

Historic Investment in Partnerships for 70 Climate-Smart Commodities and Rural Projects



USDA to Triple Commitment with Initial \$2.8 Billion Investment, with Additional Projects to Come

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today that the Biden-Harris Administration through the U.S. Department of Agriculture is investing up to \$2.8 billion in 70 selected projects under the first pool of the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity, with projects from the second funding pool to be announced later this year. Ultimately, USDA's anticipated investment will triple to more than \$3 billion in pilots that will create market opportunities for American commodities produced using climate-smart production practices. These initial projects will expand markets for climate-smart commodities, leverage the greenhouse gas benefits of climate-smart commodity production and provide direct, meaningful benefits to production agriculture, including for small and underserved producers. Applicants submitted more than 450 project proposals in this first funding pool, and the strength of the projects identified led USDA to increase its investment in this opportunity from the initial \$1 billion Vilsack announced earlier this year.

Learn More in this press release: [<Historic Investment in Partnerships for 70 Climate-Smart Commodities and Rural Projects | USDA>](#)

USDA Opens People's Garden Initiative to Gardens Nationwide

Gardens nationwide invited to register.

USDA is expanding its People's Garden Initiative to include eligible gardens nationwide. School gardens, community gardens, urban farms, and small-scale agriculture projects in rural, suburban and urban areas can be recognized as a "People's Garden" if they register on the USDA website and meet criteria including benefitting the

community, working collaboratively, incorporating conservation practices and educating the public. Affiliate People's Garden locations will be indicated on a map on the USDA website, featured in USDA communications, and provided with a People's Garden sign.

Learn More in the press release [USDA Opens People's Garden Initiative to Gardens Nationwide](#) and by viewing the [USDA People's Garden Video on YouTube](#).



USDA Seeks Input on New Grant Program to Strengthen Food Supply Chain, Reduce Irregular Migration and Improve Labor Protections for Farmworkers

FSA will hold three virtual listening sessions September 28 and 29.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is gathering input to help shape a recently announced planned grant program focused on improving the resiliency of our food and agricultural supply chain by addressing labor shortages in agriculture, reducing irregular migration through increased use of legal pathways, and improving labor protections for farmworkers. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will hold three virtual listening sessions on Sept. 28-29 for the new farm labor stabilization and protection pilot grant program, which was announced earlier this year as part of the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection.

The grant program will use up to \$65 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding to provide support for agricultural employers in implementing robust labor standards to promote a safe, healthy work environment for both U.S. workers and workers hired from northern Central American countries under the seasonal H-2A visa program.

More on the Grant Program

The program will aim to improve the resiliency of our food and agricultural supply chain and advance several major Administration priorities:

- *Driving U.S. economic recovery and safeguarding domestic food security by addressing current labor shortages in agriculture.* Even before the onset of the

COVID-19 pandemic, agricultural employers were struggling to secure a stable workforce. The pandemic has only exacerbated this problem, threatening our domestic capacity to produce a safe and robust food supply. This pilot program will help address this shortage by expanding the potential pool of workers.

- *Reducing irregular migration through the increased use of legal pathways.* The administration has taken numerous steps to address the elevated levels of irregular migration from Northern Central America. The H-2A visa program offers a lawful pathway for individuals from these countries to come to the United States to engage in temporary or seasonal agricultural work. An effective H-2A visa program is critical to the resiliency of the food and agricultural supply chain. This pilot program will aim to address challenges that both workers and employers face in utilizing the program.
- *Improving working conditions for farmworkers.* Strong and safe working conditions are critical to the resiliency of the food and agricultural supply chain. Through this pilot program, USDA will support efforts to improve working conditions for both U.S. and H-2A workers and ensure that H-2A workers are not subjected to unfair recruitment practices.

Agricultural Employer Organizations

FSA will hold a listening session for agricultural employer organizations on Wednesday, Sept. 28 at 11 a.m. ET. FSA seeks input on:

- Challenges that employers face in securing a stable workforce.
- The set of incentives employers seek from USDA in order to improve their ability to hire workers from northern Central American countries under the seasonal H-2A visa program.
- The labor standards that will make meaningful progress towards ensuring a safer and fairer working environment for both domestic and H-2A farmworkers.

Labor Unions and Farmworker Advocacy Community

FSA will hold a listening session for labor unions on Wednesday, Sept. 28 at 2 p.m. ET, and one for the broader farmworker advocacy community on Thursday, Sept. 29 at 2 p.m. ET. From both groups, FSA seeks input on:

- Barriers or challenges faced by farmworkers, specifically those from northern Central American countries participating in the H-2A visa program.
- Recommendations to enhance farmworker protections and to increase farmworker awareness of resources and worker rights.

How to Attend

Register online at fsa.usda.gov/farmworkers. FSA will also consider comments received by 30 days after the date of publication in the Federal Register. Find more details in the [Sept. 21 notice on the Federal Register](#) or on fsa.usda.gov/farmworkers.

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