

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture
Washington, DC 20515

October 1, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We write to express grave concerns regarding the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)'s September 4, 2020 memorandum prohibiting federal funds from being used for diversity training for federal employees. In the memo, the OMB Director Russell Vought states these trainings are "propaganda efforts" that teach "the United States is an inherently racist or evil country" and that the President has directed him to cancel these contracts immediately. We believe this is without merit and nothing more than a tool to further divide our country.

It is no secret the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has had a long, checkered history of discriminatory practices against farmers of color. African-American, Hispanic, and Native American farmers have experienced delays or outright rejections in USDA lending, leading to loss of land and a lack of equitable access to farm programs the effects of which can still be felt today. This is well-documented through major settlements like *Pigford*, *Keepseagle*, and *Garcia*. We are also aware of the Department's continued failure to diversify its workforce and promote people of color to leadership and management positions. In 2017, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management reported Black and Hispanic employees only make up 12.4 percent and 7.9 percent of the USDA workforce, respectively.¹

As Secretary of Agriculture, it is your duty to ensure the Department functions equally for everyone it serves and employs, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or any other protected class. Diversity trainings are educational opportunities for people who may not understand their own racial bias or cultural insensitivity. It also holds people accountable and ensures fair and equal treatment of minorities both internal and external to the Department. Without these guardrails, we believe you cannot adequately identify and address systemic racism and racial inequities that may adversely impact its program or the broader USDA workforce.

The conversation around civil rights is not easy. However, it is necessary. We are experiencing a racial reckoning in this country. And despite efforts to sow division, we remain hopeful. For USDA's part, we urge you to seize the opportunity to do what is right by rejecting any directives

¹ U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program (FEORP) Report, Fiscal Year 2017, available at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/diversity-and-inclusion/reports/feorp-2017.pdf>.

that could divide our nation and strengthening your diversity and inclusion efforts to best serve your workforce and the communities they serve.

Sincerely,



Marcia L. Fudge
Chair
House Agriculture Committee
Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations



David Scott
Chairman
House Agriculture Committee
Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy, and Credit



Jim Costa
Chairman
House Agriculture Committee
Subcommittee on Livestock and Foreign Agriculture



Filemon Vela
Chairman
House Agriculture Committee
Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management



Stacey E. Plaskett
Chair
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Chair
House Agriculture Committee
Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry