



Highlights of [GAO-11-779T](#), a statement for the record to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, United States Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

The current fiscal environment, ongoing deliberations for the next Farm Bill, and the public's expectations for a high-performing and efficient government underscore the need for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to focus on program results and customer needs, work across organizational lines to help minimize any overlap and duplication, and build its internal capacity. USDA comprises 15 agencies in seven mission areas that are responsible for, among other things, assisting farmers and rural communities, overseeing meat and poultry safety, providing access to nutritious food for low-income families, and protecting the nation's forests. For fiscal year 2010, USDA estimated that its 15 agencies would have total outlays of \$129 billion.

This statement highlights examples from GAO's previous work that illustrate how USDA can address challenges it faces in three key areas: (1) the performance and accountability of USDA programs, (2) coordination within USDA and between USDA and other agencies to minimize duplication and overlap, and (3) the sufficiency of USDA management capacity. This statement is based on GAO's extensive body of work on USDA programs authorized under the Farm Bill and issued from September 2005 through May 2011.

View [GAO-11-779T](#) or key components. For more information, contact Lisa Shames at (202) 512-3841 or [shamesl@gao.gov](mailto:shamesl@gao.gov).

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## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### More Effective Management and Performance Can Help Implementation of the Farm Bill

## What GAO Found

USDA must ensure that its programs are being implemented efficiently and services are being delivered effectively, which requires it to review the progress it and its agencies have made in achieving program goals and developing strategies to improve performance and accountability. GAO's work notes cases in which USDA programs have either met or fallen short of meeting program goals. In April 2010, GAO reported on domestic food assistance programs—an area where three federal agencies administered 18 programs consisting of more than \$90 billion in spending in fiscal year 2010. GAO suggested that not enough is known about the effectiveness of these programs. Research GAO reviewed suggested that participation in seven USDA food assistance programs it examined, including four of the five largest, is associated with positive health and nutrition outcomes consistent with the programs' goals; these goals include raising the level of nutrition among low-income households, safeguarding the health and well-being of the nation's children, and strengthening the agriculture economy. Little, however, is known about the effectiveness of the remaining 11 programs—9 of which are USDA programs—because they have not been well studied. GAO suggested that USDA consider which of the lesser-studied programs need further research.

To achieve its missions, USDA must effectively coordinate with many groups both within and outside the agency. GAO's work provides instances of where improving coordination within USDA or across agencies has contributed or could contribute to improved performance of USDA programs. For example, in September 2005, GAO reported on USDA's need to improve coordination, including information-sharing and communication, between its Risk Management Agency (RMA) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) on potential fraud, waste, and abuse in the federal crop insurance program. For example, FSA offices in nine states did not conduct any of the field inspections RMA requested of farmers' fields in cases of anomalous crop insurance losses or when farmers were suspected of poor farming practices in 1 or more of the years in GAO's review. Also, RMA did not share with FSA information on the nature of the suspected poor farming practices or the results of follow-up inspections. GAO recommended actions to both agencies to more effectively conduct field inspections.

USDA must have sufficient internal management capacity in the areas of financial management, human capital management, and information technology to effectively and efficiently fulfill its multiple missions. GAO has reported on USDA programs where improvements are needed in these areas. For example, GAO reported in October 2008 that USDA provided farm program payments to thousands of individuals with incomes exceeding income eligibility caps. GAO recommended that USDA work with the Internal Revenue Service to develop a system for verifying the income eligibility for recipients of all farm program payments, which the agencies subsequently did.