



STATE OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE BLACK BELT (SAABB)

THE BLACK BELT IS AN EQUITY DESERT: THE FARM BILL CAN BE THE SOLUTION

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SAABB’s second annual report focuses on the Black Belt Region as an equity desert. This year’s edition concentrates on four key areas where inequity is contributing to this phenomenon and where the Farm Bill can be the solution: Food Insecurity, Health Disparities, Environmental Injustice, and Black Farmers and Ranchers.

Food Insecurity

The current Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) application and associated processes discourage participants from enrolling and maintaining benefits due to eligibility, participation, enrollment, recertification barriers, and limit access to farmers markets and other locally owned and controlled authorized retailers like food cooperatives. To increase access to fresh, nutritious food and SNAP enrollment, the 2023 Farm Bill reauthorization should update (SNAP) Eligibility, Enrollment, Participation, and Recertification as well as provide for greater access to SNAP-authorized retailers by:

- Including essential expenditures in calculation of gross income, thereby adjusting net income and eligibility;
- Increasing marketing and utilizing participant focused language to support eligible individuals in enrolling;



- Increasing reimbursement rates to schools;
- Developing a one-stop-shop portal to streamline enrollment and recertification across safety net programs, especially federal nutrition programs, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid, Medicare, and WIC;
- Reducing the burden of recertification concerning frequency and documentation;
- Boosting retention through waivers for interviews and telephonic signatures;
- Reconsider eligibility standards for authorizing small food retailers with respect to the number of stocking units;
- Increase Funding for Food Cooperatives in the Historic Black Belt Region; and
- Prioritize the role of Farmers Markets and provide funding for Delivery Route/Mobile Farmers markets.



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Environmental Injustice

Environmental injustice in America, particularly in the Historic Black Belt Region, stems from a history of racism in social, political, and economic realms. Throughout the Historic Black Belt Region, plantation geographies of elite white landholdings continue to hinder the push toward a more equitable and just environmental land system. Some recommendations include:

- Develop a council to provide technical and financial assistance for Black heirs' property holders to transition land into land trusts for enrollment in USDA conservation programs;
- Provide funds explicitly to 1890 Land Grant Universities and community-based organizations to conduct outreach that spreads awareness of the Conservation Reserve Transition Incentives Program (CRP-TIP) and connects Black land seekers to landowners; and
- Deliver transparent data reports of CRP-TIP program performance measures annually to assess the impact on Black farmers and landowners.

Health Disparities

In the Historic Black Belt, the systems and practices of racism have left the area a food and health desert. The food desert issue continues to gain importance as more people understand the link between nutrition and health. Research and Extension points to the health inequities and how they affect communities through adverse health outcomes, lost productivity, and increased healthcare costs. Specific recommendations should include increased investment in:

- Programs to help address the historical systemic racism and neglect within America's food and agriculture system especially in the Historic Black Belt Region;
- Problems that cause the expansion of food deserts and poor health outcomes; and
- Building the capacity of 1890 Land Grant Universities in a way that capitalizes on their experience, expertise, and commitment to the region.



Black Farmers and Ranchers



Black farmers, ranchers, and landowners face historical and contemporary challenges in their journey toward growing their agribusiness. Supporting policies that benefit Black farmers is crucial for addressing social, political, economic, and environmental inequities that have and continue to exist in agriculture. A few recommendations to consider are:

- Support allocating 13% of all Conservation spending to Black farmers, ranchers, and landowners;
- Support a modernized Conservation & Credit program application process with dedicated resources for technical assistance by Community-Based Organizations with a successful history of providing technical assistance to Black farmers, ranchers, and landowners;
- Support a farm and student loan forgiveness program for Black farmers and professionals at Community-Based Organizations serving Black farmers, ranchers, and landowners; and
- Eliminate the use of the term Historically Underserved Producers and limit the use of the term Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers.

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