UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
UNDER SECRETARY MEMORANDUM

To: Chief Executive Officers, Chairs, and Members, Research and Promotion Boards

Date: September 17, 2026

RE: Terminating Mandatory ESG-Related Checkoff Funding; Terminating Checkoff Support for ESG Commitment Solicitation of Food Processors; and Alignment of Research and Promotion Activities with the Administration's Priorities

I. Purpose

This memorandum directs all Research and Promotion Boards, while continuing to adhere to the applicable statutory authorities, to align with the Administration's policy priorities favoring agricultural production, producer profitability, and freedom from ideologically driven mandates. Mandatory producer, handler, and importer assessments must support promotion, research, and nutrition education that expand markets and demand for agricultural commodities. Assessments should not underwrite environmental, social, and governance (ESG) frameworks, net-zero, or climate-neutrality initiatives that impose non-statutory costs, restrictions, or commitments on domestic producers or processors.

II. Direction

Effective immediately, the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) should work with all Research and Promotion Boards to:

1. Terminate research and promotion (checkoff) funds and work associated with ESG-related projects that solicit ESG commitments from producers, processors/handlers, retailers, or other like entities. AMS should work with the Boards to determine which projects are misaligned with the Administration's policy and determine if contracts can remain as is, be modified to comply with the Administration's policy, or must be terminated.

2. For contracts identified for termination, Boards should provide AMS with a proposed list of activities, including any contract termination limitations. AMS will provide a final list of activities that must be modified or terminated.

3. Boards must modify or terminate contracts consistent with the terms of each contract. For terminated activities, all work and creation of materials associated with these activities - including research, media, social media, websites, and any meetings where work supporting ESG activities would be a topic - must cease. This action applies to all boards, contractors, affiliated organizations, as well as all State, Regional, and Importer Programs.

III. Prohibition on Checkoff Support for Solicitation of ESG Commitments

1. No funds from any checkoff program overseen by AMS should be used to support the solicitation or enforcement of mandatory ESG commitments, pledges, scorecards, reporting requirements, or similar frameworks.

2. This prohibition covers activities that condition market access or participation on adoption of ESG metrics, emissions targets, or related non-statutory standards that disadvantage U.S. producers.

IV. Oversight of All Research and Promotion Activities

AMS shall ensure that:

1. Budgets, plans, projects, contracts, and activities adhere to the Administration's priorities and commitments;

2. No research and promotion funds advance ESG mandates, climate-neutrality or net-zero frameworks, or other requirements that impose additional regulatory, reporting, or cost burdens that divert resources from core statutory purposes of demand expansion and market development; and

3. All activities should continue to remain limited to authorized promotion, research, and consumer information functions.

V. Implementation and Authority

This memorandum is effective immediately and remains in effect until modified or rescinded. It is issued in accordance with the Department's relevant statutory authorities related to all research and promotion boards.

This should be implemented in a manner consistent with applicable law and existing orders. Questions regarding interpretation or application should be directed to the AMS Administrator's office, which will coordinate with the Office of the Secretary as needed.

Sincerely,

Dudley Hoskins
United States Under Secretary for Agriculture for Marketing and Regulatory Programs