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April 7, 2017

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen  
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Robert Aderholt  
Chairman, Agriculture Subcommittee  
Committee on Appropriation  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop  
Ranking Member  
Agriculture Subcommittee  
Committee on Appropriation  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members,

As Congress begins work on the FY 2018 Agriculture Appropriations Bill, we the undersigned urge your support for our nation's military veterans and other underserved populations by **restoring the cuts made in the 2014 Farm Bill to the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers (OASDVFR) Program. We urge the committee to appropriate \$10 million for FY 2018 to restore the program to previous levels.**

**The historic Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program** is the only program established in response to decades of discrimination by USDA. It 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.

Ripple effects from the recent downturn in the farm economy are being felt across the nation, as farmers struggle to stay afloat. Although federal resources are an important part of the farm safety net, military veterans and diverse producers who are essential in ensuring both the security of our nation as well as our food supply, have not historically benefitted from USDA programs to the same extent as other farmers. This disparity leaves them especially vulnerable during the recent economic downswing and stifles the growth and prosperity of their rural communities.

The **Outreach and Assistance Program for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers** is the cornerstone program that enables these now fastest

growing sectors of the US farm economy get real access to USDA programs. It supports effective hands-on technical assistance from the community-based organizations, tribes and educational institutions best prepared to reach and serve them.

In the 2014 Farm Bill, Congress expanded the to include Veteran Farmers and Ranchers in the **OASDVFR Program**, but also cut mandatory funding in half – from nearly \$19 million to just \$10 million per year. **With the additional demand for federal resources from the influx of returning military veterans to rural areas, it is essential that Congress scale up, not cut back, the support the program provides for our nation’s most underserved communities.**

The Outreach and Assistance Program has had a real impact on the lives of farmers and rural communities across the country since it was first created nearly 30 years ago:

- 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.
- This competitive grants 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**. Its investments are paying off for a wide range of underserved farmers and ranchers regenerating agriculture to build economies in persistently poor areas of the country.
- In recent years, **technical assistance supported by the program has been effective in bringing producers back into USDA**– with greatly increased and more diverse farmer participation in many programs including the NRCS EQIP program and the FSA microloan program.
- During the period of its highest funding in the 2008 Farm Bill (\$75 million in mandatory funds over 4 years, or about \$19 million a year), the number of Hispanic Farmer and Asian-American farm operators counted in the Census of Agriculture increased by 21%, Native American farm operators by 5% and African American Farm operators by 7%. By the end of that farm bill, there were 28,000 additional farm operators.<sup>i</sup>
- With additional funding, the OASDVFR Program will have the resources needed to expand services to support our nation’s military veterans, and help them transition into careers in agriculture: 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.
- The drastic reduction in funding for the program in the last Farm Bill has resulted in a consequential reduction in the capacity of support services for veteran and

underserved communities, creating a service gap to thousands of our nation's most chronically underserved producers.

- Considering the current economic conditions facing our farmers and Rural America at large, now is not the time to withdraw investments in our nation's rural economy and most vulnerable populations. We need to ensure all farmers can access the farm safety net and have the resources they need to keep their farms in business and to pass them on to the next generation.

We therefore strongly support funding for the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program. We urge the Committee to provide **\$10 million in appropriated funds in FY 2018 to restore total funding to \$20 million to ensure that all eligible groups can fully benefit from this important 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,

Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural	<i>Washington</i>	<i>DC</i>
National Farmers Union	<i>Washington</i>	<i>DC</i>
National Hmong American Farmers, Inc.	<i>Fresno</i>	<i>CA</i>
National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association	<i>Washington</i>	<i>DC</i>
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition	<i>Washington</i>	<i>DC</i>
National Young Farmers Coalition	<i>Washington</i>	<i>DC</i>
5 Star Reviewed Products	<i>Doddridge</i>	<i>AR</i>
Agriculture Land-Based Training Association (ALBA)	<i>Salinas</i>	<i>CA</i>
Alabama Association of Cooperatives	<i>Forkland</i>	<i>AL</i>
Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network	<i>Birmingham</i>	<i>AL</i>
American Federation of Government Employees Local 3354	<i>St. Louis</i>	<i>MO</i>
American Indian Mothers Inc.	<i>Red Springs</i>	<i>NC</i>
Arkansas Land and Community Development Corporation	<i>Brinkley</i>	<i>AR</i>
BioRegional Strategies	<i>Truchas</i>	<i>NM</i>
Border Agricultural Workers Project	<i>El Paso</i>	<i>TX</i>
California Institute for Rural Studies	<i>Davis</i>	<i>CA</i>
Carl's City of Angels	<i>Tulsa</i>	<i>OK</i>
Center for Family Farm Development, Inc.	<i>Decatur</i>	<i>GA</i>
Center for Rural Affairs	<i>Nevada</i>	<i>IA</i>
Community Alliance for Global Justice	<i>Seattle</i>	<i>WA</i>

Community Food and Justice Coalition	<i>Oakland</i>	<i>CA</i>
Conejos Clean Water	<i>Antonito</i>	<i>CO</i>
Desert Forge Foundation	<i>Albuquerque</i>	<i>NM</i>
Dirigo Food Safety	<i>Yarmouth</i>	<i>ME</i>
Earth Land Community Development	<i>Rowland</i>	<i>NC</i>
Family Farm Defenders	<i>Madison</i>	<i>WI</i>
Farm Aid	<i>Cambridge</i>	<i>MA</i>
Farm Aid	<i>Cambridge</i>	<i>MA</i>
Farm to Table	<i>Santa Fe</i>	<i>NM</i>
Farmer Veteran Coalition	<i>Davis</i>	<i>CA</i>
Farmers On The Move	<i>Battle Creek</i>	<i>MI</i>
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Farmworker Association of Florida, Inc	<i>Apopka</i>	<i>FL</i>
Federation of Southern Cooperatives	<i>Atlanta</i>	<i>GA</i>
Food & Water Watch	<i>Washington</i>	<i>DC</i>
Friends of the Earth	<i>Washington</i>	<i>DC</i>
Georgia Organics	<i>Atlanta</i>	<i>GA</i>
Indian Nations Conservation Alliance	<i>Twin Bridges</i>	<i>MT</i>
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy	<i>Minneapolis</i>	<i>MN</i>
Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement	<i>Des Moines</i>	<i>IA</i>
Just Food	<i>New York</i>	<i>NY</i>
Land For Good	<i>Keene</i>	<i>NH</i>
Land Loss Prevention Project	<i>Durham</i>	<i>NC</i>
Land Stewardship Project	<i>Minneapolis</i>	<i>MN</i>
Leopold Center	<i>Ames</i>	<i>IA</i>
Michael Fields Ag'l Institute	<i>East Troy</i>	<i>WI</i>
Michigan Integrated Food & Farming Systems	<i>East Lansing</i>	<i>MI</i>
Mississippi Association of Cooperatives	<i>Jackson</i>	<i>MS</i>
Missouri NAACP	<i>Auxvasse</i>	<i>MO</i>
MUHAMMAD FARMS	<i>CARNEY</i>	<i>OK</i>
New Mexico Acequia Association	<i>Santa Fe</i>	<i>NM</i>
New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council	<i>Santa Fe</i>	<i>NM</i>
Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association	<i>Columbus</i>	<i>OH</i>
Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project	<i>Oklahoma City</i>	<i>OK</i>
Operation Spring Plant	<i>Oxford</i>	<i>NC</i>
Other Worlds	<i>Louisville</i>	<i>KY</i>
Rural Advancement Fund	<i>Orangeburg</i>	<i>SC</i>
Rural Development Leadership Network	<i>New York</i>	<i>NY</i>
Silas H. Hunt CDC	<i>Ogden</i>	<i>AR</i>
Slow Food USA	<i>Brooklyn</i>	<i>NY</i>
Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group	<i>Fayetteville</i>	<i>AR</i>

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education. Inc	<i>Albany</i>	<i>GA</i>
Sustainable Agriculture of Louisville	<i>Louisville</i>	<i>KY</i>
Sustainable Pathways To Urban Prosperity	<i>Spencer</i>	<i>OK</i>
Taos County Economic Development Corporation	<i>Taos</i>	<i>NM</i>
Texas/Mexico Border Coalition Community-Based Organization	<i>San Isidro</i>	<i>TX</i>
The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group	<i>Kingston</i>	<i>NY</i>
Tilth Alliance	<i>Seattle</i>	<i>WA</i>
Trending Compassion, Inc	<i>Vian</i>	<i>OK</i>
Union of Concerned Scientists	<i>Washington</i>	<i>DC</i>
United Farmers USA	<i>Manning</i>	<i>SC</i>
West Virginia Food & Farm Coalition	<i>Charleston</i>	<i>WV</i>
Winston County Self Help Cooperative	<i>Jackson</i>	<i>MS</i>
World Farmers	<i>Lancaster</i>	<i>MA</i>
Youth Agriculture Resource Preservation Organization	<i>Spencer</i>	<i>OK</i>

cc: Members of the House Appropriations Committee

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<sup>i</sup> The **Census of Agriculture shows a steady increase in Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers** - In 2012, the Census of Agriculture shows a combined increase of 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 growth among exceeds 28,000 of all farm operators**. While not all new producers, the numbers show an increase in the number of SDA producers willing to complete the Ag Census and indicates that retired producers are being replaced and the long downward trend shows signs of reversing.