



Nicole R. Gardner
Assistant Inspector General for Investigations
U.S. Department of Agriculture – Office of Inspector General

Assistant Inspector General for Investigations Nicole R. Gardner joined the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) – Office of Inspector General in June, 2023, as the Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Investigations. In her current role, Ms. Gardner is responsible for criminal, civil, and administrative investigations related to the Department of Agriculture and its worldwide operations and programs. Ms. Gardner oversees the management of approximately 115 special agents, investigative analysts, and administrative support personnel.

Previously, Ms. Gardner served as the Special Agent in Charge of Headquarters Operations for the Department of Education, Office of Inspector General (ED OIG). In this role, Ms. Gardner oversaw ED OIG's Investigative Operations and Investigative Support Services, which ran the ED OIG Hotline. She also headed up the Special Investigations Unit, that was established in 2020 to investigate misuse and theft of Federal education pandemic relief funding.

Prior to her tenure at ED OIG, Ms. Gardner served in several roles at the Department of Energy Office of Inspector General, including Hotline Assistant Special Agent in Charge, Operations Officer, and Special Agent.

Ms. Gardner began her Federal career as a William H. Helm fellow with USDA in 2001. In this capacity, Ms. Gardner helped prevent the spread of foot and mouth disease to the United States by interviewing international passengers, inspecting international luggage, and confiscating prohibited items. Ms. Gardner was also selected to complete a 90-day detail at USDA's Plant Protection and Quarantine Laboratory in Gulfport, MS. During the detail, Ms. Gardner conducted research into the trace element analysis of imported commodities.

Ms. Gardner holds a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry with a concentration in Criminalistics from Metropolitan State University of Denver.