

US Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
[Nomination Hearing for USDA Deputy Secretary and General Counsel](#)
April 8, 2025

Opening Statements:

[Sen. John Boozman](#) (Chair; R-AR)

- Sen. Boozman mentioned that these nominees are being nominated during a challenging time in America, saying farmers are facing challenges and losing money. It remains to be seen how tariffs will affect agriculture.
- Producers want to know if USDA will be on their side.

[Sen. Amy Klobuchar](#) (Ranking; D-MN)

- Sen. Klobuchar noted that the last few months have been a turbulent time for farmers, ranchers, and rural Americans with key partners implementing retaliatory tariffs as a result of the administration's policies.
- American farmers need certainty; Deputy Secretary and General Counsel are key positions. USDA provides critical services to Americans. It's important for these two positions to be a voice for all farmers and ranchers and those participating in SNAP and conservation programs.

Witnesses:

Honorable Stephen Vaden, of Tennessee, nominated to be Deputy Secretary of USDA
[Testimony](#)

Mr. Tyler Clarkson, of Virginia, nominated to be the General Counsel of USDA
[Testimony](#)

Highlights

Topics raised by Senators include: (1) the challenges that people, especially farmers, ranchers and producers are having in relation to current tariffs and funding cuts; (2) need to pass a Farm Bill; (3) proper use of Commodity Credit Corporation programs; and (4) protecting the farm safety net to continue to support farmers, particularly those small and beginning farmers. Both Chair Boozman and Ranking Member Klobuchar stressed the importance of these two positions in helping pass a Farm Bill.

Questions and Answers:

[Sen. Tina Smith](#) (D-MN). Asked what their understanding about trust and treaty obligations of the U.S. to Tribal Nations?

- Vaden responded that he understood that the relationship between Tribes and the U.S. government is very unique and a creature of federal law. He noted that it represents federal commitments to Native Americans. He said that he respects that relationship and that the USDA's Office of Tribal Relations helps manage the relationship. He noted in his role Deputy Undersecretary, if confirmed, he understands that the Department cannot forget its legal responsibilities, saying that with respect to treaty obligations, "and our word needs to be our bond. And we need to keep our word. It's that simple".

Sen. Smith also mentioned that USDA has done significant work in supporting Tribal Self Determination Authorities under pilot projects in Forestry and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations and wants to work with Vaden to expand 638 under the administration.

[Sen. John Hoeven](#) (R-ND) brought up the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), calling it a vital tool to help farmers. He also reiterated to the nominees that Congress needs to get a Farm Bill done and ensure farm safety net is protected.

[Sen. Raphael Warnock](#) (D-GA) asked the nominees about their view that there is well-documented evidence of discrimination against minority farmers in USDA?

- Vaden said that he agreed that the history of such discrimination is there in court records. In regards to Sen. Warnock's questions concerning discrimination funding – specifically carrying out the [Underserved and Veteran Farmers, Ranchers and Foresters](#) program as designed by Congress – both Vaden and Clarkson said they would recommend the Department and Secretary follow the law.