December 8, 2022

President Joe Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20050

Dear Mr. President:

Congratulations on the gains the Democrats have made during this election campaign cycle, especially the win in Georgia. However, we are troubled by the policies and actions which are harmful to America’s Black farmers under the leadership of Secretary Tom Vilsack.

The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) has weighed in and found Vilsack’s policies seemingly inadequate. The CBC requested that $1B be allocated on tier two for Black farmers in the next round of grants and Vilsack responded with justification for only $300M. Secretary Vilsack indicated that if they have further questions, they can call the USDA’s Office of Congressional Relations rather than his office, relegating the CBC to lower-level staffers to show his disrespect. It is clear that he’s always had his feet on the hose. The Congressional Black Caucus letter is found here. Vilsack’s inadequate response is found here.

You signed the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (IRA of 2022). We, in good faith, hoped for good things to happen despite the race neutral language of the bill. In the IRA of 2022, $3.1B was allocated to “distressed” farmers and ranchers. How much more distressed does one have to be than that of Black farmers who are holding on to their land by the skin of their teeth. Only a few Black farmers have received debt cancellation. USDA is “cherry-picking” farmers while Black farmers are losing their land, wealth, and heritage. Secretary Vilsack is in charge of these processes that deny Black farmers their justice.

The IRA of 2022 also allocates for $2.2B for discrimination. Again, Black farmers are languishing on their lands while USDA and Tom Vilsack are pontificating about process.
Ramsess, a Los Angeles artist has captured in political satire the truths of the current situation within USDA as the “last plantation” focusing on Tom Vilsack. Here are some of his more poignant pieces. The symbolism is riveting. Please click on and expand for more detail.

Mr. President, this has created an opportunity for you to work to rectify the misdeeds at USDA. We are relentlessly staying the course as we spelled out our expectations in our previous correspondence.

How could legislation come out of the heart and mind of a candidate for the presidency, Elizabeth Warren, who has few Black farmers in her state? How can she care more about Black farmers while others are benefitting from their pain and suffering? How can so many be feeding
from the trough, their bank accounts bulging at the seams like never before? How can those organizations that claim to care about Black farmers continue to say great things about Tom Vilsack while Black farmers continue to suffer as they wait? Banks are profiting and white farmers are benefitting while debt relief remains a painful experience for Black farmers.

The people in Georgia have spoken, and so has the America people during this election cycle. And we know that equity, accountability, transparency, and justice are things that the people demand from you and your White House. Debt cancellation and taxes that are incurred for Black farmers remain a top priority for us. In addition to these, we remain focused on eliminating systemic racism throughout USDA. Resolving cases for both employees and farmers and the county committee system are two examples of systemic discrimination.

Time is short. Black farmers do not have the luxury of time.

We invite you to review our letter to you written September 28, 2022 for a more thorough understanding of what is important to us.

We continue to wait for your decision to meet with Black farmers and their advocates.

Respectfully,

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