



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

JAN 23 2017

TO: Deputy Under and Assistant Secretaries  
Acting Deputy Under and Assistant Secretaries  
Agency Heads  
Acting Agency Heads

FROM: Michael L. Young  
Acting Deputy Secretary

SUBJECT: Interim Procedures

Thank you for your continued service to the Department and for ensuring the implementation of our important mission. There has been a successful transition to a new Administration and over the next few weeks we can expect there will be new priorities and direction coming from our policy officials. The Department will depend on your leadership and expertise to communicate these priorities.

During this transition period, we are implementing some interim operating procedures. These procedures are intended to notify the Office of the Secretary in advance of certain actions and decisions and to provide the new policy staff with the opportunity to review such matters with a complete set of objective information.

All requests for decisions by the Office of the Secretary will be documented through a decision memorandum utilizing the Executive Correspondence Management system and will require at a minimum the approval of the agency head, subcabinet office, the Office of the General Counsel, and the Office of Budget and Program Analysis.

Press/Communications/Social Media/Public Messaging

In order for the Department to deliver unified, consistent messages, it's important for the Office of the Secretary to be consulted on media inquiries and proposed responses to questions related to legislation, budgets, policy issues, and regulations. Policy-related statements should not be made to the press without notifying and consulting the Office of the Secretary. This includes press releases and on and off the record conversations.

Agencies are requested to review their websites, blog posts and other social media and, consistent with direction you will receive from the Office of Communication, remove references to policy priorities and initiatives of the previous Administration. The addition of any policy-related content to websites or other social media should be routed to the Office of the Secretary through the Office of Communications before it is added.

Any speeches or communications at significant public events that may be covered by media must be identified in advance for the Office of the Secretary through the Office of Communications.

#### Congressional Drafting Services/Hill Briefings/Congressional Notifications

Until further notice, all legislative drafting technical assistance and related requests, and plans to brief members of Congress or their staff should be routed in advance to the Office of the Secretary through the Office of Congressional Relations. This includes any potential Farm Bill or child nutrition authorization activities. In addition, until further notice, the ability of agencies (including the FSA, RD, and NRCS state offices through the State Food and Agriculture Councils or the National Food and Agriculture Council) to close an office or notify local delegations of office closures is hereby rescinded. All notifications must work through a process that includes the approval of agency heads, the subcabinet, and the Office of Budget and Program Analysis. The Office of Budget and Program Analysis will work with Congressional Relations and the Office of the Secretary to obtain the necessary approvals. For appropriations issues all interactions should continue to work through the Office of Budget and Program Analysis who will continue to keep the Office of the Secretary apprised of ongoing appropriations actions.

#### Announcements of Financial Assistance

Until further notice, all requests for proposals, notices of funds availability and similar announcements or awarding of grants, cooperative agreements, loans, and other financial agreements should be routed to the Office of the Secretary prior to release.

#### Correspondence

Until further notice, all correspondence at an agency head level leaving the Department should be routed for approval of the Office of the Secretary.

#### Inter-agency Agreements and Interactions

Until further notice, all proposed inter-agency agreements between USDA and other Federal agencies and non-federal cooperators should be submitted in advance for review to the Office of the Secretary. In addition, interactions on policy or regulatory matters between agencies and other Federal agencies must go through the Office of the Secretary.

#### Employee Selections/Reassignments

All proposals relating to advertising or hiring at or above the GS-14 level shall be routed to the Office of the Secretary for review through the Office of Human Resources Management. In the event that there are additional processes put in place by the Administration on the advertisement or hiring of staff those will be communicated separately.

#### International Negotiations

Until further notice, please notify OSEC as early as possible in advance of bilateral and multilateral negotiations in which the Department will be participating and international conferences at which the Department will have a presence.

### Conferences

Please utilize the existing process established and operated by the Office of the Chief Financial Officer to provide the advance notification for all conferences.

### Audit Responses

Until further notice, audit responses, statement of action responses, and/or requests for management decisions for Office of Inspector General or Government Accountability Office audit reports must be submitted to the Chief Financial Officer. The OCFO will package and submit the proposed responses on a weekly basis to the Office of the Secretary for review and approval.

### Advisory Committees

Until further notice, no agency official responsible for an advisory committee should appoint a committee member to any topical, regional, state, or local advisory committee. No invitations for nominations to advisory committees shall be published until further notice. If an agency official has selected committee members for an advisory committee, but the letters of invitation have not been sent, agencies shall suspend sending the letter of invitation.

### Ongoing Litigation

Until further notice, significant Department decisions related to ongoing litigation should be routed to the Office of the Secretary for review. Decisions to concur with Department of Justice recommendations, litigation settlement, and major strategy decisions of a dispositive nature, in both administrative and civil actions, particularly in the areas of personnel, civil rights, EEO, substantive program policy matters, and tort and contract matters in excess of \$500,000 should be provided in advance to the Office of the Secretary for review.

### Contract Awards

Until further notice, all proposed contract awards for advisory and assistance services and professional services exceeding a total cost of \$500,000 should be submitted through the office of the Assistant Secretary of Administration to the Office of the Secretary for review.

cc: Sam Clovis, OSEC  
Brian Klippenstein, OSEC  
Donald Bice, OBPA