September 23, 2022

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

RE: Concerns Surrounding Funding for the Climate Smart Commodities Program

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing to express our strong concern over the recent funding of projects for the Climate Smart Commodities Program.

While we are pleased that USDA increased the funding of projects from $1 billion to approximately $2.8 billion for the first pool, we are concerned about funding that is going to the Historically Underserved, especially black farmers.

Nationwide, black farmers represent 1.4% of all farmers, compared to 14% 100 years ago; however, the black population in the United States is at 12.4%. Currently, black farmers make up a large percentage of the farms in Mississippi (12%), Louisiana (7%), South Carolina (7%) Alabama (6%) and Georgia (4%). According to data from Climate Central, these states also closely mirror the states with the highest risks of climate change, further putting black farmers in harms way.

According to the United Nations, grasslands, forests, and farms can offset 30% or more of the needed carbon reductions, worldwide. The percentage of black farmers in the above described region greatly exceed the national average, and based on risk and the high carbon sequestering nature of the region’s grasslands, forests, and farms, can provide a major opportunity to assist the Historically Underserved, in fact, more so than any other region in the nation.

Black farmers can play a major role in helping the nation off set the impacts of climate change utilizing their land. The revenue derived from these carbon offsets, or credits, can help stem, and hopefully reverse, the huge African-American land loss our community has witnessed since the early 1900s.
In order to truly benefit the Historically Underserved AND help reverse the impacts of climate change, we request you fund the second pool of the Climate Smart Commodities Program at a level of at least $1 billion, focus on the above region, and work to fund the un-funded, high quality proposals from the first round that will significantly benefit the Historically Underserved in this area of our nation.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,

Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

Jim Clyburn
Member of Congress

Dwight Evans
Member of Congress

Donald Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress

Emmanuel Cleaver
Member of Congress

Terri Sewell
Member of Congress

Sanford Bishop
Member of Congress

Donald McEachin
Member of Congress

Troy Carter
Member of Congress

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

Brenda Lawrence
Member of Congress

Nikema Williams
Member of Congress

Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress
cc:

Robert Bonnie
Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation
United States Department of Agriculture