

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250**

Dear USDA Employees,

We operate in an environment where our work often requires adaptation to changing circumstances. As we make these adjustments, one thing must and does remain constant: the Department of Agriculture's firm commitment to maintaining the highest degree of integrity and ethical behavior.

To assist employees in understanding their ethical obligations, USDA has a centralized Office of Ethics that provides ethics advice, counsel and training to all USDA officials and employees and conducts annual financial disclosure reviews. The work of the Office promotes employee compliance with Federal conflicts of interest laws and regulations.

To highlight the importance of our ethics program and to follow the best practice prevalent throughout the Executive Branch, we are realigning the Office of Ethics as a stand-alone entity reporting to the General Counsel. Oversight of all staff and ethics functions are being transferred intact to the General Counsel, and the Office of Ethics and the Office of the General Counsel will operate as separate organizational units.

This Department, like the American People, has to cope with the challenges attendant to an era of constrained resources. As we confront those challenges, let's continue to emphasize our commitment to the high ethical standards that are the foundation of the People's trust in the integrity of their government.

Sincerely,  
Secretary Tom Vilsack