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United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Research,  
Education, and  
Economics

National Institute  
of Food and  
Agriculture

1400 Independence  
Avenue SW  
Washington, DC  
20250

TO: All NIFA Employees

SUBJECT: NIFA's Equal Employment Opportunity Statement

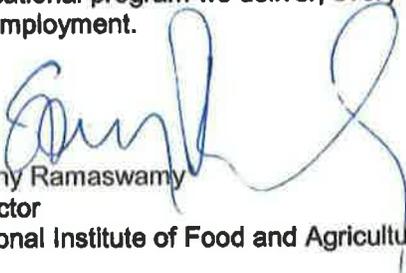
I fully support the position of the Secretary of Agriculture that equal opportunity and civil rights are of great importance and must clearly exist in USDA personnel policies and employment practices. It is of utmost importance that we renew and strengthen our efforts to ensure equal access and opportunity in all aspects of NIFA's programs and employment practices without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, or sexual orientation to the full extent of nondiscrimination laws.

As employees of this Agency, we are charged by Equal Employment Opportunity laws and regulations to conduct our business in such a manner that NIFA does not directly or by implication condone the practice of discrimination. We have an obligation to correct any program or employment practice that is not achieving the objectives of inclusion and anti-discrimination. I expect senior executives, managers, and supervisors authorized to make employment decisions to play a very important role in maintaining a positive equal opportunity environment, that ensures personnel practices are operating on a merit basis, and that employment decisions are not based on improper reasons - - such as race, age, sex, color, or national origin.

I support the Secretary's commitment to an emphasis on diversity in our programs and employment practices. I believe that learning to address the many dimensions of diversity surpasses ethnicity, gender, and culture, but also embraces a diversity of norms, values, and standards to which people act. We must strive to maintain an employment program that allows us to have differences of opinions in a climate of openness, mutual respect, and trust. I expect managers, supervisors, and employees to operate on the premise that we cannot be effective without being fair and responsive.

Let me reinforce, and direct all managers, supervisors, and employees to underscore that there is no conflict between a true merit selection system and equal employment opportunity laws - - because each requires non-discrimination in selection, hiring, promotion, and transfers and each requires that such decisions be based upon the person's ability and merit. I expect all managers and supervisors to promote best practices in providing equal access and opportunities in NIFA's programs and employment practices, and to provide a greater equity in the distribution of recognition for employees. I am holding senior managers responsible for achieving NIFA's affirmative employment program.

I will not tolerate discrimination in any form, and I expect each of you to assume personal responsibility in making every effort to ensure that our commitment to equitable treatment is thoroughly understood, aggressively followed, and recognized as an integral part of every educational program we deliver, every research project we undertake, and in every opportunity for employment.

  
Sonny Ramaswamy  
Director  
National Institute of Food and Agriculture