

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

[[DATE]]

The Honorable Brooke L. Rollins
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Madam Secretary:

We write in opposition to your decision to terminate the Regional Food Business Center (RFBC) program at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Eliminating this program will reduce market opportunities for small farmers and food producers, weaken local food supply chains, and set back efforts to build a more resilient food system. We urge you to immediately reverse this decision and reinstate this valuable program.

Regional Food Business Centers serve as the cornerstone of local and regional supply chains and have proven to be both highly successful and impactful, even within the program's first year.¹ RFBCs have consistently helped farmers get more of their products to market and strengthened the overall resilience of regional food systems. To date, the 12 established Centers have developed critical market and business development support to more than 5,000 farms and businesses nationwide. Leveraging robust partner networks, each Center effectively serves the unique agricultural needs of rural, metro, Tribal, and remote communities.

However, earlier this year, following President Trump's Executive Order 14151 of January 20, 2025, USDA abruptly halted funding for RFBCs. The sudden pause has had immediate and damaging consequences. The loss of funding has disrupted vital partnerships and threatened local and regional supply chains, undermining the food and economic security of communities across the country. Eliminating the program entirely would not only erase the progress made but severely impede a future pathway forward and slow the continuation of this essential work to build resilient food systems in these communities.

It was unexpected to see this program eliminated, especially after your department's release of the *Farmers First* agenda, which underscores the critical role of small family farms and the barriers they face in accessing markets and infrastructure. The *Farmers First* agenda states:

¹ USDA Regional Food Business Center Program Semi-Annual Performance Progress Report Highlights.https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Combined_RFBC_PPR_HighlightsandDashboardJuly2023_June2024.pdf

The first policy pillar of the Make Agriculture Great Again Agenda focuses on the prosperity of small family farms, which are the heart of our communities and our nation (pg. 3).

It can be difficult for small farmers to establish and maintain markets, particularly for lower volume producers. Limited access to infrastructure—such as cold storage, processing facilities, and reliable transportation—further complicates marketing of products (pg. 8).²

Created by USDA in 2022, the RFBC program offers the solutions – including technical assistance, coordination, and capacity-building support – needed to help small, mid-sized, and family farmers overcome these very challenges and contribute to a more resilient and competitive food system for our country.

Furthermore, by choosing to honor competitive Business Builder grants only from Centers that had already issued awards, USDA's decision disproportionately penalizes RFBCs that delayed grant issuance until reimbursement assurances were in place. As a result, several Centers are unfairly cut off from continuing their work, despite their cautious management designed to protect limited local resources and ensure accountability. Additionally, we understand that at least one Center did receive approval for their Business Builder implementation plan but has been prohibited from continuing their work. This undermines equitable support for producers in smaller or more vulnerable regions and discourages responsible stewardship of federal funds.

Given our concerns, we respectfully request your response to the following questions by August 31, 2025:

1. Before eliminating the RFBC program, did USDA engage with affected stakeholders to understand how the program benefited their communities and what impact its termination would have on local and regional supply chains? What outreach methods were used to gather stakeholder input?
2. Were potential program modifications considered instead of full termination? If so, what were these potential modifications?
3. Did USDA consider Business Builder Implementation Plans that were already submitted, and in some cases approved, before terminating the entirety of four agreements?
4. Did USDA communicate a change in agency priorities with the agreement holders to allow an opportunity for them to submit an agreement modification before termination?
5. Before eliminating the RFBC program, did USDA engage with the agreement holders to ascertain any identified or planned long-term funding beyond the contract period?
6. Did USDA assess how terminating the program would affect local and regional supply chains, food security, or economic development? Were any forecasting or predictive

² Farmers First.

<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/farmers-first-small-family-farms-policy-agenda.pdf>

models used to evaluate those effects? If so, please provide all information, analyses, data, documentation, and supporting materials. If not, what methods – if any – were used to anticipate the potential consequences of the program’s termination?

7. How will USDA continue supporting the eight RFBCs that have the option to continue managing existing Business Builder subawards, ensuring the continuation of technical assistance and capacity-building support to the awardees?
8. What measures will USDA take to ensure that terminating the RFBC program does not exacerbate existing disparities in access to technical assistance and business development resources for small and mid-sized producers, especially those in remote, Tribal, or underserved communities?
9. In your press release announcing the termination of this program, you stated “[a]ny remaining [RFBC] funds will be repurposed to better support American agriculture.”³ Are there specific programs to which the remaining RFBC funds have already been, or plan to be, dedicated? If so, do those programs specifically aid small- and mid-sized farms and farm businesses in rural, Tribal, and underserved areas similar to the RFBC program?

At a time when farmers continue to experience uncertainty, industry consolidation, and extreme weather events, we must not reduce the opportunities that support their viability and resilience. We urge you to restore the RFBC program and continue working with small- and mid-sized farms to strengthen our nation’s food system and local economies.

We appreciate your attention to this important matter.

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³ *Secretary Rollins terminates COVID-era program*. U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2025, July 15). <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/07/15/secretary-rollins-terminates-covid-era-program>