



CLIMATE, FOOD  
+ AG DIALOGUE

July 30, 2020

Deputy Secretary Stephen Censky  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Washington, D.C., 20510

Dear Deputy Secretary Censky,

On behalf of the [Climate, Food, and Ag Dialogue](#) (CFAD), we thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the strategy for USDA's Agricultural Innovation Agenda. The Climate, Food, and Ag Dialogue is a diverse and pragmatic group of food and ag leaders working to promote federal action on climate change consistent with our Guiding Principles (please see attached). Our members are producers, supply chain leaders, and civil society organizations who recognize that climate change demands ambitious and durable federal policy solutions that should be inclusive of the agricultural sector.

USDA has a critical role to play in advancing an Agricultural Innovation Agenda that recognizes the threat of climate change and designs research agendas to advance our understanding of key climate solutions. Climate change requires mitigation and adaptation strategies that engage the agricultural sector and are informed by rigorous scientific research and data analysis. USDA is uniquely positioned to be a key player in building a knowledge base and supporting durable climate solutions that advance farm profitability and resilience. This includes conducting research to lay the foundation for high quality ecosystem services markets and/or other federal incentive programs that encourage farms to reduce emissions and sequester carbon. USDA's research should support the development of climate mitigation and adaptation strategies for farms of all types, sizes, and geographies in order to allow the full diversity of U.S. agriculture to participate in climate solutions.

We believe that better understanding the interactions between conservation practices, farm resilience, and climate benefits is key to laying the groundwork for climate policies that are inclusive of the food and agriculture sector, mitigative and adaptive, science-based, outcome-driven, and risk reducing. This can be accomplished through designing a rigorous research agenda to explore climate change solutions and executing this agenda in partnership with public research institutions that are home to a vast resource of agricultural researchers ready to do this vital work. Partnering with land grant institutions, including 1890 institutions, to conduct this research is an important way that USDA can ensure that the research it funds is more inclusive and representative of and will benefit diverse communities and socially disadvantaged farmers.

To ensure that U.S. agriculture is part of adaptive and mitigative strategies to address climate change, USDA should invest in and elevate the work of existing functions within the agency, including but not limited to, the regional USDA Climate Hubs and the NRCS Soil Health Division. Ensuring effective cross-agency communication, collaboration, and data sharing is key to effectively utilizing USDA expertise to implement and achieve an agency-wide, climate-smart research and action agenda. While developing new technologies is important, it is only part of the equation. Ensuring that USDA agencies have the capacity to implement the Agricultural Innovation Agenda is equally critical and needs attention and investment.

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We appreciate your leadership in developing the Agricultural Innovation Agenda and look forward to working with USDA to advance climate solutions that tap the innovative potential of American food and agriculture and make our food system more resilient to the impacts of a changing climate.

Sincerely,

The Climate, Food, and Agriculture Dialogue (CFAD)

## Guiding Principles for Federal Policy on Climate Change and Food Systems

Climate change demands ambitious and durable federal policy solutions that are commensurate with the urgency and scale of the problem. These solutions, which may entail costs, must provide transparency and promote affordability while distributing costs and benefits in such a way that promotes equity. The scientific consensus that the climate is changing at an increasingly rapid pace is incontrovertible. The timeframe for taking meaningful action to avoid catastrophic impacts is running short. Adherence to the following principles will help ensure the inclusion of food and agriculture in climate policies that reduce carbon emissions and curb climate impacts. Federal policy solutions must be:

1. **Bipartisan and broadly supported** – To achieve meaningful action, policy solutions must be broadly bipartisan and widely supported by Americans.
2. **Food and agriculture inclusive** – Climate legislation must work with – not against – the diverse interests that make up this critically important sector of the U.S. economy, regardless of farm or ranch scale, location, type, ownership structure, or supply chain position.
3. **Attentive to rural people and places** – A robust food and agriculture system underpins the wellbeing of all communities.
4. **Mitigative and adaptive** – Climate policies should support both mitigation of greenhouse gases and adaptation to the effects of climate change. The food and agriculture sectors are affected by and must be an integral part of any strategy for addressing climate change.
5. **Science-based** – Strategies for mitigating and adapting to climate change should be informed by rigorous scientific research and data analysis. This includes developing protocols and methodologies to quantify soil health and carbon sequestration that can drive investment and decision-making at multiple scales.
6. **Market-based- and outcome-driven** – Climate policies should provide economic incentives commensurate to contributions to climate mitigation and improved ecosystem services, including rewarding early action. These incentives may include market-based solutions that reward performance.
7. **Risk reducing** – Efforts should support farmers, ranchers, and supply chain actors in determining the best long-term strategies to mitigate economic and environmental risk and bolster resilience.