

For: State and County Offices

Advancing Equity at FSA

Approved by: Administrator



1 Overview

A Background

Executive Order 13589 (EO 13985) established guidance for agencies to advance racial equity and support for underserved communities through agency programs. In response, USDA took immediate action with a series of activities aimed to meaningfully listen to internal and external stakeholders, staff, and producers, and understand where barriers to accessing USDA programs and services exist and assess data to identify opportunities to advance equity.

The FSA Equity Action plan was developed to support both USDA and FPAC Equity plans to provide all farmers and ranchers an equal chance of success and prosperity.

B Purpose

This notice provides:

- definitions and examples to understand key equity terminology
- links to recent USDA equity actions
- information about FSA’s new Equity Statement, Action Plan, and Equity Officer.

C Contact

If there are questions about this notice:

- State Offices will contact J. Latrice Hill, FSA Equity Officer
- County Offices will contact their District Directors.

Disposal Date	Distribution
January 1, 2023	All FSA employees; State Offices relay to County Offices

2 Understanding Equity

A Key Terms and Definitions

- **Accessibility** means the design, construction, development, and maintenance of facilities, information and communication technology, programs, and services so that all people, including people with disabilities, can fully and independently use them. Accessibility includes the provision of accommodations and modifications to ensure equal access to employment and participation in activities for people with disabilities, the reduction or elimination of physical and attitudinal barriers to equitable opportunities, a commitment to ensuring that people with disabilities can independently access every outward-facing and internal activity or electronic space, and the pursuit of best practices such as universal design.
- **Diversity** is representation of different racial and ethnic groups, LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities, women across the workplace and all customers we serve. While diversity is primarily a quantitative measure of representation, a fundamental understanding of diversity includes diversity of thought and perspective.
- **Equity** is the consistent and systematic, fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, Asian Americans, and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons, persons with disabilities, persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.
- **Example of FSA Equity** means when each producer who applies to an FSA program or for a service receives the resources (information, knowledge, payments, access to programs, support, etc.) they need despite their economic, racial, ethnic, gender, social, or religious background, identity, or status. This ensures that outcomes in the conditions of well-being are improved for marginalized groups, lifting outcomes for all. Equity is a measure of justice.
- **Equality** is measured in sameness. Equality focuses on everyone getting the same opportunity but often ignores the realities of historical exclusion and power differentials among marginalized but especially between racial and economic groups.
- **Example of FSA equality** is when producers are all treated the same and have access to similar resources. While this is often seen as fairness, it tends to produce inequitable outcomes and create rifts in program delivery and access.

2 Understanding Equity (Continued)

A Key Terms and Definitions (Continued)

Equality uses the same strategies for everyone, but because people are situated differently, they are not likely to get the same outcomes. Equity uses differentiated and targeted strategies to address different needs to get to just outcomes. Equality-focused strategies do not work for, or benefit, everyone. Just as this is true in education – i.e. teachers adopt different methods for different kinds of learners – the same is true in agriculture, communication with producers, and service to all.

- **Inclusion** means ensuring diverse individuals are included and participate in decision-making processes at all levels of the Agency. Inclusion is measured by the quality of representation, authentic representation, full access, empowered participation, true belonging, and power-sharing. Inclusion is a qualitative measure of representation and participation.

Note: You can have diversity without inclusion (e.g. tokenism, assimilation). However, you cannot have inclusion without diversity. Focusing on inclusion gets you further than just focusing on diversity.

- **Racial equity** is a process of eliminating racial disparities and improving outcomes for everyone. It is the intentional and continual practice of changing policies, practices, systems, and structures by prioritizing measurable change in the lives of people of color.
- **Underserved Communities** as defined by EO 13985 are populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied the full opportunity to participate in various aspects of economic, social, and civic life.

B USDA Equity Actions

USDA is making equity a priority by increasing equity in agriculture, building a more diverse USDA workforce, and lowering barriers for undeserved communities. USDA's commitment is outlined in the 2022-24 Equity plan developed with input from each mission area in the department. The USDA Equity Action plan may be accessed online at <https://www.usda.gov/equity/action-plan>.

To help shape change at USDA, an Equity Commission was established comprised of external stakeholders who continue to conduct a thorough review of USDA policies and programs and provide the Secretary with a set of recommendations on how the Department can advance equity.

2 Understanding Equity (Continued)

B USDA Equity Actions (Continued)

This 15-member independent commission is charged with evaluating USDA programs and services and will recommend how we can reduce barriers for accessing them. Using this information, USDA will make needed changes so that our programs, services, and decisions reflect the values of equity and inclusion. This will ensure everyone has a fair shot at resources, begin closing the racial wealth gap and address longstanding inequities in agriculture.

Information about the USDA Equity Commission can be found online at <https://www.usda.gov/equity-commission>.

3 Equity and FSA

A FSA Equity Statement

FSA recognizes racial equity as a driving force and is committed to advancing equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and accountability in all programs and service delivery.

FSA:

- **embraces** the unique qualities of each individual and believes all must have equal access and equitable service.
- **recognizes** equity as a driving force and stands committed to advancing equity, diversity, inclusion, access, and accountability in all programs and services.

Copies of the agency's Equity statement will be issued to FSA offices.

B FSA Equity Plan and Activities

FSA's FY 2022-2024 Equity plan incorporates the USDA Equity Plan and FPAC Equity Action Plan with agency-specific equity initiatives and goals (hiring, recruitment, program policies).

FPAC Mission Area obtained input from all agencies in the mission area (FSA, NRCS, RMA, and the FPAC Business Center) to support the FPAC Equity Action Plan. Implemented activities identified for these goals will result in the following outcomes.

- Reducing barriers to hiring and program access.
- Establishing and building trust with producers.
- Investing in underserved communities and Justice 40 communities.

3 Equity and FSA (Continued)

B FSA Equity Plan and Activities (Continued)

A copy of both plans may be accessed on the FSA Equity intranet site at <https://inside.fsa.usda.gov/operations/administrators-office/equity/index> or publicly at www.fsa.usda.gov/equity.

C Additional Agency Equity Efforts

FSA has hired its first full time Equity Officer in the Office of the Administrator. The duties of FSA's Equity Officer include:

- providing equity in oversight in programs, initiatives, and services managed and implemented by DAFLP, DAFP, DAFO, OMS, and Outreach
- liaising with equity stakeholders, working groups, communities, and advocates
- improving and monitoring FSA's workforce demographics
- ensuring program procedures and policies are equitably aligned
- implementing a quality control system to evaluate effectiveness of initiatives
- implementing equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and accountability training
- evaluating data/program information disseminated by and through FSA
- monitoring/conducting accountability reviews to ensure equitable delivery in FSA's programs and services.