



Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

November 17, 2022

THE HONORABLE BENNIE THOMPSON
U.S. House of Representatives
2466 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Thompson:

Thank you for your letter on September 23, 2022, regarding the inclusion of underserved producers and groups in the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities. I appreciate your engagement in this effort.

Equity, and the provision of benefits to underserved producers and communities, is a priority for me and for the Biden-Harris Administration. We must ensure that the programs we support and the investments we make across the board are available to everyone and that underserved, small-, and medium-scale farmers are able to participate and prosper.

The design of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities was informed by extensive public input regarding ways that USDA can support opportunities to build markets and support the production and marketing of climate-smart commodities through partner-led projects that provide voluntary incentives to producers and landowners. In addition to two public comment periods in 2021, USDA staff conducted explicit outreach to groups that work with diverse underserved producers. Across the board, we consistently heard that the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity should ensure benefits to small producers, underserved producers, and early adopters. There were specific design criteria that were recommended by many groups. These criteria included the need for flexibility in terms of match requirements, ample time for applicants to assemble applications, and certainty that grants were appropriately sized to meet the scale and needs of diverse applicants.

We listened. In response to the feedback, USDA created two funding pools in the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity that was announced in February 2022. The first funding pool was designed for large projects ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million, and all of those projects were required to have a robust plan for working with small and/or underserved producers.

USDA also created a second funding pool. This pool was specifically designed for smaller, particularly innovative pilot projects (ranging from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999) that focus on the involvement of underserved producers and/or monitoring, reporting, and verification activities at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This dedicated pool was created to ensure that the smaller projects were not competing against the larger projects. The application deadline for this funding pool was also later than the first pool to allow potential applicants more time to prepare their applications.

THE HONORABLE BENNIE THOMPSON

Page 2

Equity was explicitly part of the review and scoring process for both funding pools. To ensure that the ability to provide matching funds was not a barrier to participation, we were clear in the funding opportunity that there would be flexible match requirements.

USDA saw tremendous demand for this opportunity from across agriculture and forestry, with more than \$18 billion in proposals for the first funding pool and more than \$2 billion in proposals for the second funding pool. On September 14, 2022, USDA announced 70 tentative project selections for the first funding pool. While we will not have precise numbers of underserved producers impacted until the projects get underway, every project has a plan for benefiting underserved producers and will be required to report on this impact over the course of the project. We have a diverse set of project partners, including more than 15 MSIs, more than 15 Tribal partners, and many partner groups working with small and underserved producers.

Before the end of this year, an estimated \$300 million will be directed to more than 65 additional projects in the second pool of funding, which is focused on the enrollment of small and underserved producers and monitoring, reporting, and verification activities developed at Minority Serving Institutions, bringing the total expected investment to \$3.1 billion.

Again, thank you for your letter; we value your engagement in this important opportunity. If you have any additional questions, please contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at 202-720-9259. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary



Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

November 17, 2022

THE HONORABLE SANFORD BISHOP
U.S. House of Representatives
2407 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Bishop:

Thank you for your letter on September 23, 2022, regarding the inclusion of underserved producers and groups in the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities. I appreciate your engagement in this effort.

Equity, and the provision of benefits to underserved producers and communities, is a priority for me and for the Biden-Harris Administration. We must ensure that the programs we support and the investments we make across the board are available to everyone and that underserved, small-, and medium-scale farmers are able to participate and prosper.

The design of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities was informed by extensive public input regarding ways that USDA can support opportunities to build markets and support the production and marketing of climate-smart commodities through partner-led projects that provide voluntary incentives to producers and landowners. In addition to two public comment periods in 2021, USDA staff conducted explicit outreach to groups that work with diverse underserved producers. Across the board, we consistently heard that the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity should ensure benefits to small producers, underserved producers, and early adopters. There were specific design criteria that were recommended by many groups. These criteria included the need for flexibility in terms of match requirements, ample time for applicants to assemble applications, and certainty that grants were appropriately sized to meet the scale and needs of diverse applicants.

We listened. In response to the feedback, USDA created two funding pools in the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity that was announced in February 2022. The first funding pool was designed for large projects ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million, and all of those projects were required to have a robust plan for working with small and/or underserved producers.

USDA also created a second funding pool. This pool was specifically designed for smaller, particularly innovative pilot projects (ranging from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999) that focus on the involvement of underserved producers and/or monitoring, reporting, and verification activities at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This dedicated pool was created to ensure that the smaller projects were not competing against the larger projects. The application deadline for this funding pool was also later than the first pool to allow potential applicants more time to prepare their applications.

THE HONORABLE SANFORD BISHOP

Page 2

Equity was explicitly part of the review and scoring process for both funding pools. To ensure that the ability to provide matching funds was not a barrier to participation, we were clear in the funding opportunity that there would be flexible match requirements.

USDA saw tremendous demand for this opportunity from across agriculture and forestry, with more than \$18 billion in proposals for the first funding pool and more than \$2 billion in proposals for the second funding pool. On September 14, 2022, USDA announced 70 tentative project selections for the first funding pool. While we will not have precise numbers of underserved producers impacted until the projects get underway, every project has a plan for benefiting underserved producers and will be required to report on this impact over the course of the project. We have a diverse set of project partners, including more than 15 MSIs, more than 15 Tribal partners, and many partner groups working with small and underserved producers.

Before the end of this year, an estimated \$300 million will be directed to more than 65 additional projects in the second pool of funding, which is focused on the enrollment of small and underserved producers and monitoring, reporting, and verification activities developed at Minority Serving Institutions, bringing the total expected investment to \$3.1 billion.

Again, thank you for your letter; we value your engagement in this important opportunity. If you have any additional questions, please contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at 202-720-9259. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary



Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

November 17, 2022

THE HONORABLE BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN
U.S. House of Representatives
168 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Coleman:

Thank you for your letter on September 23, 2022, regarding the inclusion of underserved producers and groups in the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities. I appreciate your engagement in this effort.

Equity, and the provision of benefits to underserved producers and communities, is a priority for me and for the Biden-Harris Administration. We must ensure that the programs we support and the investments we make across the board are available to everyone and that underserved, small-, and medium-scale farmers are able to participate and prosper.

The design of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities was informed by extensive public input regarding ways that USDA can support opportunities to build markets and support the production and marketing of climate-smart commodities through partner-led projects that provide voluntary incentives to producers and landowners. In addition to two public comment periods in 2021, USDA staff conducted explicit outreach to groups that work with diverse underserved producers. Across the board, we consistently heard that the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity should ensure benefits to small producers, underserved producers, and early adopters. There were specific design criteria that were recommended by many groups. These criteria included the need for flexibility in terms of match requirements, ample time for applicants to assemble applications, and certainty that grants were appropriately sized to meet the scale and needs of diverse applicants.

We listened. In response to the feedback, USDA created two funding pools in the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity that was announced in February 2022. The first funding pool was designed for large projects ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million, and all of those projects were required to have a robust plan for working with small and/or underserved producers.

USDA also created a second funding pool. This pool was specifically designed for smaller, particularly innovative pilot projects (ranging from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999) that focus on the involvement of underserved producers and/or monitoring, reporting, and verification activities at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This dedicated pool was created to ensure that the smaller projects were not competing against the larger projects. The application deadline for this funding pool was also later than the first pool to allow potential applicants more time to prepare their applications.

THE HONORABLE BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN

Page 2

Equity was explicitly part of the review and scoring process for both funding pools. To ensure that the ability to provide matching funds was not a barrier to participation, we were clear in the funding opportunity that there would be flexible match requirements.

USDA saw tremendous demand for this opportunity from across agriculture and forestry, with more than \$18 billion in proposals for the first funding pool and more than \$2 billion in proposals for the second funding pool. On September 14, 2022, USDA announced 70 tentative project selections for the first funding pool. While we will not have precise numbers of underserved producers impacted until the projects get underway, every project has a plan for benefiting underserved producers and will be required to report on this impact over the course of the project. We have a diverse set of project partners, including more than 15 MSIs, more than 15 Tribal partners, and many partner groups working with small and underserved producers.

Before the end of this year, an estimated \$300 million will be directed to more than 65 additional projects in the second pool of funding, which is focused on the enrollment of small and underserved producers and monitoring, reporting, and verification activities developed at Minority Serving Institutions, bringing the total expected investment to \$3.1 billion.

Again, thank you for your letter; we value your engagement in this important opportunity. If you have any additional questions, please contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at 202-720-9259. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary



Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

November 17, 2022

THE HONORABLE A. DONALD MCEACHIN
U.S. House of Representatives
314 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman McEachin:

Thank you for your letter on September 23, 2022, regarding the inclusion of underserved producers and groups in the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities. I appreciate your engagement in this effort.

Equity, and the provision of benefits to underserved producers and communities, is a priority for me and for the Biden-Harris Administration. We must ensure that the programs we support and the investments we make across the board are available to everyone and that underserved, small-, and medium-scale farmers are able to participate and prosper.

The design of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities was informed by extensive public input regarding ways that USDA can support opportunities to build markets and support the production and marketing of climate-smart commodities through partner-led projects that provide voluntary incentives to producers and landowners. In addition to two public comment periods in 2021, USDA staff conducted explicit outreach to groups that work with diverse underserved producers. Across the board, we consistently heard that the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity should ensure benefits to small producers, underserved producers, and early adopters. There were specific design criteria that were recommended by many groups. These criteria included the need for flexibility in terms of match requirements, ample time for applicants to assemble applications, and certainty that grants were appropriately sized to meet the scale and needs of diverse applicants.

We listened. In response to the feedback, USDA created two funding pools in the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity that was announced in February 2022. The first funding pool was designed for large projects ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million, and all of those projects were required to have a robust plan for working with small and/or underserved producers.

USDA also created a second funding pool. This pool was specifically designed for smaller, particularly innovative pilot projects (ranging from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999) that focus on the involvement of underserved producers and/or monitoring, reporting, and verification activities at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This dedicated pool was created to ensure that the smaller projects were not competing against the larger projects. The application deadline for this funding pool was also later than the first pool to allow potential applicants more time to prepare their applications.

THE HONORABLE A. DONALD MCEACHIN

Page 2

Equity was explicitly part of the review and scoring process for both funding pools. To ensure that the ability to provide matching funds was not a barrier to participation, we were clear in the funding opportunity that there would be flexible match requirements.

USDA saw tremendous demand for this opportunity from across agriculture and forestry, with more than \$18 billion in proposals for the first funding pool and more than \$2 billion in proposals for the second funding pool. On September 14, 2022, USDA announced 70 tentative project selections for the first funding pool. While we will not have precise numbers of underserved producers impacted until the projects get underway, every project has a plan for benefiting underserved producers and will be required to report on this impact over the course of the project. We have a diverse set of project partners, including more than 15 MSIs, more than 15 Tribal partners, and many partner groups working with small and underserved producers.

Before the end of this year, an estimated \$300 million will be directed to more than 65 additional projects in the second pool of funding, which is focused on the enrollment of small and underserved producers and monitoring, reporting, and verification activities developed at Minority Serving Institutions, bringing the total expected investment to \$3.1 billion.

Again, thank you for your letter; we value your engagement in this important opportunity. If you have any additional questions, please contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at 202-720-9259. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary



Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

November 17, 2022

THE HONORABLE JAMES CLYBURN
U.S. House of Representatives
274 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Clyburn:

Thank you for your letter on September 23, 2022, regarding the inclusion of underserved producers and groups in the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities. I appreciate your engagement in this effort.

Equity, and the provision of benefits to underserved producers and communities, is a priority for me and for the Biden-Harris Administration. We must ensure that the programs we support and the investments we make across the board are available to everyone and that underserved, small-, and medium-scale farmers are able to participate and prosper.

The design of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities was informed by extensive public input regarding ways that USDA can support opportunities to build markets and support the production and marketing of climate-smart commodities through partner-led projects that provide voluntary incentives to producers and landowners. In addition to two public comment periods in 2021, USDA staff conducted explicit outreach to groups that work with diverse underserved producers. Across the board, we consistently heard that the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity should ensure benefits to small producers, underserved producers, and early adopters. There were specific design criteria that were recommended by many groups. These criteria included the need for flexibility in terms of match requirements, ample time for applicants to assemble applications, and certainty that grants were appropriately sized to meet the scale and needs of diverse applicants.

We listened. In response to the feedback, USDA created two funding pools in the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity that was announced in February 2022. The first funding pool was designed for large projects ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million, and all of those projects were required to have a robust plan for working with small and/or underserved producers.

USDA also created a second funding pool. This pool was specifically designed for smaller, particularly innovative pilot projects (ranging from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999) that focus on the involvement of underserved producers and/or monitoring, reporting, and verification activities at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This dedicated pool was created to ensure that the smaller projects were not competing against the larger projects. The application deadline for this funding pool was also later than the first pool to allow potential applicants more time to prepare their applications.

THE HONORABLE JAMES CLYBURN

Page 2

Equity was explicitly part of the review and scoring process for both funding pools. To ensure that the ability to provide matching funds was not a barrier to participation, we were clear in the funding opportunity that there would be flexible match requirements.

USDA saw tremendous demand for this opportunity from across agriculture and forestry, with more than \$18 billion in proposals for the first funding pool and more than \$2 billion in proposals for the second funding pool. On September 14, 2022, USDA announced 70 tentative project selections for the first funding pool. While we will not have precise numbers of underserved producers impacted until the projects get underway, every project has a plan for benefiting underserved producers and will be required to report on this impact over the course of the project. We have a diverse set of project partners, including more than 15 MSIs, more than 15 Tribal partners, and many partner groups working with small and underserved producers.

Before the end of this year, an estimated \$300 million will be directed to more than 65 additional projects in the second pool of funding, which is focused on the enrollment of small and underserved producers and monitoring, reporting, and verification activities developed at Minority Serving Institutions, bringing the total expected investment to \$3.1 billion.

Again, thank you for your letter; we value your engagement in this important opportunity. If you have any additional questions, please contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at 202-720-9259. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary



Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

November 17, 2022

THE HONORABLE TROY CARTER
U.S. House of Representatives
506 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Carter:

Thank you for your letter on September 23, 2022, regarding the inclusion of underserved producers and groups in the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities. I appreciate your engagement in this effort.

Equity, and the provision of benefits to underserved producers and communities, is a priority for me and for the Biden-Harris Administration. We must ensure that the programs we support and the investments we make across the board are available to everyone and that underserved, small-, and medium-scale farmers are able to participate and prosper.

The design of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities was informed by extensive public input regarding ways that USDA can support opportunities to build markets and support the production and marketing of climate-smart commodities through partner-led projects that provide voluntary incentives to producers and landowners. In addition to two public comment periods in 2021, USDA staff conducted explicit outreach to groups that work with diverse underserved producers. Across the board, we consistently heard that the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity should ensure benefits to small producers, underserved producers, and early adopters. There were specific design criteria that were recommended by many groups. These criteria included the need for flexibility in terms of match requirements, ample time for applicants to assemble applications, and certainty that grants were appropriately sized to meet the scale and needs of diverse applicants.

We listened. In response to the feedback, USDA created two funding pools in the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity that was announced in February 2022. The first funding pool was designed for large projects ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million, and all of those projects were required to have a robust plan for working with small and/or underserved producers.

USDA also created a second funding pool. This pool was specifically designed for smaller, particularly innovative pilot projects (ranging from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999) that focus on the involvement of underserved producers and/or monitoring, reporting, and verification activities at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This dedicated pool was created to ensure that the smaller projects were not competing against the larger projects. The application deadline for this funding pool was also later than the first pool to allow potential applicants more time to prepare their applications.

THE HONORABLE TROY CARTER

Page 2

Equity was explicitly part of the review and scoring process for both funding pools. To ensure that the ability to provide matching funds was not a barrier to participation, we were clear in the funding opportunity that there would be flexible match requirements.

USDA saw tremendous demand for this opportunity from across agriculture and forestry, with more than \$18 billion in proposals for the first funding pool and more than \$2 billion in proposals for the second funding pool. On September 14, 2022, USDA announced 70 tentative project selections for the first funding pool. While we will not have precise numbers of underserved producers impacted until the projects get underway, every project has a plan for benefiting underserved producers and will be required to report on this impact over the course of the project. We have a diverse set of project partners, including more than 15 MSIs, more than 15 Tribal partners, and many partner groups working with small and underserved producers.

Before the end of this year, an estimated \$300 million will be directed to more than 65 additional projects in the second pool of funding, which is focused on the enrollment of small and underserved producers and monitoring, reporting, and verification activities developed at Minority Serving Institutions, bringing the total expected investment to \$3.1 billion.

Again, thank you for your letter; we value your engagement in this important opportunity. If you have any additional questions, please contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at 202-720-9259. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary



Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

November 17, 2022

THE HONORABLE DWIGHT EVANS
U.S. House of Representatives
1105 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Evans:

Thank you for your letter on September 23, 2022, regarding the inclusion of underserved producers and groups in the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities. I appreciate your engagement in this effort.

Equity, and the provision of benefits to underserved producers and communities, is a priority for me and for the Biden-Harris Administration. We must ensure that the programs we support and the investments we make across the board are available to everyone and that underserved, small-, and medium-scale farmers are able to participate and prosper.

The design of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities was informed by extensive public input regarding ways that USDA can support opportunities to build markets and support the production and marketing of climate-smart commodities through partner-led projects that provide voluntary incentives to producers and landowners. In addition to two public comment periods in 2021, USDA staff conducted explicit outreach to groups that work with diverse underserved producers. Across the board, we consistently heard that the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity should ensure benefits to small producers, underserved producers, and early adopters. There were specific design criteria that were recommended by many groups. These criteria included the need for flexibility in terms of match requirements, ample time for applicants to assemble applications, and certainty that grants were appropriately sized to meet the scale and needs of diverse applicants.

We listened. In response to the feedback, USDA created two funding pools in the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity that was announced in February 2022. The first funding pool was designed for large projects ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million, and all of those projects were required to have a robust plan for working with small and/or underserved producers.

USDA also created a second funding pool. This pool was specifically designed for smaller, particularly innovative pilot projects (ranging from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999) that focus on the involvement of underserved producers and/or monitoring, reporting, and verification activities at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This dedicated pool was created to ensure that the smaller projects were not competing against the larger projects. The application deadline for this funding pool was also later than the first pool to allow potential applicants more time to prepare their applications.

THE HONORABLE DWIGHT EVANS

Page 2

Equity was explicitly part of the review and scoring process for both funding pools. To ensure that the ability to provide matching funds was not a barrier to participation, we were clear in the funding opportunity that there would be flexible match requirements.

USDA saw tremendous demand for this opportunity from across agriculture and forestry, with more than \$18 billion in proposals for the first funding pool and more than \$2 billion in proposals for the second funding pool. On September 14, 2022, USDA announced 70 tentative project selections for the first funding pool. While we will not have precise numbers of underserved producers impacted until the projects get underway, every project has a plan for benefiting underserved producers and will be required to report on this impact over the course of the project. We have a diverse set of project partners, including more than 15 MSIs, more than 15 Tribal partners, and many partner groups working with small and underserved producers.

Before the end of this year, an estimated \$300 million will be directed to more than 65 additional projects in the second pool of funding, which is focused on the enrollment of small and underserved producers and monitoring, reporting, and verification activities developed at Minority Serving Institutions, bringing the total expected investment to \$3.1 billion.

Again, thank you for your letter; we value your engagement in this important opportunity. If you have any additional questions, please contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at 202-720-9259. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary



Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

November 17, 2022

THE HONORABLE JAHANA HAYES
U.S. House of Representatives
1415 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Hayes:

Thank you for your letter on September 23, 2022, regarding the inclusion of underserved producers and groups in the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities. I appreciate your engagement in this effort.

Equity, and the provision of benefits to underserved producers and communities, is a priority for me and for the Biden-Harris Administration. We must ensure that the programs we support and the investments we make across the board are available to everyone and that underserved, small-, and medium-scale farmers are able to participate and prosper.

The design of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities was informed by extensive public input regarding ways that USDA can support opportunities to build markets and support the production and marketing of climate-smart commodities through partner-led projects that provide voluntary incentives to producers and landowners. In addition to two public comment periods in 2021, USDA staff conducted explicit outreach to groups that work with diverse underserved producers. Across the board, we consistently heard that the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity should ensure benefits to small producers, underserved producers, and early adopters. There were specific design criteria that were recommended by many groups. These criteria included the need for flexibility in terms of match requirements, ample time for applicants to assemble applications, and certainty that grants were appropriately sized to meet the scale and needs of diverse applicants.

We listened. In response to the feedback, USDA created two funding pools in the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity that was announced in February 2022. The first funding pool was designed for large projects ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million, and all of those projects were required to have a robust plan for working with small and/or underserved producers.

USDA also created a second funding pool. This pool was specifically designed for smaller, particularly innovative pilot projects (ranging from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999) that focus on the involvement of underserved producers and/or monitoring, reporting, and verification activities at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This dedicated pool was created to ensure that the smaller projects were not competing against the larger projects. The application deadline for this funding pool was also later than the first pool to allow potential applicants more time to prepare their applications.

THE HONORABLE JAHANA HAYES

Page 2

Equity was explicitly part of the review and scoring process for both funding pools. To ensure that the ability to provide matching funds was not a barrier to participation, we were clear in the funding opportunity that there would be flexible match requirements.

USDA saw tremendous demand for this opportunity from across agriculture and forestry, with more than \$18 billion in proposals for the first funding pool and more than \$2 billion in proposals for the second funding pool. On September 14, 2022, USDA announced 70 tentative project selections for the first funding pool. While we will not have precise numbers of underserved producers impacted until the projects get underway, every project has a plan for benefiting underserved producers and will be required to report on this impact over the course of the project. We have a diverse set of project partners, including more than 15 MSIs, more than 15 Tribal partners, and many partner groups working with small and underserved producers.

Before the end of this year, an estimated \$300 million will be directed to more than 65 additional projects in the second pool of funding, which is focused on the enrollment of small and underserved producers and monitoring, reporting, and verification activities developed at Minority Serving Institutions, bringing the total expected investment to \$3.1 billion.

Again, thank you for your letter; we value your engagement in this important opportunity. If you have any additional questions, please contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at 202-720-9259. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary



Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

November 17, 2022

THE HONORABLE DONALD PAYNE
U.S. House of Representatives
106 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Payne:

Thank you for your letter on September 23, 2022, regarding the inclusion of underserved producers and groups in the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities. I appreciate your engagement in this effort.

Equity, and the provision of benefits to underserved producers and communities, is a priority for me and for the Biden-Harris Administration. We must ensure that the programs we support and the investments we make across the board are available to everyone and that underserved, small-, and medium-scale farmers are able to participate and prosper.

The design of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities was informed by extensive public input regarding ways that USDA can support opportunities to build markets and support the production and marketing of climate-smart commodities through partner-led projects that provide voluntary incentives to producers and landowners. In addition to two public comment periods in 2021, USDA staff conducted explicit outreach to groups that work with diverse underserved producers. Across the board, we consistently heard that the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity should ensure benefits to small producers, underserved producers, and early adopters. There were specific design criteria that were recommended by many groups. These criteria included the need for flexibility in terms of match requirements, ample time for applicants to assemble applications, and certainty that grants were appropriately sized to meet the scale and needs of diverse applicants.

We listened. In response to the feedback, USDA created two funding pools in the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity that was announced in February 2022. The first funding pool was designed for large projects ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million, and all of those projects were required to have a robust plan for working with small and/or underserved producers.

USDA also created a second funding pool. This pool was specifically designed for smaller, particularly innovative pilot projects (ranging from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999) that focus on the involvement of underserved producers and/or monitoring, reporting, and verification activities at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This dedicated pool was created to ensure that the smaller projects were not competing against the larger projects. The application deadline for this funding pool was also later than the first pool to allow potential applicants more time to prepare their applications.

THE HONORABLE DONALD PAYNE

Page 2

Equity was explicitly part of the review and scoring process for both funding pools. To ensure that the ability to provide matching funds was not a barrier to participation, we were clear in the funding opportunity that there would be flexible match requirements.

USDA saw tremendous demand for this opportunity from across agriculture and forestry, with more than \$18 billion in proposals for the first funding pool and more than \$2 billion in proposals for the second funding pool. On September 14, 2022, USDA announced 70 tentative project selections for the first funding pool. While we will not have precise numbers of underserved producers impacted until the projects get underway, every project has a plan for benefiting underserved producers and will be required to report on this impact over the course of the project. We have a diverse set of project partners, including more than 15 MSIs, more than 15 Tribal partners, and many partner groups working with small and underserved producers.

Before the end of this year, an estimated \$300 million will be directed to more than 65 additional projects in the second pool of funding, which is focused on the enrollment of small and underserved producers and monitoring, reporting, and verification activities developed at Minority Serving Institutions, bringing the total expected investment to \$3.1 billion.

Again, thank you for your letter; we value your engagement in this important opportunity. If you have any additional questions, please contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at 202-720-9259. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary



Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

November 17, 2022

THE HONORABLE BRENDA LAWRENCE
U.S. House of Representatives
2463 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Lawrence:

Thank you for your letter on September 23, 2022, regarding the inclusion of underserved producers and groups in the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities. I appreciate your engagement in this effort.

Equity, and the provision of benefits to underserved producers and communities, is a priority for me and for the Biden-Harris Administration. We must ensure that the programs we support and the investments we make across the board are available to everyone and that underserved, small-, and medium-scale farmers are able to participate and prosper.

The design of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities was informed by extensive public input regarding ways that USDA can support opportunities to build markets and support the production and marketing of climate-smart commodities through partner-led projects that provide voluntary incentives to producers and landowners. In addition to two public comment periods in 2021, USDA staff conducted explicit outreach to groups that work with diverse underserved producers. Across the board, we consistently heard that the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity should ensure benefits to small producers, underserved producers, and early adopters. There were specific design criteria that were recommended by many groups. These criteria included the need for flexibility in terms of match requirements, ample time for applicants to assemble applications, and certainty that grants were appropriately sized to meet the scale and needs of diverse applicants.

We listened. In response to the feedback, USDA created two funding pools in the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity that was announced in February 2022. The first funding pool was designed for large projects ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million, and all of those projects were required to have a robust plan for working with small and/or underserved producers.

USDA also created a second funding pool. This pool was specifically designed for smaller, particularly innovative pilot projects (ranging from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999) that focus on the involvement of underserved producers and/or monitoring, reporting, and verification activities at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This dedicated pool was created to ensure that the smaller projects were not competing against the larger projects. The application deadline for this funding pool was also later than the first pool to allow potential applicants more time to prepare their applications.

THE HONORABLE BRENDA LAWRENCE

Page 2

Equity was explicitly part of the review and scoring process for both funding pools. To ensure that the ability to provide matching funds was not a barrier to participation, we were clear in the funding opportunity that there would be flexible match requirements.

USDA saw tremendous demand for this opportunity from across agriculture and forestry, with more than \$18 billion in proposals for the first funding pool and more than \$2 billion in proposals for the second funding pool. On September 14, 2022, USDA announced 70 tentative project selections for the first funding pool. While we will not have precise numbers of underserved producers impacted until the projects get underway, every project has a plan for benefiting underserved producers and will be required to report on this impact over the course of the project. We have a diverse set of project partners, including more than 15 MSIs, more than 15 Tribal partners, and many partner groups working with small and underserved producers.

Before the end of this year, an estimated \$300 million will be directed to more than 65 additional projects in the second pool of funding, which is focused on the enrollment of small and underserved producers and monitoring, reporting, and verification activities developed at Minority Serving Institutions, bringing the total expected investment to \$3.1 billion.

Again, thank you for your letter; we value your engagement in this important opportunity. If you have any additional questions, please contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at 202-720-9259. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary



Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

November 17, 2022

THE HONORABLE EMANUEL CLEAVER
U.S. House of Representatives
2335 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Cleaver:

Thank you for your letter on September 23, 2022, regarding the inclusion of underserved producers and groups in the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities. I appreciate your engagement in this effort.

Equity, and the provision of benefits to underserved producers and communities, is a priority for me and for the Biden-Harris Administration. We must ensure that the programs we support and the investments we make across the board are available to everyone and that underserved, small-, and medium-scale farmers are able to participate and prosper.

The design of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities was informed by extensive public input regarding ways that USDA can support opportunities to build markets and support the production and marketing of climate-smart commodities through partner-led projects that provide voluntary incentives to producers and landowners. In addition to two public comment periods in 2021, USDA staff conducted explicit outreach to groups that work with diverse underserved producers. Across the board, we consistently heard that the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity should ensure benefits to small producers, underserved producers, and early adopters. There were specific design criteria that were recommended by many groups. These criteria included the need for flexibility in terms of match requirements, ample time for applicants to assemble applications, and certainty that grants were appropriately sized to meet the scale and needs of diverse applicants.

We listened. In response to the feedback, USDA created two funding pools in the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity that was announced in February 2022. The first funding pool was designed for large projects ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million, and all of those projects were required to have a robust plan for working with small and/or underserved producers.

USDA also created a second funding pool. This pool was specifically designed for smaller, particularly innovative pilot projects (ranging from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999) that focus on the involvement of underserved producers and/or monitoring, reporting, and verification activities at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This dedicated pool was created to ensure that the smaller projects were not competing against the larger projects. The application deadline for this funding pool was also later than the first pool to allow potential applicants more time to prepare their applications.

THE HONORABLE EMANUEL CLEAVER

Page 2

Equity was explicitly part of the review and scoring process for both funding pools. To ensure that the ability to provide matching funds was not a barrier to participation, we were clear in the funding opportunity that there would be flexible match requirements.

USDA saw tremendous demand for this opportunity from across agriculture and forestry, with more than \$18 billion in proposals for the first funding pool and more than \$2 billion in proposals for the second funding pool. On September 14, 2022, USDA announced 70 tentative project selections for the first funding pool. While we will not have precise numbers of underserved producers impacted until the projects get underway, every project has a plan for benefiting underserved producers and will be required to report on this impact over the course of the project. We have a diverse set of project partners, including more than 15 MSIs, more than 15 Tribal partners, and many partner groups working with small and underserved producers.

Before the end of this year, an estimated \$300 million will be directed to more than 65 additional projects in the second pool of funding, which is focused on the enrollment of small and underserved producers and monitoring, reporting, and verification activities developed at Minority Serving Institutions, bringing the total expected investment to \$3.1 billion.

Again, thank you for your letter; we value your engagement in this important opportunity. If you have any additional questions, please contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at 202-720-9259. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary



Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

November 17, 2022

THE HONORABLE NIKEMA WILLIAMS
U.S. House of Representatives
1406 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Williams:

Thank you for your letter on September 23, 2022, regarding the inclusion of underserved producers and groups in the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities. I appreciate your engagement in this effort.

Equity, and the provision of benefits to underserved producers and communities, is a priority for me and for the Biden-Harris Administration. We must ensure that the programs we support and the investments we make across the board are available to everyone and that underserved, small-, and medium-scale farmers are able to participate and prosper.

The design of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities was informed by extensive public input regarding ways that USDA can support opportunities to build markets and support the production and marketing of climate-smart commodities through partner-led projects that provide voluntary incentives to producers and landowners. In addition to two public comment periods in 2021, USDA staff conducted explicit outreach to groups that work with diverse underserved producers. Across the board, we consistently heard that the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity should ensure benefits to small producers, underserved producers, and early adopters. There were specific design criteria that were recommended by many groups. These criteria included the need for flexibility in terms of match requirements, ample time for applicants to assemble applications, and certainty that grants were appropriately sized to meet the scale and needs of diverse applicants.

We listened. In response to the feedback, USDA created two funding pools in the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity that was announced in February 2022. The first funding pool was designed for large projects ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million, and all of those projects were required to have a robust plan for working with small and/or underserved producers.

USDA also created a second funding pool. This pool was specifically designed for smaller, particularly innovative pilot projects (ranging from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999) that focus on the involvement of underserved producers and/or monitoring, reporting, and verification activities at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This dedicated pool was created to ensure that the smaller projects were not competing against the larger projects. The application deadline for this funding pool was also later than the first pool to allow potential applicants more time to prepare their applications.

THE HONORABLE NIKEMA WILLIAMS

Page 2

Equity was explicitly part of the review and scoring process for both funding pools. To ensure that the ability to provide matching funds was not a barrier to participation, we were clear in the funding opportunity that there would be flexible match requirements.

USDA saw tremendous demand for this opportunity from across agriculture and forestry, with more than \$18 billion in proposals for the first funding pool and more than \$2 billion in proposals for the second funding pool. On September 14, 2022, USDA announced 70 tentative project selections for the first funding pool. While we will not have precise numbers of underserved producers impacted until the projects get underway, every project has a plan for benefiting underserved producers and will be required to report on this impact over the course of the project. We have a diverse set of project partners, including more than 15 MSIs, more than 15 Tribal partners, and many partner groups working with small and underserved producers.

Before the end of this year, an estimated \$300 million will be directed to more than 65 additional projects in the second pool of funding, which is focused on the enrollment of small and underserved producers and monitoring, reporting, and verification activities developed at Minority Serving Institutions, bringing the total expected investment to \$3.1 billion.

Again, thank you for your letter; we value your engagement in this important opportunity. If you have any additional questions, please contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at 202-720-9259. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary



Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

November 17, 2022

THE HONORABLE TERRI SEWELL
U.S. House of Representatives
2201 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Sewell:

Thank you for your letter on September 23, 2022, regarding the inclusion of underserved producers and groups in the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities. I appreciate your engagement in this effort.

Equity, and the provision of benefits to underserved producers and communities, is a priority for me and for the Biden-Harris Administration. We must ensure that the programs we support and the investments we make across the board are available to everyone and that underserved, small-, and medium-scale farmers are able to participate and prosper.

The design of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities was informed by extensive public input regarding ways that USDA can support opportunities to build markets and support the production and marketing of climate-smart commodities through partner-led projects that provide voluntary incentives to producers and landowners. In addition to two public comment periods in 2021, USDA staff conducted explicit outreach to groups that work with diverse underserved producers. Across the board, we consistently heard that the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity should ensure benefits to small producers, underserved producers, and early adopters. There were specific design criteria that were recommended by many groups. These criteria included the need for flexibility in terms of match requirements, ample time for applicants to assemble applications, and certainty that grants were appropriately sized to meet the scale and needs of diverse applicants.

We listened. In response to the feedback, USDA created two funding pools in the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity that was announced in February 2022. The first funding pool was designed for large projects ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million, and all of those projects were required to have a robust plan for working with small and/or underserved producers.

USDA also created a second funding pool. This pool was specifically designed for smaller, particularly innovative pilot projects (ranging from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999) that focus on the involvement of underserved producers and/or monitoring, reporting, and verification activities at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This dedicated pool was created to ensure that the smaller projects were not competing against the larger projects. The application deadline for this funding pool was also later than the first pool to allow potential applicants more time to prepare their applications.

THE HONORABLE TERRI SEWELL

Page 2

Equity was explicitly part of the review and scoring process for both funding pools. To ensure that the ability to provide matching funds was not a barrier to participation, we were clear in the funding opportunity that there would be flexible match requirements.

USDA saw tremendous demand for this opportunity from across agriculture and forestry, with more than \$18 billion in proposals for the first funding pool and more than \$2 billion in proposals for the second funding pool. On September 14, 2022, USDA announced 70 tentative project selections for the first funding pool. While we will not have precise numbers of underserved producers impacted until the projects get underway, every project has a plan for benefiting underserved producers and will be required to report on this impact over the course of the project. We have a diverse set of project partners, including more than 15 MSIs, more than 15 Tribal partners, and many partner groups working with small and underserved producers.

Before the end of this year, an estimated \$300 million will be directed to more than 65 additional projects in the second pool of funding, which is focused on the enrollment of small and underserved producers and monitoring, reporting, and verification activities developed at Minority Serving Institutions, bringing the total expected investment to \$3.1 billion.

Again, thank you for your letter; we value your engagement in this important opportunity. If you have any additional questions, please contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at 202-720-9259. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary



Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

November 17, 2022

THE HONORABLE MARILYN STRICKLAND
U.S. House of Representatives
1004 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Strickland:

Thank you for your letter on September 23, 2022, regarding the inclusion of underserved producers and groups in the Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities. I appreciate your engagement in this effort.

Equity, and the provision of benefits to underserved producers and communities, is a priority for me and for the Biden-Harris Administration. We must ensure that the programs we support and the investments we make across the board are available to everyone and that underserved, small-, and medium-scale farmers are able to participate and prosper.

The design of Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities was informed by extensive public input regarding ways that USDA can support opportunities to build markets and support the production and marketing of climate-smart commodities through partner-led projects that provide voluntary incentives to producers and landowners. In addition to two public comment periods in 2021, USDA staff conducted explicit outreach to groups that work with diverse underserved producers. Across the board, we consistently heard that the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities opportunity should ensure benefits to small producers, underserved producers, and early adopters. There were specific design criteria that were recommended by many groups. These criteria included the need for flexibility in terms of match requirements, ample time for applicants to assemble applications, and certainty that grants were appropriately sized to meet the scale and needs of diverse applicants.

We listened. In response to the feedback, USDA created two funding pools in the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity that was announced in February 2022. The first funding pool was designed for large projects ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million, and all of those projects were required to have a robust plan for working with small and/or underserved producers.

USDA also created a second funding pool. This pool was specifically designed for smaller, particularly innovative pilot projects (ranging from \$250,000 to \$4,999,999) that focus on the involvement of underserved producers and/or monitoring, reporting, and verification activities at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). This dedicated pool was created to ensure that the smaller projects were not competing against the larger projects. The application deadline for this funding pool was also later than the first pool to allow potential applicants more time to prepare their applications.

THE HONORABLE MARILYN STRICKLAND

Page 2

Equity was explicitly part of the review and scoring process for both funding pools. To ensure that the ability to provide matching funds was not a barrier to participation, we were clear in the funding opportunity that there would be flexible match requirements.

USDA saw tremendous demand for this opportunity from across agriculture and forestry, with more than \$18 billion in proposals for the first funding pool and more than \$2 billion in proposals for the second funding pool. On September 14, 2022, USDA announced 70 tentative project selections for the first funding pool. While we will not have precise numbers of underserved producers impacted until the projects get underway, every project has a plan for benefiting underserved producers and will be required to report on this impact over the course of the project. We have a diverse set of project partners, including more than 15 MSIs, more than 15 Tribal partners, and many partner groups working with small and underserved producers.

Before the end of this year, an estimated \$300 million will be directed to more than 65 additional projects in the second pool of funding, which is focused on the enrollment of small and underserved producers and monitoring, reporting, and verification activities developed at Minority Serving Institutions, bringing the total expected investment to \$3.1 billion.

Again, thank you for your letter; we value your engagement in this important opportunity. If you have any additional questions, please contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations at 202-720-9259. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,



THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary