

August 25, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman, Senate Agriculture Committee

The Honorable David Scott
Chairman, House Agriculture Committee

Re: Reconciliation Support for Climate Solutions & Equity in Agriculture

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, Chairwoman Stabenow, and Chairman Scott,

We appreciate your leadership and recognition of the deep connections between agriculture, climate change, and the overarching importance of equity. We strongly support adoption of a robust reconciliation package that advances climate, economic, and equity goals together. In particular, to build a food system that is resilient enough to feed us in a changing climate, we must dramatically increase public investments in sustainable farming and farming communities – including those who have been, and continue to be, underserved by U.S. farm policy.

USDA's well-documented and ongoing track record of marginalization of small-scale farmers and discrimination against farmers of color, especially in its farm loan programs, has left many small and limited-resource farms, particularly those owned by Black, Indigenous, and other farmers of color, on the brink of financial ruin. These farmers are often leaders in climate-friendly agriculture, innovators in regionally tailored farming practices, and key providers of food for local communities. The National Institute for Food and Agriculture calls small farms "a nursery for the development of new enterprises and marketing systems," and this is especially true of farms operated by people of color.

However, these farmers also face enormous barriers, and they need immediate support, including debt relief and other tools that will help them access and retain land and capital. In addition, they need regionally and culturally appropriate technical assistance, research, and market development.

To ensure that the Build Back Better agenda supports truly diversified and climate-friendly farming that delivers meaningful emissions reductions and climate resilience, aligns with the Justice40 Initiative, and does not exacerbate long-standing inequities in our food system, the reconciliation agriculture package should direct significant funding to climate-friendly agriculture and resources for underserved producers. While significantly more funding is needed in the future to support healthy ecosystems, underserved producers and workers, food security, and climate resilience, **at a minimum**, the reconciliation investments should include:

- **\$30B for conservation programs** with a focus on climate-friendly agricultural practices and organic production, including sustainable pest management without synthetic (fossil-fuel derived) pesticides, cover cropping, reduced tillage, hedgerow planting, pollinator protection, composting, prescribed grazing, and other regenerative practices that

increase resilience to climate change, improve the health of workers, communities, and soil, protect water and air quality, increase biodiversity, and help store carbon in the soil

- **\$5B for sustainable and organic agriculture research programs** focused on climate resilience-related research, education, and extension programs with strong dedicated support for 1890s and 1994 Land Grant Institutions
- **\$3B to support resilient rural development through investments in community-based infrastructure** focused on value-added agriculture, rural renewable energy, and infrastructure for local processing of crops and livestock to improve food system resilience and better support small- and medium-sized farmers
- **\$10B for debt relief** to stabilize the operations of producers who have not received a fair share of aid from recent federal support programs.

The package should guarantee socially disadvantaged producers the opportunity to participate in, and be key beneficiaries of, any program funded through the package, regardless of past participation and without cumbersome application requirements. These resources should support the next generation of farmers, including beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, as well as farmworkers desiring to enter farming as producers, and support them as they build on their knowledge of traditional ecological stewardship.

In addition, the package should fund an on-farm Civilian Conservation Corps program that:

- Trains the next generation of farmers to adopt climate-friendly practices, particularly in underserved regions;
- Creates job opportunities for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers that pay a living wage and provide pathways to long-term employment;
- Protects farmer and farmworker health, safety, and economic stability;
- Increases biodiversity, restores critical wildlife habitat, and increases carbon sequestration on working lands;
- Promotes rural entrepreneurship and rural economic development; and
- Prioritizes environmental justice for frontline communities

We look forward to working with you to fully realize the many benefits of climate-friendly agriculture and to ensure producers of color receive the support they deserve – this year and into the future.

Sincerely,

Alabama State Association of Cooperatives
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas
American Indian Mothers Inc
American Sustainable Business Council
Appetite For Change
Beyond Pesticides
BioRegional Strategies (BRS)
Black Farmers and Agriculturalists
Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment

Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Food Safety
Concerned Citizens of Tillery
Cottage House Incorporation
Detroit Food Policy Council
Earthjustice
Family Farm Action
Farm Aid
Farmworker Association of Florida (FWAF)
Fertile Ground LLC
FoodCorps
Friends of the Earth
Green America - Center for Sustainability Solutions
Hawaii Ulu Cooperative
HEAL (Health, Environment, Agriculture, Labor) Food Alliance
Health Care Without Harm
I-Collective
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
Intertribal Agriculture Council
JSA Sustainable Wealth Management
Just Food and Water
Kansas Black Farmers Association
League of Conservation Voters
MegaFood
National Center for Appropriate Technology
National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC)
National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association
National Organic Coalition
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC)
National Young Farmers Coalition
Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
Naturepedic Organic Mattresses & Bedding
Northeast Organic Farming Association-Interstate Council
North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers Land Loss Prevention Project
Nourish Colorado
Now You Know New Mexico
Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project, Inc.
Organic & Non-GMO Report
Organic Farmers Association
Pesticide Action Network
Rural Advancement Fund of the National Sharecroppers Fund, Inc.
Rural Coalition
Rural Development Leadership Network
Scenic Hudson

Sierra Club
Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education, Inc.
Steward
The Carbon Underground
Thousand Hills Lifetime Grazed
Union of Concerned Scientists
World Farmers
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation
Zero Foodprint

Cc: USDA Secretary Vilsack