

EEOC FORM 715-01 PART E

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

**FEDERAL AGENCY ANNUAL EEO PROGRAM STATUS
REPORT**

Department of Agriculture for Period Covering October 1,
2007, to September 30, 2008.

Executive Summary

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Introduction

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) submitted its first report under the EEO Management Directive 715 (MD-715) on January 31, 2005, covering Fiscal Year (FY) 2004. In that report, the Department conducted a critical analysis of its efforts in the areas of employment discrimination, complaint processing, and affirmative employment. For FY 2005, and in FY 2006, USDA's MD-715 responded to feedback received from EEOC on the previous year's report, refined the analyses of areas in which improvement could be made, and reported accomplishments in implementing the plans' objectives. In FY 2007, although USDA did not receive feedback from EEOC, it continued to make progress in all the above areas, and remains committed to achieving model employer status, as defined by MD-715, and submits this report on its achievements to date, workforce analysis, objectives, and planned activities.

Department's Mission and Mission-Related Functions

The mission of the U.S. Department of Agriculture is to provide leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, and related issues based on sound public policy, the best available science, and efficient management.

The USDA strives to:

- *Expand international trade for agricultural products and support international economic development;*
- *Expand domestic marketing opportunities for agricultural products and strengthen risk management, the use of financial tools, and the provision of sound information to help farmers and ranchers in their decision-making process;*
- *Further develop alternative markets for agricultural products and activities;*
- *Provide financing needed to help expand job opportunities and improve housing, utilities, and infrastructure in rural America;*
- *Enhance food safety by taking steps to reduce the prevalence of foodborne hazards from farm to table, and safeguard agriculture from natural and intentional threats;*
- *Improve nutrition by providing food assistance and nutrition education and promotion; and*
- *Manage and protect America's public and private lands working cooperatively with other levels of government and the private sector.*

Summary of Department's Self-Assessment (Parts G and H)

Part G of MD-715 defines the six essential elements of a model EEO program through a list of 122 measurement items. After completing our self-assessment, we identified areas for improvement in four of the six elements. The following summarizes USDA's efforts to meet the Commission's six essential elements:

Essential Element A - Demonstrated Commitment from Agency Leadership

The Department's leadership continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to equal opportunity for all employees and applicants. Secretary Ed Schafer, who was appointed in January 2008, issued a new Civil Rights policy statement declaring his commitment to ensuring the civil rights of all USDA employees and his expectations that his leadership embrace equal opportunity principles and diversity.

USDA conducted its third annual Agency Heads Assessment, where Agency Heads and Staff Directors were evaluated on performance in promoting civil rights and diversity. Planned activities for FY 2009 include the continued evaluation of Agency heads and Staff Office Directors on their performance in promoting civil rights and diversity, and refining the civil rights performance assessment criteria to support the Secretary's 2009 Civil Rights Priorities.

Essential Element B - Integration of EEO into the Agency's Strategic Mission

One of the objectives in the USDA 5 -Year Strategic Plan (2005-2010) is to ensure that diversity, civil rights, and equal opportunity principles are effectively synthesized into performance management and employee development programs and practices.

Communication to senior leadership of the effectiveness, efficiency and legal compliance of USDA's EEO program continues to be a priority. The Assistant Secretary of Civil Rights continued to have regular communication and access to the Agency's senior leadership to ensure that they are kept apprised of current and pressing EEO issues. Some areas of improvement, however, include improving a partnership between the Office of ASCR and the Office of Human Capital Management (OHCM). Next year, both offices have committed to work jointly to develop strategies that impact recruitment, work force planning, succession planning, and programs to advance the workforce.

Essential Element C - Management and Program Accountability

The Department continues to refine and strengthen its civil rights training programs, making use of information technology tools to ensure that the training is accessible by all employees. USDA will continue to conduct regularly scheduled compliance reviews which will evaluate the civil rights and employment policies and practices of the agencies to determine their compliance with applicable civil rights statutes, regulations, and policies. In FY 2008, the Office of Adjudication and Compliance (OAC) completed compliance reviews for the National Agricultural Statistics Service and the National Finance Center. Next year, the OAC will conduct a compliance review of selected Forest Service field offices, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Agricultural Marketing Service. Planned activities also include issuing the Departmental Regulation, "Civil Rights Accountability Policy and Procedures". The regulation sets forth the policy and procedures for carrying Department's commitment to ensure that appropriate disciplinary or corrective actions are taken when discrimination or civil rights related misconduct occurs.

Essential Element D - Proactive Prevention of Unlawful Discrimination

USDA continues to emphasize ADR training for supervisors and managers in planned activities. OASCR sponsored a 2.5 day Civil Rights and Diversity Training Conference in April 2008 for USDA executives, managers, supervisors, ADR, HR and civil rights professionals. The training conference addressed the task of strengthening equal opportunity in programs and employment practices and the importance of diversity.

This year, the Office of Adjudication and Compliance will conduct compliance reviews of selected Forest Service field offices (*which was postponed due to severe forest fires*), NRCS and AMS. These compliance reviews help to prevent discrimination and other related unlawful activity by closely reviewing policies, practices and complaints related to hiring, training, promotion, employee awards, disciplinary actions. The Office of Diversity will be responsible for conducting trend analysis of workforce profiles by race, national origin, sex, and disability across major occupations, by grade level, and by compensation and reward systems.

Essential Element E – Efficiency

USDA continues to make progress in improving the efficiency of its complaint processing. One significant accomplishment in the area of efficiency is the reduction of the backlog of EEO complaints pending Final Agency Decisions. Both internally and externally, measures are currently in place to ensure final agency actions will meet regulatory time frames.

Essential Element F -- Responsiveness and Legal Compliance

USDA plans to focus greater attention in the area of compliance as it continues to reduce its complaint processing workload.