

USDA Equity Commission and Agriculture Subcommittee Public Meeting #2: Meeting Minutes

May 10th and 11th, 2022

The USDA Equity Commission was convened for its second meeting on May 10th, 10am Eastern Standard Time, at the Whitten Building in Washington D.C. Co-Chairs Dr. Jewel Bronaugh and Arturo S. Rodriguez presided over the meeting along with Designated Federal Officer Cecilia Hernandez.

In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 92-463, the meeting was open to the public from 10:00am to 4:30pm on May 10th and 10:00am to 2:45pm on May 11th.

Day One – May 10, 2022

| Equity Commission Members | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| Co-Chair Bronaugh | ✓ | Mireya Loza | ✓ |
| Co-Chair Rodriguez | ✓ | Charlie Rawls | ✓ |
| Shorlette Ammons | ✓ | Dr. Ronald Rainey | ✓ |
| Todd Corley (Virtual) | ✓ | Dr. Hazell Reed | ✓ |
| Ertharin Cousin | ✓ | Shirley Sherrod | x |
| Derrick Johnson | ✓ | Poppy Sias-Hernandez | ✓ |
| Yvonne Lee | ✓ | Rick Smith | ✓ |
| Elizabeth Lower-Basch | ✓ | Toni Stanger-McLaughlin | ✓ |
| Agriculture Subcommittee Members | | | |
| Dr. Gina Eubanks | ✓ | Gary Matteson | ✓ |
| Janssen Hang | ✓ | Dr. Alexis Racelis (Virtual) | ✓ |
| PJ Haynie (Virtual) | ✓ | Russell Redding (Virtual) | ✓ |
| Savi Horne (Virtual) | ✓ | Shari Rogge-Fidler | ✓ |
| Michelle Hughes | ✓ | Dr. Jennie Stephens | x |
| Kari Jo Lawrence | ✓ | Sarah Vogel | ✓ |
| Erica Lomeli Corcoran | ✓ | | |
| USDA Staff in Attendance | | | |
| Cecilia Hernandez, Designated Federal Officer | | Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture | |
| Rick Gibson, Senior Council | | Katherine Ferguson, Chief of Staff | |
| Dr. Dewayne Goldmon, Racial and Justice Equity Advisor | | Leslie Weldon, Acting Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer | |
| Claudette Fernandez, Director of Program Equity | | Heather Dawn Thompson, Director of the Office of Tribal Relations | |
| Robert Bonnie, Undersecretary for Farm Production and Conservation | | Gloria Montañó Greene, Deputy Undersecretary for Farm Production and Conservation | |
| Zach Ducheneaux, Administrator of the Farm Service Agency | | Marcia Bunger, Administrator for the Risk Management Agency | |
| Members of the Public Providing Oral Comments | | | |
| Joe James, Member of the Public | | Ominique Garner, Member of the Public | |

*Attendance list for members of the public can be found [here](#).

1. Opening of Meeting

- **Designated Federal Officer (DFO) Hernandez** called the meeting to order and took attendance.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** welcomed members of the Equity Commission and the public. She provided an overview of the [agenda](#) for the next two days and discussed the Agriculture Subcommittee's subgroups. Additionally, she directed the public to submit public comments to EquityCommission@usda.gov. In response to public feedback from the first public meeting, she outlined USDA's internal actions to capture the status of historical recommendations. She called on the members to stay focused and dig deep on the root causes of systemic problems at USDA.

2. USDA Leadership Opening Remarks

- **Chief of Staff Katharine Ferguson** outlined USDA's ongoing equity-related work through three pillars: 1) the Equity Commission, 2) creating accessible programs and investments in underserved communities, 3) and building a diverse and equitable organization. She expressed USDA's need for the Equity Commission to hold USDA accountable and address the root causes of inequity. She spoke to the concurrent actions the administration is taking alongside the Equity Commission.

Member Q&A

- **Question from Member in-person [beginning of question inaudible]** asked how to ensure the Commission's work is maintained over time and changes in administration.
- **Chief of Staff Ferguson** expressed that USDA leadership is working to institutionalize some of the equity work to ensure a culture of equity is built into the organization rather than acting as a short-term initiative.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** stated the Commission's association with the highest level of decision-making at USDA shows the Commission is an integral part of this equity work.
- **Member Racelis** discussed the importance of bridging the implementation of historical recommendations to the Commission's present and future work to build trust. He asked for an update on the members' request for the implementation status of more than 600 historical recommendations. He also expressed that, although he hopes the Commission will address the root of injustice, the recommendations in the past matter to groups the Commission members represent.
- **Chief of Staff Ferguson** expressed that senior leadership is aware of and working to address the request and that DFO Hernandez and other presenters will speak about this in greater detail throughout the day.

3. Overview of Legal Cases

- **Senior Counsel Rick Gibson** provided historical context and an overview of USDA's legal cases: *Keepseagle v. Vilsack*, *Pigford v. Glickman*, *Garcia v. Vilsack*, and *Love v. Vilsack*. He stated the four cases originally were filed based on farm credit

discrimination; however, during the course of litigation, it became clear the cases also included issues related to extension, farm subsidies, and farm servicing. He also spoke to the results of the legal cases and the debt relief it provided. For example, the settlements for *Pigford* and *Keepseagle* included payments of \$50,000 and \$250,000 for claimants in track A and track B (as part of the two-track resolution process) respectively and provided programmatic and debt relief.

Member Q&A

- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** spoke to her own experience working for a civil rights office when these cases were being settled and mentioned that fellow Commission Member, Sarah Vogel, served in the counsel for the *Keepseagle v. Vilsack* case and wrote a book outlining her experiences.
- **Member Rainey** asked for the reason why the claims only went back to 1981.
- **Senior Counsel Gibson** responded to Member Rainey's question by stating that this was the way the statutory language was written; however, views this as a miscalculation.
- **Member Lee** spoke to the need to include Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander populations in the settlements in these cases because these people were not allowed to access USDA programs.
- **Member Vogel** raised the fact that, in litigation, other agencies are involved as well. She mentioned Department of Justice's role in the extended litigation process in the *Keepseagle* case and suggested that, when the government is wrong, it should settle cases rather than draw out litigation.
- **DFO Hernandez** closed out this portion of the meeting and the Commission went on a 10-minute break.

4. Current Status of Equity Efforts – Part 1 [See meeting slides]

- **DFO Hernandez** resumed the meeting and introduced the next speakers, Dr. Dewayne Goldman (Senior Advisor for Racial Justice and Equity), Leslie Weldon (Acting Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer), and Claudette Fernandez (Director of Program Equity and Opportunity Strategy).
- **Dr. Goldman** presented an overview of USDA's current approach to equity work and the compilation of historical recommendations.
- **Claudette Fernandez** provided an overview of USDA's mission areas' equity action plans and a few of the early accomplishments that resulted from this process.
- **Leslie Weldon** discussed her experience and USDA's shared goal to ensure its staff and organization is diverse, equitable, and inclusive with a value of service for USDA's customers.

Member Q&A

- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** emphasized the requirement for USDA to undergo a culture change and, to be most effective, the Commission's recommendations must have accountability built in.

- **Question from Member in-person [beginning of question inaudible]** asked what is in USDA's power to ensure equity and accountability trickle down to the county level and extensions.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh responded Audio Unclear**
- **Member Reed** asked how we hold people accountable at the local level and emphasized the importance of doing this to solve inequity.
- **Dr. Goldmon** brainstormed a few different options to further increase local accountability, like receipts of service that outline the quality of service.
- **Member Horne** asked how equity policies and trainings will grind down to the local levels. She emphasized the importance of institutionalize change at the local levels to ensure barriers are being removed.
- **Dr. Goldmon** laid out the need to start at the top and follow words with actions in order to begin the process.
- **Member Horne** shared her thoughts that reengaging community-based organizations could support these necessary changes.
- **Member Rainey** expressed the need for institutional change to also come at the local staff level and that USDA should set expectations for staff and evaluate performance with an equity lens.
- **Leslie Weldon** echoed Member Rainey's comments and stated USDA needed to establish a feedback loop with customers regarding the quality of service to establish some accountability at the local level.
- **Member Cousin** questioned how we prioritize the changes needed to accomplish culture change.
- **Dr. Goldmon** shared his thoughts that the answers to some of these questions are likely present in the more than one hundred historical recommendations related to DEIA.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** discussed her organization's efforts to solve these problems from the outside and suggested USDA elevate the Chief Diversity Officer position to the Assistant Secretary level to establish more accountability from the mission areas.
- **Member Racelis** stated that no funding exists for Hispanic serving institutions even though these institutions conduct outreach to local communities. He suggested that the Commission leverage these institutions.
- **Member Johnson** reminded the Commission that USDA's programs extend beyond agriculture, and suggested the Commission consider also focusing on rural utilities and housing.
- **Co-Chair Rodriguez** asked how the Commission can be proactive in ensuring USDA implements its recommendations.
- **Dr. Goldmon** shared USDA's commitment to provide updates on the implementation of these recommendations.
- **Member Sias-Hernandez** recognized the progress USDA has already made and encouraged members to take advantage of the presence of staff members in the room.
- **DFO Hernandez** closed the discussion for a break.

5. Oral Public Comments

- **DFO Hernandez** resumed the meeting and opened the period for public comments.
- The Commission heard public comments from:
 - Joe James
 - Ominique Garner
- **DFO Hernandez** reminded members of the public that they can submit written public comments to equitycommission@usda.gov and in future meetings they can register to provide an oral comment by visiting <https://www.usda.gov/equity-commission>.

6. Agriculture Subcommittee Report Out [See Meeting Slides]

- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** framed the goals of the Commission to establish a set of recommendations for the interim report and introduced the work of three Agriculture Subcommittee work groups.
- **Member Hang** presented the goals and emerging recommendations for the Access work group.
- **Member Lawrence** presented the goals and emerging recommendations for the Service work group.
- **Member Matteson and Member Hughes** presented the goals and emerging recommendations for the Performance work group.

Member Q&A

- **Member Reed** asked for more information on how the Access work group's emerging recommendations address the Access goals.
- **Member Lee** responded by outlining how the recommendations focus on increasing inclusivity for underserved groups to access USDA programs.
- **Member Cousin** expressed the need to be bolder in the Commission's recommendations. She asked what the goal of the Commission is to provide access for the 1.4 percent of farmers that are Black, or will the Commission look to provide access to those populations who have already been removed from the system.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** encouraged the Commission to continue to be transparent and honest about the recommendations required to create systematic change.
- **Co-Chair Rodriguez** asked if the Commission should look at setting a percentage of resources that should be allocated to underserved populations.
- **Member Corley** encouraged members to trust the intention of all other members and to work together to pursue this path.
- **Member Rainey** questioned how much discussion is centered on limited access to capital and encouraged discussion surrounding how to increase access to capital and funding availability.
- **Member Sias-Hernandez** asked Member Cousin the total number or percentage of farms owned by minority farmers.

- **Dr. Goldmon** responded that the total percentage is around eight percent. He then asked the Commission what would be considered a win: sustaining this eight percent or increasing the percentage of minority farmers.
- **Member Cousin** reflected on the need to ensure the Commission establish recommendations that are politically viable and avoid getting caught in litigation.
- **Member Matteson** shared his perception of a win by asking what percentage use the Farm Service Agency (FSA) as a lender or another source of income. He reminded the members that USDA is not the only place where farmers of color can go.
- **Member Racelis** responded to Member Matteson’s comments through emphasizing the fact that farmers without intergenerational wealth are more likely to need to use FSA loans. He also spoke about the need to invest in intellectual capital alongside access to capital.
- **Member Lomeli Corcoran** spoke to the need to include farmworkers in the conversations about access to capital and resources.
- **Member Ammons** stated that the Commission must focus on the people who have already lost land due to the legacy of discrimination. She also suggested USDA should consider a policy of “get with it or get going”.
- **Member Sias-Hernandez** agreed with Member Ammons but added that public service prevents the “get going” and as a result, cultural change is harder to conduct; however, she also added this process allows for wins to be more stable and harder to undo as well. She also mentioned the need for the Commission to make some hard decisions on what to let go to have some progress.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** shared how her organization and the tribal space as a whole is currently working with USDA on expanded minority lending through changes in language and program requirements. She invited all members to join them in phase two of their project.
- **Member Eubanks** discussed the need to really hold mission areas and employees accountable and add consequences for failing to do what is required.
- **Dr. Goldmon** asked the Commission to look at the distinction between discriminatory language in the Farm Bill versus discriminatory results due to language in the Farm Bill.
- **Member Lee** encouraged the Commission to remember that Asian American populations have been left out of the process as well and reminded members that they are all in the room to achieve the same purpose.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** discussed how the Commission’s discussions so far are already leading them to recommendations that will be different and more impactful than previous recommendations.
- **DFO Hernandez** closed the discussion for a break.

7. Current Status of Equity Efforts – Part 2

- **DFO Hernandez** resumed the meeting and introduced the next group of presenters (Under Secretary Robert Bonnie, Deputy Under Secretary Gloria Montañó Greene, Farm Service Agency Administrator Zach Ducheneaux, Risk Management Agency

Administrator Marcia Bunger, and USDA Office of Tribal Relations Director Heather Dawn Thompson).

- **Under Secretary Bonnie** acknowledged that many of the problems fall under his organization (Farm Production and Conservation) and outlined what they are doing at this moment to support equity efforts.
- **Administrator Ducheneaux** provided an overview of barriers facing farmers in accessing USDA programs.
- **Deputy Under Secretary Montaña Greene** recognized the importance of the Commission's role in pushing them forward and opened the conversation.

Member Q&A

- **Member Rainey** requested recent data on the racial make-up of County Committees across the country for the Commission to review.
- **Administrator Ducheneaux** responded to Member Rainey and ensured he would provide the demographics of County Committee make-up.
- **Member Matteson** requested clarification regarding the minority advisors appointed to serve on each County Committee.
- **Member Vogel** asked for further clarification of the role of County Committees and mentioned her experience that County Committees were not providing adequate advice or information.
- **Administrator Ducheneaux** responded to Member Vogel and stated the role of the County Committee is more of an “eye on the ground” approach – county staff may rely on County Committees to provide a profile of the needs of the farmers they represent. He mentioned County Committees are also responsible for requesting emergency conservation practices.
- **Administrator Bunger** responded to Member Vogel's question through mentioning crop insurance. She stated that the Risk Management Agency's customer-facing representatives, unlike other programs, were private brokers. She mentioned her observation that this may be an area of opportunity to advance equity.
- **Dr. Goldman** recommended the Commission analyze the County Committee structure based on its ability to deliver equitable programs.
- **Member Hang** asked how to enhance access to programs by ensuring farmers that do not own land directly have representation on the County Committees and mentioned the funding pause on the USDA COVID Food Assistance Program. He also discussed some counterintuitive requirements burdening Hmong farmers when enrolled in USDA programs.
- **Administrator Ducheneaux** responded that he would check the requirements to serve on a County Committee and mentioned he believed all producers could serve regardless of land ownership.
- **Deputy Under Secretary Montaña Greene** responded to Member Hang's questions over the USDA COVID Food Assistance Programs by stating USDA paused the funding

to gather more data on where the funds are going. She expressed her support for the Commission's efforts to investigate existing programs that they may be able to leverage to further equity alongside broader systemic changes.

- **Member Cousin** asked what barriers exist for developing opportunities to increase the number of private agents. She also suggested that members focus on the desired outcomes of the Commission rather than changing individual technical programs that may make a difference in the office but not grow opportunities for those who already lost land.
- **Administrator Bunger** committed to being as flexible as possible and using any authority they have in order to implement the recommendations of the Commission.
- **Administrator Bunger** drew from her experience to question why more farmers were not enrolled in crop insurance. She mentioned her belief that the lack of diversity among crop insurance agents is a reason why underserved communities do not participate in crop insurance.
- **Administrator Ducheneaux** stated his commitment to changing FPAC in a manner that cannot be undone when he leaves.
- **Member Horne** commended Administrator Ducheneaux's responsiveness and mentioned that while there is a need for more crop insurance agents, it's also critical to increase the capacity of people who do farm property assessments. She emphasized the need for extensive data regarding who is served by County Committees and made the suggestion to allow producers in heirs' property systems to participate in County Committees.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** stated you can serve on a County Committee as a producer in the heirs' property system and mentioned a document she sent to be shared with the members. She also mentioned the recommendation to allow the National Appeals Division to take some civil rights cases to assist with the caseload. She stated that one reason tribal producers do not participate in Risk Management Agency (RMA) programs is because of RMA's requirement to submit copies of tax filings as part of the application process. Tribal producers are not required to file taxes with the U.S. federal government.
- **Member Lawrence** asked whether newly elected members of County Committees/state committees are required to take any trainings.
- **Administrator Ducheneaux** responded to Member Lawrence's question by stating that County Committees are told of their role when appointed; however, he does not believe there is any training beyond this.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** further suggested that RMA's role in policy research and creation could provide another opportunity for more minority input.
- **Member Matteson** asked for clarification surrounding the 13,000 RMA insurance agents and stated that many of those agents worked in farm credit.
- **Under Secretary Bonnie** reminded members that the private insurance agent system is subsidized by USDA and encouraged members to bring forward recommendations to improve this system.

- **Member Hang** mentioned the challenges of federal disaster relief crop insurance including the timing, which does not align with specialty crop producers.
- **Member Cousin** spoke to the need to increase opportunities to small producers through overcoming the barriers to farmers in specialty crops.
- **Co-chair Bronaugh** thanked the members for the lively discussion and transitioned the meeting to the next presentation.

8. Office of Tribal Relations

- **DFO Hernandez** introduced Heather Dawn Thompson, Director of the Office of Tribal Relations.
- **Director Thompson** provided a brief history of USDA’s policies related to tribes and an overview of the systemic issues that all tribal communities are facing. She emphasized the importance of keeping in mind that all tribes face unique barriers.

Member Q&A

- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** echoed Director Thompson’s presentation and expressed two Farm Bill issues that her organization is pushing for: 1) reinstating a federal advisory committee for tribal equity and issues and 2) the expansion/funding of the 638 Authority, allowing for tribal sovereignty and treatment as a state.

9. Closing Remarks

- **Co-Chair Rodriguez** thanked members and staff for their presentations and comments. He emphasized the need for this process to be different and refrain from following the same roads in the past.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** thanked everyone for coming out and encouraged members to bring their recommendations tomorrow.
- **Secretary Vilsack** thanked all the members for their willingness and commitment to work on this very difficult and challenging issue in a department that has incredible reach and potential if it is structured right. Secretary Vilsack thanked Deputy Secretary Bronaugh and Co-Chair Rodriguez for their willingness to chair this important effort and thanked DFO Hernandez for leading this effort from the staff side.

MEETING AJOURNED

Day Two – May 11, 2022

| Equity Commission Members | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| Co-Chair Bronaugh | ✓ | Mireya Loza | ✓ |
| Co-Chair Rodriguez | ✓ | Charlie Rawls | ✓ |
| Shorlette Ammons | ✓ | Dr. Ronald Rainey | ✓ |
| Todd Corley | ✓ | Dr. Hazell Reed | ✓ |
| Ertharin Cousin | ✓ | Shirley Sherrod | x |
| Derrick Johnson | ✓ | Poppy Sias-Hernandez | ✓ |
| Yvonne Lee | ✓ | Rick Smith | ✓ |
| Elizabeth Lower-Basch | ✓ | Toni Stanger-McLaughlin | ✓ |
| Agriculture Subcommittee Members | | | |
| Dr. Gina Eubanks | ✓ | Gary Matteson | ✓ |
| Janssen Hang | ✓ | Dr. Alexis Racelis (Virtual) | ✓ |
| PJ Haynie (Virtual) | ✓ | Russell Redding | ✓ |
| Savi Horne (Virtual) | ✓ | Shari Rogge-Fidler | ✓ |
| Michelle Hughes | ✓ | Dr. Jennie Stephens | x |
| Kari Jo Lawrence | ✓ | Sarah Vogel | ✓ |
| Erica Lomeli Corcoran | ✓ | | |
| USDA Staff in Attendance | | | |
| Cecilia Hernandez, Designated Federal Officer | | Dr. Dewayne Goldmon, Racial and Justice Equity Advisor | |
| Gloria Montaño Greene, Deputy Undersecretary for Farm Production and Conservation | | | |

*Attendance list for members of the public can be found [here](#).

1. Opening of Meeting

- **Designated Federal Officer (DFO) Hernandez** opened the meeting to order and took attendance.
- **Co-Chair Rodriguez** welcomed members and expressed that the visit from the Secretary confirmed the commitment they have been hearing from the members and USDA staff to this work. He stated he is honored to participate.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** welcomed members and expressed gratitude for their decision to be a part of the work. She provided a recap of the presentations the day before and expressed appreciation for the transparency of the speakers. She encouraged members to continue to ask questions to understand the information they need and make recommendations.
- **DFO Hernandez** provided an overview of the [agenda](#) and objectives for the day.

2. Member Perspectives

- **Member Lomeli Corcoran** presented information about the problems facing farmworkers in America today. [see presentation]
- **Member Vogel** spoke about her work as a civil rights lawyer in the 1980s that made her become known as “The Farmers Lawyer” (also the title of her book).
- **Member Reed** spoke about his work as a representative of the National Black Growers Council.

Member Q&A

- **Member Ammons** spoke to the need for the Commission to focus on the shared experiences of all stakeholders and to avoid a mindset of competing interests between underserved groups. Rather, the Commission should solve the problems that impact all groups.
- **Member Johnson** expressed the importance of lived experience. He expressed his hope that, at the end of this process, the Commission produces a product they can be proud of and includes a range of different areas of USDA.
- **Member Loza** spoke to the complexity and diversity of the United States. She also discussed the history of farmworker exploitation across all races and its relation to immigration policy.
- **Member Cousin** shared her desire for the Equity Commission to avoid debates of whose pain is greater but rather recognize the opportunity the Commission has to help everyone overcome that pain through its actions.
- **Dr. Goldmon** shared his commitment to ensure the Commission’s recommendations are implemented and provided several questions for the Commission to consider related to COVID-19’s impact on the agriculture system and the history of diversity in USDA programs.
- **Member Racelis** discussed the progress USDA has made in terms of diversity. He also spoke to his experiences working at Hispanic serving institutions and the negative preconception minority students have towards the agriculture industry. He recommended the Commission identify and address the needs in education as a place to start.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** shared several stories from different farmers she spoke with who experienced barriers accessing programs. She emphasized the Commission’s goal to address past inequities and ensure the new and existing farmers and farmworkers have opportunities and support.

3. Member Discussions

- **Member Rogge-Fidler** outlined three buckets for the Commission to consider: 1) restoring trust in USDA through independent reviews, 2) welcoming people in, partnerships, and reducing the administrative burden, 3) and structural change that supports smaller producers.
- **Member Cousin** proposed that the Commission discuss the outcomes they want to achieve. She suggested that the outcomes of the Commission should have parity based

on race and ethnicity in the agriculture system and to improve the standards of living for all farmworkers. She recommended the Commission look at both how USDA can be more compliant with the law and how laws can change to achieve these outcomes.

- **Member Loza** spoke to the need to look at where USDA allocates its resources to ensure it provides to smaller farmers and not to corporate farmers. She requested a breakdown of the budget to see where USDA's resources are allocated.
- **Member Rainey** pulled from his experience working in DEIA in Arkansas to express his observations that discrimination is not always intentional, but rather the result of a lack of empathy or understanding. He suggested the Commission focus on the language regarding Requests for Applications (RFAs) at the agency level to ensure funding is accessible.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** expressed that USDA has only successfully changed the direction of inequities through working with all facets of agriculture. She stated the budget is the heart of this change and that unlike industries, minorities have been left out of the budget process.
- **Member Lee** discussed the need for ensuring corporate farms are held responsible for certain standards of equity and be required to assist smaller farmers if they receive funding from USDA.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** echoed Member Lee's comment and mentioned the progress that the administration has made so far in reallocating resources. She suggested the Commission start the conversation on USDA's current resource allocation and how USDA can further reallocate.
- **Deputy Under Secretary Montañó Greene** discussed the Farm Production and Conservation's flexibility in some budgetary tools and how the division is using research to target underserved communities with these funds.
- **Member Smith** drew from his professional experience to express the value cooperatives have for small farmers. He expressed his desire to help build a system that is inclusive and offers equitable opportunities for all.
- **Member Redding** echoed member Smith's comment and encouraged the Commission to use the definition of equity as a lens for this work and recognize there will be tension between aspirational and practical goals. He expressed his support for Member Reed's comments on base acreage mentioned in his presentation.
- **Member Rogge-Fidler** offered some suggestions to continue the progress of the Commission's work. She summarized her observations from the meeting so far by outlining 12 different topics. She also suggested the Subcommittee on Agriculture reassess its current structure and requested data on the 15 states with the largest underserved populations to ensure policies are targeted to the needs of these states.
- **Member Horne** acknowledged the richness of the conversation and suggested the Commission consider the root causes of inequities as they work to empower farmers.
- **Member Racelis** expressed the importance and impact universities and extension programs have on empowering small farmers. He suggested the Commission consider increasing investments in 1890 institutions and Hispanic-serving institutions.

- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** closed out the morning conversations and expressed her goals for the afternoon to discuss more specific recommendations on how the Commission can produce a solid interim report.

4. Member Discussions (Afternoon)

- **DFO Hernandez** reopened the meeting.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** encouraged members to stay focused on the root causes of systemic discrimination in agriculture throughout the afternoon's discussion.
- **Member Rawls** outlined three recommendations for the Commission to consider. 1) identify and bring voice to the current administration's equity efforts, 2) use the Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA) to regularly track and review USDA's equity plans, 3) and work with Office of the Secretary (OSEC) to ensure action plans are carried out. He also suggested loan modification funds that became temporarily available as a part of COVID relief should become permanent.
- **Member Horne** expressed her support for Member Rawls' ideas on loan modifications.
- **Member Matteson** discussed the differences between farm credit and USDA's loan programs, including farm credit's ability to be more flexible with loan repayments.
- **Dr. Goldmon** suggested that USDA should support farmers in precarious situations but also address the causes behind why farmers fail.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** informed the Commission that the OBPA is already beginning to perform the function of reviewing equity action plans. She suggested the Commission discuss how to establish long-lasting accountability for the action plans.
- **Member Rawls** expressed his hope to further enable the Deputy Secretary's office to hold mission areas accountable for equity action plans.
- **Member Vogel** drew from her experience to show that many solutions for struggling small farmers is tied to giving them more time, rather than more money. She recommended that flexibility in time for repayments should be built into USDA loans.
- **Member Johnson** suggested the Commission discuss enhancing farmworker standards and require equity plans from industries that access USDA funds. He also discussed suggestions to bolster and build more equitable cooperatives.
- **Member Cousin** echoed Member Johnson's comments and added that electric cooperatives could provide an opportunity to further invest in rural broadband. She also suggested fortifying the Chief Diversity Officer position with adequate funding to support accountability at USDA and increasing institutional bandwidth (through the Farm Bill) to support small specialty crop farmers financially and technically. She recommended the Commission work to ensure equitable access to knowledge through one-to-one matching for land grant universities and expanding the capacity of county offices.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** responded to Member Cousin's comments and asked how the Commission could look at the language to ensure accountability is sustained over time.
- **Member Cousin** suggested a bi-annual audit as part of the Farm Bill to ensure accountability.

- **Member Corley** focused on the need to institutionalize an audit through language in the Farm Bill.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** also questioned if it is a good idea to further analyze the formulation of funding to land-grant institutions.
- **Member Sias-Hernandez** suggested funds for flexibility for loans should also include grants, and that all recommendations should be intersectional by nature. She also spoke to the need to be explicit in recommendations for farmworkers versus farm-owners and using procurement as a lever.
- **Member Rainey** reminded the Commission that extensions are federally mandated and funded. He recommended that USDA pursue an assessment to ensure extensions are serving all of agriculture.
- **Member Loza** discussed the fact that, in the past, USDA has done more for farmworkers than it does today. She reminded the Commission that there is a historical precedent for USDA to empower and protect farmworkers in ambitious ways.
- **Co-Chair Rodriguez** spoke to USDA's capacity and budget to influence the food system. He suggested that one necessary outcome is to ensure a secure food supply and recommended USDA use its resources to incentivize better treatment of farmworkers.
- **Member Lawrence** echoed members' suggestions regarding land grant institutions and added that USDA should remove the competitive nature of grant applications between institutions.
- **Member Lomeli Corcoran** recommended that the Commission investigate funding key positions in USDA and provided an example, the farmworker coordinator, which is not receiving funding.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** asked members of the Commission if there is anything USDA can do differently in terms of planning or resource allocation.
- **Co-Chair Rodriguez** mentioned the Commission may have opportunities to work with the Secretary to address immigration reform and to support a more legal workforce in the farmworker industry.
- **Member Rainey** suggested intentional language in grant funding and applications could ensure extension programs work to serve all of agriculture and support socially disadvantaged farmers.
- **DFO Hernandez** recapped on the conversation and asked how the Commission would like to use the last 30 minutes of the public meeting.

5. Recap and Next Steps

- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** asked the Commission to consider whether the preliminary list of recommendations reflected the goals the Agriculture Subcommittee was charged to address.
- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** suggested the Office of Tribal Relations and the Chief Diversity Offices be elevated into Assistant Secretary positions and expressed that if these offices succeeded, this could serve as an example for other departments.

- **Member Corley** provided suggestions on how the Commission could prioritize and deliver the recommendations, including how to make recommendations actionable.
- **DFO Hernandez** reminded members that these recommendations could be further built-out and prioritized by members, but all deliberation would be done in a public setting. She also mentioned the Commission would be doing a lot of the preparatory work behind the scenes.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** opened the floor for members to further discuss recommendations regarding farm programs.
- **Member Vogel** asked for further information regarding the format of recommendations.
- **DFO Hernandez** responded that the Commission has a template that goes beyond the recommendation and asks for evidence, the problem, and implementation plans.
- **Member Rawls** mentioned he wanted to look more into a few different issues, like County Committees and the National Appeals Division. He suggested that it may be helpful to hear directly from the National Appeals Division.
- **Dr. Goldmon** recapped on issues that required more information for the Commission to make informed decisions, including crop acreage basis, County Committees, and National Appeals Division.
- **Member Horne** mentioned her workgroup discussed how to increase minority participation in County Committees and requested data on voter eligibility, demographics, outreach, and responses in elections. She also suggested the Commission look at how to bolster USDA's conflict of interest investigations across the Department, provide receipts for service, and conduct periodic audits. She also asked Dr. Goldmon to further discuss the crop acreage basis.
- **Dr. Goldmon** responded by providing a brief history of crop acreage basis and mentioned the County Committees have had a major influence on this process.
- **Member Cousin** further recommended that the Commission focus on improving access to capital (financing), launching targeted technical assistance outreach programs that can meaningfully improve farm performance and outputs, and increasing the bandwidth of county offices to support with applications.
- **Member Hughes** framed the next iteration of the Farm Bill as the last opportunity to support this generation of new farmers. She also mentioned that student loan debt is one of the major barriers facing young farmers and suggested that young farmers should be included in the public student loan forgiveness program. She also discussed the need for increased non-profit funding to be paired with programs to increase non-profit accountability and suggested creative ideas outside of private landownership to increase equitable land access.
- **Member Corley** encouraged Member Hughes' representation of young farmers in this room and mentioned the importance of engaging the next generation of farmers.
- **Member Loza** mentioned the need for programs to allow for undocumented farmworkers to become farm owners, like requiring only a Tax Identification Number (TIN) number for program access rather than a Social Security Number.

- **Member Stanger-McLaughlin** suggested USDA hold an annual convening on equity where equity related statistics are presented. She mentioned this would further support the Commission’s work.
- **Member Lawrence** supported Member Stanger-McLaughlin’s comments and mentioned they had a quarterly convening in South Dakota so they could assess the needs of underserved farmers based on the statistics presented each quarter.
- **Member Reed** expressed his concern at the lack of well-trained young experts in agriculture.

6. Closing Remarks

- **DFO Hernandez** requested a consensus from Commission members to keep the list established by the Agriculture Subcommittee and through the member discussions throughout the public meeting to serve as the basis for recommendations. All Commission members agreed with this next step. DFO Hernandez also explained that, due to Member Sherrod not being in attendance for this public meeting, no vote would be required, and that Member Rainey and Member Stanger-McLaughlin would become the Commission’s representatives on the Agriculture Subcommittee.
- **Co-Chair Rodriguez** expressed his excitement for how far the Commission has come and for the future of this work.
- **Co-Chair Bronaugh** thanked the members for their commitment to this work.
- **DFO Hernandez** adjourned the meeting.

MEETING AJOURNED

I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing minutes are accurate and complete.

Jewel Bronaugh, PhD.
Co-Chair, USDA Equity Commission
Deputy Secretary, USDA

Arturo S. Rodriguez
Co-Chair USDA Equity Commission

APPENDIX

Members of the Public: Attendance List

| First Name | Last Name | First Name | Last Name | First Name | Last Name |
|------------|----------------------|--------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Chris | A | Clifton | Gilchrist | Ralph | Noble |
| Gbenga | Ajilore | Regina | Ginyard | Avriel | Null |
| Ferry | Akbar Buchanan | Maria | Goldberg | Sherran | Nutson |
| Reginald | Alexander | Roberto | González Jr. | Victoria | Orellana |
| Shana | Alford | Vanessa | Gordon | Rachel | Owen |
| Lyle | Allen | Dorothy | Grady | J | P |
| Natalie | Alms | Marco | Guerrero | Anthony | Pahnke |
| M. Carlo | Altman | Shalonda | Guy-Kangah | Samantha | Parrish |
| Juan | Alvarez | Victoria | Haber | Jestin | Patton |
| Torre' | Anderson | Jodi | Halvorson | alvin | peer |
| AL | Anderson- Lazo | Hubert | Hamer | Ed | Penny |
| Rhonda | Anthony | Justynn | Hammond | Cliff | Penwell |
| Liz | Archuleta | Jamiah | Hargins | Anita | Petty |
| alejandra | arciniega | Ben | Harms | Kim | Pevia |
| Tonya | Armstrong Olusola | Michele | Hawkins | Molly | Pfaffenroth |
| Rudy | Arredondo | William | Henry | Minh | Pham |
| Bill | Ashton | Herman J | Hernandez | Shielder | Pressley |
| Louis | Aspey | Rocio | Hernandez | Edward | Profit |
| michael | aucoin | Victor | Hernandez | Christine | Prouty |
| Denise | Banks | Marsheela | Hines | Julio | Puentes |
| Megan | Barnes | Waymon | Hinson | Lisa | Purnell |
| Walter | Battle | Janie | Hipp | Jamie | Quarfeld |
| Benny | Bauer | Stephanie | Ho | Carla | Quincy |
| Marissa | Beinhauer | Horace | Hodge | Susana | Quiroz |
| Belinda | Bell | Ferd | Hoefner | Ram | Ramdass |
| Rhonda | Benton | Karla | Hollis | Kelli | Reynolds |
| Rajade | Berry-James | Dr. JohnElla | Holmes | Kenesha | Reynolds |
| Monique | Bethell | Brandon | Honeycutt | Justin | Rhee |
| Karl | Binns | Beau | Ingle | Jesse | Ridge |
| DeShawn | Blanding | Wytonya | Jackson | Erika | Rincon |
| Sarah | Bobrow- Williams | Joe | James | Kelly | Robinson |
| Christine | Bond | Vionette | James | Carine | Rodrigues |
| Alex | Boskovich | Nicholas | Jennings | Diamond | Rodriguez |
| Philip | Brasher | Sherron | Jernigan | Candice | Rogers |
| Emy | Brawley | Allison | Johnson | Jean | Rose |
| Shawn | Broadnax | Anna | Johnson | Marla | Rose |

| | | | | | |
|----------|-------------|---------------|--------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Hassey | Brooks | Ashlee | Johnson | Periasamy | S |
| RODNEY | BROOKS | Elizabeth | Johnson | Rosa | Saavedra |
| Warren | Brooks | June | Johnson | Tessa | Salzman |
| Sylvia | Brown | Richard | Jones | Shirley | Samson |
| EVETTE | BROWNING | Tiffany | Jones | Stan | Santos |
| Traci | Bruckner | Beverly | Kegley | SHelby | Saucier |
| Nathan | Bruemmer | renee | keitt | Margo | Schlanger |
| Isabel | Brumley | Ryan | Kelley | Michelle | Schroeder-Moreno |
| Tinelle | Bustam | Amanda | Kim | Emma | Scott |
| Cinnamon | Butler | jackie | klippenstein | Samuel | Scott |
| Dion | Butler | Jeff | Knishkowsy | Alexis | Settineri |
| Hektor | Calderon | PAULARIE | KNOX | Jennifer | Silveri |
| carmen | carrasco | Louie | Krak | April | Simpson |
| WENNDY | CARRASCO | Starry | Krueger | charles | smith |
| Leticia | Carreon | James | Kubla | Matthews | Smith |
| Daniel | Carrillo | Winona | Lake Scott | Sandy | Song |
| Kathryn | Carruth | Mike | Lavender | Eryn | Spangler |
| Kimberly | Carter | Avery | Lavoie | rodney | stone |
| Edyael | Casaperalta | Zulima | Leal | Delores | Taylor |
| Keely | Cervantes | Harold | Lee | Leslie | Thompson |
| Tara | Chadwick | Martin | Lemos | tessa | thraves |
| Alyssa | Charney | Sheree | Lesch | Jacob | Titterington |
| Jennifer | | | | | |
| Norah | Coile | Keon | Lewis | Andrew | Tobin |
| Emily | Cole | Alondra | Lomeli | Terrence | Trimble |
| Jonathan | Corcoran | Hanna | Love | Cynthia | Vanderpool Garcia |
| Elliot | Cordano | Lawrence | Lucas | Gladys | Vaughn |
| Alex | Cordova | Angelo | Maceira | Tharun | Vemulapalli |
| Zachary | Couture | Md Salahuddin | Majumder | Gabrielle | Vignone |
| Jaclyn | Dallas | LeTonya | Mann | Ellen | Vollinger |
| Ruby | De La Garza | Ben | Marcus | Andrew | Walchuk |
| Andrea | Delgado | chad | martin | Carl P | Wallace |
| Vivian | Dickson | Chief Andre | Mathews | Tiffany | Wallace |
| Jocelyn | Dillard | Mia | Mayberry | Veronica | Watson |
| Anne | Divjak | Nicole | McCrone | Vanessa | Watters |
| Darrell | Dixon | Edena | McDaniel | Portia | White |
| Emma | Dixon | Leander | McDonald | Noah | Wicks |
| Leah | Douglas | xavier | mcdonald | Keith | Widdowson |
| Maribel | Duran | Angela | McKee Brown | Eston | Williams |
| Irma | Durand | Orlando | McMeans | Tammy | Willis |
| Tania | Ellersick | Karen | McSwain | Andreka | Wills |

| | | | | | |
|-----------|----------|---------|-----------------|---------|--------------|
| Mike | Espy | etienne | melcher philbin | Suzette | Wilson |
| Grant | Ewing | Dawn | Mellion | Haley | Winter |
| ASHLEY | FEHR | Shana | Miles | Damali | Wynter |
| Drew | Felz | Carroll | Mills | LISA | YELLOW LUGER |
| Katharine | Ferguson | Mara | Momenee | Lisa | Yellow Luger |
| Sederis | Fields | carolyn | Mugar | B | Z |
| J Robert | Fraze | Sonya | Neal-Reeves | katie | zenk |
| Gisselle | Frias | Aaliyah | Nedd | John | Zippert |
| Timothy | Gannon | Chris | Nelson | | |
| Juan | Garcia | Kirstin | Nelson | | |
| nathan | garcia | Demalda | Newsome | | |
| Ominique | Garner | Kenya | Nicholas | | |
| Sally | Gifford | Paola | Nieves | | |