



Joe Leonard, Jr. Ph.D.

#### Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack swore in Dr. Joe Leonard, Jr., as Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights on April 6, 2009. Nominated by President Barack Obama and confirmed by the U.S. Senate on April 2, 2009, Assistant Secretary Leonard is the longest serving Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights in USDA's history and the longest serving African-American Senate confirmed appointee ever at USDA.

Under Assistant Secretary Leonard's leadership, USDA was able to accomplish several historic accomplishments. To address long-standing allegations of past discrimination, Assistant Secretary Leonard spearheaded an effort to settle large-scale class-action lawsuits with Native American and African American farmers and ranchers and established a voluntary claims process for women and Hispanic farmers and ranchers, which provided payments of more than \$2.5 billion combined and over \$118 million in debt forgiveness. Notably, during Dr. Leonard's tenure, there has been an increase in civil rights trainings within USDA nationwide, a 90% decrease in farmer complaints nationwide, a 9% increase in the number of African-American farmers and a 21% increase in the number of Hispanic farmers in the United States.

Additionally, in 2013, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR) provided unprecedented protections for Gender Identity and Gender Expression for conducted programs at USDA. And, more recently, in 2014, OASCR issued a Departmental regulation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of National Origin affecting persons with limited English proficiency in assisted and conducted programs.

Under Secretary Vilsack's leadership, and the tremendous efforts of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, USDA has made a comprehensive cultural transformation. USDA's Senior Executive Service (SES) now exceeds the government-wide workforce in 9 out of 10 diversity categories. Most notably, the percentage of minorities and women in the SES have increased by 88% and 38%, respectively. These achievements have earned USDA recognition as one of the most diverse groups of executives in the entire federal government.

Before joining USDA, Assistant Secretary Leonard served as Executive Director of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) under the leadership of Representative Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick (D-MI). While at the CBC, Leonard managed the daily activities of the Caucus and helped guide the legislative policy for its 43 congressional members.

Prior to his role at the CBC, Assistant Secretary Leonard served as the Executive Director of the Black Leadership Forum, an umbrella organization of 32 member groups that together work to develop and implement progressive public policies for social change. He has also served as the Washington, DC Bureau Chief of the Rainbow/ PUSH Coalition and Director of the Arthur Fleming Institute of the Center for Policy Alternatives.

Assistant Secretary Leonard is a native of Austin, TX. He holds a Ph.D. in American history with a specialization in civil rights history from Howard University, Washington, DC; an M.A. degree from Southern University, Baton Rouge, LA; and a B.A. degree from Huston-Tillotson University in Austin, Texas. Assistant Secretary Leonard and his wife, Dr. Natasha Cole-Leonard are proud parents of a 13-year-old son, Cole.