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USDA Reaffirms Focus on Scientific Integrity
Policy and Training Will Protect Researchers and Ensure Public's Trust in Scientific Findings

WASHINGTON, July 11, 2013 – Answering President Obama’s call to craft scientific integrity policies in every federal agency, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced that it is one of the first Departments to launch an online training course in the policy for employees along with a handbook to accompany it.

“USDA’s bench of scientific expertise is deep, with thousands of scientists, researchers, veterinarians, economists and statisticians working on behalf of the nation’s food safety and security,” said USDA’s Chief Scientist and Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics Dr. Catherine Woteki. “Launching our employee training will support the President’s call for forging scientific integrity policies into the very structure of our agencies and give the public yet another reason to know they can trust what USDA science tells them.”

The training will be launched in three phases between now and June 2014: first, for all USDA employees who engage in, supervise or manage scientific activities, as well as those who communicate about them; second, additional persons in the agencies who will be determined by area directors and supervisors; and third, online training for all contractors, cooperators, partners, permittees, lessees and grantees. Depending upon the nature of the contract, the training may be required or voluntary.

USDA’s scientists provide ongoing research into some of the most difficult threats to our nation’s food supply and its safety. The Department’s cadre of experts includes veterinarians with specialties in diseases that affect poultry and livestock; researchers focused on farming, ranching and forestry systems, to build resilience in the face of global climate change; microbiologists who study how to reduce food safety challenges such as anti-microbial resistance, salmonella, and a host of serious health and food safety concerns; and researchers, economists and statisticians whose work provides data important to commodity markets, nutritional guidance for all Americans, and policy analysis for agencies across the federal government.

President Obama placed such a high priority on instilling the public’s confidence in federally funded science that he called for the Scientific Integrity Policy (SIP) in an Executive Order in March 2009 soon after his first Inauguration. Within the Department, the policy was developed under the auspices of USDA’s Office of the Chief Scientist. A team of scientists and managers from across USDA developed the USDA SIP, with direction from the Department’s Science Council and the Administration’s Office of Science and Technology Policy, led by Dr. John Holdren. The policy was written after a period of public comment in 2011 on the Secretary’s Memorandum, which established the principles and directed the Chief Scientist to oversee implementation. The eventual Departmental Regulation incorporates responses to the concerns expressed by the public during that period of time.

Key elements of the policy include:

- Guidance on what actions scientists and researchers should take if they feel their work is being revised to fit a political agenda;
- Instructions to ensure the quality, accuracy and transparency of information when considering scientific or technical information in deriving policy decisions;
- Establishment of Agency Scientific Integrity Officers in every USDA agency; and
- Parameters for employees on communicating about scientific research and findings.

The policy can be found at: <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2012/DR%201074-001.pdf>

A video statement from USDA's Chief Scientist can be found at:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMGsVkZYCkg>

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