

Testimony
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Affairs
and
Subcommittee on Health Care, Benefits, and Administrative Rules
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Regulatory Reform Task Forces Check in: Part II
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Thank you for the invitation to testify before your Subcommittees today. As the designated Regulatory Reform Officer for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), I am delighted to assure both Subcommittees that Secretary Sonny Perdue is committed to fulfilling the President's promise to reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens and process barriers at the Department. In line with the President's Executive Orders 13771 and 13777, Secretary Perdue is determined to abate the practice of legislating through Department regulations and staying within the bounds of Congressional authority.

USDA embraces the President's five regulatory reform principles – reducing burdens and barriers, regulating effectively and efficiently, promoting due process, providing fair notice and transparency, and respecting individual freedoms and property rights. Consistent with the Executive Orders, it is our goal to collaborate with the public and identify regulations that are creating more problems than they are solving. To achieve that goal, we published a call for public input on July 17, 2017, that lasts through July 2018. USDA will review comments received during this time period in four batches—in September and November 2017 and February and July 2018. To date, USDA has received over 145 comments.

Additionally, as a function of the Secretary's leadership of the President's Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity, USDA held a series of listening sessions with our stakeholders across the countryside. During Secretary Perdue's travels through rural America, he heard from producers, industry stakeholders, rural residents, and community leaders on everything from farm program implementation to Forest Service directives to wetlands. Here in Washington, the Secretary held a public listening session on 'cutting the red tape' where policy experts, non-profit organizations, and industry groups aired their concerns about different regulatory burdens. USDA listened, and with our submissions to the Spring—and most recently—the Fall Unified Regulatory Agendas, we are taking actions to revise, reconsider and, where appropriate, deregulate.

We are also committed to communicating clearly about our stakeholders' rights and options, including the opportunity to appeal decisions. For both new regulations and old, we are carefully reviewing the Federal Register to ensure that we are zeroing in on rules that the public feels are unnecessary. Due process demands that we give advance notice of which regulations are under consideration and we commit to carefully considering all feedback. In our communications, we use plain language to ensure constituents understand what the regulations and laws mean for their business practices.

In addition, customer service is a priority for the Secretary. USDA has been communicating with our customers and stakeholders asking them to inform us of potentially inappropriate enforcement actions and bad service interactions. Based on this early input, we realized there were some internal reforms that USDA could take to improve the services we provide to the American public. This included the reorganization of the former Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services mission area to include the Natural Resource Conservation Service, whose mission overlapped with the Farm Service Agency and the Risk Management Agency's focus on domestic producers. We are looking at ways to ensure that when a producer walks into a USDA service center, they have a one-stop shop where they can quickly find the answers and guidance they need to navigate the regulatory environment. It is our hope that the newly named Farm Production and Conservation mission area will meet that need.

As you know, USDA has a large organization that touches the lives of virtually every American in ways that most may never notice. We have nearly 100,000 employees, made up of dedicated civil servants who believe in the work we do to support the production of food, fiber and fuel, as well as rural communities. Even as we continue to wait for the confirmation of new leadership, our internal Regulatory Reform Task Force, composed almost exclusively of career senior staff from all mission areas, made over 275 recommendations about how we can decrease duplication of efforts and work more efficiently and effectively. Many of the administrative actions recommended are already underway and many recommended regulatory reforms will be announced in the Unified Fall Regulatory Agenda. We view reform as an ongoing process aimed at improving the culture of how USDA regulates. Final regulatory decisions will be fact-based and supported by data collected through sound scientific methodology. We evaluate all regulatory actions based on the President's five principles as well as doing our best to consider how the action impacts jobs and the economy as well as costs, benefits and burden to stakeholders.

At the U.S. Department of Agriculture, we trust in the American people and their representatives to do the right thing for their businesses, communities, and the country. America's rural businesses, farmers, ranchers and producers are all-too-aware that their long-term economic success depends on responsibly managing the land and its resources. Because of the breadth and diversity of USDA's programs and missions, we see strong evidence of Americans being good stewards of the land while also promoting economic growth and caring for one another. We believe there is tremendous opportunity for Americans to grow the economy responsibly while restoring citizens' faith in their government. Alleviating unnecessary regulatory burdens, through a transparent process that improves the efficiency and effectiveness of our government, helps American society grow and prosper. Simply put, we believe USDA can and must do better and are committed to that end. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Rebeckah (Freeman) Adcock serves as a Senior Advisor to Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue. At the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), she manages and directly advises Secretary Perdue on many policy, regulatory, and operational matters. Rebeckah is also USDA's designated Regulatory Reform Officer (RRO), leading the effort to ease the burden of overregulation on the private sector. Additionally, under the Secretary's Chairmanship, Rebeckah serves as manager of the President's Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity.

Prior to joining USDA, Rebeckah was Senior Director in CropLife America's Government Affairs division. She handled government relations issues relating to water, domestic and international chemical laws, human health, and air quality. She also oversaw state affairs in the northeastern United States.

Rebeckah previously served as Counsel on the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, for Ranking Member Senator Jim Inhofe. As Counsel, she gained extensive knowledge of environmental law and public policy as well as strong legislative and regulatory experience. Her portfolio included chemical and science policy, endangered species, property rights, and all water related issues.

Before joining the Senate Committee, Rebeckah served as governmental relations director at the American Farm Bureau Federation in Washington, D.C. and Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation in Louisville where she managed a wide variety of environmental policy issues. Rebeckah began her career as an environmental scientist for a private remediation consulting firm, where she worked for several years.

Rebeckah's service also includes the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Pesticide Policy Dialogue Committee, USDA's IR-4 Advisory Committee, and as an emeritus chair of the stakeholders' Pesticide Policy Coalition.

Rebeckah earned her undergraduate degree in environmental resource management from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville and her Juris Doctorate from the University of Kentucky College of Law in Lexington. She is a Kentucky native, a member of the Leadership Kentucky Class of 2000, and a member of the state's Bar Association.