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USDA and Justice Department Enter into Memorandum of Understanding on Civil Enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act

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Press Release

Agreement Formalizes Agencies' Enforcement Relationship

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WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division (ENRD), and USDA Office of the General Counsel (OGC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Civil Judicial Enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA).

Assistant Attorney General Todd Kim of ENRD, USDA Principal Deputy General Counsel Mary Beth Schultz, and USDA-APHIS Administrator Michael Watson made the announcement.

The agencies have been closely collaborating on civil judicial enforcement of the AWA for almost four years. This collaboration has resulted in a number of important

enforcement actions, including [securing the surrender of close to 150 animals from a Michigan animal dealer](#), some of which are protected under the Endangered Species Act, and [an injunction protecting dogs and cats against pervasive mistreatment at a breeder facility](#).

The MOU represents another significant step forward in AWA enforcement, as it outlines new actions the agencies will take to enhance their collaboration. In general, the MOU establishes a framework for notification, consultation, and coordination among APHIS, USDA's General Counsel and ENRD. Building on the agencies' ongoing relationship, this framework formalizes procedures for regular meetings, coordination on enforcement referrals, information sharing, and additional training for employees, among other activities. These procedures will better enable the agencies to prepare for and coordinate on potential civil enforcement actions.

USDA and DOJ take seriously their common goal of ensuring that animals protected by the AWA are cared for and treated humanely. This MOU demonstrates the agencies' joint commitment to fulfilling this mission.

[View final-awa-mou.pdf](#)

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.