

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

June 10th, 2021

Re: Relief for America's Small Farmers Act

Dear Senators and Representatives:

The undersigned 103 farm, food, rural, community, consumer, faith and other advocacy organizations wholeheartedly endorse the Relief for America's Small Farmers Act, re-introduced by Rep. Sean Maloney (HR. 3782) and Sen. Gillibrand (S. 2023) in June, 2021 and urge you to cosponsor this critical bill and support its inclusion in any future legislative package.

As the United States grapples with a second year of the COVID-19 crisis, farmers and ranchers are continuing to endure major disruptions to their markets and farm operations, as thousands of local markets, including schools and restaurants, remain closed or operating at significantly reduced capacity to protect the health of workers and the general public. And there is no clear timetable for a 'return to normal.'

While all farmers are affected by the COVID 19, small family farmers already operating on thin margins are most at risk of losing their farms, homes and land from the financial free fall caused by this pandemic, further harming the rural economies and the communities they call home. We have already seen too much economic suffering, and too many farms lost, emphasizing the urgent need for decisive action from Congress and targeted support by federal agencies.

These challenges come at a catastrophically difficult period for family farmers. For more than seven years, farmers and ranchers of all kinds have received prices consistently below their cost of production, which have driven historically high levels of farm debt and farm foreclosure: USDA has reported total farm sector debt increased 1.6 billion over the past year to \$441.7 billion<sup>1</sup>, and the U.S. has lost more than 81,000 farms since 2013<sup>2</sup>. Over this same period, producers in various regions of the country endured increasingly intense and frequent natural disasters, such as the historic flooding throughout the Midwest in 2019, devastating hurricanes in the Southeast in 2020, and annually recurring wildfires across the West Coast. Furthermore, we have seen that USDA's implementation of CFAP in 2020 left out droves of producers, particularly smaller-scale and diversified operations, many of whom now face unprecedented economic crisis due to circumstances entirely outside their control.

Prior to the pandemic, projected median farm income for 2020 was negative \$1,840 with most farms relying on off-farm sources of income to support household finances and to secure benefits like healthcare coverage. This year, with federal direct payments to the agriculture sector expected

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/farm-sector-income-finances/assets-debt-and-wealth/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Todays\\_Reports/reports/fnlo0221.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Todays_Reports/reports/fnlo0221.pdf)

to decrease, USDA is forecasting that net farm incomes too will fall. Thus while farm foreclosures have been stalled by USDA over the past year, the fundamental economic stress experienced by small farmers has not gone away, and the continued urgency of this moment cannot be stressed enough. Small family farmers are the backbone of our food system and rural economies, and they need our support in this moment of unprecedented hardship, especially while they galvanize to feed their communities. We cannot afford to lose a single additional farm.

The Relief for America's Small Farmers Act would provide direct debt relief for small farmers around the country by providing a one-time loan forgiveness of up to \$250,000 across three types of USDA FSA loans: Direct Operating, Direct Farm Ownership, and Emergency Loans. Eligible farmers must have an average AGI of \$300,000 or less over the previous 5 years, regardless of what they grow. Forgiveness of federally held debt is an important tool for directly assisting these farmers, most of whom have not benefited from prior farmer relief programs. While USDA has taken steps during the pandemic to set aside loan payments or suspend some adverse actions, these measures delay damage but cannot actually solve the multi-year crisis for most small farmers. Furthermore, forgiving these FSA loans allows farmers to redirect financial resources to other farm and household debts, such as private loans and credit cards.

On March 10th, 2021 Congress passed the American Rescue Plan, which included \$4 billion of direct debt forgiveness to farmers of color due to the history of systemic racism in USDA. We believe this legislation set an important precedent for the Biden Administration's USDA to act on forgiving farmer debt during this continuing and unparalleled public health crisis. We call on you to consider co-sponsoring this bill as an essential financial assistance tool for small-scale family farmers not eligible for American Rescue Plan relief.

Sincerely,

ActionAid USA  
Advocates for Clean & Clear Waterways  
Agrarian Trust  
Agricultural Justice Project  
Alabama State Association of Cooperatives  
American Federation of Government Employees  
American Indian Mothers Inc.  
American Raw Milk Producers Pricing Association  
American Sustainable Business Council  
Blossom Foundation for Children & the Environment  
Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment  
Carolina Common Enterprise  
Carolina Farm Stewardship Association  
Central Texas Young Farmers Coalition  
Church Women United in New York State  
CitySeed  
Community Alliance for Global Justice  
Community Alliance with Family Farmers

Community Farm Alliance  
Community Food and Justice Coalition  
Dakota Resource Council  
Dakota Rural Action  
Earthjustice  
Earth Ethics, Inc.  
EcoHealth Network  
Fair World Project  
Family Farm Action  
Family Farm Defenders  
Farm Aid  
Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance  
Farmer Veteran Coalition  
Farmers Union Milk Cooperative  
Farmworker Association of Florida  
Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT)  
Food & Water Action  
Food for Maine's Future  
Food in Neighborhoods Community Coalition  
Friends of Family Farmers  
Friends of the Earth  
Fund for Democratic Communities  
GoFarm  
GMO/Toxin Free USA  
Grassroots International  
Greenhorns  
Green State Solutions  
Grow Appalachia  
Harpeth Conservancy  
Illinois Stewardship Alliance  
Intertribal Agriculture Council  
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy  
Institute for Food and Development Policy (Food First)  
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement  
Iowa Farmers Union  
Lake Erie Waterkeeper  
Land For Good  
League of Conservation Voters  
Missouri Rural Crisis Center  
National Family Farm Coalition  
National Farm to School Network  
National Farmers Organization  
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition  
National Young Farmers Coalition  
Natural Resources Defense Council

North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers Land Loss Prevention Project  
Northwest Harvest  
Northern Plains Resource Council  
Northeast Organic Farming Association Interstate Council  
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Massachusetts  
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Hampshire  
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New Jersey  
Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York  
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Rhode Island  
Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont  
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group  
Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance  
Ohio Farmers Union  
Organic Consumers Association  
Pennsylvania Council of Churches  
People's Action  
Peoples Climate Movement-NY  
Pesticide Action Network  
Pinnacle Prevention  
Progressive Agriculture Organization  
Public Citizen  
Real Food Media  
Resilience Project  
R-CALF USA  
Rural Advancement Foundation International – USA (RAFI-USA)  
Rural Coalition  
Rural Development Leadership Network  
Rural Vermont  
Sitka Salmon Shares  
Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education, Inc.  
Sustainable Food Center  
Sustainable Iowa Land Trust  
Texas Coalition of Rural Landowners  
Texas Mexico Border Coalition  
WATCH Inc.  
Western Organization of Resource Councils  
Winston County Self Help Cooperative  
Wisconsin Farmers Union  
World Farmers Inc.

If you need more information or have questions, please contact:

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