



FY 2021

PERFORMANCE REPORT



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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 our 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. Further, 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.

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 deliver 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

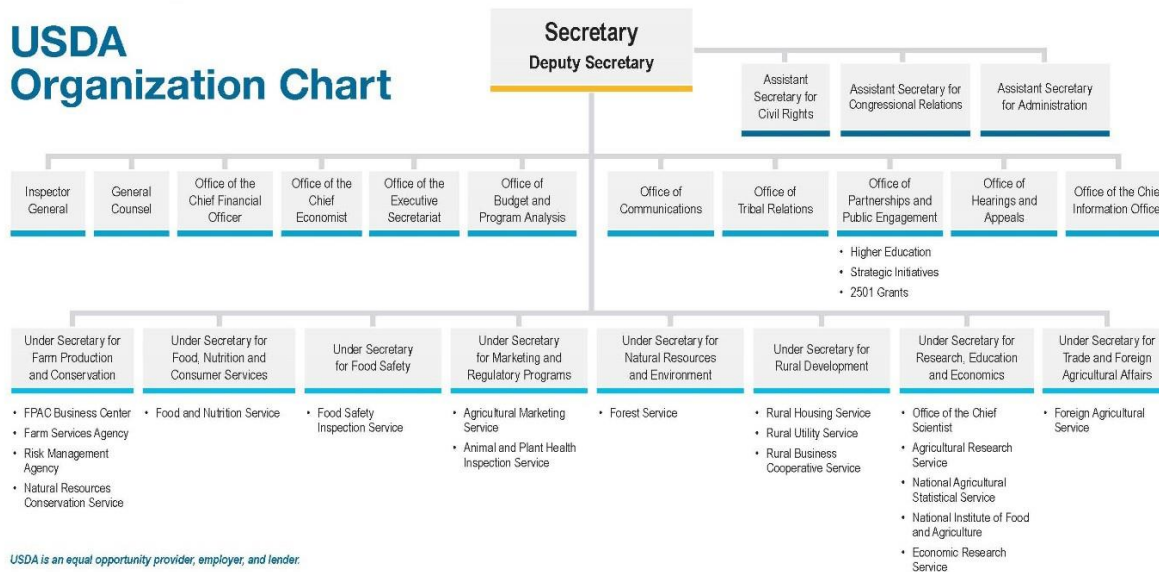
- *Respect and Dignity:* We treat all people with courtesy and respect, and we value the inherent dignity of every individual.
- *Equity and Inclusion:* We seek to end discrimination in all forms, wherever it exists, and expand services and opportunities to underserved people and communities across America, 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.

Cross-Agency Collaboration and Partnerships

USDA is committed, to improving the services we provide to better meet the needs of our customers, while ensuring we are taking the steps necessary to anticipate and meet future demands. To meet this commitment, USDA established partnerships and collaborations throughout the Department that focused on improving customer experience and capitalize on our long and distinguished history of moving science into practice to better meet the needs of our customers and the public.

Organization of the Department

Today, USDA is comprised of 29 Agencies organized under eight Mission Areas and 16 Staff Offices, with nearly 100,000 employees serving the American people at more than 6,000 locations across the country and abroad. Our Agencies help to keep America's farmers and ranchers in business and ensure that the Nation's commercial supply of meat, poultry, and egg products is safe, wholesome, and properly labeled. They also help ensure the health and care of animals and plants and the health of the land through sustainable management and work to improve the economy and quality of life in rural America.



UPDATED 10/01/20 This organization chart displays the names of USDA offices, agencies, and mission areas. Each office, agency, and mission area is placed within a cell connected by lines to show the structure and hierarchy (Under Secretary, Deputy Secretary, or Secretary) for which they fall under. An HTML version that lists [USDA Agencies and Offices](#) and [USDA Mission Areas](#) is also available on usda.gov. The [Secretary's Memorandum 1076-031](#) was signed August 12, 2019 effectuating a change to Rural Development.

Introduction

This publication summarizes performance progress for fiscal year (FY) 2021 for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA or the Department). The performance tables throughout this document, unless otherwise noted, show target and actual data levels for FY 2017 through FY 2021. Performance goals reflect performance levels at ongoing funding levels and do not include the effect of supplemental appropriations. Performance target levels are estimates and subject to change.

The 2021 Annual Performance Report outlines the performance goals and targets that align to the [FY 2018 – 2022 USDA Strategic Plan](#). Due to FY 2022 being a transition year of administration and strategic direction, this is the final report on the USDA 2018 – 2022 Strategic Plan. The USDA 2022 – 2026 USDA Strategic Plan reflects the new strategic direction for USDA.

The Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA) leads the Department in Performance, Evaluation, Evidence, and Risk Management and chairs the USDA Performance, Evaluation, Evidence Committee and the Enterprise Risk Management Committee. All Mission Areas and Departmental Administration are represented in both committees, which are comprised of individuals from different backgrounds throughout USDA, as well as key evaluation partners, the Chief Data Officer, and the Statistical Official. These different perspectives and expertise facilitate buy-in across the Department, augment technical expertise, and create a greater diversity of perspectives. Partnership with the Chief Data Officer and Statistical Official provides greater insight and advisement on data access, data quality and statistical methods.

The data collected and used by the Department to measure performance uses a standardized methodology. This methodology has been vetted by federally employed scientists and policymakers, and, ultimately, the leadership and Undersecretaries of each respective mission area. All attest to the completeness, reliability, and quality of the data. The following terms are fundamental to the FY 2021 Annual Performance Report:

- *Strategic Goal*: The highest-level statement of aim or purpose that is included in the strategic plan. The strategic goals articulate the broad categories of action that the Department will take to advance its mission.
- *Strategic Objective*: This report's 17 strategic objectives are the primary unit for strategic analysis and decision-making. Strategic objectives state the outcomes or management impacts the Department is trying to achieve.
- *Performance Indicator*: A key performance measure used to track progress toward achieving a strategic objective. The Department measures and monitors the trend for these indicators. Performance indicator status results are determined by the following standard:
 - **Met**: Within 100% or more of target
 - **Needs Improvement**: Within 10% of target
 - **Unmet**: Greater than 10% below target
- *Target*: A quantifiable level of achievement that is planned for a measure of Strategic Objective progress.
- *Baseline*: A performance indicator's level over one or more time periods to assess the appropriate level for future performance targets.

FY 2018 – 2022 Strategic Goals and Objectives

The [USDA FY 2018 – 2022 Strategic Plan](#) guided the work of USDA over the last four years to ensure that the Department’s efforts best served the American public. As part of our vision to make USDA the most efficient, most effective, and most customer-focused department in the Federal government, the Department established seven strategic goals for FYs 2018 to 2022. These strategic goals outlined key priorities and strategies, and the objectives the Department used to achieve them.

Strategic Goal 1: Ensure USDA Programs are Delivered Efficiently, Effectively, and with Integrity and a Focus on Customer Service

- Objective 1.1** Modernize Information Technology Infrastructure, Facilities, and Support Services to Improve the Customer Experience
- Objective 1.2** Maintain a High-Performing Workforce Through Employee Engagement and Empowerment
- Objective 1.3** Reduce the Regulatory Burden and Streamline Processes
- Objective 1.4** Improve Stewardship of Resources and Utilize Data-Driven Analyses to Maximize the Return on Investment

Strategic Goal 2: Maximize the Ability of American Agricultural Producers to Prosper by Feeding and Clothing the World

- Objective 2.1** Provide an Effective Financial Safety Net for Farmers and Ranchers to Sustain Economically Viable Agricultural Production and Support Rural Jobs and Economic Growth
- Objective 2.2** Increase Agricultural Opportunities and Support Economic Growth by Creating New Markets and Supporting a Competitive Agricultural System
- Objective 2.3** Protect Agricultural Health by Preventing and Mitigating the Spread of Agricultural Pests and Disease

Strategic Goal 3: Promote American Agricultural Products and Exports

- Objective 3.1** Expand International Marketing Opportunities
- Objective 3.2** Prevent or Resolve Barriers to Trade That Hinder U.S. Food and Agricultural Exports
- Objective 3.3** Build Demand in Developing Countries Through Trade Capacity Building

Strategic Goal 4: Facilitate Rural Prosperity and Economic Development

Objective 4.1 Expand Rural Business Opportunity and Rural Quality of Life with Access to Capital

Objective 4.2 Improved Infrastructure, Broadband Access, and Connectivity

Objective 4.3 Support for Workforce Availability

Strategic Goal 5: Strengthen the Stewardship of Private Lands Through Technology and Research

Objective 5.1 Enhance Conservation Planning with Science-Based Tools and Information

Objective 5.2 Promote Productive Working Lands

Objective 5.3 Enhance Productive Agricultural Landscapes

Strategic Goal 6: Ensure Productive and Sustainable Use of our National Forest System Lands

Objective 6.1 Contribute to the Economic Health of Rural Communities Through Use and Access Opportunities

Objective 6.2 Ensure Lands and Watersheds Are Sustainable, Healthy, and Productive

Objective 6.3 Mitigate Wildfire Risk

Strategic Goal 7: Provide All Americans Access to a Safe, Nutritious, and Secure Food Supply

Objective 7.1 Prevent Foodborne Illness and Protect Public Health

Objective 7.2 Provide Access to Safe and Nutritious Food for Low-Income People While Supporting a Pathway to Self-Sufficiency

Objective 7.3 Support and Encourage Healthy Dietary Choices Through Data-Driven, Flexible, Customer-Focused Approaches

Agency Priority Goals

In FY 2021, USDA continued to use Agency Priority Goals (APG) to focus and monitor performance where the Department needed to drive significant progress and change. USDA identified five APGs for the FY 2020 to 2021 cycle:

- 1. Improve Customer Experience and Operational Efficiency:** Enhance the customer experience for farmers, ranchers, and foresters through operational efficiencies and expansion of service delivery channels. By September 30, 2021, USDA modernization and technology efforts will improve customer experiences by avoiding at least \$50 million in costs annually, associated with enhancements to acreage reporting, applications and eligibility forms, self-service capabilities, and other process.
- 2. Reduce Consumer Risk from Regulated Products through Modernization:** Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) will reduce consumer risk from FSIS-regulated products by systematically controlling and preventing hazards through the use of modernized systems, policies, and scientific approaches. By September 30, 2021, the Department intends to propose or implement eight modernization initiatives.
- 3. Reduce Animal Diseases:** To effectively control the spread of animal diseases, USDA supports animal health professionals and other agency partners who use identification technology to quickly trace potentially diseased animals. By September 30, 2021, at least 55% of all USDA approved identification tags distributed for cattle will be electronic Radio Frequency Identification tags.
- 4. Connect Rural America Through Innovative Solutions:** Create and implement innovative solutions to rural connectivity by expanding broadband infrastructure and services. By September 30, 2021, rural broadband investments will leverage over \$250 million in non-Federal funding through new program rules that encourage more private sector investment, enabling the deployment of innovative solutions and cutting-edge technologies to support precision agriculture, distance learning, and telemedicine.
- 5. Increase Utilization of Agricultural Research:** Increase the utilization of Departmental research results into real world technology improvements to USDA customers, producers, and industry. By September 30, 2021, USDA will develop data-driven methods to measure the impact of research in sustainable agricultural intensification; agricultural climate adaptation; food and nutrition translation; and value-added innovations.

The means used to verify and validate measured values, the sources of data, the level of accuracy required for the intended use of the data, and limitations to the data at the required level of accuracy are described and documented for each Agency Priority Goal on <http://www.performance.gov/>.

Cross-Agency Priority Goals

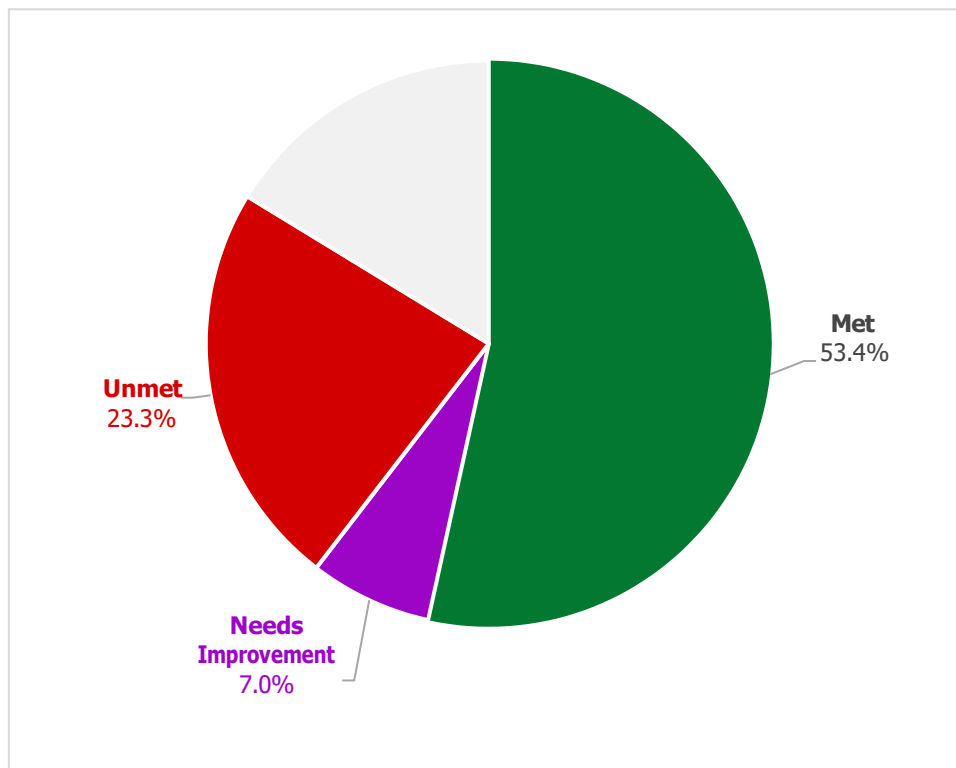
GPRAMA requires Cross-Agency Priority Goals to be addressed in the Annual Performance Report. Please refer to <https://www.performance.gov> for the Department's contributions and progress toward those goals, where applicable.

Executive Summary of Performance for FY 2021

In FY 2021, USDA was able to meet or exceed the target for 23 out of 43 (53.4%) performance metrics. Three of the 43 (7%) performance metrics were deemed to “need improvement,” meaning they were within 10% range of meeting the set target. Ten performance metrics (23.3%) were more than 10% below target, designating them as “unmet.” Seven performance metrics (16.3%) do not have available data at the time of this report, due to lag times associated with data reporting and processing.

USDA also made significant progress in reaching multiple milestones to its APGs, continuing its modernization efforts and the increased use of agricultural research to assist in reduction of food safety risk to our customers. Enhancements made to Departmental programs and systems improved efficiency and the overall customer experience for our Nation’s farmers, foresters, and ranchers.

Mission Area staff responsible for performance management will continue to explore the right balance between a challenging yet feasible target threshold. As precedent data become more readily available, staff will be able to make more informed decisions about manageable targets. USDA will continue to build upon its success, using the Quarterly Strategic Review process to maintain accountability and to articulate resources necessary to successfully reach performance metric targets and strategic goals. In addition, the integration of Enterprise Risk Management, along with increased capacity for evidence building, will improve decision-making surrounding resources and program activities.



Strategic Goal 1: Ensure USDA Programs are Delivered Efficiently, Effectively, With Integrity and a Focus on Customer Service

USDA will modernize and consolidate information technology (IT) infrastructure and services and strengthen management and oversight of procurement, property, and finance to ensure resources are deployed as effectively and efficiently as possible. USDA will create a safe and modern space within which employees can work and feel empowered to find innovative solutions to serve customers’ needs and promote accountability and professional development. USDA will leverage the strength and talent of its employees and reduce regulatory and administrative burdens to allow agencies to focus on their customers. Improved customer service and employee engagement will create a more effective and accessible USDA for all its stakeholders.

1.1 Modernize Information Technology Infrastructure, Facilities, and Support Services to Improve the Customer Experience

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER

Reduce the Number of Tier 1 Data Centers Across the Department*

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	Baseline	20	4	2	N/A
Actual	39	21	6	2	---

N/A: Not available

* This performance indicator was retired in FY 2020 after the target was met.

Progress Made

Client Experience Center: In FY 2021, the Client Experience Center (CEC) made strides in its End User Consolidation project, onboarding the National Agricultural Statistics Service Information, National Finance Center, Economic Research Service, Marketing and Regulatory Programs, and Agricultural Research Service to its customer base, which had already included the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Rural Development, and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The onboarding of these USDA Agencies effectively doubled the size of the customer base of CEC. Additionally, significant work was pushed into the preparation and standardization activities for FSIS; Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services; and Natural Resources and Environment. With those final three Mission Areas, USDA became the first Federal agency to centralize customer information technology (IT) capabilities for the entire workforce (about 115,000 people).

Improving Client Services and Experience: Throughout FY 2021, the Office of the Chief Information Officer improved services for clients that led to increased efficiencies and cost savings. The CEC developed a Remote Support First initiative to accommodate remote work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The CEC developed a USDA-wide Enterprise Depot service for deploying IT equipment such as laptops, phones, and monitors. The service included one-stop ordering, imaging, and delivery and was awarded a Tier 1 contract that provides additional services and saves \$5 million annually. Chief Data Officer Data Analytics expanded its open data platform to the Forest

Service, Rural Development, and Food, Nutrition, and Customer Service, which led to an increase of information sharing with the public and other Federal partners.

Innovative IT: The Information Security Center–Enterprise Geospatial Management Office supports and serves the Department through the management of cybersecurity threats and the modernization of IT. During FY 2021, the Office worked to deliver the USDA mission through an innovative approach to assure the cybersecurity of unmanned aerial systems or drones.

Barriers to Progress

Administrative Complications and Delays: The Digital Infrastructure Services Center faced significant delays in awarding contracts for Enterprise Infrastructure Solutions task orders in support of USDA Network Modernization due to lengthy legal analysis. The CEC also faced significant impact to customers through its Tier 1 Help Desk support contract, which has now been cancelled due to performance.

Cybersecurity Risks: Drones procured by USDA have been a known cybersecurity risk for several years. The Information Security Center cataloged more than 300 drones currently deployed by the Mission Areas, assessed the cybersecurity of each, and identified the cybersecurity risks inherent to the different drone types in use. Risks included foreign manufacturers exploiting known security weaknesses in these products; accessing, collecting, and disseminating registration, user, and mission-related geospatial data (e.g., topography, private residences, pictures of people); and using that data in a way that could be exploited by foreign governments.

COVID-19 Impact

COVID Dashboards: Chief Data Officer Data Analytics integrated data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and led development of several COVID-19 dashboards in support of USDA pandemic coordination, which enabled the Department to make decisions about facility status, workforce safety, and the impacts of COVID-19 on USDA staff. These dashboards have strengthened USDA’s ability to maintain effective delivery of programs and services.

1.2 Maintain a High-Performing Workforce through Employee Engagement and Empowerment

OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Progress Made

Revitalized Performance Management System at USDA: The Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) oversees the transition from a five-tier performance management to a two-tier pass/fail system. Mission Areas were unanimous in their desire to improve the performance management process in a manner that would further promote employee accountability and empower supervisors to reward top performers more easily. New policies and directives were established and approved. A communications, change management, and comprehensive training strategy was developed and executed across the entire Department. In addition to shifting USDA’s non-Senior Executive Service performance management system to the two-tier pass/fail, OHRM led the development and implementation, first-ever automated enterprise performance management system for use by all USDA employees and supervisors.

Forward-Leaning Human Capital Policy: OHRM developed, coordinated, and implemented a Federal sector leading policy promoting telework and remote work in response to Secretary Vilsack’s initiative to make USDA a better place to work for all employees.

Improving Department-Wide Labor Relations: OHRM has led the restoration of Labor Relations Councils throughout USDA to improve two-way communication, collaboration, and labor partnerships with the exclusive representatives of a vast amount of USDA's employees.

Leveraging Technology: OHRM created a Human Capital Management Dashboard that consists of real-time data reporting resulting in Mission Areas, Agencies, and Staff Offices being able to retrieve accurate and valuable workforce data and metrics in the hiring process that help pinpoint many inefficiencies and bottlenecks in recruitment efforts.

COVID-19 Human Resources Flexibilities: OHRM issued advisories and coached managers, supervisors, and employees on the following: emergency paid leave with frequently asked questions; administrative leave for vaccinations, adverse effects, and to accompany a family member for their vaccination; work schedule flexibilities and Agency core hours; telework and remote work frequently asked questions; hiring flexibilities; position eligibility templates for remote work and telework; remote work implementation guidance; and special premium pay caps. These advisories and coaching assisted Agencies to help mitigate the burden the COVID-19 pandemic created on employees.

Strengthening USDA's Ability to Hire: OHRM worked closely with the Mission Areas, Agencies, and Staff Offices, as well as the Office of Personnel Management, to improve the Federal hiring process and ensure all available hiring flexibilities were available to ensure the expeditious hiring of critically needed talent.

Barriers to Progress

Rapidly Changing Environment and Guidance: OHRM is a very agile and flexible organization that contributes high value and structure to USDA's Human Capital Management programs and services, in spite of facing many challenges, and with balancing rapidly changing and sometimes conflicting guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, the Office of Personnel Management, and the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force while still staying within regulatory parameters.

Staffing Shortage and Internal Structural Deficiencies: OHRM has been significantly impacted by resource constraints, which limited the Office's ability sufficiently support the many critical initiatives it provides leadership on.

COVID-19 Impact

Changing the Way OHRM Accomplishes Work: OHRM developed strategies to adapt to how human resources programs and services were delivered to USDA's workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic. OHRM is evolving to a more enterprise-wide approach aimed at improving the experience of all customers and employees. OHRM has pivoted from traditional issues such as compensation and recruitment to a renewed focus on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility; employee wellness; health; retention; and the use of workplace flexibilities. While the fallout from the pandemic has created many challenges, it also provided new avenues for managing systemic challenges and opportunities to build back better.

1.3 Reduce the Regulatory Burden and Streamline Processes

OFFICE OF BUDGET AND PROGRAM ANALYSIS

Progress Made

Reviews and Clearance: OBPA coordinated the review and clearance of 61 regulatory workplans, 157 funding documents, 62 rules exempt from Office of Management and Budget (OMB) review, 49 rules deemed not significant by OMB, and 32 significant and economically significant rules requiring OMB review. OBPA also reviewed and approved 236 Federal Register notices and 106 policy or guidance documents that required OMB review.

Prioritization and Efficiency: To ensure that reviewers were able to better focus on priority items, OBPA worked with the Office of the Secretary to draft and issue an updated set of clearance process expectations for the Agencies. An important feature of this update was to push approval authority for several categories of routine, non-policy related notices down to the Mission Area and Agency levels, which freed up OBPA and other staff office reviewers.

Barriers to Progress

As noted above, a major challenge for OBPA from a regulatory and process standpoint was the sheer volume of Agency actions, many of which came about unexpectedly or had tight implementation deadlines. OBPA worked with agencies and OMB to ensure that all available time-saving strategies were utilized (e.g., sharing advance copies, handling reviewer comments in real time rather than through email, etc.).

COVID-19 Impact

USDA actions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have generally fallen into two categories: 1) establishing regulations and guidance to implement new authorities and programs, and 2) issuing time-limited waivers to existing regulatory requirements (e.g., to allow pick-up rather than in-person school lunches). Both categories of actions require coordination with OMB and the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, and OBPA has served as the conduit and clearinghouse for Agency submissions and OMB review.

1.4 Improve Stewardship of Resources and Utilize Data-Driven Analyses to Maximize the Return on Investment

RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND ECONOMICS

Reduce the Department’s Overall Real Property Footprint Through Effective Disposal and Consolidation Efforts (Million Square Feet)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	Baseline	31.6	31.5	31.2	31.1
Actual	31.9	31.7	31.3	31.2	31.1

Reduce the Department's Total Number of Fleet Vehicles (Thousand)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	Baseline	28.8	27.1	36.5	36.5
Actual	29.4	27.7	27.1	37.9	37.1

Percentage of USDA Patents Licensed Per Number of Patents Issued

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	---	---	25%	35%
Actual	---	---	---	26%	50%

Number of Agriculture and Food Research Initiative-Supported Undergraduate, Graduate, and Post-Doctoral Students

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	---	---	1,423	2,495
Actual	---	---	---	1,167	4,462

Citations of REE Reports

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	---	---	119	122
Actual	---	---	---	134	82

Progress Made

Automated Dashboard for Key Performance Metrics: During FY 2021, Research, Education, and Economics (OCS-REE) Agencies worked with the OCS-REE analytics and dashboard team to build an automated dashboard to track metrics in a more streamlined manner, improving data accuracy and usage.

Barriers to Progress

Siloed Legacy Systems for Data: The majority of OCS-REE data are housed in siloed legacy systems across the Mission Area. Significant effort was spent in FY 2021 to build dashboards across the Mission Area and improve access to these valuable data. As OCS-REE matures its data capabilities, enhancements to the existing performance metrics (and respective measurement methodology) are expected in the coming years.

COVID-19 Impact

Educational Institution Shutdowns: COVID-19 impacted higher educational institutions as many were shut down during FY 2020. The agricultural workforce development metric is gaining momentum to resume normal output as institutions are reopening.

Strategic Goal 2: Maximize the Ability of American Agricultural Producers to Prosper by Feeding and Clothing the World

A strong and prosperous agricultural sector is essential to the well-being of the U.S. economy. America’s farmers and ranchers ensure a reliable food supply, support job growth, and promote economic development. To maintain a competitive agricultural sector, USDA will support farmers’ and ranchers’ ability to start and maintain profitable businesses and offer financial support to producers affected by natural disasters. Furthermore, USDA’s research Agencies will continue to introduce high-performance plants, animals, and integrated management options that increase the efficiency of farming practices. Lastly, USDA will also provide tools to producers, so they are well-positioned to secure a share of a growing market for agricultural products.

2.1 Provide an Effective Financial Safety Net for Farmers and Ranchers to Sustain Economically Viable Agricultural Production and Support Rural Jobs and Economic Growth

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RISK MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Annual Normalized Value of Risk Protection Provided to Agricultural Producers Through the Federal Crop Insurance Program (Billions of Dollars)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	\$63.6	\$64.0	\$77.3	\$77.6	\$77.9
Actual	\$74.6	\$76.8	\$78.2	\$84.1	\$87.9

Progress Made

Implementing New Shallow Loss Coverage: A privately developed product approved by the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation Board provides area-based coverage for a portion of the deductible of the underlying insurance policy. This program is available for over 70 crops and more than 21,700 policies were sold in FY 2021.

New and Improved Coverage to the Dairy and Livestock Section: Dairy Revenue Protection has grown to cover almost 30% of the milk production in the U.S. in only the second year since the program’s inception. In FY 2020, the Risk Management Agency (RMA) implemented several changes to cattle and swine policies, which will make these policies more affordable and accessible to livestock producers. These initiatives will help dairy and livestock producers weather the markets by providing vital protection against price declines.

Flexible Written Agreements: Of the more than one million policies in effect, RMA issued nearly 14,000 written agreements. Written agreements are manually underwritten policies that offer coverage not available in the county or offer specific improved coverage or terms. This process provides significant flexibility, which covered \$995 million of the total \$150 billion in liability for our Nation’s farmers annually. This process also naturally identifies changing farming practices and crops grown in areas ensuring that the program is adaptive and effective.

Risk Management Education: In FY 2021, RMA awarded nine cooperative agreements for \$955,000 for the delivery of training to U.S. farmers and ranchers in managing production, marketing, financial, legal, and human risk. The program gives priority to risk management training and educational tools aimed at assisting historically underserved farmers and ranchers and helping producers effectively manage long-term risks and challenges. The program awarded projects covering a broad range of risk management training including education on Federal crop insurance, wildfire preparedness, financial management, record keeping, and risk analysis.

Barriers to Progress

Farmers Understanding New Coverage: Due to the new nature of the coverage, education opportunities are imperative in ensuring farmers have a strong understanding of how they are covered. This challenge is being addressed by training agents and farmers through participation in industry training meetings, training webinars, Frequently Asked Questions, and other resources.

COVID-19 Impact

RMA experienced little to no impact on operations in FY 2021 due to COVID-19.

FARM SERVICE AGENCY

Average Number of Days to Process Direct Loans

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	Baseline	31	30	32	32
Actual	31	30	32	34	36

Percentage of Direct and Guaranteed Loan Borrowers who are Beginning Farmers

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	Baseline	53%	59.9%	59.9%
Actual	---	55%	54.5%	58.6%	59.9%

First Installment Delinquency Rate on Direct Loans

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	---	---	8%	8%
Actual	---	---	---	9.9%	13.8%

Direct Loan Delinquency Rate

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	---	---	7%	7%
Actual	---	---	---	4.3%	4.7%

Progress Made

Farm Loans’ Lending Activity to Farmers and Ranchers: There were 29,051 loan obligations totaling \$6.7 billion made or guaranteed in FY 2021. The entire portfolio of outstanding debt as of September 30, 2021 was \$32.3 billion, serving 127,610 farmers and ranchers. The amount of lending declined in FY 2021 in both dollar and volume terms, down 11 and 17% respectively. While lending in dollar terms for real estate purchases was mixed among direct and guaranteed loans, decreasing three and eight percent respectively, there were large declines in operating loans. Operating loan obligations fell in dollar terms among direct and guaranteed loans, by 20% and 34% respectively. The decline in FY 2021 obligations was not unexpected, particularly for operating loans that provide working capital to farmers and ranchers. Rising commodity prices and Farm Loan Program payments contributed to an increase in farm income. Once current supply chain challenges ease, there may be pressure on farm income if commodity prices decline. This cyclical nature underscores the importance of Farm Loans as a safety net.

Heirs’ Property Relending Program: In August 2021, the Heirs’ Property Relending Program [final rule](#) was published in the Federal Register and the Secretary announced the availability of funds for intermediary lenders to provide loans to assist heirs with resolving land ownership and succession issues. The first application period for intermediary lenders to receive up to \$5 million at one percent interest for relending ended on October 29, 2021. Three loan applications were received totaling \$12 million. The selection of successful eligible intermediary lenders is expected to be announced in early 2022. Once announced, lenders will be published on the Heirs’ Property page located at [Farmers.gov](#). As part of its efforts to expand intermediary lender participation and assist heirs, FSA will undertake an assessment of potential barriers to participation and what outreach and technical assistance it can provide to increase program interest prior to the next application period.

Loan Flexibility for Producers During COVID-19: FSA provided flexibility to direct farm loan borrowers to defer a loan payment for at least one year. This option has been used to defer 4,741 loan payments totaling \$48.2 million. This option reduces loan delinquencies and frees up working capital for a borrower’s other expenses.

Business Process Re-engineering, and IT Modernization to Improve Program Delivery: Development of a roadmap to identify business processes for re-engineering and to retire or integrate and modernize more than 20 IT systems is two-thirds complete. Among the objectives are automation of paper-based and manual processes performed by employees, replacement of a 45-year old accounting system to become Financial Management Modernization Initiative compliant, and to provide online features to customers such as a document repository and online interactive loan application submission and loan repayment processing.

Data Analytics to Mitigate Risk and Improve Internal Controls: To support more informed decision making and improve program delivery, Farm Loans is implementing several initiatives to better

utilize its large datasets. Farm Loans and the Farm Production and Conservation Economic Policy and Analysis Division have developed an analysis of borrower risk factors and their correlation to operating loan delinquencies encompassing 70,000 loans made from 2011 to 2020. The Economic Policy and Analysis Division documented its methodology and findings in an article to be published by the Agricultural Finance Review Journal. This project is being expanded to analyze development of a risk-based model to streamline and automate borrower and loan risk assessments. The program implemented comprehensive dashboards that track individual and aggregate loan making and loan servicing activities to identify trends and pinpoint bottlenecks. Additional accomplishments within data analytics initiatives include:

- Expanded the reviews of loan dockets for more than 1,000 loan officials to ensure consistent application of policy and identify needs for training and clarifying directives; and
- Improved projections of loan funds needed in fiscal year budget planning to minimize funding shortfalls that would cause approved loans to be unfunded.

Barriers to Progress

Business Process Re-engineering and IT Modernization Initiative: This is a complex initiative due to the more than 20 IT systems that must be retired, modernized, and integrated, as well as the requirement to retain and have readily accessible decades of historical loan data. The consequences of implementation delays include employees continuing to use manual processes and performing duplicate entry into systems. This directly impacts their productivity and ability to adequately service loan applicants and borrowers in a timely manner; and delays customer access to online interactive loan applications, online payments, and risk management tools.

Average Number of Days to Process Direct Loans: The time to process applications for direct loans has been increasing approximately one day per year over the past decade. This is attributable to several factors that have been accelerating in recent years, including:

- Poaching by commercial lenders of loan officers who have recently completed their two-year training program and received loan approval certification is a significant challenge, with some States reporting that one- to two-thirds of their trainees are being hired away by banks. Hiring and retention bonuses are being analyzed for expansion to mitigate the impacts of retirements and poaching by commercial lenders that offer a more attractive compensation package and work-life balance.
- The legal structure of businesses and their loans have become more complex, particularly since the doubling of direct loan limits in the 2018 Farm Bill. Due to a wave of attrition, many State and county offices have a lower average experience level, including the loan chief who provides guidance and oversight to all loan officials in their State. Retention bonuses and other options are being analyzed to mitigate this challenge.
- It is time consuming and inefficient to use existing processes and systems. This impacts loan making and servicing program delivery, including implementing the American Rescue Plan Act Section 1005 for debt relief, which has required Rural Development and Farm Loans to use manual and paper processes. Over the past five years, business processes and forms have been streamlined to the extent possible, but there are limitations to this without automation options. Inefficiencies and delays caused by Farm Loans using manual and paper-based processes has been exacerbated by COVID-19 and the limited ability of employees to meet with customers face-to-face. This underscores the importance of the Farm Loans business process and IT modernization initiative.

- States report that their review of incomplete applications reduces the ability to provide timely customer service, delays processing complete applications, and causes frustration among customers who are uncertain about the application process. Options to reduce the prevalence of incomplete applications are being considered. For example, efforts have begun to develop a plain-language loan readiness tool that will be a guide and checklist describing program eligibility, business plan/cash flow requirements, and collateral requirements. A pilot for non-governmental organizations to offer technical assistance in using the loan readiness tool is also being explored. In addition, current loan forms will be simplified and streamlined as part of the business process re-engineering and IT modernization initiative to provide customers an online, integrated application process.

COVID-19 Impact

Productivity and Business Processes: In recent months, the impact on employees’ productivity has been mixed as COVID-19 infection rates fluctuate within States and counties. The number of staff who can be present at a service center due to local infection rates impacts employees’ ability to meet directly with customers. While mitigation efforts such as electronic signatures and telework with government laptops have been helpful to increase productivity, business process re-engineering and automation are needed to fully address manual and paper-based processes.

2.2 Increase Agricultural Opportunities and Support Economic Growth by Creating New Markets and Supporting a Competitive Agricultural System

AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE

Percent of Meat and Poultry User Fee-Funded Employees’ Time Recovered Through Customer Billings (Meat)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	---	---	83%	83%
Actual	---	---	---	93%	94.9%

Percent of Meat and Poultry User Fee-Funded Employees’ Time Recovered Through Customer Billings (Poultry)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	---	---	83%	83%
Actual	---	---	---	95%	94.5%

Progress Made

Significant Investments and Expanded Coordination: The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) supported local and regional markets and new agricultural stakeholders by:

- Developing and deploying expanded and new grant programs and cooperative agreements in response to an increase from \$159 million to \$1.8 billion in funds, driven by pandemic assistance authorized by Congress for local and regional food systems, agricultural workers, and supply chain resiliency; and
- Convening three universities and 17 organizations to build a network of networks for local food systems and COVID-19 response, collaborating across market channels, product sectors, and geography and enabling robust multi-directional communication with university researchers, practitioners, and government.

Executive Order No. 14036: AMS enhanced livestock market transparency and the Department's initiatives for [Executive Order No. 14036](#) on *Promoting Competition in the American Economy* through publication and dissemination of new cattle market reports that provide critical insight into formula trades and provided time-sensitive market intelligence for the Office of the Chief Economist and the Secretary's office during on competition, This information informed the Administration's actions to address near-term supply chain challenges and market growth.

Barriers to Progress

Support of New Markets and Agriculture Opportunities: Deployment of a significant increase in Federal funds to support increased agricultural opportunities and expanded markets requires rapid onboarding of new staff, build-out of new systems, and additional auditing support to ensure financial accountability. The staff and systems often lag behind the need to deploy pandemic-related resources to stakeholders in a timely fashion.

COVID-19 Impact

Hiring to Support Increase Agricultural Opportunities and Expanded Markets: The practice of hiring to support the above activities remains a challenge, and the difficulties have been exacerbated due to the overall labor and workforce shortages across government and the Nation.

2.3 Protect Agricultural Health by Preventing and Mitigating the Spread of Agricultural Pests and Disease

ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH INSPECTION SERVICE

Number of Hours it Takes to Mobilize Resources Once it is Determined that a Federal Emergency Response is Needed to Manage an Agricultural Outbreak

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	24	24	24	24	24
Actual	24	24	24	24	24

Percent of High-Risk Plant Pests for Which Early Detection Surveys are Conducted

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	85%	93%	95%	96%	96%
Actual	96%	96%	96%	96%	97%

Progress Made

APHIS Response Support of African Swine Fever: In late FY 2021, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) confirmed an outbreak of African Swine Fever (ASF) in the Dominican Republic and Haiti. APHIS supported the response in the Dominican Republic by providing advisory services and helping with diagnostic testing, and the Agency continues to engage with Haitian authorities. APHIS also mobilized staff to Puerto Rico to expand surveillance and laboratory capacity and remove feral swine. For this response, the National Veterinary Stockpile (NVS) program mobilized resources such as personal protective equipment (PPE) and other supplies as soon as it was determined they were needed, continuing to meet the target of mobilizing resources within 24 hours.

Success in Early Pest Detection Surveys: In FY 2021, APHIS and cooperators in 50 States and five territories conducted a total of 434 early pest detection surveys, targeting more than 97% of the high-risk plant pests and diseases identified for FY 2021 surveys (and exceeding its target of 96%). APHIS confirmed 11 species new to the U.S. and determined that an additional 36 species were found in new areas or were re-introduced during FY 2021 through these surveys. Documenting these detections allows APHIS and State officials to determine whether control or regulatory measures are necessary to mitigate the potential impacts of the pests or diseases.

Barriers to Progress

Control of African Swine Fever: The proximity of the Dominican Republic and Haiti to Puerto Rico and other U.S. territories poses a serious risk for ASF spread. There are estimated to be 2.7 million swine in the Dominican Republic and Haiti and the political instability in Haiti, along with continuing impacts of recent earthquakes and hurricanes, make response efforts particularly difficult. APHIS is engaging with officials from the Dominican Republic and Haiti to help control ASF on Hispaniola while increasing prevention and emergency preparedness activities in the United States. APHIS is establishing a protection zone around Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to prevent introduction of ASF to these areas and to avoid trade restrictions on pork products from the U.S. mainland if ASF enters the protection zone.

COVID-19 Impact

Personal Protective Equipment Supply: The NVS experienced low supplies of PPE due to COVID-19, as the Agency used stocks normally designated for animal health emergency response activities to equip employees to safely conduct routine business during the pandemic and provided PPE supplies to USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service to supplement their supply. To ensure that the NVS could continue to restock these essential supplies, the program worked to receive priority (referred to as “rated”) status under the Defense Priorities and Allocation System in December 2020. This allowed APHIS orders of PPE to be filled and for the Agency to continue working on the front lines. Travel restrictions continued to impact in-person trainings and emergency response exercises and the NVS program has conducted virtual workshops where possible.

Strategic Goal 3: Promote American Agricultural Products and Exports

Expanding international marketing opportunities for U.S. farmers and exporters is critical to business and income growth across rural America. It is essential for USDA to continue its efforts to expand American agricultural products and exports through promotion activities, development of international standards, removal of trade barriers by monitoring and enforcing existing trade agreements, and negotiation of new trade agreements that benefit the U.S. agricultural economy. USDA will also partner with developing countries to support them along the agricultural market continuum from developing economies to developed economies with promising demand potential. Ultimately, this work builds foundations for future markets and creates long-term international relationships that further advance U.S. agriculture’s exports.

3.1 Expand International Marketing Opportunities

FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICE

Value of Agricultural Exports Resulting from Participation in Foreign Foods and Agricultural Trade Shows and Trade Missions (Billions of Dollars)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	\$1.56	\$1.78	\$1.75	\$2.13	\$1.75
Actual	\$2.35	\$2.13	\$2.20	\$1.16	\$.119

Progress Made

Virtual Trade Events: Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) was successful in hosting 11 virtual trade events that included buyers from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, China, Hong Kong, India, Bangladesh, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Egypt, Algeria, Indonesia, and South Korea. Together, these virtual trade events resulted in 1,216 business-to-business meetings and generated \$25.5 million in 12-month projected sales.

USDA-Endorsed Trade Shows and Business Growth Across International Markets: In FY 2021, 179 U.S. companies and organizations participated in 11 USDA-endorsed trade shows (including three virtual tradeshows) in five countries, drawing buyers from all over the world. Twelve-month projected sales reported by exhibitors were estimated at \$93.3 million. The companies made nearly 2,100 serious business contacts and displayed 1,200 new products in various markets worldwide.

Barriers to Progress

Travel Restrictions and Show Cancellations: Travel restrictions due to COVID-19 significantly reduced USDA’s international marketing activities in FY 2021. Of the 25 trade shows endorsed by USDA during the fiscal year, 12 were either postponed until FY 2022 and 2023 or cancelled, two were reformatted to virtual conferences, and three were reformatted to virtual tradeshows.

COVID-19 Impact

Postponed Trade Shows and Decreased Sales: In FY 2021, trade missions and trade shows were catastrophically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and postponed to FY 2022. Of the 25 USDA-endorsed trade shows, only 11 took place. Three of those trade shows were virtual, and most others only allowed domestic participation. All trade show 12-month projected sales decreased dramatically from pre-COVID levels.

3.2 Prevent or Resolve Barriers to Trade that Hinder U.S. Food and Agricultural Exports

FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICE

Value of Trade Preserved Through Resolution of Foreign Market Access Issues (Billions of Dollars)*

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	\$4.10	\$4.0	\$5.50	\$6.0	\$6.10
Actual	\$7.50	\$12.75	\$2.47	\$7.67	\$5.89

* Foreign market access issues include U.S. export detention, sanitary/phytosanitary concerns, technical barriers to trade, and trade regulations

Progress Made

Record-High Agricultural Exports: Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. agricultural exports reached a record \$172.2 billion in FY 2021. This success was buoyed by continued trade increases to China, as well as resolution of various restrictions in other countries affecting U.S. exports. In November 2020, Egypt agreed to harmonize its maximum residue level for ractopamine, a commonly used feed additive, in beef with Codex. The action preserves the largest market for U.S. beef liver, a market recently valued at nearly \$60 million and previously valued at as much as \$110 million before Egypt proposed to ban the veterinary drug. In January 2021, USDA was instrumental in convincing Shanghai port officials to substantially improve the processing of U.S.-imported cold-chain containers, clearance, and disinfection. This expedited the entire process to between four and five days and ensured that \$585 million worth of U.S. meat, poultry, and seafood subject to the enhanced COVID-19 inspection protocols entered the Chinese market in a timely fashion. Finally, USDA worked to preserve access to the Hong Kong market for U.S. beef and pork, ensuring continued access that averaged \$1.84 billion in beef and \$2 million in pork between FY 2018 and 2020. Since FY 2016, FAS has worked to dissuade Hong Kong authorities from adding ractopamine to their list of harmful substances.

Barriers to Progress

Travel Restrictions: There were significant reductions in USDA's direct face-to-face engagement with trading partners on trade restrictions. In many countries, in-person meetings are still restricted due to the pandemic.

COVID-19 Impact

Travel Limits: The pandemic has continued to limit travel opportunities that facilitate meeting with foreign trading partners to resolve trade restrictions. As the effects of the pandemic begin to lessen, there will likely be greater opportunity for direct engagement with trading partners aimed at expanding market access.

3.3 Build Demand in Developing Countries through Trade Capacity Building

FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICE

Progress Made

Progress in Practice: As a result of a sustained collaborative effort by the Trade and Regulatory Capacity-Building Division, Agricultural Economic Development Division, International Fund for Agricultural Development/Food for Progress, and U.S. Agency for International Development, Tanzania ratified the East African Community Sanitary/Phytosanitary protocol, which establishes harmonized regional rules and will facilitate regional and international trade.

International Agricultural Education Fellowship Program: FY 2021 saw the first International Agricultural Education Fellowship Program in Ghana, which included nine Fellows teaching school-based agriculture techniques to children in secondary schools across Ghana. In FY 2021, FAS also initiated more than 75 cost-reimbursable agreements with Land Grant Universities that will assist with addressing global food security issues and promote U.S. agricultural products.

Barriers to Progress

Travel Limitations: Travel challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic continued to have a minor impact on FAS' ability to implement certain activities. Among the challenges facing FAS' ability to implement trade capacity-building activities are the inability to coordinate in-country training. For example, Sri Lanka's Market-Oriented Dairy project funded by the Food for Progress program had to cancel 83% of its planned in-person farm trainings in FY 2021 due to COVID-19. Despite these cancellations, the project was able to dramatically strengthen farmer outreach by adding the option of phone calls to physical visits during the COVID-19 lockdown, which allowed the program to reach a cumulative total of 12,433 mentoring and monitoring visits and calls.

Rising Commodity Prices and Freight Costs: With economies around the world attempting to re-open and recover as new variants of the COVID-19 virus emerged, commodity prices driven by reduced supply and a recovery in demand continued to rally throughout FY 2021. On aggregate, grains and oilseed prices rose by nearly 27% worldwide. Ocean freight rates, primarily for bulk and container cargo vessels, also saw a substantial uptick in FY 2021. Food for Progress projects are funded primarily by proceeds from the sale of donated U.S. agricultural commodities, a process commonly referred to as monetization. On average, freight costs for Food for Progress monetizations were up 12% from FY 2020. Despite the challenges of increased costs, improved coordination through joint sales and consolidated shipments in FY 2021 resulted in higher average monetization sales prices.

COVID-19 Impact

Global Travel: Though COVID-19 stalled global travel, FAS utilized its fellowship and exchange programs to continue educating agriculturalists and research scientists by hosting more than 40 virtual meetings and engagements. The virtual meetings provided a platform for fellows, mentors, and implementing partners to discuss food security, climate change, and trade opportunities prior to their fellowship.

Strategic Goal 4: Facilitate Rural Prosperity and Economic Development

USDA promotes rural prosperity and economic development by financing investments in rural utilities, housing, and businesses. When rural Americans share the same level of infrastructure services as the country's urban areas, rural communities can make even greater economic contributions with healthy businesses and families. With this aim in mind, USDA leveraged funds, stimulated public-private partnerships, and collaborated to build rural infrastructure, including broadband, community facilities, safe and affordable housing, and health services and facilities. It also provided capacity building to help underserved communities become thriving communities.

4.1 Expand Rural Business Opportunity and Rural Quality of Life with Access to Capital; Improved Infrastructure, Broadband Access, and Connectivity; Support for Workforce Availability

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Percent of Customers who are Provided Access to New and/or Improved Essential Community Facilities

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	5.0%	6.8%	6.8%	3.0%	3.0%
Actual	6.0%	9.4%	2.45%	5.1%	9.1%

Number of Borrowers' Subscribers Receiving New and/or Improved Telecommunication Services (Thousand)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	100	175	139	160	162
Actual	158	45	68.9	131	50.5

Percent of Rural Development Infrastructure Investments that Leverage Non-Federal Funding

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	Baseline	78%	79%	80%
Actual	---	77%	83%	62%	91%

Percent of Rural Development Assistance that Went to Distressed Communities

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	Baseline	12%	13%	14%
Actual	---	11%	11%	12.5%	12.3%

Progress Made

Investments in Rural Communities: Rural Development continued to make significant investments to lift economies in distressed rural communities. More than \$4.8 billion was invested across 60 programs in 555 rural counties or county equivalents. These investments provided the critical building blocks for community economic development and rural prosperity. Overall, 12.3% of Rural Development investments were made in distressed communities supporting homeownership and community quality of life.

Barriers to Progress

Staffing and Attrition: Rural Development continued to receive increases in funding to deliver programs and make investments into rural communities without the commensurate staffing increase to manage the increased workload. In addition to the increased workload, Rural Development faced issues related to attrition in FY 2021. Currently, 22% of Rural Development staff are eligible to retire, which will increase to 37% in the next four years. Rural Development is currently conducting staffing analyses to better understand the number of full time-equivalents needed to deliver its mission and plan for loss of knowledge and experience due to attrition.

Administrative Hurdles: The Notice of Funding Opportunity for ReConnect Round 3 was not released during FY 2021. This limited the number of e-connectivity projects funded throughout the fiscal year and reduced the projected number of subscribers that were able to receive new or improved telecommunications services.

COVID-19 Impact

Technology Adaptation: Despite challenges from 100% telework during FY 2021, Rural Development staff learned to use existing technology for improved communication, pivoted to online outreach, facilitated webinars in place of in-person meetings, and continued to obligate funds. Rural Development processed more than 99,000 loan servicing requests and continued to consult the borrowers in good faith to alleviate defaults. The Innovation Center’s Data Analytics Division created the COVID-19 Economic Risk Assessment as part of the Rural Development’s data-driven approach to identify how Agency resources and services can provide immediate relief to communities affected by the pandemic and support economic recovery in rural America. This dashboard enabled Rural Development leadership to be more proactive and reach out to customers in vulnerable communities, enabling a timelier response to the needs of rural communities.

Strategic Goal 5: Strengthen the Stewardship of Private Lands Through Technology and Research

The world population is expected to reach 9.6 billion by 2050. Feeding this population will require the adoption of new science and technologies and the implementation of science-based conservation plans to increase agricultural production sustainability. To ensure U.S. private working lands and public agricultural landscapes are conserved, the Department provided technical and financial assistance using the latest technology and research available.

5.1 Enhance Conservation Planning with Science-Based Tools and Information

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Contract Implementation Ratio¹

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	Baseline	87%	87%	87%
Actual	---	87%	87%	87%	87%

Annual Practice Implementation Rate²

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	Baseline	53%	53%	53%
Actual	---	43%	55%	43%	68%

Progress Made

Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative: NRCS continued to refine its processes and systems to deliver technical and financial assistance more efficiently and effectively to USDA customers. As part of the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative, NRCS implemented the Conservation Desktop (CD), one of three integrated systems including the Mobile Planning Tool and Conservation Client Gateway, which was replaced by Farmers.gov. The CD is an internally facing, map-based tool for field conservationists to efficiently develop science-based conservation plans and practice schedules to support conservation implementation. The CD also helps field conservationists with the management of Farm Bill conservation program contracts. Since the initial release of CD in July 2017, there have been 23 additional releases providing further enhancements and improvements, enabling NRCS to retire its legacy conservation planning system

¹ Percentage of items in a contract that are certified during the life of the contract. The ratio is computed for each individual contract, as the percent of practices applied out of total practices agreed-to upon obligation. The Contract Implementation Ratio is calculated for each individual contract using the third-year CIR after year of obligation.

² Numerator: a count of all practices certified within the target quarter. Denominator: a count of all practices that are expected to have been certified as of a given end-of-quarter timeframe.

Customer Service Toolkit. In FY 2020, CD was integrated with the Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool (CART), which is used for performing science-based resource inventories, assessments, and ranking. With the integration of these systems, NRCS expects to save approximately two hours per conservation plan. Cumulatively, NRCS estimates that this will result in an annual savings of approximately 160,000 hours for field conservationists while improving customer service. By the end of FY 2021, there were more than 9,500 users in CD and CART. CD and CART increased the number of assessments that planners completed by 17.85% in FY 2021 compared to FY 2020.

Farmers.gov Application: In addition to improving customer experience, the Farmers.gov gateway application interfaces with field staff via secure, one-stop, customer-facing online conservation software. NRCS continued to monitor and improve Farmers.gov, where customers can view, digitally sign, and interact with NRCS conservation documents such as conservation contracts, payment documents, practices, and maps. Users may also submit assistance requests for new conservation plans. To date, Farmers.gov has delivered 22 incremental releases of content. Each release has enhanced capabilities to allow users to request conservation assistance, report practice completion, request practice certification, eSign documents, and manage NRCS plans and contracts for themselves, their authorized businesses, and Power of Attorney grantors.

Barriers to Progress

Agency Hiring: To address the growing disparity between workload and staffing, NRCS has been developing and using data analytic models such as the National Staffing Distribution and the Optimally Productive Office models. The Optimally Productive Office model leverages analysis of cycle-time study and NRCS core workload to inform National and State leaders on optimal field staff locations. The workload cycle-time study was a National study conducted by NRCS to determine the time it takes field employees to complete workload tasks. This analysis, along with a suite of State-level tools, are displayed in online dashboards. Additionally, NRCS is actively using the pathways program for recruitment efforts, both for interns and Presidential Management Fellows.

COVID-19 Impact

New Workplace Protocols and Phased Return to Office: NRCS is rapidly adapting to a new servicing protocol for program applications, contracting, and field-based delivery with social distancing. In FY 2021, NRCS began delivering technology and remote training to engage new employees in resource and application processing work.

5.2 Promote Productive Working Lands

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Cropland with Conservation Applied to Improve Soil Quality – Environmental Quality Improvement Program (Million Acres)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	3.0	3.0	3.1	3.4	3.4
Actual	3	3.1	3.4	3.9	3.4

Cropland with Conservation Applied to Improve Soil Quality – Conservation Technical Assistance (Million Acres)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	5.9	5.9	5.9	6.0	6.0
Actual	5.9	6.0	5.7	6.4	3.6

Tons of Sediment Prevented from Leaving Cropland and Entering Waterbodies (Million Tons)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	4.6	4.6	5.7	5.7	5.7
Actual	4.8	5.3	6.3	8.2	8.1

Cropland with an Applied Soil Health Management System (Thousand Acres)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	---	---	---	225
Actual	---	---	---	---	313

Progress Made

Environmental Quality Incentives Program: The Environmental Quality Incentives Program provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers and non-industrial forest managers to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits. Through this program, NRCS provides its customers with financial resources and assistance to plan and implement conservation practices. By the end of FY 2021, 116,631 total applications and 34,829 contracts had been submitted in the system for a total of \$1.3 billion on 11,849,088 acres.

Urban Agriculture Success: Urban agriculture refers to the cultivation, processing, and distribution of agricultural products in urban and suburban settings, including activities such as vertical production; warehouse farms; community gardens; rooftop farms; hydroponic, aeroponic, and aquaponic facilities; and other innovations. Urban farmers and gardeners work among diverse populations to expand access to nutritious foods, foster community engagement, provide jobs, educate communities about farming, and expand green spaces. The 2018 Farm Bill directed USDA to stand up a new Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production to institutionalize the support for urban farming. This Office, which works in partnership with numerous USDA Agencies, implements a Competitive Grants Program that supports a wide range of activities through two grant types (Planning Projects and Implementation Projects). \$4.75 million

was awarded to 10 Planning Projects and 11 Implementation Projects in FY 2021. Recipients included projects in New York, Florida, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, California, Arizona, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, West Virginia, Alabama, Connecticut, Texas, and Maryland. Activities included operating community gardens and nonprofit farms, increasing food production and access in economically distressed communities, providing job training and education, and developing business plans and zoning.

Barriers to Progress

Conservation Technical Assistance Program Metric: NRCS faced challenges meeting the target for cropland with conservation applied to improve soil quality, primarily due to process efficiencies from the implementation of CART. This tool allowed for the utilization of multiple funding sources and a broader range of practices to address farmer planned needs, resulting in fewer unfunded practices being implemented through the Conservation Technical Assistance program. As a result, fewer acres were reported under this indicator. The indicator and target are being re-evaluated by NRCS leadership and subject matter experts.

5.3 Enhance Productive Agricultural Landscapes

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Working Lands Protected by Conservation Easements (Thousand Acres)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	107	101	140	163	163
Actual	60.7	163	178	167	145

Restored Wetland Acreage (Million Acres)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	1.9	1.9	2.34	2.41	2.34
Actual	1.9	2.3	2.34	2.35	2.36

Progress Made

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program Success: The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) consists of two components: 1) an agricultural land easement component, under which NRCS assists eligible entities to protect agricultural land by limiting non-agricultural uses of that land through the purchase of agricultural land easements; and 2) a wetland reserve easement (WRE) component under which NRCS provides financial and technical assistance directly to landowners to restore, protect and enhance wetlands through the purchase of wetlands reserve easements. Through the agricultural land easement component, ACEP helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. In Q4 of FY 2021, NRCS reviewed and closed 33 new WRE easements. ACEP-WRE provides technical and financial assistance directly to private landowners and Indian

tribes to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands through the purchase of wetland easements. WRE enrollment options include permanent easements, 30-year easements, term easements, and 30-year contracts (for acreage owned by an Indian Tribe). By the end of FY 2021, NRCS closed on 189 new WRE easements with 24,959 acres.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program Success: The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) promotes the implementation of conservation activities through agreements between partners and producers. RCPP helps implement conservation projects that may focus on water quality and quantity, soil erosion, wildlife habitat, drought mitigation and flood control, or other regional priorities. Successful RCPP projects provide innovative conservation solutions, leverage partner contributions, offer impactful and measurable outcomes, and are implemented by capable partners. By the end of Q4 of FY 2021, there were 103 active Farm Bill 2018 RCPP projects with a combined budget of more than \$412 million that will be further amplified by more than \$695 million in partner contributions. Another 82 awards, whose combined budgets exceed \$345 million, are currently being negotiated by NRCS State Offices.

Barriers to Progress

Conservation Easement Metric: NRCS faced challenges meeting the target for working land protected by conservation easements. Some landowners have backed out of agreements in certain States due to high land values and better opportunities with other programs. COVID-19 is also a consideration, as it takes typically 18 to 36 months to close out an easement, resulting in less acreage reported in FY 2021.

COVID-19 Impact

See *Barriers to Progress*.

FARM SERVICE AGENCY

Acreage Enrolled in Conservation Reserve Program Riparian and Grass Buffers (Million Acres)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	1.7	1.6	1.43	1.41	1.46
Actual	1.6	1.53	1.43	1.36	1.42

Progress Made

Expanded Acreage Cap: The 2018 Farm Bill extended enrollment authority to September 30, 2023, and incrementally increases overall enrollment caps for the CRP. Incentives include the addition of a 10% inflationary factor and adjustment of county rental rates.

Climate Smart Practice Incentive Implementation: As of June 2021, continuous, grassland, and general CRP practices are eligible for a climate-smart practice incentive of three, five, or 10% to encourage practices that sequester carbon and reduce emissions.

Continuous Signup Improvements: Effective June 2021, the practice incentive payment for practices installed on land enrolled in Continuous (non-Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program) CRP increased from 20% to 5%.

Agency Collaboration: FSA and NRCS National Staff and State subject matter experts collaborated on a regular basis on conservation planning, documentation, and monitoring of CRP contracts. These groups also held joint trainings on new initiatives and changes to CRP. In addition, FSA provided a CRP Overview webinar for USDA Forest Service and State Forestry Agency personnel.

CLEAR30 Implementation: The Clean Lakes, Estuaries, and Rivers (CLEAR30) program is a pilot for producer enrollment into 30-year CRP contracts. Re-enrolled practices will continue to reduce sediment loadings, nutrient loadings, and harmful algal blooms. In FY 2021, the pilot expanded Nationwide. Financial benefits include 30 years of annual rental payments, a rental rate incentive, and funding for contract maintenance.

Barriers to Progress

Prices and Targets: Crop prices are increasing, which may result in reduced interest in CRP enrollment. FSA CRP slightly missed the FY 2021 targets for both acreage enrolled in CRP riparian and grass buffers and restored wetland acreage. FSA expects improvement to these numbers next year with the implementation of program enhancements.

COVID-19 Impact

Staffing and Appointments: FSA continued to be impacted by COVID-19 complications in the form of reduced staffing and appointment availability.

Strategic Goal 6: Foster Productive and Sustainable Use of Our National Forest System Lands

The Nation’s forests and grasslands are a fundamental part of the American landscape and are a legacy that the USDA Forest Service holds in trust for present and future generations. Forests provide clean air and water, forest and rangeland products, mineral and energy resources, jobs, quality habitat for fish and wildlife, recreational opportunities, and memorable experiences. The Forest Service plays a critical role in making America’s forests and grasslands resilient to threats and disturbances while mitigating wildfire risk. The Department also manages the National forests and grasslands to ensure that they are healthy and sustainable while allowing rural communities to access and benefit from the Nation’s forests’ economic opportunities. This work is complemented with USDA’s research in forestry, ecology, and economics to ensure that world-class science guides effective policies and management practices.

6.1 Contribute to the Economic Health of Rural Communities through Use and Access Opportunities

FOREST SERVICE

Percent of Customers Satisfied with Recreation Facilities, Services, and Settings on National Forests

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%
Actual	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%

Progress Made

Equity and Environmental Justice Research: Forest Service Research and Development (R&D) advanced scientific knowledge related to environmental justice and equity. Social scientists conducted research to understand how minority or low-income communities access, use, or benefit from forests and natural resources; studied environmental justice implications of management efforts; and worked with the USDA Climate Hubs and diverse stakeholders spanning the agriculture and forest sectors, rural and urban areas, and public and private lands to better engage and serve communities and disadvantaged groups. The Forest Service also developed revised measures for visitation and visitor characteristics, including satisfaction levels, to account for pandemic effects.

Modernize and Employ New Tools to Meet Year-Round Public Recreational Needs: [Recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov) introduced timed reservation tickets to some popular Forest Service recreation sites and National Parks to ensure social distancing and appropriate capacity. Online Christmas Tree Permits and digital passes were developed for the public to purchase recreation passes remotely and safely. Use of curbside pickup services for recreation permits continued to minimize face-to-face transactions, ensuring the health and safety of the public and Agency employees. Digital payments for first-come/first-served campsites were also successfully used by visitors through the Recreation.gov mobile application, reducing the need for cash handling. Many visitors were first-time recreation users of National forest lands, and the steps taken to ensure safe operations and long-term viability

of the Forest Service’s recreation service provider partners ensured that the Agency was able to meet the needs of visitors.

Infrastructure Improvements: To improve access to recreation opportunities, the Forest Service continued work addressing the backlog of road and bridge rehabilitation and replacement needs. To this end, the Forest Service used an adaptable framework to prioritize transportation construction projects with limited budgets. Another example of these efforts included advancing a comprehensive bridge inspection program to improve bridge quality condition data thereby ensuring public safety, adequate access, and resource protection.

Barriers to Progress

Fire Activity: The Forest Service struggled to complete timber activity fieldwork due to large fire activity across the entire western United States. The Forest Service had to assign employees who usually work to prepare timber sales to support wildfire suppression efforts. Additionally, recovery efforts after large fires, including stabilization work and hazard tree removal, also necessitated the involvement of staff who would typically be preparing and administering timber sales.

COVID-19 Impact

Visitor Satisfaction Measurement and Timber Sale Preparation: The COVID-19 pandemic shifted some visitation from developed sites to dispersed settings, allowing visitors to increase social distancing. Safety protocols prevented direct measurement of visitor satisfaction in many of the same places that had the largest changes in visitation patterns; consequently, the Forest Service is challenged with interpolating data to develop reliable measures of current satisfaction levels. The pandemic continues to challenge work on timber sale preparation, with tight restrictions on field crews and limited travel while the Agency continues to review and adjust COVID-19 policies to allow maximum flexibility in movement of staff to meet agency goals.

6.2 Ensure Lands and Watersheds are Sustainable, Health, and Productive

FOREST SERVICE

Timber Volume Sold (Billion Board Feet)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	2.9	3.4	3.7	3.7	4.0
Actual	2.9	3.2	3.27	3.21	2.8

Percent of National Forest Service Landscape Ecosystems Improved, Maintained, or Recovering Due to Management Actions – Terrestrial Condition Assessment

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	---	---	42%	42%
Actual	---	---	---	32%	33%

Number of Watersheds Moved to Improved Condition Class or Sustained in Condition Class 1³

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	19	14	15	N/A
Actual	---	16	8	9	N/A ⁴

N/A: Not available.

Progress Made

Data Process Management and Further Research: The Forest Service centralized and automated many of the processes that analyze and update the various ecological datasets that serve as inputs to the Terrestrial Condition Assessment, reducing staff time required for annual updates and facilitating data accessibility. Forest Service scientists found that the damage caused by insects and diseases across the contiguous U.S. is reducing the sequestration potential of America’s forests by roughly 50 million tons of carbon dioxide each year, the equivalent of emissions from more than 10 million cars. Forest Service R&D continued to study the effects of silvicultural treatments for climate change adaptation at multiple forest sites across the U.S. and applied the data from these studies to improve tools to understand and predict potential shifts in tree species distributions with climate change. National science syntheses published by the Forest Service in FY 2021 provide managers with the latest science on forest and rangeland soils and invasive species. Forest Service R&D also continued to develop menus of adaptation practices for natural resource managers and made strides breeding trees such as ash and pine to increase resistance to insects and pathogens exacerbated by climate change.

Forest Health Management: Forest Service staff worked with partners to provide technical assistance, surveys, and forest health treatment funds to reduce forest susceptibility to insects and disease. Treatments such as forest thinning promote forest health in a holistic manner that can

³ National Assessments of national forest and grassland watershed conditions rate 47% either as “Functioning at Risk” or “Impaired Function”. To improve their conditions and increase climate change resiliency, these watersheds require substantial restoration work. Specifically, using a mix of funding, the agency will complete essential projects outlined in the Watershed Condition Framework (WCF) Watershed Restoration Action Plans (WRAPs).

⁴ This performance metric was developed in 2010 as the Agency’s first Nationally consistent outcome performance measure to demonstrate accomplishments in watershed restoration. For FY 2021, watershed restoration was not a Departmental performance metric and no target was established.

reduce forest susceptibility to insects and disease while also reducing the threat from wildland fire. This is critically important as each of these disturbances are being amplified by climate change.

Barriers to Progress

Measurement Instrumentation: In FY 2021, the number of landscapes improved, maintained, or recovering increased, but so did the total number of landscapes where the Forest Service is doing work. The Terrestrial Condition Assessment indicates that the work is spread out, resulting in less ecological impact on the landscape scale. Hence, the percentage of landscapes improved, maintained, or recovering decreased from last year and did not meet the target of increasing the scale of the Agency’s efforts.

COVID-19 Impact

Reduction in Outputs and Activities: The pandemic impacted the Forest Service’s ability to accomplish work in FY 2021 and meet the targets for its performance indicator related to improving forest ecosystems. The FY 2021 actual was approximately 25% lower than the three-year average from FY 2016 to 2018 in acres accomplished and in the number of activities accomplished, reducing the percent of landscapes improved, maintained, or recovering.

6.3 Mitigate Wildfire Risk

FOREST SERVICE

Annual Acreage of National Forest System Lands Where Final Treatment Effectively Mitigated Wildfire Risk (Millions of Acres)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	0.74	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1
Actual	0.348	1.04	0.851	0.81	1.28

Annual Acreage Treated to Reduce or Maintain Fuel Conditions on National Forest System and Non-Federal Lands (Millions of Acres)

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	2.2	3.0	3.4	3.4	3.5
Actual	2.7	3.4	2.9	2.65	3.67

Number of High-Priority Areas Where Treatments Have Occurred to Reduce Wildfire Risk to Communities (Number of Firesheds)⁵

⁵ Fireshed refers to a geographic region with a similar risk of wildfire to adjacent communities. Reducing hazardous fuels within parts of the fireshed may reduce the overall risk to the adjacent community.

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	---	---	---	N/A
Actual	---	---	---	---	N/A ⁶

N/A: not available

Progress Made

Exceeding Targets and Obtaining New Research Results: The regions exceeded the established annual target and treated 1.28 million acres with final treatments to mitigate wildfire risk. Forest Service scientists updated the National Wildland Fire Hazard Potential map using the most current vegetation data to inform risk reduction models of hazardous fuels treatments and support wildland fire response systems. Additional research produced new information about the vulnerability of communities to wildland fire, including a new spatial dataset of wildfire risk for populated areas in the United States and a Fireshed Registry that uses information about community vulnerability as one of the datasets to inform the Agency’s strategic placement of fuel treatments to reduce risk.

Fuels Treatments Modified Fire Behavior: During the FY 2021 fire season, numerous wildfires interacted with cross-boundary fuels reduction projects across all regions, with a significant number of occurrences in the Pacific Northwest, Pacific Southwest, and Southwestern Regions. Assessments of the effectiveness of these treatments are ongoing, and initial observations indicate that in most cases, fuels treatments resulted in reduced fire behavior which provided strategic advantages for firefighters responding to these wildfires. In many cases, these treatment areas altered fire behavior and mitigated the effects of large, damaging wildfires.

Barriers to Progress

Reporting Delays and Factors in Potential Treatment Delays: In some regions, extended wildfire activity delayed final fiscal year accomplishments reporting. Some regions are also reporting employee exhaustion and fatigue due to an extended, active fire season, which may limit final treatments including prescribed burning. Some regions are still reporting extensive drought and/or the early onset of winter weather, which may also limit final treatments.

COVID-19 Impact

Successful Adaptation to Safety Protocols: The Forest Service continues to use COVID-19 mitigation procedures that were established in the spring of 2020 and refined during the fire season of FY 2020 to limit the spread of COVID-19 and protect the workforce. Diligent adherence to these protocols enabled the regions to resume hazardous fuels mitigations on the landscape resulting in a record year of treatments.

⁶ Number of firesheds is a new indicator to move to outcome-based measures on reducing wildfire risk at a scale that will make a difference on transmission of wildfire to communities. The Forest Service expects to begin reporting fireshed accomplishments in FY 2023.

Strategic Goal 7: Provide All Americans Access to a Safe, Nutritious and Secure Food Supply

USDA has critical roles in preventing foodborne illness and protecting public health while also ensuring Americans have access to food, a healthful diet, and nutrition education in a manner that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence. The Department will take several actions to achieve this goal. First, to ensure the food supply is safe, the Department will continue to prevent contamination and limit foodborne illness by focusing on reduction of pathogens. USDA’s research, education, and extension programs will continue to provide information, tools, and technologies about the causes of foodborne illness and its prevention. Second, USDA will continue to develop partnerships that support best practices in implementing effective programs to ensure that eligible populations have access to programs that support their food needs. These collaborations include research on the nutritional quality of American food and diets, as well as continuing to discover the drivers of poor diets and nutritional choices. Lastly, USDA will collaborate with partners and stakeholders on strategies to reduce foodborne illness and childhood obesity and improve diets. USDA ensures agriculture production incorporates the best available science into its efforts to produce safer, more nutritious, and secure food.

7.1 Prevent Foodborne Illness and Protect Public Health

FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE

Percentage of Establishments that Meet Pathogen Reduction Performance Standards

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	71%	68%	72%	87%	88%
Actual	77%	71%	84%	86%	87%

Percentage of Establishments Whose Non-Compliance Rate Decreases 120 Days After Receiving Early Warning Alert

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	70%	71%	73%	74%	74%
Actual	73%	74%	74%	74%	74%

Progress Made

Support for Small and Very Small Establishments: FSIS implemented a 10-year, \$100 million program in response to the American Rescue Plan to help small and very small establishments by reducing their overtime and holiday inspection fees. FSIS also announced the availability of revised guidelines to assist poultry establishments in controlling *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* in raw poultry. The revised guidelines will assist FSIS in achieving its public health goal of preventing

foodborne illnesses and further protecting the food supply by providing best practice recommendations for poultry establishments.

Barriers to Progress

Staffing Challenges: FSIS faced challenges in staffing due to attrition of the front-line occupations, such as food inspectors, consumer safety inspectors, and Public Health Veterinarians who operate in establishments across the country. FSIS also experienced significant increases in resignations and retirements and anticipates that this trend will continue into FY 2022. Another challenge for FSIS was statutory restrictions on billing for overtime for inspection personnel, which limits flexibility in scheduling that would improve work-life balance for and retention of inspection personnel.

COVID-19 Impact

Personal Protective Equipment Requirements: The safety and well-being of FSIS employees is a top priority of the Agency. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, FSIS protected its employees by supplying and requiring the use of PPE and adapted its policies as guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and USDA evolved. In FY 2021, FSIS protected its employees by acquiring approximately \$4 million in PPE for its inspection workforce stationed across 6,500 establishments and other FSIS employees located across 62 facilities inside and outside of the National Capital Region.

7.2 Provide Access to Safe and Nutritious Food for Low-Income People While Supporting a Pathway to Self-Sufficiency

FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE

Percentage of American Households with Consistent, Dependable Access to Food

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	88%	87.7%	87.9%	89%	89.2%
Actual	88.2%	88.9%	89.5%	89.5%	N/A ⁷

Percentage of SNAP Employment & Training Participants Engaged in Education and Skills-Based Training

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	33%	25.5%	27.5%	35.5%	31.5%
Actual	---	35%	34.7%	38.4%	N/A

N/A: Not available

⁷ FY 2021 actuals will not be available until September 2022 due to reporting delays of administrative data.

Progress Made

Thrifty Food Plan: The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) completed a reevaluation and published the Thrifty Food Plan on August 16, 2021. The Thrifty Food Plan is the basis for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) allotments. Ensuring the SNAP benefits reflect the cost of a practical, cost-effective diet that meets dietary guidelines is an important piece of USDA’s commitment to food and nutrition security.

SNAP Employment and Training National Forum: FNS hosted the first SNAP Employment and Training National Forum in October 2020, during which more than 1,600 people shared best practices about effective workforce development strategies. In addition, FNS published the Employment and Training Opportunities in SNAP [final rule](#), which allows additional skill-based activities such as apprenticeships.

Barriers to Progress

Policy, Process, and Systems Changes: Many of the provisions in the SNAP Employment and Training final rule required States to make policy, process, and systems changes. This proved challenging, as States continued to struggle with impacts of the pandemic and complexity of implementing provisions of the American Rescue Plan. FNS continued to provide resources and technical assistance to States to support implementation of the final rule.

COVID-19 Impact

Hunger Increase: Hunger has increased across the U.S. as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with as many as 30 million adults and 12 million children living in households where they do not always have enough to eat. USDA supported struggling families through FNS programs by increasing SNAP benefits by 15%; increasing access to online purchasing; providing an increase in administrative funding; bolstering support to U.S. territories; waiving requirements and adding flexibilities; strengthening the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program; supporting innovation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children; and increasing access to fruits and vegetables.

7.3 Support and Encourage Healthy Dietary Choices Through Data-Driven, Flexible, Customer-Focused Approaches

FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE

Annual Percentage of Eligible Children Participating in the National School Lunch Program

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	59%	59%	59%	59%
Actual	58%	58%	56.5%	43%	N/A

Annual Percentage of Eligible Children Participating in the School Breakfast Program

	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
Target	---	30%	30%	31%	31%
Actual	---	30%	29.6%	24%	N/A

N/A: Not available

Progress Made

Resource Releases: USDA released the [2020 – 2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) in FY 2021. Additionally, USDA released numerous supporting MyPlate consumer resources, and the [MyPlate.gov](#) website received more than 41 million page views during the fiscal year.

Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer Increase: In support of President Biden’s call to action on hunger and with authorities provided by Congress, USDA announced an increase in the P-EBT benefit by approximately 15% in January 2021, providing more money for low-income families and millions of children missing meals due to school closures. As of October 1, 2021, FNS approved 56 State school plans and 50 State child care plans to provide \$30.7 billion in P-EBT benefits to 33.9 million children for school year (SY) 2020 - 2021. In addition, FNS approved 51 summer 2021 plans to provide \$13.8 billion in P-EBT benefits to 36.5 million children.

Barriers to Progress

Supply Chain Disruptions: FNS issued an additional set of flexibilities to address supply chain disruptions due to COVID-19 and unanticipated school closures. FNS conducted extensive outreach and technical assistance to stakeholders regarding supply chain disruptions. In addition, the USDA Secretary announced an additional \$1.5 billion to assist schools with supply chain issues.

COVID-19 Impact

Hybrid Schedules and Meal Services: Due to the continued COVID-19 pandemic, many schools operated virtual or hybrid schedules for students, which impacted meal service. Under waivers provided by USDA, many schools served meals through the Summer Food Service Program in lieu of the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program for SY 2020 - 2021, which is reflected in the SY 2021 performance metric data.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACEP	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
AFS	African Swine Fever
APG	Agency Priority Goal
APHIS	Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
CART	Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool
CD	Conservation Desktop
CEC	Client Experience Center
CRP	Conservation Reserve Program
FAS	Foreign Agricultural Service
FNS	Food and Nutrition Service
FSA	Farm Service Agency
FSIS	Food Safety and Inspection Service
FY	Fiscal year
IT	Information technology
NRCS	National Resources Conservation Service
NVS	National Veterinary Stockpile
OBPA	Office of Budget and Program Analysis
OCS-REE	Office of the Chief Scientist – Research, Education, and Economics
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
P-EBT	Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer
PPE	Personal protective equipment
R&D	Research and development
RCPP	Regional Conservation Partnership Program
RMA	Risk Management Agency
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
SY	School year
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
WRE	Wetland reserve easement

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