**USDA & SBA Join Forces to Help Businesses in Rural America**

*By:  Richard Mayfield, New York State Director*

This past year had a number of great examples where federal agencies came together to work collaboratively across the state – specifically I am speaking to the partnership between the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and our friends at the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA).

Stemming from a [Memorandum of Understanding](https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2018/04/04/usda-and-sba-join-forces-help-businesses-rural-america) (MOU), signed into action on April 4th, 2018 in Washington, DC by Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue and then Administrator Linda McMahon of the SBA – our two agencies were tasked with finding ways to better inform, support and promote stronger business ties in rural America.

As we progressed through the year, our teams fanned out across the state and engaged in a number of rural funding forums and general interest meetings throughout a dozen rural communities. These meetings ranged from small scale functions to well attended informational events at college sized venues -- where ideas were shared, conversations were had, and efforts for future collaborations took root.

All of this took place during my first year as the State Director for USDA Rural Development here in New York. Having spent a larger share of my professional career in public service in Washington, DC, Albany and Orange County – it was great for me to get out and see different parts of the state, to listen and hear from small business owners and producers and also learn more about the needs, challenges and even the best practices taking place in rural New York.

Someplace, during all of these functions, I got to know my counterpart from the SBA – Regional Administrator Steve Bulger – and his staff very well. Together, our respective state staff have also grown their understanding of not just the programs that each agency brings forward, but we have also strengthened our friendships among one another. And it has made all the difference.

As we begin the next fiscal year, I am eager to get back into the field and engage our rural small business stakeholders and could not think of a better partner to do it with than our friends from the SBA. Are you a rural small business owner, producer or interested in becoming an entrepreneur? Perhaps you want to expand your operation and have questions as to what programs or resources are available – if so, don’t hesitate to reach out! Contact me directly at our state office at (315) 477 – 6400 or by email at Richard.Mayfield@usda.gov. We look forward to hearing from you and working with you!