

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 • MADISON, WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • WWW.FFRF.ORG

July 10, 2026

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: agsec@usda.gov

Secretary Brooke Rollins
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Re: Continued unconstitutional promotion of religion through official USDA communications and programming

Dear Secretary Rollins:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding additional complaints we have received from employees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture concerning the department's continuing use of official government resources to promote religion. As you may recall, FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 41,000 members across the country. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

On April 8, 2026, we wrote to object to your department-wide Easter message that proselytized and celebrated what you described as “the greatest story ever told, the foundation of our faith, and the abiding hope of all mankind.” Unfortunately, rather than being an isolated incident, subsequent complaints demonstrate an ongoing pattern of official promotion of religion within the department.

Most recently, USDA employees reported receiving an official Memorial Day message from your office that concluded not with a secular remembrance of those who died in military service, but with a Christian promise of eternal salvation:

Yet, we can take comfort that they are safely at rest by trusting in the words of Almighty God: “I give unto them eternal life, that they shall never perish.” — John 10:28.

While many Americans draw personal comfort from religious beliefs, a Cabinet secretary speaking in her official capacity may not use official government communications to promote one religion’s theological claims to all employees. A Memorial Day observance should unite federal employees in honoring the nation’s fallen service members, not exclude those who do not share the Secretary's particular religious convictions.

We have also received complaints regarding an official event titled “Faith and Fellowship Musical Celebration and Launch of USDA Prayer Service,” organized by the USDA Center for Faith and promoted through official departmental communications.

According to the event brief, the purpose of the gathering was to “celebrate faith,” educate employees about faith-based organizations, and launch a recurring quarterly “USDA Prayer and Worship Service.” The event, held during working hours, featured an opening prayer, worship music, “Corporate Prayer & Intercession,” and a “Special Message from the Secretary.” The program states that participants would gather to seek “God’s presence, wisdom, protection, and blessings” for USDA and that the department seeks to ensure employees may “share and celebrate their faith.”

Federal agencies exist to serve the public, not to organize worship services or encourage employees to participate in prayer. Government employees remain free to pray privately or gather voluntarily on their own initiative. What the Constitution forbids is the government itself becoming the organizer and promoter of religious worship.

Finally, employees reported receiving an official Independence Day message from your office concluding:

May God continue to protect the United States of America and may His favor shine over all her land.

This message is yet another example of official USDA communications invoking religion. Viewed alongside the Easter devotional, the Memorial Day scripture, and the department's sponsorship of recurring prayer and worship services, it contributes to an unmistakable pattern of official governmental religious messaging. Taken together, these communications convey that USDA leadership is aligning the department with religious belief and, specifically, with Christianity.

Our complainants report feeling increasingly marginalized by these repeated religious communications. USDA employees represent every faith tradition and no faith at all. They should not have to wonder whether their department expects participation in religious exercises or whether they are viewed as outsiders because they do not share the religious beliefs repeatedly promoted by agency leadership.

We are also aware that several USDA employees have filed federal litigation challenging these same practices.¹ The additional complaints we continue to receive only reinforce that these concerns remain ongoing and widespread among USDA employees.

As you are aware, the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause requires government neutrality between religions, and between religion and nonreligion. *See McCreary v. ACLU of Ky.*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Ark.*, 393 U.S.97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947). By repeatedly using official USDA communications and programs to promote religious beliefs, organize government-sponsored prayer and worship services, and invoke specifically Christian doctrine, the department conveys governmental preference for religion and sends the message that Christianity is favored by agency leadership.

¹ <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/05/13/usda-employees-lawsuit-rollins-easter-00918623>

USDA employees represent a wide range of religious and nonreligious viewpoints. When a Cabinet secretary uses her official position to promote a specific set of religious beliefs, it sends the message that employees who do not share those beliefs are outsiders in their own workplace.

We therefore again request that USDA cease using official government communications and resources to promote religion. Specifically, we ask that the department discontinue official devotional messages, refrain from including religious exhortations and scriptural quotations in department-wide communications, and end the department's sponsorship and promotion of official prayer and worship services.

USDA should reaffirm a commitment to welcoming all employees equally, regardless of their religious beliefs or lack thereof, and uphold the constitutional principle of governmental neutrality toward religion.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Line". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Christopher Line
Legal Counsel
Freedom From Religion Foundation