

A FARM BILL FOR A THRIVING FUTURE FOR US ALL



PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL PRODUCERS

For too long, the U.S. food and farm system has relied on the exploitation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) producers, and the USDA's well-documented track record of discrimination has left these producers without adequate support. Yet many BIPOC producers are growing and distributing food in ways that nourish their communities and safeguard ecosystems. The next Farm Bill must ensure that these producers can thrive by (1) prioritizing funding for programs to supporting BIPOC producers and (2) increasing transparency, accountability, and access to all USDA programs.

Re-prioritize Program Funding

Prioritizing the needs of BIPOC producers in all federal food and agriculture programs is warranted and should involve:

- Increasing funding for the Socially Disadvantaged Farmer and Rancher Development Program (2501), prioritizing program investments for BIPOC farmers, and increasing program transparency and reporting.
- Funding for trauma-informed, BIPOC-led farmer training programs.
- Increasing funding for 1890 land-grant universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities (1994 Land-Grant Colleges), and Hispanic-serving Institutions (HSIs).
- Enacting the policies in the Justice for Black Farmers Act.

Improve Access to Credit and Capital

Federal policies and programs should promote the success of independent BIPOC farm businesses. To do so, access to credit and capital is necessary and can be improved by:

- Developing flexible, low-interest, non-predatory credit and capital opportunities — including grants — for BIPOC producers.
- Providing reparations in the form of debt relief for producers that have experienced discrimination in trying to access financial assistance programs.
- Expanding equitable relief funds to include farmers who have experienced harm.
- Ensuring equitable access to crop insurance.
- Reforming the programs and services provided by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) by eliminating 1) the ineligibility provision for farmers who have had a debt write-down 2) the graduation requirement 3) excessive collateral requirements; by reducing the turnaround time for loan approval; and by creating a pre-approval mechanism for FSA Direct Farm Ownership.

Improve Land Tenure & Access for BIPOC Producers

The number of farms owned by Black and Indigenous people continues to shrink due to federal policies and programs that have excluded and discriminated against these farmers. To reverse course, improving land access and tenure for BIPOC producers is necessary and includes enacting a moratorium on farm foreclosures for small and mid-size BIPOC-owned farms, and establishing new or increasing funding for:

- The return of stolen land to Indigenous groups and tribes.
- Reparations to those who lost land due to discriminatory lending practices.
- Tribal colleges and institutions to expand community programs and outreach.
- Historically Black colleges and universities to play a role in rebuilding Black land ownership.
- BIPOC-led agricultural land cooperatives and/or land trusts.
- Transfer of ownership of land to BIPOC producers, via capital gains incentives and/or government purchase at market price.
- Land purchase via down-payment assistance grants.
- BIPOC-led urban agriculture programs and operations.
- Fishing vessel acquisition and repair; fishing permits and fishing quota permits.
- The Heirs Property Relending Program.

Improve Accessibility of USDA Programs

Accessing USDA programs is burdensome, and often, limited-resource and non-English proficient producers have challenges applying for and benefiting from these programs. Improving accessibility and expanding grants and technical assistance opportunities is necessary and should involve:

- Regular updates and translation of all agency opportunities for farms.
- Translation services in outreach and assistance programs, including legal and accounting support.
- Financial support for community-based organizations that provide outreach and technical assistance to BIPOC producers
- Easing application processes by (1) reducing paperwork (2) adjusting application periods to the winter (or down season) for farmers (3) increasing agency staff support for application processes (4) eliminating matching funds requirements
- More opportunities for farmers in unincorporated areas
- Equalization and expansion of technical assistance by (1) Fully funding the USDA Office of Partnership and Public Engagement (2) Increasing funding for the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach Program and (3) Establishing a Youth Farm Conservation Corps for BIPOC communities.

Transparency, Accountability, & Oversight of USDA

This must include:

- Increased anti-discrimination training and accountability for USDA staff.
- More transparency and public reporting on USDA services and programs, including equity outcomes.
- Improving the USDA Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR) by establishing an Independent Civil Rights Oversight Board to oversee OASCR; a Civil Rights Ombudsman; clear timelines for appeals decisions and to prevent foreclosures; and limiting the Office of the General Counsel's (OGC's) role in complaints.

The HEAL (Health, Environment, Agriculture, Labor) Food Alliance is a national multi-sector, multi-racial coalition. HEAL is led by its member-organizations, who represent about two million rural and urban farmers, ranchers, fishers, farm and food chain workers, Indigenous groups, scientists, public health advocates, and community organizers united in their commitment to transformed food systems.