

As Prepared

**Chairman Robert Aderholt
Office of the Inspector General Hearing
Opening Statement
February 15, 2017**

Welcome to the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee's first hearing of the 115th Congress with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Inspector General.

First, I want to congratulate and welcome our new Ranking Member from the second district of Georgia, Mr. Sanford Bishop. I've had the pleasure of working with Mr. Bishop on the Appropriations Committee since 2003. We both share a passion for the great work that this Committee does and even more so for this Subcommittee. We both represent districts where agriculture plays a big role in the livelihoods of our constituents. Mr. Bishop is a well-respected and principled Member of this Committee who is not afraid to reach across the aisle and work to solve the real, everyday problems faced by our constituents. I look forward to working with you, Mr. Bishop, as we begin this new Congress.

I'd also like to welcome back all of the other Members of this Subcommittee - we were one of two Subcommittees that did not change Membership on the Majority side. On the Minority side, we welcome the addition of our new Member from the second district of Wisconsin, Mr. Pocan. We look forward to working with you. I view the popularity of the Subcommittee to be a very positive sign of interest in the Members' intent of dealing with the real world challenges of our constituents.

Due to the typical delay of a new Administration's first budget request, we may not see an FY 2018 budget request for a month or two. However, I'd like to share in detail some of the themes I have set to guide the Subcommittee's work for FY 2018.

Our first theme builds off of our oversight activities of the past several years. It is about evaluating and accounting for taxpayer dollars to ensure efficiency and accountability. We will continue to work to eliminate and prevent burdensome regulation; improve agency accountability; eliminate duplicative programs and initiatives; ensure proper staffing levels; and prioritize investment in proven and effective programs with a demonstrated benefit to American families.

Our second theme is investing in rural infrastructure as a catalyst for growth. I want us to make smart investments in critical utility infrastructure, such as broadband, electricity, water systems, and housing for vulnerable populations; assist rural businesses to create unique economic opportunities; and prioritize funding that helps to grow economies and jobs.

Our third theme is about ensuring support for our farmers, ranchers, and producers. This includes providing opportunities for our constituents through access to domestic and international trade; providing credit to producers; ensuring free and fair markets; supporting science and research to promote productivity and sustainability; and guaranteeing the safety net is there for those who need it most.

Our fourth and final theme is protecting the health and safety of people, plants and animals. We will work to protect our safe and healthy food supply; control or eradicate plants and animal pests and diseases that threaten agricultural industries; ensure the safety and effectiveness of human and animal drugs and medical products; deliver nutrition assistance to vulnerable populations; and provide for the efficient use of funds for nutrition research and education.

As for today's hearing, Ms. Fong, I would like to thank you for appearing. I believe this marks your fifteenth straight year that you have appeared before this Subcommittee. So needless to say, we have a deeply experienced team at the OIG as the new Administration fills in its leadership positions. I look forward to discussing the ongoing challenges faced by the Department that arose over the last eight years. I'd also like to get your input on future problems that may arise and programs, policies, or practices that may be of concern to your organization. Based upon your written testimony, I can see that the last Administration failed to fix the problems in a number of high priority areas such as financial management, information technology security, and the integrity of benefits.

The work you do covers so many different aspects of the lives of all Americans, from housing to electricity, business development, the farm safety net, food safety, and making sure people don't go hungry- things that most citizens don't even realize.

Your job is incredibly important to the integrity and success of this Department. The U.S. taxpayer should also be supportive of your work due to the risk exposure of USDA's financial activities. Most Americans would be surprised to know that USDA has over \$200 billion in assets, \$143 billion in annual spending, and more than \$100 billion in loans. The outstanding recommendations offered by the OIG over the past eight years could yield \$700 million in savings. These are areas you have identified and no final action was taken during the previous Administration.

One example of the success of your work is the recent drop in improper payments for the crop insurance program. As a result of the OIG's annual reviews and recommendations, this rate is at a record low of two percent and has dropped for the past two consecutive years.

Among other things, I plan to discuss issues related to your audits and investigations that range from the Farm Bill, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, information technology, accounting deficiencies, and USDA's three year delay in setting up the Under Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs mandated by the 2014 Farm Bill.

The Subcommittee would also like to highlight the fact that you have once again received outstanding recognition for your excellent work among the IG community. You received five awards and recognitions in 2016 from the Council for Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, which encompasses the entirety of the IG community across the federal government. I extend my congratulations for these achievements.

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