U.S. Department of Agriculture

Annual Evaluation Plan
Fiscal Year 2025

In Accordance with the

Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018

Contents

About the U.S. Department of Agriculture

On May 15, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed legislation to establish the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA or the Department). Two and a half years later in his final message to Congress, Lincoln called USDA "The People's Department." At that time, about half of all Americans lived on farms, compared with about two percent today. But through its work on food, agriculture, economic development, science, natural resource conservation, and a host of other issues, USDA continues to fulfill Lincoln's vision—serving millions of Americans every day. The agriculture and food industry contributes $1.1 trillion to the U.S. domestic product and represents nearly 11% of total U.S. employment. Furthermore, USDA over the years has gained more authorities to expand its support not only in agriculture but the support infrastructure that give all producers better access to market and its surrounding communities and natural resources to also thrive.

Today, USDA is comprised of 29 agencies organized under eight Mission Areas and 16 Staff Offices. The department employs nearly 100,000 persons who serve the American people at more than 6,000 locations across the country and abroad (see USDA Organization Chart).

Mission, Vision, and Core Values

USDA Mission: To serve all Americans by providing effective, innovative, science-based public policy leadership in agriculture, food and nutrition, natural resource protection and management, rural development, and related issues with a commitment to deliverable equitable and climate-smart opportunities that inspire and help America thrive.

USDA Vision: An equitable and climate-smart food and agriculture economy that protects and improves the health, nutrition, and quality of life of all Americans; yields healthy land, forests, and clean water; helps rural America thrive; and feeds the world.

USDA Core Values

- *Respect and Dignity:* We treat all people with courtesy and respect, and we value the inherent dignity of every individual.
- *Equity and Inclusion:* We seek to end discrimination in all forms, wherever it exists, and expand services and opportunities to underserved people and communities across America, starting with our workforce.
- *Trust and Integrity:* We act in a manner that is deserving of the public's trust and with the utmost integrity in everything we do as public servants.
- *Service and Results:* We listen to our internal and external customers and actively incorporate their ideas on how to best reach our diverse customers and deliver service that significantly and positively impacts the lives of all Americans.
- *Science Leadership:* We base our decisions and policy on science and data that are reliable, timely, relevant, and free from political interference.

Executive Summary

Background

In accordance with the Foundations or Evidence-Based Policymaking Act (Evidence Act of 2018), the Department is pleased to present USDA's FY 2025 Annual Evaluation Plan. This Plan includes our most significant program evaluations that will be active in FY 2025. It also includes, for the first time, a sample of other evidence-building efforts that contribute to the department's ability to use evidence in decision making.

The Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA) leads USDA in Performance, Evaluation, Evidence, and Risk Management and chairs the USDA Performance, Evidence, Evaluation, and Risk Committee. All Mission Areas and Departmental Administration are represented on the committee, as well as other key evaluation partners. The broad representation facilitates buy-in across the Department, augments technical expertise, and creates a greater diversity of perspectives. Additionally, OBPA has a close partnership with the Chief Data Officer and Statistical Official, which provides insight and advisement on data access, data quality, and statistical methods.

Stakeholder Engagement

OBPA engages its internal evidence and evaluation stakeholders on a continuous basis, including to inform the development of the FY 2025 Evaluation Plan. USDA's internal stakeholders are organized into the following standard hierarchy to ensure that all levels are appropriately engaged and to provide clarity around roles and responsibilities:

- *Strategic Direction:* Responsible for setting the Department's strategic direction (Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and Sub-Cabinet officials);
- *Departmental Operations:* Responsible for supporting strategic implementation efforts in alignment with the Department's Goals and objectives (staff offices such as OBPA, Human Resources, Office of the Chief Information Officer, etc.); and
- *Mission Delivery and Performance:* Responsible for aligning Agency strategic directions and resources with the Department-wide strategic directions and for delivering statutorily required missions, functions, programs, projects, etc. (all USDA Mission Areas and Agencies).

OBPA engages stakeholders through the Performance, Evidence, Evaluation, and Risk (PEER) Committee and a subgroup, the Evidence and Evaluation Working Group. The PEER includes representation from across USDA Mission Areas and Agencies and engages in dynamic dialogue of planning, performance, evidence, and data, including identifying "significant" planned evaluations. In addition to building a strong community of practice, the PEER serves as a conduit between OBPA and Mission Area and Agency leadership. The PEER Committee and the working group are spaces where staff from the mission areas and staff offices share their evidence and evaluation work. OBPA's weekly office hours are an opportunity for members of the community to ask questions of and provide feedback to OBPA staff on how it can improve its planning and execution processes.

Significant Evaluations

Goal 1. Combat Climate Change to Support America's Working Lands, Natural Resources, and Communities

Evaluation of Rural Development Programs and Climate Impacts (RD)	
• To what extent do RD programs help reduce the risks of climate impacts for rural communities? • How do RD programs increase the resilience, adaptation, and mitigation of rural communities to climate impacts?	
Background and Rationale	Rural and Tribal communities are disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change. RD is committed to increasing rural community resilience to climate change, securing environmental justice, and spurring economic opportunity for disadvantaged communities that have been historically marginalized, overburdened by pollution, and have experienced underinvestment in essential services.
Completion Date	FY 2026
Technical Approach and Methodologies	These evaluations will focus on the collective benefits of RD programs, including the funding provided by the Inflation Reduction Act to expand the Rural Energy for America Program, Higher Blends Infrastructure Incentive Program, and the two new electric programs, Powering Affordable Clean Energy program and Empowering Rural America program. We will assess mitigation and resilience of rural communities against climate change as the specific programs pertain to climate mitigation and adaptation goals. Administrative data on climate mitigation and adaptation set asides and projects will be used to measure RD support. For outcome variables, data such as measures of household capacity for renewable energy production and consumption, risk index for natural hazards will be used. These evaluations will utilize multiple regression and instrumental variable analysis.
Data Sources	Administrative data on major RD programs will be used in combination with other external data available from the Environmental Protection Agency, Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool, Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Risk Index for Natural Hazards, Bureau of the Census, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and ERS. The various datasets will be combined by community geography.
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	The biggest challenge will be to identify all outcomes variables and associated covariates at the community geography level without disclosure issues. Ensuring climate impact metrics accurately represent the environmental hazards experienced by rural communities and the resulting barriers to equity and environmental justice.

Use and Dissemination	The findings will be shared throughout the RD Mission Area and wider USDA community, and larger federal community through the dissemination of reports and presentations. The findings will be delivered in a manner that is most appropriate for the audience. In addition to sharing the findings internally, the evaluation studies will be used to generate peer-reviewed and outreach publications and conference presentations.

Goal 2. Ensure America's Agricultural System is Equitable, Resilient, and Prosperous

Evaluation of Rural Development's Investments in Food Supply Chains (RD)	
• How much has RD invested in food supply chains over the past five years and through which mechanisms (loans, grants, and technical assistance), including investments made during the COVID-19 pandemic? • To what extent have these programs met their goals and objectives and contributed to each stage of the supply chain? • What types and magnitude of outcomes and benefits did the programs generate for producers, processors, aggregators and distributors, and consumers? What types and magnitude of benefits were realized by socially disadvantaged farmers and female, Tribal, and Veteran farmers. • To what extent can observed changes in the relevant food supply chains be attributed to RD's investments?	
Background and Rationale	USDA has long invested in local and regional food systems, however the pandemic made clear that more needs to be done to withstand future pandemics, cyberattacks, and other threats that have hobbled portions of the food supply system in recent years. As a response, in 2022, USDA launched the Food Transformation Initiative to create a more distributed and fair food system with fewer steps from farm to fork, provide options for small- and medium-sized producers to create value-added products to sell locally and regionally, and support new economic opportunities and job creation in rural communities. The U.S. food and agricultural system is highly concentrated, both geographically and commercially. Most food consumed by Americans is grown on large farms and aggregated, processed, and distributed by a few multinational companies. While the U.S. food system is a highly efficient one, COVID-19 exposed the risks of a centralized system. Several preliminary studies have found the crippling effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on food supply chains across the United States and the world exposed the risks of a highly concentrated food system that has worked to the detriment of the small- and medium-sized farmers who serve local and regional food systems. (Voss 2020 https://uca.edu/business/2020/04/28/is-the-food-supply-chain-breaking-down/ , Hendrickson 2020 https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10460-020-10092-y , https://rules.house.gov/sites/republicans.rules118.house.gov).

	Since 2022, RD has invested $1.15 billion to transform the American food supply chain through the Food Supply Chain Guaranteed Loan Program, the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, the Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program and the Meat and Poultry Intermediary Lending Program. The overall purpose of this evaluation is to provide an evidence-based assessment of the impact of RD's programs on local and regional food supply chains. This review will include a combination of formative, performance, and impact evaluation methods depending on the availability of data and the age of the program.
Completion Date	FY 2027
Technical Approach and Methodologies	Rural Development is awarding $750,000 through a cooperative agreement to University of Kentucky Research Foundation. Through this agreement, the Community and Economic Development of Initiative of Kentucky and the Food Connection within the Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment will assess USDA Rural Development programs, including the four programs listed above. They will focus on how well the programs are creating market opportunities for small- and mid-sized farmers and independent agricultural businesses throughout the food supply chain. Through this partnership, USDA will identify the extent to which the investments support local and regional food supply chains have: • Created a more resilient, diverse, and secure food system. • Resulted in more fair and accessible food systems with more and better market opportunities. • Led to more economically viable farm and food businesses and healthy rural communities. The research team will deploy a mixed methods approach to conduct a comprehensive evaluation that captures both formative and performance measures that will allow RD to both accurately tell the story of the impact of its investments as well as better understand the factors that contribute to grantees meeting program goals. The research team will utilize quantitative and qualitative data from historical project reports integrated with key informant interviews with project leaders, up to five focus groups with producers, and a supplemental grantee survey with a view toward addressing the research questions above.
Data Sources	Data collected by RD's program offices, field surveys, research studies, and other USDA survey data related to local and regional markets and small- and medium-sized farmers and Bureau of the Census, and Economic Research Services (ERS)

Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	Comparative studies, such as this one, depend on the availability of a body of valid and consistent data across multiple programs. This study will tap into the research and expertise of the agricultural research community, centered largely in the land-grant university system to compile a valid and reliable body of evidence.
Use and Dissemination	This evaluation will provide USDA an evidence-based understanding of how and to what extent these programs have achieved their goal of a more resilient food supply chain and created market opportunities for small- and mid-size farmers and independent agricultural businesses up and down the food supply chain. The body of evidence and findings produced through this evaluation will guide the department as it takes these programs into the future.

Goal 3: Foster an Equitable and Competitive Marketplace for All Agricultural Producers

Impact of AMS' Local and Regional Food System Programs on Producers and Markets (AMS)	
• How and to what extent does the Local Agriculture Market Programs (LAMP) affect the economic viability of small- and mid-scale producers and local and regional markets?	
Background and Rationale	While efficient, supply chain shocks revealed that the U.S. food system is highly concentrated, both geographically and commercially. In response, USDA made significant investments through the 2018 Farm Bill, annual appropriations, Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, and American Rescue Plan funds to reinvigorate local- and regional food systems by creating market opportunities for small- and mid-size farmers and independent agricultural businesses up and down the food supply chain. This evaluation will provide USDA an evidence-based understanding of how investments in LAMP were most effective in fostering viable agricultural businesses that operate in underserved, rural and urban, local, and regional markets. The objective of LAMP is to maximize opportunities for economic growth and ingenuity in local and regional food systems. LAMP is an umbrella program that encompasses the Farmers Market Promotion Program, Local Food Promotion Program, Regional Food Systems Partnerships Program, and Value-Added Producer Grants Program. AMS administers the first three programs and RD administers the Value-Added program. This evaluation will focus on the three programs administered by AMS; RD is currently conducting a study that includes the Value-Added program, the results of which will also contribute to this evaluation.
Expected Completion date	FY 2028

Technical Approach and Methodologies	This evaluation will use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodology, including a review of program documents, survey instruments, and a financial/economic analysis and audit. Measures of effectiveness include: (i) number of small and mid-size farmers and independent agricultural businesses served by LAMP, and (ii) number of jobs created (to improve income and economic opportunities for producers and food businesses).
Data Sources	Data sources include grantee demographics; local and regional agricultural business demographics; local and regional market data, and financial data.
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	Challenges to this evaluation are the scale of data and the data cleaning process for accurate data analytics. Employment of agile evaluation products and data analytics processes will mitigate these challenges.
Use and Dissemination	This evaluation will provide USDA an evidence-based understanding of how and to what extent LAMP has achieved its goal of enhanced local and regional market opportunities for small- and mid-size farmers and independent agricultural businesses. The body of evidence and findings produced through this evaluation will guide the department as it takes similar programs into the future and designs new and more agile programs.

Effectiveness of Farm Service Agency's Credit Assistance (FSA)	
• To what extent do FSA's loan activities contribute toward a farmer's financial success, such as timely debt repayments, profitability, and solvency?	
Background and Rationale	Farm Loan Programs (FLP) provide credit to loan applicants who cannot obtain credit from commercial lenders. An initial assessment and ongoing analysis of the effectiveness of FLP's credit assistance will inform policies to result in a higher proportion of direct borrowers sustaining and growing the financial success of their operations.
Completion date	2026
Technical Approach and Methodologies	The evaluation will model and analyze the impact of credit and servicing activities on the probability of favorable borrower outcomes reflected through improved financial indicators for select time periods (5, 10, and 20 years). Examples of indicators include profitability, solvency, and the ability to meet future financial obligations in a timely manner. Loan servicing activities include loan modifications such as flexible payments terms, payment deferrals, extending terms, and reducing interest rates.

	Standard statistical and econometric techniques for credit risk analysis will be used to identify factors more likely to impact a borrower's progress. Randomized trials, focus groups, and surveys may be conducted if resources for this work are available.
Data Sources	FLP-specific data and other internal data from USDA sources (e.g., the National Agricultural Statistics Service, the Economic Research Service); University and commercial lender studies; Survey data from borrowers; and Documentation related to data governance, validation, and assessments for all data systems to identify areas and levels of impact.
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	Ongoing efforts to modernize and de-silo Farm Loan program Information Technology applications will help mitigate the data challenges experienced to date.
Use and Dissemination	Insights gleaned from this study will inform delivery of the Farm Loan Program and can be disseminated throughout USDA to identify best practices in program delivery.

Food for Progress, McGovern-Dole, Local and Regional Procurement, and International Food Assistance (FAS)	
• Assess the extent to which the following food assistance programs are achieving their goals and objectives: • McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program • Food for Progress Program • Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement Program	
Background and Rationale	Each year, USDA is mandated to provide four annual reports to Congress: one each for Food for Progress, McGovern-Dole, and Local and Regional Procurement, and an International Food Assistance Report that serves as a consolidated summary of the entirety of our food assistance programs. The content of these reports is driven by requirements set forth in the Farm Bill and touches upon dollars spent, commodities programmed, and beneficiaries reached.
Completion date	FY 2025
Technical Approach and Methodologies	Each of the four congressional reports is authored by the International Food Assistance Division, assisted by monitoring and evaluation staff, and each reflects a programmatic summary of the program(s) for the previous fiscal year. Each report includes financial information, commodity information, and select aggregate or project-specific performance data.
Data Sources	Each congressional program report is based on project-level reports submitted by implementers to USDA during the year. These reports include semi-annual performance reports, semi-annual financial

	reports, and other required and ad hoc reporting by implementers. For example, all implementers submit data on the performance indicators in their agreements to USDA, which USDA then aggregates annually and includes for select indicators in each congressional report.
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	The Food Aid Information System, the only system where performance data for international food assistance programs is stored, does not allow queries and data pulls to meet annual reporting data requirements. FAS mitigates this challenge with a heavy investment of staff time and effort to manually pull and aggregate performance data. Modernizing this system, developing, or procuring a new performance management system, or investing in more staff would each help further mitigate or eliminate the challenge.
Use and Dissemination	The primary audience for these reports is the U.S. Congress. They also help FAS monitor progress and inform decisions about future programming.

Goal 4: Make Safe, Nutritious Food Available to All Americans

Assessment of Mobile Technologies for Using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Benefits (FNS)	
• How effective are FNS' strategies in eliminating barriers to access to nutrition assistance programs?	
Background and Rationale	The Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 authorizes the use of mobile technologies for the purpose of accessing SNAP benefits. This allows SNAP participants to input their Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards into a mobile technology, such as Apple Pay or Google Pay, and make SNAP purchases at the point-of-sale without the presence of the EBT card. The Act requires that the FNS approve no more than five projects to pilot the use of this technology and subsequently determine if mobile technology should be authorized nationwide. This study will assess the pilots in the areas of participant access, ease of use, and program integrity to facilitate the decision-making around the broad authorization of the use of mobile technologies.
Completion Date	FY 2026
Technical Approach and Methodologies	This study will assess the pilot projects in the areas of participant access, ease of use, and program integrity to facilitate the determination of whether to broadly authorize the use of mobile technologies. Process and outcome evaluations will be conducted in up to five States that participate in the pilot program.

Data Sources	Data collection will include interviews with stakeholders and document review from each pilot project. Analysts will also utilize SNAP administrative data from State agencies and retailer characteristics data.
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	Obtaining the needed data from EBT processors and SNAP State agencies poses a challenge as well as delays in implementation of mobile technologies. FNS will work closely with the pilot operations to assist with integration of mobile technology.
Use and Dissemination	FNS will use the findings of the evaluation to determine the successes of the Mobile Payment Pilot and inform future regulations and policy related to the use of mobile technology for EBT payments. The final report will be posted publicly on the USDA website.

Understanding the Relationship Between Poverty, Well-Being, and Food Security (FNS)	
• How effective are FNS' programs in improving nutrition security through access to nutritious foods?	
Background and Rationale	Research has shown that the economic and demographic circumstances of households are closely correlated with food security status. However, not all households with similar circumstances experience the same food security status. This evaluation will identify measures of poverty and well-being associated with household food security status among SNAP-eligible participants and non-participants in persistent-poverty counties, defined as counties where 20% or more of their population lived in poverty in the last four decennial Censuses. Moving beyond household income, many dimensions of well-being and material deprivation may affect food security status and SNAP participation, such as mental health, depression, health-related quality of life, disablement, medical expenditures, alcohol or opioid addiction, place of residence, and within-household sharing of resources. Collecting representative, qualitative, and quantitative data at the county level will enable improved estimates of county-level food security status, as official data at this granular level are unavailable. These data are unavailable because the USDA has a partnership with Census to develop one nationwide food security rate once per year, as such, there is no official federal rate or data collection at anything lower than that national rate.
Completion Date	FY 2027
Technical Approach and Methodologies	Analysts will conduct county-level representative surveys of household food security, well-being, and material hardship measures in at least six persistent-poverty counties to help identify factors other than income that impact food security status. The analysts will also conduct in-depth interviews with a subsample of households in

	these counties to provide additional context for the survey findings. Counties will represent a variety of spatial types (urban, suburban, and rural) and other policy-relevant characteristics.
Data Sources	Data sources will consist of county-level representative surveys of household food security, well-being, and material hardship measures in at least six persistent-poverty counties, and in-depth interviews with a subsample of households in six counties.
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	Sampling of SNAP non-participants is difficult given there is no predetermined list of non-participants. This contrasts with SNAP participants who will be sampled from State administrative data. To mitigate this, the study will use address-based sampling that will cover all primary sampling units in each county, providing a representative sample of households in each county. Furthermore, collecting survey data among most population groups is difficult in an era of declining response rates. To mitigate this, the study will collect both survey data via the internet and telephone and follow-up with a subsample of non-respondents via infield locating (e.g., knocking on doors).
Use and Dissemination	Examining food insecurity and poverty in these persistent-poverty counties will help FNS better understand the association between SNAP, other USDA-administered programs, and community-based assistance with well-being and the food environment. This information is crucial for designing interventions that address long-standing disparities in food insecurity and poverty not only in these counties, but the hundreds of other persistent-poverty counties across the nation. The final report will be posted publicly on the USDA website.

WIC Participant and Program Characteristics Study 2024 and 2026 (FNS)	
• What demographic, income, and health-related characteristics are associated with WIC (women, infant, and children) participation in 2024 and 2026? • At what rate are WIC participants using their food package benefits? • What are the actual costs of food package benefits by participant category? • What are the rates of retention among participants?	
Background and Rationale	For every two years since 1998, FNS has conducted the WIC Participant and Program Characteristics Study (WIC PC). Per 7 CFR § 246.25(b)(3)(i)), this study collects demographic, income, and WIC-related health characteristics and behaviors of all WIC participants in the 89 State agencies and their WIC benefits. This study will also pilot the collection of longitudinal WIC data, including food package redemption data.
Completion Date	FY 2028
Technical Approach and Methodologies	Administrative data will be collected during two time periods, 2024 and 2026, from the WIC state agencies. At a minimum, we will collect

	demographic, income, and WIC-related behavior and outcome information on a census of WIC participants enrolled as of April of each year. We also anticipate collecting the same information over a two-year "look back" period to create a longitudinal dataset of a census of WIC participants. Finally, we will collect longitudinal food redemption data (electronic benefit transfer information) from EBT processors for every State agency.
Data Sources	Administrative data from a census of WIC agencies, including longitudinal Management Information System and EBT redemption data.
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	One challenge will be collecting uniform longitudinal data from as many State agencies as possible in a timely manner. We plan to mitigate this challenge by providing ample technical assistance to State agencies during data collection and having a clear and robust data cleaning plan.
Use and Dissemination	Data will be used to evaluate programmatic changes to WIC, evaluate targeted interventions among WIC participants, and estimate program budgets. Study findings will be disseminated through short and topic-specific reports, infographics, journal articles, presentations, briefings, as well as longer reports.

WIC Health Opportunities and Participant Experience (HOPE) Longitudinal Study (FNS)	
• Update the feeding practice and the nutrition-related outcomes findings from WIC Infant and Toddler Feeding Practices Longitudinal Study (ITFPS-2) • Assess maternal diet, birth, and health outcomes from pregnancy and postpartum periods. • Examine the independent association between duration of WIC participation and diet, health, and nutrition security outcomes. • Describe WIC participant's experience engaging with different aspects of WIC such as clinic experience, technology use, and benefit use.	
Background and Rationale	It has now been more than a decade since the launch of WIC ITFPS-2, the predecessor longitudinal study to WIC HOPE. In that time, WIC has undergone programmatic changes and public health goals and priorities have progressed. The updated study objectives and methods in WIC HOPE will facilitate a continued comprehensive understanding of how participation in WIC affects participants and their health over time. The new objectives and methods align with emerging public health concerns and the most recent maternal and child health recommendations.
Completion date	FY 2031

Technical Approach and Methodologies	This is a longitudinal study that will follow a cohort of caregivers and infants enrolled in WIC prenatally or in the first 3 months of the infant's life. Surveys and dietary recalls among infants/children and their caregiver will be conducted periodically over the course of five years. Case studies and qualitative data will also be collected at various time-points among participants as well as State or local agency staff.
Data Sources	Primary survey, interview, and 24-hour recall data collection as well as some administrative data.
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	Maintaining a low attrition rate will be the biggest challenge of this study. Tailored and frequent engagement with participants as well as robust incentives will be used to limit attrition.
Use and Dissemination	Study findings will be disseminated through short and topic-specific reports, infographics, journal articles, presentations, briefings, as well as longer age-specific reports.

Summer Meals Study (FNS)	
• How do Summer Food programs work together to improve nutrition and reduce food insecurity?	
Background and Rationale	The first Summer Meals Study, conducted in 2018, provided a comprehensive, nationally representative assessment of the two summer meal programs operated by USDA – the Summer Food Service Program and the National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option. The study examined the characteristics of participating and nonparticipating children, including socio-demographic characteristics, household food security status, reasons for participation or nonparticipation, and satisfaction with the meals served to children. Since that time USDA has implemented a new and permanent Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer program, as well as a change to allow summer sites in rural areas to provide meals in a non-congregate setting. FNS' new study will provide an updated assessment of summer meal programs to include these new options and provide a broad overview of how these programs work together to improve nutrition and reduce food insecurity among children during summer months when school is not in session.
Completion date	FY 2029
Technical Approach and Methodologies	Data will be collected using a mixed-methods approach and will likely include surveys of a nationally representative sample of sponsor and program staff, participants and caregivers, and collection of administrative data.

Data Sources	Surveys and administrative data
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	This complex study will require collecting data from a variety of sources, including participating households, local program operators and sponsors, and state agencies. The main challenge is likely to be low response rates as collecting survey data is becoming more and more challenging. To mitigate these challenges FNS will consider collecting data in less-burdensome ways, providing robust incentives to participants, and providing informational resources and technical assistance to address any data collection concerns or challenges.
Use and Dissemination	Findings from this study will be used by FNS to assess how the available summer feeding options work together to provide nutrition support to children during summer months when school is closed and to identify service gaps or areas for improvement. The study findings will be disseminated publicly through a final report and/or other dissemination materials.

Evaluation of the Use of Third-Party Income Databases in SNAP (FNS)	
• How can FNS assist State and local agencies and program operators to further improve integrity, accountability, and customer service when administering nutrition assistance programs?	
Background and Rationale	In recent years, most State agencies have independently contracted with commercial vendors to obtain automated verification of individuals' employment and income status via a third-party income database (TPID) of employer-reported payroll data. FNS plans to implement a national contract for matching with TPID, which States will have the option to use, to achieve economy of scale and lower contracting costs across all SNAP agencies. This evaluation will assess the extent to which TPID reveals undeclared income at certification or recertification, relative costs savings achieved from national TPID implementation (if any), and correlative factors related to undeclared income, including the effect of casework interviews in eliciting relevant income declarations. Data will come from a selection of States from each region, with a sample of SNAP households pulled from administrative data matched against TPID search records.
Completion date	FY 2028
Technical Approach and Methodologies	Match TPID to State administrative data and conduct analysis
Data Sources	Third party income data and State administrative data
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	Signing Data Use Agreements and getting administrative data from State agencies is always a challenge. FNS will remind the States of the

	importance of confirming the value of using TPID if the national contract for the services to continue.
Use and Dissemination	Study findings will be disseminated publicly through a final report and/or other dissemination materials.

Evaluation of Selected SNAP Nutrition Education (SNAP-Ed) Interventions (FNS)	
• When developing and implementing nutrition education for FNS program participants and the public, what strategies can most effectively communicate messages that reflect the latest nutrition science, incorporate healthier foods, promote the use of culturally relevant foods, and reach diverse populations to help reduce racial inequities and mitigate diet-related health disparities?	
Background and Rationale	States may choose from many interventions in the SNAP-Ed toolkit as well as other evidence-based interventions and deliver nutrition education and obesity prevention services through a combination of educational approaches. However, clear evidence on the effectiveness of SNAP-Ed is lacking. For this study, States will be invited to submit projects for the evaluation. The study will select and evaluate four promising projects that combine direct nutrition education with comprehensive multi-level interventions or community and public health approaches to improve nutrition and obesity prevention. Results will provide models for both implementation and evaluation of nutrition education interventions and contribute to the SNAP-Ed evidence-base.
Completion Date	FY 2029
Technical Approach and Methodologies	Design will depend on the interventions chosen but will likely be either a randomized control trial or quasi experimental design.
Data Sources	New data collection from SNAP-Ed Implementing Agencies or SNAP-Ed program participants.
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	Designing the evaluations to properly assess the impacts of the interventions will be a challenge. In addition, obtaining PRA clearance from OMB in a timely manner is also a challenge. FNS will seek to select interventions which lend themselves to a rigorous evaluation design.
Use and Dissemination	Study findings will be disseminated publicly through a final report and/or other dissemination materials.

School Nutrition Meal Cost and School Food Purchase Study (FNS)	
• What is the food and nutrient content of school meals and afterschool snacks and what is the overall nutritional quality of meals served through school meal programs? How do the diets of children who participate in school meals compare to the diets of nonparticipants? What is the cost to produce school meals and what foods do districts purchase for their meal programs? How do these outcomes vary across school district characteristics?	
Background and Rationale	The School Nutrition and Meal Cost components of this study will examine the nutritional content and quality of the meals offered and purchased at school, plate waste, the school nutrition environment, school food service operations, cost to produce school meals, as well as student participation, characteristics, satisfaction, and attitudes towards the school lunch and breakfast programs. The School Food Purchase components will provide national estimates of the type, quantity, dollar value and unit price of food acquisitions as well as overall changes in the composition of the entire school food market basket including food purchases for a la carte sales and the relative importance of donated USDA Foods. It will also examine the relationship between district characteristics, purchasing practices, and food costs. This study will also develop estimates of the cost of school meals for the outlying areas of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands, Alaska, and Hawaii. Funding this fiscal year will support data analysis and/or dissemination of study findings.
Completion Date	FY 2028
Technical Approach and Methodologies	Data will be collected from a representative sample of SFAs, schools, and children using a mixed methods approach.
Data Sources	Surveys of school and SFA staff, participants, and caretakers; analysis of menu data; 24-hour dietary intake recall; direct observation; and administrative data
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	This complex study will require collecting data from a variety of sources, including administrative data, surveys of program operators and participating families, and dietary recall data. The main challenge is likely to be low response rates as collecting survey data is becoming more and more challenging. To mitigate these challenges FNS will consider collecting data in less-burdensome ways, providing robust incentives to participants, and providing informational resources and technical assistance to address any data collection concerns or challenges. In addition, the sample will be stratified in such a way as to minimize response burden on any respondent group.
Use and Dissemination	Study findings will be disseminated publicly through a final report and/or other dissemination materials.

Goal 5: Expand Opportunities for Economic Development and Improve Quality of Life in Rural and Tribal Communities

Evaluation of the Broadband Programs (RD)	
• What are the impacts of RD broadband programs on broadband availability and use, as well as on economic (property values, household income, and employment) and social (population growth, healthcare access and availability, and telemedicine) outcomes?	
Background and Rationale	This evaluation includes a portfolio of studies that cover the following programs: the Rural Broadband Access Loan and Loan Guarantee Program, Community Connect Grants, Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grants and Loans, Broadband Initiatives Program, and ReConnect Program. These programs are designed to promote access to broadband in rural areas. E-connectivity is fundamental to economic development, innovation, technological advancement, workforce readiness, and the improvement of quality of life in rural and Tribal communities.
Completion Date	FY 2026
Technical Approach and Methodologies	The in-depth evaluation of these programs will utilize rigorous quasi-experimental methods. These methods include matching, matching with regression, difference-in-difference analysis, synthetic matching, instrumental variable analysis, and regression discontinuity. Due to complexity of geography of service areas and data availability in rural areas, one of the best methodologies that minimizes the standard errors will be reported while others provide robustness of the results. The in-depth evaluation will also use the input-output analysis toolkit, IMPLAN, to estimate the short-run impacts of building out broadband infrastructure in rural areas. In using this framework, the project analysts will use detailed data as inputs to simulation models to obtain estimates on employment and output for a specific regional economy. The IMPLAN software and database will serve as the modeling platform for this impact analysis. These evaluation projects will be conducted by six trained economists and social scientists at the Innovation Center who have experience in both ex-ante and ex-post evaluation approaches. Some of the projects will be conducted in collaboration with the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS). The Innovation Center is working collaboratively with program areas to obtain administrative data.
Data Sources	Administrative data available from the USDA Rural Utilities Service (RUS) will be used in combination with other external data available from the Bureau of the Census, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Bureau of Labor Statistics, ERS, and Federal Communications Commission. Proprietary datasets such as the National Establishment Time Series and Zillow's Assessor and Real Estate Database will also be used. The various datasets will be combined using program service area information, such as service area boundaries available from program

	shapefiles, census blocks, census tracts, and Federal Information Processing Standard County and sub-County codes. For the input-output analysis of the ReConnect Program, data from published engineering cost and economic impact studies will be used in addition to detailed program data. Project cost data housed in the RUS represent a new type of data that are not normally stored in the National Rural Development database but are essential for developing model simulation scenarios.
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	RD has several programs that fund broadband access and the data available for analysis under these programs varies. For new programs, e.g., ReConnect, service area shapefiles are available for more precise analysis and attribution of impacts. In addition, linking program data to external data sources and the lack of publicly available data to measure certain outcomes can be a challenge that limits analysis and evaluation.
Use and Dissemination	The findings will be shared throughout the RD Mission Area, the wider USDA community, and the Office and Management and Budget through the dissemination of reports and presentations. RD is currently working on the creation of a public-facing website to disseminate findings from evaluations and other analyses. Additionally, projects are published in peer reviewed journals and presented across various conferences.

How Different Combination of RD Programs Concurrently Improve Well-being of rural America? (RD)	
• Which combination of RD programs does most to improve well-being of rural America?	
Background and Rationale	In FY22-FY23, RD has explored the collective impact of all RD programs on well-being of rural America using its administrative data and Distressed Community measures at the county level. From that study, we have found counties that decreased in distressed community measures have different combinations of funding awarded for FY2020-FY2019. Thus, we intend to explore this question further and see which combinations contribute the most to improve the lives of rural population. We expect this study to be one of the first studies to inform the policy makers how combination of investments or collective efforts of different aspects in community development is necessary and what could be the best approach.
Completion Date	FY 2025
Technical Approach and Methodologies	At the Census Tract level, the evaluation will utilize rigorous quasi-experimental methods. These methods include difference-in-difference analysis and the matching method to isolate groups as untreated (no funding) and treated (funding).

Data Sources	Administrative data on major RD programs will be used in combination with other external data available from Distressed Community Index (Economic Innovation Group), RD calculated distressed community scores at the Census Tract level; US Census Bureau for socio-economic data
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	At the macro level, the lack of shapefiles for program data to delineate service areas forces the analysis to be at the county level or city and town level. Linking program data to external data sources and the lack of publicly available data to measure certain outcomes can also be challenges. We plan to mitigate these challenges by looking at the investment data at the Census Tract level, the smallest geography level that would allow some quasi-experimental design of impact evaluation
Use and Dissemination	The findings will be shared throughout the Rural Development Mission Area, the wider USDA community, and the Office and Management and Budget through the dissemination of reports and presentations. Rural Development is currently working on the creation of a public-facing website to disseminate findings from evaluations and other analyses. Additionally, projects are published in peer reviewed journals and presented across various conferences. The findings will be delivered in a manner that is most appropriate for the audience. In addition to sharing the findings internally, the evaluation studies will be used to generate peer-reviewed and outreach publications and conference presentations.

USDA RD Community Facilities Program and Impact on Educational Attainment and Equitable Educational Facilities (RD)	
• To what extent has the USDA RD Community Facilities Program, through development of educational facilities, contributed to increased educational attainment and expanded equitable learning opportunities?	
Alignment with USDA Goal(s)	Goal 5: Expand Opportunities for Economic Development and Improve Quality of Life in Rural and Tribal Communities
Background and Rationale	Community Facilities (CF) program goal is to ensure rural areas to have the same equitable basic quality of life and services as those in urban areas. Through support in school facilities and services, we expect there is positive impact of CF programs in education outcomes. No prior analysis of CF program on education outcomes has been performed, and with this impact evaluation analysis, support in more investment in education-related services and facilities will be garnered.
Completion Date	FY 2027

Technical Approach and Methodologies	The evaluation will utilize rigorous quasi-experimental methods. These methods include difference-in-difference analysis and the matching method to isolate groups as untreated (no funding) and treated (funding). Equity will be operationalized by the Child Opportunity Index. The Child Opportunity Index measures and maps the quality of resources and conditions that matter for children to develop in a healthy way in the neighborhoods where they live.
Data Sources	Administrative data from the Community Facilities program; Performance K-12 data for the school years (2019-2020 and 2020-2021); Child Opportunity Index 2010 and 2015 data at the Census Tract level; Census Bureau American Community Survey data for school enrollment; Department of Education's High School graduation data
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	Challenges of this project include collecting the necessary data and linking the program data to external data of interests. We plan to mitigate these challenges by limiting the period of study, assuming the effect of school funding will have short-term effect on students' educational outcomes.
Use and Dissemination	The findings will be shared throughout the Rural Development Mission Area, the wider USDA community, and the Office and Management and Budget through the dissemination of reports and presentations. Rural Development is currently working on the creation of a public-facing website to disseminate findings from evaluations and other analyses. Additionally, projects are published in peer reviewed journals and presented across various conferences. The findings will be delivered in a manner that is most appropriate for the audience. In addition to sharing the findings internally, the evaluation studies will be used to generate peer-reviewed and outreach publications and conference presentations.

USDA RD Investment in Persistent Poverty Counties and Distressed Communities and its Impact (RD)	
• How much does the targeted assistance to persistent poverty counties and distressed communities help RD increase investment in underserved, vulnerable rural areas? To what extent are these targeted investments effective in helping economically underdeveloped areas and alleviating economic hardships?	
Background and Rationale	Rural Development provides targeted assistance to persistent poverty counties to the maximum extent possible by utilizing a variety of outreach tools such as social media, events, success stories, and collaborating with affordable housing partners (packagers, intermediaries, self-help grantees). Per requested by the Congressional Committee as well as performance and impact evaluation purposes, RD is interested in finding out whether this targeted assistance is "successful," in short-term outcome of

	increase in investment and in long-term outcome of betterment of persistently poor or distressed communities.
Completion Date	FY2025
Technical Approach and Methodologies	The evaluation will utilize rigorous qualitative and quantitative methods. Rigorous case studies and descriptive analysis will accompany quasi-experimental methods. These methods include difference-in-difference analysis and the matching method to isolate groups as untreated (no funding) and treated (funding).
Data Sources	Administrative data on major RD programs will be used in combination with other external data available from Census Bureau poverty data from the American Community Survey data, persistent poverty Census tract lists and Distressed Communities Index from the Economic Innovation Group, and Socially Vulnerable Communities Index from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	At the macro level, the lack of shapefiles for program data to delineate service areas forces the analysis to be at the county level or city and town level. Linking program data to external data sources and the lack of publicly available data to measure certain outcomes can also be challenges. We plan to mitigate these challenges by looking at the investment data at the Census Tract level for Distressed communities, the smallest geography level that would allow some quasi-experimental design of impact evaluation, along with at the County level for Persistent Poverty Counties.
Use and Dissemination	The findings will be shared throughout the Rural Development Mission Area, the wider USDA community, and the Office and Management and Budget through the dissemination of reports and presentations. Rural Development is currently working on the creation of a public-facing website to disseminate findings from evaluations and other analyses. Additionally, projects are published in peer reviewed journals and presented across various conferences. The findings will be delivered in a manner that is most appropriate for the audience. In addition to sharing the findings internally, the evaluation studies will be used to generate peer-reviewed and outreach publications and conference presentations.

Goal 6: Attract, Inspire, and Retain an Engaged and Motivated Workforce that is Proud to Represent USDA

Changes in USDA's Performance Management and Awards System (OHRM)	
• What effects did USDA's shift from a five-tier performance management system to a two-tier system have on employee performance and engagement, and the ability of managers to distribute performance awards equitably?	
Background and Rationale	USDA moved from a five-tier performance management system to a two-level (i.e., pass/fail) management system and separated monetary and time off awards from annual summary performance ratings. In response to feedback from USDA staff, supervisors, and managers, USDA seeks to understand how, if any, effects these changes have had on performance, employee engagement, and the distribution of awards.
Completion Date	September 30, 2025
Technical Approach and Methodologies	Procure funding and contract support to conduct an evaluation and assessment of the change to a two-level performance management system, which compares relevant pre- and post-implementation data and feedback from stakeholders.
Data Sources	Examples of data sources include data capturing aggregate performance ratings issued, demonstration of opportunities administered (including results and disposition), distribution of monetary and time off awards recognizing accomplishments by amount and fiscal quarter; Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey; Future of Work Survey results.
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	Data availability and privacy issues may pose challenges. OHRM will work with the Office of Chief Information Officer and USDA's Privacy Officer to use aggregated and masked data.
Use and Dissemination	USDA will use the findings to understand the effects of the policy change and decide if additional changes are needed.

AMS' Implementation of USDA's Equity Recommendations, the Performance of Agricultural Marketing Services' (AMS) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Council, and Improved Relationships and Support of Underserved Communities	
• How, and to what extent, have AMS DEIA council activities, outreach to underserved populations, and enhanced engagement with and support to underserved communities, addressed AMS' and thereby USDA's equity recommendations and DEIA goals and objectives?	
Background and Rationale	Beginning in 2021, AMS took a proactive stance to assess and further employee engagement across the DEIA space through establishment of a DEIA council, strategic plan and in FY23, establishment of the

	AMS Office of the Chief Diversity Officer. AMS has also been implementing its Equity Action Plan to address Departmental equity objectives, with three areas of focus: (1) increase targeted investments, (2) reduce barriers to AMS programs, and (3) advance equity in procurement. With all activities working in FY23 and FY24, it is reasonable to evaluate progress and next steps to ensure fulfillment of the Agency goals in accordance with the Department and Administrations goals for enhanced engagement with and support of AMS work with underserved communities to advance their inclusion and market share.
Completion Date	FY 2025
Technical Approach and Methodologies	The evaluation will employ quantitative and qualitative methodology (i.e., demographic analysis, economic measures, surveys, structured interviews, etc.) to assess investment in DEIA strategies and program performance. Analyze policy/program effects on underserved communities, and detail outcomes of the programs after they are fully implemented. The near-term outputs and mid-term outcomes indicating movement in the desired direction include: <u>DEIA</u> (1) conducting DEIA training to expand employees' knowledge, awareness, understanding and application of DEIA in the workforce to promote an inclusive work environment, (2) creating the AMS Hiring and Recruitment Resource Library, a database of policies and recruitment tools, and <u>Equity</u> (3) increased participation of underserved communities in AMS programs, specifically in grants and procurement.
Data Sources	The evaluation data sources will include: i) human resource data (hiring, diversity metrics, retention, promotion); ii) program policies and performance data; iv) economic; and v) other sources as needed.
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	Given the growth time needed to create an equitable profile at the highest levels, we may not fully realize the hiring-to-promotion profile and employee engagement in the early years of this evaluation. The time factor may be mitigated through comparative analysis against similar groups and across the labor market.
Use and Dissemination	These data will drive future USDA DEIA investments in employees and underserved populations in the agriculture space, ensure best use of Congressional investment and increase trust of the public. The data will also inform AMS on future actions to ensure our programs and services are accessible, especially to underserved communities.

From Learning to Leading: Cultivating the Next Generation of Diverse Food and Agriculture Professionals Program (NextGen) (NIFA)	
• To what extent did this program succeed in generating the next generation of food and agriculture professionals? • Which aspects of the program (e.g., fellowships, job opportunities, etc.) have the greatest effect on recruiting and retaining young people into food and agricultural sciences as a career path?	
Background and Rationale	The NextGen program aims to build the next generation of the food, agriculture, natural resources, and human sciences workforce, including the future USDA workforce, through providing student scholarships, meaningful paid internships and fellowships, and matching participants to job opportunities, particularly jobs in the federal sector. The demand for trained personnel in food, agriculture, renewable natural resources, and the environment remains high. Employment opportunities for new college graduates is estimated to grow by 59,400 annually through 2025. USDA, for example, faces critical staff shortages across the department with many experienced employees poised to retire. For example, approximately 15 percent of the Federal workforce are currently eligible to retire and in the next five years this proportion will grow to 30 percent. Only 61% of those jobs, however, will be filled by people who were trained in these fields. Crafting the future of farming hinges on nurturing new leaders and building a more diverse workforce. The NextGen program aims to address these gaps by raising awareness and interest and ultimately preparing students with the skills and degrees required to strengthen and fill the pipeline of workers, including positions at USDA, industry, and other sectors. The evaluation will help to identify which pathways are effective in bringing about these outcomes and why.
Completion date	FY 2028
Technical Approach and Methodologies	The evaluation will use quantitative and qualitative methods to capture both formative and performance (outcome) measures to enable NIFA to assess the extent to which the program helped to mitigate shortages in critical areas and create pathways to science careers among historically under- represented groups. Specifically, to (i) measure the efforts of individual grantees to identify early indicators that the projects are achieving their objectives; and (ii) assess the extent to which the program is building a new generation of food and agricultural scientists, creating pathways to science careers among historically under-represented groups, and mitigating shortages in critical areas.
Data Sources	The evaluation will draw from the following data sources, as a start: • Survey responses from project directors and students • Site visits

	• Virtual Communities of Practice • Focus groups NIFA may also draw from the National Student Clearinghouse (www.studentclearinghouse.org) and the Food and Agricultural Education Information System (https://faeis.cals.vt.edu).
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	Building the next generation of food, agriculture, natural resources, and human services professionals is a medium- to long-term investment. NIFA will work with the evaluation team and awardees to establish a method for tracking the longitudinal outcomes of participants in accordance with privacy laws. NIFA has experience tracking participants after the period of performance is completed to determine if the longer-term objectives of the program were achieved. Participants will need to be tracked for several years to determine if their involvement in the program's activities influenced them to pursue an education and career in food and agriculture. This evaluation builds and expands on previously funded assessments of Hispanic Serving Institution programs. Similar indicators were used in the past and have been updated and expanded to account for the diversity of institutions, projects, and students participating. Funding is not allocated to support long-term tracking after the award completion date (2028).
Use and Dissemination	This evaluation will yield greater understanding on how USDA can facilitate the formation of a new cadre of professionals from which it may hire or collaborate with in the field. Findings, including indicators and conditions of success, will be shared widely across USDA as multiple agencies are exploring ways to recruit and retain a diversified workforce.

Civil Rights Impact Analyses (CRIAs) (OASCR)
• How and to what extent does the CRIA process effectively protect USDA employees from adverse and disproportionate impacts from changes to USDA's policies, actions, and decisions? • Under what conditions is the CRIA process effective at mitigating the potential for adverse effects?

Background and Rationale	USDA's Mission Areas, Agencies, and Staff Offices conduct CRIAs to protect USDA employees and program beneficiaries from disproportionate and adverse impacts that may result from policies, actions, or decisions proposed by the Department. CRIAs ensure every policy, action, rule, or decision are conducted in accordance with Federal civil rights laws. A CRIA identifies the effects of: (1) proposed employment actions; (2) eligibility criteria for USDA benefits; (3) methods of implementation, (4) underrepresentation or lack of diversity within its programs; or (5) any other Mission Area/Agency-imposed requirements that may adversely and/or disproportionately impact employees or program beneficiaries based on their membership in a protected group. Proper follow-up actions based on CRIA findings can lessen, eliminate, or substantially alleviate these potential or anticipated impacts on protected groups.
Completion date	FY 2025
Technical Approach and Methodologies	Qualitative, Quantitative, Disproportionate and Adverse Impact Analysis
Data Sources	Available Data, Departmental Regulation 4300-004, Civil Rights Impact Analysis; OASCR Strategic Plan; CRIA Guidebook
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	Staffing Capacity, Timelines for Completion, Data Availability, and Funding Availability
Use and Dissemination	Agencywide

Appendix: Significant Evidence-Building Activities

Goal 1: Combat Climate Change to Support America's Working Lands, Natural Resources, and Communities

Data Quality and Impacts to Wildfire Crisis Strategy Implementation (FS)	
• The purpose of this evidence-building effort is to create a reliable and accurate set of administrative and programmatic data in support of wildfire-related modeling, decision making, and accomplishment tracking. The Forest Service protects life, property, and natural resources on National Forest System lands, other Federal lands, and an additional 20 million acres of non-Federal lands under protection agreements. Within the Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS), Forest Service has proposed a significant increase in the number of acres treated. Measuring progress toward the goals and objectives in the WCS depend on having reliable and accurate data. See Wildfire Crisis Strategy Implementation Plan.	
Completion Date	FY 2027
Technical Approach and Methodologies	We will use advanced analytics to review the multiple administrative and programmatic data most critical to wildfire-related modeling, decision-making, and accomplishment tracking. This risk-based approach will focus on identifying data quality improvements where they are most needed to improve evidence building related to the wildfire crisis. The Forest Service Chief Data Office will be responsible for this activity and will coordinate appropriately with agency data stewards (within Forest Service as well as at other USDA agencies) as appropriate.
Data Sources	As part of this effort, the agency will create an inventory and catalog priority enterprise datasets related to strategic goals and the WCS as often hazardous fuels treatments and other land management activities have related benefits and outcomes. These activities will include documenting critical metadata and developing processes to determine how these data could better integrate with the USDA Enterprise Data Catalog and where data gaps may exist.
Use and Dissemination	The findings will be shared throughout the NRE Mission Area and wider USDA community through the dissemination of reports and presentations. The findings will be delivered in a manner that is most appropriate for the audience.

Survey of Local Irrigation Systems (NASS)	
• How and to what extent do local irrigation decisions have an impact on drought resilience?	
Completion Date	FY 2025
Technical Approach and Methodologies	Survey conducted by NASS under the guidance of USDA's Economic Research Service is intended to provide a nationally representative assessment of irrigation water-delivery entities and groundwater

	management districts serving the U.S. irrigated sector. The dataset will include information on organization structure, irrigation infrastructure and system management practices, and water use by source, with a special emphasis on institutional measures and conservation initiatives that enhance drought resilience and long-term water-supply management.
Data Sources	Survey findings and related research; Local Irrigation Commissions
Use and Dissemination	The final report will be available to the public. The information will help USDA officials and external stakeholders make informed decisions regarding irrigation.

Conservation Data Series (NASS)	
• To what extent do agricultural conservation practices contribute to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions?	
Completion Date	FY 2025
Technical Approach and Methodologies	The Conservation Practice Adoption Motivations Survey (CPAMS) is a joint project between the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) aimed at assessing the adoption rates of different conservation practices. Four different conservation categories are surveyed: crop practices, grazing practices, confined livestock practices, and forestry practices. Each category will have a questionnaire designed to gather information specific to the practices involved in each category.
Data Sources	CPAMS Surveys, Irrigation and Water Management Survey, NASS Agricultural Resource Management Surveys
Use and Dissemination	The final report will be available to the public. The information will help USDA officials and external stakeholders understand the capacity of conservation practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Greenhouse Gas Conservation Practices: Cross Agency Data Series Team (NASS)	
• Align staffing and data collections related to greenhouse gas conservation practices. • Fill critical data gaps as no consolidated data series exists	
Completion Date	Ongoing data collection to produce longitudinal data
Technical Approach and Methodologies	USDA-wide working groups. The primary goal is to produce an annual data series of conservation practices, to be jointly produced by NASS, ERS, ARS, and NRCS and to be published by ERS. The series will draw

	on existing methodologies used by NASS, NRCS, and ERS for aggregate statistics at the state or regional level, drawing on survey and administrative data – but the exact methodologies will be determined over the course of FY24 and FY25 depending on the data sources employed for each statistic.
Data Sources	NASS, ERS, ARS, and NRCS, publicly funded research such as research conducted at Land-Grant Universities.
Use and Dissemination	Public report, will be used by USDA, external stakeholders, and policy/decisions makers

USDA Climate Adaptation Progress Report for USDA Facility Operations (OPEM)	
• How and to what extent have USDA agencies and staff offices identified and mitigated climate change threats to their facility operations? • Assess the relationship between climate adaptation activities and outcomes for USDA facility operations.	
Background and Rationale	Executive Order 14008 and the White House Council on Environmental Quality require Federal agencies to conduct climate vulnerability assessments, identify actions to address climate change impact to missions and operations, and conduct annual progress reporting on status and accomplishments.
Completion Date	FY 2026
Technical Approach and Methodologies	Conduct data calls and workgroup meetings. Develop Climate Hazardous Exposure and Resilience Assessments tools to identify and mitigate climate risks.
Data Sources	Data sources include property data from the Federal Real Property Profile Management System and USDA's Corporate Property Automated Information System, Geo-spatial climate risk data, and reporting from USDA agencies and offices.
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	The lack of funding and dedicated staff resources are the most significant challenges. The Office of Property and Environmental Management continues to request funds and leverage the knowledge and resources of other federal agencies.
Use and Dissemination	Assessments are available through USDA's SharePoint system to staff, managers, and leadership [and shared with the Office and Management and Budget]. These assessments facilitate collaboration across the department and can inform the development of performance metrics and program direction.

National Program Assessments (Agricultural Research Service (ARS)) • Water Availability and Watershed Management • Soil and Air	
• To what extent did this national program accomplish its goals and objectives as specified in the national program action plan?	
Background and Rationale	The national program assessments are conducted every five years and play a key role in both retrospective evaluation and prospective priority setting for ARS. Based on feedback from external experts (from academia, stakeholders, and government), the national program assessment ensures that research is being conducted as indicated in the national program action plan; and serves to capture insights regarding the future direction of the national program.
Completion Date	FY 2025
Technical Approach and Methodologies	Program assessments include 3 phases: 1. Conduct in-house program assessment to identify research accomplishments and progress toward goals. 2. Convene a panel of external reviewers to assess the research's relevance, quality, and impact. 3. Inform ARS leadership of evaluation findings and recommendations.
Data Sources	Internal ARS systems, outreach to ARS scientists, ARS stakeholders and collaborators.
Use and Dissemination	Retrospective review reports are available on the national program Web page at https://www.ars.usda.gov/research/programs/ and are used to inform decision-makers. The evaluations are a key component of the ARS 5-year National Program Cycle

Goal 2. Ensure America's Agricultural System is Equitable, Resilient, and Prosperous

National Program Assessments (ARS) • Animal Health • Plant Diseases
• To what extent did this national program accomplish its goals and objectives as specified in the national program action plan?

Background and Rationale	The national program assessments are conducted every five years and play a key role in both retrospective evaluation and prospective priority setting for ARS. Based on feedback from external experts (from academia, stakeholders, and government), the national program assessment ensures that research is being conducted as indicated in the national program action plan; and serves to capture insights regarding the future direction of the national program.
Completion Date	FY 2025
Technical Approach and Methodologies	Program assessments include 3 phases: 1. Conduct in-house program assessment to identify research accomplishments and progress toward goals. 2. Convene a panel of external reviewers to assess the research's relevance, quality, and impact. 3. Inform ARS leadership and the Office of Management and Budget of evaluation findings and recommendations.
Data Sources	Internal ARS systems, outreach to ARS scientists, ARS stakeholders and collaborators.
Use and Dissemination	Retrospective review reports are available on the national program Web page at https://www.ars.usda.gov/research/programs/ and are used to inform decision-makers. The evaluations are a key component of the ARS 5-year National Program Cycle.

Goal 3. Foster an Equitable and Competitive Marketplace for All Agricultural Producers

Data Modernization (FSA)	
• Modernize FSA's data management systems to enable new analytic capabilities communicated in the FSA Data Strategy.	
Background and Rationale	FSA requires data analytics environment modernization to address business continuity risks presented by in-place systems reaching end of life. FSA's Data Analytics Modernization efforts will be a multi-year endeavor that is broken into manageable work packages to achieve FSA data analytics vision. FSA will implement our solution with Amazon Web Services (AWS) in the USDA Enterprise Data Analytics Platform and Toolset (EDAPT) for policy and tool alignment with the whole of USDA. To be more aligned with USDA's goal of accelerating data-driven decision-making capabilities, FSA is in middle of a multi-year project of migrating the Enterprise Data Warehouse from an on-premise system at OCIO-Digital Infrastructure Services Center to the modernized data analytics platform in the EDAPT Cloud. FSA is also sending new sources of data directly to this EDAPT environment.

	This will allow FSA to use advanced toolsets through a platform based 'data science' virtual machine environment to support research into common farm program, farm loan, and field office questions including acreage reporting status and payments by crop and producer. This will also support delivery of data-driven analytics reports developed by staff and partners to answer congressional inquiries.
Completion Date	2025

Goal 4. Make Safe, Nutritious Food Available to All Americans

Food Safety Capacity- and Evidence-Building (FSIS)	
Background and Rationale	FSIS is collaborating with ARS to provide evidence to support policy making related to the *Salmonella* framework for poultry and other food safety issues.
Completion date	FY 2025
Technical Approach and Methodologies	Develop virulence-based detection methods for pathogens to allow for more rapid identification of strains that are public health relevant. • Evaluate detection and enumeration methods for *Salmonella*, to determine which samples are more highly contaminated or contaminated with *Salmonella* strains that are more likely to cause illness. • Evaluate the use of antimicrobial interventions in processing plants to reduce *Salmonella* in poultry to provide optimal guidance to small and very small establishments. • Identify improved methods for sampling turkey carcasses to optimize FSIS' approach for finding *Salmonella* in turkeys. • Develop a method to detect Shiga toxin-producing Escherichia coli based on genetic factors, including virulence. FSIS identified scientific data gaps in guidance documents for small and very small establishments regarding how to produce safe food and meets regulatory requirements. FSIS is working with ARS to provide evidence to fill these gaps. • Safe production methods for baked goods that contain raw meat and poultry and for low moisture products like country cured hams and smoked meats to ensure that *Salmonella* is destroyed. • Determine conditions under which bacteria can grow and produce toxins in egg products.

Data Sources	Virulence-based detection methods for pathogens: • FSIS laboratory data • ARS laboratory data Scientific data gaps: • ARS laboratory data
Challenges and Mitigation Strategies	Virulence-based detection methods for pathogens: • Challenges –Many samples need to be analyzed to generate the data needed to scientifically support the development of new detection methods. • Mitigation Strategies – FSIS sent known positive samples to ARS for analysis, which reduced the time needed to identify positive samples, and facilitated the research. Scientific data gaps: • Challenges – Resources for small and very small establishments to obtain the data are limited. • Mitigation Strategies – FSIS is providing resources to generate the data.
Use and Dissemination	Virulence-based detection methods for pathogens: • A new method will allow FSIS to detect products contaminated with pathogen strains that are of public health significance relevant. This will enable FSIS to target the riskiest products and improve food safety. Scientific data gaps: • ARS will publish the data in peer reviewed literature. FSIS will use the data to update guidance documents used by small and very small establishments to set their cooking times and temperatures for ready-to-eat products, to ensure that they are safe for consumption.

Acronyms	
AMS	Agricultural Marketing Service
ARS	Agricultural Research Service
CF	Community Facilities
CPAMS	Conservation Practice Adoption Motivations Survey
CRIA	Civil Rights Impact Analyses
DEIA	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility
EBT	Electronic Benefit Transfer
EDAPT	Enterprise Data Analytics Platform and Toolset
ERS	Economic Research Service
Evidence Act	Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018
FAS	Foreign Agricultural Service
FDPIR	Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations
FIPS	Federal Information Processing Standard
FLP	Farm Loan Program
FNS	Food and Nutrition Service
FSA	Farm Service Agency
FSIS	Food Safety and Inspection Service
FY	Fiscal Year
ITFPS	WIC Infant and Toddler Feeding Practices Longitudinal Study
LAMP	Local Agriculture Market Programs
NASS	National Agricultural Statistics Service
NIFA	National Institute of Food and Agriculture

NRCS	Natural Resource Conservation Service
OASCR	Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
OBPA	Office of Budget and Program Analysis
OHRM	Office of Human Resources Management
OPEM	Office of Property and Environmental Management
PEER	Performance, Evidence, Evaluation, and Risk Committee
PRA	Paperwork Reduction Act
RD	Rural Development
RUS	Rural Utilities Service
SFA	School Food Authority
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
SNAP-Ed	SNAP Nutrition Education
TPID	Third-Party Income Databases
WCS	Wildfire Crisis Strategy (Forest Service)
WIC	Women, Infant, and Children
WIC HOPE	WIC Health Opportunities and Participant Experience
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture