

**Producer:** Welcome all, and thank you for joining today's teleconference, Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers, ACMF teleconference meeting. Please note that all lines will be muted until the open comment portion of the call. We will provide you with instructions on how to participate at that time. With that, I'll turn the call over to Eston Williams, DFO. Please go ahead.

**Eston:** Hello and good afternoon all. My name is Eston Williams and today I am serving as the Designated Federal Officer also known as the DFO. This is the third meeting of the United States Department of Agriculture Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers. I would like to welcome the 15 appointed member of the committee and thank everyone for participating.

Secretary of Agriculture appointed committee members that represent social disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, nonprofit organizations, civil rights organization, or professions and institution of higher education. All members have been briefed on ethics, civil rights, and their responsibilities. As the DFO, it is my responsibility to make sure that the committee adheres to requirement established by the Federal Advisory Committee Act also known as FACA.

The FACA was established in 1972, firmly recognizing the merits of seeking the advice and assistance of our citizen. The committee was established pursuant to section 14008 of the Food Conservation and Energy Act of 2008, public law 110-246, 122 Stat 1651, and is managed in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act known as FACA.

First being authorized by Congress in 2008, the committee has served to advise the USDA Secretary on the following items: the implementation of the section 2501 program by the Food Agricultural Conservation Trade Act of 1990, measures on maximizing the participation of minority farmers and ranchers in USDA programs and civil rights activities with USDA as such activities relate to participate in such programs.

The committee is managed by the USDA Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement. The committee plays an important role in advising USDA on challenges and opportunities which shape programs and policies impacting minority farmers in the United States. The committee is to provide advice that is relevant, objective, and open to the public.

At this time allow me to introduce to you all our Acting Director for the Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement, Ms. Jacqueline Davis-Slay. Welcome Ms. Davis-Slay.

**Jacqueline:**

Thank you, Mr. Williams, and thank you to all participants of this third annual meeting, this third meeting, I should say. Listen, the Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement, we are committed to our minority farmers. You all play a very vital role in really in establishing the policies and guiding a program that can assist our minority farmers. Listen, we're looking to continue to partner with our organizations, our community-based organizations, our institutions of higher learning, and really in providing those resources that USDA has to offer to our minority farmers.

I've spent about 30 years here at USDA and worked in 10 agencies and offices, and so I have a unique set of skills that really can serve our minority farmers and ranchers. I am committed to it. The Office of Partnership and Public Engagement is committed to it. We want to look at those issues that our minority farmers and ranchers are facing. We want to hear from you all. We want that dialogue to continue and we will connect you all, those farmers, and the ranchers with the agencies and to assist them in really tweaking and improving those programs that service our producers.

We continue to seek marketing opportunities for our farmers and ranchers. This office, it is the lead and outreach and partnership, and we're continuing to communicate with private sector industry, communicate with other agencies, communicate with other federal departments on all programs, resources, and opportunities that can really serve our minority farmers and ranchers. OPPE, USDA, we are here for you. We want to hear what you have to say. We want to hear those recommendations that really can improve our programs and service to you all. Thank you again, and I look forward to continuing the work ahead.

**Eston:**

Thank you. Ms. Jacqueline Davis-Slay. Next, we will have Harvey Reed III who serve as the Chairperson for the Advisory Committee of Minority Farmers. Harvey, all yours.

**Harvey:**

Good afternoon. I want to thank everybody for being here today. I'm going to thank those from the USDA agency as to taking the time out to come and give us the things that we need to know in regards to what we trying to do for the minority farmers, ranchers, and veterans'

advisory committee. At this time, before I go forward, I'd like to call out the members of this 15-member committee that we have.

At this time, we have Mr. William Miller. He's from Ohio. He's our Vice Chair/he's also our subcommittee chairperson. We have Dr. Claud Evans, who is also subcommittee chairperson for us. He's out of Oklahoma. We have Dr. Dewayne Goldmon out of Arkansas. He's also participating on our committee. This is his third time around. We are glad that he's here to support us in what we are doing and to give his input that he's learned over the last three times working on this committee.

I'll call a lot of names that has this doctor in front of them. We have Dr. Elsa Selina Sanchez. She's from Pennsylvania. We have Dr. Duncan Chembezi. He is from Arkansas. He won't be with us today because he's trying to get some medical things taken care of on his own. Also, we have Ms. Arnetta Cotton. She's from Oklahoma. We have Ms. Michelle Cruz, she's from Rhode Island. We have Mr. Ivan H. Howard. He's from Florida. We have Ms. Carolyn Jones, she's from Mississippi. We have Mr. Cary Junior. from Minnesota. We have Ms. Lois Kim, she's out of Texas, and we have Ms. Kimberly Ratcliff, she's also out of Texas. We have Mr. Delmar Stamps, he's also from Mississippi.

As you can see, we have a wide array of individuals from different cross section in agribusiness, and agriculture. These are the individuals that sits here on this committee to help us to give the advice and make the recommendation to the Secretary, or those in the Secretary office. This is our full responsibility.

I would like to thank all of you who are watching or listening to today's telecast, not telecast, actually a teleconference, it's supposed to be telecast and understand that this advisory committee is aware of the 2501 Program. It is there to serve people of color under the USDA Farm Bill, which is dedicated to address the specific needs of the farmers and ranchers who are Black American, Indian, Latino, Asian Americans, and military veterans.

We're here to advise that the newly USDA Secretary, when he's confirmed, he has a lot on his hand right now to help us to alleviate some of the disparity that has plagued those underserved communities that have been agreed by the funding and also outreach and technical assistance. The advisory committee was not functioning under the 2018

Farm Bill that the Congress had affirm participation and mandatory funding for us to work through.

By not being there, we weren't AOL, we were just eliminated from the process under the previous administration, which declined to panel this particular committee, not until July of last year, we are finally here. We can't say it's too little too late, but we here, we here to serve. This 15-member committee has the vast responsibility to represent 50 States and also six US territory, so that's a wide range of what the USDA has to do, because all the way from Saipan, all the way down to Puerto Rico.

We need to assure that the USDA do right by everyone in breaking down the walls of division of the socioeconomic status. The heart of our work will include our commitment to protecting the civil rights of all people of color in the USDA programs, and to support the efforts that the 2501 funding would no longer be redirected for other purposes as under the previous administration that was authorized by Congress to stay in the right manner. Also, to assure that all the people of color in agriculture in rural, urban and veterans are treated the same, regardless of their race, color, national origin, religion, gender, disability, and age, by providing that they receive a receipt of service before they leave any USDA center.

With that, this is my opening statement in regard to where we are, and what we're here for, and what this committee stands for. There's 15 of us. We have a positive DFO, who has worked with us tremendously since we got back together. We weren't restructured, we were just brought back again because Congress said we need to be back here. We're the only committee under 2018 Farm Bill that represent people of color. We go back far as 2008. It is our job to protect those that has been aggrieved by the process, and we're here to try to make the wrong and get it right. With that, I'm going to turn everything back over to our DFO, Mr. Eston Williams.

**Eston:**

Thank you, Chair Harvey Reed III for that. We will move right along without agenda. Next, we have on our agenda would be the USDA agency briefing. I noticed on my agenda I had someone come in from the Secretary Office of Agriculture. I don't believe that we have anyone on today from that office, if so, here's the opportunity for you to speak. Hearing none, we'll go to our next speaker. I'm sorry did somebody chime in. Hearing none, we'll go to our next speaker. Our next speaker is none other than Kenya Nicholas. She is the Program Director for the USDA 2501 Program. Mrs. Kenya, it's all yours.

Kenya:

Good afternoon to Chair Reed and Mr. Bill Miller and our esteemed members of the committee. Eston, DFO for the committee, great job to all our guests and USDA colleagues on the line. I thank you all for participating in this very important committee, especially in a critical time of need that we're in, especially amongst the minority farming community. It's so glad to see this committee reconvene, and if I can ever be of assistance, I'm just a phone call away.

The committee has a huge responsibility because minority farmers' lives right now can be changed merely from your recommendations that you set forth to the Secretary. He has a tall order, but I do understand that his priorities for this administration will be racial equality, and that's one of the tall orders that you all have. I've seen some of the recommendations come through the committee that's been implemented that there's positive things in the minority farming community.

I encourage you all to continue in that spirit and work together for the good of committee. I know some of the decisions and some of the discussions you may not all agree on, but if you keep that minority farmer that's waiting and wanting to present information and hear from them to set forth these great recommendations that I know you're going to bring to USDA, it's a win-win for everyone.

Again, this new administration brings forth new priorities, well needed priorities, and you all are uniquely positioned so that we can keep our minority farmers and ranchers at the forefront. I did want to give a special shout out to a couple of your committee members or our committee members, Ms. Carolyn Jones, and Kimberly Ratcliff, I've seen you all had a few press opportunities. I really want to say that my hat goes off to you ladies.

They were featured in some of the USDA and native publications from the Frank Taylor shop down in Mississippi Louisiana area. I want to thank you for being involved, a long-term partner. You're on the ground. We need you. We're here in DC making programmatic decisions, but we need your input as a committee. You all were selected as a cream of the crop from a panel of our peers in outreach professionals here in DC. We just want to make sure you all understand that your recommendations can greatly improve the lives of our minority farmers and ranchers.

We want to make sure that we address the downward trend of the minority farmers and ranchers. I know most of you have seen the NASS

report. When I say NASS, it's the National Agricultural Statistical Service. Whatever you all can bring forward from your constituents that could help them in reversing that trend, we're all for it.

I know the 2501 funding for this fiscal year, we have unprecedented dollars. We have our regular Farm Bill funding and appropriations, which is about \$20 million this fiscal year, and for stimulus, we've received 37.5 million in addition to that, that's 50% of the 75 million that was allotted for the FOTO, which is Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach program. That funding is shared with the BFRDP, Beginning Farmer Rancher Development Program. That's a gross amount of 57 and a half million dollars, ladies, and gentlemen.

We're not a 100% certain of how we're going to roll that out. We are going to get the advice and guidance from our new Secretary, but trust and believe, those funds will be put to a great use. If you have some recommendations on how we can better serve, how we can maximize our outreach with these dollars, please make sure that you put forth that information. What makes this program so competitive is that there's no matching funds and that's to respond to the sensitivity of the social disadvantaged community.

We're seeking to get innovative funding strategies so that we can impact the lives of those social disadvantaged farmer and rancher communities. Again, we need you, we need to enhance our outreach and training. We need to bring forth and increase the awareness of all of our federal programs, especially with USDA and farming, because we're situated in OPPE where we work across all agency lines. I like to look at 2501 as the front door to resources, programs, services that can serve our minority farming population.

Having said that, again, Eston, we must strike this iron while it's hot. If I can be of any assistance to any of you committee members, please feel free to reach out to me. We're always here, as Jacque mentioned, we're always here and we stand ready to assist in any way possible. Having said that, to a great meeting to you all. Thank you.

**Eston:**

Great. Thank you, Ms. Kenya. It is always good to hear updates on 2501 program. Next on our agenda we have Mr. Bill Ashton. He is the Military Veterans Agricultural liaison. His title is with USDA Veterans and Agriculture. Bill, all yours. Go ahead.

**Bill:**

Thank you Eston. Can you hear me?

**Eston:** Yes. We hear you loud and clear. Go ahead, Bill.

**Bill:** Okay. Super. Good afternoon, everyone. Mr. Chairman, members of the committee and Eston my colleagues at USDA, I truly enjoy anytime I get the opportunity to speak to this Advisory Committee. I have a passion for our veterans. In the briefing that I give to the public, I talk about the three E's that we operate under within the Veterans Agricultural Liaison. One is employment, the other one is education, and the third one of course is entrepreneurship, where farmers fit in the three E's.

The first one of employment, I would just like to share with you the fact that, in 2019, USDA hired approximately 1,900 veterans into our offices throughout the United States. In 2020, we hired over 2,000 veterans within USDA. USDA truly looks for veterans. There's a number of different ways that veterans can get direct hiring capabilities and things like that. We're very proud of what we're doing and continue to work with DOD and the VA with their evoke readiness and everything like that, to try to help our veterans get jobs.

On the education part, we do have the 1890s and 1994 scholars that a lot of people I find when I'm talking to them don't know about. I just bring that up, that that's a fully paid scholarship room and board, books, et cetera. That's for people getting degrees in agriculture. That's important to get that word out there and that's open to everyone that trends, it doesn't matter, you could apply for them. But I will say it's very competitive. I don't want think that "Oh, well, I'll just sign up for that and get a scholarship." Doesn't happen like that. It is competitive.

The third one is the entrepreneurship. As my colleagues here at USDA and within OPPE, one of the missions that we have is the development of rural America. Obviously, our farmers are entrepreneurs but even just opening a small business where we have loans through rural development are some areas that we can help our veterans and others.

I do want to just bring up a couple of things that are out there, but in the NIFA website and Mr. Chairman, if you don't have this information and Eston, I'm more than happy to share with you, but in the 2018 Farm Bill there was money appropriated to NIFA for stresses and resources for farm and ranch families. They're having a webinar, I think it's this month, but off the top of my head, I don't have the date, but again, I'll share that with the chairman and the DFO.

There's also one here that I think is important. There are many a times I hear small groups, small businesses, whatever it may be saying. "I have

no clue on how to write a grant. I don't have a grant writer," et cetera, et cetera. NIFA is holding grant writing tips and questions and answers webinars. Again, I'll share that with the chairman and that's from NIFA also. These are the type of things that we want to educate people with, get the word out about what we're doing there.

With that, that's all I have, except for my one last thing that Mr. Chairman I always mention is the fact that, if you really have any questions about any of our programs, go to the local USDA office. There's one pretty much in every county. I ask you to go in there and speak to whether it's NRCS, FSA, or RD, whoever it may be and go in there and get it. Because you can talk to us up here at the headquarters, most of the time we're doing just the policies and the people who are down on the ground are the ones who can really answer your questions. With that, I'll turn it back over to the DFO. Eston, all yours.

**Eston:** Thank you, Bill. It's always a pleasure having you to give those updates. We enjoy having you as our colleague as well. Next on our agenda, we have Mr. Troy Joshua, Director of Western Field Operation. Troy is with the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. Troy, how about it.

**Troy:** Thank you, Eston. First of all, I would like to thank the Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers for giving me this opportunity to share information and pertaining to what NASS does and what NASAS does not do, but also provide some information from the 2017 census at the US level. NASS mission is to provide timely, accurate, and useful statistics and service to US agriculture. NASS was established in 1863, named the Division of Statistics, where we published the crop conditions report, which continues today on a weekly basis during the growing season.

NASS employs approximately 900 employees throughout the country, servicing all 50 States and US territory. What NASS does is, we collect, assemble, process, and disseminate US agricultural data, including over 450 reports annually. We conduct the detailed census of agriculture every five years; we provide data collection and consultation services to other state and federal partners as well as other countries. We partner with the State Department of Agriculture, trade associations, universities, and others. Not only that, but we also conduct research to advance the statistical service.

What NASS does not do is, we do not set policy. We are not a regulatory agency, we do not disclose the identity of respondents, because a lot of



individual will provide very detailed information about their operation and I can get fined or put in jail if I intentionally disclose someone's information. But finally, we do not favor any group above any others. When we state that the data's going to be released to the public at noon or three o'clock Eastern Time, everyone receive that information at the same time.

I mentioned previously that NASS publishes over 450 reports and Congress mandates that we focus on, especially on seven different principle economic indicators, they are hogs and pigs, cattle on feeds, grain [00:26:45 inaudible], crop production, perspective planning, which highlight what the farmers intend to plant as well as acreage, what the farmers planted and agricultural prices.

Now just to share some information with you pertaining towards the census of agriculture. In 1974, the census of agriculture had defined a farm as any place from which a thousand dollars or more of agricultural products were produced and sold or normally would have been sold during a census year. The latest census numbers were from the 2017 census. If I look at data from 1997 to 2017, for a number of farms and land in farms, you will see slight decreases, sorry.

In 2017, just to share some numbers with you and not to bore you, but 2017, the number of farms were 2,042,220. In 2012 it was 2,109,303. That was a decrease of 3.2%. Land in farms was 900,217,576 in 2017. In 2012, it was 914,527,657. That's a decrease of 1.6%. Doing some calculation and deriving the average farm size, in 2017, there was 441 acres, in 2012, it was 434 acres. That's an increase of 1.6%. What that tells me is that the number of farms is decreasing at a more rapid pace than the land in farms.

I mentioned to you previously above the two million farms of which Texas has 248,416 in 2017. Missouri, the next closest number of farms state had 95,320. Iowa had 86,104 and Oklahoma had 78,531. But all of this information that I shared with you, I started off with the US level then I have county level, but all of this information is also available for you at the county level as well.

I mention about the two million farms within the US but if I break it up by size categories, 70% of the farms in the US had less than 180 acres. Even though the average size was 441, but 70% of them were pretty much small farms and small farm operations. Now to refer back to that

900 million acres, 45% of those acres were permanent pasture, crop land was 44% and the other 11% were woodlands and other acres.

Now to share some information pertaining towards the demographics data, and I'm going to switch from the farm or the farm operation to the farmers/producers/ranchers. Just to share a little information, in 2017, there were 3,399,836 farms in the US with an average age of 57.5. Now, I'm going to break down that 3.4 million farmers to Hispanic, American Indian, or Alaskan native, Asians, Blacks, native Hawaiians, or Pacific Islanders and then whites.

Now there are 3.4 million farms. Hispanics had 112,451 with an average age of 55. American Indians or Alaska natives had 79,198, with an average age of 56.6. Asians had 25,310, with an average age of 54.9. Blacks, they had 48,697 producers/farmers/ranchers with an average age of 60.8. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders had 5,296 with an average age of 54.9. Last but not least, White, there were 3,269,738 with an average age of 57.5.

In 2017, we asked a question pertaining to towards military service. That was the first time we asked the question like that. Referring back to their 3.4 million farmers/ranchers/producers, those with military services, that number was 370,619. Previously I had stated that, holistically, the 3.4 had an average age of 57.5, and the ones with military service has an average age of 67.9.

Now, referring back to that 370,619 of those, and looking at a percent, 95% of those were White, 2% of those were American Indian or Alaska natives, 2% of those were Black or African-Americans, and 1% had more than one rates reported. For the 370,000 farmers with military service, 3% of those were Hispanic. All this information that I have shared with you is on our website, [www.nass.usda.gov](http://www.nass.usda.gov).

Currently, NASS is preparing for the 2022 census of agriculture. The questionnaire has been finalized, and then hopefully somebody in our local area has reached out to you to try to develop a relationship in order for us to be successful marketing the census of agriculture, but not just the census of agriculture, but all of our surveys. We have been currently preparing a marketing plan, encouraging farmers to report primarily over the internet or by mail. NASS is shaping for the future, where we are modernizing our data collection plan, as well as modernizing how we are providing this information to the public.

My information, how I can be reached is, my telephone number is (202) 720-8220. My email address is troy.joshua@usda.gov. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share a little bit about what NASS has available to us, because this, census of agriculture dataset is very rich and not only is that at the US level, but if that's the US State and County level as well. Thanks a lot, Eston.

**Eston:**

Thank you, Troy. Always great to have those updates from you, Troy. Moving right along on the agenda. Next, we have, I think our first time with her, and we want to give her a warm welcome too, we have Dr. Carrie Castille, Director of NIFA. Of course, for some of you all don't know the acronyms NIFA stand for is for National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Dr. Castille, all yours.

**Carrie:**

Thanks Mr. Williams. Also, thank you, Chairman Reed, and members of the committee for the opportunity to present on some of our NIFA programs. I do want to give a shout out to Bill Ashton for highlighting some of our NIFA program. You gave me a great segue and a great start. Thanks, Bill, for highlighting those for us. Just to let you know, since I'm new, native Louisianan from South Louisiana, a little community called Breaux Bridge, Louisiana.

I couldn't be more excited to have an opportunity to talk about some of the things that we're doing. First and foremost, I want you to know that we're really doing a deep dive and taking a look at our agency at NIFA both internally as well as our external facing programs and partners to see how we can do better in making sure that we're addressing the needs of our minority farmers, but also ways that we can ensure equity amongst our program, amongst our panels and the way that we do business. It's a commitment for me, it's a commitment for the administration, and it's something that I really take seriously. I want to emphasize that first and foremost.

For those of you who aren't really aware of NIFA, our primary mission is to invest and support research education and extension programs that solve societal problems. For me, I look at this as an opportunity to really create real-world solutions to real-world problems. What I've done is, I've asked the staff to look at our programs and see how we can best align with the priorities of the administration. But I want to hear from you as to some of the ways that we can best serve you as we look at addressing some of the challenges.

First, let me start, and I have a lot of information, but let me start with one of the programs that I'm really excited about, which is our Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development program. A lot of you know that we have grants that are available to our land grant institutions, but I do want to emphasize that they're awarded to State, local, tribal, and regional networks and public and private partnerships. This program really supports education, mentoring and technical assistance for beginning farmers and ranchers.

One thing that I want to mention is, when we start, again, looking at the agency itself is, we have some opportunities for mentoring and making sure that we are representative of the communities in which we serve. If it's Pathway or other programs like that, we want to make sure that again, we're doing things both internally and externally to make sure that we're preparing our workforce to be able to meet those needs.

But again, Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development program is a great program and it's projected to be funded at about \$16.5 million for 2021. Chairman Reed, I want to emphasize to you that, and some of this funding is available for former co-ops, as well as other networks and partnerships. We're really geared towards socially disadvantaged veterans and really looking at geographic balance as a priority for this program.

Another one that we're excited about is AgrAbility. It provides Ag education assistance directed at individuals with disabilities, their families, those who work in farming and farm related occupations. Many of our veterans and service-connected disabilities have benefited from our AgrAbility program. Just to let you know, we support projects through State Cooperative Extension Systems and nonprofit disability organizations.

Our estimated total funding for this program is \$4.3 million. If you're interested in learning more about that program, reach out to your local cooperative extension system. If you have some difficulty in that, which you shouldn't please feel free to reach out to me.

Another one is, the Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities from Military Veterans program, our AgVets program. It provides grants to nonprofit organizations for our training, specifically designed for military veterans. Project may also offer workforce readiness and employment prospects for our service-disabled veterans. The estimated total program for this program... the funding for this program is \$4.8 million.

I do want to emphasize, especially in NIFA's role, that we do help fund programs for historically Black land grant universities and colleges. Our local land grant universities and colleges provide cooperative extension programs for our agents, our 4-H agents through the 4-H programs for young people, field days and technical training for farmers and farm families.

NIFA provides the federal base funding for these programs just to make sure that we're clear on that. We help fund additional programs specifically targeted towards our historically Black colleges and universities. We enhance research and outreach to encourage the next generation of our Ag sciences, our agribusiness leaders, and farmers from the underserved communities.

I do want to give you a couple of examples. When I spoke with the staff, this is, again, a priority for me and I wanted to hear from Darrylin some of the programs and some of the examples of programs that they're excited about, which of course made me excited to be able to pass that along to you.

Centers of excellence at our 1890 institutions. It was originally established in 2015 in conjunction with our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second Morrill Act of 1890. It's hosted by our historically Black and land grant institutions to one, increase profitability and rural prosperity in our underserved farming communities. Two, to address the critical needs for enhanced international training and development. Three, increased diversity in STEM research and education. Really exciting program that I'm very proud of.

They had also mentioned the scholarship for students at 1890 institutions. I do want to reemphasize that these scholarships support recruiting, engaging, retaining, mentoring, and training undergrad students, who's going to lead agriculture and food production in the future. 1890 extension supports extension activities delivered by our 1890 institution. I do want to also mention that, to ensure that our historically Black colleges and universities have the best research possible to develop new best practices and techniques delivered by extension.

NIFA fund programs to strengthen the research enterprise. Our Evans-Allen's research program it supports agriculture and forestry research at our 1890 Land Grant University. Our 1890 institution teaching, research, and extension capacity building grants. It supports work on sustainable

bioenergy, food security, childhood obesity prevention and or our food safety. Our 1890 facilities grant program supports acquisition and improvement of Ag and food science facilities and equipment.

NIFA also has programs to support Ag outreach and training for native nations and our Hispanic community. Starting with our NIFA Tribal program, which is the 1994 land grant institution. Has five programs that specifically support these institutions and Native Americans. One, our Tribal College Equity Grant, which supports formal education at the schools. Two, Tribal College Extension, which supports informal community-based learning, such as our Farmer Education, Youth Development and Rural Entrepreneurship program.

Three, Tribal College Research, build scientific capacity and supports student involvement in research. Four, our Tribal College Endowment program, which can be used at the discretion of the institution leadership. Five, A New Beginnings for Tribal Students, which supports land grant universities and colleges to provide resources that increase the retention and graduation rate of our tribal students. Six, our federally recognized Tribe Extension program, which provides funding to our 1890 and 1862 land grants that provide extension programs that compliment extension efforts of the 1994 institutions.

Then lastly, our Hispanic serving agricultural colleges and universities. From our Food Conservation and Energy Act of 2008, we authorize Hispanic-serving agricultural colleges and universities to be eligible for our NIFA program. Our NIFA Hispanic serving institution or education grants support undergraduate students at these universities and institutions.

In the years ahead, and the challenges that we face in agriculture, food production, environmental protection, economic development, climate change, and all of these issues will become a lot more complex.

Solutions, again, that are real world that we can all work on collectively and is going to require every voice to be heard and every culture to be considered. I know we have a lot of work to do, and it's an awesome responsibility and an awesome path, and I mean that in the very best way.

We got to make sure that we're inviting all of our groups to the conversation and really, and actively listening to your ideas and concerns. Again, going back to making sure that I'm receiving your input, you're receiving input from me. I want this to be the beginning of

a dialogue, but I want to make sure that we're responsive. That is the highest priority for me. When we do get this input and we do hear from you making sure that we're in the best position to respond.

I don't want to tell you that I have all the answers today, but what I do want to emphasize to you is my commitment to the task force, the commitment to the task at hand, and let you know that our NIFA staff and employees, as well as my position as the Director, how much I'm excited to be part of the discussion and the dialogue, but I also do want to make sure that I'm available to hear your concerns and ways that we can work together. Thank you so very much, and I'll look forward to the opportunities to continue the discussion.

**Eston:** Wow. Thank you, Dr. Castille. Dr. Castille, I would be remiss if I didn't share with you that, in my other job, I am a Liaison at Tennessee State University at 18 land-grant institution, so are some of my other colleagues on the call today. We represent that, the 1994s of course HSI, you name it. We would not be where we are today without the support of NIFA, and so it's always great to hear from you all. Some days while I walk across my campus, I look at the buildings that you all have funded and other programs too, it just makes my heart just smile just knowing that. Once again, a warm welcome and we thank you for the input.

**Dr. Castille:** Absolutely. Thank you again. Thank you so much. I do want to mention there was a couple of... so in a former life, I served as the State Director for Rural Development and then also with farm production and conservation. I've been around the agency for the last four years, and really, someone mentioned Rural Development Programs earlier. I hope that in any way that I can help connect, not only with our NIFA programs, but across the mission area and across the department. Thanks for that.

**Eston:** Great. Looking at my agenda, we are moving very quickly, but due to the rules and reg with FACA, we must carry out the wholeness of the agenda. Since we've been on the call, I've had a couple of messages ask, could we open for questions from the speakers and at this time, I'm going to turn over to our operator Ms. Kierra. Ms. Kierra, you can handle it from here as relates to questions.

**Kierra:** We are now opening the phone lines for questions. Please press pound two on your telephone keypad to enter the question queue, you'll hear a notification when your line is un-muted. At that time, please then

state your name and your question. Once again, pressing pound two will indicate that you wish to speak at this time. We do appear to have some questions in the queue. Let's go to the first caller. Caller, your line is now un-muted. Please go ahead.

**Steve:** Hello. I'm from Oklahoma. Do I have the floor? Can you all hear me?

**Eston:** You do.

**Steve:** Okay. My name is Steve Hargis, Native American, proudly served in the National Guard. I'm a New Guinea farmer and what I'm so concerned about is, and I'm so glad that the USDA is going to the Carbon Sink program. I have implemented a carbon sink on my property. I own 10 acres and I lease another 80 acres. I have, due to illnesses in the family and had to do a lot of intensive research for 10 years into microbes and the molecular structure of water.

When we start working with the water and we work with the microbes, we're opening and creating life. That life is what sequesters the carbon. The one question I hear, and it always gets a negative answer is, a little old lady in the city she'll say, "Well, how can I help with carbon sequestrations?" Everybody says, "Oh, you can't. It takes organizations and this and that." I have written a program that lets every household, city, State, rule, whatever, they can apply these microbes and learn about water.

I want to teach this. What I'm doing is releasing the nutrients in my soil. I cut down my feed bill from \$3,700 to \$700, because I'm growing grass year around and the winter grasses will grow almost like in summertime if you will feed them properly. I know I'm speaking Greek to some of you all, but this is where farming and ranching has got to go because our soils are so depleted. What I'm doing is showing and I'm solving with anyone that will listen to me. Hey, it's simple. You just must open your mind a little bit and change your practices.

Now, the minorities can lead this, and we can build up our soils, we can make our farms more profitable and when we're giving the soil what it needs, and the plant what it needs, the amount of sickness and illness in our cows and our bodies greatly reduces. I have not used antibiotics in two years. Thank God my cows, they get a little snotty nose every now and then, but they make it through it. But I reduced the chemical intake on my property and adversely saw health in myself and in my animals greatly increase all the time, getting more production.



I've had college presidents come out here in November and they said, "My gosh, Steve, you have an abundance of grass." I said, "Well, this is what I'm showing. This is what I'm doing. All the farmers can do this now, we'd have to open the soil and feed the soil again. I'm two and a half hours from Langston University, a land-grant college, I'm willing to work with them. You all can just come and test my soil. You can take core samples of my trees. I have healed trees that were dying. Practically dead. You can tell by the rings in these trees exactly when I started my nutrient and microbe program.

I'm trying to give as much... and I don't invent these microbes. I studied the companies and the ones that will work here in Oklahoma. Anyone familiar with Oklahoma knows that we have what's called hardpan or Caliche. I'm now able to change that stratosphere into a light sandy loam in one year's time. It doesn't take 10 years to build your soil up. We can implement a program where you can gradually bring it back, or you can hit it for all it's worth and give it all the nutrients that it needs and what I'm able to do since I'm putting more carbon...

**Eston:** Excuse me, Steve. We are sorry to interrupt you. Now, these could be of courses for the speakers. We have a time on the agenda for open public comments and we need to be mindful of other folks who want to ask the questions too. We limit our questions to three minutes. If you want to just wrap it up. If you want to... we have a period for open comments from 2:40 to 3:20, but at this time let's [00:55:12 crosstalk] on the call. Yes, that's okay. That's okay.

**Steve:** I'm sorry. My mistake [00:55:17 crosstalk].

**Eston:** We can assist you later offline.

**Jacqueline:** Hi, Eston and Steve. This is Jacqueline Davis-Slay, the Acting Director for the Office of Partnership and Public Engagement. I will give you my contact information and you can reach out to me and we can continue this conversation also.

**Steve:** Okay.

**Jacqueline:** Yes, sir. Thank you.

**Steve:** Thank you all for this meeting.

**Eston:** All right, Steve. Thank you. Kierra, do we have others?

**Kierra:** Let's move to the next caller in the queue. Caller, your line is unmuted. Please go ahead.

**Lucia** My name is Lucia Shulz. I work with Latino Beginner farmers in Nebraska. I just wanted to thank everybody for this wonderful meeting. I didn't know that the committee existed, and so I'm glad that there's a new committee that has been formed and we need all the help we can get in Nebraska, especially in the Latino community. Just one question, who and how do I submit any suggestions or recommendation to the committee so they could help us further our work with Latino farmers in Nebraska? Thank you.

**Kenya:** Eston?

**Eston:** Yes. I'm here. I had another call going too, I'm trying to multitask. I'm sorry. That was the emergency call that came through from a doctor. I'm sorry, guys. Could you repeat... was that question directed to me?

**Kenya:** Do you want me to answer that, Eston?

**Eston:** Yes. I'm sorry. I apologize. Folks, I'm dealing with some illness and I had to take that call. I apologize, folks. But yes, Kenya, if you'll handle that for me, please?

**Kenya:** Sure. I can answer that question. There is a time on the agenda, I believe at 2:40, which is probably in another, maybe 40 minutes, you'll have an opportunity to place your recommendations on record for the committee right here in this form or you can email them to ACMF, which is Advisory Committee for Minority Farmers @usda.gov. That's acmf@usda.gov. Thank you.

**Eston:** Thank you, Kenya. I apologize for that. Never is a good time for anything but thank you so much. Kierra, back to you if we have anybody in the queue. Thank you.

**Kierra:** Moving to the next caller. Caller, your line is unmuted. Please go ahead.

**Karen:** I'll be back in just a minute.

**Kierra:** Hello there.

**Karen:** I am Karen [00:58:24 inaudible]. What I am looking at, there was the question that was posed about whether we should eliminate some of the participation for minority farmers. I guess what I'm looking... I wanted a little bit of clarity into what is meant by that, because we went

on ahead and we mapped out in the United States where the grantees are at, based on the advisory board members, and it looks like a huge discrepancy with, especially as we look at it on the West Coast, anything West of San Antonio. I just wanted a little bit of clarity before I go on.

**Eston:** Are you wanting clarity of how the board members were selected or their placement? Is that what you're asking?

**Karen** I guess yes. I'm asking both. Also just looking at the verbiage that went out with the notice about this meeting, about eliminating the participation. We have a whole bunch of farmers all across the country who represent ethnic minority groups and who are already just socially disadvantaged. A good portion of them in a leased land, they work on less than 10 acres, and so I'm seeing that if we're eliminating positions that will represent those farmers, will the funding go with it as well and why would we leave out a section of the country that is already at a disadvantage?

**Eston:** Okay. Was somebody else trying to speak? Chair Reed were you're trying to speak on that?

**Harvey:** Yes. I'm I in? Hello?

**Eston:** Yes. You are in. Go ahead.

**Harvey:** Okay. I'd have to answer that question. No, I didn't select anybody, but as the chairperson of the committee that was brought up to my attention also, I [01:00:39 inaudible], past the Rocky Mountains, there was nobody being represented. But one of the things that we're looking into since we're representing 50 states and six territories, our job is to make sure that the liaisons and other folks that's working in Westwood, towards the Pacific Coast that we make some [01:00:55 inaudible] over there as well.

That would be recommendations that we'll be making to the Secretary through our DFO, to ask them to make sure... and one of the reasons why we had a telephone call for one o'clock Central Time was to allow those on the Western side, especially from Guam and [01:01:11 inaudible] and what have you, it would be early in the morning for them, we didn't want it too late or too early for them. We didn't want an early morning meeting there's one [01:01:19 inaudible] afternoon. But we are aware of what you're talking about. When the committee sits down, we will be convening next week, and I've always brought it up

about the West Coast, because we have farmers and ranchers and agribusiness all over the country.

As the chairperson of this committee, that's something that we'll be looking into. We noticed a disparity there. I understand that there is a strong disparity there. I used the Rocky Mountains as the baseline. There's nothing past the Rocky Mountains and, not only looking at us, but also prior administrations and what have you, what have been done because sometimes they forget about the West and we're working on it. The committee will be working on that.

That's a priority for me as well about the West Coast, because I have a lot of people that I work with on the West coast. We have cooperatives in Hawaii as well as other places as well and they need to know what's going on too. That's why we're trying to broaden our range. It's only 15 of us to break 50 States and six territories. But we're going to do it. We're going to do it. I hope that answers your question.

**Karen:**

Yes. I appreciate your comment. Like I said, we want to have them mapped out for the 2501 grantees alone and just for **[01:02:37 crosstalk]**. It's a map and I'd be happy to share where our jaws just drop when we know we have such a diverse number of farmers; I'm just going to pick out California alone. We have a huge number of farmers who are disadvantaged. We have Black farmers who are trying to come back, and we know the history of what's happened to Black farmers in the country.

We have Southeast Asian farmers who have defended the United States and had to escape to come from the Vietnam War and when they came, there were no ESL classes or any programs to be able to prep them. They faced not just injustice in terms of the things that are allocated and access to funding, but truly it's lack of technology, lack of everything else, and we are seeing funding that's going out to agencies that we'll treat the mainstream populations and not being awarded to a lot of groups that actually work with the disadvantaged farmers via **[01:03:52 inaudible]** farmers or other indigenous farmers.

I'm glad that you are considering this because we also know people who have applied for this position year after year and have not been awarded a seat. Thank you.

**Harvey:**

Yes. Because, I want to say this, going back to what Nicholas has said about the amount of money that they have just received and that they have to share that money with all of us as well, there's programs in

there that has not been instituted as of yet, but as a committee is a recommendation. We're only here to give advice and recommendation to the Secretary and to let him know since we know that there's funding there through the 2501 and also through NIFA, we just want to make sure that those funds are directed in that place, that it goes to people of color and what have you to try to level the playing field.

That's our main concern. This is why Mr. Troy Joshua was on the line to give us those stats. Because if you look at it, there's a lot less farmers than there are versus the White farmers out there as well. There's nothing against them. We all have to work the same land, but we just trying to level the playing field and make sure that some disparity is alleviated. Hopefully it's done in our time because it's going to be a fight because we're going to have these things that we have to work with, but don't worry, we have not forgotten the West at all.

I used the Rocky Mountains as a baseline. We have not gone past there. I was just amazed that we have so many people on this side of the country, because I think our country is much bigger than the people that we have here. We're going to do it. I've finished.

**Kierra:** Thank you for your question. Moving to the next caller in the queue. Caller, your line is unmuted. Please go ahead.

**Mya:** Hi there. Can you hear me?

**Kierra:** You have the floor.

**Corrine:** Hi. Thanks. This is Corrine Mya Rodriguez. I work for Rural Coalition. I just want to know... I have two concerns. The first is whether or not the National Agricultural Statistics Service Agricultural Labor Survey has been restored that was ended in October last year or if there's any intention to restore that survey. Then, I also wanted to express concern over the amount of minority led organizations and farmers that were excluded from follow-up rounds for the Farmer to Family Food Box program. After the first round, a lot of minority led organizations were excluded, and we want to know if there's any intention also for the following rounds to include some of those organizations and farmers again. That's all. Thank you.

**Troy** [01:06:54 inaudible], may I?

**Harvey:** Yes, Troy. Go ahead.

**Troy:** Okay. Thank you for the question. In respect to the Farm Labor study, that program has been re-established. Data will be published tomorrow, and it will be retrospective to the data that was eliminated. That information will be available and we're looking forward to how we can improve that program in the future.

**Jacqueline:** Hi. Thanks, Troy. This is Jacque Davis-Slay. As relates to the minority participation in the Farm to Family Food Box program, I will definitely get your concerns over to the Agricultural Marketing Service. Please feel free to email me your specific name and my email address is jacqueline.davis-slay@usda.gov and we will put it out for you. Eston will share that information with you. Thanks.

**Corrine:** Thank you so much. Appreciate it.

**Kierra:** At this time, there are no more questions in the queue. Once again, pressing pound two indicates that you wish to ask a question.

**Eston:** Okay. Are you seeing any...?

**Kierra:** Caller, your line is unmuted. Please go ahead.

**John:** Yes. This is John Jameson with the Legacy Taste of the Garden we're out of Indiana. We have 2501 grand that's a part of our project is called The Life Project. One of the major issues that we have seen in working with introduction of USDA programs, loans, grants, and scholarships, is that there needs to be some type of assistance for these individuals to be able to walk through. One, access to the information is always a little bit slower for them, as well as knowing how to maneuver through those different applications and things of that nature.

Is there any thoughts or anything about creating a service that will help to assist them in that, with the understanding that due to them being socially disadvantaged for so long that there's been a disenfranchisement with the community and with the organizations and stuff, and that by creating something that will allow them to be able to have a more pleasant, I should say, experience that will invite them to come back and continue to try to participate?

**Jacqueline:** This is Jacqueline Slay. Let me get this right. You're looking for a process that will allow our socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers to be comfortable with accessing and participating in USDA programs?

**John:** To help them to walk through.

**Jacqueline:** To walk-through.

**John:** Yes.

**Jacqueline:** Perfect. We have the USDA liaison that our staff that's off of the partnership and public engagement, that is a major part of their role and responsibility. We conduct summit training and workshops that really lay out the programs, resources and those USDA that are available for our socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

In addition, our USDA liaison in collaboration with our State Food and Agriculture Council, and that's those agencies, the agencies that consist of councils are the Natural Resource Conservation Service, Rural Development, and the Farm Service Agencies, those are the major power agencies, but all of our agencies are really participant in the State FAC, and so our USDA liaison in collaboration with that State FAC and that institution where they're housed is doing just that.

Feel free to reach out to me and we can look to really facilitate a summit and training in your area for your social disadvantage farmers and ranchers that really would bring those programs and the state leadership and County leadership of those agencies to those farms and ranches, and provide that introduction and that hands-on training and assistance to them.

**John:** Okay. [01:11:57 crosstalk].

**Kenya:** This is Kenya. I just wanted to add to what Jacque mentioned about, we have 2501 grantees that are out in the field, and you can access them on our website, is a whole list of them. They will also walk you through some of those programs and help you apply. Many of them have reported back to us how they actually walked and help the farmers and ranchers or non-profits to complete the application.

We know sometimes it can be a daunting process, so if you have a pen and want to get our website down, it's [usda.gov/partnership](https://usda.gov/partnership). That's [usda.gov/partnership](https://usda.gov/partnership). You scroll down where it says, socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, and then there's a list of grantees since, goes back to 2010.

**John:** Okay. Thank you.

**Kenya:** You can reach out to them their contact information is there, email and phone number.

**John:** Thank you.

**Kenya:** Excellent.

**Kierra:** We have one last question in the queue. Caller, your line is unmuted. Please go ahead.

**Arnetta:** Hi, this is Arnetta Cotton. I want to ask on behalf of people who have asked me, if much of the money is being funneled to 2501 or 1890 grants, how then do you partner with those organizations as an organization out in the field or away from them, and be able to benefit from those grant dollars?

**Jacqueline:** Hey, Arnetta, this is Jacque. Can you elaborate a little bit more so I can get a good understanding?

**Arnetta:** In the implementation of many of these programs and partnerships and trainings, there are organizations out in the rural area here native American, African American, veteran owned, so forth and so on, that would like to partner with these organizations. They reach out to them, they get good feedback, but then when it comes to actually implementing the program and perhaps benefiting with some of those program dollars to help their program move forward, then there are difficulties.

I've had two in the last week to reach out for me for direction and I really don't know how it's enforced or how it is that they gain those program dollars out, how it goes from the land grant universities, or to get to the program other... I don't want to say, other programs that are not land grants or 2501.

**Jacqueline:** These would be organizations that are trying to partner with a grantee at USDA?

**Arnetta:** Yes.

**Jacqueline:** Okay. I know for most of our grant programs, that would be a contractual agreement and that agreement would have to be negotiated first when they apply for the grant. But that information would really have to be a part of that grant agreement when it's submitted. I can say that I'm certain that our institutions and our grantees are willing to work with organizations to get the word out. But as far as that contractual agreement that would have to be negotiated a part of that grant process.



If these organizations meet the eligibility and requirements of our grant programs, please have them to apply for the grant programs themselves. In addition to that, our office, we will work with any organization to get the word out on programs that the only way you can access resources from our office is through that 2501 grant program. But we are totally willing to work with any organizations in getting the word out to our socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers at any time. Feel free, you have my number. Just call and we can discuss further.

**Arnetta:** Yes. I was trying to ask on behalf of others, [01:16:44 inaudible].

**Jacqueline:** I am willing, if you would like, we can schedule a call with those other organizations, and we can start discussing the details of what they're looking for.

**Arnetta:** We'll do it. Thank you.

**Jacqueline:** Excellent.

**Eston:** Let me add to Mr. Jameson call. I know that we have liaisons that are out there that's willing to work with you all. You don't have to go as far as to Washington DC to get answers, our liaisons are housed throughout the country, and we can help you in those areas for some of these questions has been asked. Utilize us before you want to take a stab at getting into Washington DC. We don't mind you doing that, but we're here on the ground working too and we want to hear from you too, because we are encouraged to build our customer base and we definitely want to do that.

I know in Indiana there is not an 1890 there, but we have someone there at Kentucky State, which is close by and some others as well. I just want to throw it out there so in case some of you all are wanting to get a feel for where we're located. By all means go find us and, hey, we'll be more than happy to help. Thank you.

**Jacqueline:** Eston, please feel free to share the USDA liaison directory.

**Eston:** Yes, will do.

**Jacqueline:** Excellent.

**Eston:** Okay. Kierra, sorry, go ahead.

**Kierra:** We do have one more question in the queue. Caller, your line has been unmuted. Please go ahead.

**Jerry:** Hello. Can you hear me okay?

**Kierra:** You have the floor.

**Jerry:** Yes. Can you hear me okay, ma'am?

**Kierra:** Yes, we can.

**Jerry:** Okay. Basically, as a minority farmer that is getting into the program, been in the program... my last name is Pewett, P-E-W-E-T-T, first name Jerry. What I'm seeing and hearing is very good information. I have to ask all the people on the committee some very serious points. It's good to hear that this is open and operating. When does the minority stop being a minority? Because I heard somebody has mentioned about millions of farmers and non-minorities, and then the numbers about other minorities being a lot lower.

What point and what information do a person get to find out who has graduated out of the program to be part of the non-minority program? It's good to be in the minority program but the ultimate goal is just to be in business, not to continue just to be labeled as a minority. I'm addressing that to some of the people on the advisory committee, how many success stories do you really have as up to date from this program being in place for so many years?

**Eston:** That's a great question. We have Ms. Jacqueline Davis-Slay, our Director on the call. Ms. Davis-Slay, you want to take that question for us please?

**Jacqueline:** I'll say that's a... I can't say how will we move past being a minority? I will tell you that OPPE and USDA is committed to working with all farmers and ranchers, and in particular, our minority farmers and ranchers. I talk about the resources that are available at USDA. The 2018 Farm Bill provided \$468 billion in resources for farmers and ranchers to access. There are some special incentives for our minority farmers and ranchers such as up to 90% cost share or incentive payments through NRCS. We are working every day to really... How do I want to say this? Improve the standing of our minority producers. Do we have time? You said time, Eston?

**Jerry:** No. The question was this. I called another minority company today and say that he is not worried about these resources and he's doing good in business, what minority farmer can I call today, and for all these

programs that's been out for years and for him to tell me, he's not making a hundred thousand dollars, he's making \$10 million. These programs are set not for you to stay in them. These programs are set there as stones to get to another level. I need to get to another level.

I'm not interested, and I know it's a lot of other people too, that we know the programs that are out there. We understand the programs. We are the minorities. What needs to be done to be mentors? We need these large farmers to come in and grab us by the toes and say, you see your minority, okay, come on. Let's work [01:22:06 inaudible]. The outreach that I'm saying is, we outreach over each other minority that only gets you so far.

You got three million farms that you all do business with, that you should have some programs that say, you got to do 10% with this farmer, you got to do 50% with this farmer. It doesn't matter if it's supply trackers, labor, equipment, and maintenance. You should have some program that's [01:22:30 inaudible] non-minorities that's in the program to graduate out of the program from USDA. You are just the agency, but you are not the program. You are just the agency regulating the program.

We need to get the non-minority farmers to start acknowledging that they need minority farmers to help them. That's the missing link in all of this [01:22:54 inaudible], that we shouldn't have to worry about all these other things when you got three million non-minority farmers out there as of today. That goes back to the person that [01:23:06 inaudible]. I am I correct or I'm out of whack here?

**Jacqueline:**

No, what we will do is record that as a recommendation. It seems like you're looking for a mentorship program of those larger non-minority farmers to really work with our minority farmers to help them move to that next level.

**Jerry:**

That is correct. Though the program is really [01:23:32 crosstalk].

**Jacqueline:**

We'll take that as a recommendation.

**Jerry:**

Right. That's why I'm saying. I'm one of the newest guys. I need to get... As a matter of fact, I have a mentor. He owns 35,000 acres. I got nine. He said, "Mr. Pewett, what do you need for me to help you?" I sent him a list of things and he's got them completed. I got a finished product. All I got to do is go back through the policies and say, I need to continue to graduate. The training, all of those things are great when people are

starting to get out, but once you get past these programs you can't get back in these programs, you got to go forward.

**Jacqueline:** I agree.

**Jerry:** That's what I'm saying, that's where I'm at when I'm making my statement to the advisory committee.

**Jacqueline:** Thanks. We appreciate that, sir.

**Jerry:** No problem.

**Jacqueline:** Again, please feel free to contact me and we can continue the conversation. We can bring in some of our other agencies to hear these comments and we will work with you. We are committed to working with all of our farmers and ranchers.

**Jerry:** Thank you.

**Jacqueline:** Yes, sir. You have my contact information. I think I said it over the phone. It's jacqueline.davis-slay@usda.gov.

**Eston:** Kierra, we have time for one... I'm sorry. We have time for one more question before we go to break, Kierra. If you will allow one more question.

**Kierra:** Moving to the last caller. Your line is unmuted. Please go ahead.

**Dewayne:** Good afternoon, everyone. This is Dewayne Goldmon. I don't have a question Mr. Williams, but I did have a comment for Mr. Pewett. I want to thank you for bringing up the question. It's a very valid question, Mr. Pewett. I have the pleasure of serving as the Executive Director of the National Black Growers Council, and I'm going to answer your question first.

The fact that you are a minority farmer will continue to be a fact until... if you're Black, you're going to be a minority farmer until Blacks outnumber the other farmers that are out there. I don't think I'll see that in my lifetime because Blacks are only 13% of the population in the US and we're a lot less in the population of farmers, but that's the definition of a minority. I think the concern that I have is a lot of people equate other things with the fact that you are a minority farmer or a Black farmer, Native American, whatever the situation may be.

But to your point, Mr. Pewett, I think we have to enable our minority farmers to move into all the different segments of agriculture. Right

now, I'm more comfortable talking about row crop farmers, because I'm a farmer myself and in my community, I farm over a thousand acres, but I'm considered a small farmer because technology, economies of scale allow farmers, you mentioned the 35,000 acre guy, we have some Black farmers that are now farming over 10, 15,000 acres. But technology and economies of scale allow them to do that.

My request is that we create minority farmers that can follow those trends if they so desire. Yes, when you get into that, and when you get over a certain size 5,000 acres, 10,000 acres, you tend to think a little different and your needs tend to be a little different from someone that's just starting out. But regardless, I think we have to have minority farmers that are equipped to go into all segments of agriculture production.

Farmers, ranchers, large, small, organic, traditional, whatever the case may be, we've got to have programs that are colorblind, that enable all of our US farmers to operate at peak efficiency and be the best that they can be and not have to be concerned about discrimination and my neighbor getting something that I don't have access to simply because of my skin color. I just wanted to make that point and thank you for the question.

**Eston:**

Thank you. Great way to end. We're right at 2:30, the agenda calls for a break. We will break from 2:30 to 2:40 and when we come back, we will be coming back to the committee open for the public comment. Keep in mind, this next part of this agenda will only be comments. We'll not have a deliberation, a dialogue. It will only be comments, and those will be recorded. Kierra back over to you. Thanks.

Welcome back. As I stated before we went to break, when we come back, we'll be going into... we got noise in the background, can we mute? Thank you. Once again, welcome back. I hope you all had a great break. Keeping on with our agenda. Next on our agenda, we have the committee open for public comment, and I will kick it off by reading some of the comments that came in and when I get done, we will open up the phone lines for comments.

Beginning with the first comment that was sent into me, it's lengthy, but this will be just this one and we'll go ahead. This comment came from Lance Green. Ms. Ritchney, I explained that I am allegedly discrimination, are you not acknowledging that part and just focusing on a copy of an application. You already sent a copy of 125,000 application

but now you want to send another copy and you were saying, I asked for a copy for the \$125,000 application.

No, I did not. We only asked for a copy of the \$400,000 application that was submitted. Why? I believe hemp was removed from the crops in yields section. That's it. Nothing about the 125,000 application. You want to send me extra paperwork to try confusing me, but that's not going to confuse me.

It's also not necessary. You still working with Ms. Rosenstein, even after knowing there is an active discrimination chart. I'm making this clear, Ms. Richnie, you have begun to discriminate as well. I'm allegedly discrimination on your part as well because you're trying to confuse me. This whole time, you have been working to clear Ms. Rosenstein, Ms. Helen of my application, but they have another department for that. Next, you have not explained the long terms nor did Ms. Rosenstein. You have not explained it here as well. All you speak to is Ms. Rosenstein, what about the interest rate long-term?

Something I noticed last night online while I was searching, the loan I'm applying for is not for new farmers because the loan must be paid back in seven years not 30 to 40 years as I expected. The correct loan that allows a payment of 30 to 40 years is called something else. It's not operational loan. I believe it's just called a farm loan. Can you help me? Which loan should I be applying for? How can I apply for the correct loan if you don't give me any information?

You asked me to do a credit check and fill out the application, but you never explained the loan. We spoke for one hour and 40 minutes and all you mentioned was Ms. Rosenstein. I told you that I had 30 years to pay back the loan and you never said anything different. You never said this loan must be paid back in seven years. Why? Why don't you help me like you help others who usually get farm loans? That was one comment that will go for our records. All these comments go for our records, due to the fact I must read these comments.

I will go to our next one that we have. This is basically just; I believe an announcement and all these comments will be posted on our website. Now, I have at least 90 days to get everything posted, transcript, minutes and also... because at any day timeframe, I typically get those done before 90 days, but it is a process and a lot of work involved with this. I tell folks, just tune to our website. The best way to do that is just Google, is the quickest way is Google the Office of Partnership and

Public Engagement. That will get you to our website. You can see all the email threads, the minutes, the agenda, and everything that's been done as relates to this committee.

Now, moving right along to the next comment, this was sent to me. This just an announcement. They said, register now to hear a presentation from STK Bio-Ag Solution and Marrone Bio Innovations. It states, we're excited to announce the registration is now open for our Biopesticide Europe 2021 conference, taking place in Brussels, Belgium on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2021. That will be posted as well.

Moving right along to the next comment. This comment come from Jane Public. This program is been run to be discriminatory to the majority population in this country. This country should not be discriminating against the White people who suffer the same disability as all other minorities and race. It is time that White people are not being discriminated against, which they are every single day in America right now.

White men are constantly being called out as not being worthy of any government help, when the fact is, they are as discriminated against as anybody else so to favor minorities and other racist and discriminatory and unequal and violates the US constitution. This comment is for the public, record please. We will do that. That's coming from Ms. Jane Public

Moving right along to our next comment. This comment come from Haiti Peterson. Good afternoon, Eston. I'm reaching out because Sand County Foundation received a conservation gravity grant in October 2020. The project deals on Leopold Conservation Award to pallet Nation Mentorship program for historically underserved farmers and ranchers. Since you are the contact for the committee on minority farmers, I was hoping that you might be able to help me to list to a call for mentees. We have our 20 power pallet mentors lined up and ready to go. I have an enrollment form available online for those interested in a mentorship. Now we just need mentees to sign up.

I am attaching a flyer that I am wondering if you might be able to distribute to any other partnership context. Also, I'm wondering if you have other contacts that you suggest I reach out to. We, of course, are not just recruiting minority farmers and ranchers, but also the other categories under the USDA classifications. Our mentors are so excited to

start building new conservation relationships. Thanks so much for your assistance. We will handle that.

Next, we're going to the next comment. This one comes from... excuse me if I don't get his name right. Camille Lohas Smith. To whom it may concern. My name is Kamealoha Smith, and I work for a newly formed non-profit [01:46:07 inaudible] Anahola, Kaua'i. I was informed by the Mr. Harvey Reed that this is the committee I can send my public comments to regard minority ranchers and farmers. Our non-profit could have sent our comments earlier, but we needed to wait until we had our land instruments seller before proceeding with comments.

The comments we provide in our non-profit's letter are tied to the land instrument. We hope public comments are still being accepted. Our letter to the committee is attached to this email. We look forward to learning more about opportunities to partner with the USDA on current and future projects. Please feel free to contact me, Carmille Lohas Smith [01:46:59 inaudible] Anahola Board Secretary. I'm also providing the nonprofit get technical assistance like grant writing, communicating with federal agency. Respectfully, Kamealoha Smith, Board Secretary. We have that.

I think I have one or two more to read and then we'll open it up. This is from Linda Fortnerberry. Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns with this committee. As the pandemic has presented a huge problem for families across America, some families in rural communities are having an even more difficult challenge feeding their families. Our organization, Circle of Faith, CDC, serve citizen in Catahoula, Franklin, Richland and [01:47:56 inaudible] Parish.

Our concern is that we have not received any food boxes from farmers to families to distribute since October 2020. Why aren't these Parish underserved communities receiving food, unlike the larger metropolitan community? We need to know how do we get food to these communities? Who should we reach out to? Thank you for your support. The phone number listed, Linda Fortneberry, Director.

The next one we have is... this was lengthy, [01:48:40 inaudible] Agroforestry Small Farmers and Rancher. This is from Igalious Ike Mills, Executive Director. Number one, question. This is public comment question for the minority farmer advisory committee. Number one, question, was there a [01:49:02 inaudible] in place on the former



Secretary, Purdue, if not, why? Who made the decision and why there was no function committee for three to four years to address critical issues concern facing social disadvantaged Black farmers in America?

The second question, why and how was the Office of Partnership and Public Engagement established? What [01:49:25 inaudible] agriculture data was compiled, which led to the creation of this office? On what authority using public taxpayer dollars to create OPPE office, will this data be available to the public? Question three, what is the status of the investigation to the unauthorized redirection of 2501 outreach funds to the community for prosperity center? Will someone provide a report to the Minority Farmer Advisory Committee? Comment, this has and continue to have a negative impact on social disadvantaged Black farmers and ranchers, not enough funds for outreach. How would this impact be measured?

Number four has the Minority Farmer Advisory Committee been providing any update brief regarding letter January 2016 sent by the late US representative, Elijah Cummings to US Secretary, Vilsack at the time, request the information on status of USDA discrimination cases. Since Secretary, Vilsack will be the 2021 incoming US Secretary of Agriculture as a taxpayer, our request, the committee ask for an in-depth personal briefing regarding current USDA discrimination complaints from the secretary or newly appointed Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. What will be the vision and plan of action to address more discrimination in USDA?

Number five, will the Minority Farmer Advisory Committee officially support the justice of Black Farmers Act? Number six, will the Minority Farmer Advisory Committee support and discuss the Jackson Lewis Civil Rights Report and other similar reports identifying discrimination in USDA? What has been done during the previous administration over the past four years to address historical racial disparities for social disadvantaged Black farmers and ranchers?

I know this is a little bit tiresome, but I must read this, is part of what we have to do to be in compliance. This one I believe was read before and it is posted, so I will not read this one. This was addressed to Director of Office of Partnership and Public Engagement, Mike Bailey. You can go to the register and see that one. It's been posted already before.

The next one. After that we have one more. This one should have been posted but not because the committee was shut down, I believe that

time. This was January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016 when someone sent into Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Department Agriculture. Dear Secretary Vilsack, thank you very much for the briefing provided to my staff in November by the Office of Compliance Policy Training Culture Transformation within the office of the assistant secretary civil rights regarding department Equal Employment Opportunity program.

This briefing was very helpful, and it helped me find remaining question, which I set forth below. Question about department MDs [1:52:59 inaudible] 15 report. In pursuant to Civil Rights Act 1964, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is responsible for the review and evaluation of the operation of all agency Equal Employment Opportunity program, properly obtain and publish or at least to my basic progress reports from each and such department agency on unit.

For the sake of time, note that this will be posted. Let the recorder know that this document will be posted, because if I read all this would take up all the time. But this is coming from the Congress of United States House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, at 2157 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC, dated January the 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016 to the Honorable, Tom Vilsack.

Going to the last comment. This comment, Booker, Warren, Gillibrand announce comprehensive bill to address the history of discrimination in Federal Agricultural Policy. November the 9<sup>th</sup> 2020, Booker, Warren, Gillibrand announced comprehensive bill to address the history of discrimination in federal agricultural policy. The justice for Black Farmers Act will reform the US Department of Agriculture and create a land grant program to encourage a new generation of Black farmers.

Washington DC today, US Senators Cory Booker, Elizabeth Warren and Kirsten Gillibrand announced landmark legislation aimed at addressing and correcting historic discrimination within the US Department of Agriculture and federal farm assistant and lending that has caused Black farmers to lose millions of acres of farmland and rob Black farmers and their families of hundreds of billions of dollars and intergenerational wealth. In 1920, there were nearly one million Black farmers in the United States, today due to this history of discrimination, it is estimated that there are less than 50,000 remaining Black farmers.

The justice for Black Farmers Act will enact policies to end discrimination within the USDA, protect remaining Black farmers from

losing their land, provide land grants to create a new generation of black farmers and restore the land base that has been lost to implement systemic reforms to help family farmers across the United States. Overly discriminatory and unjust federal policy has robbed Black families in the United States of the ability to build and pass the intergenerational wealth, said Senator Booker.

When it comes to farming and agriculture, we know that there is a direct connection between discriminatory policy within the USDA and enormous land loss, we have seen among Black farmers over the past century. The justice for Black Farmers Act will work to correct the extort injustice by addressing and correcting USDA discrimination and taking bold steps to restore the land that has been lost in order to empower a new generation of Black farmers to succeed and thrive.

For decades, racist policies have robbed Black farmers of the economic opportunity to thrive in our country's agriculture industry. I'm glad to co-sponsor Senator Booker's bill, which goes a long way toward restoring, protecting property rights of Black farmers, which goes towards restoring protective property rights of Black farmers rooting out of discriminatory policy and providing Black farmers with the necessary tools to succeed Senator Warren.

Black farmers and ranchers have been stroked and excluded in the agriculture industry, and then inequalities and federal aid have stripped them from their land. It is not only our responsibility to investigate this systemic discrimination, we must end and correct it so that the next generation of Black farmers can bloom said Senator Gillibrand, a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee.

The justice for Black Farmers Act will ensure the Department of Agriculture puts an end to discriminatory practices that have harmed Black agriculture producer for more than a hundred years. I thank Senator Booker for leadership on the issue, and I'm proud to co-sponsors legislation to make farming more equitable and inclusive.

There's a whole lot more to this, but this will be posted, so let the record show that this will be posted as well for your read, and this announcement is called The Announcement Comprehensive Bill to Address the History of Discrimination in Federal Agricultural Policy. Kierra, we can open the floor now for the public comments at this time.

**Kierra:**

We are opening the phone lines for any comments. If you wish to speak during this time, please press pound two on your telephone keypad to

enter the queue. Once you hear a notification that your line is unmuted, please then state your name and your comments. Comments may be limited to three minutes if there is a high volume, we will give a one-minute warning if so. Let's move to the first caller. Caller, your line is unmuted. Please go ahead.

**Andrew:** Yes. My name is Andrew Douglas and I'm trying to get some information on how to obtain my family farm back. We were part of the Black Farmers Association lawsuit, and my family have lost their farm here in Louisiana.

**Eston:** Thanks for the comment. We will take that, and we'll be addressing that. Kierra, you can go to the next question, next comment. I'm sorry,

**Kierra:** Caller, your line is unmuted. Please go ahead.

**Dow:** Hi, my name is Dow. Can you guys hear me well?

**Kierra:** We can hear you.

**Dow:** Great. I am out in California and I represent a agency called **[01:59:21 inaudible]**. I myself is also a farmer, co-founder of Chi Fresh Farm and a second-generation farmer, so I am an Asian farmer. Before I start, I'd like to make a little... just talk about some of the struggles that a lot of Asian farmers had. During the beginning of this pandemic, a lot of the Southeast Asian farmers in the central Valley were facing this... they were struggling to just move their crop because of the whole closure shelter in place mandate.

You have everybody... myself in this particular case, I have lost... I'm a small farmer of five acre and all of our product is sold at farmer's market, we drive three hours to sell the product. When this epidemic hit, we seek out programs available. On average, this half an acre of sugar snap peas would have given me about 10 to \$15,000. That's a small amount of money to a lot of farmers, but for my family in this situation is enough to feed a family for three months.

I'm not going to discount the factor that, there are farmers who may have been a lot, but here I'm just talking about the small farmers, the micro farmers, as some would call them. What happened was, a lot of us didn't know where to go for help, and there was no program in place. It's very easy for... oftentimes we hear, "You could always call our office in for help," but there are people who will call us, in particular our

agency and we will ask them, "Have you called the USDA office?" They will say, "Yes, we have."

First of all, there's nobody who speak in English who's not close to competent, and at the same time, we're getting referrals. We get referrals once, twice and three times we get it set after that. There's the issue that we need to resolve here, because oftentimes it's very easy for us to say, "Well, go to this place, call this person." Then you did that two or three times, as I mentioned, you get discouraged. What are some of the needs that our community needs? We need resource and dollars to come back to our community and to hire staff who are on the USDA side, who is just not culturally competent, also speak the language and who's an expert with a group.

Also, recognizing that there are small farmers who are small than 10 acres, because often times small... I believe the USDA definition of a small farmer could go up to hundreds of acres. But a lot of times in the Central Valley and in California, our small farmers are five acre or 10 acres. That's what I would like to make today and thank you for the opportunity to speak.

**Kierra:** Thank you for your comments. Let's move to the next caller.

**Eston:** Did you get the next caller?

**Female Speaker:** [02:02:20 inaudible]?

**Eston:** Yes.

**Kierra:** Caller, your line is unmuted. Please go ahead.

**Steve:** Yes, this is Steve Hargus, again. It's come to my attention likely that there's grants out there available, and these are the 2501 grants with some of the land grant colleges and with the pandemic and money tight, why are these universities sitting on these grants and not going out? When you qualify and you go to the college and they just ignore you, what's up with this?

**Kierra:** Thank you for your comment. Let's move to the next caller. Caller, your line is unmuted. Please go ahead. Caller, your device may be on mute. Let's move to the next caller in the queue. Caller, your line is unmuted. Please go ahead.

**Linda:** Yes. Good afternoon. I'm Linda Fortner Barry. I serve several rural communities in central Louisiana and these communities are totally

desolate, deprived, depressed, and truly have no existence whatsoever. Me and our organization did, Circle of Faith Community Development Corporation, we have taken upon the task of revitalizing these communities. One of our initiatives, our first initiative was to bring food back to the people during this pandemic, our seniors in particular, who are isolated and who cannot get out to get food and things like that. They have no transportation. There are no stores in the area or anything like that.

My concern is that we have not received any type of assistance as far as food distributions from the USDA since October. We've not been able to go down to serve those communities since October and it's well over 1,500 people plus, in these three small towns in particular that we've been working with. I need to know whom should I speak with? Because what I noticed is that, when I went to the USDA website and to see who was serving Louisiana, well, the companies national produce down in reserve Louisiana, they only receive 195,000 boxes. I don't think that would nearly be enough to serve the State of Louisiana.

Furthermore, I made seven phone calls to them, and I did not get a phone call back either. But in any day, I have people calling me constantly every day, wondering when can they, and how can they get some food for their families? They lost jobs, they're dealing with the pandemic, and some of them have also dealt with the COVID themselves in their family, and they had several hurricanes. We need some help. We needed it right away, and I need to know how, who, where to get it so I can make sure these people are being [02:05:56 inaudible].

Again, my name is Linda Fortner Barry and I work for Circle of Faith Foundation as the director, and we are there to help these communities rebuild. Thank you.

**Kierra:**

Thank you for your comments. Moving to the next caller in the queue. Caller, your line is unmuted. Please go ahead.

**King:**

Hi, my name is King Vang. I'm from Fresno, California, and I'm a new and beginning farmer as well as a Hmong farmer. I'm a micro farmer that farm about two to three acres. I want to speak on behalf of the other farmers who farm two, three acres. It's really hard for us to get to or qualify for resources, because of the requirements that are required. Not only that, I want to speak on behalf of the Hmong farmers.

A lot of Hmong farmers are around the age of 40 to 60, and they don't really speak English well, and they don't understand, read, or write in English. There are no documents from the USDA that are translated into Hmong. It's really hard for them to understand the resources and get the resources. If there can be some more or if there can be documents that are translated into Hmong that will be very helpful. Thank you.

**Kierra:** Thank you for your comment. Moving to the next caller in the queue. Your line is unmuted. Please go ahead.

**Eugene:** Yes. My name is Eugene Pickett. I'm in New Mexico with the Black Farmers and Ranchers, New Mexico, as well as the National Latino Farmers Ranchers Trade Association, and I'm currently on the governing board of the New Mexico Food and Agricultural Policy Council. There were several comments that came up that are very much in line and on point. I think one of the very pointed comments is to identify, point the finger at those programs and projects that you can say have been implemented and are successful. Because the resources are available, but then the access to the resources have become very difficult.

We had a major grant that we participated in over the last two years through NRCS to really do some outreach work and everyone has experienced the challenge of COVID. Our outreach model was to go into the field and directly impact farmers in the field and on the ground. With stay at home orders and travel restrictions, it hampered our delivery of service over the last year. Many of the farmers who only have flip phones have minimal access because it's in rural areas with the lack of a broadband and high-speed internet.

There are tremendous challenges, but I think that, seemingly, this shift that is occurring in the sensitivity may create an openness. There's a lot of technical aspects that those who were on the call realized that you got to get a farm number if you don't. A farm number can be issued to one eighth of an acre, so an eighth of an acre allows for a small farmer to gain access. Then, so acre, two acres up to a thousand acres as a small farmer coming together and sharing information and using this as an avenue and yes, OPPE became a tremendous challenge as well when it shifted funds from 2501.

Most people don't even know what the language of 2501 equals. As we move forward, I think that since it appears that the door may be open, that all of us need to challenge this committee and challenge this administration to engage you, to help us do better because all farmers

have lost land, but Black farmers have lost a significant amount of land. Through this pandemic, the data tells us we have the least access to healthcare. We have the least access to healthy food. We have food deserts in our community, and we're dying at the highest rate.

Everything that would equal us having even access to clean water, we don't have all these things so continuing to be in this struggle to access nutrition and food is tremendous, because there's our land-based strengths, the demand increases, and we have the least access to food. When starvation really occurs, our community will probably be the greatest impact.

But as we partner, as we go across racial barriers and farmer rancher barriers, then we have an opportunity for success. I think that the department now becoming seemingly more sensitive, then we can't go backwards. We must go forward. Like so many have commented, once we get through programs, once we are able to move forward, we got to keep on moving forward and continue to grow.

Now, specific to New Mexico, in 2017 we experienced a lot of floods, in 2019 we had, in '20 we had a pandemic, now we're faced with tremendous drought to where many counties in New Mexico, farmers are been requested not to farm, so it's dilemma after dilemma. Whatever the sensitivity is that equals how we will move forward collectively to share information, to provide whatever the outreach is and partner with you, we have to do that on a serious basis.

I think the discriminatory practices, where they exist and how they exist, we have to remove those barriers, because if we don't have the resources, then we cannot produce. I think that the food industry in and of itself, the systemic production that we need to share as small farmers and ranchers across the country becomes very paramount, because we have struggled, we have suffered and it's still transpiring and going on as we go into 2021.

**Kierra:** We appreciate your comments.

**Eugene:** Thank you.

**Kierra:** Let's move to the next caller in the queue. Caller, your line is unmuted. Please go ahead. Caller, your device may be on mute. I cannot hear you, so let's go ahead to the next caller. Caller, your line is unmuted. Please go ahead.



**John:**

Hello. This is John Jamerson, again, in Indiana. Just wanted to make a comment. One that, thank you guys for this opportunity. I do believe that it is very helpful, and I do appreciate the fact that you guys allow all the comments to be put out there without covering them up. I appreciate that. My comment is in collaboration with a few other comments that were made, and that is the fact that our communities our farmers and everything has been greatly impacted over the years.

To take this into consideration that, just as [02:15:12 inaudible] trillion dollars was given out to businesses and organizations and stuff, if proportionally our community received their equal share, that should have been \$350 billion that was given to businesses in our community and these grants and opportunities and stuff that are out there and programs that are out there. Could there be resources that are just set aside from those programs, from those grants that can be put aside to help the socially disadvantaged groups for those whose languages and things of that nature are difficult because they are barriers, for those whose skin color and everything else has become the barrier?

I know that there's an equip grant or not a grant but a program that's out there and they allow a certain amount of money to be accessed, so I know this is not something that is totally new, but there's certain amount of money that they allow the socially disadvantaged farmers to be able to access ahead of time. Could that be something that you guys consider and try to implement to be able to put access to these funds so that all this drama and everything else while they're applying for it, that they can again, have access to these things.

Because a lot of times it's due to the timing that we miss out and I don't know that the pool, the scale of how to do it, but there should be a program or something put out there to address that, to allow the access through to happen for these community and those grants to be applied in the communities that are in need. Thank you.

**Kierra:**

Thank you for your question. At this time, there are no more questions in the queue.

**Eston:**

Thank you, Kierra. This is a great time because we are at 3:20, and we go to our next item on our agenda. The next item on our agenda is for the Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers. Let me first thank all for making those comments. We must hear your comments and I will assure you that we will get those comments out to the appropriate organizations that can give some feedback. Stay tuned to our website.

As I stated earlier, I have 90 days as DFO to get this posted and to get the minutes and the transcript converted over so that we can post this. Stay tuned. It should be done before 90 days, but stay tuned for that, and we'll do our best to submit these comments to the appropriate agency or person to get you an answer.

Also, too, if you think you didn't come through clear enough, you can also email to [acmf@usda.gov](mailto:acmf@usda.gov). At this time, we will have our Chair, Harvey Reed to take over for the Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers into their discussion this time. Kierra, all other lines are to be muted during this discussion.

**Harvey:**

Thank you Mr. Eston. I want to thank everybody else for today. At this time, I would like to ask the committee members that are there on the line at this time, open your line ups for your comments and observations, because this time we want to make sure that you're in the queue and you can say some things. I want to refer this over to all the committee members to give them time to place their opinion, to give their feedback on what they heard today, because this has been very informative and a lot need to be dealt with, and a lot need to be addressed. This is why we are here. Advisory committee members feel free to chime in and give your opinion and give your thoughts and a few recommendations as well. Are you there? I'll just give you a few more minutes.

**Arnetta:**

Hi, this is Arnetta Cotton. I am both amazed and dismayed by some of the things that I am hearing. So many have quoted things back in the '90s, in the early 2000s, mid-2000s, all the way up to where we are today. Although there are different names associated with this set of circumstances, although there are different people now experiencing the shortcomings and disconnectedness and disassociation and there's the lack of follow through and [02:21:01 inaudible] of the resources, it seems the issues are still the same.

The one gentleman who spoke on the mentorship, which was excellent, assigning people out of these various offices, and I know that there was a short coming, a shortage of people, a shortage of social... and because of social distancing and so forth and so on, it would be just tremendous if these liaisons in these various areas could specifically address the people who have been on this call and on similar calls throughout the USDA so that we can have testimonies of victory attach themselves to those individual, I wish it were possible.

I believe that if we can reach one in every sector and that person commits to helping another person in a situation, that we can actually move the needle forward. That's all I have to... it's sad that the situations are the same and similar. We ought to be further than that by now.

**Harvey:** The floor is open for the next committee member. Let's hear from you.

**Dewayne:** Dewayne Goldmon here. Good comments. Good call. To answer to Mr. Reed, Chairman, I'm assuming we have these captured somewhere so we can follow up on these and act accordingly, is that correct?

**Harvey:** Yes.

**Dewayne:** The other thing I'll say, as a committee member is, when I look at where we are now, particularly with this administration, I'm still holding out a lot of hope that we have some resources now that we've never had before. Because we don't know how those resources are going to play out, who's going to be in different positions, what budgets would be assigned to tackle the things that we agree need tackling? I think we need to engage with the administration as soon as we can, but we need to wait until there's a critical mass of people in place to actually implement some of the things that this committee and the people that we're speaking for need to do.

That's the only comment I have. I think all of these things that were brought up today were excellent points and good consideration, but I'd really like before we release funds or set priorities or anything like that be able to follow that up. Once we know who some of the key players are and have the people who are going to be ultimately responsible for implementing these things, make sure that we involve them in the process. That's the only comment I have. Thanks.

**Harvey:** Thank you, Dewayne. I appreciate that, Doc. I appreciate that. Committee members? Unmute yourselves, come on. With that last statement by Dewayne. I'm going to move on.

**Cary:** Yes, hello?

**Harvey:** Yes. Go ahead.

**Cary:** This is Cary Junior, General Manager, Southeast Michigan Association up in Michigan.

**Harvey:** Hi Cary.

**Cary:**

A rural small Black farmer cooperative. Let me say, first of all, a lot of comments, I'm really glad to hear because they resonate with some of the challenges we've had working with a group of small farmers, whether we're talking about the programs or just talking about access in general. Again, my personal objective on this committee, because my primary interest in food systems as it was mentioned earlier, is we need to look at all areas of fashion of agricultural, including those of process and distribution and in some cases, even retail, if we're talking about being successful as small farmers of color.

I've been in this... I might have said this, but I've been making efforts to reach out to small grassroots organization across the country, including California, which unfortunately, I didn't make the connection I want. But I guess, the point I'm saying is, I'm hearing the same issues and challenges that we all have, and we need to start looking at those things in those areas. But we also got to make sure everybody has called in, the organization did a call in and made efforts to participate in some of these programs of guiding [02:26:21 inaudible] sort.

If they have not then that's... maybe we need to look at what we can do to come up with a way of, I guess, getting outreach to them, understanding that they need... how to go about going by doing that. As they go through programs and run to barriers, then that's when we can as a committee can figure out what those barriers are, trying to get into these programs and how to resolve them.

Lastly, I was going to say, I think the bigger thing is, with all the complaints that's all justify the case that we need more local, small grassroots organizations of color to get more engaged in some of this policy, which is in a sense is what we will be... it was really what we're in place to do, but it makes more sense, and it really, I think it should resonate that we have to get more engaged on how these programs are going out and how they've been implemented.

Anyway, just in general, I'm saying, a lot of comments that I heard before, and even some of the statements and presentations I think were appropriate. We just got to figure out how we put all these things in place, so we can actually make it better for the small farmer, the micro farmer, and in particularly disadvantaged farmers of colors. I'll stop right there.

**Harvey:**

Anyone else in the committee? Because if not, we have to have a... we're going to say a whole lot after we convene after this meeting

probably next week sometime to discuss with all we heard today so it's fresh in our minds. With that, I just want to give you a closing comment on what's going on. I'd like to thank everyone today that joined in today.

The USDA, Ms. Kenya Nicholas, Ms. Jacque Slay, Dr. Carrie Castille, Mr. Troy Joshua as well as my commander buddy, Bill Ashton from the VA representing our veterans as well. Most of all, I want to thank the operator for controlling this whole thing and making sure that our callers get through and everybody was online. I want to thank you again.

But needless to say, we have a good DFO. That's Mr. Eston Williams. He's been with us since we reconvened this particular committee. He's been there from day one, worked with us, and then not knowing what he's going to get entailed with, but he realized that we got this tied by the tail and we're going to keep it by the tail and not going to let it go. But this committee is here to service the general population. As the guy said, worried about the minorities status and what have you, but we have to realize how our country has been.

Our past administration was not good to a lot of us, especially this committee. I look back at the history, I always ask myself, where do we go from here now that we have been reestablished? They called us back in June, asked all of us to come back and we came back to assist the 11 people on this committee that was chosen to do things, even though the numbers from the West Coast, but don't worry about that, we work with the entire 50 States and also six territories, but that will change as well.

But doing this, it is a task that we have to sit down and conceptualize and see how we can reach out to everyone. As I said, where do we go from here? Because looking at some of the old records, back in 1966, President Johnson started the same thing that's going on today. We wouldn't be here if we didn't do what we were supposed to do back in 1966, but in '67 this is where we had riots and everything else in the streets. But nevertheless, the same charge that was given to this particular committee, which is the only committee in the Farm Bill that's under Title VII Section 2279, we have to stay within the guard rails of that and follow the guidelines that they've given us in the Farm Bill.

We want to stay in the Farm Bill because we have a lot to do, because if you check out Title VII Section 2279, it'll tell you who all we represent, what we have to do. We're not here to put anybody down. We're not

here to go after the White male farmers or anything else like that. Our job is to try to take the playing field and make it even for everybody so we can work well. We have a pandemic on our hands, so we don't have time to fight. Right now, we're fighting for our lives under this pandemic.

But what I would like to say to those that are here today, that we are here, we've heard a lot today. We should have heard more. We should have heard a lot more today, but nevertheless, what we heard today is enough for this committee to glean on and to start working on that until we get together next week. There were things that were said in the first two meetings that built us to where we are right now.

The last administration was not good to us because when they came back in November 2017, they decided to do a restructuring. The past administration said it was going to reduce the government, we're going to bring it down to where they can hound it. They reduced it, all right. They reduced it to the fact that they had us included in restructuring, we had an ethical federal statutory committee and they reduced it without telling Congress it was going to reduce it. They reduced it so well that we weren't participating.

Our participation did not come back until July last year, over three and a half years. That's how they reduced this committee. Conversation we had today we could have done this long time ago. Not only that they reduced the committee, they took funds, they redirected funds elsewhere. Those funds could have taken care of those individuals and groups out there that come under the minority status to do things they needed to do, but it went elsewhere. They didn't tell Congress about it. That was unlawful and what happened.

Past administration, as you can see right now, there's another "trial," the act is going on right now in regard to the past president. I don't want to get political. I'm going to stay within the guardrails, but we can see how this is affecting us in agriculture industry. We have a lot to catch up on and we're going to get everybody on deck. All hands have got to come on deck. I'm very thankful that 2501 has received a lot of funds and I'm happy for Dr. Carrie Castille and what she's doing, because her hands are full.

That's another department, that's going to be very influential to the things that we need to do to make things even. But we cannot let the funds that we have now be misdirected and go out and try to save

somebody else. That's not part of this particular group. Congress has authorized us to do what we are doing right now. When we came back on board, we agreed that every 90 days we're going to have a meeting, a public meeting, and this wasn't done by program or anything else, we decided you need to hear from us all the time, and we need to hear from you most of all. We can't do any work until we hear from you.

Once you tell us what we need to do, then we can go from there. But the important thing is that send those comments in, tell your neighbors, tell the other farmers down the street, tell the other agro folks out in the street as well, because there's a lot of disparities across our countries. A lot of things that should have happened, didn't happen. Blatantly, it just didn't happen. It was just overlooked. But our concern is, how do you overlook our entire Committee that Congress said that we coexist? You just overlooked it, but we are here.

I'm glad one of the callers said they are going to challenge the committee. Yes, we need to be challenged because to challenge us would give us an insight on what we need to do to support those that are out there. Mr. Ashton came up with the programs that he has with the veterans, in regard to the scholarships, in regard to some of the things that you need to take a lot of stress and employment and is three E's. We have employment, education and also entrepreneurship.

But you veterans out there, I'm a veteran myself and we have another veteran in our committee, Mr. Will Miller. He's also a veteran. We're veterans, so we're not going to sit down there and leave anybody behind. We're not going to do that. This is our responsibility. I want thank Mr. Troy Joshua for what he did in regard to the stats. This is why it was important. Mr. Joshua was with us on the first call that we had, but I wouldn't mind having him come... give him a lot of space to say what he has to say without restricting any time on him.

Because this committee represent over half a million people, that is in agriculture. Over half a million. From Saipan all the way down to Puerto Rico. Everybody knows the Pacific Coast, the specific route, all the way down to the Southern part of the United States. We represent over half a million people. That's a lot in regard to the three million other farmers that are out there. We need to eat. We need to be productive. We need to be employed. That's why we had the individuals on the telephone today that try to bring this thing, not full circle, because we're halfway around, but it's just the number of people that we represent. We represent a whole host of ethnic groups out there.

If you look at Guam, there's about four or five different ethnic groups on that Island of Guam, which is part of the United States. They're there. We're not just representing Southeast United States, we represent the entire United States and their territories. These funds that we have here, we want to make sure that due diligence is done with these funds, they don't go any the other direction. We have some proactive people on this committee, they're going to make sure that these funds... and I didn't know they smell the blood of money right now, so they're going to make sure where this money is going.

I know I will be getting telephone calls from committee members on who wants to handle what. We have two sub-committees that represent several different agencies, Mr. Will Miller is the chairperson, and also vice chair of the group, he shared that in one of his sub committees and Dr. Claude Evans, he has also a subcommittee. It took us a little while for us to get in gear, but this pump has been primed and we are ready to move on.

With that, we're going to follow the funds to make sure that more grants, more funding go to the proper places where they should go, that reach everybody. As we stated earlier, the number of people that we represent, which is true to farm from American Indians, African Americans, Asians, Hawaiians, and Hispanics. Because Mr. Eston had a letter that he was, trying to get the name right, it was Camille Lohas Smith, Hawaii. Five hours behind me. I'm in Louisiana. I wanted to make sure.

It goes to show you how far things go and what we are doing. We need you. You just don't need us; we all need one another. But our job is to make sure that the funds are placed where they're supposed to go. I'm glad that we have the people that was on the line today that handles those funds, Ms. Nicholas, and Ms. Castille, they're the ones who are handling all those grants and servicing those communities and servicing the universities.

Mr. Ashton, taking care of all the veterans. Mr. Joshua is getting all the stats that we need. I just want you all to be prepared. We're going to meet again within a 90-day period, or it may be sooner than that, it all depends. We just don't want to lock ourselves up. Once again, I'm going to open the floor to any committee member who wants to say anything before I close it out on my end. Anybody out there?



**Eston:** Chair Reed. There was one, and she emailed me, a committee member, Michelle Cruz.

**Will:** This is Will Miller.

**Harvey:** Okay, Will.

**Will:** Chairman, Reed, this is Will Miller from Vice Chair of the committee with the Ohio Farmers Union. I just wanted to... I'm in the middle of a snowstorm driving back home so I really shouldn't be talking on the phone, but I was able to hear the whole teleconference session. It was a great session. We learned a lot, very informative and I have to congratulate all of the USDA employees, as well as you for providing the format for feedback to the committee.

Two things that weren't mentioned that I'd like to mention. One, I'm driving in the middle of a severe weather warning period in Ohio and I think minority farmers can play a very strategic role in this whole issue of climate change and the impact of the environment on agriculture. I'm hoping that at some point we will be able to address those issues through the USDA and make sure that our minority farmers are participating in those programs directed to the farming community.

The other thing that I just wanted to mention that some of us represent the faith community and there has been a lot of discussion and involvement with the churches leading the way to address some of the food, agriculture and environmental issues impacting this country. Anyway, I just wanted to congratulate you on providing this format for today, and I look forward to really digging in and continuing our work on the committee. Thanks.

**Harvey:** You're welcome Will. Thank you. You be careful coming home.

**Will:** Thanks.

**Harvey:** I think Mr. Eston wanted to say something.

**Eston:** Yes. There was an email came in from the other committee member, Ms. Michelle Cruz. She was trying to get in, but I would read what she said. I've been having trouble with the connection today and wanted to chime in now, but it was not working. I'm still listening, but I just wanted to say, I echo what my fellow committee members have said and want to be able to make things accessible through different marketing, as well as providing materials in different languages. I look forward to being part of this and shorten this disparity. Best, Michelle Cruz.

Harvey:

Thank you, Michelle. Thank you. Mr. Eston, our DFO, is there anything else? I know we have to follow the guidelines on everything. By the way, I can say this. There are several things that's going on, we're going to just interact with, is going to happen, even though it's not part of our purview. The bill that Senator Booker has on the table with the other congressional people and also with Congress [02:44:44 inaudible] has also. Those things pertain mainly to Black farmers and what have you, but our job here is to represent [02:44:52 inaudible] States and its territories.

But all these things are going to work hand in hand with one another. It's about time we get our country back in shape again, and not look at it as the North and South, look at it as the one country under God. That we're not indivisible, but we are here to do the things we need to do. Without agriculture none of us can really function. Try go two or three days without eating anything, you just won't do anything. Agriculture is important.

All of us are part of the agriculture business and all the agencies that sit in agriculture they're vital to us. But the only way we are going to make things go is to make sure that we do the right thing and that all the funding, I'm a stickler on funding, make sure all the funding go where it's supposed to go and not be misdirected. Because without using your stakeholders or talking to the communities about doing things and moving things around causes problems. Because a lot of us didn't know... one of the callers called up about this. No one knew what was going on. No one knew, but now that we know, so that's why the committee is here.

As I've said, we're the only committee in the Farm Bill that represent people of color. I'm not trying to segregate ourselves, we just want to make sure that we just don't get duped under this administration, the way we got to duped under the last administration. Our job is to protect your interest and to protect your welfare. We're not the police. We are not doing no investigative work. I want to give advice and recommendation. You put it out there, we take it, we package it up, give it to the Secretary.

I know when he sits there, he has a lot of work on his hand coming from this committee, because he has a backlog of comments that has to be addressed. We don't address comments, the Secretary Office does because this is what professionals are. This is why they paid him the money that they do, and this is why they're there from time to time.

Our job is to take it and package it and give it to the Secretary. But nevertheless, don't hesitate to call anyone of us.

As I called out early, we come from several different States. You got somebody in your State, talk to them. Mississippi, Texas, Oklahoma Rhode Island, Michigan, Florida, and Ohio, and also Pennsylvania and Louisiana, the state where I live. Call us. We are important if somebody call us. If you don't call us, we're not important. Make us work. Give us something to do, because right now we're trying to catch up from what has happened over the last three and a half years, and that's not easy. Mr. Eston, you think you could take it from here? That's my time. 3:50, what else do we have to do?

**Eston:**

Yes, sir. Chair Reed, and you are right on time too. Let me follow up with some closing things. Let me, first of all, thank you, Chair Reed, for your leadership and the committee for what they're doing in giving the support that I need to be successful and be able to provide all that that's helping us get where we are now.

Also want to thank all the speakers today. Everyone from the Acting Director for Office of Project Public Engagement, Jacqueline Davis-Slay to Ms. Kenya Nicholas, Program Director to Bill Ashton, Military Veteran Agriculture Liaison, Mr. Troy Joshua with NASS and Dr. Carrie Castille with NIFA. Last but not least, I want to thank the public for coming on and providing a comment because this committee is all about you as well and we're there to serve you.

As Chair Reed said, there are certain protocols had to be done with these meetings and I'm learning, this was a stiff learning curve for me, but we're going to be okay. There are certain things that must be done. As I stated before, if you have any emails you want to send out to me, do it at [acmf@usda.gov](mailto:acmf@usda.gov). Also stay tuned to our web page. Best way to get there, just Google, the Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement, and you can see everything that goes on with this committee.

I will state again, all of this will be posted on the website. It must be done, and that's what we were set out to do and we have to post these comments and the minutes, and also the transcript will be there as well. I'll be remiss if I didn't ask for our Acting Director, Jacque Davis-Slay, if she has anything that she wants to say before I adjourn this meeting. Jackie, if you're on, do you want to address the group before I adjourn? Maybe she's not, maybe she has another meeting to attend.

Anyway, at this time I can end the meeting, let the record shows that the USDA Advisory Committee of Minority Farmers meeting did adjourn at 3:54 PM Central Standard Time. Thank you all and have a great evening.

**Harvey:**

You are welcome.

**Kierra:**

That concludes our conference. Thank you for using Events Services. You may now disconnect.



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Designated Federal Officer

Date: 3/31/2021

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**Harvey Reed**  
ACMF Chairman

Date: 3/31/2021