

# **Fact Sheet**

## **Justice for Black Farmers Act**

### **S.96 / H.R.1167**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Led in the U.S. Senate by Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) and in the U.S. House of Representatives by Representative Alma Adams (D-NC-12) in the 118th Congress, the Justice for Black Farmers Act takes up the issues at the heart of the historic racial discrimination in U.S. agriculture.

#### **BACKGROUND**

If the United States is going to build a resilient, safe, and healthy food supply that feeds its people while building economic opportunity for rural communities, government programs must remove the obstacles independent family farmers face and shift government agriculture programs to support all independent family farmers. There is no better place to start than by removing the biggest obstacle: discrimination.

Monopoly control of the market, access to land, and lending discrimination are just a few of the obstacles today's farmers and ranchers face. While harrowing for all, Black farmers and ranchers disproportionately bear the brunt of challenging conditions in the food and farm sector.

Discrimination against Black farmers is sewn into the fabric of U.S. agriculture, and over time it has gotten worse. In 1910, Black farmers owned 16 to 19 million acres of land and made up 14% of America's farmers, while in 2017 Black farmers operated on 4.7 million acres of farmland and accounted for 1.4% of farmers in the U.S. Between 2012 and 2017 alone, the number of Black farmers has dropped 3%. Much of this land loss can be attributed to discriminatory lending,<sup>1</sup> particularly by the USDA.

#### **THE JUSTICE FOR BLACK FARMERS ACT:**

- Establishes an Independent Civil Rights Oversight Board to review civil rights complaint appeals and investigate discrimination reports with USDA. The Board would also provide oversight of Farm Service Agency County Committees
- Creates an Equity Commission to develop recommendations to end disparities in treatment of Black farmers
- Forms a Black Farmer Land Grant through a new line agency at USDA where land of up to 160 acres would be available to Black individuals at no cost
- Increases credit access and land retention for marginalized farmers

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2019/04/03/467892/progressive-governance-can-turn-tide-black-farmers>

- Funds historically Black colleges and universities at a level of \$500 million per year for 10 years to expand agricultural education
- Strengthens existing antitrust enforcement through the Packers and Stockyards Act, with the knowledge that farmers and ranchers of color are additionally vulnerable to economic exploitation

## **EQUITY IN EDUCATION AND ASSISTANCE**

On top of disproportionate Black-operated and -owned land loss and dispossession, technical assistance and outreach for current and aspiring Black farmers and ranchers has not been deployed to its full potential through federal support.

Historically Black land grant universities (1890 land grants) have been gravely underfunded relative to their 1862 land grant university counterparts. Just like 1862 land grant universities, 1890 land grant institutions play a vital role in agricultural education, outreach, and technical assistance through their cooperative extension programs. This is another example of how historic federal support has fallen short for Black farmers and ranchers.

## **BLACK WOMEN AND WOMEN OF COLOR IN AGRICULTURE**

Economic and educational challenges compound, especially for Black women in agriculture. Due to data collection methods, it's impossible to disseminate the lending rates of women of color from current Socially Disadvantaged Farmer and Rancher (SDFR) lending data; however, many female farmers and farmers of color report discrimination in agricultural lending.

**The Justice for Black Farmers Act recognizes these challenges and offers a clear path toward addressing the ongoing legacy of systemic racism and injustice that Black farmers have experienced in the U.S.**