

Annotated Agenda
MAFAC Meeting – Virtual
October 12-14, 2021

1. Title of Discussion: **Regional Food Enterprise Centers, proposal by USDA**

2. Presenter: **JuliAnna Arnett**
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USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

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3. Objective/Purpose (Informational & Action)

Provide MAFAC an overview of a new proposal by USDA to develop the capacity and infrastructure to support development and expansion of regional supply chains that strengthen community resiliency and local economic development as well as support a more coordinated and fair supply chain.

4. Background/Synopsis

Business technical assistance for small and mid-size producers, processors, and distributors varies widely across the country; is often difficult to access; and small food, seafood, and farm businesses often lack access to capital that would facilitate market access. The American Rescue Plan offers the flexibility for USDA to develop a new program that will address technical assistance gaps, increase access to USDA programs, and transform USDA operations for local and regional food systems' (LRFS) stakeholders.

A. Connect through USDA infrastructure and human capital

To support LRFS stakeholders, USDA will expand its internal support and coordination. A new office, housed in AMS, will oversee the regional centers (see below), manage new state coordinators, and coordinate across USDA (including training for cooperative extension and field staff (RD, FSA, NRCS, FNS).

B. Build regional infrastructure and invest in more competition through business technical assistance:

Through cooperative agreements, USDA will design, implement, and oversee a network of seven Regional Food Enterprise Centers (Centers) that will provide backbone support for regional supply chains and offer technical assistance and capital to small and mid-sized food, seafood, and farm businesses. Eligible entities to lead the Centers will include land grant universities, minority-serving institutions, state governments, tribal governments, non-profits, and community development finance institutions (CDFIs). The Centers will have three main responsibilities:

- 1) **Coordination:** The Centers will act as a regional hub coordinating across a geographic area, with USDA, and with the other Centers.
- 2) **Technical assistance:** The Centers will subgrant to organizations to provide direct business technical assistance to small and mid-sized food, seafood, and farm businesses.
- 3) **Investment in local businesses:** The Centers will invest in small and mid-sized food, seafood, and farm businesses through grants, low-interest loans, and other innovative financing methods. Coupling technical assistance and capital streamlines business support.

5. Action to be taken by MAFAC members

Provide feedback to USDA, and consider the information in the context of your on-going work to build resilience in fisheries and for seafood businesses and coastal communities.