USDA

August 7, 2007

United States Department of Agriculture

Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services

Farm Service Agency

1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Stop 0501
Washington, DC 20250-0501

TO: All FSA Employees

FROM: Teresa C. Lasseter
Administrator

SUBJECT: Government Resources and Lobbying

It has come to my attention that some employees may have used government equipment in a campaign to influence Congress with regard to provisions in the House-passed farm bill concerning the Pigford Consent Decree process. As a follow-up to the General Counsel's attached Memorandum, I want to further emphasize the importance and seriousness of following the legal advice contained in his memo. In each instance where we have reason to believe that FSA personnel may have engaged in unauthorized activities, we will conduct an inquiry into the circumstances and, depending on the findings, appropriate action will be taken.

In addition to issues regarding employees' proper use of official time and government resources, I am concerned that certain statements that may have been made by a small number of employees will be construed as the official position of the Farm Service Agency – which they are not. The Department of Agriculture (USDA) has commented that the House-passed farm bill provision containing the $100 million spending limitation creates false hopes, but has not yet taken a position on the underlying legislative proposal.

I am also concerned about the tone in which the legislative provisions have been characterized. In one of his very first official acts upon his swearing in, Secretary Johanns issued a Civil Rights Policy Statement in which he emphasized his commitment to "ensuring the civil rights of all of USDA's customers and employees." He clearly and firmly set forth his expectation for every USDA employee, stating: "Our programs and services must be accessible and delivered to all of our customers fairly and with dignity. There can be no exceptions and no excuses." I share the Secretary's commitment. If FSA does ultimately take a position on the legislation, we will do so in a manner that is respectful of the sensitivities involved.

FSA continues its efforts to further ensure that all our programs are administered in a manner free from discrimination because of race, color, national origin, gender, age, and other prohibited bases. We greatly appreciate the commitment that FSA employees have demonstrated in support of these efforts. We look forward to continuing to build upon the tremendous progress we have made with our diverse partner groups, and to working with the Congress to enact a new farm bill that is consistent with our commitment to all farmers.

Attachment