

# Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Advisory Committee (UAIPAC)

## Meeting Transcript

Thursday, March 24, 2022 ( Day 2)

Time: 11:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Eastern Time

Meeting Start

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, Office of Urban Agriculture & Innovative Production (OUAIP), Designated Federal Officer (DFO)** Thank you, Jeff. And good morning everyone. I am opening the second day of the Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Advisory Committee meeting. Welcome, Committee Members and presenters. Thank you, Jeff Davis for operating in the background as our meeting producer to ensure things are running smoothly.

Yesterday, we heard great remarks from the Secretary and from the NRCS Chief Cosby, and other USDA leaders as well, sharing their vision and expectations about USDA's efforts with urban agriculture. We were also fortunate to hear from Senator Stabenow. She joined us to share her thoughts and plans as well, and it was very inspiring to hear her message. We also learned a lot from the Advisory Committee Members and appreciate their honest input.

For our agenda today, you will meet the new Director for the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production, we will hear about USDA's plans to establish urban offices, the committee will be identifying and setting their priorities, and then we'll be hearing the public forum which we're all very interested in listening to. So we've got a full day ahead of us. But before we welcome the new Director, I wanted to see if the Committee Chair or member Dr. Wallace would like to make any opening remarks.

**Member Angela Mason** Thank you, Leslie. I just wanted to say that I'm very excited to continue the discussion today, and thank you, everybody, for all your thoughtful comments and just the general tone of the meeting. It's been very positive and thank you.

**Member Dr. Carl P. Wallace** and I would like to say, Leslie, thank you for all that you've been able to contribute and for overcoming that little problem difficulty we had hearing from you. That was great how we did this, and how we just chipped in and made it happen. But I have to say good, good morning. It was a great day yesterday. We had a lot of good discussion, good presentations. And it's really obvious what a really great and good committee we are, and I especially like the fact that the committee is not just being a committee that's doing nothing. We're holding people accountable organizations accountable. Your input is valued and is being appreciated. Obviously, like I said we're just not here just to be here, so this is going to be a great day, and I hope everybody's looking forward to even making it better today than it was yesterday.

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, OUAIP and DFO** Thank you very much for that. I do think it's going to be a great day, and I think people are going to find it a very interesting discussion.

So now, I would like to introduce to you the new Director of the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production. We're fortunate that he was able to join us today as he fills out his duties at the Foreign Ag Service. He's actually going to be coming fully on board on March 28. So next Monday he will start. I'm going to let him introduce himself. He's a great speaker, so Brian, I'm going to turn the mic over to you, and I'd like to hear what you have to say. Thank you.

**Brian V. Guse, Director, Office of Urban Agriculture & Innovative Production** Thank you, Leslie. Hi, everyone. I can't tell you how excited I am to begin as the Director of the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production. Monday is going to be a new and exciting day for me, and I'm looking forward to getting to know the Members of the Committee in the days ahead and learning from the best experiences and perspectives the Members will share with me and my team.

A little bit about me. I'm a 22-year veteran with USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service. And prior to completing my master's degree at Indiana University in Bloomington I served as an agricultural extension volunteer in the Peace Corps in Mali, West Africa. I'm originally from St Louis. There should be a little cardinal behind my shoulder there for my favorite baseball team, and I now reside in Silver Spring, Maryland. During my career with FAS, I helped lead and coordinate and implement USDA's efforts to address global food security and agriculture development programs. I got into USDA's participation in the Global Food Security Strategy and the Feed the Future initiative, which instilled in me the importance of including urban agriculture in efforts to attain a food secure world.

Currently, serve as a Senior Advisor at the Customer Engagement Center in the Foreign Agricultural Service, where I lead efforts to reach out to diverse and often underserved stakeholders who are unfamiliar with the services that USDA has to offer. As a Peace Corps volunteer I learned that listening is the most crucial element of assisting. And that is what the team here is doing today: listening and learning to help us build the best office we can.

My mom grew up on the urban farm in suburban St Louis, and as a child my family maintained a pretty large garden, enough to provide my family with year-round fresh and canned vegetables, sometimes with a surplus that I'd have to sell in the front yard. Urban ag, has always been a lifelong interest of mine. I plan to apply the skills, knowledge, and experience I gained from my current stakeholder outreach position, and from decades of leading global food security efforts to this important job.

Urban agriculture at all levels of production is a critical component to attaining food and nutrition security in the United States. Together, we're going to work to remove barriers, build alliances, collaborate with others, harness resources, and gather and share information to help all members of the communities that we represent and serve. I look forward to serving as the Designated Federal Official for the second meeting of this Committee sometime in May.

And with that, I want to thank everyone for all the good work that the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production is doing, and especially a big thanks to Leslie who has really paved a smooth road for my transition into the office. So with that, Leslie, back over to you.

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, OUAIP and DFO** Thank you, Brian. We very much look forward to your arrival on Monday, and I know that you're going to find that the team of folks we have assembled with the office, they're high energy, they're very passionate about urban agriculture, and they produce

high quality work. So, I think all the way around the board it's going to be a great experience for both you, and for them, and for all of your customers.

We now are going to switch over to the Farm Service Agency Administrator, who cannot be here today, unfortunately, and he apologizes for that. He prepared recorded remarks to share with the Committee and others, and we would like to turn it over to Jeff to post that video feed.

Mr. Zach Ducheneaux was appointed Administrator for the Farm Service Agency in February of 2021. In this role, he provides leadership and direction on agriculture policy, including the administration of FSA's Farm Loan, Conservation, Commodity, Disaster, and Farm Marketing programs to a national network of field offices. Before joining the Administration at USDA, Mr. Ducheneaux previously served as the Executive Director of the Intertribal Agriculture Council. He served the IAC and other roles, starting in 1990. He also previously served as the Tribal Council Representative for the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe.

He has spent his career educating people about the critical role of improved food systems and value-added agriculture, all through the lens of finding ways to address endemic, enduring, economic and social challenges facing Native Americans and reservations. His family still operates a fourth-generation ranch on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation. But before I turn on the video, I need to caution that the volume of the video is a little bit low, so we recommend you turn up the volume on your systems, so the message comes across clearly. Jeff are we ready?

**Zach Ducheneaux, Administrator, Farm Service Agency** Hi, I'm Zach Ducheneaux, Administrator of the Farm Service Agency, and it's a great pleasure for me today to visit with you as you start off on your journey to provide advisory comments to the Secretary and the Department on the important work that we're going to do together around urban agriculture. We have a unique opportunity to capitalize on our urban ag opportunities as a means to rebuild that rural-urban connection to, at the same time, have our producers be educated in regular real crop urban, rural ag, while the urban folks help educate our consumers, so that we're all working together and going the same direction as we think about what our food and nutrition infrastructure need to be like in the future.

Urban farmers and gardeners work among diverse populations to expand access to nutritious foods, foster community engagement, provide jobs, educate communities about farming, and expand green spaces. And they, too, are part of the climate change mitigation strategies that we are going to be engaging in. At the USDA, we understand and acknowledge the responsibility we have as leaders to set the tone for how our staff and those we serve recognize the opportunities that lie ahead, through urban agriculture. FSA and NRCS leadership at all levels are going to be at the forefront of this, pushing this through all of our staff, not only our staff that are directly related to urban agriculture, but also the staff that all do our normal work out there in the over 2,100 county offices. Many of those county offices have urban centers within them, and we have an opportunity to spread that work into those urban centers to enhance our efforts to bridge that connection between rural and urban communities.

In the 2018 Farm Bill, we were charged with-standing up the Office of Urban Ag and Innovative Production, to institutionalize support for urban farming. That's led by the NRCS and works in partnership with the Farm Service Agency, and the numerous other agencies that support ag across the Department.

While the OUAIP was charged with creating a Secretarial advisory committee, FSA was charged with establishing urban County Committees devoted to urban agriculture. The County Committee structure is an important part of the work we do, and it gives producers who are actively producing in their community a voice in our policymaking and our policy implementation, an opportunity that we really

don't see anywhere else in the Federal Government. As of March 22, we have established 11 urban ag County Committees devoted exclusively to urban agriculture in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Atlanta, Georgia; Cleveland, Ohio; Dallas, Texas; Minneapolis-St Paul, Minnesota; New Orleans, Louisiana; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Phoenix, Arizona; Portland, Oregon; Richmond, Virginia; and St. Louis, Missouri. We anticipate announcing six additional cities to join this first 11 soon. Each Urban County Committee is comprised of three to 11 Members made up of folks from their community. They will be local urban, suburban farmers and they'll help ensure fair and equitable administration of FSA farm programs in their county or multi-county jurisdiction. And they're going to be able to provide feedback to leadership about where we still have gaps in the services that we're providing. Urban farmers who participate in USDA programs in the area selected are encouraged to participate through the nominations and voting processes.

Since its inclusion in the 2018 Farm Bill, USDA's Office of Urban Ag and Innovative Production has funded \$7.77 Million in 31 Urban Ag and Innovative Production competitive grants in 2020 and 2021. We've also funded \$3 Million in 37 cooperative agreements for community compost, food waste reduction projects in 2020 and 2021. The FSA and the NRCS are uniquely situated to partner with other agencies and stakeholders to provide broad, effective, and efficient outreach to producers about our resources. Our goal is to increase urban ag outreach, program participation, and technical assistance, because, like all of our other programs and services, urban ag is just that: agriculture. We welcome input, we welcome comments, we welcome questions from the urban ag Federal Advisory Committee, and we look forward to working together with you as you guide us in this important work. Thank you.

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, OUAIP and DFO** Thank you, Administrator Ducheneaux. It is unfortunate that he was not able to join us for this meeting like our other speakers. If you have questions or comments that you would like to make sure reach the Administrator, we will set up at the end of this meeting today... there will be the contact information in which to submit questions or comments. The points that he made about the urban County Committees, about NRCS and FSA being uniquely situated, given our numerous locations across the country, that benefits urban agriculture producers rings so true and is something that we are well aware of.

The next piece of this feeds into the comments that the administrator was saying, and that USDA is in the process of setting up urban offices, and we have with us here today representatives from both NRCS and FSA. Arthur, or "AJ", as we know him in USDA, has been with NRCS since 2005. AJ Served as the Urban Conservationist from Ohio from 2016 to 2021. In his current position, he serves as the Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in Tennessee. AJ is a committed and dedicated public servant and very passionate about urban agriculture. He is leading the effort along with Jenna Segal to establish these urban centers in each city selected for urban County Committee pilots. Jenna Segal, a National Outreach Specialist, is currently working at the Farm Service Agency as their acting Urban Agriculture Lead. She is passionate about increasing access to fresh local foods, supporting the professional development and growth of farmers, and educating us about how food is grown to promote careers in agriculture and sustainable food systems. AJ and Jenna, the platform is yours.

**Jenna Segal, Acting Urban Agriculture Lead, Farm Service Agency** Thank you so much for that introduction, Leslie. Moving onto the next slide, there. So as Administrator Ducheneaux just explained, Farm Service Agency, or FSA, is working really closely with the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production to implement an urban agriculture urban County Committee pilot in no fewer than 10 cities across the country. This was authorized by the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, the Farm Bill, as we all know it. And FSA has been working really closely, as I said, with OUAIP to identify pilot locations and stand up these new committees. This map shows you the 11 urban County Committees that

were established already through the pilot across the country. The locations were actually selected based on a consideration of data that included opportunities for economic growth, diversity, proximity to tribal nations, and well as the number of farm-to-table projects, urban farms, community and residential gardens, and green infrastructure projects within metropolitan urban areas.

As the Administrator just mentioned, OUAIP and FSA are planning and preparing to announce the third round of UCOC selections as this pilot continues to expand across the country, including an additional six UCOC locations in these upcoming weeks.

**Arthur (AJ) Hawkins, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations, Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production** To demonstrate USDA's commitment to serving urban and innovative producers, the Farm Service Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service have jointly committed to establishing Urban Service Centers in each city selected for urban County Committee locations that Jenna just identified. FSA and NRCS are currently working and holding meetings with local stakeholders and local USDA staff to identify locations for Urban Service Centers within each city that will be accessible and welcoming for local urban and innovative producers.

Our guiding principles are number one, finding locations that will ensure a positive customer experience; number two, implementing input from the local level, stakeholders, partners, and local USDA staff, to meet customer expectations and leverage existing resources. We'll be leaning towards the easy and economical versus the difficult and expensive to meet this goal. FSA and NRCS are committed to adding staff on the ground to assist urban farmers and operators and support urban agriculture overall and all urban County Committee locations. These Urban Service Centers will offer the full suite of all USDA programs and services applicable to urban areas.

So, on behalf of myself and the Urban Service Center establishment team in the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production, we're happy to take on this effort and are committed to seeing this come to fruition. Thank you.

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, OUAIP and DFO** Thank you, A.J. and Jenna. As you can see up here now, we have their contact information in case anybody needs more information about the effort on setting up the offices. I do want to take a moment or two to let Committee Members ask you questions, Jenna or AJ. And I see that John Erwin's hand is up.

**Member John Erwin** Morning. Thanks for the presentation. Just a real quick question. Maryland is in the process, we hope, of establishing two statewide urban ag extension specialists that hopefully the legislature will pass this session. So, how do they, how would they work with you? Would they work through a County, or how do you work with existing urban ag extension specialists?

**Jenna Segal, Acting Urban Agriculture Lead, Farm Service Agency** I can take that on here. So, the urban County Committees, once they get established, of course, they are encouraged to work with all parties in the States, but that is a great opportunity for them to reach out to local or any regional Service Centers at FSA and just kind of start beginning those conversations, engaging in that process. As I mentioned before, when we are determining where the pilot will expand and which locations and states we are identifying, it really is based on feedback from the States, from conversations that are happening on the ground, and from movements that are already in existence. So the best way to prepare and kind of engage in the pilot is to have that preliminary conversation, to engage with producers in your state and really kind of start to work with your FSA counterparts or individuals who are on the ground in those areas. That really helps us to identify where the demand is and articulate the need to have and establish an urban presence in those urban County Committees, and I will just share that once they are established, we

kind of skipped through that side a little bit there, but urban County Committees have been, or County Committees as a whole from FSA, have existed across the country, and have been in existence for over 100 years, hundreds of years, and this is a shift from the traditional dynamic. And urban County Committees are really similar to the traditional County Committees, but they are unique, because this is a great opportunity that we get new Committee Members who can really voice the needs of urban producers and kind of serve as a way to educate urban producers about the programs that we have and that we do offer. It is a new audience for FSA as a whole, so it's really kind of laying the groundwork to identify the needs of those urban producers and think about ways that our programs can better serve their needs as well.

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, OUAIP and DFO** All right, thank you. Thank you, Jenna, I see Bobby Wilson's hand.

**Member Bobby Wilson** Yes, this is Bobby, and I'm in the metro Atlanta area. And one of the things that we've noticed over the years that County Commissioners that's being appointed, has not worked for minorities and disadvantaged communities. The other challenge that we are faced with, is that traditionally, positions with Cooperative Extension has been funded through county, state, and federal government. And a lot of the county and state money has dried up. And if we are going to put agents back into these counties, we really need to look at how we're going to be able to fund them.

One of the things that NRCS has done is put forth funding in developing a funding process so that individuals that have experience in working in these areas are able to get, for lack of a better term, I'm going to call it a grant from NRCS to do the work. So I just throw those suggestions out there to you, based upon the funding process and give you some ideas of what other agencies are doing to make sure that the work getting done in these communities. Thank you so much.

**Jenna Segal, Acting Urban Agriculture Lead, Farm Service Agency** Thanks for that feedback. Zachari, why don't you go ahead while we figure out the technical difficulties over here?

**Member Zachari Curtis** Thank you. Thanks, Bobby, as well. I'm very familiar with County Committees, having turned in my ballot for Martin County Committee election. I want to know if the urban county committees are going to be elected positions in general. I agree, that, you know, as elected positions, there's definitely the potential for democratizing the power of local governance and resource sharing, but that hasn't really panned out. I'd love to see an audit of County Committees, the election practices around free and fair elections. Based on what I know, I think I've been told you need a farm number just to have a to get a ballot, or that's how they reference where to send your ballot. So I'm wondering what are the eligibility requirements for participating in urban County Committee elections, qualifying as a candidate, and receiving support, especially for Black communities that have been marginalized from those structures?

**Jenna Segal, Acting Urban Agriculture Lead, Farm Service Agency** Sure. So, the nomination process really mirrors what's happening in traditional County Committees. County Committee members nominate themselves or others and are voted in by urban agriculturalists in that area. To be eligible to vote, or participate, or vote in the elections, or be nominated, we basically say that those farmers need to participate or cooperate in a USDA program. So, again we recognize this, as a pilot, this is a brand new area for FSA, so we are being a little bit more flexible in terms of what participation means and really identifying that there are some nuances in urban areas were a farmer, for example, may be farming outside of an urban area but the majority of their sales and their engagement in urban agriculture initiatives is happening in a particular urban area, so that's really at the discretion of the local area, who is administering the pilot, to determine how those boundaries are defined, where the farmers reside versus

participate in the programs. And one of the key things about the urban County Committees and COCs in general, is that there is a requirement to have some diversity and representation from socially disadvantaged producers on those Committees, and if there aren't any that were nominated or elected, then those are appointed as well. So, what we think is really exceptional about the County Committee pilot in the urban areas, is that urban areas are, as we all know, diverse. There are many different stakeholders in those areas who represent a variety of cultures and farming backgrounds, so the urban County Committee pilot does create an opportunity for more diverse representation in those Committees to really voice the concerns and needs of the farmers to USDA and have that line. So we've already seen that the County Committees that have been established in urban areas are much more diverse than our some of our traditional counties who are in different areas, and I think it's a really great opportunity to get those populations involved. And what is interesting as well as that, again, this is a new population and it's a new area that we're serving, so the urban County Committee is to create a space for kind of more detailed conversations in that regards.

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, OUAIP and DFO** Great, thank you. We have one last question. Tara Chadwick?

**Member Tara Chadwick** Really quickly. So, if we wanted to get more information about that eligibility that you were talking about, is that ready for the urban, specifically for the urban County Committees? Is that information available on a website somewhere? And secondly, could you just clarify when you say that for the eligibility for participating in these urban County Committees, that a farmer would have to participate in a USDA program? Are you specifically referencing a Farm Service Agency program, or are you referencing a USDA program? For example, could an urban gardener who's on SNAP benefits participate, be eligible, who doesn't have a farm number?

**Jenna Segal, Acting Urban Agriculture Lead, Farm Service Agency** I think that SNAP participation might be something we'd have to look into or make some particular, have some discussions about that eligibility, but I think it's something to absolutely consider and think through. And sorry I kind of missed the first part of your question there because I got stuck up on that.

**Member Tara Chadwick** Yeah, no, thank you, thank you.

**Jenna Segal, Acting Urban Agriculture Lead, Farm Service Agency** Oh, the resources. We do have fact sheets that describe, on FSA's website or USDA's website, that talks about, you know, the timeline of participating in COC elections and the nomination process. We have one for County Committees as a whole, and then we have urban County Committees in an FAQ document as well. And we have both those fact sheets available, and we'll be updating those in the upcoming months as we kind of start the new election cycle. And those are readily available online.

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, OUAIP and DFO** All right. Thanks, Jenna. We do need to move on. I want to make sure that the Committee has a full 40 minutes to talk about their priorities. And I think what we'll do is we'll just push back the lunch a little bit just to make sure that you have the time to have that critical discussion.

Thank you, Jenna, and AJ, for those remarks and for that information, and again, if you need additional information on any of those topics, urban County Committees, or the setup of the office, please reach out to AJ and Jenna.

Now the Members of the Committee are going to share information about their priorities and where they plan to focus their energies. I'd like to bring Angela Mason, acting Chair, Member Dr. Wallace to the platform to lead the discussion.

**Member Angela Mason** Morning, Leslie. Thank you. Dr. Wallace and I are pleased to moderate this discussion of Member priorities. I want to make sure that we have a productive meeting.

One of the things that I'd like to do is set some ground rules for this conversation. So I hope that we can all agree to these. The first one is, be present; let everyone contribute; listen with an open mind; stay on point and on time; attack the problem, not the person; and show mutual respect to one another.

I'm going to read Members' names, and when you hear your name, you'll have a minute and a half to state your priorities for service on the Committee. And once all Members have had a chance to speak, we'll kick off a question and discussion period for this meeting. Our goal with this is to determine what our priorities are and form subcommittees around three or four priority areas. I'm going to start, and, Dr. Wallace, do you have anything to add to that?

**Member Dr. Carl P. Wallace** I just want to add so that we can have some decorum and so can we hear from everybody. One of us is going to raise our hand towards the end of your minute and a half to let you know that your time is coming to an end. We need to do this because we really, really want to make sure we hear from everybody.

**Member Angela Mason** We have such a dynamic group and everybody has so much to say, I want to make sure that we all get it in. Thank you, Dr. Wallace. Okay, we're going to start with Allison Paap. Allison?

**Member Allison Paap** Great. Well, good morning and thank you so much for the opportunity to speak a little bit. So, my priorities for this Committee and for this group are really centered around the concept of supporting long term viability of urban agriculture farmers and their businesses, and other organizations working within urban agriculture. And I think some keyways to address that initially are to understand the definition of what we mean when we say, "urban farming", and that we don't want to exacerbate the problems of not understanding who's eligible for what programs and who's eligible for what services that are being developed by this Committee.

Another avenue that I think needs to really be considered is career pathing, career development, and understanding the long-term viability of how to support ongoing career development for people participating in urban ag, the business owners, the organization owners, and for the people in the communities working within those businesses and organizations. Thank you.

**Member Angela Mason** Thank you, Allison. And next, Bobby Wilson. Bobby, do you want to present your priority areas?

**Member Bobby Wilson** Yes, that's my priority here. Yes. I'm Bobby Wilson. I've spent more than 30 years in urban agriculture and have worked and have quite a bit of knowledge about FSA and NRCS, and working with Historical Black Universities, and done some work around getting more people of color involved into the science programs through research and development. And making sure that minorities and underserved communities have access to the program that's available to us through NRCS and FSA.

And as an urban agriculture farmer, I want to make sure that we are moving towards creating opportunities in the urban areas to create generational wealth through agriculture. As we train and develop

new agriculturalists in the in the urban area, we want to be able to move towards getting larger farms. Thank you so much.

**Member Angela** Thank you. Dr. Wallace, you're up next.

**Member Dr. Carl P. Wallace** Yeah, so these are my three priorities. First, to raise awareness of the critical need for innovative urban farming by providing specific recommendations to help eliminate food deserts. The second one is identifying obstacles and barriers to successful, sustainable urban farming, including opportunities for financial, environmentally empowering, and educational needed resources, especially for the historically underserved communities. And the third and last one for me is to advance climate, smart agriculture, and urban farming. It's our hope that these priorities, that we come at the very end of our subcommittees, we're going to make sure it's going to be out there, and it's going to be successful.

**Member Angela Mason** Thank you, Dr. Wallace. John Erwin?

**Member John Erwin** Good morning. I'll mention mine. First, expanding food growing opportunities in non-traditional places, I have to say that LEDs have radically changed where we can grow food. We can grow food now in any building, so I think there's a lot of opportunities around that, to really address the food insecurity as was mentioned in food deserts. Bringing appreciation for all forms of urban agriculture: greening streets with trees and green roofs are part of urban agriculture and an important part of that sector. Exposing all kids to the joy of gardening and food. There's plenty of studies that show that if kids are exposed to gardening between the age of six and 12, they become interested in it for the rest of their lives. I think we need to work with kids in school districts to promote the next generation of farmers, developing long term policies and funding structures to ensure that the advances we talk about are sustainable and continue to happen. That this isn't just a flash in the pan but something that will continue in the long term. And last, challenging our building paradigms, how we design buildings I think can be different now. With these new technologies, we could grow food and grow plants in places we never could before. So I think we need to look at how our buildings are designed and maybe include farms in schools and other locations. Thank you.

**Member Angela** Thank you, John. John Lebeaux.

**Member John Lebeaux** Thank you very much. Good morning, everyone. I do think it's interesting how some of us took priorities, our assignment, to be goals, and some of us might have looked at a little more of a tactical or implementation perspective. So, to have a farm, one needs to have land, and that's a great challenge for our urban farmers. So how the gold standard is ownership. But how can we explore that to help farmers acquire land, or to work out long term leases, the use of government land, how land trusts might come into the picture? Once the land is acquired, infrastructure immediately becomes necessary. How can we support irrigation, structures, equipment, and how can we help our farmers do what they want to do, the technical assistance and business planning? There's been several references made to urban ag extension specialists that might be a great tool from a technical perspective. Thank you.

**Member Angela Mason** Thank you. And next, Kaben.

**Member Kaben Smallwood** Yes, thank you. And thank you to the Committee Members so far, some wonderful ideas. My ideas all have a theme, and that's sustainability. I define sustainability as providing for today while leaving for tomorrow. And if we look at our number one resource I think we need to focus on, that's water. I encourage the Committee, I encourage the USDA, I encourage the general public, to not only look at their own personal water usage but think about how we could build a better food

infrastructure, utilizing water more efficiently moving forward. Next, it's organic certification. I won't say going through with the process, because that can be time consuming and arduous, but what I will say is that utilizing those practices will prevent pesticides, herbicides, and insecticides from building up in our urban areas. Additionally, I would like to add, to please consider fish as part of the solution. Fish have a one-to-one point two to the conversion rate when it comes to pounds in, pounds out, and they can be raised almost anywhere to John's point earlier. Lastly, I would like to make sure that underserved populations, including indigenous populations, have full access to these opportunities, and we move forward in an equitable matter.

Thank you.

**Member Angela Mason** Thank you, Kaben. Sally Brown.

**Member Sally Brown** Hi. My emphasis here and my passion here is, is much more on non-commercial agriculture in an urban environment: community gardens, home gardens, curbside gardens, school gardens. I see those as having the potential to reach the greatest number of individuals and have the greatest long-term impact. And my key here, or one of my pathways in doing this, is understanding that you can integrate growing food into a municipal infrastructure and have that be a piece of what the municipality provides to its citizens: libraries, access to gardens, access to resources for growing food, gleaning programs, access to incorporating extra food from these gardens into food banks, education on how to grow food, using resources from urban areas. Here I'm talking about composts, reclaimed water, municipal wastewater solids, range of things that cities provide that can enrich soil, soil testing services. And finally, to go with the aquaponics, bringing growing protein on a commercial level closer to municipal centers, including fish, and also insects, as a source for future types of protein. Thank you.

**Member Angela Mason** Thank you, Sally. Tara is next.

**Member Tara Chadwick** Good morning, everyone. So, my three priority areas are food access, food production, and climate resilience, and the reflections that I had on those priorities based on our discussion yesterday as we figure out this process, you know, while engaging in this process comes down to basically thinking about three words. One is community, because we're all parts of so many different communities: geographic, linguistic, cultural, artistic, value or topic area, communities, as well as, you know, how we think of our community from the perspective of whether we're a homeowner, a generational homeowner, you know who has had a homestead for many years, or whether we're a renter who changes our, you know, likely to change our geographic area for a long time, and so we really need to be open about how we each define community because there's so many definitions. The second word is innovation, and that's part of what we're doing. And, you know, that concept of innovation so often can go against our training, so we need to be open again. And the final one is interconnectivity, because when we're talking about all these things, everything is connected. Thank you.

**Member Angela Mason** Thank you, Tara. Viraj Puri, you're next.

**Member Viraj Puri** Good afternoon, just unmuting myself. So my three priorities are: One, is to help to dismantle regulatory hurdles. So, building codes in urban areas were certainly largely developed before urban agriculture grew into the movement and the industry and the phenomenon that it is today. So many cities have prohibitive building codes that are not set up for urban agriculture, zoning infrastructure, and its significant regulatory hurdles in many markets, so to continue to encourage different forms of urban agriculture and innovative farming, whether it's a commercial or non-commercial, I think we really need a new set of codes, business rules, and tax programs for urban farmers. Second would be workforce development. I believe in order to continue to really support this industry, from a nonprofit, or even a

commercial standpoint, we need to invest in building the specialized skilled labor that the sector requires. Our organization is approached all the time, by community groups, schools, nonprofits. They say we want to develop an urban farm, but we don't know who's going to run it. People don't have the requisite skillset to run it. So I personally would really like to advance the development and implementation of a workforce development program that can really build the urban farmers for tomorrow to help create these jobs and make all the positive impacts in our communities that we all believe that urban farming can do. And then finally, I think we need to expand and support sales channels. So not every urban farm needs to be a for-profit, but they need to be financially sustainable. And I think that urban agriculture organizations need to be able to work. For example, the government should be able to create pathways for government agencies such as schools and other organizations to use funding to buy produce grown on urban farms and potentially even at a subsidized pricing. So those are my three, really: workforce development programs, dismantling regulatory hurdles, and finally expanding and supporting sales channels.

**Member Angela Mason** Thank you, Viraj. Zachari Curtis.

**Member Zachari Curtis** Thank you. So my priorities, I have two. One is really focusing on quantifying equity measures, where it comes to resource distribution and adequate support for marginalized communities. I would even say getting more specific about who we mean when we say, “marginalized community”. Those terms have been utilized very often, but as we get toward needing to get some metrics under our feet, really wanting to understand to what degree are we all being served by the infrastructure of the USDA, the resources of the USDA. Some of the suggestions that have been raised here about democratizing county committees and others are of particular interest to me because I believe the engagement of citizens in the actual process will move this move us toward equity goes faster than any one person's idea. The other is, of course, interested in the economics of farming, specifically the creation of market, the creation of jobs up the supply chain, and the distribution of infrastructural and policy resources. So, for example, e-WIC, and the ability to accept SNAP for deliveries are particularly interesting. They are only accessible to bigger businesses and not to farms and individual farmers markets. Those are mine.

**Member Angela Mason** Thank you, and I'll end with mine. I want to build a stronger connection between food access, nutrition, and how to prepare foods, in that some people may not be used to preparing or eating. It's not just about food access. It's also about connecting people to food again, engage with people around the community, and economic development opportunities within urban agriculture. So, looking at food, health, and jobs as kind of three pillars and help make connections to the broader food system. We can't be the only solution. We're one piece of a pie in figuring out food access and really looking at how to support kind of that broader idea of food systems work.

So thank you all for contributing in that way. I want to open this to... I have a couple of questions here for you. One, I'd like each of you to go through and tell me your number one priority. If you could choose one priority of your three, what are they, and from that I want to pull out some common themes and common threads in our priority areas to discuss whether those should be maybe some subcommittee areas.

So can we start with, we'll start from the bottom of the alphabetical list here. We'll start with you, Zachari. Can you tell me your number one priority?

**Member Zachari Curtis** Yeah, so I will always choose racial equity. I think that's a concrete and quantifiable measures for racial equity, as well as audits of where we are as a committee and the agencies we touch.

**Member Angela Mason** Thank you. And Viraj?

**Member Viraj Puri** It's really hard to pick one but I would say given my background, environmental sustainability, I think soil and water health, reducing carbon emissions, and making our cities as environmentally sustainable as possible, capturing the urban heat island effect, capturing stormwater runoff issues that can, you know, certainly contribute to a healthier and equitable urban population as well.

**Member Angela Mason** Tara

**Member Tara Chadwick** Um, yeah. It is hard to choose one thing, but for me it has to be access to food, because that's what my community struggles with the most.

**Member Angela Mason** Sally Brown

**Member Sally Brown** One easy way to summarize many things is to let everyone have access to good, clean dirt and growing at least a portion of what they eat.

**Member Angela Mason** Excellent. Thank you. Kaben?

**Member Kaben Smallwood** Unmute first. I think that I'm going to have to echo the sustainability cause. I think that even as we look at how we define innovative production, we need to take into consideration that these technologies are going to be adopted at urban centers, and in those urban centers you have that chance for bioaccumulation and waste issues. So looking at the fertilizers that we're using, looking at the styles of agriculture that we're using, looking how we're using our water resources, and looking how that plays into the overall economics and job creation and workforce development. They can all be summed up with sustainability.

**Member Angela Mason** Excellent, thank you. John Lebeaux.

**Member John Lebeaux** Thank you. Our experience has been that access to land is the biggest challenge for an urban farmer, so that is my number one priority. And that would, I just want to add, that what Viraj mentioned about zoning ordinances, zoning bylaws, that is part of that equation very much as well.

Absolutely, thank you. John Erwin.

**Member John Erwin** I'd have to say it's my first one, which is basically expanding food growing opportunities in non-traditional places with these new technologies and with the hope that increases food access, nutrition, security, and safety. It completely eliminates the need, necessarily, for land. In some cases it just needs a room in the building.

**Member Angela Mason** Thank you. Dr. Wallace

**Member Dr. Carl P. Wallace** Yes, my number one priority is in context with what I believe our committee should be about, the business. And one of the things is that were to advise and make a recommendation. And I hope our committee will be able, and it's a priority for me, to make a recommendation to specifically help eliminate food deserts.

**Member Angela Mason** Thank you, Dr. Wallace. Bobby Wilson.

**Member Bobby Wilson** Yeah, it's to make sure that all people, regardless of race, color, will have access to all programs that USDA has to offer, and to make sure that we have voices at the table as we make recommendations to the urban ag Committee as well as the Secretary of Agriculture, and make sure that

extension agents, NRCS agents, and FSA agents are better trained to serve all communities so that we can bring more farmers into the boat. Thank you.

**Member Angela Mason** Thank you. Allison Paap.

**Member Allison Paap** for me, my top priority would be supporting long term business and financial sustainability, and with that, supporting things like access to land, access to infrastructure, access to technical support. Because if these organizations and businesses are not able to support themselves and maintain over time, we won't have a mechanism to get these other benefits that we've been discussing.

**Member Angela Mason** Agreed. And I would say my top priority would be access to food. And there are lots of ways to approach that, and I think it shows that everything that we're talking about, there's a lot of overlap between our priority areas. I wanted to start with a discussion around the common themes that I've been taking notes as we're walking through these priority areas, and there are five common themes that I think are coming out of this, and please speak up if I have misrepresented anything that has been stated: climate-smart, resilient, sustainable agriculture and sustainable practices; access to USDA support, lending, incentives, etc.; access to fresh produce; equitable distribution and sales channels that support these opportunities; access to land; and then workforce development in innovative agriculture production. Does that kind of summarize our, our priority areas, or are there some in here that I've missed? Did I misrepresent anybody in in that? Can we open that for discussion, and if you raise your hand, I'll call on you?

Zachari. You're muted.

**Member Zachari Curtis** Hi and forgive me if I missed it. So, you know, I think there's different language that we're all using for this, but I'm very clear as far as articulating a need for a racial equity focus as one of these priorities. There are ways that cut through all of the issues, when you talk about food access, who's most impacted. When you talk about land access, when you talk about rezoning and how rezoning has been used to dispossess communities that were conducting urban agriculture, especially black communities, from their land. That is all on the table. And to the degree that we can agree that all of the other priorities are important, I believe that we should be very clear about the need for a specific focus there, given where we are, and what we're doing.

**Member Angela Mason** I agree totally, and I think weaving racial equity into each of the priority areas is going to be really important to accomplishing anything that we set out to do.

Any other comments, questions? Tara.

**Member Tara Chadwick** Thank you. Yeah, I appreciate that comment from Zachari, and it's almost as though... I thought those five areas were a good synopsis of what we all said, with the caveat that it almost needs to say "equity in" before each and every one of them, you know? Just given the historical situation and looking, you know, back at how the system has actually been, you know, used to create the inequities that we now need to look at.

**Member Angela Mason** Yes, I hear that and agree with you. Bobby Wilson.

**Member Bobby Wilson** Yes, and I want preface whatever I say by saying, 30 years of experience, I was on the ground in Cleveland, Ohio, in Ohio for the Irving Initiative that Marcia Fudge put on the ground. I was in New York City, marching with Ben Miller back in the days when they were trying to save the community gardens. So my working took me to urban agriculture across this country. And I realized the

importance, and I've been an extension agent. I understand the importance of having extension agents on the ground that's committed to, our extension agent, our CSA agent, FSA agent, that's on the ground that's committed to the communities that they're being paid to serve. And too often we don't have that coming into our community, but the voice at the table is very important. And I'm so glad that we have voiced it as part of this urban agriculture Committee that's going to speak on behalf of marginalized and underserved communities across this great country of ours. So I just want to make sure that better training programs for the agency, not only in terms of knowing their jobs, but knowing the communities that they are being paid to serve. Thank you.

**Member Angela Mason** Thank you, Bobby. John Erwin.

**Member John Lebeaux** I'll just frame these in a different way to try to maybe make sure we are able to implement things easily. So the one way to frame it might be large-scale, which would be government and USDA funding, and so that could capture zoning regulation, water was mentioned, land use, and also the food desert issue. So that's dealing with the macro, so we'd be dealing with local city governments and so forth. And we might be able to come up with specific recommendations they could implement. The secondary would be businesses, which would be medium scale. So that's food channels and sales development of co-ops, larger community gardens that might be involved with something like the Small Business Administration, and we might capture other people, other organizations that could come in. And then on a small scale, like Sally was talking about, how do we stimulate local, small community gardens to just dramatically increase food access on a personal level? So, and also the next generation stuff I do think is important. I think we need to grow the next generation of farmers out there. So, it's just a different way of framing it, and the recommendations might be different based on that framing.

**Member Angela Mason** Yes, thank you. And I think part of the hope is to figure out a couple of, three or four subcommittees, as we talk through this. And I see more hands up. John, do you have more to add?

No? Ok, Tara.

**Member Tara Chadwick** Just quickly, for John. So, in this proposal that you have sort of reframing in terms of what I think was like government-scale, large-scale, and small-scale, where would focus on the student or school gardens come in? Would that come under small-scale, or large-scale?

**Member John Lebeaux** Yeah, it's a good question. I would say if you're talking about an entire school district, it's large-scale, right? Because it's local government. If you're talking about on a smaller level like childcare services or neighborhood childcare, things would be small scale.

**Member Angela Mason** and Sally.

**Member Sally Brown** I think it's important to remember that a lot of the theory for how people learn and how change occurs, diffusion of information, early adopters, came out of USDA knowledge transfer, extension agents, and programs. And so, USDA led the way for this. And here we have an opportunity to work with USDA to lead the way in a different form of agriculture, a different form of growing things, and it would be great if USDA could do it again with our help.

**Member Dr. Carl P. Wallace** Well, I need to add one thing. I'm not trying to set the tone for this, but Tara. I have to tell you this. What resonated with me was your comment. I love to have the prefix "equity in". I mean, I really need to make sure we're setting that tone, because for me one of the most glaring problems that we're facing is the lack of equity and justice in all of these areas. So, having a prefix really sends a message. And I hope others can agree with me on that. But I think that is so very, very simple and so very, very important to our work.

**Member Angela Mason** So, if we... I will likely be tapping each of the Committee Members after the meeting to talk through the subcommittee themes. I agree “equity in” should be kind of the guiding principle for all of our subcommittees. I am wondering if we can... I like this approach of large-scale, medium-scale, small-scale. If there are other ideas of how we create themed subcommittees that people would like to speak on now...

**Member Bobby Wilson** The one thing that I would say is that, as our listening audience tune in just today, if they have some ideas and suggestions, we will hope that they will put them in the chat as well, because your voice is just as important as ours, and we’re only there to represent you. So we’re asking that you put your ideas and suggestions in the chat as well.

**Member Dr. Carl P. Wallace** Bobby let me make sure we are clear on your point. I think it's important to hear from the community. It cannot be in the chat section. It needs to be in the Q&A section. We're not opening up the chat opportunity. So just the pragmatic piece of this is that put those things in the Q&A. That's where we'll be able to receive them.

**Member Bobby Wilson** Thank you. Thank you.

**Member Angela Mason** Yeah, so in all of the public comments during this afternoon, and responding to public comments, will happen after the meeting, and getting public feedback about what our committee should focus on is important. So thank you for bringing that up, Bobby and Dr Wallace. John.

**Member John Lebeaux** But there's a couple other things that popped out as well.

No, you mentioned equity. Sorry, Dr Wallace. You're talking about equity, but access, access is something that goes through everything. We might have like a group of overarching themes that we have that we want to apply to all of this framework. And then the other is economic opportunity. We haven't really talked about that, but I think there's a hope that we have economic opportunities as part of this as well. And then the other is nutritious and safe food. Those are like key principles I'm hearing, I think, coming out of some of this stuff.

**Member Angela Mason** Yeah, I agree, I agree. Tara.

**Member Tara Chadwick** I do realize that we are within this scheduled lunch period, but I just wanted to take just a moment to reflect back on what Dr. Brown said, and she was talking about this social diffusion of innovation theory, which was the way that we all adopted hybridized corn in the 1930s to 50s. It's been a while since I've looked at it, but when she mentioned that, you know, like I spent 10 years teaching people about HIV prevention, using that theory, which was an accepted evidence-based mechanism for changing people's behavior. And so the reason I wanted to reflect on that is because as we're setting up these committees, we need to be actively thinking about what is it that we, what is the end result, what is the behavior, we want to change, how do we think it's most effective, and that theory says that the most effective way is to go to where people are to engage the gatekeepers, to apply some of that anthropological, ethnic, ethnographical knowledge that we have, and use our community as the leaders, and teach the leaders. In my community, it's the grandmothers, it's the people who go to the churches, you know, and so we need to think about that while we're setting up these subcommittees.

We're not here to try to create more bureaucracy. There's enough bureaucracy. We're here to think about what the change is. We need to make some substantial change on all of these issues that we just talked about, and we need to make them like yesterday. So how are we going to set up these working committees, with that active mindset, that we are going to take action. How best, how most effective can we take that action?

**Member Angela Mason** Thank you that.

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, OUAIP and DFO**

May I interrupt a minute? Um, so, we are in the lunch break period, but I don't want to stifle the Committee's conversation. The public comment period is starting at 12:30. So, if you want to talk through the lunch period, that's fine with me. I just want to make sure that we manage this the way the Committee wants to. We can keep it open and have you keep talking up until 12:30, or we can break when you say you want to have one.

**Member Angela Mason** Let's take Sally's comment, and I'll try to summarize what the Committee ideas are, and then we can break for lunch. Does that sound okay with everybody?

**Member Bobby Wilson** Good.

**Member Angela Mason** Okay, Sally?

**Member Sally Brown** So, one thing that is in this whole discussion, and to bring it to the forefront. If you bring food access, growing food, green areas, and connections to nature into an urban environment. This goes across racial equity issues, economic equity issues, you get a full suite of benefits, including improved health, not just as a result of diet. You get better outcomes for kids in schools, you get reduced recidivism for incarcerated individuals. To have that explicitly recognized in what we're doing, so it's not just a focus on commercial endeavors, though those are an integral part of this, but to understand and explicitly recognize the full suite of benefits from making cities green and exposing people to growing things.

**Member Dr. Carl P. Wallace** Let me do this really quick before we summarize everything, Angela. We have to remember one thing that's important. We have one year to do this. So our priorities have to be something we can attain in one year. That is the forefront of all of this discussion, we've got to do it in one year.

**Member Angela Mason** I think we have some common themes. I want to see what the public comments are after today. And look at this through the lens of large, medium, and small scale. Equity being at the forefront, access, economic opportunities, and safe food are kind of what I'm hearing from the Committee right now as the three priority areas within that large, medium, and small-scale lens.

Let's thank you all for the discussion and your comments, and I think that we'll take the lunch break now. I look forward to hearing public comments here in just a little bit.

Leslie?

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, OUAIP and DFO** All right. Thank you very much. So, we do want to be back at 12:30 so we can fit all the commenters that are scheduled to come in today. So right now, lunch break, and thank you all for that Committee discussion. It was very interesting. We look forward to hearing continued conversation regarding the priorities.

**Member Bobby Wilson** See you at 12:30.

**BREAK**

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, OUAIP and DFO** Good afternoon, everyone. I just want to let you know that we're going to start the public forum at 12:30, that's two minutes from now. Is Jeffrey Davis on the line?

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** For you, Leslie, anytime.

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, OUAIP and DFO** Oh, very good. Thank you. I'm just going to say a couple of, I'm just going to bring us back on and then turn it over to you for your remarks and opening, okay?

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** That's correct. And we've got our lists out, and our assistant from the Office of Communications TT Pham is online, and she'll be coordinating with me on bringing people over from Attendee status to Panelist status, and then moving them back to Attendee status. Okay? I want to reiterate again, if anything goes wrong again, it's my fault.

Mary Hould, at this point, when do you anticipate the next switchover for interpreters?

**Mary Hould** Every 20 minutes.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Every 20 minutes. Okay, we'll try to be tracking that as best as we can. Okay.

**Member Sally Brown** Will we be able to see the people, or just hear them?

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** That's a great question, Sally, and the response is yes, we will be able to see them. What we'll be able to do is we're switching them from Attendee status to Panelist status, which then enables us to activate their audio and video feeds. Not everyone may have a video feed. But basically everyone should have a working audio feed. They're already in our top 10 speakers that it's already two people who we don't even see signed on yet, so it'll be a pretty fast-paced activity, okay?

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, OUAIP and DFO** All right. So, Jeff it is 12:30 now. Do we have our Chair and Member Dr. Wallace back on the line?

**Member Angela Mason** Yes, I'm here. Thank you. Leslie.

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, OUAIP and DFO** All right, very good.

**Member Dr. Carl P. Wallace** I'm here as well.

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, OUAIP and DFO** Very good, thank you. I didn't want to get started without you being present.

**Member Dr. Carl P. Wallace** Thank you.

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, OUAIP and DFO** So I thought, just for the public's benefit, I just wanted to state, when registering for this meeting members of the public were asked if they wanted to make public comment during the public forum. We also accepted written comments. And we're taking comments during this session as well. All of those comments will be submitted to the Committee. We'll be working to consolidate, bring everything together, and make sure that you have everything that you need based on the public feedback that we requested.

And we accommodated as many people as we could today. We selected as diverse a sampling of speakers and opinions as possible. I mentioned yesterday we will be having a flow over session for the people that cannot be accommodated today, and we are still planning on having that on April 1, and we'll be publishing information about that session on the website [Farmers.gov/urban](http://Farmers.gov/urban). So with that, I'd like to turn us over to Jeff Davis to get us started with the public forum.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Jeff Davis, and I'll facilitate the open forum today. Assisting me will be Tiki Pham at the USDA Office of Communications. The methodology for today's session and the follow up session in April will be the same. Our speakers will appear in a pre-determined sequence and be given three minutes to present their remarks. Each speaker will be introduced by their full name, organization, job title, and the city and state of their origin.

No slideshows or material will be presented. Only verbal remarks will be considered. In the event a speaker demonstrates inappropriate language or unprofessional behavior, the individual will be removed from the broadcast. Each speaker will be prompted in advance by the host of us changing their status from Attendee to Panelist. At that point, each speaker will be prompted to unmute their audio and start their video feed so all participants will be able to clearly be seen and heard. Once the speaker completes their three-minute remarks, they will be returned to Attendee status.

If a speaker misses their slotted speaking window, they will be passed over and rolled to the bottom of the list. All speakers have had opportunities through multiple practice sessions to prepare for today's session. So let's get started. I'm going to introduce now our first speaker. Let me verify we have her on board here.

Sara Bernal with the Center for Land Based Learning, an urban ag Program Manager out of Woodland, California. Sara, are you with us?

**Sara Bernal** I am, thank you.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Go ahead, Sara. You're on the clock.

**Sara Bernal** Okay, so thank you so much for giving me a chance to speak. As you said, my name is Sara Bernal and I started and I'm the program manager for the West Sacramento Urban Farm Program, which is a part of the nonprofit The Center for Land Based Learning. We're operating five urban farms over seven acres directly across from the state capitol in California for the last eight years.

I'm so impressed by the talent and inspiration coming from the advisory committee, so thank you for your service. According to the USDA's action on nutrition security report, poor nutrition is the leading cause of illness in the United States, particularly present in designated food desert areas. More than four in 10 American adults have obesity, and it's predicted that most children will have obesity by the time they're 35, making this generation of children the first in America's history slated to die at a younger age than their parents. The affordability of the thrifty food plan on which SNAP is based depends on whether a family can allocate up to 30% of their income to food, but expenditures on many goods such as housing, childcare have grown substantially, reducing the average share of income spent on food to around 10%. Before the pandemic, the maximum SNAP benefits fell short of an average meal cost in 96% of US counties. Among people in America earning low incomes, cost continues to be the primary barrier to getting food. So poverty is in fact one of our leading national crises.

Urban agriculture is often seen as a way to help mitigate the negative effects that food desert environments have on the urban poor and nutrition security. In many meetings with public officials, I've heard the assumption that small urban farms can provide produce to low-income residents, but the glaring gap and the exceedingly higher cost of production on an urban farm due to the cost of water, land costs, the lack of mechanization, organic practices, and a transient labor force, not coincide with providing discounted produce to low-income people. Innovations and production focused on vertical agricultural often offer a very limited number of types of crops, restricted mostly to leafy greens that don't represent the bulk of culturally relevant crops needed to feed residents. Advocates of urban farms suggest that such

farms have significant social benefits, such as community development, consumer education, air quality improvement, habitat restoration, heat island mitigation, carbon sequestration, stormwater runoff. But these benefits do not generate revenue. So, what solutions do you see as the urban ag advisory committee to mitigate this stark reality? Does the USDA have a method to support the financial viability of small scale regenerative urban farms whose focus is on producing longer-to-mature crops like eggplant, okra, carrots, and onions?

Urban farms will often have a huge social mission with a load of goodwill to help the community but often fall short or fail due to the realities of cost versus a customer's ability to pay. And it seems that accepting SNAP is really not enough.

And I just really want to thank everyone for your time and for being on this committee. It's been an inspiration to listen to all of you, and I'm sorry I talk so fast. I was trying to get through all that. So thank you guys so much, really appreciate it, and I hope to interact with you all in the future.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** That's great. Thank you for your remarks, Sara. Next potential speaker is Leticia Crews, of (inaudible) Research and Consulting group. She's an RN, MSN, MPH, SPS, DMP at of Aqua Via, Minnesota. Leticia, are you online? Because I don't see you currently in our attendees list. Okay, moving on. Our next speaker is Joy Promise with Eagle's Nest Community Kitchen. She's the CEO, based out of Kent, Washington. Joy, are you online?

All right, we'll go to our next speaker after that, who I can see is here. Our next speaker is Justin Nickelson. Justin is with Ag-lanta Grown. He's a Project Coordinator based out of Atlanta, Georgia. Justin, can you unmute your microphone for us, please?

**Justin Nickelson** Yes. Yeah. Can you all hear me?

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** We can hear you just great, Justin. Go ahead, you're on the clock.

**Nickelson** All right. Thank you, everyone, for sharing space. Again, my name is Justin Nickelson. I work with the City of Atlanta's Ag-lanta Grown local food production program as the Project Coordinator. Again, I want to say thank you all for providing this space. Thank you, Committee for uplifting such great focus areas. And a lot of our comments have aligned with what you all are seeing as focus areas, so we're definitely pleased with that.

So today I definitely want to speak about land access to John Lebeaux's point earlier. As working, you know, as a beginning farmer in metro Atlanta, and then now on the municipal side, I see that land access is one of our top issues. Affordable land, we're seeing in Atlanta, land is being developed at a rapid pace, and property values are really going up. So, I would like to see some support and assistance in, you know, occupying vacant lands. Also, land that is not being used currently, such as faith-based institutions, school systems that may have been in limbo or shut down, and also making municipal lands which we here at the City of Atlanta are looking to identify. And we want to really have support in identifying conservation easements or funds for conservation easements. Also, agrarian trusts, I think would be great options to make sure that our land stays agricultural land. A lot of times our farmers really are in limbo, season after season, trying to understand if they can keep their land. So I think that it should be a priority focus.

Also, really just strengthening those key partnerships. So, I think the USDA could work a lot closer to municipal efforts, just to kind of partner and understand what those cities are doing in efforts to sustain

urban agriculture. And ultimately, I think it'll be a great idea to see urban agriculture as a public works, as a public service, you know, just as, you know, we collect garbage and recycling. If we really want urban ag to feed our communities, I think instituting it in our municipal sector as public service will be the way to go. Thank you all again for sharing space.

My name is Justin Nickelson once again I can be reached at JNickelson at AtlantaGA dot gov. God bless. Thank you.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Justin, thank you for your comments today.

Our next speaker is Scheril Strong Powell. Scheril is with the African American Farmers Association and Green Sustainable Strong. She's the Executive Director based out of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Good afternoon, Scheril. How are you today?

Scheril, we can't hear you right now, it sounds like your audio is out. Can you try again?

No worries, we still can't hear you. Oh, now we're getting something there. Hello, Scheril.

**Scheril Strong** Can you hear me now?

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** We can hear you. It's kind of spotty, but yeah, go ahead and give it your best shot.

**Strong** Okay, all right, thank you so much. My name is Scheril Murray Powell, Esq. I'm a cannabis, agricultural, and dietary supplement attorney. I am based in Florida, as stated, and I'm the Executive Director for the African American Farmers Association. I'm also the founder of Green Sustainable Strong, an agricultural consulting firm.

So with that stated, I definitely want to thank the USDA and also the Commission on urban agriculture. Urban agriculture is a very important issue, especially when it comes to health equity in this country.

There's definitely a clear opportunity to build a bridge between rural farmers, as well as urban farmers. Urban farmers can learn from the traditional growing practices of rural farmers, and rural farmers can learn from some of the innovation and technology that has been embraced by our urban agriculturalists.

With that said, I think we're experiencing a farming Renaissance. I really appreciated hearing from the Commission and their priorities, especially with regards to racial equity and sustainability. Sustainable practices are the way of the future, and encouraging our communities to be more sustainable, as far as growing practices, packaging, and other areas.

I've worked with farming organizations with my GROW the SHIP program. So it's an acronym. G is grow, grow diverse commodities. R is recruiting diverse professionals from different industries. O is outreach to like-minded organizations; W is making our farmers the wellness hub once again of the community. S stands for sustainable practices. H stands for healthy financials. I stands for innovation and technology. And P stands for planting sub-chapters throughout our geography which endorse the same tenants. So I just wanted to share that with everyone.

I've implemented it in a number of farming organizations here in the United States as well as in Ghana, Africa, and I've educated at universities with regards to that, so I just want to say congratulations to our commission on urban agriculture. We'd like to see more activity where urban and rural agriculturalists are brought together, and I want more people in the cities to experience this farming Renaissance and grow their own food.

Thank you so much.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Scheril, thank you for your remarks. Our next speaker is Joe James.

**Joe James** I'm here.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Hello, Joe. Joe is with Agricheck Producers LLC. He's President, based out of Columbia, South Carolina. Take it away, Joe.

**James** I'm a black ag and climate tech entrepreneur who has invented and begun implementing interrelated and patented agricultural processes which cost-effectively combat climate change, clean up polluted brownfield sites, making much needed land available and safe for planting food crops, promote environmental justice, create pop-up shade infrastructure, and create new inner city bio economy jobs, converting our plant material into bio products.

Climate change is one of the world's most severe existential challenges, which, if handled right, also presents the world's greatest set of opportunities ever, to promote improved health, food security, environmental justice, and economic opportunities for urban communities. The USDA should recognize and incentivize the ability of innovative forms of urban agriculture to meet our nation's food, environmental, and economic challenges. And the US government, instead of only incentivizing the use of roots of crops to store captured carbon, should also incentivize using the above-ground portions of certain fast growing bio crops to capture many times the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> per acre as forest.

So, using my patented combined remediation biomass and bio product production process, terrible name. One plants and then multitasks very special bio props to cost effectively do good things, powered by sunlight, like capturing large amounts of CO<sub>2</sub>, remediating air, soil, and water, and then making circular economy bio products from the harvest of material in which the captured carbon is sequestered, demonstrating traction for our CRBBP process. Our Maryland operating affiliate of the climate change investment initiative is commercializing our CRBBP process in Baltimore, where will be capturing almost four times the atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> as an equal acreage of trees.

When biomass sorghum is planted to remediate brownfield sites, or to provide instant pop-up shade to protect at-risk residents and treeless neighborhoods from climate changes, heat island impacts, while also providing other environmental services. Biomass sorghum will capture nine times as much CO<sub>2</sub>, as far as when planted in our proposed vertical bio crop forms, the captured CO<sub>2</sub> directly from industrial emissions and certain urban infrastructure. And my Pennsylvania operating affiliate has just begun planning similar CRBBP process projects in Philadelphia, in partnership with community-based organizations and utilities.

Again, climate change is one of the world's most severe existential challenges, which, if handled right, also presents one of the world's biggest set of opportunities ever, for improved health, food security, environmental justice, and economic opportunities for at-risk urban communities. USDA programs should incentivize the ability of urban agriculture to meet a variety of challenges, and to benefit everyone.

In closing, I look forward to talking and partnering with the Advisory Committee, and with additional urban communities. Thank you.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you for your remarks, Joe.

Our next speaker is Kent Bey. Kent is with, he's President of the Project Love Coalition based out of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Welcome, Kent.

**Kent Bey** Hello. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm listening in on this wonderful meeting and this commission, and all the people participating have certainly created some inspiration and some hope on our end here. Again, my name is Kent Bey. I'm a veteran who resides in the Pittsburgh Gallatin County Southwestern Pennsylvania region, where agricultural obstacles exist.

I'm a member of several food security and policy organizations. I'm currently the President of the Project Love Coalition, a Veterans advocacy organization. We currently operate an urban farm. We want to create opportunities for a wide range of people by connecting our urban farm efforts to the rural area. Would like to know how can marginalized Veterans and African Americans with low income get needed support to engage in agriculture and agribusiness, especially with the grant technical assistance.

None of this has been easy for me and clearly requires technical assistance expertise that is not easy to locate or accessible in terms of affordability. I am failing socially and economically in my personal agricultural pursuits and mission to help other marginalized Veterans and African Americans in doing the same. Where is the equitable support and opportunities for agriculture and agribusiness for marginalized Veterans with low income, and for low-income African Americans?

Additionally, other challenges that we're looking at is the lack of investment in projects and strategies that drive innovation technological growth within communities. Poor soil quality is a common barrier to urban agriculture. It is important to commit funding to finding workable strategies to help identify suitable urban ag sites, remediate, and sustain urban soil health.

And lastly, given the location of urban operations, finding technologies that are a help to minimize energy use and limit utility costs, such as water, heat, and power, while maximizing production, is also a priority for us.

Again, I want to thank this wonderful panel. I truly appreciate listening to everyone here, and you have great insight. I look forward to working with you in the near future, and any way that I can assist or provide information that can help this process move forward. I'm definitely available. Thank you.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** And thank you, Kent, for your insight. Our next speaker is Suzanne Slavens.

Let me try to switch our interpreters here for a second to get everybody caught back up. And again, just as a side note, our interpreters helping us out here for the last two days have been nothing less than spectacular, so again we appreciate all of their efforts.

Suzanne Slavens is responsible for stewardship with Elder Tree based out of Dayton, Ohio. Welcome aboard, Suzanne.

**Suzanne Slavens** Hi, thank you so much for letting me join you. Can you hear me okay?

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** We can hear you just fine, Suzanne. Go ahead.

**Slavens** Okay. So, yes, my name is Suzanne, and I'm calling here from Dayton, Ohio. I'm an alum of the University of Michigan School of Natural Resources and Environment and the School of Public Health. I'm a California native who's been impacted by California wildfires on agricultural areas where I was working as well as the drought. I've been connected to food co-ops, farm school gardens, and healthcare gardens for the past 22 years.

Currently, I'm on the stewardship team with Elder Tree, which is a small youth-led nonprofit that's dedicated to promoting public health through sustainable agriculture and ecological education through a

grant from the sustainable agricultural research and education with NRCS. We're working on an agro-forestry initiative that will engage local youth in cultivating bio-regionally appropriate non-timber forest products on a nine-acre wood lot that's owned by a church in Dayton, Ohio.

We're very interested in using this project to bridge the gap, a very discouraging gap, between East and West Dayton, and the racial divide that we see in places like Dayton and in Houston. I'm also a field manager at the Farm on Central, which is a small organic farm startup just south of Dayton, in Carlisle, Ohio.

So my comments will re-emphasize and reaffirm many of the priorities and goals that have already been verbalized earlier today by Bobby Wilson, Zachari Curtis, Angela Mason, Dr. Wallace, Viraj Puri, and Tara Chadwick. A lot of what you said resonated really deeply with me earlier.

So one priority I would love to see somehow manifest through this initiative on urban agriculture would be faith-based initiatives to promote urban agriculture. Justin Nickelson just mentioned that many churches and other faith-based institutions on larger tracts of land in urban areas that are underutilized and could easily be revitalized. In addition, faith-based communities and churches are the center of many people's lives. And we have change makers in those communities. Specifically, as Tara said, we need to engage the gatekeepers, the grandmothers, our abuelas, the deacons, the deaconess, the reverends, the rabbis, the elders. These are the people that we need to engage to create the changes we want to see.

Addressing racial equity has been spoken of many times this afternoon, specifically health equity, and we see those connections to our agricultural food system. This can't be rhetoric; it has to be a fruit that flowers with cultivation of our schools. And we've seen that successful movements that have created massive shifts in our understanding of the shared dignity of humanity, were grassroots and faith based, and the most ancient prayers so many of us share our agricultural. Give us this day our daily bread.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Suzanne, if you could please use your last 15 seconds to wrap up.

**Slavens** Yes, ma'am. Sorry. Yes, sir. So the key thing, though, is financially viable career pathways in agriculture, to quote Bobby Wilson, creating generational wealth in agriculture. Agriculture is a scary endeavor. Many young people are very idealistic and want to make change but being able to do this in a way that is financially viable is the key to the success of these movements. Thank you.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you, Suzanne we appreciate your time today. Our next speaker is Jacqueline Bido. Jacqueline is the CEO of Elevate Newark based out of Mount Dora, Florida. Welcome, Jacqueline.

**Jacqueline Bido** Greetings. Actually, I am the CEO of Elevate North, based out of Newark, New Jersey, as well as a company out in Mount Dora. I am also the Chief Strategy Officer of Newark Science and Sustainability.

And it was a pleasure witnessing the conversation live between the Advisory Committee. And I would just ask that, as you continue to deliberate, that we be mindful of the use of the word equity, and not use the definition of equity as giving people the same, but more so giving people what they need.

There is a diverse cultural, communal definition of urban farming that is very unique to each state, each community. And I would just make sure that when you are discussing equity that we keep that in mind so that the true voice of the stakeholder comes to the forefront.

In addition, I would ask that the Advisory Committee really disaggregate what it looks like to be a grower in year one and be a growing year 15. Working with a host of grassroots organizations and supporting them in efforts of grant writing and program development, I have seen the struggles within those organizations. Historically, I have worked with marginalized communities, and as a strong educated and proud Latina, I would like that there be resources that are real to the people that are in the trenches doing the work, so that when we ask them to apply for these grants and seek these resources, that we keep in mind that sometimes they are a one-stop-shop with very little volunteers and help, and that we truly come together to offer resources that are accessible to those that are focused on the work and the people and not caught up in the policies, protocols, and red tape that exists in accessing these resources.

I thank you for this time, and I invite all of you listening, and those who may hear this recording later, to come visit us in Newark, New Jersey. Come visit us as we build out the Newark Community Food System, as we love collaborating with others and seek to share our knowledge, as my resources are your resources. Thank you.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you, Jacquleen. We're now trying to locate two other speakers that are next in line, but we can't identify them through our attendees list. One is Jerry Robinson, founder of the Urban Greek University in Dallas, Texas, and the other is Sate Sar, a graduate research assistant with the University of Louisville in Louisville, Kentucky. I'd also note that we have seven people that have joined us today, via their cell phone, and all I can see on our reports right here is the cell phone number. I can't tell who the person is on the other end of the line.

So our next speaker is now going to be Christina Chalmers if I'm pronouncing that correctly. She's a Research Specialist with UVI out of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. Go ahead, Christina.

**Christina Chanes** Can you hear me?

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Christina, your volume is very low. Could you speak up just a little bit louder, please?

**Chanes** Yes, good afternoon everyone. Can you hear me?

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you, we can. Yes. We can hear you just fine now. Go ahead.

**Chanes** Awesome. Thank you. Good afternoon. Members of the Committee and colleagues, my name is Christina Chanes at University of the Virgin Islands.

I have a joint appointment at UVI. I am a Research Specialist in the College of Math and Science. I'm also an extension agent with experience in A&R and have more than 10 years working with 565 farmers across the Virgin Islands. Thank you for the opportunity to share our needs and the challenges that we face. Many programs that are offered in the US do not actually apply in the Virgin Islands. One problem is we do not have a dedicated Farm Service Agency office in St. Thomas, or St. John. We have one on St. Croix. We also don't have services for NRCS in St. Thomas or St. John. That's on St. Croix, and those programs, while helpful and needed, are actually directed out of Puerto Rico.

What I would like to bring to your attention is when we talk about equity, we don't include the insular areas. Your map previously was the continental United States, and Hawaii, because if you want to achieve this.

Sorry.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** No, go right ahead. You just locked up for a minute. Go ahead.

**Chanes** Okay, sorry. Keep in mind we're not proximity. We're not Puerto Rico. We're close in proximity, but the people, the typography, and the population are not the same. Therefore, having services that are eligible to people in our population are vital.

Also, as it relates to drought, drought declaration and emergency funds, we have limited to little access. We have 65 farmers that are livestock farmers. The majority of our farmers work in harsh conditions with a lack of resources, infrastructure.

If you want to create parity and increase food security, you have to address cultural relevance, as well as access to water security. In essence, there is a disparity from the get-go. We know that is not the intention of USDA, NRCS, or FSA, and we want to work with you. We have to get to the table. Please understand that many farmers do not have the ability to access funding from the programs that are provided. And it is vital.

I encourage all of you as committee members to come to the Virgin Islands, to go to American Samoa, to see what insular territories are faced with, and when grants and opportunities are available, please do not offer them to our sister insular territories. Offer them to us. Have them reviewed by culturally relevant individuals, because the 565 farmers that I am speaking on behalf of today work in very harsh conditions with limited access to resources, and while we understand that it is important to work together to gain equity, if your goal is to engage farmers and create food security and close the gap on water insecurity, then we must [inaudible] programs of old and move into new eras. Climate smart technology, drought tolerant food crops, and other areas where we bring in succession plans and new and young farmers to create new and innovative opportunities for all. That is America.

That is my summary. Thank you.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Okay, great. Thank you. That's great. Thank you. Our next speaker is Mama Lynne Tillman. Ms. Tillman is the director of Mama Lynne Farm in Columbus, New Mexico. Go ahead, Mama Lynne.

**Mama Lynne Tillman** Good morning and thank you all. I'm grateful, grateful for this opportunity. My farm is As We Grow in New Mexico. My business is Italia Till LLC that stands for my mother and my auntie, who were sustainable from the word go.

I want to address composting. I have worked with [inaudible] in Nashville, Tennessee, as well as Will Allen doing compost as a community organization, versus the municipality. We can get a lot more done. We're able to salvage the food, I worked with [inaudible], getting food salvage from Whole Foods and places like that. We were able to glean through it, women in the community was able to make sauces, all kinds of things quickly, stews and everything. When you turn it over to the municipality, it sets and rots. So, I'm really advocating for a lot of things, but compost as a part of like my farm operation as being able to... Out here in the desert, there's no trees. There's no nothing. It's hard to get compost.

I had to, I also have a CDL I had to borrow a commercial truck to drive all the way over to Las Cruces and get loads and loads driving back at only 30, 45, 60 miles an hour in a 70-mile zone with 18-wheelers, you know risk and death, to bring compost back to this little community so we could provide compost for this community and other communities, without going through the red tape of bureaucracies. This can be done all across the country. Compost is key to growing, as we know, soil is compost.

So I just wanted to get that out. I want to really talk about getting funding directly in our communities. I want to talk about the equity committee, but I want to talk about Mr. Harvey Reed, who has been educating a great deal of us... I'm also a Veteran, female Veteran, low-income, got challenges, and I belong to a very strong Facebook group, where we have been, thousands of us, getting educated on what USDA has to offer. Things that I didn't know. I went to the USDA office here just the other day. That woman told me they didn't do nothing but handle disasters, and so she didn't know anything about urban farming. She didn't know anything about small new farmers, new growers, Veterans. She didn't know nothing.

So we really need people. And everyday people like I'm talking to you, I'm an everyday person. Yes, I got education, but I speak with everyday conversations. So, this is who we need in our community so we can really get work done. My mother and my auntie, that's what they did. I'm out in the middle of the desert. I got here three months before Corona hit. I've been canning my socks off. I built a hoop house out of PVC pipe and T posts. I've been growing what people thought couldn't grow out here.

We have to get this done wherever we're at, like, Venezuela, when Russia, whatever did years ago and then people down there went hungry, and they had to start growing in town. To me that's where we're at.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** And if you could use the last 15 seconds to wrap up, please.

**Tillman** Okay, thank you very much, again. I really would like you to look into helping us in the everyday community, and once again I want to mention the powerful job that Mr. Reed is doing for us. Thank you.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you, Mama Lynne. Our next speaker is Wil Hemker. Wil Hemker is a Fellow with the University of Akron Research Foundation in Akron, Ohio. Welcome, Wil.

**Wil Hemker** Thank you. Our foundation is affiliated with the university, and not only in this University in Akron, but in many regions, as well as around the globe. Our mission is to advance technology with pragmatic implementations with businesses to create jobs and communities to create well-being and an economically driven community.

We are involved in a controlled environmental agriculture and in sustainable water systems and energy systems. Behind me you'll see an image recently released of a company in Vietnam. And this company is a textile company, using natural fibers, and makes high quality denims and other materials. What's unique is 40% of their footprint, which is about a 25-acre building site, is for controlled environmental agriculture. Ten acres of hydroponic farming, plus twice that amount of outdoor organic farming. They are committed to asserting their 700 employees, plus a community, to drive change and to provide healthy foods and resources for their community. And it's all being done at zero emissions of greenhouse gases and reuse of their water. So, a tremendous opportunity to look at hybridization of communities of business and food production to make it sustainable for urban agriculture.

Another aspect that were involved in is normal ways of growing bio-based materials and are needed in our structure, in our marketplace. One is natural rubber. Natural rubber has been unsustainable for decades, sourced in Southeast Asia and shipped over here. There is a plant like a dandelion. It can grow natural everywhere but has yet to be cultivated outdoors. Why? Because it's a wild plant.

We're working with multiple universities, Ohio State being a leader in this one, avoiding these dandelions in hydroponic environments. We've demonstrating to the Department of Defense as a strategic material

but guess what that dandelion also has high value inulin coming from that root, as well as the natural rubber, and the most nutritious leafy green, and I appreciate this committee of looking at urban and peri-urban opportunities to really grow vital crops we need in our production system.

The key thing is, as I heard it before, is we need to look at building paradigm shifts, not only community organizations such as churches and schools, but also businesses and how we can incentivize that to bring high nutritious, high valued, very perishable crops, like your committee member from Gotham Greens has been doing, and demonstrating, it's very vital to us.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Wil, can you wrap this up in the last 15 seconds?

**Hemker**

Lastly, I'm pleased to see the diversity and experience with this committee, please reach out to us. We'll be glad to be part of this committee and help drive change like you. Thank you.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you, Wil.

We're missing a couple of speakers as well, again. Emmanuel Rude, Founder and General Manager of the Urban Food Park in St. Petersburg, Florida. We're also missing Sharon Lewis. Sharon is the Executive Director of the Meadows Eastside Community Resource Organization in Chicago, Illinois.

As we switch our spotlights to our next ASL interpreters.

Oh, I lost somebody else here. Here we go. Sorry about that, Angela. I need your face everywhere.

Our next speaker is going to be Haroun Hallack, Owner-Operator of Redbud Urban Farms in Hagerstown, Maryland.

**Haroun Hallack** Hi. Hello. Thank you very much for having me, and I would like to thank this Committee for taking time off your busy schedule to serve in this organization.

Yes, my name is Haroun Hallack. I've been an organic grower for over 25 years. Currently, I train and consult on sustainable farming systems and food safety, based on the FISMA, the food and modernization, food acts of the FDA. I mean, I currently focus on urban growing techniques and specialty at new crops.

See, urban agriculture, just as real agriculture, has its challenges, such as land insecurity, energy, clean water, and waste management. However, these challenges are not new to the USDA, or the NRCS in supporting any kind of agricultural production systems, including urban agriculture. Matter of fact, NRCS has been doing this since its founding during the Dust Bowl.

As the Secretary of Agriculture alluded yesterday. The NRCS, they have engineers, they have top scientists, they have talent. It's this community and our inputs that can drive USDA to focus the attention and help out or support some of these programs in this emerging market of urban agriculture.

Urban agriculture as two flavors. We have it as a social enterprise. And then we have it as a commercial enterprise. And we need all of the above in the name of food security. Moving forward, the FSA and the NRCS will be the default agencies to support urban agriculture programming. However, based on history, these agencies have traditionally some rural farmers and a history of being fair to all farmers wasn't that great.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Haroun, if you can please wrap up in your last 15 seconds...

**Hallack** So I'll be eager to see what comes out of 11 FSA pilots and the urban County Committees, because it is in these Committees where decisions are made that affect policy, right at the local level. So, let's focus on these Committees and see how they're going to produce policy, programming, to support these new ventures in our backyard and culture. Thank you very much.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you, Haroun. I'm trying to contact Kirsten Buckstaff. Kirsten if you are here, please acknowledge the prompts you're receiving on your computer so that we can upgrade your status so you can speak.

Our next speaker is Bruce Carman. Bruce is the Owner and Director of Technology with Controlled Environmental Farming Incorporated based out of Ellsworth, Wisconsin. Thank you for joining us today, Bruce.

**Bruce Carman** Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee on this urgent need. I will suggest that urban agriculture is the most important solution to solving food security, safety, and social economic issues occurring within our metropolitan areas. Urban agriculture reduces fresh food deserts, while providing nutritious food to the local community, including schools and childcare facilities.

Oil is not needed within the concept of urban ag. Transportation costs are significantly reduced, if not eliminated, providing affordability for products that are cultivated with consistent quality and quantity. Sustainable businesses are created, continue sustainable employment and education opportunities, while reducing traditional agriculture's environmental impact. The time for development, and well thought out placement of these food production facilities is upon us now. An urban area that cannot feed itself is not sustainable. Facilities that cultivate, process, and distribute thousands of pounds of food daily are required. Universal need for nutritious food is non-political, and as such, all forms of investment incentives should be considered. To facilitate faster and successful development of urban ag facilities, incentives should include complete tax exemption status for all funds on a dollar-per-dollar basis, or other such methods to drive this industry forward at lightning speed. Our need to gain oil independence to solve food security issues and to reduce agricultural environmental impact demands quick implementation of urban ag. The structures and methods exist. They are scalable, they are innovative, they make use of renewable energy, and they can be replicated anywhere. They just need to be supported in a manner that is all in.

Finally, wherever, and whenever possible, local urban ag facilities should also contain full scale childcare operations for its employees, and for the local community. That is where food education begins. Thank you for the time, your time today, and I look forward to collaboration on these ideas and topics. Have a great day.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you for your comments, Bruce. Our next speaker is Kirsten Buckstaff. Kirsten is a Collaborator with Urban Eden 1212 based of Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Welcome, Kirsten.

**Kirsten Buckstaff** Hi. Thank you. My name is Kirsten and, as you said, I am a collaborator. I use that designation because I was taught that we do not own the Earth. My husband and I initiated a backyard philanthropy, I'll call it, to serve primarily off-reservation American Indians in our urban population, as well as serve the greater community. We've received a lot of exuberance and support, especially from

NRCS. Very unfortunately, to see the project to its fruition, we would be in gross violation of a number of codes and ordinances, and to that end, I would make my comments today to the Advisory Committee.

The right to grow, produce, and cultivate the land are inherent to our existence. This compelling sense to work the earth, run soil through our fingers, is innate. Restricting this right condemns a symbiosis we need to survive. Current land use regulations, zoning, city, and municipal ordinances, tread our natural instinct and obliterate historic use of residential lots or county land parcels, extending draconian policy to our own backyard gardens. Right to grow laws, regrettably, are a necessity to counter the unfriendly environment fostered by a blatant disdain for urban producers, growers, and the residential gardener. Arbitrary language in planning and zoning code, special use permits, water use on development, laws, tax burdens, regressive policy, contribute to the cultural injustices crushing a privilege which we should otherwise freely enjoy.

These hurdles to grow in an urban setting are counterproductive to innovation and the spirit of the producer. And in our cultural disparity, the action of growing, creating food security, becomes an act of radicalism. In this age of reimagining an urban agrarian culture, I implore the OUAIP to model a national standard. Much like the state of Maine's Food Sovereignty Act, the nation's first right to food amendment, protecting the rights of individuals to grow, harvest, consume, and sell their own food, including protections for rights to seed saving and seed sharing.

Thank you. I look forward to a future where metro and suburban agriculturists are valued as vital to the health of urbanity.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you for your remarks, Kirsten. Now, we're still missing a few people that we can't locate as attending at this time. One is Beverly Collins, President of the American Indian Farmer, Indian Mothers Incorporated of Red Springs, North Carolina. Another is Delbert Howell, founder of Healthy Place in Chicago, Illinois, and another is Frieda Graves, Administrator with Faith Farms in Gary, Indiana.

As we indicated at the start, everyone who we cannot locate at the time you're scheduled to speak, have simply been rotated to the bottom of the list. And we'll be calling you out again later as we get at that point of the presentation.

At this point, I'd like to introduce our next speaker, Mr. Otho Farrow. I'm sorry if I mispronounced that. Please correct me if you can. Welcome. Otho.

**Otho Farrow** Thank you. It's Otho, but Otho is fine, too. I'm the Founder and CEO of an indoor vertical farm called Metropolis Greens in South Bend, Indiana. We grow micro leafy greens vertically indoors in a 140-year-old building that was repurposed after its manufacturing days. To get that operation started, I got a loan from the FSA, or USDA, and let me tell you it was the most arduous, terrible process of all time. It took me over a year from when I started, and I just believe, you know, from my experience, is the way the USDA has the rural development set up, it's not designed for urban farmers, and it's truly not designed for African Americans.

Typically, you go into these offices, they're in very rural areas. And it appears, from my perspective, that there's a lot of cronyisms in these small rural areas, and favoritism toward white farmers. They're not used to, in my opinion, in my experience, having educated, Black folks who have detailed business plans being able to come into the office and tell them how they're going to do their business.

I think if USDA is sincere about diversity, and this just in my opinion, this over-use of the word equity, because I'd like to speak right to it. It's just raw discrimination against Black folks in general, and people

of color. And if you're going to be serious about it, they need to have more, or not more, they need to have offices in urban areas like South Bend, like Kalamazoo. You know, cities that need direct access to the programs with people who look like me, an African American.

Another thing that I'd like to see done with the USDA and urban farm movement is that we be able to access lending across state lines. I mean, it's a federal program, and we should be able to use the resources of other regions to grow our business.

And, you know, I just think if we're going to be truly diverse, if this agency is ever going to be diverse and start acting on the promises that they say that they're serious about, you're going to have to put these ag dollars in the hands of the people you say you represent, and that means African Americans, and a lot of African Americans live in urban areas, and that money should be coming to urban farmers in those areas directly.

Those are pretty much my comments, and I'll yield the rest of my time to someone else. Thank you.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** We appreciate your great input. Thank you. Our next speaker is, I'm going to mis-pronounce this, so I apologize in advance, Aunie Henry, that's my best guess, a Food Systems Futurist and ag-vocate with The Cultivation Lab, out of Fort Wayne, Indiana. How are you today?

**Anié Henry** Hi, thank you. It's Aunie, but close. I'm doing okay. Thank you for this opportunity. This has been really great, with the way that the Administration has been providing these opportunities for us to engage with the different Departments and Commissions, and I really appreciate the opportunity.

So there's a couple of things that I wanted to touch on. I'm based in the ancestral homelands of the Miami Nation, in what is modernly known as Fort Wayne, Indiana, at the confluence of Three Rivers here in Indiana. And I've been working in food systems and policy for the last 14 years, but I've had an interest since I was a kid, and it comes from being food insecure and, you know, knowing firsthand and experiencing firsthand just how challenging it is to try and be effective at anything when you're hungry all the time, or when the food that you're eating doesn't really give you the energy or fill you up the way that you really need it to. And that's where my passion and my commitment comes from. And a big part of why I believe that experiential leadership is a very important aspect in the success of these programs.

So there's a couple of things that I want to touch on that are challenges for us here, especially in the Midwest, here in Indiana particular. The gentleman before me, several of his comments, you know, he's in South Bend, and I'm from the Michigan border, you know, with Michigan and, unfortunately, we have a lot of issues internally in our institutions. And, you know, the land grant institutions, you know, so many people throw out "land grant", but they don't understand what that means, or how that, you know, came about, you know, and that it was the intentional, you know like, removal of resources and land from Native Americans and indigenous communities and given to these institutions in order to, you know, serve the communities in which they're located. And, unfortunately, many people who are part of the land grant institutions don't even seem to understand that themselves. And that, you know, carries through to unfortunately our extension, and our FSA office as well. I similarly had a challenge where, you know, going to the FSA office to find out information on, you know, the guaranteed refrigerated facilities, you know, loan programs for a farmer who, you know, was looking for something to expand their capacity and was told oh you must be lost or, you know, we don't have anything to do with those sorts of things, and it's very frustrating and very challenging for small and alternative and non-traditional farmers who try to reach out to these resources and are met with obstruction or, you know, staff that doesn't know what they're talking about.

And when we ask about, you know, the urban County Committees, you know...

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Can you wrap up in 15 seconds, please?

**Henry** Yep. A couple of things that we need to focus on is we need to focus on the youth and organizing things that are prioritizing, giving them leadership and empowerment, because it's their future that they're inheriting and, you know, the land of the opportunities that, you know, we need their buy-in, and we need to change the perspective that we're going at this, and being intentional about really the institutional obstacles that are preventing, you know, people from entering into agriculture and alternative things. Thank you.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you. Our next speaker is Dash Pettaway. Dash Pettaway is a farmer, based with Emperor Farms out of Toledo, Ohio. Go ahead, Dash.

**Dash Pettaway** Hello, everyone. Thank you for this opportunity. It is great to kind of, you know, bridge the gap between a lot of individuals that I may have even spoken with online, through emails and, you know, it's nice to really get back to getting personal from all this COVID stuff. But I'm going to, excuse me, quickly go through my notes.

I do realize that we are on a new wavelength of farming wholly, where we actually don't even need dirt to create so many products and such. So I kind of want to really pick at the aquaponics and the aquaculture, so to say, and why the US has 40,000 buildings, a study in 2020, that are vacant, so there are so many more commercial buildings and such that are vacant as well. And why aren't these buildings being utilized? You don't even have to spend money to start an aquaponics farmer, or something like that, because of the fact that the building is already, you know, there. You don't disturb microorganisms you don't disturb ecosystems; we're not going to dig any more, true sustainability. And how can we really truly encompass that we shouldn't, you know, waste, two and three and maybe four and five days, getting lettuce from point A to B, because not only are we wasting its actual shelf life. But then, you know, the people who actually do get it down the line, they're not getting the freshest and the best quality product. So a lot of these, like I said, the commercials and the abundance of land that is just simply abandoned, like grocery stores, you know, places that have shut down. Inflation is a real thing. And now it's going to cost so much, like in rent and to lease, or to own land, to actually be able to produce these things to give to grocery stores, to give to schools, to give you know farmer to plate, and how can we like really to bridge the gap between that. We're not really being sustainable when it comes to the self-sustainability aspect.

Also, there is so many other things, like the fact that there's 90% of shrimp that is being farmed and imported outside of the US. I don't even understand how that's a real number. It really confuses me. Ninety percent of the shrimp that the US consumes, which is the highest and most demanded seafood right now, is being imported from somewhere else. That should not exist. It just shouldn't exist. I really, I'm more confused because I, again, just like how they've said in the past, I get people who have absolutely no idea what I'm talking about. They have no idea when I come with these questions, or these comments, or if I'm doing aquaculture, you know, do I register as a farmer, do I do this, is it different, you know steps or paperwork? You know, coding and ordinances that I have to follow, and it's like jumping through hoop, through hoop through hoop, and I'm getting nowhere.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Okay, Dash. If you can wrap up in the next 15 seconds, please.

**Pettaway** Yes, absolutely. Yeah, to save money, to really stop pouring our money into the ground. Ninety percent of water is saved in rotating tables, and then you know aquaponics, so I really want to kind of get more information and kind of drive towards truth, sustainability, in a sense, and you know, stop just disrupting the environment in the process. Thank you.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you. Okay, for other speakers, we're still looking for Brick Wenzel, the Founder of America's Link Seafood out of La Villette, New Jersey. Anthony D. Jones, Senior, Owner of Meta Farm LLC of Blackstone, Virginia. And Tessa Christian, Founder and Managing Director of the Lake Erie Urban and Small Farm Food Forest advocates of Cleveland, Ohio. But our next speaker is Marsha Allen. Marsha Allen is a Vision Keeper and CEO of the Vineyard Farms Incorporated based out of Rochester, New York. Welcome, Marsha.

**Marsha Allen** Thank you, Jeff. And I want to thank Secretary Vilsack and his staff, the Advisory Committee, and the urban farmers that are on the line and all the other listeners. For my remarks, it's a clarion call and focused on the existential threat of COVID-19, the Delta variant, the omicron, and in our location in Rochester, New York, zip code 14605, we were last in this state in April, in terms of vaccinations. So, we are not in the place where we can open up, take off masks because we have 4,000 people of the 12,610 that are not vaccinated.

And the clarion call that I would like to put forth is the fact that farmers can play, urban farmers, a strategic role in our nation healing, and our nation needs to heal at many levels, but food is obviously a major area in terms of food security, but also nutrition security, because people have food many times, but it's not the right kind. And what we've seen from the impact of COVID-19 and the variants is that those that are obese, those that have high blood pressure, that have diabetes or cancer, they are the ones that highest statistics of death. When we speak about equity, we've not had equity in health care, and nutrition is a strategic component.

So my clarion call to those who can set policy, and I see this as a listening session, if you will, and on August 26 of 2020, I had a listening session with Commissioner Richard Ball, who is the head of agriculture and markets in this state of New York, where I'm located. And from that listening session, he wanted to know, what did I need as a farmer, but I told him I needed to first be able to protect the farm, to be able to continue our youth programs, to let people be able to come safely back on the farm. So I'll farm you from just doing produce, with the help of the Commissioner's department to having, you know, a vaccination location, a testing site, to having hand sanitizer. And every urban farm in this season with COVID is coming in cycles and waves, we can play a tremendous role in impacting and be leaders as soldiers on the battlefield.

So I went back to our foundation, where we said we the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Okay, Marsha, if you can. Can you summarize in 15 seconds, please?

**Allen** Yes, I summarize that we can bring a significant part of our nation back to what our founding fathers intended. And that is to be well, and to be able to pursue happiness and prosperity. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you, Marcia. Our next speaker is going to be Kesha Cobb, but before I do that, I can see we have a speaker available, Jerry Robinson. Jerry, it appears you're driving. If you could pull over somewhere, because I think none of us would cause an accident, so that we can be sure to be able to speak with you. So, Jerry you're going to follow Kesha right as we get her squared away here. Kesha Cobb is the Director of the Sustainability Project based out of North Little Rock, Arkansas. Thank you, Kesha or am I'm mispronouncing is Kesha?

**Kesha Cobb** It's Kesha. It's Kesha.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Okay, great. Go ahead and knock it out.

**Cobb** All right. Hello, everyone. As he stated, I am Founder and Director of the Sustainability Project. We stand to promote health, wellness, sustainability, and community development. We're based in Arkansas, where we are number five in poverty in the US. We're number nine in hunger in the US. We're riddled with food deserts and swamps, yet we are number one, our largest industry is agriculture. We produce \$16 billion a year, and we are number one in rice production in the US. There is definitely an equity divide afoot.

We with the Sustainability Project, we created what's called the Grow-operative, and we're a conglomerate of urban gardeners and farmers, because we needed a voice. We needed a collective voice. We stand to empower the urban gardeners and provide much needed resources for us all to thrive.

So small producers are becoming the new suppliers in light of COVID-19, and in light of climate change, and it is imperative that we meet the needs to offer success, such as access to funding, support from local FSA and USDA, and relevancy in our field. We are more than hobbyists. We are the new agriculture because we are now. We are the new agriculture, because we believe that this is how agriculture started, and how it's going to end.

Big farms have a lot of issues that small farms can handle, and can address, and can avoid. So the Sustainability Project is pleased to announce that we are establishing our first really big urban farm, and we make sure we establish them in impoverished communities. We established one, a 10-acre farm in an old elementary school building where it was riddled with crime. We are also number one in methamphetamine drug use.

We have a case study that proves our program literally reduced the crime and drug use in the area directly, because of our outreach efforts and because of our urban farming in that area, and we will be replicating these projects throughout the state, and other states. We welcome collaboration, and we can be reached, my email is on the speaker's list, and it's just been a pleasure to present and speak with everyone. Thank you so much.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you for joining. I'm going to go ahead, and we're going to Jerry. He's pulled over, so we're going to take advantage of that and take a moment to speak with Jerry. Jerry Robinson is the Founder of the Urban Greek University based out of Dallas, Texas. Jerry, can you unmute yourself for us, please? We can see you, but we can't hear you right now.

**Jerry Robinson** Let me just make a quick correction that's the Urban Green University. We're located here in Dallas, Texas. I am originally from Ohio, so I do want to shout out all my Ohio people and those surrounding Indiana, whatnot.

Some of my comments that I would like to make is, first of all, if the USDA is serious about putting funding behind the urban ag community, they first need to right some wrongs. The \$5 billion or \$4 billion

that is being held up by our Texas group here, that money needs to be released because it was already allocated and promised. Another thing that needs to happen is, over the last about 25 years we have had representation within the, I'll call it the African American community, where I prefer to use the term Moorish, the Moorish community of black national agricultural associations that don't represent us well and have even less of the information that the USDA has been passing now. And that's why we are overlooked, because we have gatekeepers who continue to keep information from us and/or hoard the majority of the grant contracts.

Another thing I would like to comment about is, there is a national group of women in agriculture, with 43 chapters who have been going to Washington, DC, for the last 10 years. We would like to see a charter, a federal charter given to them much like Four-H and FFA. That would be a great start. Historically, the discrimination continues to go on. I am in the urban area of 75215 here in Dallas, which is south Dallas, one of the poorest here in Texas. I personally went out to Coffee County and apply to purchase a farm through the USDA loan farm program and the operating program, and I, too experienced what Mr. Otho experienced out there in Indiana, of it taking one year of getting ran around. The FSA didn't know what was going on, they did not tell me that, hey, you need an actual real estate contract before we can even put the application in, and I feel like the agency knew that, but they didn't share that with me. So that process took a year, and it failed.

So, what my consulting group, the Urban Green University, what we do is we provide real up to date information, but if the FSA doesn't know what's going on, and a lot of the extensions don't know what's going on, and then you have those places in the rural community that don't have people that look like me. I'm black, Moor.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** All right, Jerry if you could, could you wrap up in the last 15 seconds?

**Robinson** Yes, I can. If the USDA is serious, these are the comments that seriously have to be addressed within this year, especially before the new Farm Bill comes around in 2024. Thank you.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** And thank you, Jerry, for your remarks. Our next speaker is Mr. Anthony D. Jones Sr.

**Anthony D. Jones, Sr.** Hello. Hello, there, everybody.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Go ahead.

**Jones** All right. Previously, I submitted written comments which are currently posted on Regulations.gov. I wish to summarize and further clarify my submission. I've also submitted to staff a separate fact sheet describing our farm, its vision, mission, values, and a description of our farm's relationship to Black family heirs' property. My written comments suggest an update from the team "urban agriculture" to "urbanized agriculture". The first is restrictive. The latter reflects US Census data revealing that rurality is evolving into urban core and statistical areas. The term urbanized agriculture indicates this reality, and as a framework of reference, can be used to recognize and create additional agricultural production, processing, distribution, consumption, waste management, and land use opportunities

Urbanized agriculture needs to be clearly recognized, understood, sustainable, and relevant through urban, suburban, and rural context. Therefore, I challenge you all to consider forward-thinking terminology that promotes urbanized agriculture as a local food, wellness, and empowerment system. One way to do this is to eliminate the term "food desert" and in its place consider a more socially forward-moving terminology, such as "food independence". In addition, low income and poor people should not be forced to spend their

limited benefits on cheaper foods and lower quality items. Urbanized agriculture subsidies should be made available to LLCs, guided collectives, and farm cooperatives. Lack of subsidies place agropreneurs at a disadvantage within the marketplace. Also, collectives and cooperatives want efficient access and equity to collection, packing, and distribution channels.

And finally, 46 states currently have some form of decriminalization, CBD, medical, and fully legalized marijuana access. There are only four states where marijuana is illegal remaining. Marijuana is a drug and medication, and in its natural, organic state, a delicious angiosperm. This plant, when freed of domestic constraints, would be classified by USDA as flora culture, which is a sub-category of horticulture and ultimately is a specialty crop. Specialty crops provide species and economic diversity to farms. I suspect at some point this Committee will be asked to weigh in, and when you do, just know there will be many who are willing and ready to assist.

I thank you for this opportunity. And I hope you will consider me for regional subcommittee participation. Thank you for your time.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Anthony, thank you. Our next speaker is Mr. John, and I apologize if I mis-state your name, Manirakiza, Director of the Florencia Heritage Foods of Hyattsville, Maryland. Go ahead, John.

**John Manirakiza** Thank you for having me. And I'm thanking the Committee for organizing this event where we get to share the work we're doing and how, in the future, you can consider everybody who's doing this work.

My name is John I'm an American of Burundian descent, and as an immigrant, like most immigrants when we come here, we switch our diet from a more plant-based diet to a meat-based diet. And over time, that becomes an issue. We start thinking that probably we should switch back to what we are culturally familiar with. So, in the process I've found out that a lot of immigrant communities struggle in the food system here, in terms of what's available for them. And I've been engaged in working with institutions, universities, University of DC, University of Maryland, to see how we can increase the availability of culturally appropriate food in urban settings. That's where most immigrant communities are, where our most foreign-based communities are.

So, in the process we are also engaged in education of the next generation of farmers. It has a cultural aspect to it. We do workforce development. Over the summer I had high school students come to the farm, which is based in Upper Marlboro. They spent six weeks on the farm learning about the process of production, and also engaging the community with fresh food. For a lot of these urban students, it was the first time to actually access fresh food and actually to see how fresh food is grown.

So as we move forward, some of the challenges we face is the fact that we are not really included in some of these policies. Probably you're not going to see an immigrant word in the policy making. But we are your neighbors, immigrants are. America is a country of immigrants. Our culturally appropriate food should be included in conversation because we are really maybe ten to 15 percent of the population. So resources should be appropriately allocated thinking about these cultures. We bring a lot of our skills, we bring a lot of culture, and we also want to be part of that. The issues that we face is in terms of labor, logistics, and the infrastructure that deals with food value chains.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** John, if you can wrap up in the next 15 seconds I'd appreciate it.

**Manirakiza** Absolutely, thank you. So we would like to see more engagement from the USDA, in terms of reaching out to these are usually culturally unavailable, unreachable communities and make our food system more rich, and nutritious, and safe. Thank you.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you, John. Our next speaker is Marguerite Green. Marguerite is the director of Sprout NOLA in New Orleans, Louisiana. Go ahead, Marguerite.

**Marguerite Green** Thanks so much to the organizers of this event. I'm a native New Orleanian, and I've been a farmer in a city for a long time, both for profit and nonprofit, but my day job is to provide technical assistance to farmers and help them navigate systems and institutions that generally are not accessible to them.

Initially I had wanted to speak about making sure that the programs that the USDA is tailored to rural farmers need to be thoughtfully adopted to urban producers, and not just transposed on them. But on Tuesday night, I was sheltered in my bathroom in New Orleans, a city that's very ill equipped to handle tornadoes, as a tornado touched down a few blocks from my house. It leveled one of the producers we work with screen houses. This is a small business that we had literally just convinced to fill out farm number paperwork last week at an event that we did. This is a person whom we unsuccessfully tried to help access an FSA loan, and who we also tried to help access crop insurance. Seeing his devastation yesterday as we helped clean up at the near complete loss of his uninsurable urban agricultural business was awful. Accessing USDA programs can be stressful for producers, especially producers of color, whose experiences, all of a sudden, don't count towards ownership loans or operating loans, because they don't fit a certain paradigm.

This is amplified during disasters. In August, hurricane Ida made landfall and completely decimated several of the farms we serve with roofs landing on gardens, complete crop loss, ruined equipment, high tunnels, and not to mention the immense emotional toll. You get the idea.

None of the FSA programs or USDA programs that existed really fit our producers. And this is just, you know, it's really rough when you call people together after one of the worst days of their lives, and the things that you're offering them really don't work for them. Urban producers tend to be diversified producers, specialty crop producers, and they tend to have less capital and are more frequently what the USDA qualifies as socially disadvantaged producers.

So as the USDA moves to more fully acknowledge the need for urban agriculture, I really urge us to look at the programs that we have and figure out how to truly make them serve urban producers the same way they have rural producers, especially as our community continues to be devastated by the effects of the climate crisis. Oftentimes we have urban farmers that are feeling like they aren't allowed to access programs, and that the programs aren't for them, or that they have to sneak into them. Traditional American agriculture has succeeded, not in a true free market, but with a litany of support and subsidy from the USDA. Urban agriculture needs that same level of support.

As an urban County Committee member of the inaugural urban County Committee in my Parish, we're parishes not counties, I'm working hard to get our urban producers engaged, and they asked me what the USDA can do to help them, why they're signing up for farm numbers. And, you know, because traditionally it's never panned out in the past, so I really hope that moving forward I can give them really confident answers.

I'm so thankful for our local NRCS and FSA staff. They're amazing, kind, communicative, responsive, but they're handed a rulebook that just doesn't fit these new producers to their roster. I think the amount of

support urban farms need to survive financially with market development, all that good stuff is a lot when you first hear it. But I ask that we consider whether or not rural crop farmers, rural farms, and large-scale farms are really any different in their need for market stabilization, subsidy, and support programs. I'm so excited for this next chapter of the USDA, acknowledging urban agriculture and really embracing it, and I really think that this is moving in amazing direction. I look forward to helping however I can both in my community and beyond. So, thank you so much for my time.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you, Marguerite. Our next speaker is Dr. B. Adam Baptiste, I apologize, Chief of Wellness with Balancing Being out of Tallahassee, Florida. Welcome.

**Dr. B. Adam Baptiste** I'm indigenous, Aboriginal, and Illinois. Along with representing these people, I represent the people who have their roots in harmonizing, the people who have experienced the greatest injustices over the course of the last two millennia.

You may call me Dr. B, also known as [inaudible], to invoke my doctorate degrees in medicine. However, my discipline is in wellness and wellbeing. Balancing Being is an entity that I founded to assist mothers, fathers, and children in performing the lifelong act of balancing being. This occurs through education, advising, consulting, curriculum, acupuncture, energy, sound, touch, crystal therapies, natural environment immersion, and team gardening, amongst other therapies.

Thank you to the Committee for this moment, and your work that you do. I also salute all the warriors in the grassroots, at the grassroots level, who are both here with us today, and are unable to be represented. We represent you. We send love, respect, and gratitude to all who have passion and willpower to be present and put the energy towards implementing changes that will affect those who need help the most. Our effort is to power up, promote, and implement true justice over equitable solutions, taking into account the full historical context of why we even experienced disparities, and the people, and the injustices, to the magnitude that we do.

Working with nonindigenous, capitalistic, government agencies and bureaucratic processes have not fared well historically, or currently benefitted the people as a whole, or the earth we inhabit. There is a need for policies at the local, state, and federal levels to adopt more affordable and native landscaping, to improve the quality-of-life environment for flora and fauna alike. How will the committee direct its energy and resources to especially serve, empower, and develop underserved and underrepresented populations, including the flora and fauna, that could truly use the assistance, addressing the issues of food security and environmental justice, as a whole. Respect and gratitude to all committed to representing and implementing justice. [inaudible]

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Mr. Baptiste, we appreciate your comments. Thank you very much. Our next speaker is Lauren Stone. Lauren Stone is the acting Policy Coordinator with the Good Food Institute in Washington, DC. Go ahead, Lauren.

**Lauren Stone** Thank you. On behalf of the Good Food Institute, thank you for the opportunity to make comments today. We urge the committee to support urban and indoor agriculture that fills dinner plates, not just salad bowls, by supporting research and workforce development and alternative proteins. Alternative proteins are innovative foods that focus on developing the characteristics of animal meat, using plants, animals cell cultivation, or fermentation. Together they offer ways to produce more with less, requiring fewer inputs such as land and water, and generating fewer externalities, such as greenhouse gas emissions. Some are available today, but cultivated meat remains primarily in development.

USDA should support innovation in the sector in three ways. First, USDA should solicit support and prioritize applications for funding for alternative protein research through the urban indoor and emerging agriculture grant program. Second, USDA should evaluate and expand opportunities for supporting the sector through NIFA's existing competitive programs that support urban agriculture. Third, this work should expand workforce development opportunities, particularly for individuals from underrepresented backgrounds, increase collaboration with minority-serving institutions, and provide technical and financial assistance to alternative protein producers. A food system based on alternative proteins has the potential to provide more options to consumers while growing the US economy, addressing public health issues such as antibiotic resistance and genetic disease, and increasing food security, food safety, and food system resilience.

The production of alternative proteins can be done in urban and indoor settings with limited space and resources. In addition to expanding the menu of options for consumers, alternative protein production also avoids specific challenges related to raising or keeping livestock in urban areas, such as excessive noise, odors, and restrictive municipal ordinances. Moreover, while the majority of urban and indoor agriculture is focused on producing fresh fruits and vegetables, alternative proteins can create a diversified urban and indoor food system that provides high quality proteins to urban consumers, forming a closed-loop local food system that can feed Americans food from every food group. Alternative protein companies are now located across 38 US states, in both rural and urban areas, including in the country's largest cities. Alternative protein production lends itself to smaller, more widely distributed production facilities. At scale, this distributed infrastructure, can create jobs, and a network of protein production to protect against supply chain issues such as drought, floods, disease, and other losses. All these changes would result in greater food security for Americans.

More research would help alternative proteins become more available and affordable. USDA has already demonstrated its support for alternative proteins by awarding competitive grants in this area, including a grant of \$10 million over five years to Tufts and its five partnering universities to establish a center of excellence for cultivated meat research. This is a tremendous start, but significantly more funding is needed to support gaps in basic research. By including alternative protein research as a core component of the urban indoor and other emerging agricultural production initiative and supporting workforce development, USDA will help enable this emerging sector to feed a growing and increasingly urban population by producing more protein using fewer resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to deliver these comments. We also invite you to read our written comments, which will provide more detail on the benefits of alternative proteins and the ways that this USDA initiative can help. Please reach out directly with any questions.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you for your remarks, Laura. Right now, what we're going to do is we're going to take a 10-minute break. It is currently 2:02. We're going to rejoin at 2:12, at which time we have at least two speakers still left to go, and then we'll wrap up the rest of the day. So again, we'll be going on a break right now, rejoining at 2:12 pm. Thank you.

It is now to 2:00 pm. The Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Advisory Committee meeting will commence again at 2:12, 2:12 pm. Thank you.

All right, we've got 2:12pm on the clock right now, and we'll go ahead with our next speaker. Our next speaker is Brick Wenzel.

**Brick Wenzel** Good afternoon.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Good afternoon. How are you today, sir?

**Brick Wenzel** Very good, thank you. So, I would just start with my presentation if that's all right. So my name is Brick Wenzel, a New Jersey commercial fishermen and founder of America's Clean Seafood. I am here to ask for the establishment of the United States seafood gleaning program within the Department of Agriculture. Gleaning means to gather after the harvest. The act of gleaning is most commonly recognized and is funded within the Department of Agriculture, where nonprofits go out onto farms to pick the bruised fruit and vegetables for distribution to the nation's 200 plus food banks. Via the food banks, soup kitchens, pantries, and churches, then distribute these gleaned products to the food insecure.

Our communities love gleaning. The problem is that it is seasonal and there is no protein. Gleaned seafood is all protein and happens all year round. Every year, commercial fishers catch an estimated 2 billion pounds of bycatch, the extra fish caught in the nets. Instead of donating this catch to our food banks to feed millions of foods insecure, we have to throw it overboard.

In 2018, I established a nonprofit, America's Glean Seafood, to get the bycatch to those who need it most. To date, America's Glean Seafood has gleaned tens of thousands of pounds of fish that has been donated by fishers who did not get a penny, or a tax write off, for their contribution. By working within federal and state regulations, partnering with processors like Sysco foods, and receiving grant money from organizations like Feeding America, the seafood gleaning program has proven to be extremely successful.

America's Glean Seafood's long-term goal is to have gleaning written into the nation's diverse fisheries' management plans. I am happy to report that in 2021, a fisheries management plan that creates a zero-discard policy has been established, with the second to be implemented in 2024. We can only anticipate that the Department of Commerce will continue to do their part to help fight food insecurity within our nation, and around the world, by continuing to adopt regulations that bring this much needed protein to our shores.

I'm here to ask that the establishment of a United States seafood gleaning program assist with the regulatory policy, and financial oversight. Funds need to be immediately provided to grow America's Glean Seafood into a shareable model of how seafood gleaning can be implemented and work within existing regulations. The United States Department of Agriculture and Department of Commerce should embrace the public, private, and NGO partnership that will work to achieve a successful United States seafood gleaning program. We at America's Glean Seafood look forward to further sharing the working details of the establishment of a seafood gleaning program. Thank you.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you for your comments, Brick. Our next speaker is Derrick Bedward, a farmer with Red Gold and Green LLC, out of Hartford, Connecticut. Welcome, Derrick. You need to unmute yourself, please, sir.

**Derrick Bedward** Thank you.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you.

**Bedward** I am Derek Bedward, urban farmer in the state of Connecticut in Hartford, and I enter incubator program, two years ago just because of the love for farming. I'm originally from Jamaica, where I grew up around a farming community, so it's in me, and when I came here, I used to work in a regular job. And then I turned out into farming free time. We've got a wide West Indian community in Hartford, and I grow specialty crops, Scotch bonnet, bok choy, scallion, and thyme. And this is good for the community. I do the farmers market, and we do schools, we do restaurants, we do on-farm, people just come to the

farm to get your fresh produce. We also do people who was into green juices, they want the kale, and the spinach, and the parsley.

So, urban farming is a huge thing in every state, and where the urban farmers come together and they bring a tradition from their country from the original. So, we was composed as [inaudible] and compost there, which is good. We get benefits out of the compost, and it could last for years and still be fertile and good.

And first of all, I want to say that we should also implement it, and the community should implement that, for school trips for students to look visit local farms, so they could see what's going on and then bring out the next generation of farmers. So, I'm talking about education and field trips for students, and the school gardens are one good way to bring them into farming, and they need the nutrition and help.

So my job is to farm, and then land access is a problem, but no matter what your obstacles, my determination is to grow food and feed a nation. I would like to see the community also think about buying back farms like I want a farm to buy I would go on the internet and there is a farm up for sale, and I can buy it. And then we farmers that are urban farmers and are small, but in inner cities are open lots that need to transition after that, so we need more space. I'm one of those who acquire more space outside of my urban here, and I lease other land outside here just to continue doing what I'm doing in agriculture.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Derek, if you can wrap up your summary remarks in 15 seconds, please.

**Bedward** Thank you. I would like to see where urban farmers grow on a scale and they could identify with a packaging plant, so they could bring up other businesses that come out of their crafts that they grow in the field, like they look at peppers and they say, outsource. And there's got to be some backing into packaging plants that would accommodate those needs.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Well, that's great then. Derek, we appreciate your comments today. Thanks again. Our next speaker is Joy Promise. Joy is the CEO of Eagle's Nest Community Kitchen based out of Kent, Washington. Joy, go ahead.

**Joy Promise** Thank you for the opportunity. I'll get right to the point. It is very important for urban areas and children of color to have access to land and access to information about agriculture. Several contributions of a black farmer to agriculture. It was an African American who started the early seed planting in the 1807. Compost, sustainability, farming practices, community supported agriculture, transportation refrigeration system came from an African American by the name of Frederick Jones. It is important that our children see people of color and get better educated about people of color in farming.

Right now, the average farmer, African American farmer, the average farmer is 61 years old. We need to change that. The funding practices at USDA I found a very challenging. I'm just going to just get to the straight to the point that we need more funding in urban areas with urban farmers. We have a program that works with at-risk youth. It is a place where they can go and get back in touch with the earth, put the devices down and learn more about healthy living and healthy eating. Majority of these children live in areas where there are food deserts and food swamps, so there's no nutritionally valued food in their area. That brings in heart disease, diabetes, hypertension. Things that we need the proper nutrition, nutrients to grow, for our children to grow healthy. We're just asking for the same access to funding and also resources. Thank you so much.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Thank you, Joy. Our next speaker is Cidalia Cornelio. Cidalia is the CEO and Founder of the Idea Business Consulting and Educational Services, LLC, out of Boalsburg, Pennsylvania. Welcome, Cidalia.

**Cidalia Cornelio** Thank you so much for the opportunity. I'm really excited to have an opportunity to just share a little bit about the work that I do, as well as to talk about my thoughts on urban agriculture as it relates to the regional areas. I would have to say, just to kind of piggyback on what Joy had mentioned previously, is that education is key in terms of strategically planning opportunities for current agricultural support resources that are available, regionally.

So just to give a little bit more specific clarification to that, in the area of Pennsylvania, we have different resources that are available for small business owners, and so within each area that is being highlighted for the new urban agricultural resources, it has to be very specific to the community and having a blanket, you know, education, that's just being promoted to everyone throughout the US in urban areas is, I think, will not ultimately help when it comes to reach looking at the challenges that are happening regionally. I'm looking at it in terms of economics, what currently are the economic challenges that each of these areas are having, what are some of the business resources that are already available, and what type of educational resources are available as it relates to agriculture? So it has to be a comprehensive approach that could be adapted to each of the areas.

So, in my area in Pennsylvania, you have Philadelphia, and Harrisburg, and Pittsburgh in terms of the urban areas. Each of these areas are very diverse, but they also have their own regional challenges as it relates to economics, as it relates to education, and finding resources for the community. And then within each of these urban areas, the neighborhoods are also different as well. And so, the approach has to be on a community level, community-level engagement, and also they have to buy into that, and I don't know. I don't want to really take up too much time. But the key part of it is to work with leadership and the decision makers within their community.

So, in addition to doing business consulting, business development, and career development work is what I specifically do with for my business, I also work in the area of business consulting for a national organization. I am the DIE Mid-Atlantic Regional Ambassador for SCORE, which is an organization that supports business consulting, business mentorship, for those who need that, and it's a free service. And so, I believe that there's a lot of crossovers that can happen, where rather than recreate the wheel to integrate diversity, equity, inclusion as part of the conversation, regionally specific to the areas, specific to the neighborhoods.

And then the last thing I wanted to say was, as it relates to public policy. If you have all these plans in place, but you're not communicating with your local, state representatives you're not communicating with township managers, with superintendents, with commissioners, then all of these plans will not go into play. They will not be successfully implemented. And so there has to be conversation, there has to be education. How do you talk to your township, how do you look at what current policies are in place as it relates to growing food in your backyard, for example, you know, are there, you know, different things that the township has in place to be able to do that, or do we have to then go, go to the township, and then request to have amendments made to existing policies? So there's a learning curve that a business leader has to take when they're looking at implementing any type of agribusiness or, you know, agricultural education that they want to implement for their community. So it's not one model that can be used throughout the region. It has to be specific. And so that's really the approach.

But the last part I was going to say is that I'm hoping, at some point, there will be an opportunity to look at regional liaisons as an opportunity to look at how to better support the Committee, because if you have

local liaisons... I'm also on the Planning Commission for my Township. And so with that, I have the opportunity to attend meetings. I know when all the current projects that are happening throughout the Center County area that I'm that I'm working, that I'm supporting, and so I can then be able to have that conversation with the Committee and say, this is what will happen, this is what will not happen, in our area. So having local liaisons to support the committee would be advantageous in terms of helping to roll out the plan, both on a national level, the regional level, and the local level.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** All right, Cidalia. Can you wrap up your comments in the next 15 seconds, please?

**Cornelio** I'm done. That's all I had to share.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Alrighty. That's great, then. Thank you very much. You can actually fit in a few remaining people if they'd like. We've got a caller, a Bob Campbell. Bob, if you could unmute yourself please, and you can address the Committee. Bob, we can see you, we just can't hear you, buddy.

**Bob Campbell** Now can you hear me?

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** We can hear you right now. Go ahead, Bob.

**Campbell** Yes, my name is Bob Campbell. I originally grew up on a 475-acre dairy farm in Tennessee. Went on to have a 36-year career in education, social work, and mental health with children, adolescents. I currently am the manager of Franklin City, Virginia, farmers market.

I've just started an initiative with the local school system to go into the schools and teach kids about fresh produce, how to cook it, eating fresh food, and staying healthy. Also going to be, with elementary school level kids, going to be doing a garden and giving them a table at our market to sell our produce, and we're going to be doing the same thing at the high school, as well as providing internships, to students in agribusiness, and so on.

I'm very firm believer that good nutrition and healthy lifestyle begins a very early age. I also believe very firmly that children have a lot of say in what is eaten in households. So I'm very passionate about that. I'm trying to get some assistance in actually partnering with local school system to implement the farm to fresh farm to table initiative. So that's what I'm very passionate about and determined to do.

**Jeff Davis, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service** Well, that's great. Thank you very much for your comments, Bob, and for all your good work. Our next speaker is Pamela Smith. Pamela, you have the floor. Pamela, can you turn up your microphone just a bit because we can't hear you? I'm sorry we still can't hear you, ma'am. Pamela, we still can't hear anything coming out of your mouth. All right? If you have the ability to get your microphone fixed, we might be able to talk to you in a little bit, then. Okay, ma'am?

All right at that point, with that in mind, I can tell you that at this point we've basically run out of our scheduled speakers. What we'll do at this time is go ahead and return it back over to Leslie Deavers.

And Leslie, if you can, why don't you guide us in from here?

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, OUAIP and DFO** All right, thank you very much, Jeff. Thank you, all of our public speakers. We appreciate you taking the time to give your personal experiences and recommendations to us. We accommodated as many people as we could, and unfortunately some people

were not available at this time, but we are still going to have the flow over session on April 1, and we will be posting information about that on our [Farmers.gov/urban](http://Farmers.gov/urban) website.

This has been a great opportunity for us. This whole session, this whole meeting has been a great opportunity for us to learn more about the agriculture activities, the urban ag activities at USDA, to listen to the public feedback and get information from people's personal experiences and learn more about their needs. Also hearing about the priorities being set by the Committee and their plans forward. It's all been inspirational, motivational, and makes me see that the future is bright for USDA contributions to urban agriculture.

As a reminder, I wanted to say this Advisory Committee meeting is a public meeting. As such, all the documents, the presentations, etcetera, as well as the taping of this session, they will be made public on that [Farmers.gov/urban](http://Farmers.gov/urban) website. The next Advisory Committee meeting will also be posted there. It is tentatively scheduled for late May, so be looking on that website to see when the specific date gets mentioned. And similar to all public meetings, that next one should have a public forum associated with it as well.

If you have any questions or would like to reach out to the Advisory Committee, their emails are also on [Farmers.gov/urban](http://Farmers.gov/urban). And before I close officially, I would like to turn the mic over to our chair, Angela Mason, to see if you had any closing remarks. And additionally, whether Dr. Wallace had any closing remarks for us as well.

**Member Angela Mason** I just want to say thank you to everybody for your thoughtful comments. I was taking notes furiously throughout the public comment session, and we will be incorporating those into our subcommittee topics and look forward to our next meeting. Thank you.

**Member Dr. Carl P. Wallace** Well, my comments will be a little succinct as well. Bottom line, it's great hearing from the community. We are here to serve the community, and we are taking all your comments seriously. And I urge you to continue to talk to us. But I want you to know, again, I'm so proud of being a part of this great Committee. We're filled with people who are bringing a lot of expertise and passion to it. And the leadership that Leslie has given us has been fantastically and wonderfully received, and I look forward to us getting back together and May. It's going to even be a better time in May, so take care. God bless and keep all.

**Leslie Deavers Interim Director, OUAIP and DFO** All right, thank you very much. And on behalf of our Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production, we would like to thank the Committee Members for their time and their insight, we'd like to thank the entire USDA presenter team for their contributions, particularly behind-the-scenes people. We want to thank Me Campbell and Tammy Willis for organizing the meeting, Jeff Davis for serving as our producer, and Nina Bhattacharya for running the slides behind the scenes and making sure that we stay on track to our run of show. And we also want to thank again, in closing out, all the members of the public for your interest, for your attendance, for your comments, etc.

Here at USDA, you know, our interest in hearing from you never ends. We want to keep an ongoing dialogue with people. We want to know whether you are seeing improvements from us, or whether you still have needs from us. And we just want to keep an open flow of information. So again, thank you, and keep that in mind we are sincere in our interest in improving our services to the urban agriculture community.

So with that, I'd like to just say that this meeting is now adjourned. Again, thank you all. Have a good rest of the day.

**NOTE AND DISCLAIMER:** This transcript reflects the remarks and conversation during the March 24, 2022, Urban Agriculture, and Innovative Production Advisory Committee (UAIPAC) meeting and may contain transcription errors.

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