

April 6, 2016

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman, Senate Committee on
Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Chairman, Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and
Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members,

As Congress continues work on the FY 2017 Agriculture Appropriations Bill, we the undersigned urge your support **for providing an appropriation for an additional \$10 million annually for the Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers 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.

In the 2014 Farm Bill, Congress expanded the Outreach and Assistance Program for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers to include Veteran Farmers and Ranchers, and also reduced mandatory funds from the previous funding levels of almost \$19 million annually to only \$10 million direct each year. The Farm Bill provided for an additional appropriation of up to \$20 million more annually. **We urge the committee to appropriate the additional \$10 million needed to restore the program to its previous levels.**

- Established in Section 2501 of the 1990 Farm Bill, OASDVFR provides technical assistance to reduce the trend among socially disadvantaged and veteran producers of engaging in fewer farm program payments, fewer and lower-valued loans, and less outreach and training than other producers.
- 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 socially disadvantaged recipients living in persistent poverty areas of the country.

- 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 by diverse producers in the NRCS high-tunnel program and in the FSA microloan program.
- 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.
- The lack of funding for the program in FY 2013 and cut in funding in FY 14 and 15 has meant that groups receiving support across the country have already or are currently in the process of laying off hundreds of experienced staff, creating a service gap to thousands of producers who need their assistance to access USDA program.

We strongly support this important program and urge the committee to provide **\$10 million in appropriated funds in FY 2017 to restore total funding to \$20 million annually to accommodate both the traditional and new constituencies of the program, and ensure that Veteran Farmers and Ranchers are able to fully benefit from the program.** Adequate funding for the OASDVFR Program will increase farm livelihoods and cooperatives in rural communities, advance intergenerational land tenure and promote familial and community wealth for socially disadvantaged and veteran producers.

We appreciate your support of our nation's most underserved farmers and ranchers,

Farm Aid, Cambridge, MA
 Farm Credit Council, Washington, DC
 Farmer Veteran Coalition, Davis, CA
 First Nations Development Institute, Longmont, CO
 Food & Water Watch, Washington, DC
 Intertribal Agriculture Council, Billings, MT
 National Center for Appropriate Technology, Davis, CA
 National Congress of American Indians, Washington, DC
 National Family Farm Coalition, Washington, DC
 National Farm to School Network, Washington, DC
 National Farmers Union, Washington, DC
 National Hmong American Farmers, Inc, Fresno, CA
 National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association, Washington, DC
 National Milk Producers Federation, Washington, DC
 National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Washington, DC
 National Young Farmers Coalition, Washington, DC
 Rural Coalition, Washington, DC
 Union of Concerned Scientists, Washington, DC

Adelante Mujeres, Forest Grove, OR
 Agricultural Missions, Inc, New York, NY
 Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association, Salinas, CA
 Alabama Association of Cooperatives, Forkland, AL
 Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, Oxnard, CA

Alternative Energy Resources Organization, Helena, MT
American Federation of Government Employees Local 3354, Saint Louis, MO
American Indian Mothers Inc, Shannon, NC
Arkansas Land and Community Development Corporation, Brinkley, AR
Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake Counties Farmers Union, Windsor, OH
Atrisco Land Grant, Atrisco, NM
Atrisco Land Rights Council, Atrisco, NM
California FarmLink, Santa Cruz, CA
California Institute for Rural Studies, Pasadena, CA
CASA del Llano, INC, Hereford, TX
Center for Social Inclusion, New York, NY
Colorado Hispanic Ranchers & Farmers, Antonito, CO
Community Alliance for Global Justice, Seattle, WA
Community Alliance with Family Farmers, Davis, CA
Community Food & Agriculture Coalition, Missoula, MT
Community Food & Justice Coalition, Oakland, CA
Conejos County Clean Water, Antonito, CO
Corbin Hill Food Project, New York, NY
Cottage House Inc., Ariton, AL
Delta Fresh Foods Initiative, Hernando, MS
Desert Forge Foundation, Albuquerque, NM
Ecohermanas, Washington, DC
Ecological Farming Association, Soquel, CA
Edible San Diego, San Diego, CA
Family Farm Defenders, Madison, WI
Farmworker Association of Florida, Apopka, FL
Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Atlanta, GA
Florida Organic Growers, Gainesville, FL
Food Chain Workers Alliance, Los Angeles, CA
Food First, Oakland, CA
Francis Flowers and Herbs Farm, Pickens, MS
Friends of Family Farmers, Salem, OR
Growing Power, Inc., Chicago, IL and Milwaukee, WI
H.E.L.P., Big Sandy, TN
Housing Assistance Council, Washington, DC
Illinois Stewardship Alliance, Springfield, IL
Indian Country Agriculture and Resource Development Corporation, Anadarko, OK
Indian Nations Conservation Alliance, Twin Bridges, MT
Indian Springs Farmers Cooperative, Petal, MS
Kirschenmann Family Farms Inc, Ames, IA
Land For Good, Keene, NH
Land Loss Prevention Project, Durham, NC
Land Stewardship Project, Minneapolis, MN
Livestock Association of Eastern Arkansas, Brinkley, AR
MAFO, Inc., St. Cloud, MN
Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, East Troy, WI
Michigan Food & Farming Systems, East Lansing, MI
Midwest Organic Dairy Producers Alliance, Glenwood City, WI

Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, Jackson, MS
Mississippi Farm to School Network , Oxford, MS
Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network, Oxford, MS
Mississippians Engaged in Greener Agriculture, Shelby, MS
Missouri Rural Crisis Center, Columbia, MO
Native Natural, Albuquerque, NM
Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society, Ceresco, NE
New Mexico Acequia Association, Santa Fe, NM
New Roots, Louisville, KY
Northeast Organic Farming Association - Vermont, Richmond, VT
North Carolina Association of Community Development Corporations, Rocky Mount, NC
Northeast Organic Farming Association - Interstate Council, Stillwater, NY
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, New Paltz, NY
Northern New Mexico Stockman's Association, Taos, NM
Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance, Gloucester, MA
Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides, Eugene, OR
Northwest Forest Worker Center, Albany, CA
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association, Columbus, OH
Ohio Farmers Union, Ottawa, OH
Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project, Oklahoma, OK
Operation Spring Plant, Oxford, NC
Orange County Food Access Coalition, Santa Ana, CA
Peaceroots Alliance/ Farms Not Arms, Petaluma, CA
Peaceroots Alliance/ Farms Not Arms, Summertown, TN
Pesticide Action Network, Oakland, CA
Roots of Change, Oakland, CA
RRBG Farm, Ariton, AL
Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA, Pittsboro, NC
Rural Advancement Fund, Orangeburg, SC
Rural Development Leadership Network, New York, NY
Silas H. Hunt Community Development Corp, Ashdown , AR
Solidarity Farms, Pauma Valley, CA
Taos County Economic Development Corporation, Taos, NM
Texas Mexico Border Coalition CBO, San Isidro, TX
The Center for Family Farm Development, Inc, Decatur, GA
The Conservation Fund, Arlington, VA
The Farmers Guild, Sebastopol, CA
The Foundation of Women In Hip Hop, Detroit, MI
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Ashdown, AR
Veteran Farms, Vinemont, AL
Voices for Earth Justice, Detroit, MI
WhyHunger, New York, NY
Winston County Self Help Cooperative, Jackson, MS
World Farmers, Lancaster, MA

cc: Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee