

Scorecard Department of Agriculture



Department of Agriculture

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About the Department of Agriculture (USDA)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition, and related issues based on public policy, the best available science, and effective management. 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.

This page provides information on how **the Department of Agriculture (USDA)** is working to advance environmental justice for communities across America. It is part of Phase One of the Biden-Harris Administration's Environmental Justice Scorecard.

Justice40 Initiative

As part of President Biden's [Justice40 Initiative](#), the federal government is working toward the goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain federal investments reach disadvantaged communities that are marginalized and overburdened by pollution and underinvestment. In particular, the President's Justice40 Initiative applies to federal investments that address climate change, clean energy and energy efficiency, clean transit, affordable and sustainable housing, training and workforce development, remediation and reduction of legacy pollution, and the development of critical water and wastewater infrastructure.

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This Phase One Scorecard provides an update on initial progress made by **the Department of Agriculture (USDA)** in implementing the Justice40 Initiative. Future versions of the Environmental Justice Scorecard will provide additional information and updates on the benefits of Justice40 covered programs.

For more information on USDA's Justice40 covered programs, please contact Justice40_USDA@usda.gov.

Phase One Scorecard metrics and highlights in Fiscal Year 2022 include:

- **65** Justice40 covered program(s)
- **Over 12,000** funding announcement(s) covered under the Justice40 Initiative
- **Nearly \$7 billion** in funding made available from Justice40 covered programs¹
 - Funding for climate change related activities was distributed through programs such as the Northwest Climate Hub, Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry Program, Farm Service Agency (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program — Climate Change Mitigation Assessment Initiative, Forest Service's Tribal Grants and Agreements, and the National Seed Strategy funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL).
 - Funding for workforce development was distributed through multiple programs administered by the Research, Education, and Economics mission area.
 - Funding to support the remediation and reduction of legacy pollution was administered through programs including the Food Production and Conservation Business Center's Hazardous Waste Cleanup Program, Forest Service's work to Restore Native Vegetation on Federal/Non-Federal Land, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnerships.
- Made program modifications for Justice40 covered programs such as:
 - The Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) revised evaluation criteria for the Fiscal Year 2023 funding cycle of the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership to include a new criterion to evaluate the benefits a proposal would confer to Justice40 communities.
 - In Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, the Food Production and Conservation Business Center's Hazardous Waste Cleanup Program overlaid hazardous waste grain bin sites with the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST) and institutionalized CEJST into its program to prioritize soil and ground water remediation efforts for disadvantaged communities.
 - NRCS published a policy on Alternative Funding Arrangements under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program to provide Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations with additional flexibilities for funding, planning, and administration where existing processes created barriers for program participation.

¹ This funding amount describes examples of the funding that was made available in Fiscal Year 2022 through Justice40 covered programs. The amount does not represent the total funding that benefits disadvantaged communities. The funding was made available through grants, notices of funding opportunity, and other funding announcements. These funding announcements were from Justice40 covered programs that were funded through discretionary and mandatory appropriations, as well as

supplemental appropriations, such as those enacted under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (Pub. L. 117-58). The Justice40 Initiative sets a goal that 40 percent of overall benefits from certain federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities.

USDA's Highlights

In FY 2022, the Forest Service Job Corps program provided more than 1,500 young adults, including from Justice40 communities, with over 273,000 hours of training.

Environmental and Civil Rights Protection

USDA's Highlights

The Animal Plant Health Inspection Service noted 2 modifications in the NEPA process: working with local communities to minimize or avoid impacts from emergency High Pathogen Aviation Influenza responses; working with local communities to notify schools and individuals with chemical sensitivities about nearby Spotted Lanternfly treatments.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service's NEPA staff training covered policy and procedure to address environmental justice as one of the special environmental concerns, part of the environmental evaluation done during conservation planning.

Federal agencies are advancing environmental justice by carrying out their responsibilities under the law to identify and address disproportionate and adverse public health and environmental, climate-related, and cumulative impacts on communities with environmental justice concerns. Agencies are working to ensure that all communities experience the protection of our country's bedrock environmental laws. The following information reflects some of the environmental and civil rights work **the Department of Agriculture (USDA)** has done from January 2021 to September 2022.

For more information, please visit [USDA's Equity Action Plan](#) .

National Environmental Policy Act

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to consider and disclose the environmental, health, and community impacts of certain decisions or actions before taking them. Environmental reviews help ensure the public is informed about potential actions, and give communities an opportunity to participate in the



government's decision-making process. Environmental reviews also ensure that federal agencies consider ways to protect and enhance public health and the environment, and advance environmental justice in their decision-making. The following information highlights some work **the Department of Agriculture (USDA)** has done from January 2021 to September 2022.

Phase One Scorecard metrics and highlights include:

- USDA's Departmental Regulation on Environmental Justice requires agencies to incorporate environmental justice considerations into their NEPA compliance. Multiple USDA agencies—including Farm Service Agency, Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Animal Plant Health Inspection Service, Rural Development, and National Institute of Food and Agriculture—also have manuals, handbooks, and other forms of guidance to support engagement with and consideration of environmental justice communities in NEPA processes.
- **6 USDA agencies reported conducting** training(s) on environmental justice considerations during NEPA reviews

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Environmental Justice

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires that no person be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance on account of race, color, or national origin. Title VI requires federal agencies to ensure that programs or activities receiving federal funding, including those that affect human health or the environment, do not use discriminatory criteria, methods, or practices. The following information includes updates from January 2021 to September 2022 from **the Department of Agriculture (USDA)** on Title VI that are related to environmental justice.

Phase One Scorecard metrics and highlights include:

- In North Little Rock, Arkansas, Eureka Gardens received a utility loan/grant to improve sewage systems for homeowners in a designated project area. USDA received a complaint alleging lesser services for minority homeowners from Eureka Gardens. An investigation and review are underway as of 2022.
- **1** open Title VI investigation(s) or compliance review(s) related to environmental justice

Centering Environmental Justice in Decision-Making

Federal agencies work to ensure that the voices, perspectives, and lived experiences of communities are heard and reflected in the priorities, policies, and decision-making of the federal government. Agencies also take steps to respect Tribal sovereignty and ensure government-to-government consultation on federal policies. The following information highlights work **the Department of Agriculture (USDA)** has done from January 2021 to September 2022 to center environmental justice in its decision-making.

Community Input and Engagement

Phase One Scorecard metrics and highlights include:

- **Several USDA agencies conducted** technical assistance outreach event(s) in Fiscal Year 2022
 - Forest Service's Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program implemented outreach to help underserved communities and Tribes access the grant program and reduce these communities' wildfire risk.
 - Natural Resources Conservation Service conducted outreach to increase community awareness of environmental impacts on natural resources, create opportunities for conservation improvements, and support community discussions about environmental justice.
 - Animal Plant Health Inspection Service conducted outreach events to provide technical assistance to Tribal members, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Tribal Colleges. Typically, participants were interested in capacity building to enhance outreach and education to community members concerning pests and diseases of native plants and trees, wildlife management, and to improve access to federal environmental justice programs.
- **25** public process(es) related to environmental justice, e.g., requests for information or listening sessions
 - USDA published a request for information in the Federal Register and hosted five public listening sessions related to Executive Order 13985 in order to identify barriers that people of color and underserved communities and individuals may face in accessing USDA programs.
 - Multiple USDA mission areas, including Farm Production and Conservation, Research, Education, and Economics, and Natural Resources and Environment, conducted collaborative listening sessions with community and Tribal partners to advance environmental stewardship, advance agricultural production, and understand how to better implement Justice40 covered programs.

Consultation and Partnership with Tribal Nations

Phase One Scorecard metrics and highlights include:

- USDA agencies are required to incorporate consultation, treaty, and trust responsibilities in our work and decision-making, including those related to environmental decisions; this is governed by the USDA Departmental Regulation on Tribal Consultation, Coordination, and Collaboration. USDA is also continuing to make strides in working with Tribes and fulfilling trust responsibilities through our commitment to co-stewardship, per Joint Secretarial Order 3403. In Fiscal Year 2023, Forest Service published “Strengthening Tribal Consultations and Nation-to-Nation Relationships: A USDA Forest Service Action Plan,” which outlines steps the agency will take to advance Tribal consultation and strengthen Nation-to-Nation relationships with federally recognized Tribes. Forest Service, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and Rural Development have policies related to Tribal Consultation. USDA’s Farm Service Agency is reviewing and updating existing handbooks and policies to address Tribal equity barriers and promote collaboration with Tribes.
- **26** Tribal Consultation(s) related to environmental justice from January 2021 to September 2022

- The Farm Service Agency conducted 2 Tribal Consultations focused on access barriers to federal services, including the location of Farm Service Agency service centers and the unique nature of Tribal and Trust land. Program modifications and improvements are under consideration.
- Natural Resources Conservation Service conducted two consultations with Tribes. The NRCS Tribal Working Group was established to recommend solutions to issues impacting tribes and other environmental justice issues.

Institutionalizing Environmental Justice

Since the start of the Biden-Harris Administration, federal agencies have been working to embed environmental justice into all aspects of their work, including by implementing [Executive Order 12898](#) and [Executive Order 14008](#). The following information shares some of the work **the Department of Agriculture (USDA)** has done from January 2021 to September 2022 to institutionalize environmental justice.

Phase One Scorecard metrics and highlights include:

- **Has** an environmental justice strategic plan that **has not been** updated in the past 5 years
 - USDA agencies have developed a range of tools and resources to support work related to environmental justice, including: Maps and accompanying data layers to assist leaders and program staff in identifying communities with environmental justice concerns, data tracking dashboards for both internal and external use, and resource toolkits for leaders and staff. For example, Forest Service’s Stewardship Mapping and Assessment Project effort seeks to understand the stewardship territories, social networks, and organizational capacities of current and potential partners.
 - The USDA’s Departmental Regulation on Environmental Management was updated to integrate environmental justice considerations in all actions.
 - Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, and the Office of Property and Environmental Management have updated guidance in a variety of programs, including environmental clean-up criteria, watershed management, and grant awardee processes to consider environmental justice and equity.
- **8** tool(s) or resources to advance environmental justice
- **247** staff that work on environmental justice, either in a full- or part-time capacity
- **42** internal training(s) for staff on environmental justice
- **1** new or strengthened office(s) on environmental justice
- **9** new or strengthened internal working group(s), steering committee(s), council(s) on environmental justice
- The Environmental Protection Agency and USDA partnered on Closing America’s Wastewater Access Gap Community Initiative to address wastewater infrastructure shortcomings. USDA’s Office of the Chief Economist co-chairs the America the Beautiful subcommittee with the Department of the Interior, working on environmental justice and equity. USDA serves as a member of the White House

Environmental Justice Interagency Council (IAC), which was established in Executive Order 14008.

USDA's Highlights

USDA has 2 department-wide groups related to environmental justice and the Justice40 Initiative—an environmental justice-focused community of practice and a Justice40 community—each meets monthly to coordinate across USDA agencies. Multiple USDA agencies, including Animal Plant Health Inspection Service and agencies within the Research, Education, and Economics mission area, have their own internal environmental justice working groups.

[Return to top](#)

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The Office of Management and Budget and the Council on Environmental Quality