

March 25, 2021

Statement from Sedrick Rowe to the U.S. House Agriculture Committee  
Congressman David Scott, Chairman

My name is Sedrick Rowe. I am a young Black first generation farmer. I have a Bachelors Degree in Plant Science with a concentration Horticulture and a Masters of Public Health with a concentration in Environmental Health. I own a 30- acre organic farm where I grow peanuts, watermelons, sunflowers and hemp. I was one of the first three farmers in my area to establish a market for organic peanuts and I am a founding member of the Georgia Organic Peanut Association. I have been involved in agriculture all of my life and that experience continues to show me what it takes to develop a successful farm business. Unfortunately, I did not inherit land, so I built my farm from the ground up by purchasing land. I have seen and experienced racism and discrimination within the agricultural system, as have so many other Black seasoned as well as young farmers. My experience has allowed me to witness firsthand, the difficulties Black farmers have when attempting to access funds from the United States Department of Agriculture. I personally have been unable to access those funds while watching my white counterparts having little, if any, problem doing so. I have applied for micro-loans as well as Beginning Farmers Assistance and was denied: reasons given included insufficient collateral, market contracts were insufficient and tax returns for the previous year did not show enough income to pay the loan. It is extremely difficult for a beginning farmer to meet these criteria. Loan criteria has to be more flexible and equitable – and should include a combination of loans and grants.

Even when funds are supposedly put in place to assist Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers, the rules, regulations and paperwork make them difficult to access, for example, farming history and matching funds. Although FSA is supposed to be the “go to” agency for farmers who are having difficulty securing loans from commercial or other sources, it falls way short when it comes to Black farmers – again this comes from personal experience.

Although I consider myself to be a successful young Black farmer, it is difficult for me to convince others to join me if I cannot assure them that if they do all of the right things, they will have the backing of the USDA.

Although Black farmers make up a small percentage of all farmers, they play a critical role in making sure that marginalized people and communities throughout the Black Belt Region have access to healthy and affordable food. We need to make sure they not only remain in business but that their number increases.

Community organizations also need support as they are often the only thing standing in the way to keep people like me from losing their farms. I once worked with one organization (The Southwest Georgia Project). I saw how these organizations advocated on behalf of farmers of color and worked through the red tape when farmers could not do so themselves. In many instances they helped mitigate the lack of trust between the USDA and farmers of color. So their continued existence and sustainability is critical.

In the end, it is the responsibility of the USDA to level the playing field so that Black and other minority farmers can not only survive, but also prosper.

Thank you.