



## STAKEHOLDER ANNOUNCEMENT

### USDA Rural Development Announces Selection of Three New Executive Leaders

WASHINGTON, Nov. 20, 2017 – Assistant to the Secretary for Rural Development Anne Hazlett today announced the appointment and selection of three new executive leaders for USDA Rural Development.

- Gina Sheets has been selected to serve as the Chief Innovation Officer for Rural Development. Sheets has more than 20 years' experience working in economic development at the local and state level, building prosperity in rural communities through small business development and economic attraction. A long-time small business owner, she served as a local elected official at the start of her career and later as Director of Agriculture under Indiana Governor Mike Pence. In addition to her economic development and local leadership experience, Sheets and her husband served as missionaries in Liberia, where she was responsible for coordinating a farmer-to-farmer capacity building program and extending agriculture education and small business development practices.

As Chief Innovation Officer, Sheets will oversee the creation and management of the Rural Development Innovation Center, a team within Rural Development working to streamline, modernize and strengthen the delivery of Rural Development tools effectively and efficiently. The Innovation Center will focus on improving customer service to rural communities and increasing rural prosperity through strategic partnerships, capacity-building, data analytics and evaluation, and regulatory reform. The Innovation Center will also inform policy decisions and develop creative solutions to rural economic development.

- Marie Wheat will serve as **Director of External Affairs**. Wheat is currently an Industry Economist for USDA and oversees delivery of the Department's BioPreferred Program. In this role, Marie is responsible for worldwide interactions with regulators, key stakeholders and industry associations to advance the market for chemicals and consumer products made from agricultural commodities. Before coming to USDA, Wheat served as Chief of Staff and Chief Operating Officer of the United States Peace Corps, overseeing global operations as well as Congressional and Public Affairs, for the world's largest international volunteer service organization.

As Director of External Affairs, Wheat will manage Rural Development's communications and stakeholder engagement activities, including community engagement, legislative and public affairs.

- Mia Jordan will serve as the new **Chief Information Officer** for Rural Development. Previously Jordan was the Director of IT Governance and Chief Architect of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Since 2010, Jordan has overseen a \$200M+ annual Information Technology budget, delivering business critical systems. Prior to joining NRCS, Mia was the Capital Planning Lead with the National Nuclear Security Administration at the Department of Energy, where she managed a \$1.5B portfolio of IT investments.

These program leadership changes are effective as of Nov. 27, 2017. USDA Rural Development encourages partners and stakeholder groups to reach out to these leaders in their new roles to build on existing partnerships and facilitate new relationships.

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