

From: The Office of the Secretary - OSEC <Officeof.theSecretary@usda.gov>
Sent: Friday, September 10, 2021, 12:50 PM
Subject: Secretary Vilsack: Thank you FOIA professionals and information aggregators!

**This email is intended for all USDA employees.
***** Please do not respond to this mailbox. Thank you. *******

Colleagues,

I would like to highlight the outstanding work of USDA's Freedom of Information Act ([FOIA](#)) professionals. Since 1967, the FOIA has provided the public the right to request access to records from any federal agency. It is often described as the law that keeps citizens in the know about their government. At USDA, we are committed to ensuring transparency and trust with the public. Although the USDA community has a number of full-time FOIA professionals, there are also many staff members performing FOIA functions across the country in addition to other assigned duties. This is testament to the shared responsibility and dedication towards this priority. I applaud the teams' hard work and diligent effort to respond promptly to FOIA requests, to adapt a presumption in favor of disclosure, and to provide exemplary customer service for the tens of thousands of requesters seeking records annually.

In fiscal year 2020, the FOIA community decreased its overall initial backlog by 12.8% and its administrative appeal backlog by 20.4%. The FOIA community also successfully closed all 10 of its overall oldest initial requests and administrative appeals. This is significant progress, and this team was able to do this because of your help.

Today I am asking each USDA employee to renew your commitment to open government and transparency and embrace the challenge of living up to the FOIA's aims and aspirations. Ensuring fulfillment of both the letter and the spirit of the FOIA is the responsibility of everyone at USDA.

If you should receive a request for records from a FOIA professional, please promptly conduct a search and return any potentially responsive records unredacted to the assigned FOIA professional. Similarly, if you receive a FOIA consultation request from a FOIA professional, please promptly arrange a review of the records and keep an open a line of communication with the assigned FOIA professional. Time is of the essence. Generally speaking, the FOIA only provides 20 working days to satisfy records requests. Requests not promptly satisfied can result in costly litigation for our programs.

If you have any outstanding search or consultation requests, please immediately coordinate with your assigned FOIA professionals. By taking action today, you can ensure the timely production of records that sheds light on the great work we do at USDA. Let us continue working together to promote public trust. FOIA remains an emblem of a free society, that values openness and ultimately, the peoples' right to know.

Once again, I would like to thank our FOIA community for their outstanding efforts and continually pushing themselves to improve USDA's administration of the FOIA. For more information about FOIA, please visit [FOIA.gov](https://www.foia.gov). If you have specific questions about USDA's FOIA process, please email USDAFOIA@usda.gov.

Sincerely,

Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture



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