U.S. Department of Agriculture: Announces key staff

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WASHINGTON, November 8, 2021 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture today announced the names of individuals who will hold key staff positions in Washington, D.C.

Joaquin Altoro was appointed Administrator of the Rural Housing Service within Rural Development

For nearly three decades, Altoro has been dedicated to understanding the heart and passion of minority communities and applying his experience and wisdom to provide financing opportunities that spark economic development. Recently, he served as CEO and Executive Director for the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA). As CEO, Altoro strategically positioned WHEDA to adopt a holistic approach to leverage affordable housing to grow economic prosperity for historically marginalized communities. Under his guidance, WHEDA was able to enhance its 2021-2022 housing tax credit Qualified Action Plan, encouraging diversity among participating developers and providing greater consideration of the unique needs of rural communities. Prior to WHEDA, he served as Town Bank's Vice President of Commercial Banking. Altoro is a graduate of Cardinal Stritch University where he received a Bachelor of Science in Business Management and is a graduate of the African American Leadership Program.

Allen Rodriguez was appointed Deputy Press Secretary in the Office of Communications

Rodriguez joins USDA after over four years of service in the legislative branch. Recently, Rodriguez served as Deputy Press Secretary to Senator Jeanne Shaheen. Prior to his role as Deputy Press Secretary, Rodriguez worked as a Press Assistant and Staff Assistant for Senator Shaheen. Rodriguez is a graduate of Salem State University where he received a Bachelor of Science in Political Science.

Riya Mehta was appointed Policy Advisor to the Farm Service Agency

Mehta will focus on policy work within the Farm Program and Farm Loan Program to

ensure equitable access to USDA programing that supports the initiatives of the Biden-Harris Administration. Mehta joins USDA after serving as Policy Advisor to Congressman Jimmy Panetta. Mehta was the primary policy advisor to the Congressman on a portfolio that included domestic and international agriculture, food security, and the environment. Prior to Rep. Panetta's office, Mehta was a Legislative Fellow to the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. Mehta received a Bachelor of Science in Earth Systems from Stanford University.

Conisha Hackett was appointed Policy Advisor to the Farm Service Agency

Hackett will focus on organizational policy work to empower USDA staff at the federal, state, and local level to best carry out the equity goals of Secretary Vilsack and the Biden-Harris Administration. Prior to joining USDA, Hackett served as a Research Analyst with the Policy Research Center at Alcorn State University. Hackett specialized in research on past Farm Bill legislation, USDA rules and regulations, manuals, handbooks and conducted and coordinated research studies and projects by multiple 1890 universities and community-based organizations. Hackett has also served as a law clerk to the Senate Judiciary Committee in the office of Senator Cory Booker. Hackett is a graduate of Tougaloo College, Mississippi State University, and the University of Mississippi School of Law.

"USDA's team continues to grow – in numbers, expertise, experience, and commitment – as we work to build a better future for all Americans," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "These new leaders are a welcome addition to achieving our mission, meeting the moment's greatest opportunities, and meaningfully serving the American public."