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Acting Comptroller General
of the United States

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July 6 29, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Priority Open Recommendations: U.S. Department of Agriculture

Dear Secretary Rollins:

The purpose of this letter is to call your personal attention to three areas where open recommendations to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) should be given high priority. In January 2026, we reported that, on a government-wide basis, 77 percent of our recommendations made 5 years ago were implemented.¹ USDA's recommendation implementation rate was 82 percent. As of May 2026, USDA has 110 open recommendations, including 6 priority recommendations.² Since our June 2025 letter, USDA has implemented 2 priority recommendations.³ I appreciate USDA's continued commitment to addressing our recommendations, which will better position the department to more effectively and efficiently achieve its mission.

We are highlighting the following areas that warrant your timely and focused attention:

¹GAO, *Performance and Accountability Report, Fiscal Year 2025*, [GAO-26-900644](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 29, 2026).

²GAO considers a recommendation to be a priority if when implemented, it may significantly improve government operations, for example, by realizing large dollar savings; eliminating mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or making progress toward addressing a high-risk or duplication issue.

³GAO, *Priority Open Recommendations: U.S. Department of Agriculture*, [GAO-25-108088](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 9, 2025). In this letter, we identified five priority recommendations. Since then, two were implemented, and we added three new priority recommendations.

- **Improving IT modernization.** USDA has faced challenges effectively managing IT modernization and reducing IT duplication and overlap in its Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) mission area. For example, FPAC has yet to develop and publish [a strategic plan and associated metrics](#) to monitor and measure its IT portfolio, as we recommended. Having these tools would position FPAC to effectively measure its performance against goals and maximize efficiencies. It would also provide greater assurance that FPAC is able to meet the needs of farmers, ranchers, and foresters. Including appropriate goals and measures to reduce duplication and overlap in its IT strategic plan could provide further efficiencies and savings.
- **Deterring SNAP retailer fraud.** USDA's existing monetary penalties for retailer trafficking—when a retailer exchanges SNAP benefits for cash instead of food—may be insufficient to deter trafficking. The 2008 Farm bill gave USDA the authority to increase penalties. USDA proposed regulatory changes in August 2012, including a new trafficking penalty, stating that they were necessary to improve program integrity and deter retailers from committing violations. However, USDA did not finalize this rule. [Increasing penalties for retailer trafficking](#), as we recommended, would assess an estimated additional \$174 million per year in new trafficking penalties and serve as an important tool for deterring trafficking and help safeguard federal funds.
- **Improving data sharing about foreign investment in U.S. agricultural land.** Sharing data could help increase the visibility of potential national security risks related to foreign investments in U.S. agricultural land, such as proximity to a sensitive military base. The Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act of 1978, as amended (AFIDA), requires foreign persons acquiring or transferring agricultural land to report certain information to USDA, which USDA must collect. Some of this information could help the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) identify relevant transactions to review of which it had not previously been notified. By [sharing timely and more detailed AFIDA data](#), as we recommended, USDA could help CFIUS reduce the likelihood of missing potential risks to national security.

Some of our priority recommendations to USDA are included on GAO's [High Risk List](#).⁴ For example, [improving IT modernization](#) is included on GAO's High Risk List. Another high risk area, [improving federal oversight of food safety](#), has direct implications for USDA. For example, we reported that USDA should [develop a prioritization plan](#) to document which meat and poultry products to address and any additional policies needed to effectively reduce pathogens from food products.

A comprehensive list of open recommendations, including new priority recommendations, and information about their status can be found on the GAO website at [Recommendations Database | U.S. GAO](#). Copies of this letter are being sent to the appropriate congressional committees.⁵ This letter will also be available at [Priority Recommendations | U.S. GAO](#).

⁴This list identifies government operations with greater vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. GAO, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, [GAO-25-107743](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 25, 2025).

⁵We also help Congress identify congressional oversight actions that can help agencies implement priority recommendations, such as incorporating them into legislation. James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-263, § 7211(a)(2), 136 Stat. 2395, 3668 (2022) (codified at 31 U.S.C. § 719 note). Congress can also use its budget, appropriations, and oversight processes to incentivize executive branch agencies to act on our recommendations and monitor their progress. For example, Congress can hold hearings focused on agencies' progress in implementing priority recommendations, withhold funds when appropriate, or take other actions to provide incentives for agencies to act.

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss how to address our open recommendations, as we pursue the shared goal of working to increase efficiency and effectiveness of government programs and spending. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Allison Bawden, Managing Director, Natural Resources and Environment, at BawdenA@gao.gov. Contact points for our offices of Congressional Relations and Media Relations may be found on the last page of this letter. Thank you for your personal attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,

//SIGNED//

Orice Williams Brown
Acting Comptroller General
of the United States