



September 18, 2023

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

Re: Champion Racial Equity in Agriculture: Urge Implementation of Key
IRA and Farm Bill Provisions

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing to ask that the USDA implement Section 22006 and 22007 of the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), Farm Loan Immediate Relief for Borrowers with At-Risk Agricultural Operations, and in direct payment for past discrimination, in a timely and intentional manner. This funding could change the lives of thousands of farmers of color and, in particular, Black farmers who have struggled for decades to hold on to their land due to the historically discriminatory practices of the USDA. We are also requesting that you implement the "Transparency and Accountability" section 14006 of the 2008 Farm Bill that would track the race, ethnicity, and gender of persons receiving USDA program services and make that information available to the public.

Between 1910 and 1997, Black farmers lost 90% of their land, compared to 2% lost by white farmers during the same time. Considering the past failures of the USDA to properly implement the policies and funding passed by Congress to address this issue, it is past time for the USDA to right their wrongs by taking genuine and impactful actions that will save the land owned by Black farmers.

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE

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You have the power to support thousands of Black farmers who are, to this day, still facing the effects of discrimination at the hands of the USDA. Implementation of Section 22006 and 22007 would go a long way in lifting these farmers out of the poverty that has characterized their lives for decades. The IRA section 22006 allocates \$3.1 billion dollars towards relieving the debt of distressed farmers. Black farmers have a collective debt of \$210 million dollars—less than 7% of the funds allocated for this debt relief program¹. Section 22007 allocates \$2.2 Billion dollars to pay for past discrimination in USDA lending programs. Use this opportunity to show the Black community that they are important to the agricultural industry and that the USDA will no longer tolerate the racist practices of the past.

You have the opportunity to right a historic wrong, to erase the debts of a group of people who have played an instrumental role in amassing the more than \$100 billion in revenue farmers contributed to this nation, all while experiencing oppressive forms of racism, oppression, and injustice. Please, make history by making Black farmers whole and helping to ease the economic burdens they've shouldered for far too long.

Signed,

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)

Organization Sign-Ons

Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism
Boulder Shambhala Center
Church of the Larger Fellowship Unitarian Universalist
Climate Generation

¹ Ximena Bustillo, *Black farmers worry new approach on 'race neutral' lending leaves them in the shadows*, NPR, February 26, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/02/26/1159281409/black-farmers-worry-new-approach-on-race-neutral-lending-leaves-them-in-the-shad>

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