

**Testimony**

**of**

**John Boyd  
President**

**National Black Farmers Association**

**Before the**

**Committee on Agriculture**

**United States House of Representatives**

**on**

**March 25, 2021**

**Testimony of John Boyd**  
**President, National Black Farmers Association (NBFA)**  
**United States House Committee on Agriculture**

Dear Honorable Chairman David Scott, Vice Chair Alma Adams and Congressman Glenn "GT" Thompson, Ranking member. Thank you for the invitation. It is truly an honor to address your committee hearing, "*A Hearing to Review the State of Black Farmers in the U S*".

I am John Boyd, Founder and President of the National Black Farmers Association (NBFA). The NBFA has over 116,000 members predominately in 42 states. Our membership consists of full-time farmers, part-time farmers, land and timber owners and many concerned citizens. I am a fourth-generation farmer, maintaining about 1,300 acres in Southside, Virginia, where I grow soybeans, wheat, corn and raise beef cattle.

The long history of discrimination by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is not in dispute.

Scholars, commissions, the courts, and even the Department itself have confirmed that USDA systematically denied loans, subsidies and other benefits to Black farmers that were routinely provided to white farmers.

- In 1965, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights found that discrimination in farm programs had contributed to a decline in Black ownership of farmland.
- In 1968, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights found that Black farmers faced discrimination when seeking farm loans and other forms of assistance.
- In 1970, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights found discrimination in the administration of USDA programs.
- 1982, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights documented discrimination complaints at USDA county offices.
- In 1995, the Government Accountability Office found USDA county committees had few people of color.
- In 1996, a study for USDA's Farm Services Agency found farmers were not getting an equitable share of farm payments and loans.
- In 1997, USDA's Inspector General documented a "climate of disorder" among USDA civil rights staff.
- In 1997, the Civil Rights Action Team created by USDA documented stories of discrimination against farmers of color.
- In 1998, the USDA's Commission on Small Farms cites discrimination as a cause of the decline of Black farmers.

- In 1999, a federal court found USDA discriminated against Black farmers by denying or delaying loans.
- In 2001, the U.S. Commission on Civil rights found Black farmers waited four times longer than white farmers to receive farm loans.
- In 2008, the Government Accountability Office reported that USDA had still not resolved many discrimination complaints.

I have attached to my testimony the reports by the Commission on Civil Rights, the Department of Agriculture, and the Government Accountability Office that document this history of discrimination.

But discrimination is not something that I read about in a report or a court transcript.

In 1983, I was introduced to the USDA Farmers Home Administration (now known as Farm Service Agency) by an elderly Black farmer who was fighting off foreclosure. Once I purchased the farm with a farm ownership loan, the lien was recorded in the local county courthouse. That was the being of my relationship or lack thereof that brings me before you today to discuss the "State of Black Farmers". I experienced racial discrimination personally when I sought farm operating loans from the Department. I was called "boy." I was spit on. My loan applications on numerous occasions were torn up and thrown in the trash while I watched. Upon investigation by the USDA Office of Civil Rights, several applications were found unprocessed in my USDA file. In my county office, Black farmers were only seen on Wednesday -- or what came to be known as "Black Wednesday." When Black farmers received USDA loans they were assigned "supervised" bank accounts which required white loan officers to co-sign every transaction.

As a result of differential treatment and discrimination against Black farmers like myself, the number of Black farmers has fallen dramatically -- from more than 900,000 in 1920 to less than 50,000 today.

Unfortunately, the effects of discrimination by the Department continue to be reflected and reinforced by current USDA programs.

While Black farmers receive about \$60 million in annual commodity subsidies, white farmers annually receive about \$10 *billion* in commodity subsidies.

While an eligible black farmer receives, on average, \$7,755 in commodity subsidies, an eligible white farmer receives, on average, \$17,206 in commodity subsidies.

Like commodity subsidies, ad hoc disaster payments also overwhelmingly flow to white farmers.

Experts found that 99% of the Market Facilitation Payments made to offset the effects of President Trump's trade war went to white farmers. Experts also found that 97% of Coronavirus Food Assistance Payments made to address the Covid-19 pandemic went to white farmers.

The disparity in the crop insurance program -- which requires a farmer-paid premium many Black farmers cannot afford -- may be even greater, but Congress will not lift the veil of secrecy that hides who receives crop insurance subsidies.

As you know, arm income support payments are tied to production or revenue. So, the largest 10% of subsidy recipients collect more than half of all subsidies. Virtually all of these farmers are white.

The result of decades of discrimination is that Black farms are smaller, and our revenues are smaller than those of our white neighbors. Therefore, eligible Black farmers receive less support from USDA and fall further and further behind. What's more, a disproportionate share of black farmers produce farm products that are not even eligible for traditional subsidies.

Rather than right these historic wrongs, government programs have largely perpetuated systemic racism.

In response to discrimination by the Department, I joined with other farmers to sue USDA, which resulted in the Pigford and In Re Black Farmers Discrimination settlements. By acknowledging the long history of discrimination, the Black Farmer settlements were an important first step. But they failed to provide farmers the debt relief Black farmers needed.

During the Trump Trade war, it is unacceptable that foreign owned corporations benefited at an alarming rate while tax-paying American farmers such as myself received miniscule amounts of the relief designated with stated purpose to help American Farmers. Economic fairness was at stake in that matter but failed to provide much needed relief for the disruption to our farms.

On June 19, 2019, I testified before the U.S. Financial Services Committee. I stated, "Unless there is a set aside amount for support of small-scale farmers in the proposed \$16 Billion Bailout, we will be treated as invisible and insignificant participants in the process. Policy decisions regarding farmers will continue to disproportionately reward foreign-owned corporations and exclude already disadvantaged farmers in our category. Justice would be served in the current crisis by a vote for bipartisan legislation from this committee to set aside \$5 Billion to help address the needs of black and other small-scale farmers. Fair treatment is all we are asking. Just justice." <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/BA/BA10/20190619/109679/HHRG-116-BA10-Wstate-BoydJ-20190619-U1.pdf> (video testimony: <https://youtu.be/Ibm-zA4wQII>)

By providing debt relief to Black farmers and other farmers of color, the American Rescue Plan Act begins to fulfil the promises of the Black Farmers lawsuits and, more importantly, gives new

life to Black farmers facing foreclosure. But there is still much more to be done to right these historic wrongs and to ensure that Black farmers remain part of the fabric of American agriculture.

To support Black farmers, we must reform our subsidy and crop insurance programs to level the playing field between white farmers and Black farmers. We must make these programs more transparent, so Black farmers can see whether promised reforms are actually working. We must expand access to land and credit so that Black farmers can expand our operations. And we must improve outreach and technical assistance to Black farmers who have been treated as second-class citizens by the Department for too long.

Thank you, Chairman Scott, for holding this historic hearing.

(see Appendix)

**Committee on Agriculture  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Information Required From Nongovernmental Witnesses**

**House rules require nongovernmental witnesses to provide their resume or biographical sketch prior to testifying. If you do not have a resume or biographical sketch available, please complete this form.**

1. Name: John Wesley Boyd, Jr.
  
2. Organization you represent: National Black Farmers Association
  
3. Please list any occupational, employment, or work-related experience you have which add to your qualification to provide testimony before the Committee: Black Farmer and Black Farm Owner/Operator since 1983  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Please list any special training, education, or professional experience you have which add to your qualifications to provide testimony before the Committee: Founder and President of the National Black Farmers Association  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list the capacity in which you are representing that organization, including any offices or elected positions you hold: President, National Black Farmers Association  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE ATTACH THIS FORM OR YOUR BIOGRAPHY TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.**

## Truth in Testimony Disclosure Form

In accordance with Rule XI, clause 2(g)(5)\* of the *Rules of the House of Representatives*, witnesses are asked to disclose the following information. Please complete this form electronically by filling in the provided blanks.

Committee: Agriculture

Subcommittee: \_\_\_\_\_

Hearing Date: 03/25/2021

Hearing Title :

"A Hearing to Review the State of Black Farmers in the U.S"

Witness Name: John Wesley Boyd, Jr.

Position/Title: Founder and President

Witness Type:  Governmental  Non-governmental

Are you representing yourself or an organization?  Self  Organization

If you are representing an organization, please list what entity or entities you are representing:

National Black Farmers Association

### **FOR WITNESSES APPEARING IN A NON-GOVERNMENTAL CAPACITY**

Please complete the following fields. If necessary, attach additional sheet(s) to provide more information.

Are you a fiduciary—including, but not limited to, a director, officer, advisor, or resident agent—of any organization or entity that has an interest in the subject matter of the hearing? If so, please list the name of the organization(s) or entities.

NA

**Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) related to the hearing's subject matter that you, the organization(s) you represent, or entities for which you serve as a fiduciary have received in the past thirty-six months from the date of the hearing. Include the source and amount of each grant or contract.**

USDA - Forest Service - \$10,000  
USDA - OAO - \$199,454

**Please list any contracts, grants, or payments originating with a foreign government and related to the hearing's subject that you, the organization(s) you represent, or entities for which you serve as a fiduciary have received in the past thirty-six months from the date of the hearing. Include the amount and country of origin of each contract or payment.**

None

**Please complete the following fields. If necessary, attach additional sheet(s) to provide more information.**

- I have attached a written statement of proposed testimony.
- I have attached my curriculum vitae or biography.

\* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(5), of the U.S. House of Representatives provides:

(5)(A) Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof.

(B) In the case of a witness appearing in a non-governmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include— (i) a curriculum vitae; (ii) a disclosure of any Federal grants or contracts, or contracts, grants, or payments originating with a foreign government, received during the past 36 months by the witness or by an entity represented by the witness and related to the subject matter of the hearing; and (iii) a disclosure of whether the witness is a fiduciary (including, but not limited to, a director, officer, advisor, or resident agent) of any organization or entity that has an interest in the subject matter of the hearing.

(C) The disclosure referred to in subdivision (B)(iii) shall include— (i) the amount and source of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) related to the subject matter of the hearing; and (ii) the amount and country of origin of any payment or contract related to the subject matter of the hearing originating with a foreign government.

(D) Such statements, with appropriate redactions to protect the privacy or security of the witness, shall be made publicly available in electronic form 24 hours before the witness appears to the extent practicable, but not later than one day after the witness appears.