

**Statement by
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Secretary of Agriculture
Before the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives
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Thank you, Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Fortenberry, and members of this Subcommittee, for inviting me here today to discuss the Administration's priorities for the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and to provide you an overview of the President's fiscal year (FY) 2022 budget for USDA.

Today, containing the pandemic, ensuring racial justice and equity, responding to a mounting hunger and nutrition insecurity crisis, rebuilding the rural economy, strengthening and building markets for farmers and producers, and addressing the impacts of climate change are our top priorities. Amid these challenges, we are tasked with delivering fundamental services—safe and nutritious food, clean water and last-mile broadband, energy security, sound infrastructure, business services, and tackling the climate crisis. In rural America—which holds a special claim to USDA's mission—we must build back better, stronger, and more resilient and equitably than ever before.

To do all of these things effectively requires staffing, programmatic tools, technology, and a robust budget. Over the past four years, USDA has suffered an outflow of talented and expert staff. Several critical Mission Areas, such as Rural Development and Research, Education and Economics, as well as essential offices were weakened, leaving the Department hamstrung in carrying out its responsibilities as determined, in part, by this Subcommittee.

The President's Budget request for FY2022 is not a list of things we would like to do—it is a plan for what we need to do to get USDA back on track to provide services to the American people.

This funding request invests in the core foundations of our country's strength and will advance key USDA priorities, including economic development and growth in rural America, maintaining support for American agriculture, rebuilding scientific expertise in our agencies, leading in the development of market-based and farmer and forestry focused solutions to climate change, and building a stronger safety net to address hunger and nutrition insecurity.

Through this budget, the Biden-Harris Administration harnesses the resources of USDA to target underserved communities and those who have been marginalized to help them realize their dreams. We will put rural America at the heart of solutions for climate change, renewable energy, and building a fairer, more equitable food system. We will find new and creative ways to collaborate with other federal agencies, social service organizations, community and grassroots organizations, and the private sector to spur community development, start or grow thousands of businesses, and give individuals the financial tools to succeed in rural America. We are committed to building or rebuilding infrastructure in rural America that gives communities better schools, health centers, and public safety facilities; supports a local and regional food system; that embraces renewable energy; that provides broadband connectivity to strengthen education, health care, and public services. Beyond infrastructure, USDA will provide access to capital and financing for rural businesses to create jobs, grow the tax base and cultivate diverse, equitable communities that attract new residents.

Rebuilding scientific expertise within our USDA agencies is foundational to supporting American agriculture, being a part of the rural fabric, and addressing the impacts of climate change. American farmers must be able to leverage new technologies to compete in world markets, all while protecting our soil and water. This budget proposes investments in agricultural research to advance innovation and the application of science-based and data driven agricultural decisions and practices. Increased funding for agricultural research is a key component for restoring the confidence of our employees and morale among our workforce. We must protect scientific integrity, provide outlets to share feedback, and work at rebuilding expertise in our agencies and restoring the confidence of our workforce.

We have fully funded our county offices in this budget request, and we will build on the resources provided in the American Rescue Plan to ensure that USDA does not harbor discrimination in any form. Restoring the expertise and confidence in our workforce is essential to being a better partner to collectively mitigate and adapt to the impacts of a changing climate. Ninety-seven percent of the land in the United States is in rural areas, and most is either privately owned—with adjacencies to federal programming—or federally owned and managed. This is an opportunity to use the Department's expertise in conservation, science, and research—and the passion and commitment of our farmers, ranchers and private forest owners—to put the United States in a leadership position on climate change mitigation. We must put food, agriculture and

forestry at the center of climate smart practices by building new markets—including in renewable energy and biobased manufacturing—and creating new streams of income for producers and landowners. We believe farmers and forest owners are the best stewards of our land, and they require the resources and the technical know-how to implement soil conservation, carbon sequestration, pasture or rangeland management plans, and waste management programs.

While much of our work supports American agriculture, rural economic development, and safe food, the glaring reality is that many families are experiencing food insecurity and do not have access to nutritious options or nutrition education. Our goal is to introduce more eligible families to the resources and services of WIC and keep them in the program so that they continue to benefit. This will improve health for infants, provide more nutritious diets and better health care for children, and higher academic achievement for students. We believe that connecting more eligible women and young children to WIC is one of the tools to reduce stark racial disparities in our country and ensure the country's prosperity in the future.

The President's 2022 discretionary request totals \$29.358 billion, a \$3.76 billion increase from the 2021 enacted level. Highlights of the budget designed to address USDA's and the Nation's contemporary challenges are:

- \$400 million in new funding to give rural electric providers financial flexibility as they accelerate to carbon-pollution free electricity by 2035. The discretionary request also provides funding to support \$6.5 billion in loan authority for rural electric loans. This is an increase of \$1 billion over the 2021 enacted level to support additional clean energy, energy storage, and transmission projects to put people back to work in good-paying union jobs to help meet the ambitious climate progress that science demands.
- \$717 million for Rural Water and Wastewater Grants and Loans, an increase of \$100 million over the 2021 enacted level. That funding includes \$25 million for grants targeted to Colonias, Native Americans, and Alaska Native Villages and \$75 million for grants targeted to rural, poor communities.
- \$700 million, an increase of \$65 million over the 2021 enacted level, for the Rural e-Connectivity Program "Reconnect," which provides grants and loans to deploy broadband to unserved areas.

- \$32 million for a renewed and expanded initiative to leverage USDA’s extensive network of offices to help people in high poverty counties. Referred to as the “Strikeforce” initiative, USDA will coordinate with other Federal agencies on an all-of-government approach to connect rural stakeholders with Federal programs and resources.
- \$4 billion, or nearly \$647 million above the 2021 enacted level, for USDA’s research, education, and outreach programs. These investments in agricultural research will advance innovation and the application of science-based and data driven agricultural decisions and practices.
- \$6.7 billion, more than \$1 billion above the 2021 enacted level, for critical nutrition programs, including the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), to help vulnerable families put healthy food on the table and address racial disparities in maternal and child health outcomes.

The FY 2022 discretionary investments reflect only one element of the President’s broader agenda. Next month, the Administration will release a full Budget that will build on this discretionary funding request and detail a comprehensive vision for the Nation that reinvests in America, supports future growth and prosperity, and meets U.S. commitments. I look forward to working with this Subcommittee when more details about the budget become available. USDA is charged with addressing critical issues within the food supply chain, the impacts of climate change, and the pressures on our public and private lands – each of which will require the requested budget levels to address. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about our budget proposals.