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July 24, 2015

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

We, the undersigned 112 organizations, write to seek your support to restore funding in FY 2017 to the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program (OASDVFR).

The OASDVFR Program is the cornerstone federal program for increasing opportunity for our nation's growing sector of racially diverse and veteran farmers and ranchers particularly from 2009-2012 when the program had direct funding of almost \$20 million annually. The 2012 Census of Agriculture numbers show that investments in OASDVFR and other external partnerships have helped your administration reverse the long decline in our nation's diverse farmers, with a total gain of 28,000 African-American, Native American, Hispanic and Asian-Pacific farmers farm and ranch operators since 2007, concentrated in some of the poorest rural areas in the nation.

These activities fall directly in line with your White House Initiative, ***"Opportunity for All Fighting Rural Child Poverty."*** OASDVFR helps ensure that USDA and other federal agencies work with key external partners to "accelerate policy innovations... and increase investments in areas of child poverty."<sup>i</sup>

In areas where OASDVFR programs are in operation, farm families and communities are reengaging in agriculture in areas where poverty is greatest and the need for affordable and nutritious food and jobs the greatest. Innovative agriculture and entrepreneurial training and outreach programs are providing valuable skills and experience to prepare young and new-entry farmers for careers in agriculture. Please see attached information sheet for more information.

However, without action, this remarkable success is in jeopardy. Direct funding for the program was slashed by half in the 2014 Farm Bill to only \$10 million a year. While its funding base was halved, the program was also expanded to serve another important sector of American agriculture – veteran farmers and ranchers -- in addition to socially disadvantaged farmers that the program has historically served.

**You have the power to change this situation by including in your FY 2017 Budget to Congress an increase of \$10 million in discretionary funding also authorized for the program.** We have already contacted many members of Congress who are willing to support this increase, and they have made clear to us that a request from you would

enhance their ability to assure sufficient funding is appropriated in FY 2017 in order to restore crucial funding for the program.

We fear that without the restoration of full funding, USDA's hard work in the Strikeforce and other initiatives, and that progress of USDA agencies in improving relationships with Socially Disadvantaged and Veterans Farmers and Ranchers will lose steam or be reversed. While our shared work has represented an increase of more than 10% overall in this sector, this is the only program we know of that had a 50% reduction in support in the most recent farm bill despite its important accomplishments. This additional funding is urgently needed to meet the increased demand for outreach and technical assistance by socially disadvantaged and military veteran farmers, and other historically underserved producers.

**Therefore, as you prepare your funding recommendations for the FY 2017 budget, we urge you to support a request of \$10 million in additional discretionary funding in order to restore total program funding to historic levels.** This investment will increase farm livelihoods and cooperatives in rural communities, advance intergenerational land tenure and promote familial and community wealth for new generations of socially disadvantaged and veteran producers, for their families and for their communities.

We pledge to work with you to get a higher appropriation from Congress in succeeding years, and thank you for your support for the program. Please contact us if you need additional information or have questions about our request.

Cooperatively yours,

Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural, Washington, DC

Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, Atlanta, GA

Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, Oxnard, CA

National Council on Agricultural Life and Labor Research Fund, Inc., Dover, DE

National Family Farm Coalition, Washington, DC

National Hmong American Farmers, Inc., Washington, DC and Fresno, CA

National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association, Washington

National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Washington, DC

Slow Food USA, Brooklyn, NY

and

21st Century Youth Leadership Movement, Eutaw, AL

Abanitu Organics, Roxboro, NC

Agri-Tech Producers, LLC, Columbia, SC

Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association, Salinas, CA

Alabama State Association of Cooperatives, Forkland, AL

Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network, Birmingham, AL

Alcorn State University, Lorman, MS

American Federation OF Government Employees Local 3354, Saint Louis, MO

American Indian Mothers Inc. (AIMI), Shannon, NC

American Sustainable Business Council, Washington, DC

Arkansas Land and Community Development Corporation, Brinkley, AR

Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation, Fargo, AR

Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake Counties Farmers Union, OH

Atrisco Land Grant, Atrisco, NM

BioRegional Strategies, Truchas, NM

Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association, Tillery, NC

Blackwoods Group, LLC, Sparks, NV

California FarmLink, Santa Cruz, CA

Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, Pittsboro, NC

Catholic Rural Life, St. Paul, MN

Center for Rural Affairs, Lyons, NE

Center for Social Inclusion, New York, NY

Colorado Hispanic Ranchers & Farmers, Antonito, CO

Community Food and Justice Coalition, Oakland, CA

Concerned Citizens of Tillery, Tillery, NC

Concerned Citizens of Wagon Mound & Mora County, Wagon Mound, NM

Dakota Rural Action, Brookings, SD

E-merging Communities, Albuquerque, NM

East Arkansas Enterprise Community, Forrest City, AR

Ecohermanas, Washington, DC

Environmental Justice Health Alliance, Washington, DC

Fair World Project, Portland, OR

Family Farm Defenders, Madison, WI

Farm Aid, Cambridge, MA

Farm School NYC, New York, NY

Farmer Veteran Coalition, Davis, CA

Farmers' Legal Action Group, St. Paul, MN

Farmworker Association of Florida, Apopka, FL

Fernandez Ranch, Centerville, WA

Food & Water Watch, Washington, DC

Friends of Family Farmers, Salem, OR

Georgia Organics, Atlanta, GA

Grassroots International, Boston, MA

Greene-Sumter Farmers Cooperative, Eutaw, AL

Hill Connections, Chaseburg, WI

Housing Assistance Council, Washington, DC

Illinois Stewardship Alliance, Springfield, IL

Indian Country Agriculture and Resource Development Corporation Anadarko, Oklahoma

Indian Nations Conservation Alliance, Twin Bridges, MT

Indian Springs Farmers Association, Petal, MS

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Minneapolis, MN

Institute for Social and Economic Development, Boston, MA

Jesus People Against Pollution, Columbia, MS

Just Food, New York, NY

La Mujer Obrera, El Paso, TX

Land Stewardship Project, Minneapolis, MN

Los Jardines Institute (The Gardens Institute), Albuquerque, NM

MAFO, Inc., St. Cloud, MN

Main Street Project, Northfield, MN

Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, East Troy, WI

Michigan Integrated Food and Farming Systems, East Lansing, Michigan

Michigan Young Farmer Coalition, Canton, MI

Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, Jackson, Mississippi

NA, Germantown, MD

National Center for Appropriate Technology, Butte, MT

Native Natural, Isleta Pueblo, NM

Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society, Ceresco, NE

New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, Lowell, MA

New Mexico Acequia Association, Santa Fe, NM

North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers, Land Loss Prevention Project, Durham, NC

Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NESAWG), New Paltz, NY

Northwest Farm Bill Action Group, Seattle, WA

Northwest Forest Worker Center, Albany, CA

Not Forgotten Outreach, Inc., Taos, New Mexico

Ohio Farmers Union, OH

Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project, Oklahoma City, OK

Operation Spring Plant, Oxford, NC

Organizacion en California de Lideres Campesinas, Inc., Oxnard, CA

Pesticide Action Network, Oakland, CA

Phoenix Gardens, LLC, Lawrenceville, GA

PLBA Housing Development Corporation, Epes, AL

Pululu Farm, Arroyo Seco, NM

Renewing the Countryside, Minneapolis, MN

Restaurant Opportunities Centers –DC, Washington, D.C.

River Region Food Policy Council, Montgomery, AL

Rooting DC, Washington, DC

Roots of Change, Oakland, CA

Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA, Pittsboro, NC

Rural Advancement Fund, Orangeburg, SC

Rural Development Leadership Network, New York, NY

Silas H. Hunt Community Development Corporation, Inc., Texarkana, AR

Sustainable Farming Association, Princeton, MN

Taos County Economic Development Corporation, Taos, NM

Texas Mexico Border Coalition, San Isidro, TX

The Acequia Institute, San Luis, CO

The Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, Baltimore, MD

Truly Living Well Center for Natural Urban Agricultural, Inc., Atlanta, GA

United Farmers USA, Manning, SC

Veggielution Community Farm, San Jose, CA

Winston County Self Help Cooperative, Louisville, MS

World Farmers Inc., Lancaster, Massachusetts

Youth Agriculture Resource Preservation Organization, Huger, SC

Youth Agriculture Resource Preservation Organization, Mr. Pleasant, SC

Youth Agriculture Resource Preservation Organization, Oklahoma, OK

Individual Signers:

Dorothy L. Nordness, Ann Arbor, MI

Mark A. Harris, Atlanta, GA

Moises A Morales Jr., Canjilon, NM

Richard Rosenstock, Santa Fe, NM

Spencer Wood, Manhattan, KS

Cc: Tom Vilsack, Secretary, US Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Krysta Harden, Deputy Secretary, USDA

Dr. Gregory Parham, Assistant Secretary for Administration, USDA

Carolyn Parker, Director, Office of Advocacy and Outreach, USDA

Doug O'Brien, Senior Advisor for Rural Affairs, White House Domestic Policy Council

Attachment: Information Sheet

For more information contact Lorette Picciano, Rural Coalition, [lpicciano@ruralco.org](mailto:lpicciano@ruralco.org), 202-628-7160 or John Zippert, Federation of Southern Cooperatives, [jzippert@aol.com](mailto:jzippert@aol.com).

### ***Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program***

**The Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers (OASDVFR) Program** helps our nation's historically underserved producers gain access to the United States Department of Agriculture's credit, commodity, conservation and other programs and services. The program supports technical assistance to producers through community-based organizations, tribes and educational institutions best prepared to reach and serve them.

We urge for FY 2017 that President Obama request \$10 million of the \$20 million in discretionary funds authorized to restore OASDVFR funding to 2008 Farm Bill levels and thereby ensure adequate funding to continue this already successful program and extend it to veteran farmers and ranchers.

The OASDVFR Program has served more than 100,000 rural constituents and is an invaluable resource for the more than 400 counties in more than 35 states where it has been implemented serving a wide range of historically underserved farmers and ranchers living in persistent poverty areas of the country, and their families and children. <sup>ii</sup>

These activities fall directly in line with your White House Initiative, "***Opportunity for All Fighting Rural Child Poverty.***" OASDVFR helps ensure that USDA and other federal agencies work with key external partners to "accelerate policy innovations... and increase investments in areas of child poverty."<sup>iii</sup> In areas where OASDVFR programs are in operation, farm families and communities are reengaging in agriculture in areas where poverty is most severe, and the need for affordable and nutritious food and jobs the greatest. Innovative agriculture and entrepreneurial training and outreach programs are providing valuable skills and experience to prepare young and new-entry farmers for careers in agriculture.

- **Established in Section 2501 of the 1990 Farm Bill, OASDVFR** is USDA's most important tool to reduce the historical patterns of very low participation by historically underserved producers in USDA Farm, Disaster and Conservation Program, who have had access to fewer payments, fewer and lower-valued loans, and less outreach and training than other producers.
- In recent years, work under the program is bringing producers back to USDA or in the door for the first time with greatly increased participation in the NRCS High-tunnel program and in the FSA microloan program with increasing reach to diverse producers.
- With adequate resources, the OASDVFR Program can also provide critical support for veteran farmers and ranchers. The 2010 Census identified 21.9 million veterans in 2009, including 156,000 American Indian Veterans, 2.4 million African American



Veterans, 1.2 Million Hispanic Veterans, and 265,000 Asian Veterans. Many Veterans are from rural areas.

**2014 Farm Bill Reauthorization** - The 2014 Farm Bill expanded eligibility requirements for the program to include veteran farmers and ranchers but provided only \$10 million in mandatory funding annually for OASDVFR, or \$50 million over 5 years. This reflects a deep reduction from the 2008 Farm Bill, which included \$75 million in mandatory funding for the four years of the bill for the OASDVFR Program, or between \$17 million and \$20 million a year. Also, as a result of the delays with reauthorization of the Farm Bill, no funds were provided at all for FY 2013.

The Farm Bill added authority for an additional \$20 million in appropriations for this important program but the President has not requested and the Congress has not provided any increase. Restoration of full funding for the OASDVFR Program is essential to restore and increase farm livelihoods and cooperatives in rural communities, advance intergenerational land tenure and promote familial and community wealth for socially disadvantaged and veteran producers.

**Census of Agricultural shows a steady increase in Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers** - In 2012, the Census of Agriculture shows a combined increase of 8,372 American Indian, African American and Asian American principal operators and an increase of 11,430 Hispanic principal operators. While there may be overlaps between the race and ethnicity categories, the combined total growth among is just shy of 20,000 principal operators.

While not all new producers, the numbers show that not only have retired producers been replaced, but new producers or new to USDA producers have replaced them. This net increase reflects a contribution of almost 20% toward Secretary Vilsack’s goal of 100,000 new farmers.

**SDA Principal Operators**

	<b>2007</b>	<b>2012</b>		<b>%Change</b>
<b>American Indian</b>	34,706	37,851	3,145	9%
<b>Asian</b>	11,214	13,669	2,455	22%
<b>Black</b>	30,599	33,371	2,772	9%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>76,519</b>	<b>84,891</b>	<b>8,372</b>	<b>11%</b>

  

	<b>2007</b>	<b>2012</b>		<b>%Change</b>
<b>Total Hispanic</b>	<b>55,570</b>	<b>67,000</b>	<b>11,430</b>	<b>21%</b>

The 2012 Census of Agriculture numbers for all farm operators show an even greater combined net increase since 2007 – 11,369 more American Indian, African American and Asian American producers and an increase of 17,234 Hispanic producers. While there may be overlaps between the race and ethnicity categories, the combined total net growth in all operators exceeds 28,000. This net increase would reflect a contribution of over 28% toward the Secretary’s goal of 100,000 new farmers.

### All SDA Farm Operators

	2007	2012		% Change
American Indian	55,889	58,475	2,586	5%
Asian	18,289	22,140	3,851	21%
Black	39,697	44,629	4,932	12%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>113,875</b>	<b>125,244</b>	<b>11,369</b>	<b>10%</b>

	2007	2012		%Change
Hispanic	82,462	99,734	17,272	21%

**The Outreach program serves communities that have been historically underserved and are in vital need of services.** The program has provided outreach to more than 100,000 rural constituents and has been an invaluable resource for the more than 400 counties where it has been implemented, among them some of the poorest in the country, where socially disadvantaged and under-served small and family farmers are concentrated.

**Technical and outreach staff understand their clients' needs.** This program supports technical assistance by community-based organizations, tribes and educational institutions with innovative hands-on training and technical assistance in farm management, production, marketing, cooperative and credit union development, and other assistance critical to accessing USDA programs and managing viable farm operations. This assistance is provided by community-based organizations, tribes and educational institutions that have demonstrated experience working with historically underserved producers and who have established themselves as trusted members of the community.

**The Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Program WORKS!** Communities where this program operates have seen a dramatic increase in the number of socially disadvantaged producers participating in farm programs and staying on the land. Producers in communities with no outreach program have little to no knowledge of USDA programs. There is an urgent need to extend outreach services to more eligible organizations to reach more communities and farmers where resources have never been allocated.

**Restore Support for the Outreach and Technical Assistance Program for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers and its Partner Programs is Critical** – Restoring funding to a minimum of the \$20 million of the previous Farm Bill - including the \$10 million in mandatory and an additional \$10 million in appropriated funds is an important invest to assure that USDA fully completes its cultural transformation to assure all producers have access to federal agriculture programs. **We call upon President Obama to request of \$10 million in discretionary funds in the Administration's FY 2017 Budget to restore the funding base for the OASDVFR Program** and to allow the Secretary of Agriculture assist both socially disadvantaged and veteran farmers and ranchers in participating equitably in the full range of USDA agricultural programs.

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<sup>i</sup> The White House Council of Economic Advisors, Domestic Policy Council and Office of Management and Budget, *“Opportunity for All: Fighting Rural Child Poverty,”* Washington, DC May 2015

<sup>ii</sup> In FY 2012, with OASDVFR Program funding level at \$19 million approximately 200 applications were received from Community-Based Organizations (CBO’s) and Higher Education Institutions (HEI’s) totaling over \$89 million. 70 competitive grants were funded (35 new and 35 supplemental). Of these, 41 went to CBO’s and 29 went to HEI’s. In FY 2010 and 2011, the OASDVFR Program awarded a total of \$38 million in competitive grants (61 awards in FY 2010 and 33 new awards in 2011). Of the 164 total project awards 2010-12, 94 went to Community Based Organizations and 70 to Higher Education Institutions.

<sup>iii</sup> The White House Council of Economic Advisors, Domestic Policy Council and Office of Management and Budget, *“Opportunity for All: Fighting Rural Child Poverty,”* Washington, DC May 2015