



DEC 13 2012

United States
Department of
Agriculture

TO: All NIFA Employees
SUBJECT: NIFA's Civil Rights Policy Statement

Research,
Education, and
Economics

National Institute
of Food and
Agriculture

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Washington, DC
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When Agriculture Secretary Vilsack came to USDA he called for a "new era in civil rights," making it clear the USDA would have zero tolerance for any form of discrimination. As the director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), I fully support the Secretary's civil rights, equal employment opportunity, diversity, and inclusion policies. I expect our senior executives, managers, and supervisors to support this commitment, to lead by example, and to effectively embrace cultural transformation and diversity for greater productivity within NIFA. In keeping with this commitment, I affirm that no NIFA employee or program beneficiary will be unlawfully denied opportunity because of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, marital or family status, or political beliefs.

My commitment extends far beyond simply reducing or preventing discrimination. As part of the federal government, we have an obligation to do more. As NIFA employees, we are expected to play a very important role in maintaining a positive, equal opportunity environment that ensures discrimination and harassment do not exist in our employment activities, programs, or work environment. I believe that learning to address the many dimensions of diversity surpasses ethnicity, gender, and culture, but also embraces a diversity of thought. Therefore, we must strive to maintain an environment that allows us to have differences of opinion in a climate of openness, mutual respect, and trust.

As you know, discrimination is costly, nonproductive, and negatively impacts NIFA. When complaints are filed against the agency, I expect prompt action and positive communication in trying to reach an early resolution. Any appearance or act of reprisal against employees who exercise their right to file complaints will not be tolerated.

I am requesting that NIFA managers and employees make every effort to ensure this commitment is thoroughly understood, and vigorously followed. I expect this to be, recognized as an integral part of every educational program we deliver, every research project we undertake, and every opportunity for employment we offer. Achieving this commitment will require diligence, innovation, and a willingness to depart from traditional practices that have not consistently yielded positive results.

I view NIFA as a model agency for the government and see my role as director as one that works with all employees to ensure we conduct ourselves in a way that others would choose to adopt our methods of operation and choose to avail themselves of the services we can provide.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sonny Ramaswamy', is written over a light blue circular stamp.

Sonny Ramaswamy
Director
National Institute of Food and Agriculture