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New Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture to Meet March 23-24

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will host the first public meeting of the inaugural Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production on March 23-24, 2022. The public – including urban producers – is encouraged to attend.

“I look forward to working with this new urban agriculture federal advisory committee,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “The committee’s valuable insights and expertise will provide critical guidance to help us better serve urban agricultural producers, strengthen local food systems, and increase equity and access to healthy, local food.”

The new federal advisory committee is part of USDA’s efforts to support urban agriculture, creating a network for feedback. Members were announced last month, and include agricultural producers, and representatives from the areas of higher education or extension programs, non-profits, business and economic development, supply chains and financing.

About the Meeting

USDA’s Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production is coordinating the meeting, which runs from 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. ET on March 23 and 24, 2022. To attend, register by March 18, 2022.

At the meeting, committee members will discuss administrative matters and consult on the National Institute of Food and Agriculture’s Notice of Funding Opportunity for the Urban, Indoor and Emerging Agriculture grants.

Members of the public who wish to submit comments or questions related to urban agriculture may submit them via www.regulations.gov.

Comments must be submitted by March 18, 2022.

For special accommodations, please contact Leslie Glover at (602) 395-9536 or UrbanAgricultureFederalAdvisoryCommittee@usda.gov.

Additional details are available in the March 8, 2022 Federal Register notice and online at farmers.gov/urban or on the committee’s webpage.

USDA and Urban Agriculture

The Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production is part of a broad USDA investment in urban agriculture. Other efforts include:
• Grants that target areas of food access, education, business and start-up costs for new farmers, and policy development related to zoning and other urban production needs.

• Cooperative agreements that develop and test strategies for planning and implementing municipal compost plans and food waste reduction plans.

• Investing $260,000 for risk management training and crop insurance education for historically underserved and urban producers through partnerships between USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA) and the University of Maryland, University of Connecticut, and Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems.

• Providing technical and financial assistance through conservation programs offered by USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

• Organizing 11 Farm Service Agency (FSA) urban and suburban county committees. FSA will organize additional committees.

The Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production was established through the 2018 Farm Bill. It is led by NRCS and works in partnership with numerous USDA agencies that support urban agriculture. Its mission is to encourage and promote urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural practices, including community composting and food waste reduction.

More information is available at farmers.gov/urban and the new Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production website at www.usda.gov/partnerships/advisory-committee-urban-ag-innovative-production.

Additional resources that may be of interest to urban agriculture entities include grants from USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service and National Institute of Food and Agriculture as well as FSA loans.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America’s food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy, and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit usda.gov.

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New Online Tool Allows Farmers, Ranchers to Easily Report Anticompetitive Practices

Farmers, ranchers, and other producers and growers now have a one-stop shop to help ensure they are treated fairly. The new farmerfairness.gov portal developed jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Justice (DOJ) allows you to report potential violations of livestock and poultry antitrust laws, including the Packers and Stockyards Act.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently expressed concern that producers across the country have for too long faced a marketplace that benefits a few large companies over the farmers and ranchers who grow and raise our food.

For example, ranchers received more than 60 cents of every dollar a consumer spent on beef 50 years ago, compared to approximately 39 cents today. Hog farmers fared worse over the past 50 years, as their share of the consumer dollar fell from between 40 to 60 cents 50 years ago to approximately 19 cents today.

In order to assure economic opportunity and fairness for all, this portal makes it easy for farmers and ranchers to register a complaint or tip and provide details that would aid an investigation.

Who may submit a complaint or tip?

Anyone who suspects a violation of Federal law governing fair and competitive marketing and contract growing of livestock and poultry, including the Packers and Stockyards Act.
What information should I provide?

Those reporting potential violations of the Packers and Stockyards Act and other competition laws via the online portal are asked to submit the following information:

- The names of companies, individuals, or organizations that are involved,
- A description of any possible violations of the Packers and Stockyards Act or other federal antitrust laws,
- Examples of the conduct that may violate one or more of these laws,
- Any other relevant details about the violation, and
- The names of companies, individuals, or organizations that may be harmed by the alleged violation and how they are harmed.

What is the process following submission of a complaint or tip?

Complaints and tips will go through a preliminary review by USDA Packers and Stockyards Division staff and Department of Justice staff. If a complaint raises sufficient concern under the Packers and Stockyards Act or antitrust laws, it will be selected for further investigation by the appropriate agency. This action may lead to the opening of a formal investigation.

USDA or DOJ staff will only contact complainants if additional information is needed.

Will my confidentiality be protected?

Both USDA and DOJ will protect the confidentiality of the complainants to the fullest extent possible under the law. For any information provided, DOJ and USDA will follow their respective Privacy and Confidentiality Policies found at: DOJ Confidentiality and USDA Privacy. Packers and Stockyards regulations regarding confidentiality also apply: PSD Confidentiality. DOJ and USDA commit to supporting relevant whistleblower protections, including newly applicable protections for criminal antitrust complainants against unlawful retaliation.

To submit an anonymous complaint or tip, complainants or tippers should provide appropriate details but not enter their names or contact information. Neither USDA nor DOJ will be able to contact anonymous complainants or tips to obtain additional information that might be needed to evaluate your complaint tip, or to engage in future correspondence regarding your complaint or tip.

Farmers, ranchers, and other producers and growers deserve the benefits of fair and competitive markets for their products and services. This portal is an additional tool to support and protect these individuals who are vital to agriculture and our food supply.

USDA to Invest $1 Billion in Climate Smart Commodities, Expanding Markets, Strengthening Rural America

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced on February 7 that the U.S. Department of Agriculture is delivering on its promise to expand markets by investing $1 billion in partnerships to support America’s climate-smart farmers, ranchers and forest landowners. The new Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity will finance pilot projects that create market opportunities for U.S. agricultural and forestry products that use climate-smart practices and include innovative, cost-effective ways to measure and verify greenhouse gas benefits. USDA is now accepting project applications for fiscal year 2022.

For the purposes of this funding opportunity, a climate-smart commodity is defined as an agricultural commodity that is produced using agricultural (farming, ranching or forestry) practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions or sequester carbon.

Funding will be provided to partners through the USDA’s Commodity Credit Corporation for pilot projects to provide incentives to producers and landowners to:

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implement climate-smart production practices, activities, and systems on working lands,

measure/quantify, monitor and verify the carbon and greenhouse gas (GHG) benefits associated with those practices, and

develop markets and promote the resulting climate-smart commodities.

Funding will be provided in two funding pools, and applicants must submit their applications via Grants.gov by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on:

- April 8, 2022, for the first funding pool (proposals from $5 million to $100 million), and
- May 27, 2022, for the second funding pool (proposals from $250,000 to $4,999,999).

A wide range of organizations may apply, but the primary applicant must be an entity, not an individual.

USDA is committed to equity in program delivery and is specifically seeking proposals from entities serving all types of producers, including small or historically underserved producers.

Visit usda.gov for additional information including Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities and resources to support your application.

What’s New and Improved for Specialty Crop Producers?

Does your operation include specialty crops? Whether you grow fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, or nursery crops - USDA is here for you.

Over the past year, USDA has stepped up our support of specialty crop producers and local and regional food systems. USDA believes specialty crop producers are integral to the food system of the future, and we are working to improve available options for specialty crop producers as well as ensure equity in program delivery.

What’s New?

The Risk Management Agency (RMA) rolled out a new insurance option for small-scale producers who sell locally, which is named Micro Farm. This new insurance coverage option simplifies record keeping and covers post-production costs, such as washing and value-added products. It is available now, and you can learn more from an Approved Insurance Provider or your RMA specialty crop liaison.

In addition to Micro Farm, RMA rolled out other new insurance options in the past year, including: California Citrus Trees, Florida Citrus, Production and Revenue History option for Florida strawberries, and Hurricane Insurance Protection-Wind Index (HIP-WI). These new options either fill gaps in coverage or offer advantages over other policies. Since 2020, producers weathered several major hurricanes. The new HIP-WI played a crucial role in recovery with more than $250 million in indemnities paid so far with most payments issued in a matter of weeks following a hurricane.

Interest in growing and insuring specialty crops has grown significantly with $1 billion in liabilities for 1990 to $22 billion in liabilities for 2021. (For more details, check out reports on our Specialty Crops webpage.)

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) also offered pandemic assistance for organic producers. The new Organic and Transitional Education and Certification Program (OTECP) provided assistance to help cover loss of markets, increased costs, labor shortages and expenses related to obtaining or renewing their organic certification.

What’s Improved?

In the past year, RMA made improvements to existing policies -- including Whole-Farm Revenue Protection, a key insurance option for specialty crop producers. Beginning in the 2021 crop year, direct market producers could report two or more commodities using a new combined direct marketing code.

This reduced a tremendous burden for diversified producers and allowed them to receive a premium rate discount for diversification. For 2022, RMA increased coverage for organic and aquaculture producers and enabled organic...
producers to report certified organic acreage as long as the request for certification had been made by the reporting date, which provides additional flexibility to producers.

Want to Learn More?

These new and improved options for specialty crop producers are but a few of USDA’s strides over the past year to build a fairer, more transparent food system rooted in local and regional production. To learn more, please read USDA’s January 19, 2022, news release.

For crop insurance, visit RMA’s Specialty Crops webpage or contact your specialty crop liaison.

Also, if there is not a standard offer for the crop you would like insured, you may still be able to get a written agreement for coverage. RMA Regional Offices review these requests to help provide coverage. These requests also provide Regional Offices the opportunity to review the possible expansion of the policy to your county.

Lastly, you can read our Specialty Crops webpage on farmers.gov and question-and-answer with two specialty crop liaisons, Adrienne Steinacher and Matt Wilkin.

Wyoming State Office
951 Werner Ct Ste 130
Casper, WY 82601
Phone: 307-261-5231
Fax: 855-415-3427