



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

May 8, 2017

## **POLICY STATEMENT ON FIRST AMENDMENT**

As your Secretary, it is my privilege to lead the Department of Agriculture (USDA). But make no mistake, it is USDA's career employees—the food inspectors, the forest rangers, the farm loan officers, the research scientists, and all the varied and dedicated USDA employees—who carry out the important responsibilities that Congress has entrusted to us. America eats safely because USDA works.

Today, I want to reestablish this Department's commitment to safeguarding every American's First Amendment rights, particularly the right to free speech *and* the right to free religious exercise. USDA is committed to protecting both. I expect each and every USDA employee to uphold their fellow Americans' First Amendment freedoms. Whether we are inspecting private businesses for compliance with food safety laws or protecting our public lands for recreation, cultivation, and preservation, we must set the example of our Nation's highest ideals. Doing so is not optional, and it is not discretionary: It is one of the crucial reasons why we exist.

Freedom of expression flourishes in a climate of mutual respect and tolerance. To that end, USDA will continue to uproot and eliminate discrimination, harassment, and retaliation and ensure our employees and customers work in an atmosphere of dignity and equality—a place where the rules are known, respected, and fair to all. This is one of my primary goals as Secretary.

I intend to evaluate USDA's record on a variety of issues that are vital to our operations and, with your help, chart a course that respects the principles enshrined in our Constitution. And I intend to work hard by your side so that all Americans know that our Department embodies all that is diverse, exceptional, and great about our Nation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sonny Perdue". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sonny Perdue  
Secretary