



Meet the Nominees

**ROBERT M. TOBIAS CERTIFICATE
★★★★★ of ★★★★★
ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

Dionne Toombs

Associate Director

Programs National Institute of Food and
Agriculture (NIFA)

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Key Cohort SES 12



Dr. Toombs is a highly accomplished and skilled senior executive leader with a vast knowledge of and over 20 years of experience with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs. Throughout her career, she has made significant contributions to the Department's agricultural research, education, and Extension mission while serving in various leadership roles. She is the Associate Director for Programs at USDA, National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) grant funding agency for agricultural research, education, and Extension programs. In this role, Dr. Toombs provides leadership and strategic direction for the organization's multifaceted science programs. These programs are designed to generate and disseminate innovative knowledge that advances the agriculture, environmental stewardship, and the promotion of human health and well-being across communities nationwide. Her leadership facilitates the seamless integration of research, education, and extension endeavors throughout the extensive Land-Grant University system and fosters collaborative partnerships with diverse organizations within the United States and globally. As the administrator of a comprehensive portfolio of extramural research, education, and extension grants, Dr. Toombs ensures that the NIFA addresses the pressing needs of agricultural stakeholders, including farmers, ranchers, and producers.

Previously she served as the Director of the USDA Office of the Chief Scientist (OCS) and Acting NIFA Director. As OCS director, she provided scientific leadership, identified key science issues and needs, and coordinated and prioritized USDA's science efforts. Dr. Toombs led and coordinated major departmental initiatives and activities to strengthen science and science leadership, improve national coordination, and enhance outreach and awareness of agricultural challenges.

As Acting NIFA Director, Dr. Toombs oversaw and funded 80 programs totaling \$2.2 billion, covering broad areas of agriculture-related science that integrated research, education, and Extension across the country. She successfully led the rebuilding of NIFA's workforce, managing an unprecedented budget and

implementing new programs through various federal initiatives. Dr. Toombs' leadership has been instrumental in developing a succession plan, ensuring a high-performing and diverse workforce, and completing the hiring of 342 employees, a 30% increase from the previous year. She relaunched NIFA's Mentoring Program to improve recruitment, retention, and career development opportunities, fostering a pipeline for succession planning. Dr. Toombs has been repeatedly featured as one of USDA's most impactful woman scientists and recognized by the Secretary of Agriculture for outstanding leadership. Throughout her career, Dr. Toombs has helped her colleagues, staff, and students maximize their potential by bolstering their talents and developing their leadership skills. Always willing to champion the next generation of scientists, she often emphasizes the importance of relationship building, citing collaboration as a key to her success.

Dr. Toombs earned her Ph.D. in Nutritional Sciences from Howard University, her Master of Science degree in Food Science from Alabama A&M University, and her Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from Bethune-Cookman University.

She enjoys spending time with family, Pilates, participating in community service projects with her sorority, and learning how to play golf.