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Res. No. 468

Resolution in support of African-American farmers in their pursuit of justice and compensation for the losses suffered during years of racial discrimination in the administration of federally funded credit and benefit programs by the United States Department of Agriculture.

By Council Members Barron, Clarke, Comrie, Koppell, Perkins, Rivera, Sanders, Seabrook and Vann

Whereas, A coalition of African-American farmers recently convened at the nation's Department of Agriculture to meet with President Bush and Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman to pursue long overdue justice for the African-American farmer; and

Whereas, Decades of discriminatory practices by the U.S. Department of Agriculture ("USDA") in farm lending and benefit programs barred access to much-needed loans and industry resources and caused many African-American farmers and their families to lose millions of acres in land along with millions of dollars in income; and

Whereas, Historical records, including the USDA's own reports, documented the pattern of racism and discrimination directed towards African-American farmers across the country, a pattern which was affirmed in the recent U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia decision in *Pigford v. Veneman*; and

Whereas, According to the Black Farmers & Agriculturists Association (BFAA), African-American farmers, on average, received \$20,000 less than their white counterparts to operate the same size acreage; they were also not informed of USDA programs and were denied funds that were earmarked for them; and

Whereas, According to a USDA commissioned report, while discrimination complaints were processed slowly, if at all, the USDA proceeded with farm foreclosures even where discrimination may have contributed to the farmers' plight; the report concluded, "[m]inority farmers lost significant amounts of land and potential farm income as a result of discrimination by [USDA] programs"; and

Whereas, A settlement reached in *Pigford v. Glickman* (now captioned *Pigford v. Veneman*), a class-action suit filed on behalf of African-American farmers three years ago, provided for compensation of \$50,000 in each case where such illegal action by USDA agents and officers could be proven; and

Whereas, However, in the years since the flawed consent decree was signed, thousands of claimants remain uncompensated, primarily due to class counsel's failure, "bordering on legal malpractice" as the district court called it, to meet critical consent decree deadlines; and

Whereas, Due to the USDA's admitted discriminatory practices, thousands of African-American farmers lost their land and their livelihood and were forced to struggle to support their families; the USDA must right these wrongs, beginning by adequately compensating those rightful claimants for the losses they have suffered; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York supports African-American farmers in their pursuit of justice and compensation for the losses suffered during years of racial discrimination in the administration of federally funded credit and benefit programs by the United States Department of Agriculture.

TMQ
LS#1046