

**PART 15d—NONDISCRIMINATION  
IN PROGRAMS OR ACTIVITIES  
CONDUCTED BY THE UNITED  
STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

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AUTHORITY: 5 U.S.C. 301.

SOURCE: 64 FR 66709, Nov. 30, 1999, unless otherwise noted.

**§ 15d.1 Purpose.**

The purpose of this part is to set forth the nondiscrimination policy of the United States Department of Agriculture in programs or activities conducted by the Department, including such programs and activities in which the Department or any agency thereof makes available any benefit directly to persons under such programs and activities.

**§ 15d.2 Definitions.**

For the purpose of this part, the following definitions apply:

*Agency* means a major organizational unit of the Department with delegated authority to deliver programs, activities, benefits, and services. Heads of Agencies receive their delegated authority as prescribed in 7 CFR part 2.

*Agency Head Assessment* means the annual Agency Civil Rights Performance Plan and Accomplishment Report conducted by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR). It is an evaluation tool used by OASCR to assess USDA Agency Heads and Staff Office Directors on their civil rights activities and accomplishments to ensure accountability throughout the Department on these issues.

*Alternative Dispute Resolution* or *ADR* means any number of conflict resolution procedures in which parties agree to use a third-party neutral to resolve complaints or issues in controversy. ADR methods include, but are not limited to, mediation, facilitation, fact finding, arbitration, use of ombuds, or any combination thereof.

*Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights* or *ASCR* means the civil rights officer for USDA responsible for the performance and oversight of all civil rights functions within USDA, and who retains the authority to delegate civil rights functions to heads of USDA agencies and offices. The ASCR is also responsible for evaluating agency heads on their performance of civil rights functions.

*Complaint* means a written statement that contains the complainant's name and address and describes an agency's alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the ASCR of the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The statement must be signed by the complainant(s) or someone authorized to sign on behalf of the complainant(s). To accommodate the needs of people with disabilities, special needs, or who have Limited English Proficiency, a complaint may be in an alternative format.

*Compliance report* means a written review of an agency's compliance with civil rights requirements, to be prepared by OASCR and to identify each finding of non-compliance or other civil rights related issue. The review is conducted at the discretion of OASCR or if there has been a formal finding of non-compliance.

*Conducted Programs and Activities* means the program services, benefits or resources delivered directly to the public by USDA.

*Days* mean calendar days, not business days.

*Department* (used interchangeably with USDA) means the Department of Agriculture and includes each of its operating agencies and other organizational units.

*Discrimination* means unlawful treatment or denial of benefits, services, rights or privileges to a person or persons because of their race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, sexual orientation, familial status, parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or gender identity.

*Secretary* means the Secretary of Agriculture or any officer or employee of the Department whom the Secretary has heretofore delegated, or whom the

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Secretary may hereafter delegate, the authority to act in his or her stead under the regulations in this part.

[79 FR 41410, July 16, 2014]

### § 15d.3 Discrimination prohibited.

(a) No agency, officer, or employee of the USDA shall, on the grounds of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or gender identity, exclude from participation in, deny the benefits of, or subject to discrimination any person in the United States under any program or activity conducted by the USDA.

(b) No person shall be subjected to reprisal for opposing any practice(s) prohibited by this part, for filing a complaint, or for participating in any other manner in a proceeding under this part.

[79 FR 41411, July 16, 2014]

### § 15d.4 Compliance.

(a) *Compliance program.* OASCR shall evaluate each agency's efforts to comply with this part and shall make recommendations for improving such efforts.

(1) OASCR shall oversee the compliance reviews and evaluations, and issue compliance reports that monitor compliance efforts to ensure that there is equitable and fair treatment in conducted programs.

(2) OASCR shall monitor all settlement agreements pertaining to program complaints for compliance to ensure full implementation and enforcement.

(3) OASCR shall oversee Agency Head Assessments to ensure that Agency Heads are in compliance with civil rights laws and regulations.

(4) OASCR shall monitor all findings of non-compliance to ensure that compliance is achieved.

(5) OASCR shall require agencies to collect the race, ethnicity and gender of applicants and program participants, who choose to provide such information on a voluntary basis, in USDA-conducted programs, for purposes of civil rights compliance oversight, and evaluation.

(b) *Agency data collection and compliance reports.* (1) Each Agency shall, for civil rights compliance, collect, maintain and annually compile data on all program applicants and participants in conducted programs by county and State, including but not limited to, application and participation rate data regarding socially disadvantaged and limited resources applicants and participants. At a minimum, the data should include:

(i) Numbers of applicants and participants by race, ethnicity, and gender, subject to appropriate privacy protections, as determined by the Secretary and in accordance with law; and

(ii) The application and participation rate, by race, ethnicity, and gender, as a percentage of the total participation rate.

(2) Each Agency shall submit to the OASCR timely, complete and accurate program application and participation reports containing the information described in §15d.4(b)(1), on an annual basis, and upon the request of the OASCR independently of the annual requirement.

(c) *Complaint reporting compliance.* OASCR shall ensure compliance with mandated complaint reporting requirements, such as those required by section 14006 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Pub. L. 110-246).

[79 FR 41411, July 16, 2014]

### § 15d.5 Complaints.

(a) Any person who believes that he or she (or any specific class of individuals) has been, or is being, subjected to practices prohibited by this part may file (or file through an authorized representative) a written complaint alleging such discrimination. The written complaint must be filed within 180 calendar days from the date the person knew or reasonably should have known of the alleged discrimination, unless the time is extended for good cause by the ASCR or designee. Any person who complains of discrimination under this part in any fashion shall be advised of the right to file a complaint as herein provided.

(b) All complaints under this part should be filed with the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights,