



United States Department of Agriculture



# Strategic Plan FY 2014 - 2018

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## Message from the Secretary

Over the past five years, I've overseen a transition in the way we do business at USDA. We've modernized and streamlined our programs in an effort that has improved service for our customers, saved taxpayer dollars, and better prepared us to face today's challenges. As a result, we've achieved significant results for the men and women who live, work and raise their families in rural towns and cities, and those across America who use food, fiber and forest products every day.



Our fiscal year 2014-2018 Strategic Plan serves as a roadmap for everything we will do to further the progress we've made since 2009 over the next four years. It will provide direction to our employees as they craft policy in Washington, DC and implement USDA programs in the field. Perhaps most importantly, the strategic plan framework will increase accountability of our mission delivery and ensure that we deliver the best outcomes to our customers.

USDA will also use the strategic plan to help guide decisions about our budget and how we manage resources. Since 2009, through our Blueprint for Stronger Service, USDA has reduced spending, modernized operations and cut costs to save the American taxpayer a total of \$1.2 billion, while ensuring that our customers receive the best possible service. It is likely that we will continue to be asked to implement increasingly complex programs with fewer resources, but I am confident that USDA and its employees are prepared to meet the challenge.

Since 2009, we've taken a leaner, more targeted approach to maximize the impact of our financial and technical assistance. We have identified and partnered with organizations that are already doing great work at a local or regional level to address the most pressing challenges impacting rural America. As a result, our stakeholders have helped to mold and shape the strategic plan. The White House Rural Council, Rural Tour, and listening sessions have helped USDA leadership identify and hone in on key concerns and priorities across a diverse group of our stakeholders. We will rely on their support and partnership to implement our strategic plan.

USDA touches the lives of almost every American, every day. Our strategic plan reflects that reality and reinforces our commitment to achieve results for everyone we serve. As we move forward, we will actively seek out ways to better serve our stakeholders as we work towards our shared goals of rural prosperity, preservation of forests and working lands, sustainable agricultural production, safe, nutritious food, and jobs and opportunity for every American.

Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture



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## Mission Statement

We provide leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition, and related issues based on sound public policy, the best available science, and efficient management.

## Vision Statement

To expand economic opportunity through innovation, helping rural America to thrive; to promote agriculture production sustainability that better nourishes Americans while also helping feed others throughout the world; and to preserve and conserve our Nation's natural resources through restored forests, improved watersheds, and healthy private working lands.

## Core Values

Our success depends on:

- **Transparency** — Making the Department's management processes more open so that the public can learn how USDA supports Americans every day in every way.
- **Participation** — Providing opportunities for USDA constituents to shape and improve services provided by the Department.
- **Collaboration** — Working cooperatively at all governmental levels domestically and internationally on policy matters affecting a broad audience.
- **Accountability** — Ensuring that the performance of all employees is measured against the achievement of the Department's strategic goals.
- **Customer Focus** — Serving USDA's constituents by delivering programs that address their diverse needs.
- **Professionalism** — Building and maintaining a highly skilled, diverse, and compassionate workforce.
- **Results Orientation** — Measuring performance and making management decisions to direct resources to where they are used most effectively.

## Strategic Plan Framework

Founded by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862, when more than half of the Nation's population lived and worked on farms, USDA's role has evolved with the economy. Today, the country looks to rural America to not only provide food and fiber, but also for crucial emerging economic opportunities in renewable energy, broadband, and recreation. People in rural areas operate in a technologically advanced, rapidly diversifying, and highly competitive business environment driven by increasingly sophisticated consumers.

To assist the country in addressing today's challenges, USDA will:

### **Strategic Goal 1. Assist rural communities to create prosperity so they are self-sustaining, re-populating, and economically thriving.**

- 1.1 Enhance rural prosperity, including leveraging capital markets to increase Government's investment in rural America.
- 1.2 Increase agricultural opportunities by ensuring a robust safety net, creating new markets, and supporting a competitive agricultural system.
- 1.3 Contribute to the expansion of the bioeconomy by supporting development, production, and consumption of renewable energy and biobased products.

### **Strategic Goal 2. Ensure our national forests and private working lands are conserved, restored, and made more resilient to climate change, while enhancing our water resources.**

- 2.1 Improve the health of the Nation's forests, grasslands and working lands by managing our natural resources.
- 2.2 Lead Efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change, drought, and extreme weather in agriculture and forestry.
- 2.3 Contribute to clean and abundant water by protecting and enhancing water resources on national forests and working lands.
- 2.4 Reduce risk of catastrophic wildfire.

### **Strategic Goal 3. Help America promote agricultural production and biotechnology exports as America works to increase food security.**

- 3.1 Ensure U.S. agricultural resources contribute to enhanced global food security.
- 3.2 Enhance America's ability to develop and trade agricultural products derived from new and emerging technologies.

### **Strategic Goal 4. Ensure that all of America’s children have access to safe, nutritious, and balanced meals.**

- 4.1 Improve access to nutritious food.
- 4.2 Promote healthy diet and physical activity behaviors.
- 4.3 Protect public health by ensuring food is safe.
- 4.4 Protect agricultural health by minimizing major diseases and pests to ensure access to safe, plentiful, and nutritious food.

### **Strategic Goal 5. Create a USDA for the 21st century that is high performing, efficient, and adaptable.**

- 5.1 Develop a customer centric, inclusive, and high performing workforce by investing in and engaging employees to improve service delivery.
- 5.2 Build a safe, secure, and efficient workplace by leveraging technology and shared solutions across organizational boundaries.
- 5.3 Maximize the return on taxpayer investment in USDA through enhanced stewardship activities of resources and focused program evaluations.

These five strategic goals articulate the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s priorities. These goals contain 16 objectives that include the Department’s major programmatic efforts and cover the programs and services that USDA administers. Each goal includes outcome-related performance indicators that inform how USDA activities fit within broader societal efforts surrounding achievement of the goal. Performance indicators will track progress in attaining each objective and goal. Indicators specify baseline information and long-term performance targets. Strategies and means that identify actions that need to be taken to accomplish the objectives are included in each objective. The external risk factors section of each goal highlights possible challenges the USDA may encounter in making progress on each strategic goal.

This strategic plan represents the dynamic process within USDA to ensure the best results for America. Through this process, the Department is able to continually assess the quality of its provision of services to the public. This close attention to performance outcomes and results will allow USDA to better support its constituents as they strive to take advantage of today’s new opportunities.

# Strategic Goal 1

**GOAL 1:** Assist Rural Communities to Create Prosperity so They Are Self-sustaining, Repopulating, and Economically Thriving

**OUTCOMES:**

- Reduction in percentage of rural communities in persistent poverty
- Reduction in rural out-migration
- Increase in median net farm income and median non-metro household income

Performance Indicators

**OBJECTIVE:** Enhance Rural Prosperity, Including Leveraging Capital Markets to Increase Government’s Investment in Rural America

Number of jobs created or saved through investments in business, entrepreneurship, cooperatives, and industry

2012: 75,000  
2018: 86,000

Percentage of targeted Rural Development (RD) investments in high-poverty areas that leverage private-sector funding.

2013: 4.5%  
2018: 10.0%

Percentage of rural residents who are provided access to new or improved services resulting from RD investments

2013: 46.7%  
2018: 51.4%

**OBJECTIVE:** Increase Agricultural Opportunities by Ensuring a Robust Safety Net, Creating New Markets, and Supporting a Competitive Agricultural System

Number of agricultural operations certified as organic

2012: 17,750  
2018: 20,000

Percentage of beginning; racial and ethnic minority; and women farmers financed by USDA

2012: 36%  
2018: 41%

Value of trade preserved annually through USDA staff intervention leading to resolution of foreign market access issues such as U.S. export detention, restrictive Sanitary/Phytosanitary or Technical Barrier to Trade issues and trade regulations

2012: \$3.7 billion (B)  
2018: \$4.2 B

Normalized value of risk protection provided to agricultural producers through the Federal Crop Insurance Program

2012: \$62.1 B  
2018: \$64.0 B

Number of new local and regional food systems supported annually through USDA investment

2013: 170  
2018: 423

**OBJECTIVE:** Contribute to the Expansion of the Bioeconomy by Supporting Development, Production, and Consumption of Renewable Energy and Biobased Products

Millions of kilowatt hours (mkWh) generated in rural America from alternative energy source

2009: 1,504 mkWh  
2018: 3,123 mkWh

Number of jobs created and/or retained through USDA investments supporting production of renewable energy and biobased products, and energy efficiency measure

2012: 1,300  
2018: 1,500

Amount of USDA procurements of biobased products

2013: N/A  
2018: \$10.0 million (M)



## Strategic Goal 1: Assist Rural Communities to Create Prosperity so They Are Self-sustaining, Repopulating, and Economically Thriving

USDA is the leading Government advocate for rural America and agricultural production. By improving rural prosperity, increasing opportunities for agriculture, and expanding the bio-economy, USDA is striving to create thriving communities where people want to live and raise families and where children have a bright future. To achieve this, the Department is helping to make an impact on persistent poverty, out-migration, and rural income.

**Persistent poverty.** About 1 out of every 16 persons in the United States lives in deep poverty, with an income below 50 percent of the Federal poverty line. Poverty and lack of opportunity are especially acute in rural regions and can become entrenched. USDA's Economic Research Service defines a persistent poverty county as one in which 20 percent or more of its population has lived in poverty over the past 30 years. Eighty-five percent of persistent poverty counties are rural.<sup>1</sup> While about 14 percent of America's children live in rural areas, 18 percent of children in poverty live in rural areas.

**Out-migration.** Although export opportunities and agricultural revenue are at historic highs, rural America is losing population. Some rural areas have experienced population loss for decades. However, 2010 to 2012 was the first period where rural America as a whole lost population. Causes include unemployment, housing-market challenges, energy sector developments, and other factors. Out-migration

often includes the loss of highly educated individuals to regions with greater economic opportunity. Out-migration depletes the economic base of the region and discourages outside investment in infrastructure and other resources needed to attract good paying jobs.

**Rural income levels.** Adequate and stable income levels are a vital contributor to rural prosperity. Median household income in rural areas was 78.6 percent of the suburban and urban median in 2011, although the generally lower cost of living in rural areas narrows this gap in real terms. Median total household income increased each year from 2008 to 2011 and is projected to continue to trend upwards. Economic opportunities in rural areas are important to continue this positive trend.

### OBJECTIVE 1.1 – ENHANCE RURAL PROSPERITY, INCLUDING LEVERAGING CAPITAL MARKETS TO INCREASE GOVERNMENT'S INVESTMENT IN RURAL AMERICA

Prosperous rural communities are those with adequate assets to fully support the well-being of community members. USDA helps to strengthen rural assets by building physical, human and social, financial, and natural capital. To achieve maximum impact, USDA will leverage resources across the Department and beyond, collaborate on cross-agency efforts such as Promise Zones and the White House Rural Council, and support community and Tribal efforts to form regional strategies. USDA targets funds through strong analytics, grass roots support, and asset-based strategies.

<sup>1</sup> Mosely, Jane and Miller, Kathleen. 2004. "Spatial Variations in Factors Affecting Poverty." RUPRI Rural Poverty Research

Addressing the needs of economically distressed regions is a top priority. The Strikeforce Initiative coordinates USDA's rural development, agriculture, and conservation efforts in high-poverty communities.

### Physical Capital

Through loans, grants, and technical assistance, the Department will provide support for decent housing and homeownership; health care, school, library, and safety investments; and broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas. USDA also supports utility deployment of smart grid, renewable energy, energy efficiency, and carbon capture and storage for maintaining reliable electric systems in rural communities. Construction of electric, telecommunications, and water and waste system infrastructure and of farm storage facilities are also a priority for USDA.

### Human and Social Capital

To assist rural residents to find jobs and start small business, USDA will provide educational opportunities, job training programs, and technical support and tools. For youth, USDA promotes non-formal education programs, 4-H, and other youth development programs to transfer knowledge and develop leaders. The Department supports job corps centers and youth corps programs through the America's Great Outdoors initiative. Human and social capital formation is also assisted by USDA funding and oversight of rigorous agricultural research, education, and extension programs.

### Financial Capital

To help build financial capital, USDA will undertake a variety of efforts. The Department will pursue public-private partnerships by including structuring investment in rural

communities to attract capital from third-party investors. USDA will participate in marketing efforts to reach national lenders (capital markets) and leverage USDA resources with private capital. USDA programs will provide business and industry development opportunities to develop a local economy and create well-paying jobs. To facilitate strategic decisionmaking to support livable communities, USDA will provide economic analyses and promote successful economic development models. USDA will also provide equitable access to capital for rural minority farmers and business owners and target outreach to under-served and minority populations.

### Natural Capital

Clean air, clean water, productive farmlands, and outdoor recreation opportunities result from USDA's efforts working with partners and producers in our national forests and on working lands. Goal 2 of this strategic plan provides a detailed look at USDA's contributions to natural capital.

#### Strategy in Action # 1

USDA programs help expand broadband capacity into communities that otherwise might not have access. USDA will aid in the deployment of broadband infrastructure by targeting outreach, expanding the availability of public computer centers, and encouraging the adoption of broadband service. Increased access to broadband will help rural communities attract new business and cooperative development; connect to the global economy; and increase local leadership development. Community services will improve with access to community connect, distance learning, and telemedicine programs.

### **OBJECTIVE 1.2 – INCREASE AGRICULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES BY ENSURING A ROBUST SAFETY NET, CREATING NEW MARKETS, AND SUPPORTING A COMPETITIVE AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM**

The economic vitality and quality of life in rural America depends on a healthy agricultural production system. Farmers and ranchers face a challenging global, technologically advanced, and competitive business environment. USDA works to ensure that producers are prosperous and competitive, have access to new markets, can manage their risks, and receive support in times of economic distress or weather-related disasters.

#### **Strengthen the Farm Financial Safety Net**

The Department strives to provide producers with prompt and equitable disaster assistance, income support payments, marketing assistance loans, farm loans, and risk management tools. USDA partners with commercial lenders to guarantee farm ownership and operating loans and makes direct loans to producers to purchase property or finance farm operating expenses. USDA's loan programs are available to producers who are temporarily unable to obtain financing commercially. The Federal Crop Insurance Program mitigates production and revenue losses from yield or price fluctuations and provides timely indemnity payments.

To further strengthen the farm financial safety net, USDA will:

- Improve partnerships with other agricultural lenders to better leverage limited funding resources;
- Expand crop insurance availability and product coverage, especially for livestock, pasture, rangeland, forage, organic, and specialty crops;
- Use geographical information systems (GIS), remote sensing, precision agriculture, and data mining to improve crop insurance products and program integrity;
- Provide timely disaster relief to producers using available programs, use GIS to assess damage rapidly, and partner with other agencies on disaster relief outreach; and
- Expand outreach for farm storage facility loans to biomass, fruit, and vegetable producers.

#### **Facilitate Access to International Markets**

USDA expands and protects international market opportunities and connects agricultural exporters to customers. The Department works to strengthen the global rules-based trading system and supports development of international standards to facilitate safe trade. Cooperative efforts with other U.S. Government agencies and industries ensure that America's producers have fair market access, have an understanding of key market trends, and have support to overcome market barriers. To address the threats to international trade posed by high-consequence animal and plant pests and pathogens, USDA supports research, education, and extension programs, and networked regulatory, surveillance, and rapid response capabilities.

USDA works with exporters, importers, and other end-users of U.S. agricultural products around the world to facilitate sales in global markets. In cooperation with other U.S. Government agencies, USDA monitors and investigates discrepancies reported by importing countries on the quality or weight of U.S. grains, oilseeds, and related products.

To further facilitate access to international markets, USDA will:

- Stimulate greater involvement by small- and medium-sized enterprises selling U.S. agricultural products;
- Negotiate and implement trade agreements and support international equivalency agreements;
- Facilitate the overseas marketing efforts of U.S. commodity organizations; and
- Reduce technical barriers to trade and eliminate sanitary and phytosanitary barriers not based on sound science.

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### Support the Development of New Domestic Markets

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Accessing domestic markets helps build financial sustainability for producers and provides fresh, local food for consumers. USDA supports the planning, coordination, and education necessary for thriving regional food systems and replication of successful models. USDA will work closely with partners to develop and revitalize infrastructure for regional food systems. This includes innovative new opportunities and proven approaches like cooperatives and farmers markets. USDA analyzes market trends and provides tools to help producers identify opportunities. USDA also oversees national standards for the production and handling of agricultural products labeled as organic. To increase the number of certified organic operations, USDA will support research and

education that enables organic production; reduce overlapping requirements; eliminate other obstacles; and collaborate with others to make certification more feasible for small and beginning farmers and business.

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### Ensure a Financially Sustainable and Competitive Agricultural System

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USDA manages farm price support and commodity purchase programs to help balance supply and demand and conducts oversight to protect producers from unfair competition and unfair business practices in the livestock, meat, and poultry markets. Working with the U. S. Department of Justice, USDA enforces fair market practices and takes action against anti-competition behavior to create a level playing field for producers.

The Department ensures efficient marketing of agricultural products through clear and consistent descriptions and measurements of the grade, quality and quantity of products that are bought and sold. By providing current, unbiased statistics, price and sales information, USDA assists in the orderly marketing and distribution of farm commodities to inform decisionmaking by agricultural producers and agribusinesses and to ensure market stability. USDA will ensure that USDA-approved and licensed warehouse programs maintain adequate storage facilities, adequate frequency of warehouse examinations, and reduced product losses. USDA foods will be delivered in a timely manner, within contract specifications, and at competitive prices.

USDA develops and maintains national standards for the production and handling of agricultural products labeled as organic and examines and accredits State and private organic certifying agents. By providing education resources on organics to producers

through its field offices, USDA will better serve diverse management systems including organic and specialty crops.

The Department works to ensure that minority, women, beginning, and other socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers have full knowledge and access to its programs. USDA also works with producer and farmworker organizations and the U.S. Department of Labor to improve working conditions and income for farmworkers.

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### Protect the Foundations of the Agricultural System

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USDA provides leadership in creating and disseminating knowledge spanning the biological, physical, and social sciences through agricultural research, economic analysis, statistics, and partnerships with cooperative extension, and higher education institutions. The Department conducts research, education, and extension programming to reduce the costs of agricultural inputs and to improve crop and animal production efficiency and practices. Research efforts lead to more thorough assessments of Americans' nutritional needs; new methods for sustaining a competitive agricultural economy; and a better understanding of how to enhance the natural resource base. Research priorities include improving agriculturally important plants and animals, including those resilient to anticipated changes in climate. USDA will use the cooperative extension system to transfer technology and best practices from the laboratory into active use.

In coordination with Federal partners, USDA helps higher education institutions with undergraduate and graduate programs in agriculture develop strong science, technology, engineering, and math curriculums, and

increase enrollment in secondary and 2-year post-secondary programs, especially from underrepresented groups. As part of USDA's science leadership, the Department will continue to provide Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education grants for projects designed to help America's 2 million small- and medium-scale producers improve their knowledge of sustainable agriculture production and marketing practices.<sup>2</sup>

### Strategy in Action # 2

As the average age of America's farmers and ranchers nears 60 years, USDA is enhancing its programs and outreach to assist beginning farmers to gain entry into agriculture. Beginning farmers, as well as minorities and women, typically operate smaller farms, have less equity, or lack sufficient production or credit history. USDA's direct operating microloans are a valuable tool for these groups. With a short application process and reduced paperwork, microloans of up to \$35,000 can be used for equipment, livestock, feed, and other operational expenses. In its first full year of operation, nearly 70 percent of microloans went to beginning farmers.

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<sup>2</sup> 2007 Census of Agriculture. Small- and medium-sized farms and ranches are less than 1,000 acres.



### **OBJECTIVE 1.3 – CONTRIBUTE TO THE EXPANSION OF THE BIOECONOMY THROUGH DEVELOPMENT, PRODUCTION, AND CONSUMPTION OF RENEWABLE ENERGY AND BIOBASED PRODUCTS**

Expanding the bioeconomy creates economic opportunities and improves the environment. Biomass from farms, forests, and rangelands could supply a significant portion of U.S. transportation fuels, heat, power, and biobased products. Research, development, and demonstration are necessary to realize the potential of biomass resources. USDA efforts in this area will help reduce investor risk, support market development, and contribute to energy security, environmental quality, and economic opportunity. USDA's efforts will include:

- Creating viable engineering, business, and financial protocols to evaluate proposed commercial renewable energy and energy efficiency projects;
- Developing superior genetic feedstocks and production and logistic systems suited to regional conditions;
- Developing advanced biomass crops and methods for their sustainable production as biofuels and other forms of biopower; and
- Providing analysis and data about commodity markets for renewable energy sources.

USDA will create bioeconomy opportunities for farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, small businesses, rural utilities, Tribal governments, and rural municipalities by providing financial and technical assistance and leveraging investments of other Federal agencies and industry. By facilitating commercialization of biobased products, USDA will work to create green jobs and investment opportunities and

expand support for commercial deployment of wind, solar, geothermal, hydro and ocean resources. USDA will:

- Support expanding production of advanced biofuels through the financing of the widespread deployment of full-scale commercial facilities;
- Support the development of integrated regional systems for the sustainable production of biofuels, biopower, and biobased products;
- Integrate renewable energy and biobased product feedstock production into sustainable agriculture, forest, and range management systems; and
- Support the establishment and production of annual and non-woody perennial crops and woody biomass crops for conversion to bioenergy and biobased products.

USDA education programs use the Nation's public institutions, private-sector partners, and the Land-Grant University System to promote and expand the workforce needed to grow the bioeconomy. USDA also has a role in educating the general public and international partners, through capacity building programs, on the benefits and costs of bioenergy production and use from economic, environmental, social and sustainability perspectives.

#### **Strategy in Action # 3**

To promote purchase and use of biobased products across the Federal Government and civil society, USDA administers the BioPreferred<sup>SM</sup> program. USDA designates categories of biobased products that are afforded preference by Federal agencies when making purchasing decisions and certifies and awards labels to qualifying products to increase consumer recognition of biobased products. USDA also designates intermediate materials and complex products for Federal purchase.

**EXTERNAL RISK FACTORS**

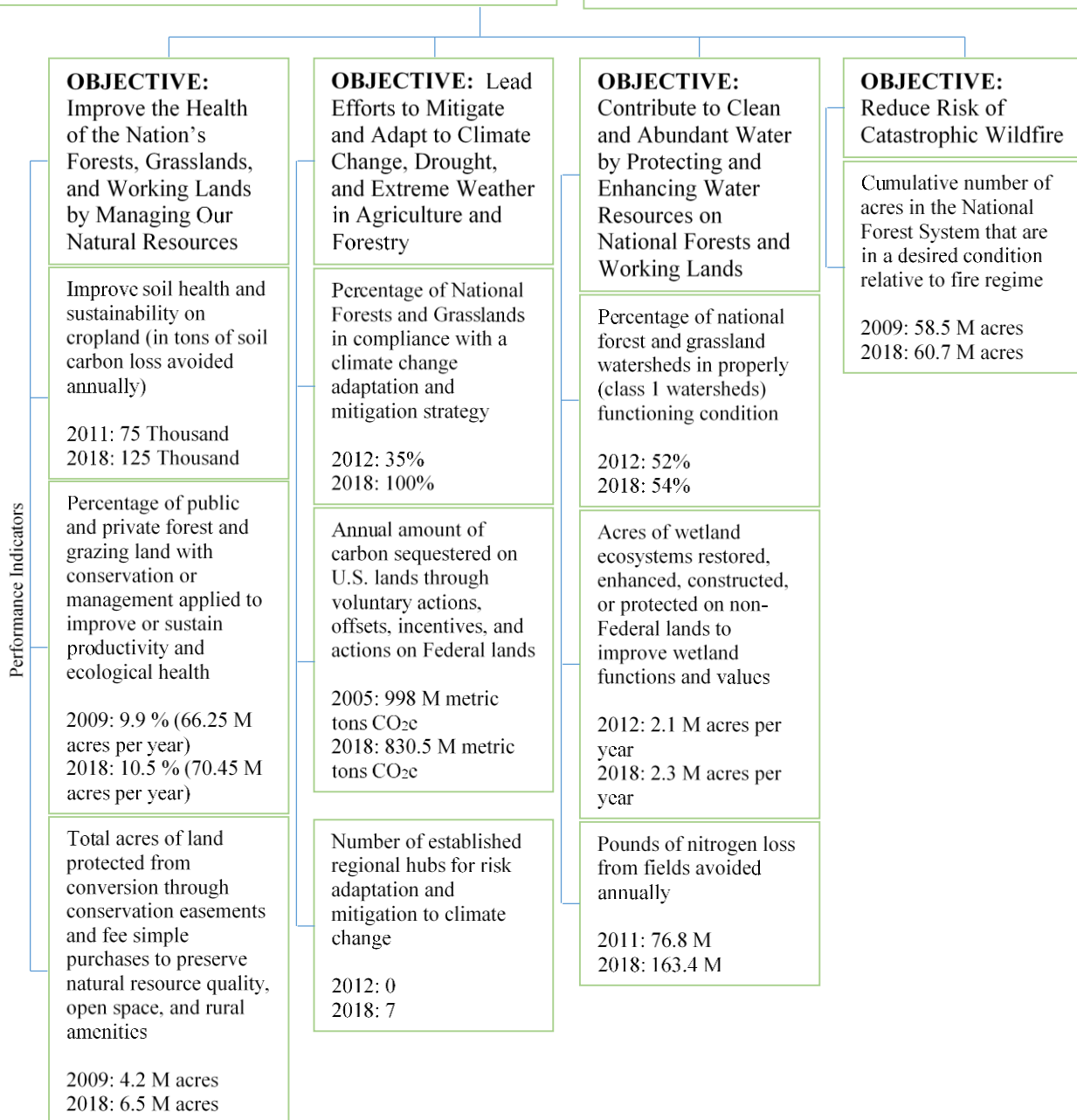
External risk factors include environmental conditions, including climate change, changing weather patterns, and ecosystem health. Other factors involve natural disasters, animal and plant pests and disease outbreaks, and intentional food contamination. Still others are primarily economic. Production-level factors include the volatility of farm commodity prices, workforce skills and competencies, and increasing input and operating costs for farms. Certain macroeconomic factors are also important, including unemployment levels, inflation, changes in the relative strength of the U.S. dollar to foreign currencies, and changes in the market demand for organic or biobased products. Other influences include international concerns, such as trade policy and regulatory developments in other countries, and availability of appropriations.

# Strategic Goal 2

**GOAL 2:** Ensure Our National Forests and Private Working Lands Are Conserved, Restored, and Made More Resilient to Climate Change, While Enhancing Our Water Resources

**OUTCOMES:**

- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions from agricultural sector (in millions of metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents (CO<sub>2</sub>e))
- Improved soil health and sustainability on cropland (in tons of soil carbon loss avoided annually)



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## Strategic Goal 2: Ensure Our National Forests and Private Working Lands Are Conserved, Restored, and Made More Resilient to Climate Change, While Enhancing Our Water Resources

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National forests and private working lands provide clean air, clean and abundant water, and wildlife habitat. These lands sustain jobs and produce food, fiber, timber, and biobased energy. Many of our landscapes are scenic and culturally important and provide Americans a chance to enjoy the outdoors. To sustain these many benefits, USDA works with private landowners to protect and enhance 1.3 billion acres of working lands and manages 193 million acres of national forests and grasslands. The Department uses an “all-lands” approach to bring people together across ecosystems and property boundaries. This increases the scale, pace, and effectiveness of conservation and restoration. Our partners include Federal, Tribal, and State governments; industry; non-governmental organizations, community groups and producers. Our lands face increasing threats that must be addressed. USDA’s natural resource-focused strategies are designed to make substantial contributions in the areas described below.

**Soil health.** There is a need to grow more food on a shrinking available land base, as global food demand rises and agricultural land is developed for other uses. From 1982 to 2007, approximately 23 million acres of agricultural land was lost to development. Improved soil health helps us use available land most productively and increases water quality, resilience to extreme weather, and carbon sequestration. Soil loss from erosion is one important metric for monitoring soil health.

**Climate change.** Climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing the United States and the world. Producers are increasingly faced with extreme weather events, ranging from drought to flood. The agriculture sector accounts for 7 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Forests and other lands absorb approximately 14 percent of emissions. However, recent studies project that the forest carbon sink could become a net source of carbon emissions in the next few decades.<sup>3</sup> This decline is primarily due to conversion of forest land area to urban and other developed land uses.

**Water quality.** Protecting and improving the Nation’s water resources is a priority. In an assessment of the Nation’s rivers and streams released by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 23 percent of the Nation’s river and stream length was rated to be in fair condition and 55 percent in poor condition.

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 2012. Future of America’s Forest and Rangelands: Forest Service 2010 Resources Planning Act Assessment. Gen. Tech Rep. WO-87. Washington, DC. 198p.  
NCA Citation: Vose, J M.; Peterson, David L.; Patel-Weynand, Toral, eds. 2012. Effects of climatic variability and change on forest ecosystems: a comprehensive science syntheses

**OBJECTIVE 2.1 – IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF THE NATION’S FORESTS, GRASSLANDS AND WORKING LANDS BY MANAGING NATURAL RESOURCES**

Restoring watershed and forest health is central to USDA’s efforts in our national forests and grasslands. USDA will develop and implement National Forest System land management plans and projects to restore and sustain ecosystem function. This includes improving the health of fire-adapted or fire-impaired ecosystems; addressing the spread of insects and diseases that kill trees; restoring wildlife habitat; improving or decommissioning roads; replacing and improving culverts; and rehabilitating streams and wetlands.

On agricultural and grazing lands, USDA will assist private landowners and managers with sustainable land management through conservation programs. USDA provides technical and financial assistance to enable landowners to develop conservation plans and implement effective conservation practices. These efforts restore vegetative cover; implement sustainable agricultural production levels on erosive lands; and improve soil productivity through soil health management. USDA is working to protect forest and agricultural land from conversion to urban and other developed land use through conservation easements and strategic land acquisition. Beyond national forests and agricultural lands, USDA also invests in urban and community forestry programs to improve urban forests and greenspaces.

USDA will work with partners to identify the most environmentally and socially important landscapes, create strategies to protect natural resources, and involve communities in this work. USDA will also prioritize and accelerate research that delivers tools for more effective conservation.

**Strategy in Action # 1**

Markets for ecosystem services provide incentives for producers to deliver environmental benefits. Markets can be established for many services – from improving water quality to sequestering greenhouse gases. USDA will support the formation and utilization of markets for ecosystem services by ensuring high standards of environmental integrity that result in measurable environmental gains. The Department will develop tools to quantify the value of ecosystem services, monitor and assess conservation practices effectiveness, and connect producers with market opportunities.

**OBJECTIVE 2.2 – LEAD EFFORTS TO MITIGATE AND ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE, DROUGHT, AND EXTREME WEATHER IN AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY**

USDA will work through its natural resource conservation and energy programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and sequester carbon, while leading adaptation efforts. This supports the Administration’s goal to reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions to 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020.

USDA will encourage voluntary practices to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions. These include conservation tillage; manure and nutrient management; fertilizer efficiency; planting trees; minimizing deforestation; increasing energy efficiency in agriculture and rural development; and developing renewable



sources of energy. Forest restoration, along with conservation easements and land acquisition, will help maintain forests as a net carbon sink.

The Department will assist rural communities, producers, resource managers, and community planners to develop and implement climate adaptation strategies. Impacts that are already appearing include changing water flow, availability, and quality; fire risk; and extreme weather events. USDA will monitor impacts and help implement adaptations (e.g., measuring changes in water flow and then installing stream buffers or upgrading culverts to handle increased water overflow).

The Department conducts and invests in research to inform climate change policy and mitigation and adaptation strategies, tools and technologies. USDA will evaluate the effects of conservation actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to identify effective and economic approaches. USDA is supporting plant variety and animal breed development that maximize carbon sequestration and can adapt to climate change. Work is also underway to develop methods and technical guidelines to measure and model the effects of climate change on ecosystem services and to conduct greenhouse gas inventories of the urban forest and agriculture sector. The Department and its partners will make research outcomes widely available through outreach and extension networks.

### Strategy in Action # 2

USDA is establishing seven “Regional Climate Hubs” to deliver science-based knowledge and practical information to farmers, ranchers and forest landowners to support decisionmaking related to climate change. The Hubs will provide technical support, assessments and forecasts, and outreach and education. Each Hub will be the center of a network of connected activities or services with the operational center located in a USDA facility (Agricultural Research Service, Forest Service, or Natural Resources Conservation Service) within its region. The Hubs will maintain a vibrant network of public, academic, and private-sector organizations, researchers, and outreach specialists.

### **OBJECTIVE 2.3 – CONTRIBUTE TO CLEAN AND ABUNDANT WATER BY PROTECTING AND ENHANCING WATER RESOURCES IN NATIONAL FORESTS AND ON WORKING LANDS**

Clean and abundant water is essential for healthy ecosystems, sustainable agricultural and forest production, livable communities, and viable industry. Eighty-seven percent of America's surface supply of drinking water originates on our Nation's forests, farms, and range lands. The National Forest System alone is the source of fresh water for more than 60 million people.

USDA helps protect and enhance water quality through its work in national forests and grasslands and by supporting the efforts of private landowners and communities. Assessing water resource vulnerability nationally and investing in high-impact watershed improvement projects ensures strategic use of USDA resources. USDA will also increase watershed-based partnerships with Tribes, States, communities, landowners, and other stakeholders to improve watershed management.

To restore and protect head-waters and wetlands in the national forests and grasslands, USDA will implement integrated watershed restoration. This will be based on a national assessment of watershed conditions and restoration needs established in the Watershed Condition Framework.

USDA will deliver financial and technical assistance to land owners to implement conservation measures and management strategies to benefit water quality and availability, conserve water, and improve watershed health. The Department will work with landowners to protect wetlands and implement soil health management systems that mitigate the impacts of extreme weather. Working with Federal and State partners, USDA will assist private landowners who are improving water quality to achieve regulatory certainty.

### Strategy in Action # 3

USDA is moving toward more integrated and result-based approaches to assess the outcomes of efforts to improve water quality. As part of an Agency Priority Goal (APG), USDA tested a new water quality measurement framework in the St Joseph's River watershed in Indiana, and the Cienega Creek watershed in Arizona. As a result of that APG, it was concluded that a combined water quality and watershed condition monitoring and modeling approach is needed to document water outcomes. The application of these approaches will enable USDA to prioritize locations for water quality activities and increase the effectiveness of conservation and management actions. USDA is now adapting water quality activities to include the recommendations and lessons learned from this APG.

### **OBJECTIVE 2.4 – REDUCE RISK OF CATASTROPHIC WILDFIRE**

Many forests, rangelands, and grasslands are dependent on fire for ecological health. Unfortunately, fires that burn too hot and too large are becoming more prevalent due to climate change, development in fire-prone areas, and other factors. These catastrophic fires harm the environment and threaten communities. To reduce the risk of catastrophic fire, USDA works with the Department of the Interior, other Federal agencies, Tribal and State governments and local law enforcement and emergency preparedness staff on prevention, preparedness, and response.

USDA and its partners will work with communities to assess risks and develop and implement community plans to improve capability to respond to local wildfires. USDA will also collaborate with public and private forest and rangeland owners to develop and implement hazardous fuels reduction and ecosystem restoration projects. In the national forests and grasslands, land management plans will be designed to restore degraded ecosystems and to allow fire to play a healthy role in fire-dependent ecosystems. This will reduce fuel loads, improve wildlife habitat, and sustain healthy ecosystems.

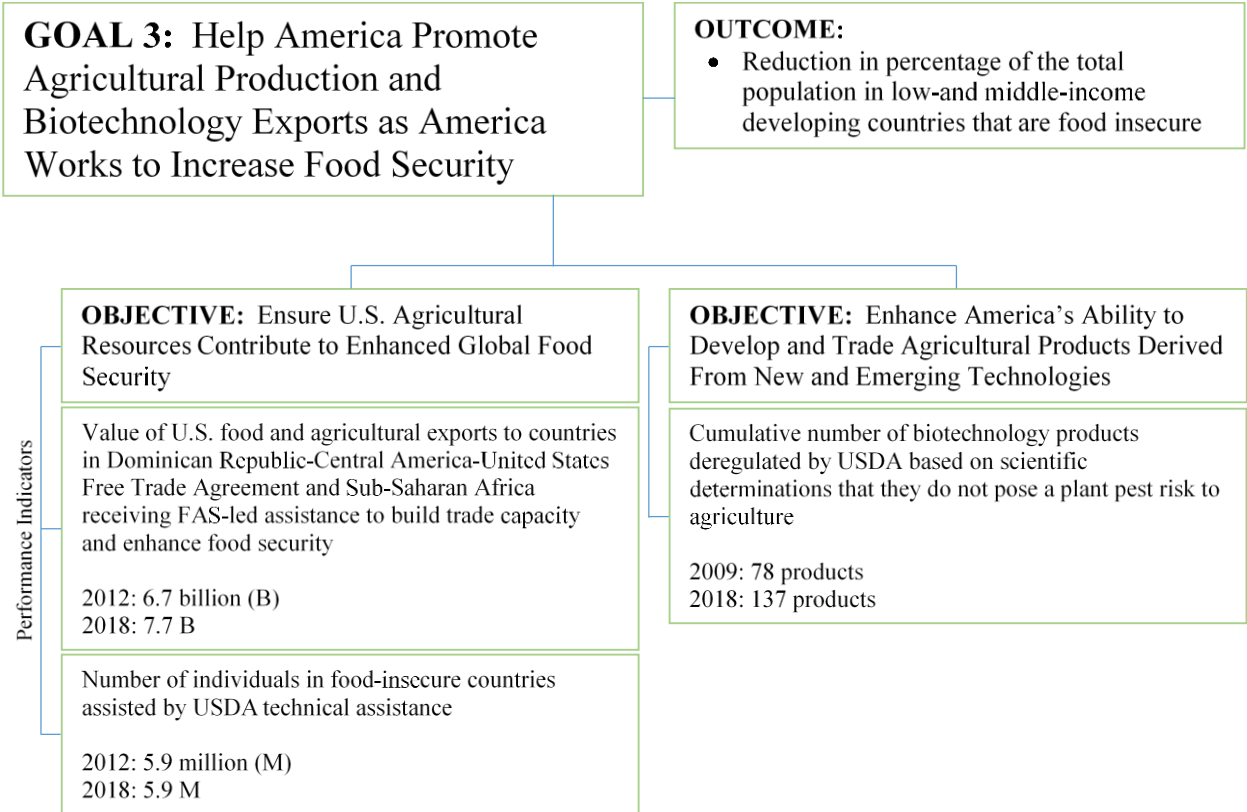
### Strategy in Action # 4

Nearly 70,000 communities are at risk from wildfire across the United States. The Department works with communities to assess risks and develop, implement, and update Community Wildfire Protection Plans and improve local wildfire suppression capability and coordination. For effective emergency response, USDA will increase fire suppression initial attack success rates near communities. Through law enforcement, USDA and its partners will help keep people safe and protect property and resources. The Department will also improve fire decision support tools to reduce risks to firefighters, increase efficiency, and protect communities.

### EXTERNAL RISK FACTORS

External risk factors include: extreme weather, climate fluctuation, or environmental change beyond the natural range of variability; increasing population, urban development and sprawl; increases in impervious surfaces and point and non-point source pollution beyond what the Department can influence through its programs; success of and level of participation in markets for ecosystem services; unpredictable economic fluctuations or commodity price changes that affect market conditions; budgetary, legal, and regulatory constraints; and international crises or homeland security issues that alter domestic program allocations or immediate public needs.

# Strategic Goal 3



## Strategic Goal 3: Help America Promote Agricultural Production and Biotechnology Exports as America Works to Increase Food Security

Food security is important for sustainable economic growth of developing nations and the long-term economic prosperity and security of the United States. Unfortunately, food insecurity is expected to rise in the next 5 years. USDA has a role in curbing this distressing trend through programs such as Food for Progress and President Obama's Feed the Future Initiative and through new technology-based solutions that improve yields and reduce post-harvest loss.

**Food security.** Food security means having a reliable source of nutritious and safe food and sufficient resources to purchase it. In 2000, USDA estimated that 37.4 percent of the population of 76 low- and middle-income developing countries were food-insecure. By 2012, this dropped to 20.6 percent, largely due to increases in the total area harvested, while yields remained constant or declined. Continued growth in the area harvested is not sustainable, thus food insecurity is expected to rise to 24.4 in 2018. High-population growth rates also contribute to the expected increase in food insecurity.

### **OBJECTIVE 3.1 – ENSURE U.S. AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES CONTRIBUTE TO ENHANCED GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY**

Adequate food supplies must be based on enhanced trade, in-country increases in production, and the ability of the poor to earn enough to purchase food. The largest contributors to insufficient in-country production are chronic under-investment in

agriculture, inefficient inputs and markets, and poor governance.

USDA supports global and national security policy through development and capacity-building of sustainable agricultural systems in the developing world. USDA promotes sustainable, market-led growth across the entire food production and market chain. The Department uses a cooperative approach to make strategic investments to strengthen countries' capacity to participate in international markets, thus expanding demand for U.S. agricultural products and enhancing global food security.

USDA's Food for Progress Program increases productivity and expands trade of agricultural products along the value chain, while the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education program improves literacy, health, hygiene, and nutrition practices of school-aged beneficiaries in targeted countries. Improving the education of women is especially important due to their critical links with economic growth, health, nutrition, and improved living standards for future generations.

USDA will assist priority countries to increase capacity to develop sustainable agricultural systems and markets. This includes providing advice on developing and adopting market and science-based policies and institutions and building trade capacity. The Department helps countries create an enabling environment for increased private-sector participation in agricultural value chains, while leveraging partnerships with U.S. Government agencies,



land-grant universities, other institutions, and the private sector to conduct technical assistance and training.

USDA will invest in research, development, and extension to improve agricultural techniques and technologies, including biotechnology. Data and analysis from USDA will assist with addressing food security including market analysis, and food security assessments for food insecure countries. The Department will assist developing countries in establishing robust agricultural statistics programs through technical assistance and training. To support the sustainable management of soil, USDA will: disseminate soil science information and technology; build capacity to conduct soil surveys; and promote the adoption of data, technology and science-based solutions for soil management. Many of these activities are carried out collaboratively with funding partners, such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Department of State, Department of Defense, and Millennium Challenge Corporation.

The Department promotes agricultural policy and regulatory programs to strengthen food safety and animal and plant health systems, which help countries take advantage of new trade and marketing opportunities. At the same time, promotion of these policies and programs reduces the worldwide prevalence of significant diseases.

USDA is a key partner in President Obama's Feed the Future Initiative, a global food security and nutrition initiative led by USAID. The three key areas in which USDA will contribute at the country and global levels for sustained and enhanced impact include: (a) in-country capacity-building efforts with government, farmer organizations, the private sector, and universities on agricultural policies,

regulatory systems including sanitary and phytosanitary systems, natural resources management, and agribusiness, market chains and trade; (b) basic and applied research, including extension; and (c) market information, statistics, data, and economic analysis.

### Strategy in Action # 1

Cooperators in developing countries, who are host-government officials, farmers, agricultural scientists, extension agents, educators, private-sector representatives, and international and civil society organizations, are key to promoting food security and building trade capacity. Their participation in the Department's trade and scientific exchange programs, such as the Borlaug and Cochran Fellowship Programs, provide them with critical learning opportunities. Since the Borlaug program's inception in 2004 through 2012, approximately 700 fellows from 64 countries participated in research and training on topics such as agronomy, veterinary science, nutrition, food safety, sanitary and phytosanitary issues, natural resource management, agricultural biotechnology, global climate change, agricultural economics, and agricultural policy. Cochran fellows develop their knowledge of agricultural trade, agribusiness development, policy, and marketing. Since inception in 1984, more than 15,000 trainees from 123 countries have participated in this research and training.

**OBJECTIVE 3.2 – ENHANCE AMERICA’S ABILITY TO DEVELOP AND TRADE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS DERIVED FROM NEW AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES**

The United States is in a unique position to combat global hunger and the impacts of a changing climate. American farmers are among the most productive in the world, and U.S. science is among the most advanced in developing innovative solutions to agro-ecological challenges. USDA supports the safe and appropriate use of science and technology, including biotechnology, to help meet agricultural challenges and market needs of the 21st century.

USDA uses science-based regulatory systems to allow for the safe development, use, and trade of products derived from new agricultural technologies. USDA will continue to regulate the importation, interstate movement, and field-testing of newly developed genetically engineered (GE) organisms that qualify as “regulated articles” to ensure they do not pose a threat to plant health before they can be commercialized. These science-based evaluations facilitate the safe introduction of new agricultural production options and enhance public and international confidence in these products. USDA will coordinate responsibilities with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration as part of the Federal Coordinated Framework for the Regulation of Biotechnology.

To bring products of new and emerging technologies to the worldwide marketplace, USDA works with other Federal agencies to address trade challenges while building strong international partnerships. These efforts facilitate the safe use and trade of products

produced by such technologies, including the genetic engineering of animals, animal cloning, next generation plant and animal biotechnologies and nanotechnology. USDA will continue to monitor and encourage industry efforts to enable the development and export of biotechnology products containing intellectual property whose patents have expired.

USDA supports global adoption of science-based regulatory systems and works to advance internationally accepted science-based regulations with U.S. trading partners. Ensuring the enforcement of existing global commitments governing trade in agricultural biotechnology products is also a priority for the Department. USDA raises awareness of the contributions of innovative technologies to global food and energy security, environmental sustainability, and climate change mitigation and adaptation. This fosters global adoption of these technologies and their products, increases trade opportunities for U.S. producers, and provides tools for addressing 21st century challenges to agriculture.

At the same time, USDA facilitates increased dialogue and cooperation among farmers who employ varied agricultural production methods. This leads to domestic and international growth for all production systems and reduces friction among diverse interests. USDA will implement, as appropriate, recommendations provided by the USDA Advisory Committee on Biotechnology and 21st Century Agriculture on strengthening coexistence among different agricultural systems.

### Strategy in Action # 2

Research is central to developing useful and safe biotechnology. Economic research suggests that, depending on the GE trait, crop, and level of pest pressure, planting GE seeds can increase yields, reduce insecticide use, and/or reduce management time and field operations. Some GE crops allow farmers to substitute less toxic herbicides in place of more toxic, persistent, and costly alternatives. USDA will generate fundamental knowledge through research in genomic sciences and biotechnology to enhance agricultural sustainability and productivity. Research, education, and extension grants from USDA will help develop, use, and expand access to new knowledge and technologies, including biotechnologies, for food and agriculture.

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### EXTERNAL RISK FACTORS

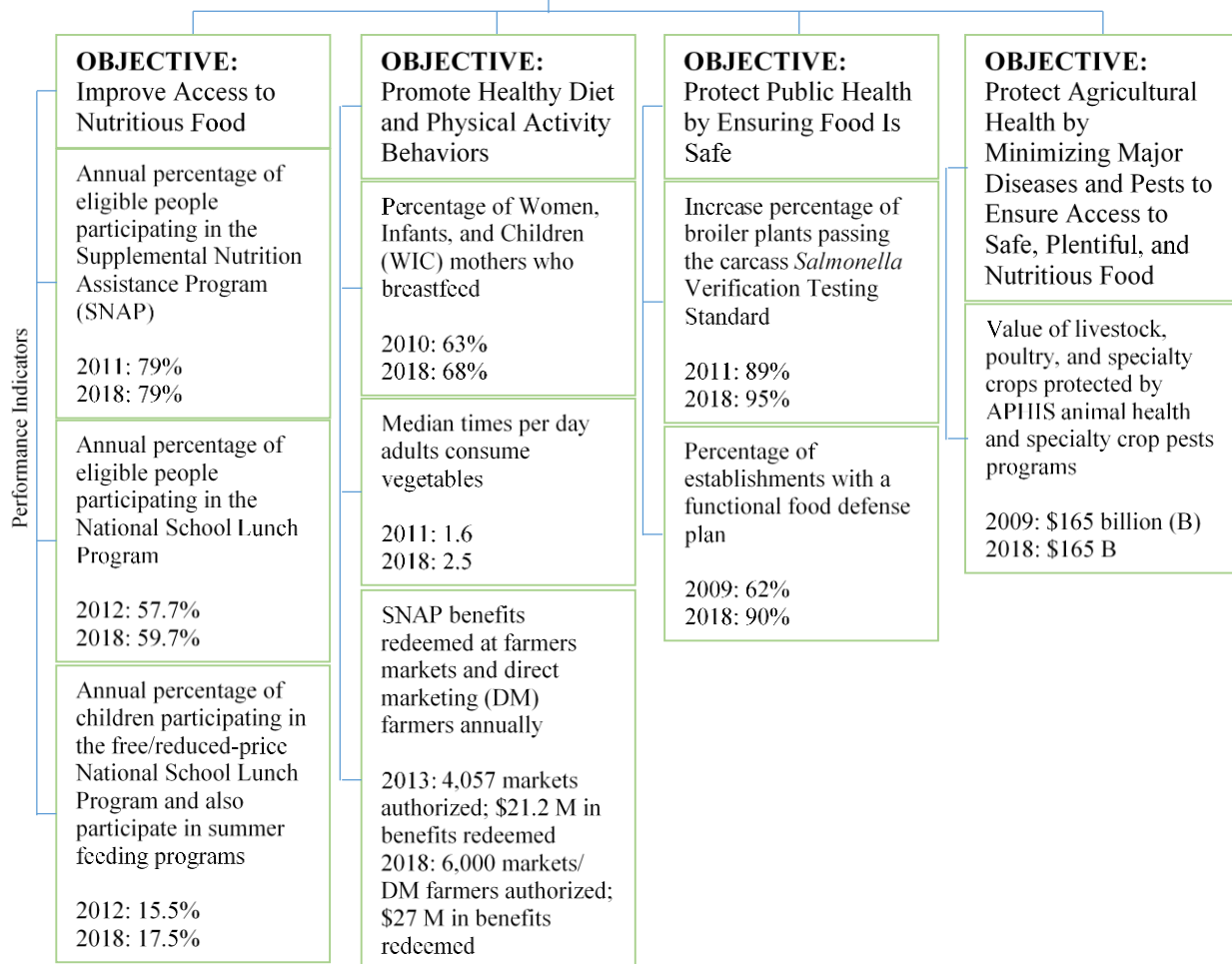
External risk factors include: public resistance, both at home and abroad, to foods produced through biotechnology; natural disasters and weather variability, including global climate change; political and policy changes in partner countries; conflicts within a country or region; and fluctuating exchange rates, slow-down in the economies of developing countries, and unexpected trade barriers. As it relates to the goals and objectives of achieving food security in developing countries, it should be noted that USDA is just one partner in this endeavor. Initiatives are undertaken by many U.S. Government agencies, other governments, international financial institutions, and private development organizations, as well as the local governments. In addition, there are events, be they natural (i.e., floods, droughts) or man-made (civil strife), that may preclude or limit the success of these programs.

# Strategic Goal 4

**GOAL 4:** Ensure That All of America’s Children Have Access to Safe, Nutritious, and Balanced Meals

**OUTCOMES:**

- Reduction in percentage of children and adolescents who are obese
- Reduction in total number of *Salmonella*, *Listeria monocytogenes (Lm)*, and *Escherichia coli (E. coli)* illnesses from all USDA-regulated products
- Reduction in prevalence of food insecurity in households with children



## Strategic Goal 4: Ensure That All of America's Children Have Access to Safe, Nutritious, and Balanced Meals

A plentiful supply of safe and nutritious food is essential to the well-being of every family and the healthy development of every child in America. Science has established strong links between diet, health, and productivity. Even small improvements in the average diet may yield significant health and economic benefits. Yet we know that for many American families, food and nutrition issues remain serious problems.

**Food insecurity.** While most American households have access at all times to enough nutritious food for an active and healthy lifestyle, food insecurity and the risk of hunger remain serious problems. The latest data show that over 17 million American households, including over 8 million households with children, had difficulty putting enough food on the table at some point during 2011. Even more alarming, in more than 350,000 households, with more than 800,000 children, one or more children simply did not get enough to eat. At times during the year, these children were hungry, skipped meals, or went whole days without food.

**Poor diet and obesity.** Poor dietary habits and a lack of physical activity contribute to serious health conditions; perhaps the most troubling of these conditions is childhood obesity. Over the last 30 years, the childhood obesity rate has more than tripled.<sup>4</sup> This has serious implications for the Nation's future. Children

who start out life obese have greater struggles with their weight in later years. In fact, 80 percent of teenagers who are obese remain obese as adults and are at risk for coronary heart disease, hypertension, and heightened risk of stroke, diabetes, and some cancers.<sup>5</sup> This has serious implications for the Nation's future. Beyond the physical suffering such diseases cause, obesity-related health complications can increase medical costs to America's health care system and decrease overall productivity.

**Food safety.** While the U.S. food supply system is one of the safest in the world, foodborne illness is still a common, costly—yet largely preventable—public health problem. Many different disease causing microbes, or pathogens, can contaminate foods, so there are many different foodborne infections. Today, as many as one in six Americans experience a foodborne illness annually, meaning they get sick by consuming contaminated foods or beverages.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Surgeon General's Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, January 2010, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site, "Overweight and Obesity – Health Consequences".

<http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/causes/health.html>

<sup>6</sup> Scallan E, Hoekstra RM, Angulo FJ, Tauxe RV, Widdowson M-A, Roy SL, et al. Foodborne illness acquired in the United States—major pathogens. *Emerg Infect Dis* [serial on the Internet]. [July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013].

<http://www.cdc.gov/EID/content/17/1/7.html>



**OBJECTIVE 4.1 – IMPROVE ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS FOOD**

USDA’s domestic nutrition assistance programs serve one in four Americans annually. The Department is committed to making benefits available to every eligible person who wishes to participate in the major nutrition assistance programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Child Nutrition Programs, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). While the Department’s ultimate objective is for economic opportunities to make nutrition assistance unnecessary for as many families as possible, we will ensure that these vital programs remain ready to serve all eligible people who need them.

While the rate of SNAP participation among eligible people has returned to the coverage levels of the 1990s, a substantial portion of those eligible for SNAP are not participating. USDA will continue its efforts to ensure that every eligible person is aware of the program’s benefits so that they can make an informed choice whether to participate or not.

USDA also intends to ensure effective and easy access to the Child Nutrition Programs for eligible children who need them. The National School Lunch Program is available in most schools. Schools can receive cash subsidies and donated commodities from the Department for each meal they serve. In return, those schools must serve lunches that meet Federal requirements and offer free or reduced-price lunches to eligible children.

Promoting access to nutrition assistance goes hand-in-hand with managing these programs in a manner that ensures public confidence and maximizes the impact of Federal dollars. Strong management ensures that those most in

need of nutrition assistance receive it. It also ensures that nutrition assistance programs leverage opportunities to positively impact the local economy in the communities they serve. Finally, it ensures that resources are not wasted by error or abuse. USDA uses all available opportunities, including new communication and eGovernment technologies, to serve customers, work with partners, and administer programs as effectively as possible.

**Strategy in Action # 1**

The School Breakfast Program operates much like the National School Lunch Program, except the program may not be reaching all the children who need it as effectively as its counterpart. Eating a healthy breakfast, at home or at school, is linked to better educational performance and classroom behavior, and fewer visits to the school nurse. The Department is working to improve access to and the meal quality of these programs. These moves ensure that healthful and appealing food is available to every student to support growth and learning.

**OBJECTIVE 4.2 – PROMOTE HEALTHY DIET AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY BEHAVIORS**

The Administration has set a goal to solve the problem of childhood obesity within a generation so that children born today will reach adulthood at a healthy weight. The First Lady’s Let’s Move! campaign has been central to this effort, and USDA will continue to play a critical role in its success. In addition, USDA is fighting to reverse the rapid increase in childhood obesity by improving school meals and the school nutrition environment. On school days, children who participate in both the breakfast and lunch programs consume as many as half of their calories at school. The Department must ensure that all foods served

in school contribute to good health, and the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act provided new authority to set common-sense nutrition standards for food sold throughout the school day. USDA will work with schools to implement the new standards for all foods sold in school and will continue to support ongoing implementation of updated school meals nutrition standards.

USDA is also encouraging and supporting WIC mothers to breastfeed their infants by strengthening breastfeeding policy and program activities. Breastfeeding is linked to a lower risk of numerous health problems for both mother and infant. It also may have a protective effect against pediatric overweight and obesity. Breast milk provides the best source of infant nutrition and helps infants get a healthy start in life. USDA will recognize and reward State achievements in promoting breastfeeding through performance awards, expand the availability of peer-counseling in WIC clinics, and continue its core promotion and support activities.

Furthermore, USDA is working to motivate and support Americans to eat fruits and vegetables more frequently each day. Too many Americans simply do not eat enough of these nutrient-dense foods to support good nutrition. The Department establishes evidence-based nutrition guidance, the basis for which is the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA), which are developed in partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The Department is also working to improve access to healthful, locally produced food in underserved communities through a multifaceted strategy that focuses on food production, distribution, and both traditional and non-traditional retail options. Through

research and technical and financial assistance, the Department will help producers produce, distribute, and market healthy foods locally. The Department will also encourage additional farmers markets in low-access areas to become authorized SNAP vendors, equip markets to accept SNAP through electronic benefit transfer (EBT), work with local and private partners to test and expand the use of incentive programs for healthy food purchases, and promote greater use of farmers markets by SNAP participants. Through its farm-to-school efforts, USDA also connects schools with regional and local producers to increase producers' market opportunities as well as young people's access to healthy, local foods.

To improve Americans' physical activity behaviors, USDA is promoting the use of the Nation's public lands. Most Americans need to move more to promote their health and well-being and improve the energy balance between the calories they consume and those they expend. National forests and grasslands are America's backyard, offering chances to increase physical activity. Over 90 million National Forest System visitors participate in outdoor-based physical activities each year. USDA will promote the use of these lands and facilities to nurture the body and mind in natural settings near local communities. The Department also will increase access to green space through such programs as the Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry program.

### Strategy in Action # 2

Through the MyPlate initiative, USDA implements the Dietary Guidelines for Americans with supporting tools and resources (ChooseMyPlate.gov). These resources are designed to give every consumer the knowledge and motivation he or she needs to choose a diet that supports a healthy future. USDA will use these tools to promote fruit and vegetable consumption and other healthy eating behaviors through public-private partnerships and cutting-edge technologies.

### OBJECTIVE 4.3 – PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH BY ENSURING FOOD IS SAFE

USDA is committed to ensuring that Americans have access to safe food through a farm-to-table approach to reduce and prevent foodborne illness. The Department invests in its workforce and data infrastructure to prevent harm to consumers by reducing the incidence of food contamination and quickly identifying and working to prevent or limit outbreaks. Effective response to food safety issues and enforcement depends upon timely, quality data and analysis.

USDA conducts in-commerce surveillance activities to protect public health by ensuring that meat, poultry, and processed egg products are safe, secure, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged. In fiscal year 2012, USDA ensured public health requirements were met in establishments that slaughter or process 147 million head of livestock and 8.9 billion poultry carcasses. In the same year, USDA estimated that there were 479,621 *Salmonella*, *Listeria monocytogenes* (*Lm*), and *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) O157:H7 foodborne illnesses attributed to Department-regulated products.

USDA also measures industry adoption of functional food defense plans. Food defense plans are written procedures that official meat and poultry slaughter and processing establishments, egg product plants, and official import inspection establishments should follow to protect the food supply from intentional contamination of food products with chemicals, biological agents, or other harmful substances. These plans help the industry protect public health and reduce negative economic impacts on the food infrastructure.

Finally, as imported products and on-farm practices can dramatically impact food safety, USDA participates in and leads government-wide Codex Alimentarius activities to ensure that science-based international public health standards are in place, promotes use of Codex standards by other governments and international producers, conducts re-inspection of imported products, and audits foreign countries to ensure the safety of imported products and provides guidance to promote good agricultural practices on the farm. The Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (chaired by the United States) also adopted Guidelines for the Control of *Campylobacter* and *Salmonella* in chicken meat in 2011. The guidelines are consistent with USDA hygienic performance standards and will help ensure the safety of imported products.

**Strategy in Action # 3**

USDA collaborates with its public health partners, especially the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA,) through interagency workgroups such as the Interagency Food Safety Analytics Collaboration (IFSAC), the Interagency Foodborne Outbreak Response Collaboration (IFORC), and the Interagency Risk Assessment Consortium (IRAC) to improve the understanding of foodborne illness and which foods are responsible for making people ill.

**OBJECTIVE 4.4 – PROTECT AGRICULTURAL HEALTH BY MINIMIZING MAJOR DISEASES AND PESTS TO ENSURE ACCESS TO SAFE, PLENTIFUL, AND NUTRITIOUS FOOD**

The Department detects and quickly responds to new invasive species and emerging agricultural and public health situations through a three-part strategy that involves (1) identifying threats overseas and working to prevent them from coming to the United States, (2) providing training and expertise to identify threats at ports of entry, and (3) working to eradicate pests and diseases or manage them to limit the damage done if they are already in the United States.

Where possible, USDA eradicates or manages existing agricultural pests and diseases and wildlife damage. The Department also develops and applies more effective scientific methods to prevent, detect, eradicate, or manage pests and diseases. These efforts contribute to the overall agricultural health of the Nation and the world.

**Strategy in Action # 4**

Each year, the volume of smuggled and improperly imported agricultural products entering the United States grows. In response, APHIS works to identify the unlawful entry and distribution of prohibited agricultural products. These products may harbor harmful exotic plant and animal pests, diseases, or invasive species that could seriously damage America’s crops, livestock, and environment.

**EXTERNAL RISK FACTORS**

The USDA’s ability to ensure that all Americans have access to safe, nutritious, and plentiful food supplies is impacted by several external factors. These factors include: the effectiveness of State and local organizations that deliver benefits for nutrition-assistance programs; the collaborative efforts of other Federal agencies that deliver or support health, human services, and education benefits; problems with food handling or preparation that lead to outbreaks of foodborne illness; increases in the volume and types of food products available on the market; changes in industry supply, slaughter and production, and consumer demand, new and evolving pathogens and other threats to public health, food terrorism and intentional contamination and infestation of the food supply; changing human consumption trends; gaps in food safety record-keeping by outside parties; and increased risks of pest and disease introductions through globalization and more open trade practices.

# Strategic Goal 5

**GOAL 5:** Create a USDA for the 21<sup>st</sup> century That Is High-Performing, Efficient, and Adaptable

- OUTCOMES:**
- USDA ranked in top ten of best places to work in the Federal Government
  - USDA is recognized as an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) “Model Employer”
  - Maintain or achieve historic low levels of improper payments and loan delinquency in Departmental programs

Performance Indicators

**OBJECTIVE:** Develop a customer-centric, inclusive, and high-performing workforce by investing in and engaging employees to improve service delivery

Percentage of employees engaged in core telework

2013: 19.88%  
2018: 35.0%

Cumulative number of staff hours saved through implementation of process improvement initiatives

2013: N/A  
2018: 1 million (or more)

**OBJECTIVE:** Build a safe, secure, and efficient workplace by leveraging technology and shared solutions across organizational boundaries.

Amount of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions resulting from Departmental operations

2008: 604,439 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e  
2018: 498,662 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e (17.5% reduction)

Percentage of agencies receiving Departmental civil rights program and employment compliance reviews annually

2013: 24%  
2018: 35%

Number of physical security assessments completed annually

2013: 155  
2018: 667

**OBJECTIVE:** Maximize the return on taxpayer investment in USDA through enhanced stewardship activities and focused program evaluations

Amount of office and warehouse space controlled or operated by Department

2013: 38.2 million square feet  
2018: 35.3 million square feet (7.5% reduction)

USDA procurement spending through Federal-wide strategic sourcing and Shared-First initiatives

2013: \$33 million  
2018: \$36.3 million (10% increase)

Number of USDA-controlled vehicles

2013: 40,393  
2018: 38,373 (5% reduction)



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## Strategic Goal 5: Create a USDA for the 21st century That Is High-Performing, Efficient, and Adaptable

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With over 100,000 employees located across the country and around the world, USDA faces challenges in managing and supporting a workforce responsible for a broad array of programs and services for the public. At the same time, however, USDA has tremendous opportunities to leverage this workforce to increase the value of USDA activities to taxpayers by building a modern workforce and modern workplace.

Through the Blueprint for Stronger Service, USDA is striving to build itself into a Department for the 21st century by leveraging technology enhancements; reducing operating costs and increasing efficiencies; investing in a flexible, results-oriented workforce; and effectively managing limited resources in an ever-tightening budget environment.

USDA's efforts under this strategic goal will result in a Department that is recognized as a top place to work in Government that respects the rights of its employees and customers and actively works to improve its stewardship of taxpayer resources. By investing in its workforce while holding leadership and employees accountable for delivering results and ensuring that effective programs and services are being made available to new and existing customers, USDA will increase its value to taxpayers for years to come.

### **OBJECTIVE 5.1 – DEVELOP A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC, INCLUSIVE, AND HIGH-PERFORMING WORKFORCE BY INVESTING IN AND ENGAGING EMPLOYEES TO IMPROVE SERVICE DELIVERY**

USDA employees work on the frontlines every day to serve the country and its taxpayers, whether it is through battling wildfires or ensuring the safety of our Nation's food supply. Since the employees are responsible for providing these services, it is imperative that the workforce be equipped with the skills and abilities to effectively and efficiently carry out the Department's responsibilities. To effectively develop the workforce, therefore, USDA is focusing on ensuring that the skills and competencies of its employees are appropriately assessed and improved upon. At the same time, the Department is striving to institute an inclusive and high-performance culture that not only values the differences offered by a diverse workforce, but also leverages those differences to better serve the Department's customers. To further improve performance, the Department is engaging its workforce in the development and implementation of innovative solutions to the challenges of today.

With a high-performing, results-focused, and engaged workforce, USDA will be positioned to better serve the public. As a result, the Department and its component agencies and offices can more effectively collaborate on challenges facing our Nation's farmers, ranchers, and rural communities.

**Strategy in Action # 1**

One particular area where the engaged and collaborative workforce will be especially valuable is in the service to historically underserved people and communities. Through the Strikeforce for Rural Growth and Prosperity initiative, the Department is focusing resources on areas of high poverty around the country. USDA partners with rural communities and regions on locally supported projects. USDA employees take steps, in partnership with the community, to provide technical assistance as needed to ensure that communities can fully access USDA programs.

**OBJECTIVE 5.2 – BUILD A SAFE, SECURE, AND EFFICIENT WORKPLACE BY LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY AND SHARED SOLUTIONS ACROSS ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES**

In order to effectively serve the public and deliver the programs and services to USDA customers in the future, the Department must modernize its operations and administrative support structures. With a modern structure and workplace, the Department can more quickly and efficiently support America’s farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, rural communities and other USDA stakeholders. In addition, by creating a modern workplace, the Department can better ensure the security of the USDA facilities infrastructure and the safety of employees and customers across the country.

A key provision to this modern workplace will be the focus on streamlining operations and creating an environment through which employees can be as effective as possible. To achieve these streamlining targets, the Department will look across its entire portfolio of operations to identify opportunities to reduce the time and effort required to deliver its

programs and services. Through coordinated and continuous process improvements, USDA will reduce the burden on its employees and the public while enhancing program delivery. In addition, the Department will also strive to improve the effectiveness of its employees through the increased implementation of technology solutions and workplace enhancements, such as telework. These improvements will enable USDA to become more flexible in its service delivery and more adaptable and responsive to the needs of its employees and customer base.

**Strategy in Action # 2**

Each day, USDA processes thousands of applications for loans, grants, permits, or other customer services. Together, these applications represent a significant investment in time on the part of the public to access these USDA programs. One way in which USDA is increasing its value is by examining the processes and procedures through which applications are completed, submitted, and approved – with a focus on reducing the time needed to complete applications and deliver benefits. As a result of these Signature Process Improvements, USDA is striving to save 1 million staff hours of time through the implementation of more streamlined processes. The improved processes will also yield benefits to program participants in the form of time savings.

**OBJECTIVE 5.3 – MAXIMIZE THE RETURN ON TAXPAYER INVESTMENT IN USDA THROUGH STEWARDSHIP OF RESOURCES AND FOCUSED PROGRAM EVALUATIONS**

In order to become a truly modern organization, the Department will need to improve the efficiency and efficacy with which it utilizes taxpayer resources to deliver services to the public. Intrinsic to these improvements will be an enhanced focus on being good stewards of the financial and property resources entrusted to the Department. Key to such stewardship will be a continued focus of the Department on the accuracy of payments being made through USDA programs. USDA will continue to strive to reduce its rate of improper payments to ensure that the program resources are being received by the intended recipients.

To also improve its program delivery, the Department will focus on expanding its use of performance data and program evaluation results to drive decisions. Information derived from these evaluations will focus on identifying areas for improvement and opportunities for applying limited resources to improving the quality of service provided by USDA programs.

**Strategy in Action # 3**

USDA spends nearly \$6 billion annually on the purchase of goods and services to support its operations and program delivery. By establishing a Shared First procurement policy and implementing strategic sourcing (i.e., smarter purchasing), the Department is reducing its costs to purchase things. Examples of these improvements include the consolidation of cell phone plans, which at one time numbered over 800 for the entire Department, and the merger of various contracts for information technology hardware and services among the Department's agencies and offices. As a result of this focus on strategic sourcing, the Department can use its contract dollars more effectively.

**EXTERNAL RISK FACTORS**

The ability of USDA to transform itself into a modern Department is affected by a number of factors external to the Department. Of primary importance is the potential impact resulting from continued budgetary constraints resulting from sequestration and associated reductions in resource availability. In addition, the effectiveness of the Department in delivering an array of programs and services to the public is dependent upon having legislative actions taken to ensure that stable and long-term statutes are enacted providing USDA with its authority to deliver programs and services. The Department is also subject to risks associated with being able to recruit and retain a diverse and high-performing workforce that will be responsible for ensuring that programs are operated efficiently and effectively while providing the services and results expected of the broad USDA customer base. Examples of these risks include the competition with the private sector and other Government agencies to fill key positions (e.g., information technology).

## Appendix – Program Evaluations

Program Evaluations Used to Develop the Strategic Plan			
Evaluations/ Analyses	Brief Description	What Was The Effect	Date
<b>Goal 1: Assist Rural Communities to Create Prosperity so They Are Self-Sustaining, Repopulating, and Economically Thriving</b>			
<b>Independent reviews of Rural Development (RD) Customer Satisfaction Surveys</b>	JD Powers review of RD performance when compared to mortgage companies providing single family home services.	RD was rated “superior.”	Every 2 years (most recently FY 2009)
<b>Comprehensive analysis of Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) training programs</b>	A meta-analysis of past evaluations of FSIS training programs.	Findings from the contracted evaluation were confirmed and improvements to training programs were planned. These will help meet the outreach and training objectives of Goal 1.	October 2008
<b>Economic Research Service (ERS) annual macroeconomic estimates</b>	Review, analysis, and update of macroeconomic models that estimate number of jobs created and additional economic activity generated from the export of agricultural products at both farm and non-farm levels.	Estimates the impact of agricultural export activity on jobs and income at both farm and non-farm levels.	Annually
<b>GAO Beginning Farmers and Ranchers report</b>	Report focused on coordination of USDA activities affecting beginning farmers and ranchers (all USDA agencies evaluated).	Congress provided mandatory funding for the Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Program.	2007
<b>National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) evaluation</b>	The evaluation by NAHLN partners and stakeholders assessed how well the program meets its original objectives, future objectives, and what objectives need to change.	Change in structure of NAHLN leadership, clearer definition of responsibilities, and initiation of closer examination of NAHLN progress and priorities.	2007
<b>American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) comprehensive program evaluation for the Farmland Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)</b>	Program delivery assessment for program administered by Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).	All Federal Government programs have a combined average of 69 for an ACSI indexing score; FRPP received a 73.	Completion and final report available as of September 2009
<b>Oversight of Recovery Act monies expended by USDA programs</b>	Oversight of both funded and unfunded Emergency Watershed Protection Floodplain Easement applications.	NRCS developed a national oversight and evaluation plan.	September 2009

<b>Program Evaluations Used to Develop the Strategic Plan</b>			
<b>Evaluations/ Analyses</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b>What Was The Effect</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>RMA Know Your Customer</b>	Gained a better understanding of who RMA's Customers are and what barriers certain producers face as they manage their risks.	Proposal to use data mining information as part of the criteria for education focus, program expansion, and new program development.	May 2013
<b>RMA The Risk Management Safety Net: Portfolio Analysis-Market Penetration and Potential</b>	Provides information about current business and market penetration with identification of areas of market potential.	Allows for improved targeting of new insurance products and improvement of risk management safety net.	July 2013
<b>National Rabies Management Program review</b>	Conduct a review in two phases: Phase I – goals, timelines, management strategies, and benefits vs. costs; and Phase II – administrative processes, budget, supervisory controls, internal and external networks, and communications.	An internal Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) review team will provide a report of findings and recommendations for adjusting policies, practices, and processes as they relate to overall program objectives. This review was completed in early fiscal year 2012. It resulted in eight recommendations. Wildlife Services has begun implementing all of the recommendations; some of which have already been completed.	FY 2010
<b>Goal 2: Ensure Our National Forests and Private Working Lands Are Conserved, Restored, and Made More Resilient to Climate Change, While Enhancing Our Water Resources</b>			
<b>Inventory, Monitoring and Assessment (IM&amp;A) Strategy</b>	This strategy was developed to identify opportunities to improve agency IM&A activities. It contains goals, objectives, strategic improvements and priority actions. Implementation is focused on identifying critical natural resource information needed to effectively address agency priorities.	Identifying core information will assist in improving the quality, timeliness and accessibility of information and help ensure that efficient investments are made to inform and support essential decision-making and management needed.	2014 -2018
<b>USFS National Advisory Committee for the Forest Planning Rule Implementation</b>	The Committee advised the Secretary of Agriculture, through the Chief of the Forest Service, by providing advice and recommendations on the implementation of the National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule	The Committee has identified recommendations on the use of best available science, social and economic metrics, monitoring, and adaptive management approaches to make land management processes more efficient. Ongoing topics include public engagement and collaboration strategies around these issues.	2014 -2018



<b>Program Evaluations Used to Develop the Strategic Plan</b>			
<b>Evaluations/ Analyses</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b>What Was The Effect</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Wildland Fire Management Efficiency Assessment Program (MEAP)</b>	Since 2006, the USDA Forest Service and the Department of Interior (DOI) have been jointly conducting Management Efficiency Assessments of various aspects of wildland fire management. The results of these assessments outline findings and present recommendations for the USDA Forest Service and the Department of the Interior's (DOI) Wildland Fire Management Officers to make changes to improve program management.	Since the inception of this program 7 years ago, it has produced an estimated annual cost avoidance of \$50 to \$90 million (varies by season intensity) through implementation of the evidence based on findings and recommendations. The MEAP has had a total outlay of \$5 million over this period in support costs.	2014 -2018
<b>ForWarn Forest Disturbance Monitoring System</b>	ForWarn delivers a refreshed suite of maps and materials every 8 days and provides tools for detecting insects, disease, wildfire, storms, human development or unusual weather. This technology supports an initiative known as the National Early Warning System (EWS).	Early and frequent evidence-based information inherently improves the efficiency and effectiveness of forest management work regardless of jurisdiction.	2014 - 2018
<b>Goal 3: Help America Promote Agricultural Production and Biotechnology Exports as America Works to Increase Food Security</b>			
<b>Biotechnology Petition Process Improvement Initiative using Lean Six Sigma methodology</b>	This project focused on reducing the overall time of the regulatory determination process related to biotechnology product petitions by examining root causes of the length and variability of the process.	The review resulted in reducing the overall process from about 3 years to a little over a year, with key process enhancements implemented.	Lean Six Sigma review completed in 2011; New process implemented Spring 2012; first petitions being completed using new process in 2013
<b>Assessment of functionality and usability of the Biotechnology Regulatory Services Web site</b>	Customers and stakeholders had suggested improvements and were involved in focus groups to improve the Web site; benchmarking was conducted to identify best practices of other Federal agencies.	Some enhancements were initiated by the Biotechnology Regulatory Services program, and others will be considered in the new APHIS-wide Web enhancement initiative underway.	Review was completed in FY 2010

<b>Program Evaluations Used to Develop the Strategic Plan</b>			
<b>Evaluations/ Analyses</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>	<b>What Was The Effect</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>External, independent evaluation of USDA Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement Pilot Project (USDA LRP project)</b>	Evaluation of the USDA LRP project conducted by Management Systems International assessing the timeliness, cost-effectiveness, market impacts, quality of commodities purchased, and comparative assessment of local and regional procurement to in-kind food aid.	Evaluation results will help USDA and other U.S. Government agencies determine when, where, how, and under what circumstances LRP is the most suitable tool for providing U.S. food assistance. Findings and conclusions are being used to improve program performance and effectiveness, as applicable.	Completion and final report available as of December 2012
<b>External, independent mid-term programmatic evaluation of the USDA Caucasus Agricultural Development Initiative in Armenia (CADI)</b>	Mid-term programmatic evaluation of the USDA CADI conducted by The QED Group, LLC focused on assessing the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of USDA efforts in Armenia.	Findings, conclusions, and lessons learned will be used by USDA program managers to improve management, implementation and future program decisionmaking.	Completion and final report available as of September 2012
<b>Goal 4: Ensure That All of America's Children Have Access to Safe, Nutritious, and Balanced Meals</b>			
<b>Reports on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation Rates, 2010</b>	Reported national rates of participation among eligible people.	Showed that while SNAP is reaching the neediest eligible individuals, many eligible people are not participating; identified underserved eligible populations.	December 2012
<b>School Nutrition Dietary Assessment IV</b>	Assessed nutrient content of school meals.	Identified needed area for improvement in school meals content.	November 2012
<b>Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) Evaluation</b>	Compare experiences of students in FFVP schools with similarly situated non-participating schools, using 24-hour dietary recalls, Web-based surveys, and interviews with school officials, teachers, students, and parents.	Demonstrated substantial impact of program on children's fruit and vegetable consumption; informed policy decisions to sustain program.	March 2013
<b>Access, Participation, Eligibility and Certification (APEC) study for school meals programs</b>	Provides an estimate of erroneous payments in the school meals programs.	Showed that errors in certification, counting, and claiming are significant sources of improper payments.	November 2007

Program Evaluations Used to Develop the Strategic Plan			
Evaluations/ Analyses	Brief Description	What Was The Effect	Date
<b>Assessment of program impacts on diet quality</b>	Uses data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey.	Showed that, while programs are linked to certain positive dietary attributes, the diets of all groups (low-income participants, nonparticipants and higher income individuals) fell far short of the <i>Dietary Guidelines for Americans</i> .	July 2008
<b>FSIS Inspection and Enforcement Activity at Swine Slaughterhouses</b>	OIG Report 24601-0001-41 Objectives were to identify areas of risk, if FSIS' controls were sufficient to ensure compliance and if appropriate enforcement actions were taken against establishments that were not in compliance.	FSIS determined what measurable improvements the HIMP program achieved and its suitability as a permanent program. FSIS is working to minimize reliance on the inspectors' judgment to ensure they consistently enforce laws.	May 2013
<b>USDA's Implementation of New State-Delegated Meat Inspection Program</b>	GAO Report No. GAO-13-332R. Evaluated the effectiveness of the FSIS implementation of the Cooperative Interstate Shipment (CIS) program.	FSIS helped small establishments and States that may be interested in the CIS program obtain information for their decision and promote more consistency between the CIS and existing inspection programs in which State inspectors convey Federal marks of inspection.	May 2013
<b>FSIS <i>E. coli</i> Testing of Boxed Beef</b>	OIG Report 24601-0003-31. Determined if (1) if FSIS is sampling boxed beef as required in agency procedures, (2) FSIS is entering plant profile data correctly into PHIS, and (3) industry's trace back documentation is adequate.	FSIS took steps to ensure that beef to be ground is subject to sampling and testing for <i>E. coli</i> at additional points in the production process.	March 2013
<b>Verifying Credentials of Veterinarians Employed and Accredited by USDA</b>	OIG Report 50601-0001-31. Evaluated the effectiveness of USDA's verification of the credentials of veterinarians employed by USDA or those used to carry out USDA functions.	FSIS established control procedures on what constitutes an official transcript, appropriate transcript delivery methods, and the means to verify transcripts, equivalent degrees, and specialized experience when it qualifies the applicant for higher pay.	February 2013
<b>Processing Team Inspection</b>	Survey of frontline supervisors to assess the effectiveness of processing team inspection.	Survey results indicate that the majority of processing teams schedule tasks properly and the Team Coordinator position rotates as intended.	January 2013

Program Evaluations Used to Develop the Strategic Plan			
Evaluations/ Analyses	Brief Description	What Was The Effect	Date
<b>USDA Controls Over Shell Egg Inspections</b>	OIG Report 50601-0001-23. Evaluated USDA's controls over shell eggs to prevent, detect, and report the presence of <i>Salmonella enteritidis</i> or other contaminants.	FSIS implemented a plan to ensure a seamless approach to shell egg safety, implemented a process to collect data on sanitation issues, and implemented a science-based policy on shell egg refrigeration.	December 2012
<b>Salmonella and Campylobacter End of Set (EOS) Letters</b>	Survey of field employees to determine the effectiveness of the revised EOS letters in conveying information to inspection program personnel about Campylobacter and <i>Salmonella</i> subtypes associated with human illness.	Survey results indicated that the revised EOS letter is a helpful tool in determining when to initiate a food safety assessment. Field employees surveyed were hopeful that the new EOS letter format will aid in decreasing the incidence of <i>Campylobacter</i> and <i>Salmonella</i> in the future.	October 2012
<b>Office of International Affairs (OIA)</b>	Survey of OIA employees, foreign governments, sister government agencies and other external customers to assess satisfaction with OIA services and obtain feedback to improve services in the future.	Survey results indicated that most respondents are satisfied with OIA services and overall expectations are being met. Areas for further improvement included inquiry response time and accuracy of inquiry responses.	September 2012
<b>Application of FSIS Sampling Protocol for Testing Beef Trim for <i>E. coli</i> O157:H7</b>	Office of Inspector General (OIG) Report 24601-0001-0031. Observed the collection of beef trim samples, and analyzed whether sampling and testing methods vary among plants and differ from FSIS standards. Examined whether test results are used to improve food safety.	FSIS updated industry guidance on procedures to assess the effectiveness of controls for preventing contamination during the slaughter operation. FSIS made certain changes to its trim sampling program to make it risk based. FSIS evaluated the appropriateness of its Agency performance standards in the context of any changes to sampling algorithms or sample allocations.	May 2012
<b>FSIS Inspection Personnel Shortages at Processing Establishments</b>	Office of Inspector General (OIG) Report 24601-11-HY. Purpose was to evaluate the impact that inspection shortages have on FSIS' ability to ensure the Nation's meat and poultry products are safe.	FSIS developed mitigating procedures for inspectors to perform when they miss scheduled inspections at processing establishments. FSIS updated its information systems to capture additional information on reasons for missed inspections.	May 2012
<b>FSIS Notice 17-2 Antimicrobial Intervention Carcass/Product Coverage</b>	Survey of IICs to obtain feedback on Notice 17-12 to determine the clarity of the guidance provided by the new policy.	Survey results indicated that respondents understood the policy explaining how carcass/product coverage was necessary for the antimicrobial interventions to operate effectively.	April 2012

Program Evaluations Used to Develop the Strategic Plan			
Evaluations/ Analyses	Brief Description	What Was The Effect	Date
<b>Review of the Food Safety and Inspection Service Approach to <i>E. coli</i> Testing</b>	GAO Report No. GAO-12-257. Audit conducted to (1) inventory interventions before slaughter that may reduce <i>E. coli</i> in cattle, (2) determine USDA's role in approving vaccines, and (3) determine the extent to which <i>E. coli</i> strains had been determined to be adulterants and the status of tests to detect them.	FSIS began testing for the six additional STEC strains, improved test methods and found a commercial supplier for one key test component.	March 2012
<b>Review of the Food Safety and Inspection Service In-Commerce System (ICS)</b>	Office of Inspector General (OIG) Report 24601-08-AT. Determined whether FSIS' policies, procedures, and controls were adequate to provide an effective in-commerce surveillance program.	FSIS updated the tier structure in the ICS and updated its instructions for prioritizing surveillance activities. FSIS provided additional guidance on preventing and eliminating duplicates from the system and formalizing its process for identifying duplicates, inactive firms, closed firms and those that do not handle amenable products.	October 2011
<b>Sterile fruit fly production review</b>	Review of the status of sterile fruit fly production by international team of fruit fly experts.	Final report with recommendations was produced.	FY 2010
<b>Citrus Health Response program review</b>	Internal APHIS review team evaluated program strategies for controlling Asian citrus psyllids and the regulatory framework to prevent the spread of citrus greening.	Report produced with recommendations to achieve program objectives.	FY 2011
All Goals			
<b>National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) portfolio assessments</b>	Assessments focus on current and/or emerging issues of societal importance.	Improvements in program-planning and management, informing performance-based budgeting and staffing changes.	Annually
<b>Improper Payments Information Act (IPIA) reviews</b>	Analysis and testing using required IPIA thresholds.	Reduction in amount of improper payments.	Annually
<b>OIG and GAO audits and reviews</b>	Financial statement audited annually and programs reviewed on a variable schedule.	Staff made improvements to address recommendations.	Annually



<b>Future Program Evaluations and Other Analyses</b>			
<b>Evaluations and Analyses</b>	<b>Scope and Methodology</b>	<b>Purpose/Intended Use of the Results</b>	<b>Timetable</b>
<b>Goal 1: Assist Rural Communities to Create Prosperity so They Are Self-Sustaining, Repopulating, and Economically Thriving</b>			
<b>OIG review of National Organic Program</b>	Audit to evaluate whether agricultural products marketed as organic meet the requirements of the program and to assess the adequacy and consistency of program oversight.	OIG will issue a report and USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service will respond to the recommendations as appropriate.	TBD
<b>National Rabies Management Program review</b>	Conduct a review in two phases: Phase I – goals, timelines, management strategies, and benefits vs. costs; and Phase II – administrative processes, budget, supervisory controls, internal and external networks, and communications.	An internal Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) review team will provide a report of findings and recommendations for adjusting policies, practices, and processes as they relate to overall program objectives.	TBD
<b>Packers and Stockyards Program Management Accountability Review</b>	Conduct internal management accountability reviews of all major Packers and Stockyard Program units to measure performance and ensure conformance with established standard operating procedures.	The Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) will perform independent audits of each major organizational unit, based on established auditing procedures and business criteria. The program will hire an external entity to facilitate the reviews.	TBD
<b>Economic Research Service (ERS) annual macroeconomic estimates</b>	Review, analyze, and estimate the impact of agricultural export activity on jobs and income at both farm and non-farm levels.	ERS uses sophisticated econometric modeling techniques to estimate the macroeconomic impact of exports on various economic criteria, including jobs and income, at both farm and non-farm levels.	Annually
<b>Analysis of the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation's (FCIC) product portfolio</b>	Comprehensive review of the risk-management products offered by FCIC.	Actuarial and underwriting experts review current and proposed crop insurance products and opportunities to assist the FCIC Board in developing a product strategy.	Ongoing
<b>Review of FCIC policies, plans of insurance, and related materials</b>	Comprehensive quality review of FCIC's materials.	Actuarial and underwriting experts review FCIC legislation, regulation, and program materials to recommend potential ways to improve the overall quality of the program.	Ongoing
<b>RD Customer Satisfaction Surveys</b>	Independent reviews of Customer Satisfaction Evaluations.	Surveys are planned for 3 new programs within RD to be determined and completed by FY 2016.	Every 2 years

Future Program Evaluations and Other Analyses			
Evaluations and Analyses	Scope and Methodology	Purpose/Intended Use of the Results	Timetable
<b>Goal 2: Ensure Our National Forests and Private Working Lands Are Conserved, Restored, and Made More Resilient to Climate Change, While Enhancing Our Water Resources</b>			
<b>Evaluation of Integrated Resources Restoration</b>	An independent third-party evaluation of how this new budgeting tool has impacted the efficiency of implementing, and the effectiveness of restoration activities in the pilot regions.	Answer key questions about increased integration, efficiency, and effectiveness of restoration work and communicate the findings to pilot and non-pilot regions as the Forest Service moves toward nationwide implementation of Integrated Resources Restoration.	FY 2013-2015
<b>Interagency Dispatch Optimization Project</b>	Working with the Department of the Interior, the Forest Service will continue to implement evidence-based recommendations regarding the 120 dispatch centers currently managed at each local unit. Evidence and analysis shows that standardization, joint national directives, office optimization, new approaches to IT contracting under OMB Circular A-11 Part 7, and development of uniform standards for governance and staffing will produce efficiencies and savings.	Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of inter-agency fire and aviation operations.	FY 2014-2015
<b>Goal 3: Help America Promote Agricultural Production and Biotechnology Exports as America Works to Increase Food Security</b>			
<b>Food for Progress and McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program regulations require all projects to conduct independent, external third-party midterm and final project-level evaluations</b>	Midterm and final evaluations are conducted for all Food for Progress and McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Child Nutrition Programs. Multiple methodologies, including qualitative, quasi-experimental, non-experimental, and mixed methods designs are used according to approved project-level evaluation plans.	Project evaluations generally focus on relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of project efforts. Findings, conclusions, and recommendations are used by program managers, implementers, and other key stakeholders to improve management, implementation and future program decision-making.	Ongoing, depending on project duration

<b>Future Program Evaluations and Other Analyses</b>			
<b>Evaluations and Analyses</b>	<b>Scope and Methodology</b>	<b>Purpose/Intended Use of the Results</b>	<b>Timetable</b>
<b>External, independent evaluation of USDA Afghanistan Agricultural Sanitary Phytosanitary (SPS) project</b>	The evaluation is focused on USDA SPS efforts in Afghanistan. Document reviews, focus groups, key informant interviews, and quantitative data analysis of secondary data and information.	The external evaluation will determine the effectiveness of USDA's SPS project in Afghanistan. It will identify mid-term results and how they relate to the intended objectives and the likelihood of lasting effects after the project's end.	FY2013
<b>External, independent evaluation of USDA Food for Progress (FFPr) Monetization Programs</b>	The evaluation will focus on all USDA monetization activities that occurred under FY2010 agreements and later. Document reviews, focus groups, key informant interviews, and quantitative data analysis of secondary data, and information and country case studies	The external evaluation will determine the efficiency and effectiveness of FFPr's monetization program. The evaluation report will provide recommendations on process improvements related to priority areas, including transaction costs, sales process, market assessments, and identification of unintended negative and positive consequences of monetization	FY2014
<b>External, independent evaluation of USDA Trade Capacity Building Programs</b>	External evaluation using mixed-methods approach.	Assess the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of USDA's international trade capacity-building efforts. The evaluation will provide success stories, lessons learned and good practices in USDA efforts to build trade capacity worldwide.	FY2015
<b>Goal 4: Ensure That All of America's Children Have Access to Safe, Nutritious, and Balanced Meals</b>			
<b>Data Coordination Committee (DCC)</b>	Identify data collection, quality, or analysis issues for discussion at DCC meetings.	To assess analyses and ensure that projects are harmonized across FSIS.	Bimonthly
<b>Development of Data Analysis Sections for FSIS Notices and Directives</b>	Identify data analyses that should be performed in response to FSIS Notices and Directives.	Implement applicable data analyses for each notice/directive.	As needed
<b>Food Defense Plan Survey</b>	Gathers data about industry's voluntary adoption of food defense plans.	FSIS inspection program personnel will receive the survey questions through PHIS.	Annually
<b>Food Defense Plan Survey – Egg Establishments</b>	Gathers data about industry's voluntary adoption of food defense plans.	FSIS inspection program personnel in egg establishments will receive an online survey to complete.	Annually
<b>FSIS Laboratory Customer Satisfaction Survey</b>	Gathers data about sampling supplies, results, discards, lab inquiries, and data reporting in LEARN.	A recurring online survey completed by FSIS Program Personnel in establishments that use FSIS Laboratory services.	Annually

Future Program Evaluations and Other Analyses			
Evaluations and Analyses	Scope and Methodology	Purpose/Intended Use of the Results	Timetable
<b>Audit of Cooperative Interstate Shipment</b>	Field work will begin at the FSIS national office and will also be performed at selected FSIS district offices, States, and FSIS establishments	To evaluate the compliance with the Cooperative Interstate Shipment program requirements. Audit is being conducted by USDA OIG, Audit 24601-0001-22	Final report expected August 2014
<b>Not Ready to Eat Poultry Checklist Survey</b>	Will be administered to inspection program personnel in chicken and turkey slaughter and processing establishments, including establishments that produce comminuted poultry.	The purpose of the survey is to gather information on <i>Salmonella</i> controls and sanitary dressing procedures in poultry establishments.	Final report expected September 2014
<b>Measures of Nutrition Assistance Program Coverage</b>	Estimates the rate of participation among eligible people for SNAP and WIC by comparing econometric models of the eligible population based on demographic and economic data to administrative data on participation.	To assess the effectiveness of the program in reaching those in need, identify eligible groups that are underserved, and to project program volume and cost for planning and budgetary purposes.	Annually
<b>Improper Payments Measures for Major Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs</b>	Estimates generally involve analysis of program operations data supplemented by special data collections on recipient/program delivery partner characteristics.	To assess the efficiency of the program in delivering benefits without unnecessary error or waste, identify program components for reengineering, and target corrective action, such as additional oversight of program partners or policy change.	Every 5-10 years (varies by program), with interim indicator measures on erroneous payment risks
<b>School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study</b>	Collects and analyzes data from a nationally representative sample of districts and schools to determine the nutrient content of school meals, and assess other aspects of the school nutrition environment, along with the costs to produce meals.	To assess the effectiveness of existing school meals policies and operational requirements, and identify potential improvements; to assess the linkages between costs and meal quality, and identify cost-effective strategies to improve nutritional content.	Findings in 2017
<b>Study on Nutrition and Wellness Quality (SNAQ) in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)</b>	Collects and analyzes data from a sample of child care providers to assess the nutritional quality of foods provided in child care centers, opportunities for physical activity, and facilitators and barriers to providing healthy foods and physical activity.	To assess the effectiveness of existing CACFP policies and operational requirements, and identify potential improvements.	TBD
<b>ISO 9001 Annual Recertification Audits of Center for Veterinary Biologics</b>	External registrar conducts 5 day audit of all Center for Veterinary Biologics programs.	Ensure compliance with ISO 9001 guidelines with focus on good business practices and customer service.	Annually; most recent audit June 2013

Future Program Evaluations and Other Analyses			
Evaluations and Analyses	Scope and Methodology	Purpose/Intended Use of the Results	Timetable
<b>National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) Accreditation Audit</b>	American Association for Lab Accreditation (A2LA) performs audit covering testing on animal sera, tissues and fluids, environmental samples, lab equipment calibration, proficiency tests and reference materials.	A2LA provides recommendations for improving NVSL Quality Management System and lists NVSL labs as compliant with standards on their website and issues certificate of accreditation in compliance with International Lab Accreditation Council (ILAC).	Annually; Last audit held May 2013
<b>Agricultural Quarantine Inspection (AQI) User Fee Review</b>	Grant Thornton conducting comprehensive review of current AQI user fees, developing an activity based cost model to determine actual costs to deliver AQI services and an economic analysis of proposed fee changes to assess potential impact.	Better alignment of AQI user fees with actual costs; Engagement of stakeholders allows for information sharing throughout process to enable industry and Customs and Border Protection to contribute information and understand ultimate decisions on fees.	To be completed in FY2015
<b>Poultry Pathogens</b>	GAO will be contacting FSIS headquarters and field offices and other relevant USDA agencies, as needed.	To identify actions taken to reduce the prevalence of <i>Salmonella</i> and <i>Campylobacter</i> in poultry, to determine the extent these actions have reduced the prevalence and to identify challenges FSIS faces in reducing these pathogens. Audit is being conducted by GAO, assignment code 361507.	Final report expected August 2014