



## USDA Agency Descriptions

USDA provides leadership on food, agriculture, and natural resources and touches the life of every American. Secretary Vilsack and the USDA are working to promote a sustainable, safe, sufficient, and nutritious food supply; ensure that America leads the global fight against climate change; and revitalize rural communities by expanding economic opportunities. Below are descriptions of all the USDA agencies, explaining the multitude of ways they touch the lives of the American people every day and in every way.

**Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)** administers programs that facilitate efficient, fair marketing of U.S. agricultural products, including food, fiber, and specialty crops. USDA developed and oversees the National Organic Program. You can be assured when you see the *USDA Certified Organic* seal that your food conforms to consistent, national standards. More info: [www.ams.usda.gov](http://www.ams.usda.gov) or (202) 720-8998.

**Agricultural Research Service (ARS)** is the principal in-house scientific research agency of the USDA. The agency is responsible for developing solutions to a wide range of problems related to food and agriculture – ensuring high-quality, safe food and other agricultural products; assessing the nutritional needs of Americans; sustaining a competitive agricultural economy; enhancing the natural resource base and the environment; and providing economic opportunities for rural citizens, communities, and society as a whole. More info: [www.ars.usda.gov](http://www.ars.usda.gov) or (301) 504-1636.

**Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)** protects the health of livestock, poultry, and crops from foreign diseases and pests. APHIS also helps defend the environment from invasive species, promotes animal welfare, regulates the movement of genetically engineered organisms, ensures safe trade, limits agricultural damage caused by wildlife, and protects natural resources while providing for public health and safety. More info: [www.aphis.usda.gov](http://www.aphis.usda.gov) or (301) 734-7799.

**Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP)** works to improve the health of Americans by establishing the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and promoting nutritional guidance and education. Go to [www.MyPyramid.gov](http://www.MyPyramid.gov) for a network of nutrition tools, including tips on how to make smart choices from every food group, find a balance between food and physical activity, and stay within your daily calorie needs. The CNPP web site also offers personalized eating plans and interactive tools to help you plan and assess your food choices. More info: [www.cnpp.usda.gov](http://www.cnpp.usda.gov) or (703) 305-7600.

**Economic Research Service (ERS)** is USDA's principal social science research agency. ERS communicates research results and socioeconomic indicators via briefings, analyses for policymakers and their staffs, market analysis updates, and major reports. ERS supports the goals of USDA with objective analysis, addressing issues that cover the food sector, nutrition and food safety, the farm sector, agricultural trade, rural development, and the environment. More info: [www.ers.usda.gov](http://www.ers.usda.gov) or (202) 694-5050.

**Farm Service Agency (FSA)** ensures the well-being of American agriculture, the environment, and the American public through farm commodity programs: farm ownership, operating, and emergency loans; conservation and environmental programs; emergency and disaster assistance; and domestic and international food assistance. FSA programs are delivered through an extensive network of field offices. More info: [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov) or (202) 720-7163.

**Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)** increases food security and reduces hunger in partnership with cooperating organizations by providing children and low-income people access to food, a healthful diet, and nutrition education. SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) which issues monthly benefits on electronic benefit transfer cards that can be used to buy food at authorized food retailers, is the cornerstone of FNS' nutrition assistance programs. FNS administers 15 nutrition assistance programs that include SNAP, school meals and WIC that benefit low-income people and the agricultural community. More info: [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov) or (703) 305-2281.

**Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)** is the public health agency responsible for ensuring that the Nation's commercial supply of meat, poultry, and egg products is safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged. More info: [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov) or (202) 720-9113.

**Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)** works to improve foreign market access for U.S. products, build new markets, improve the competitive position of U.S. agriculture in the global marketplace, and provide food aid and technical assistance to foreign countries. FAS has the primary responsibility for USDA's international activities—market development, trade agreements and negotiations, and the collection and analysis of statistics and market information. It also administers USDA's export credit guarantee and food aid programs, and helps increase income and food availability in developing nations by mobilizing expertise for agriculturally led economic growth. More info: [www.fas.usda.gov](http://www.fas.usda.gov) or (202) 720-7115.

**Forest Service (FS)** manages 193 million acres of national forests and grasslands, and approximately 17,000 recreation sites; maintains 153,000 miles of trails; and has hosted 178.6 million visitors and 59,000 volunteers per year for activities on national forests and grasslands. The National Forests provide 18 percent of the nation's drinking water supply. The FS is the largest forestry research organization in the world. FS also provides technical and financial assistance to help rural and urban citizens, including private landowners, care for forests, watersheds, and rangelands in their communities. More info: [www.fs.fed.us](http://www.fs.fed.us) or (202) 205-1680.

**Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA)** facilitates the marketing of livestock, poultry, meat, cereals, oilseeds, and related agricultural products and promotes fair and competitive trading practices for the overall benefit of consumers and American agriculture. More info: [www.gipsa.usda.gov](http://www.gipsa.usda.gov) or (202) 720-5091.

**Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA)** facilitates the marketing of livestock, poultry, meat, cereals, oilseeds, and related agricultural products and promotes fair and competitive trading practices for the overall benefit of consumers and American agriculture. The agency promotes fair business practices and competitive marketing environments for livestock, meat, and poultry under the Packers and Stockyards Act and helps move U.S. grain through the marketplace by providing information that accurately and consistently describes the quality and quantity of grain being bought and sold. More info: [www.gipsa.usda.gov](http://www.gipsa.usda.gov) or (202) 720-5091.

**National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)** collects and disseminates a vast array of data on every facet of U.S. agriculture, including production, economics, demographics, and the environment. The agency conducts hundreds of surveys each year and, through the Agricultural Statistics Board, issues nearly 500 national reports annually. NASS also conducts the Census of Agriculture every five years, providing the only source of uniform, comprehensive agricultural data for every county in the nation. More info: [www.nass.usda.gov](http://www.nass.usda.gov) or [www.agcensus.usda.gov](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov). Ag Statistics Hotline: (800) 727-9540.

**Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** helps people help the land through scientifically based, locally led voluntary conservation. Created in response to the disastrous Dust Bowl of the 1930s, NRCS is the lead Federal agency in conserving and improving natural resources on privately-owned lands. NRCS provides technical and financial assistance that make land more productive and the environment healthier through reduced soil erosion; improved soil, water, and air quality; energy conservation; restored woodlands and wetlands; enhanced fish and wildlife habitat; and reduced upstream flooding. NRCS works in partnership with farmers and ranchers, communities, and State, local, and Tribal governments. NRCS has approximately 11,000 employees nationwide and has offices in nearly every county in America. For more info: [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov) or (202) 720-3210.

**National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)** invests in science by providing federal funding and leadership to the Land-Grant University System and other partner organizations who conduct research, education, and extension projects to solve key problems and improve lives. The scope of NIFA's investment runs from animal and plant genomics to air and water quality, rural and community development, human nutrition and financial planning. NIFA is home to the National 4-H Headquarters and supports Cooperative Extension training such as the Master Gardener program. More info: [www.nifa.usda.gov](http://www.nifa.usda.gov) or (202) 720-7441.

**Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)** provides overall leadership, coordination, and direction for USDA's civil rights programs, including matters related to program delivery, compliance, and equal employment opportunity. OASCR ensures compliance with applicable federal civil rights laws, and has five subcomponents: Office of Adjudication; Office of Compliance, Policy and Training; Early Resolution and Conciliation Division; Data and Records Management Division; and Program Planning and Accountability Division. OASCR's work provides a transparent environment within which complaints can be efficiently processed as well as meeting program and employment statutorily mandated reporting requirements. More info: [www.ascr.usda.gov](http://www.ascr.usda.gov) or (202) 720-3808.

**Office of the Chief Economist (OCE)** advises the Secretary on the economic implications of policies and programs affecting the U.S. food and fiber system and rural areas as well as coordinates, reviews, and approves the Department's commodity and farm sector forecasts. OCE staff also coordinates USDA's Agricultural Outlook Forum, which has been hosted annually since 1923. More info: [www.usda.gov/oce](http://www.usda.gov/oce) or (202) 720-5447.

**Risk Management Agency (RMA)** administers the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC) programs and promotes national welfare by improving the economic stability of agriculture through a secure system of crop insurance and risk management tools. RMA meets the crop insurance and risk management needs of the Nation's small and limited-resource farmers and ranchers through a network of public and private-sector partners. More info: [www.rma.usda.gov](http://www.rma.usda.gov) or (202) 690-2803.

**Rural Development (RD)** offers rural communities a broad array of financial, technical, and educational resources. It encourages the establishment and growth of rural businesses and cooperatives to provide good jobs and diverse markets. Rural Development provides financing to start or expand rural businesses, for single-family homes and multi-family housing developments, as well as for essential community facilities, such as municipal buildings, daycare centers, fire fighting and law enforcement equipment, etc. It also helps finance the development of electric, telephone, telecommunications, and water and wastewater infrastructures to create safe, modern, affordable utilities. More info: [www.rurdev.usda.gov](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov) or (800) 670-6553.

More info on the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act: <http://www.usda.gov/recovery>

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