization through a notice published in the Federal Register soliciting comments. The public can also provide comments and ideas on reform efforts for all of USDA as part of the government-wide reorganization by utilizing the White House reform comment process.

### **The Department's Next Steps**

The Department intends to utilize the statutory requirement to develop a new strategic plan through its reform task force and as part of the fiscal year 2019 budget process and will be asking USDA agencies to: analyze how each of their programs aligns to the Secretary's new strategic goals; rank and prioritize programs; analyze their organizational program delivery

structure and field structure to determine whether it needs to be updated; analyze and identify appropriate staffing levels; and identify proposals in the four categories identified in OMB's guidance memo (eliminate activities; restructure or merge; improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness; and workforce management).

In addition, as you may know, the President recently announced the creation of the Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity. With USDA as chair, we will examine, consider and take actions to address current barriers to economic prosperity and the welfare of communities in rural America, including how innovation, modern technology, and infrastructure play a critical role in fully bringing communities into the 21st century. This multi-department group will find ways to improve regulatory flexibility and provide relief for farms and small businesses. We will examine how the Federal government does business and how that impacts food and fiber production and rural communities. And, we will ensure that decisions and actions are founded in principles of sound science and validated facts. The questions we are asking at USDA as part of our own regulatory reform efforts, and that we will be asking the Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity, are fundamental to this process: How do we impact jobs and job creation; are we doing things that make sense; do the costs outweigh the benefits; and, is there a better way or better place we can do it?

## **Conclusion**

In closing, over the next several months USDA will be working within the Administration to develop our reform plan and contributing to the government-wide plan that will be released with the President's fiscal year 2019 budget. The Secretary is committed to improving the effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of the Department and making it the best run agency in the Federal government. Reorganizing USDA and continuing reform efforts will not be easy, but we have outstanding men and women working at USDA who are committed to providing leadership on agriculture, food, natural resources, rural infrastructure, nutrition, and related issues through facts-based, data-driven, and customer-focused decisions.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today and for your continued support of USDA programs. I am pleased to answer any questions you have for me.