

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

BETWEEN

NATIONAL FARMERS UNION (NFU)

AND

THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA)

I. Purpose

The purpose of this MOU is to formalize a nonbinding agreement of enhanced cooperation between NFU and USDA to gather and collect information and feedback from family farmers and ranchers with respect to opportunities to address staffing levels and strengthen and bolster the customer service provided by county-level USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices.

Through NFU's annual grassroots policy process, Farmers Union members passed a resolution in 2023 expressing the need, and a strong interest, to work with USDA to address staffing levels and gaps in customer service to ensure efficient and effective farm program delivery, especially at USDA FSA county-level offices.

II. Statement of Mutual Interest and Mutual Benefit

NFU represents more than 230,000 family farmers and ranchers across the country, with formally organized divisions covering 33 states. Founded in 1902, NFU works to protect and enhance the economic well-being and quality of life for family farmers, ranchers, and our communities through grassroots policy advocacy, cooperation, and education. NFU is working to build a world in which farm families and our communities are respected, valued, and enjoy economic prosperity and social justice.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture works to provide economic opportunity through innovation, helping rural America to thrive; to promote agriculture production that better nourishes Americans while also helping feed others throughout the world; and to preserve our Nation's natural resources through conservation, restored forests, improved watersheds, and healthy private working lands. USDA is made up of 29 agencies and offices with nearly 100,000 employees who serve the American people at more than 4,500 locations across the country and abroad.

III. It is mutually agreed and understood by all parties that:

NFU and USDA will work together to better understand family farmers and ranchers' experiences interfacing with USDA Farm Service Agency county-level staff and with the materials and systems employed by USDA that support program delivery.

The information gathered through this partnership is intended to improve USDA program delivery to family farmers and ranchers and to strengthen systems and processes employed by USDA to serve its customers.

NFU intends to dedicate staff time to this effort, and to coordinate activities with its state Farmers Union divisions. The organization will facilitate community convenings and listening sessions with up to three local communities.

USDA will support this effort through the joint facilitation of dialogue with employees, farmers, ranchers, and other stakeholders. USDA also plans to use NFU's efforts to inform ongoing investments in improved customer service.

The parties agree to the objectives listed in the appendix below.

IV. Modification/duration/termination

Upon the signature of the Parties, this MOU will be effective and will remain in effect for two years. Through the mutual written agreement-of the Parties, this MOU may be modified or extended. If a party chooses to terminate its participation in this MOU, they must provide a written notice to the other party at least thirty (30) days in advance of the desired termination date.

In witness whereof, the parties here to have executed this Memorandum of Understanding as of the last signature date written below.



Rob Larew

President, National Farmers Union



Zach Ducheneaux

Administrator, Farm Service Agency

APPENDIX:

Objectives of the Memorandum of Understanding between FSA and NFU

These objectives are sourced from the USDA Equity Commission Final Report that was published on February 22, 2024, and are intended to further advance equity at USDA.

	USDA Equity Commission Recommendations
14i	Ensure USDA land-related programs are accessible to all young, new and beginning, women, and BIPOC farmers specifically, and next generation farmers as a whole, by accommodating eligibility for collective, cooperative, and communal non-family entities, and tracking and publicly reporting demographics data on program participants.
16c	Develop and implement innovative, culturally responsive communication platforms and outreach strategies, including mobile technologies to engage young, new and beginning, small-scale, underserved, and specialty crop farmers on starting and maintaining a successful agricultural enterprise while facilitating strong, consistent connections with USDA personnel.
5a	Establish an enterprise-wide feedback loop for all USDA agencies and offices to hear from stakeholders through multiple mechanisms such as evaluations, surveys, dial-in calls, QR Codes, newspaper advertising, radio, etc.
5d	Train USDA staff to be culturally sensitive, understand their constituents, and include community-based organizations in USDA language contracts to interpret and translate with more accuracy and cultural competence.
5e	Increase staff knowledge of farmer and rancher customer profiles to adequately match relevant services and programs with USDA's customers.