



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Office of the General Counsel
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250-1400

December 10, 2021

Delivered via Electronic Mail

Stewart Whitson
Foundation for Government Accountability
15275 Collier Blvd.
Suite 201-279
Naples, Florida 34119
Email: stewart@theFGA.org

**Re: Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request No. 2022-DA-00858-F
Final Response**

Dear Mr. Whitson:

This is the final response to the November 19, 2021, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request submitted to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Departmental Administration (DA). The Office of Information Affairs (OIA), Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Division is under the purview of the General Counsel (GC) and serves as the focal point for USDA's FOIA program. It provides coordination and ensures agency-wide compliance with the FOIA. Additionally, the OIA-FOIA processes requests and appeals on behalf of the Office of the Secretary (OSEC); the Under Secretaries; USDA's staff offices; and the Research, Education and Economics and Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs mission areas.

The request sought the following:

- 1) All electronic communications, briefs, papers, or analysis related to your agency's decision to abandon the cost-neutral policy it has followed for the past 45 years including those authored or submitted by the Chief Economist, or the staff of the Chief Economist.
- 2) All reports, memos, briefs, electronic communications, or other documents related to a review of the costs and legal implications of the 2021 Thrifty Food Plan completed by the USDA Office of the Chief Economist (OCE). This includes any documents outlining objections to either the increase in SNAP benefits or the abandonment of the cost neutral policy raised by the Office of the Chief Economist.
- 3) If the Office of the Chief Economist was not consulted before the 2021 Thrifty Food Plan was approved, please provide any documentation that would explain why they were not consulted and who made the decision to refuse to allow them to weigh in on the decision, if applicable. (Date Range for Record Search: From 1/22/2021 To 9/1/2021)

Your request has been processed under the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

A search for responsive records was conducted by the OCE. The OCE's search did not locate any responsive records. Therefore, the OIA is unable to provide any records that are responsive

to your FOIA request. The OCE relayed that they were not asked to review any information related the 2021 Thrifty Food Plan.

You may seek dispute resolution services from the OIA's FOIA Public Liaison, Mr. Harald Fuller-Bennett. Mr. Fuller-Bennett may be contacted by telephone at 202-239-4522, or electronically at Harald.FullerBennett@usda.gov or USDAFOIA@usda.gov.

You also have the option to seek assistance from the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS). Please visit <https://ogis.archives.gov/mediation-program/request-assistance.htm> for information about how to request OGIS assistance in relation to a FOIA request.

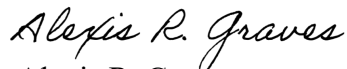
Provisions of the FOIA allow us to recover part of the cost of processing your request. In this instance, no fees are being charged.

If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Mr. Nicholas Mantzaris at 202-694-5260 or electronically at Nicholas.Mantzaris@usda.gov or USDAFOIA@usda.gov.

For additional information regarding USDA FOIA regulations and processes, please refer to the information available online at <https://www.usda.gov/ogc/office-information-affairs/foia-division>.

The OIA appreciates the opportunity to assist you with this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alexis R. Graves".

Alexis R. Graves
Director
Office of Information Affairs