

RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND ECONOMICS

**Statement of Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young, Acting Under Secretary
Before the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies**

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Fortenberry, and members of the Subcommittee, my name is Chavonda Jacobs-Young, and I am the Acting Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics (REE) and Chief Scientist at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). I am pleased to appear before you to testify on the President's fiscal year (FY) 2022 budget for the REE mission area. I am accompanied by the leaders of our four agencies: Dr. Simon Liu, Acting Administrator of the Agricultural Research Service (ARS); Dr. Carrie Castille, Director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA); Dr. Spiro Stefanou, Administrator of the Economic Research Service (ERS); and Mr. Hubert Hamer, Administrator of the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).

In his testimony before this Subcommittee on April 14, Secretary Vilsack outlined USDA's top priorities – containing the pandemic, promoting racial justice and equity, addressing the 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. He also emphasized the need to rebuild expertise and morale within the Department.

When appropriately resourced, I believe that the Research, Education, and Economics mission area is uniquely poised to advance these priorities. Over the last few decades, the United States has fallen behind in research and development – we lag far behind other nations in research investments, fewer young Americans are choosing to study STEM fields, and higher education opportunities are further out of reach than ever before. At the same time, innovative research has never been so critical. Extreme weather is threatening farmers and ranchers' operations and

bottom lines. COVID-19 continues to sweep the world as we work to get folks vaccinated, all while hunger and equity divides deepen.

That's why I am pleased that the President and Secretary are strongly committed to investments in research and development that will define U.S. innovation for coming decades. REE will support research on climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience to inform our farmers as they work to feed the world. The data and research we can provide to producers and landowners is invaluable in shaping and creating market opportunities. We will expand our partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) to leverage the important work they do, and the invaluable connection they have with underserved communities. We will also provide sound science to help the global community understand and respond to the coronavirus pandemic and the next global public health threat.

The Fight Against COVID-19

I am proud that our scientists have been part of the fight against COVID-19. Untold numbers of American families have suffered due to the coronavirus pandemic over the last year. REE is working to take a comprehensive look at the full scope of the pandemic – not just the virus' impact on humans, but also how it affected food systems, food security, and agriculture. We are leveraging decades of research and partnerships to examine these questions.

NIFA refocused over \$23 million to support COVID-19 related research, extension, and education through land-grant universities and small businesses. ARS worked to answer critical questions about the ability of domestic animals to carry and transmit the virus. ERS launched the COVID-19 Working Paper Series to provide timely analyses on the pandemic and collaborated with 11 universities to investigate how COVID has impacted agricultural supply chains.

We also deeply appreciate the resources that Congress has provided to REE to prepare for and respond to coronavirus. The December Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act provided more than \$140 million for REE to help shore up hunger relief programming and support farmers during the pandemic. These funds are helping provide

technical assistance for beginning farmers, support state departments of agriculture to respond to mental health challenges, and promote access to healthy foods in low-income areas.

While these resources and research are allowing us to respond to the pandemic and take a critical look at how we got here, it is now time to look forward. We must deepen our investment in research to improve resiliency in the future and strengthen local and regional food systems.

Tackling the Climate Crisis

Equally important is REE's work to address the climate crisis. President Biden has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the fundamental research at the heart of global climate issues, including REE's work in this area. Long-term investments in research supports continuous and consistent observational records, which are a cornerstone of global climate science and resilience research.

REE is leveraging technology to advance climate-smart land use, conservation, precision agriculture, and carbon sequestration for the good of current and future generations. We can build off the existing infrastructure like REE Climate Hubs and leverage their institutional knowledge and collaboration. The Hubs provide practical, proactive tools to American producers and customers by providing a touch point for regionally relevant science and technical information, incorporating the newest information from USDA researchers, and moving it to field application through USDA program agencies. Going forward, these Hubs will be a critical component of REE's strategy to tackle the climate crisis.

USDA is a leader in conservation, science, and research. We put food, agriculture, and forestry at the center of climate smart practices to build new markets and develop renewable energy. To successfully position the United States as a leader in climate change mitigation, we must build off the passion of our farmers, ranchers, and private forest owners. Producers are the best stewards of our land, and REE can support them with the resources and the technical know-how to implement soil conservation, carbon sequestration, pasture or rangeland management plans, and waste management programs. The REE mission area stands ready to meet these challenges and advance the Administration's climate goals. It's important to note that this data is essential

for farmers to remain competitive in today’s marketplace and to respond to consumers and food companies demanding sustainable products with metrics. Partnership with USDA can help producers participate in that marketplace.

Workforce Capacity and Advancing Racial Equity

The challenges facing agriculture, human and animal health, natural resources and conservation are immense. We must meet those challenges head on and need a well-resourced agency to do so.

That means robust funding, but it also means ensuring that the REE workforce feels supported and able to carry out their mission. REE faced significant staff losses over the past five years, and rebuilding that capacity is a key priority for the mission area. Rebuilding capacity will improve our ability to support the nation’s farmers, producers, and consumers from the farm to the dinner table. It's never been more critical to restore our employees' voices and support their efforts to advance the Agency's mission.

The President and Secretary have both been very clear – this new workforce must look like America. Investing in inclusion, diversity, and inspiring future generations through formal and informal learning is critical for the future. Talent must be inspired, nurtured, and advanced across the country if the United States is to maintain its global leadership in science and technology. USDA is dedicated to ensuring equity across its agencies and developing a diverse workforce.

The President’s Fiscal Year 2022 discretionary request for USDA’s REE mission area provides \$4 billion. If our Nation is to maintain our leadership role in agricultural innovation and productivity, we have an obligation to support research, education, and extension activities. It is too easy to take for granted the healthy, nutritious, and safe foods that are available to us, the clean air we breathe, the biobased goods we use each day, the fresh water we drink, and even the clothes we wear. These are benefits rooted in discoveries made by federal investments in agricultural science, in partnership with our land-grant universities and Minority-Serving Institutions. We look forward to building on these discoveries and starting a new chapter in

American innovation – one that supports our rural economies, spurs job growth, and expands our scientific horizons.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Fortenberry, I look forward to working with you and the members of this Subcommittee as we continue to support world-class science at USDA to maintain and increase the strength of U.S. agriculture.

Thank you again for your time and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.