

Highlights of [GAO-13-245](#), a report to the Chairwoman, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The USDA OIG plays a critical role in addressing issues of economy, efficiency, and potential fraud involving scarce taxpayer dollars allocated to USDA.

GAO was asked to review a number of issues related to the OIG's operations in comparison to other cabinet-level OIGs. The objectives of this report were to provide information on the USDA OIG's (1) budget and staffing levels, (2) reported accomplishments, (3) reported oversight coverage, (4) reported quality of work, and (5) oversight of USDA's reported causes of estimated improper payments. To address these objectives, GAO obtained information over the 3-year period covering fiscal years 2009 through 2011 on the OIG's budget and staff levels and the reported monetary and nonmonetary accomplishments from this work. GAO obtained similar information reported by the OIGs in all cabinet-level departments. In addition, GAO summarized information on the USDA OIG's oversight coverage reported by audits and investigations, and the quality of the OIG's work as reported by peer reviews performed by other OIGs. Also, GAO obtained information on the OIG's audit of USDA's reporting on improper payments.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making specific recommendations in this report. The USDA Inspector General commented that the draft of this report provided an objective and comprehensive review of the OIG.

View [GAO-13-245](#). For more information, contact Beryl Davis at (202) 512-2623 or davisbh@gao.gov.

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INSPECTORS GENERAL

USDA Office of Inspector General Resources, Accomplishments, Coverage, and Quality

What GAO Found

During the 3-year period from fiscal year 2009 through 2011, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Office of Inspector General's (OIG) total budgetary resources decreased by about 8 percent. In contrast, the total budgetary resources for all other cabinet-level OIGs increased by approximately 6 percent over the 3-year period. The USDA OIG's authorized full-time equivalent staff (FTE) increased by 11 percent, from 550 to 608, while all other cabinet-level OIGs had a combined increase in authorized FTEs of about 14 percent during the same 3-year period.

The USDA OIG had an estimated average return on investment for each budgetary resource dollar received of \$13.96 during the 3-year period compared to the other cabinet-level OIGs' average return of \$12.63, based on the potential savings from monetary accomplishments reported by audits and investigations. Most of the USDA OIG's return was the result of approximately \$4 billion in potential savings resulting from a fiscal year 2011 audit of funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 for USDA programs.

Return on Investment by the USDA OIG Compared to That of Other Cabinet-Level OIGs for Fiscal Years 2009 through 2011

Fiscal year	USDA OIG's return on each budget dollar	Other cabinet-level OIGs' return on each budget dollar
2009	\$3.01	\$13.07
2010	1.70	11.86
2011	39.40	12.98
Average 3-year return	13.96	12.63

Source: GAO analysis of Office of Management and Budget information and OIG semiannual reports.

During the 3-year period the USDA OIG issued 212 audit reports and completed 878 investigations that provided oversight coverage for each of USDA's seven mission areas, high-risk areas identified by GAO, and the management challenges identified by the OIG.

With respect to quality, the OIG received peer reviews of its audit and investigative quality from external OIGs, which concluded that the OIG had controls in place to ensure that its audits were performed in accordance with professional auditing standards, and that the OIG's investigations followed applicable professional standards.

The OIG's audit of USDA's compliance with reporting requirements for improper payments included a review of the reported root causes. The audit concluded that because of the lack of clear instructions, USDA's component agencies did not consistently categorize the root causes of improper payments. As a result, the OIG concluded that USDA's reporting of the causes of the improper payments was not accurate. The OIG made recommendations, and USDA agreed to implement a second-party review process to help ensure accuracy, implement controls to ensure consistent categorizing of causes, and update guidance for determining the causes.