



February 26, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader Schumer and Leader McConnell:

The National Young Farmers Coalition (Young Farmers) is a non-profit advocacy network of beginning farmers, ranchers, and supporters working together for a brighter, more equitable future for U.S. agriculture. Through its 49 chapters across the country and network of over 200,000 supporters, the coalition tackles the most critical structural and economic issues preventing young people from succeeding in farming and ranching.

These structural and economic issues have led to a rise in the average age of farmers, as fewer entrants to the profession are able to succeed in operating their rural businesses. For many young farmers of color, there is no greater structural barrier than structural racism. There is an urgent need to focus on supporting the next generation of farmers as they take the helm of production of our food and fiber. And in building up the next generation of farmers, we believe there is a key opportunity to avoid the mistakes and repair the past harms of the USDA.

Therefore, we have endorsed the **Emergency Relief for Farmers of Color Act** introduced by Senator Reverend Raphael Warnock, Senator Cory Booker, Senator Ben Ray Luján and Senate Agriculture Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow, and urge you to do the same. We further urge you to include the emergency relief provisions drawn from this Act in the final COVID Emergency Budget Reconciliation Package, as passed by the House of Representatives.

The inequities in our agricultural system are well-documented, resulting in fewer farmers of color with far fewer resources than their white counterparts. For example, over the last century, estimates indicate that Black farmers lost between 80 and 90 percent of their land, from a peak of 16 million acres in 1910 to only about 1 million acres today.¹ The Black, Indigenous, Hispanic, and other farmers of color who remain in business continue to provide food and fiber for their communities in spite of debt, insecure land tenure, and limited assets. These challenges have

¹ Castro & Willingham “Progressive Governance Can Turn the Tide for Black Farmers” *Center for American Progress*. April 3, 2019.

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been compounded with the market disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, deepening the need for targeted and equitable relief programs for the agricultural sector.

The House budget reconciliation package provides meaningful funding and support for debt relief, secure land access and tenure, support for agricultural education, and a racial equity commission at USDA. These provisions will allow for the greater success of so many Black, Indigenous, Hispanic and other farmers of color, and help build up the future generation in agriculture that our rural communities and our country so seriously need. Again, we urge you to ensure that the Senate COVID relief package also includes these vital provisions from the Emergency Relief for Farmers of Color Act.



Sophie Ackoff
Co-Executive Director
National Young Farmers Coalition



Martin Lemos
Co-Executive Director
National Young Farmers Coalition