



United States Department of Agriculture  
Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement  
1400 Independence Avenue S.W., Room 520A  
Washington, DC 20250

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***ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON MINORITY FARMERS (ACMF)***

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**ACMF Public Meeting: Summary Minutes**

**July 23 - 25, 2024  
Tarrytown, NY**

**Tuesday, July 23, 2024**

The meeting was brought to order by R. Jeanese Cabrera, Designated Federal Officer (DFO) with the Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement (OPPE). Upon confirming a quorum of the Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers (ACMF), Chair Kimberly Ratcliff, declared a quorum and commenced the first public advisory committee meeting of this term, describing the run of the agenda, and praising each member for their time and commitment in support of all minority farming communities. Following member introductions, Chair Ratcliff offered brief commentary noting first how this committee is set up to serve minority farmers and ranchers, and organizations that support them like civil rights organizations, institutions of higher education, organizations offering technical and other assistance and how each member is tasked with engaging their respective stakeholders to build a narrative of areas where the USDA might shore up its outreach to ensure that its programs are accessible by all, removing barriers of any sort, and expanding its communications reach to bridge any gaps (i.e., distributing materials and other languages). Chair Ratcliff also spoke about opportunity for growth and advancement in the agricultural sector for minority farmers and ranchers. Initiatives programs and policies aim to support minority farming communities should always promote equity and inclusion which would in turn foster innovation and entrepreneurship creating a sustainable and more equitable agricultural landscape.

Chair Ratcliff introduced the first speaker of the day—**Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement’s (OPPE) Deputy Director Kenya Nicholas** who began with greetings behalf of Sec. Thomas Vilsack. Importantly, Mrs. Nicholas reaffirmed the significance of this committee, underscoring the USDA’s commitment to supporting minority farming communities across the nation, and that *“it’s not just a matter of policy, it’s a matter of principle, and this committee is our testament to USDA’s dedication and ensuring that every farmer, regardless of their background, will receive the same service, access to the same resources and support that is available to all Americans in agriculture.”* Mrs. Nicholas was also keen to charge the committee with their feedback on how we might better remove barriers and how we communicate the programs and resources to all who endeavor to build enterprises in agriculture. Mrs. Nicholas then ended with well wishes as the committee embarks upon three days to consider how best to eliminate barriers of *any sort*—whether access to programs, resources, information, as well as enhancing the

USDA’s ability to address service failures and address policy changes to increase inclusion levels on county boards. *The question posed basically asks the committee to develop recommendation generally around how the USDA might better serve those who have been historically underserved and stem the tide of minority farm failures and declining numbers.* Mrs. Nicholas acknowledged the leadership of the prior Chairperson, Mr. Harvey Reed, and the heavy lift it took to keep the committee together (around the proverbial table) throughout a global pandemic and expressed with utmost confidence that this cohort will take it even further “*over the finish line.*” A robust Q&A followed during which Mrs. Nicholas described the challenges of 2501 and reaching into that “last mile” of communities often underserved, still – in terms of grantees’ technical assistance and outreach among minority and veteran farmers and ranchers. Among other topics, Mrs. Nicholas ended on a high note regarding the important contributions of the Rural Partners Network (formerly known as Strikeforce), and the many ways it addresses the needs of struggling minority farming communities in the areas of housing, utilities, water, broadband, and more.

Next, Chair Ratcliff introduced **Commodities Futures Trading Commissioner Kristin N. Johnson**, who explored *Key Trends in Commodity Markets & Agriculture*. As a nationally recognized expert on financial markets, risk management law, and policy with specialization in the regulation of complex financial products, and the implications of emerging innovations like artificial intelligence technologies that target financial transactions, transfers, and assessments. Commissioner Johnson touched upon the work of the CFTC which adopts, implements and enforces regulation and derivatives markets which she believes assists farmers and ranchers with risk management and price discovery. She explained about the futures market which dates to the 1800s. She hails from a farming family in Indiana which is her primary connection to minority farming and ranching. She alluded also to USDA’s partnership in developing U.S. agricultural markets and noted that *this* advisory committee can continue to foster efforts to achieve inclusion in the sector by ensuring equity and access to critical resources for diverse farmers and ranchers. She explored macroeconomic conditions, and how supply chain disruptions impacted production and logistic costs for large and small farmers – alike. Commissioner Johnson presented a full picture of agriculture today with historic and current data that revealed reasons why producers are often forced to shutter their businesses. She added context for how global trends show up in local markets.

The Committee next heard from the co-chairs of **USDA’s Equity Commission—Mr. Arturo S. Rodriguez, President Emeritus, United Farm Workers and Communications and Public Relations Expert and Ms. Ertharin Cousin, for US Ambassador who currently serves as the CEO and Managing Director of Food Systems for the Future**, a nutrition impact investment fund. Today she champions longer-term, more sustainable solutions for global food insecurity and hunger. She talked a bit about the work of the Equity Commission and how extremely rewarding it has been to work with a group to develop recommendations for the “People’s Department”. They stressed the importance of the ACMF’s mandate, focusing on the farmers and ranchers to ensure equal access to the services and support of the Department. They spoke of the challenges of working with a relatively large group of commissioners who came from

different areas of country, and shared how everyone eventually came together to form a cohesive *one*. They described their process and recognized from the beginning that *“there was a lot and enough pain to go around. And that rather than focusing on the pain of our individual groups, which we represented, whether it was farm workers or Black farmers or Asian American farmers, etc., that we had a shared goal of ensuring that the recommendations that we put forward were forward leaning . . . written in a way that would avoid any of the political backlash that we often see when a recommendation or an action can be defined as discriminatory from one group to another.”* *“We were able to have very thorny conversations without being disagreeable.”* After many encouraging remarks and a brief Q&A session, the co-chairs left the ACMF with a charge to *“look for every opportunity [you] can initiate whatever programs we can over the next few months to set the precedence to begin in terms of ensuring that whatever happens next, that at least we have this to fall back on and utilize as our experiences.”*

**Dr. Penny Brown Reynolds, the (Acting) Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights,** completed the morning line-up of speakers. Dr. Brown Reynolds is one of the nation’s preeminent civil rights scholars and experts with 30 years of transformative leadership in civil rights, law, executive management, as well as higher education and organizational change management. She spoke from a personal space sharing in the genre of conversation starting with where she came from, and much of her journey over the course of 30 years, with a PhD in criminal justice, a juris doctorate, and sitting judge. Dr. Brown Reynolds began her comments stating that the USDA has not always treated people well, and the historic and systemic injustice stifled many from achieving the dreams and opportunities of those who needed it most. The Secretary has vested a great deal in Dr. Brown Reynolds as the chief principal EEO officer for all USDA 113,297 employees. She opined that the perspectives and recommendations of this advisory committee (i.e., the ACMF) as being *“paramount to reversing how we do business at the USDA”*. She specifically quoted past Chairman William Miller, in his letter to the Secretary submitted with the July 2023 recommendations, in his words she said, *“unless and until there is an immediate and meaningful about face in how [we] the USDA does business, inequities will be stagnant and difficult to reverse.”* She went on to note, then Chairman Miller contended that *“these conditions are irreversible without bold and courageous transformative action.”* Dr. Brown Reynolds declared these words could not be truer today and thanked the Committee for the report. She continued with her work in organizational change and the outcomes achieved during her tour in the Department as (Acting) Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights and the outcomes achieved in doing right by the USDA stakeholders. She aimed to root out all the corruption while simultaneously bringing about efficiency at multiple levels. The members were inspired by her reflections.

The morning ended with several comments on the record from our public visitors (both in person and virtually). The members gathered to begin the afternoon excursions visiting farming enterprises and engaging stakeholders in the Hudson Valley and New York City (urban agriculturists).

**Wednesday, July 24, 2024**

The meeting was brought to order by Designated Federal Officer, R. Jeanese Cabrera, of the Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement (OPPE). Upon confirming a quorum of the Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers (ACMF), Chair Kimberly Ratcliff, commenced meeting with a recap of the prior day.

The meeting was brought to order by Designated Federal Officer, R. Jeanese Cabrera, of the Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement (OPPE). Upon confirming a quorum of the Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers (ACMF), Chair Kimberly Ratcliff, commenced meeting with a recap of the prior day. Before the first speaker of the day, the Committee heard from Ms. Yvonne Lee, representing the USDA Equity Commission, who stayed on for both days (2 and 3) and participated in several offsite engagements visiting with Asian American Farmers and Ranchers (Agriculturists) in China town. It was a quasi “convening” sharing the results of the Equity Commission’s Report on Recommendations that came out earlier this year. Ms. Lee held a seat at the table for the duration of the meeting and shared how honored she was to serve with the USDA Equity Commission.

Chair Ratcliff introduced **Dr. Dewayne Goldmon, USDA Office of the Secretary Senior Advisor on Racial Equity**. Dr. Goldmon is a former member of the ACMF, having served three full terms. He also addressed a past misunderstanding about the role of the ACMF and the newly minted Equity Commission. Dr. Goldmon was tasked with gathering all the past recommendations of certain USDA advisory committees, determine statuses, beginning with those in the 1965 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights report and ending with the most recent (last) report of recommendations produced by the ACMF in its July 2023 report. He further reported that, given continued delay to pass the Farm Bill, there may be an opportunity to craft legislation there in that draws from some of the recommendations generated by *both* committees. Dr. Goldmon touched upon several topics including (but not limited to) farming enterprises’ growth and expansion; land access, heirs’ property and fractionated land issues—the latter of which disproportionately affect Black and Native American communities. The Equity Commissions report contains 66 recommendations. Dr. Goldmon described the process of generating and implementing recommendations, noting that *“you’re asking people to come together . . . to sit down and debate and deliberate on things that are needed to put USDA in a better position from an equity standpoint, right? And so, you really want to give those people an opportunity to bring forward those recommendations. On the other hand, USDA as a department is not asleep! . . . Some situational awareness about what’s needed. Those recommendations that were implemented were the ones that the leadership and the Secretary felt were important to act upon right away, like the \$600 farm worker subsidy, the County Committees. I think Secretary Vilsack looked hard at the flexibility authority he had to . . . tighten up the county committee system.”*

Next presenter was **Josiah Griffin, Policy Advisory USDA Office Tribal Relations (OTR)**. Mr. Griffin is also the DFO for the Tribal Advisory Committee, and opened with how tribal agribusiness is valued at \$6.5 billion and since 2017 saw a growth of 82% and noted that

the landscape is shifting in positive ways. He described distinctions among tribal nations and tribal members who are citizens of the nations and citizens of the United States which is where the OTR comes in. He shared relevant statistics, e.g., more than 400 programs are available across the USDA that support farm and food interests and food viability. Mr. Griffin's presentation was rich with history not commonly known, including how the laws intersect with the evolving relationships among the nations and the US and referenced the Dawes Act relative to assimilation and allotments of land; the Indian Reorganization Act, and now there is a policy around Indian *self-determination*. Mr. Griffin also reviewed the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs which has oversight and acts as fiduciary land manager (in trust). This was a thought-provoking presentation on the current landscape of tribal affairs and relations vis-à-vis the Department and other governmental agencies. One question that arose during the Q&A of which the ACMF is keenly interested is about those tribes who are apart of discrete communities and yet are not federally recognized. The question posed was, "is there a pathway"? The answer is a resounding yes—specifically, "*the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of the Interior is recognized by law with primary authority to both identify federally recognized tribes and to manage that fiduciary interest. . . regulatory protocol for tribes that [are] interested in state-recognized and non-federally recognized entities that might be eligible for seeking federal recognition. I have also seen other tribes be recognized as federally recognized tribes under law.*"

Next the ACMF heard from **Mr. Bryan Combs, Chief of Environmental, Economics, & Demographics Branch Statistics Division, National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS)**. Mr. Combs delivered a smart, tightly framed breakdown of the status of the most recent census—the 2022 Census of Agriculture was the 30th in the series and the 6<sup>th</sup> conducted by NASS. The ACMF is aware that it may request additional data products derived from its inquiries into how the Department may stem the tide of failing farm enterprises, particularly among those in minority farming communities. Mr. Combs also touched upon the statistical Policy Directive No. 15 on which this committee worked with a NASS team 2 years ago. It was recently released and impacts how NASS will collect race and ethnicity statistics. In the beginning, the OMB had declared that race and ethnicity were separate questions. That has changed. Before the Hispanic questions were separate from race. Moving forward, the new update include Hispanic as a race selection. Several of the other major themes from the 2022 Census include: farm numbers and land in farms both have declined mostly among the largest farms; fewer farms accounted for the most agricultural products sold; average age of farmers and ranchers continues to rise; an increase in both young and new and beginning producers; increase in internet access (especially via mobile), and USDA and NASS specifically will be updating how race and ethnicity questions will be collected in the future. One outcome from this discussion is that the members are committed to seeking greater investment for USDA's NASS of the USDA.

The afternoon session for Day 2 began with **Hon. Danielle G. Lake, Deputy Regional Director, National Appeals Division (NAD)**, delivering a primer for the ACMF on the NAD and begin with the artist's rendition of NAD reflecting "face to face fairness" which is NAD's tagline. Impartial and unbiased adjudication for stakeholders seeking to explore

the issues and outcomes of adverse decision made by agencies, under the authority of the Administrative Procedures Act. Judge Lake shared a few notions of law where the appellant (stakeholder) must show by a ‘preponderance’ of the evidence that it is more likely than not (by 51% or more) that an agency’s decision is incorrect. NAD was created because farmers and producers “spoke up” because it looked like “*family and friends, or just people who knew people making the decisions, seemed to be getting better benefits than others! There were complaints of a lack of consistency and fairness in how people were awarded, be it loans, or any other benefits of USDA programs.*” Judge Lake also noted that NAD cannot “*handle complaints based on discrimination. That is exclusively within the jurisdiction of the Office of Civil Rights.*” NAD is assigned by three regions and that's the West, the South, and the East. The South also includes Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, St. Croix. There are significant timelines for filings which can be done electronically now.

Next, we heard from **Mr. Zach Ducheneaux, Administrator USDA Farm Services Agency (FSA)** who updated the ACMF on the latest machinations of FSA, beginning with a background on the FSA, which is charged with administering farm programs, farm loan programs across a network of 2,100 offices and through 50 state offices. Around 10,000 employees carry out its mission. He also described the county committee structure with anywhere from three to nine people in each of those counties and a growing number of urban ag county committees and county offices that help serve producers and those stakeholder groups. He spoke about FSA’s efforts around “*streamlining program access, streamlining the paperwork needed to participate in programs, but I think most importantly is trying to adopt a mindset about inclusion and help our staff feel supported in getting people in the door through the thoughtful use of their discretion instead of using discretion to close the door on people or find you otherwise ineligible.*” FSA has enhanced other programs that minority farmers use frequently like the Supplemental Disaster Assistance programs, the Livestock Forage Disaster Program, Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm Raised Fish Program, Livestock Indemnity Program, the Tree Assistance Program and the Emergency Tree Replacement Program—to ensure that there's a better safety net around producers in those segments.

He mentioned a final rule that is coming about within months that is going to “*transform the way we do lending*”. This new rule will also be something that producers can point to as documentation that's out there in front of everybody. A producer can now say, “*hey, the [new] rule says you will do this. Please help me get this done.*” It is a chance now for the us to pivot from the actions of the past about farm loans that led to *Pigford, Keeps Eagle, Garcia, and Love*.

And finally, the Administrator pointed to a “hard and fast line between executive branch and the legislative branch, and we can't advocate for pieces of legislation” and referred the Committee to 12 legislative proposals that relate to underwriting standards (i.e., credit) and even though they are legislative, getting them into the President’s budget proposal “*the gloves are off and we [FSA] can engage fully in those conversations.*” Among them are the *elimination of term limits, streamlining access to emergency loans, accepting other types of entity types (LLC, Corp, Partnerships) for beneficial loan programs for distressed*

*borrowers*. He asked the Committee to look at some of those ideas; FSA welcomes our feedback.

Next the ACMF heard from **Mr. Lamont Jackson, Deputy Director USDA Forest Services** and **Ms. Lynn Knight, USDA National Program Lead USDA Climate Hubs**. Deputy Director Jackson began with climate change, environmental justice, and the Justice 40 Initiative (J-40). Environmental justice can be described as the “*just treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of their race, their color, national origin, tribal affiliation, or disability in agency decision making and other federal activities*”. Environmental justice is also about “*protecting others from disproportionate impact of adverse human health and environmental effects and hazards*”. This includes eradicating a legacy of racism or other structural or systemic barriers allowing for “*equitable access to a healthy, sustainable, and resilient environment to live, play, work, learn, grow, worship, and engage in cultural and subsistence practices.*” Disadvantaged groups hail from urban America and rural America and so there is no “one size fits all” for addressing injustice. In term of Justice 40, the USDA has 70 covered programs across the Department, though Forest Services is front and center in the Justice 40, which was born out of Executive Order 14008 to tackle the climate crisis at home and abroad; J-40 was launched in 2021. J-40 in a nutshell is “the goal of deploying 40% of our overall direct and indirect benefits of *covered investments* flow to *disadvantaged communities*.”

Consider also that disadvantaged communities are more often dramatically affected by climate change. J-40 interventions might encompass “*clean energy and energy efficiency, clean transportation, affordable and sustainable housing, training and workforce development related to climate, natural disasters and environment, remediation and reduction of legacy pollution. And of course, critical clean water and waste infrastructure.*” The USDA currently has 10 climate hubs throughout the country and the territories. The hub structure is 14 years young with a mission to “*develop and deliver science-based region-specific information and technologies with USDA agencies and partners to agricultural and natural resource managers that enable climate-informed decision-making and to provide access to assistance to implement those decisions*”. The climate hub is made up of three major agencies, the Forest Service, Agricultural Research Service, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and works to “*connect a wide range of USDA partners, including federal and state agencies, universities, extension and tribes, resulting in leveraged resources for networking, for climate informed decision making. We coordinate with other regional climate change organizations, including the United States Geological Survey's Climate Adaptation Science Centers and NOAA's Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessment Program*”.

**Ms. Eloris Speight, Director Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Policy Research Center, Alcorn State University (the “Center”)**, was the next speaker and has engaged with this committee on prior occasions and is here with an update and will also provide historical context for the Center for the new members. The Center has a strategic focus in the 18 states with 1890 Land Grant Universities having been authorized by Congress in the 2014 Farm Bill to be a “*voice for the socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers*” and to ensure that “*data-driven information that was available for the minority,*

*to advance the success of minority farmers, but to assure that there was data-driven information available for both the Senate and House Agricultural Committees*". The Center is housed in the Office of the President at Alcorn, and it conducts research, analyze policies, and make recommendations to achieve equitable and economic integration of USDA programs and policies among socially disadvantaged farmer and rancher communities and rural landowners. She drew the distinction between "equality" and "equity" which are often (and erroneously) used interchangeably. They are not the same. Four areas of focus in the center includes "active research, policy development, stakeholder engagement, and strategic outreach. Ms. Speight explained the differences between the American Rescue Plan Act and the Inflation Reduction Act and shared alarming statistics including that "[the] *black farmer [represents] the only minority group that is declining and [has] declined from roughly 926,000 in 1920 to less than 40,000*" per the 2017 Census" and touched upon the inadequacy of efforts to seek "equity among black producers after more-than 400 years of oppression." The Center provides recommendations to both the House and Senate Agricultural Committees and many of those recommendations involve policy changes. The Center differs in this way from the ACMF which submits recommendations directly to the USDA Secretary.

#### **Thursday, July 25, 2024**

**Brian V. Guse, Director Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production** hales from the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production which was authorized under the 2018 Farm Bill to lead the way in the Department to promote availability of programs for all sizes and types of operation. The office specifically was authorized in the 2018 Farm Bill to encourage and promote urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural practices. The Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production was authorized under the 2018 Farm Bill to really help lead the way in the department to promote availability of programs for all sizes and types of operation. The office specifically was authorized in the 2018 Farm Bill to encourage and promote urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural practices. Many urban producers do not have the generational familiarity with USDA that a lot of our rural producers have and for that reason outreach is a huge lift but, it appears outreach is working with the number of applications are doubling annually (in 2024 along we received 621 applications for this program). One key perspective Mr. Guse shared was about, "*garden types that [are] supported include traditional community gardens producing food, gardens that promote wildlife habitat, including pollinators and beneficial insects and bird-friendly gardens, providing green space for people in urban areas just to get out and get some fresh air and sit under a tree.*" Educational and training spaces for youth coupled with workforce development and continuing education, resources for senior citizens, are collateral benefits as well.

**Ms. Melissa Bailey, Associate Administrator Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and Ms. Elizabeth Lober, Assistant to Deputy Administrator for Commodity Procurement.** Ms. Melissa Bailey began with a brief overview of AMS and its 10 programs most of which are commodity focused. AMS administers over 50 statutes relating to agricultural commodities. Food purchasing is one of the more visible services at AMS—having purchased a whopping \$3.6 billion worth of food to support producers. AMS also inspects



and grades production in beef, lamb, chicken, turkey, butter, and eggs. Another AMS service is the Perishable Agricultural Commodities or PACA program which protects enterprises producing fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables and establishes by enforcing a code of fair business practices. AMS also offers several Good Agricultural Practices' services, or GAP audits, which opens Global Food markets to those enterprises that adapt. Ms. Bailey also reported that AMS has partnered with several HBCUs to better understand how the USDA can build trust and confidence with BIPOC communities to, "*to identify and implement some concrete ways to address inequities in the ability to access our programs through targeted outreach, training and technical assistance*". Ms. Bailey closed with sharing information on AMS' local food programs as part of an effort "[to build] the resilience of food systems by expanding market opportunities. She offered to attend a more technical call should the committee seek to understand more technical aspects of this program. Next the ACMF heard from **Ms. Elizabeth Lober** who presented additional detail on the local food purchase assistance program (LFPA) and local food for schools (LFS) disclosing that "*\$864 million invested in the LFPA [of which, for example,] \$124 million is going to use by tribal governments . . . The impact on local communities is huge.*" AMS also has "*53 cooperative agreements with states, territories, Washington, DC and 76 cooperative agreements with Tribal governments.*" She shared three overarching goals of the LFPA program: states and tribal governments strengthen their local and regional food systems; help underserved producers and farmers with expanding economic opportunities; and establish, strengthen, and broaden partnerships among farmers and producers in underserved communities. AMS investments (acquisitions) are significant (e.g., 52% in produce; 25% in meat and poultry; and then dairy, eggs, seafood.)

**Dr. Ronald L. Rainey, Assistant Vice President, Professor, Center Director, University of Arkansas System, Division of Agriculture,** led with the afternoon discussions, beginning sharing that the farm economy is under a great deal of financial stress right now with "*low commodity prices, . . . high costs, profit squeeze, high interest rates [all of which] make it incredibly difficult to refinance, and a lot of our farmers are forced to increase their farm debt to refinance*". Dr. Rainey's presentation focused on Racial Equity Issues in the Evolution of U.S. Agriculture and an expanding "*tougher, more dire situation for our small, beginning, and marginalized farmers who've systematically been denied the opportunity to scale up.*" He explored the Homestead Act of 1862 where citizens were given 160 acres of land and improved the land for 5 years and its impact on displaced Native Americans. Then he touched upon the unfulfilled promise of "40 acres and a mule" following the Civil War; the land grant system of 1862; how the Extensions system was set up; the subsequent land-grants of 1890 and 1994 extensions; New Deal programming; Farmers' Home program 1946. Dr. Rainey offered a historic snapshot on the evolution of these USDA programs and others over the years and how "*inequities exist still among socially disadvantaged limited resource farmers.*" He ended with reviewing the recent Census data which is published every 5 years.

**Commissioner Richard Ball and Assistant Commissioner Damali Wynter,** New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. Next the ACMF heard from the NYS

Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets who shared his experience as a farmer first, and his journey to become New York's Commissioner of Agriculture and Markets. He shared how his family *"ate Cheerios for about five years, struggled for a long time, lived very close to bankruptcy for the first three years there. And but after 20 years, we got a business that was working, the farm was working. Kids were getting involved in the business."* He described challenges of dealing with food deserts, and the Bronx with high rates of childhood obesity and juvenile diabetes in areas with no grocery stores, or farmers markets. Mr. Ball also declared that key people on his 15,000-acre farm are women including his wife, and daughters. He also spoke about a similar challenge experienced by the USDA around great efforts for urban agriculture initiatives, community gardens, and beginning (young) farmers but, *"if you don't know about it, what good is it?"* The disconnects are confounding among the parties involved in NY agriculture and Mr. Ball got all these parties together for the purpose of hearing the others' perspectives, listening in on the "disconnects" after which significant progress has been made and much learning acquired along the way, including the issue of heirs' property. Both Mr. Ball and Ms. Wynter, Assistant Commissioner, also shared on a positive note about the great diversity among the NYS agriculture markets, e.g., *"we have Somali Butu farmers in New York" and "farmers from Ghana . . . and farmers coming from Western Africa"*. It was inspirational.

**Allison Johnson**, National Outreach Coordinator – East and **Herminia Gomez**, HSI Coordinator - New York delivered a presentation regarding **1890 Land Grant Institutions and Hispanic Servicing Institutions (HSI)**. Ms. Johnson described the Office of Partnership and Public Engagement, and how OPPE develops and maintains partnerships focused on solutions and challenges facing rural and underserved communities throughout the U.S. Much of the work is done through liaisons at various universities located on 1890 land-grant and HSI campuses. In a nutshell, the liaisons are the direct link to the surrounding community-based organizations, grassroots organizations, institutions of higher education, with the purpose of getting the message out to all underserved citizens regarding USDA programs. Liaisons also work with summer programs and bridge cooperative agreements with the universities allowing high school students to have experiential learning opportunities on those campuses each summer as sponsored by agencies.

**Ms. Lorette Picciano, Executive Director; Mr. John Zippert, Chair Rural Coalition** shared with the ACMF their humble beginnings and their role in the Farm Bill legislation and how the ACMF was established. These days they spend much time on county committees, the Farm Service Agency who administer the farm programs, and how the county committees administer and decide who gets the commodity program payments, and they hire the county executive directors. This underscores the need for greater FSA oversight and involvement. Ms. Picciano reviewed the voting practices in these local counties and the voting rules that have become *de facto* barriers to inclusion and participation over time. Rural Coalition also looks at matters around land access, land tenure, heirs' property, farm ownership and share some fascinating statistics on these and other issues involving the collection of data surveys done in the Census of Agriculture (e.g., farm owners versus operators). Mr. Zippert, shared his extensive historical recall of minorities and agricultural, having also been a member of this Committee in times past. The presentation was chock full of useful (alternative) statistical analyses that the committee reference as they pursue

and consider future advice and guidance to be offered to the Secretary.

**Ms. Cathy Glover, Deputy Administrator, Rural Housing Programs**, spoke about the Single-Family Housing and Multi-Family Housing programs at Rural Development which administers low-interest rate loan programs, loan guarantee programs, and grant programs for repairs. Low-income requirements (80% of the area median income) but purchase is only in “rural” areas. RHP also has a housing preservation grant program working with organizations that assist with repairing homes. After reviewing the mechanics of these programs Administrator Glover engaged the members with questions on the 502 direct loan program and others of particular interest among the members. One important issue broached was that in times past if RHP did not spend down the annual funding allotment (which is not controlled by RD) it was rolled over. This year, however, unused funds were rescinded, and it is unclear what will be coming next fiscal year. She also distinguished the difference between the Housing Preservation Grant (Section 533) and the 504 Grant Program which provides an automatic \$10,000 in emergency situations and is supposed to be administered with a single-page application. Ms. Glover provided clarification on some of the information received from the Rural Partners Network during the committee’s prior term’s final public meeting.

**Commissioner Yvonne Lee, USDA Equity Commission** ended with another thank you to the ACMF for the invitation to participate in this public meeting, and shared her experience with the Commission and a clarion call to *“keep the engagement with our stakeholders because their voices need to be represented here”*. Commissioner Lee vowed to keep contact and invited the members to the Equity Commission's final meeting in Washington, D.C. on September 25, 2024.

This public advisory committee meeting closed with statements from each member in attendance sharing their take-aways and areas for future focus which may be read in the transcripts captured for the last day.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:40 p.m.



October 21, 2024

\_\_\_\_\_  
R. Jeanese Cabrera  
Designated Federal Official  
Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers

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Date



October 21, 2024

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Kimberly Ratcliff  
Chair  
Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date