

Operator: Welcome and thank you for joining today's conference, USDA Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers Public Meeting. Please note that all lines will be muted. With that, I'll turn the call over to Eston Williams, a designated federal officer and Eston works for the Office of Partnership and Public Engagement. Please, go ahead.

Eston: Good afternoon and thank you. Thank you all for joining this call. This is a public meeting call. This will only be comments on this call. Let me first share an email address to the ones on the call that may have further questions and we can be reached by this email address. The email address you can submit your questions to is [acmf@usda.gov](mailto:acmf@usda.gov). Once again, that is [acmf@usda.gov](mailto:acmf@usda.gov). Next, I will introduce the committee members. OPPE and I thank them for serving. There are 15 members. We have five reappointed members, and I will start out by introducing to you the Chair. I would do their name and their location.

First, our Chair is Harvey Reed; he is from Gretna, Louisiana. Our Vice Chair is William Miller. William is from Oxford, Ohio. Our next reappointed member is Dwayne Goldman. Dwayne Goldman is from Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Our next member is Dr. Duncan Chembezi, and Dr. Duncan Chembezi is from Madison, Alabama. Our next reappointed member is Claud Evans. Claud is from Okemah, Oklahoma. Now I will introduce our new elected members. We have Cary M. Junior, Cary is from Royal Oak, Michigan. We have Carolyn Jones; Carolyn is from Okolona, Mississippi. We have Kimberly Ratcliffe; Kimberly is from Oakwood, Texas.

Next, we have Arnetta Cotton; Arnetta is from Wagoner, Oklahoma. Next, we have Antonio Harris; Antonio is from Washington, Louisiana. Next, we have Delmar Stamps; Delmar is from Jackson, Mississippi. Next, we have Michelle Cruz; Michelle is from Providence, Rhode Island. Next, we have Lois Kim; Kim is from McAllen, Texas. Next, we have Ivan H. Howard, Ivan is from Felda, Florida and finally, we have Dr. Elsa Selina Sanchez and Dr. Elsa is from State College, Pennsylvania. I have introduced to you our committee and we will presume with the agenda.

This is the time that we will open the floor to the public for comments. I will instruct you that you will have three minutes with your comment, and it will not be a process of answering. I did provide an email address to you if you have questions. Now the floor is open for the committee, open for the public comments. Thank you.

Operator: As we move to public comments, attendees, please unmute your device, press pound two on your telephone keypad to enter the comment queue. You will hear a prompt when your line is unmuted. At that time, please state your name and comment. Once again, pressing pound two will indicate that you wish to have a comment. We do have a comment, caller, please go ahead.

Angiena: Hello, my name is Angiena Freisin. I'm calling from Barilla. My question is, how can I find out what type of produce that everyone is producing? Thank you.

Eston: Okay, the floor is open for other comments.

Operator: As a reminder, attendees, please unmute your device and press pound two to enter the comment queue. We do have a comment. Caller, please go ahead.

Ronald: Yes, sir. My name is Ronald Friday, and I am from the state of South Carolina, and I see that we have 15 members on this committee, I'd like to know, procedures or how do you get a representative from each state on this committee, as minimum as best possible. Thank you.

Operator: On to the next comment, caller please go ahead.

Joy: Hi, this is Joy Gary from Boston, Massachusetts. My comment and question are like the previous person. I see the USDA has several regions. Is there a way to get a list of how many regions are represented by this committee? Because I think, every region does have some very specific needs. I know here in the northeast, there's a lot of nuance needs, and it would be great to have representation at least from every region, it may not be feasible for the entire, like one for each state but just curious about that.

Eston: Okay, and let me add too, we will answer those questions and post them on the web page. Know that we will be able to do that and have those posted for you.

Operator: If you have a new comment, caller, please go ahead.

Alicia: Yes, this is Alicia Kramer in the state of Pennsylvania. I was just curious about the composition of the advisory committee assuming there's a representation for trees and forestry since that's part of the ad but wanted to make sure that that was the case. Thank you.

Operator: Moving on to the next comment.

Jennifer: Hi, this is Jennifer Silvery from Michigan Food and Farming Systems in Michigan. I'm hoping that the committee has a discussion around the lack of accessibility of CARES funding that has come out through USDA as it gets handed down through state offices in various programs. We've had several issues with accessibility for small scale farms and farms that have not yet enrolled in USDA programs, lacking a DUNS number and requirement on the size of the farm being too large that rule out small farms often operated by historically underserved farmers being able to access that.

We're also concerned with health concerns, with the lack of technical assistance to help communities with poor connectivity, get into those application processes and we're struggling to have information translated into Spanish so that it's accessible by the 700 farmers in the state of Michigan that prefer to be able to adjust that information bilingually. Thank you.

Operator: If you have a new comment, caller, please go ahead.

Joy: Hi, this is Joy Gary again; I'm from Boston, Massachusetts. I just wanted to get clarity for these committee meetings. How does one get on a mailing list, so that they can get notified of these meetings? Then what will the frequency be and then going forward with this format, continue, or will it be more of an open forum or we have to utilize Zoom or some other type of platforms, which would be my suggestion, or they'll be a more focused and pointed discussion on common technical assistance issues and outreach issues and capacity building.

Operator: Once again, attendees please unmute your device and press pound two on your telephone keypad to enter the comment queue.

Eston: Do we have other comments?

Operator: There are no comments currently.

Eston: Okay, thank you. Let me assure you all that this committee is here to serve you and to represent you. I appreciate everyone that joined this call on today with your comments. Once again, we will address all those comments and put them on the web page. So that you will be able to have the answers. At this time, you may need to know too that everything is being recorded so that we will stay within the Federal Register Guidelines and all. We must stay on and let me share this with you, we must stay on to this call to 1:15 because of the guidelines that we have. Please if you have questions or comments now is the time to state them. At this time, I will allow our Chairperson Harvey Reed to come on and say some things that he likes to say to the public and the website address before he comes on is; gov/partnerships and this is for the Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement.

Operator: Eston, I am sorry, I think we have two comments in the queue.

Eston: Oh, excellent. I will yield to the comments.

Operator: Caller, please go ahead.

Deborah: Good morning. This is Deborah Hendricks and I'm from the state of Mississippi and I heard that we have two newly elected members, Miss Carolyn Jones, and Delmar Stamps, I would like to be educated on future goals, information, and objective that you all will have available to us, farmers. Thank you.

Operator: Moving on to the next comment, caller, please go ahead.

Joy: Hi, again, this is Joy Gary from Boston, Massachusetts. I just wanted to suggest answering the live questions, given that it seems, we don't have much else to discuss, maybe going into some of those questions now. It probably will be helpful for a lot of the people on the line and I'm not sure if there's time for us to do that, but I just wanted to give that suggestion.

Operator: Moving on to the next comment, caller please go ahead.

Jennifer: Hi, this is Jennifer Silvery from Michigan, again. At the 2501 Partnership Meeting with OPPE last fall in Savannah, there was mention of a USDA Civil Rights handbook being published, that we would be able to share with producers. I'm wondering what the status of that is and if we can have access to that? In lieu of that, if it does not exist yet, is there documentation for civil rights complaints regarding USDA program access that's easy to digest that we can share with historically underserved producers? I'm also curious if there's any ability to comment on what's going on with Community Prosperity Summits around this country.

The 2501 call and community prosperity call over the last week have alluded to a lot of activity with community prosperity and the new funding announcement due to

being dependent on eligibility for persistent poverty communities is looking at a 2015 ERS map that is no longer accurate, which would make more than half of the state's historically underserved farmers ineligible to or the country's historically underserved farmers to apply. We would just really love any discussion or comments that we can have around that. Thank you.

Operator: We have the next comment, caller, please go ahead.

Diana: Hi, this is Diana Padilla from Hope for Small Farm Sustainability. I am thinking the person that is from McAllen would be from my area. This is Kim or Lois Kim and I would like to know if she is going to have a meeting with the representatives or the farmers so that we can address some of the issues and is it going to be separate, small farmers and large farmers because we all have separate issues.

Operator: Once again, attendees please unmute your device press pound two on your telephone keypad to enter the comment queue. Speakers on the private speaker line, please press star six to unmute yourself. We do have a new comment, caller, please go ahead.

Female Speaker: Good afternoon. My name is [00:18:12 inaudible] from Farm Service Agency and as a comment, I wanted to share with some of the commenters or callers that explain a little bit about the process. Today's call gives you an opportunity, or give us all an opportunity to make comments, comments as it relates to what we suggest or recommend this committee do, to support and serve minority farmers and USDA programs and how they can better fit and work for minority farmers. The questions and I'm just giving you this background because the committee cannot do this. They can't answer your questions, over the phone; everything will be done in writing by wanted to give a background for folks who are on the call to know that the federal register notice is a process to let you know you have the opportunity to comment to make a suggestion.

It is not going to be an avenue for you to have interaction or engagement back and forth with the committee. With that being said, I'd like to make a comment or recommendation that in the future, maybe all of us at USDA do a better job of explaining what comment periods are, do a better job of providing information to the public about their availability to comment and because you all can't answer a few questions and potentially I can, I wanted to tell you that to receive future notifications about these type of meetings, you'll need to go to [USDA.gov/partnership](https://www.usda.gov/partnership); that is the site for the Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement. They post and they have a weekly or bi-weekly newsletter, where you have all these announcements that you can get information on and know about future meetings, [USDA.gov/partnership](https://www.usda.gov/partnership). Thank you.

Operator: Moving on to the next comment, caller, please go ahead.

Ronald: Yes, ma'am, thank you. I understand the concerns of what the committee can and cannot do on this call because I understand the government regulations, but my concern is that as a committee, we got to do a better job, from my perspective, this is only Ronald Friday's perspective of educating minority veteran farmers through the whole process. I shared, is not from what I've observed or heard, I am just sharing this from this perspective of the committee in farming in 2015 and some of the challenges

in the Nordic farmers that push down from the top. But then when they get down to the bottom, or if the minority farmer does not understand the procedure, we have walls, preventing the government from engaging our system, the farmer especially, I think they are based out of the world.

I think that the government must make sure that they have someone there that's available to address those issues. Not tell them that we can't help you, you got to go through an insurance company. Now, I will give you my background, I spent 37 years in the military, and I understand the contract world. You do not want a contract that should not be to the degree that the Government employee can't assist a farmer. We got to figure out how do we help the farmer when they are having a challenge as beginning in minority disadvantaged farmers because these programs that the government set up are great, but if we're not doing anything to help the minority, small farmer or whoever, through the process, he's not going to go anywhere.

He's fighting a losing battle because he's going up against big large entities like the insurance entities that he's not getting any help or not understands. I think that's needed. I appreciate, me getting this invitation to be on this call because I will engage and try to be there. I did get into farming just to do it; I got into farming as I got in the military, to go as far as I can. I want to do that to help minorities that come behind me, so they won't have the same challenge that I faced or other farmers face across the nation. Thank you.

Operator: Moving on to the next comment, caller please go ahead. Caller, please unmute your device, you can go ahead.

Jennifer: Sorry about that. This is Jen Silvery from Michigan, again. I really appreciate the last two comments and would also like to suggest that this committee help and build some transparency into decision-making processes around how COVID-19 relief funds and USDA historically underserved Farm Bill allotments are allocated.

There are some new eligibility determinants, requirements, and some of the programs that we feel; underserved farmers would best be able to understand the transparency behind how those were made. I do also like to recommend that we look at some basic framing for common issues that farmers need to address if they want to participate in USDA programs as a proactive measure, things such as, registering for a DUNS number and frequently required records that they should start keeping so that they can work towards building that eligibility. Thank you.

I think that would also--- sorry, I think that would also help sidestep some of the last-minute issues we get with underserved communities who are stretched for the time during peak harvest when a lot of the grant requests applications are coming out and administrative processes that hang them up at the last minute. These are coming out with a very short timeframe, so anything we can do to prepare our communities to be ready when that hit, I think would be well advised. Thanks.

Operator: Once again, attendees please unmute your device and press pound two to enter the comment queue. Speakers, you may press star six to unmute yourself. We do you have a new comment, caller, please go ahead.

Joy: Hi, this is Joy Gary, I want to thank whomever, I didn't catch the name, but was that answered some of the questions about this process and if this process is the only commentary process that will help us to build this committee and some of the rules around it, then I would suggest extending the commentary process, doing a fuller outreach to minority farmers. I assume that the USDA has a list of minority farmers in this, they should automatically be a part of this mailing list to know that this is happening and outreaching to organizations within various regions that are helping minority farmers. I know in the northeast, there's a new entry sustainability project that relates to several minority farmers that may or may not be fully involved in the USDA program, so just want to give that as an additional suggestion.

Operator: Moving on to the next comment, caller please go ahead. Caller, please unmute your device, you can go ahead. Caller, please unmute your device, you can go ahead. Moving on to the next comment, caller please go ahead.

Female Speaker: Is the representative from the Minority Farmers want to have a subcommittee in the area they represent?

Operator: There are no comments currently.

Eston: Thank you, let me do something here because I know there are some folks on the call, probably called in and did not understand this whole process but I want to address the public. Secretary, Perdue appointed these committee members that represented socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, nonprofit organizations, civil rights organization professional, and the institution of higher education. All these members have been briefed on ethics, civil rights, and their responsibilities. Me as the designated federal office, it is my responsibility to make sure that the committee adheres to requirements established by the Federal Advisory Committee Act, also known as FACA.

The FACA was established in 1970 to formally recognizing the merits of seeking the advice and assistance of our citizens. Now the committee was established according to Section 14008 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, Public Law 110-246, and it is managed by the quarters with revisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act, which is FACA. It's been authorized by Congress in 2008. The committee has served to advise USDA Secretary on certain items and they are, the implementation of Section 2501 program of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation Trade Act of 1990, methods of maximizing the participation of minority farmers or ranchers in USDA programs and civil rights activities within USDA, as such activities relate to participant in such program.

The Committee is managed by the USDA Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement. The committee plays an important role in advising USDA on challenges and opportunities which shape program and policy impacting minority farmers in the United States. The committee also is to provide advice that is relevant, objective, and open to the public. I just want to bring some of you up to speed. I know some of you are new and I want you to put things in perspective, so you understand what this committee is about and how it came about, and how they are to serve you. With that, are there any more comments?

Operator: If you have a new comment, caller please go ahead. Caller, please unmute your device, you can go ahead.

Sanaz: Hi, am I unmuted now? Hello, can you hear me?

Operator: Yes, we can hear from you.

Sanaz: Great. Hi everyone, my name Sanaz Arjomand, I work with the National Young Farmers Coalition. Thanks to all the members on this committee for serving and we look forward to partnering, moving forward in the ways that we can support your work. I just wanted to note that I submitted a little bit of feedback to the email address with sincere apologies that it was belated. I sent that today not realizing that deadline was yesterday but just wanted to highlight the work of one of my colleagues in the 2501 fiscal year, 2019 cycle in addition to a couple of partner organizations, the Good Food for Ag Coalition, the National Sustainable Ag Coalition, to speak with participants in the 2501 program and get their perspective on ways to improve it. We've submitted in writing a couple of thoughts, some concerns that were raised about the application, timing, and communication with both people serving on the review panel and that on applying for the grant. So again, apologies that, that came late, hopefully, there's a way to share that with committee members. Because I think it's a bit long for me to go through in three minutes. But again, we look forward to working with members of the committee and happy to find another way to share this information, if needed. Thank you.

Eston: Thank you. Let me remind everyone that you can email comments to the committee email address. As I stated earlier, the email address for questions is; [acmf@usda.gov](mailto:acmf@usda.gov). Also, I will share with you that your comments are being placed on record and the committee will review all, and we will make sure that we address all comments. Thank you.

Operator: We do have a new comment, caller please go ahead.

Joy: Hi there, Joy Gary here. I just had a question about the committee recommendations from the past years. There are a few on your websites that the links are broken, so you can't view them and just a question about why the last committee meeting materials were from May 2016 and why there aren't any recommendations between 2015 and today?

Operator: Just a quick reminder, attendees please unmute your device, press #2 on your telephone keypad to enter the comment queue. There are no comments currently.

Eston: Okay, this is Eston again, keep in mind we still have time for comments. We want to make sure that all have been heard. If you have any comments, I'll give you time to unmute yourself again, so that we can hear all. It is important to us that all comments are heard, we have this call until 1:15.

Igalious: Yes, can you hear me?

Eston: Hello, yes.

Igalious: Yes, this is Igalious "Ike" Mills, and can everyone hear me?

Eston: We hear you loud and clear, go ahead.

Igalious: Yes, I am a former member of this committee and my hat's off to the new committee members that have been appointed. My name is Igalious "Ike" Mills executive director for the Texas AgriForestry Small Farmers and Ranchers in the state of Texas. I do know that there are a lot of issues that this committee is certainly going to be charged with to address. The one thing that I learned from being on the committee is that there are a lot of issues out there that must be addressed and should be addressed without sugarcoating them. Because we have too many black landowners that have lost land, continue to lose land, and certain issues regarding the USDA that must be addressed, and which is one reason why we started doing agriculture forestry summit each year. Because of the agencies with their cutbacks and that go on out in the backwoods to try to find black landowners and somebody has got to be able to stay at a platform and venue for that to take place and that's one of the things that we found was very helpful in East Texas.

As you may know, Texas is almost like a total other state, another country for the most part and so there are some issues and some trust issues that have to be addressed as well before we can begin to connect in farmers, black farmers with the USDA programs. A lot of times it's not a matter of whether black farmers or the landowners can participate in the program. You just have so many issues, as it relates to have access, or even getting the information, there's another big issue that we're really focused on, is getting the information out to people. You can't participate in the program if you don't have the information period, so again, we can't sugarcoat this. We just must tell it the way it is, laid out there and hopefully, this committee will be able to send information to Secretary Perdue, put in place the action, and not sit on it.

Because we've had a period of time where I didn't even think the committee was going to be started off again, they went into this little area where nothing took place and my kudos off to and hats off to Kenya Nicholas, who's been the backbone of a lot of this to make it sure that they connected in with the black farmers and ranchers. I just say thank all of you for your participation and your service to the country. But I do feel that you are in a position that you must begin to address those issues hit on, regardless of whose toes they may step on, or what the general consensus is, in terms of that somebody has to step up and take charge to make this thing happen. Because otherwise, we're losing too many black landowner's land and arrows property.

Some of the basic issues that have been talked about today, and we certainly appreciate those individuals coming forward to talk about those programs. That's critical because again, getting that information out is going to be an intricate part of all the programs associated with USDA, and with that, I'll just say thank you and look forward to working with this committee and if anything, I can do, let me know. We all have to do what we can because this is going to be an effort that everybody has to be involved with and be one specific entity like one specific agency, which is why, I think, you guys have set up subcommittees or we'll be setting up subcommittees to address those areas, so you really got to get into the real meat of why we're in this situation that we are in.

When I say "we", I am talking about black farmers and ranchers, let's be clear. We are the ones who have been deprived and basically, hear a lot of the extra program. So again, with that, I'll say kudos to everybody, and congratulations, and God be with you. Godspeed.

Operator: Moving on to the next comment, caller please go ahead.

Brennan: Good afternoon, this is Brennan Martinez from Michigan. I just want to echo Jennifer Silvery's suggestion that materials be made available in Spanish. I'm also interested in knowing and being new to this body, knowing what some of the accomplishments are and some of the issues that have been addressed, wondering if there's an annual report that is available, and looking forward to seeing what is being done and what can be done together. Thank you.

Eston: Are there any more comments? We have 11 minutes before we end the call, are there any more comments? Once again, are there any more comments? Hearing none, I will allow the Chair to address the public. Chair Harvey Reed, are you on?

Operator: Speakers, please press \*6 to unmute your device. We do have a new comment, caller please go ahead.

Jennifer: This is Jennifer Silvery from Michigan; I'd like to recommend to the committee that I'm moving forward ahead of these calls with outreach communications. We preface those include information that was discussed today what the purpose of the call is, what a comment is, potentially with some examples to further build the capacity and information sharing between our organizations and producers, thank you.

Eston: Also, allow me to add to that, we will get the transcription and post to the website with responses at the appropriate time. If you're interested in more info on the committee, subscribe to our newsletter at [usda.gov/partnerships](https://usda.gov/partnerships). We will be in touch with the committee to discuss the next meeting times and make any meeting time made known in the Federal Register at least 15 days prior to the public meeting and the OPPE newsletters, and that is the Office of Partnership and Public Engagement newsletter. I was thinking that Chair, Harvey Reed would come on for the closing remarks. Are there any more comments? We still have seven minutes before, due to the Federal Register; I cannot close out until the time is up at 1:15. Are there any more comments? Are we hearing any more comments out there?

Operator: We have one new comment, caller please go ahead.

Brennan: Good afternoon, Brennan Martinez, again, I haven't heard much mentioned about Native American farmers and just want to make sure that information is provided regarding their needs and how this committee has been able to help them. Thank you.

Eston: Can you please explain again how to enter a call for comments, please, to the public?

Operator: As a reminder attendee, please unmute your device, press #2 on your telephone keypad to enter the comment queue. We do have a new comment. Caller, please go ahead. Caller, please unmute your device, you can go ahead.

Steve: Hi, sorry about that. My name is Steve Davies. I write for Agri-Pulse, It's a publication in Washington DC. I was just hoping that you could post biographical information for the members of the committee online or send it to me. I can give you my email address; Steve@agri-pulse.com, that's A-G-R-I - P-U-L-S-E.com. I did ask for this information previously. Thank you very much.

Harvey: Good evening. Good afternoon to everyone. My name is Harvey Reed, Chairman of the Minority Farmers Ranchers Advisory Committee. I have been reappointed this time, along with four other members of the committee. I'd like to welcome the new committee; we have not formally met yet. It's only been a few days or a matter of fact, less than two weeks for us to come together and be notified that we are here to serve. Previously, I want to go back to a comment that was made earlier regarding back in 2015, where there are no more comments online. I happen to be on that committee along with the other members that were reappointed.

There was a lot of information that we had gathered to put together and what have you, but we're here to bring up what was leftover from there, to bring it up to speed to where we are today. Also, to address the comments made by everyone today, I really appreciate that because we need to know, what we must do, where we must go, and who we represent? We do represent, the Native Americans, Asians, Hispanics, Blacks, and we represent all those people of color regarding this. Regarding another comment, we're not going to leave any stone unturned. We are going to do the things we need to do.

Another comment was made about this, different subcommittees we have. We have Farm Service Agency, we have NRCS, we have Agriculture Marketing Services, we have new development [00:52:57 inaudible], and NIFA. Those are the names of subcommittee agencies that we will be working with. It's also Civil Right, we'd be looking at the Civil Rights also to see exactly what disparity has been done and what remedy has been made. The veterans that are out there, farming and returning to the community, we will be working with them. I myself was a military vet, so I understand what we all need to do.

Our main purpose to be transparent to everyone there. There are over a quarter-million people that we'll be working with, not only throughout the United States but also these territories as well. We learned a lot back then from 2015 to 2017, updated with our experience and our knowledge that we have gathered during that time and where we are right now. I'm only behind the eight ball but right now we are here to serve.

There will be a qualitative report given out to everybody. I have not shared this with the committee yet, but it's a question we brought up, I want to let you know, we are going to be transparent. We want to put as much as we can out there online for you all to see exactly what's going on and address those comments, but we will have quality meetings, according to the register as well. If there is anything else that we need to do, we want to make sure we even the playing field. We're going to do our job to tear down this wall of division in agriculture. Because everybody should be on the same playing field and we all are one agriculture. We have [00:54:41 inaudible]; this is it

for us, so let's maintain what we have. We are going to be transparent and proactive. I just want to let you all know this is where we are today.

Now we'll be getting with the committee so we can sit down and finalize our plan of action. I want to thank you all today, Mr. Williams, and the rest of the agriculture staff on the panel before us, earlier this morning. Thank you for affording us the opportunity to come back to finish the work that we have not completed back in 2015. You all just stay on guard, buckle your seatbelt, and to get there is a long ride, thank you.

Eston: Thank you Chair, Reed, by my time it is 1:15, at this time, the open public comment is closed, now. Currently, we are closed for the public comment. Now, you will go into mute. If you want to stay on, the committee will have a brief discussion amongst themselves. Now the time on the agenda is for the committee to regroup. The next step, discussion, and Chair, Reed has already started. At this time, I will allow our Vice-Chair, Miller to come on and share anything he would like with the public and the group. Vice-Chair, Miller, you will need to do pound two, [00:56:21 inaudible]...

Operator: Speakers can press star six to unmute themselves.

Eston: Okay, star six. I'm sorry, star six.

Operator: If that does not work, you can press pound two and I can identify your line.

Eston: Great.

Bill: Hi, this is Bill Miller. It was a great set of comments. I really start to appreciate the scope of the comments that came in from the public. I was on the previous committee, I think it was 2016, I don't remember when we last met, but we had gone through and set up several committees so that we could really focus on, with small committees, on the various issues that were there during 2016, were probably primary to the committee. As we reorganize, I think Chairman Reed has gone through and developed some thoughts about what committee assignments people should be working on, but we have developed and have looked at committees to address in reality, all of the issues that had come up in the earlier discussions.

I don't know if Mr. Reed wants to set up committees at this point, but I think the most efficient thing to do, would be to set up committees to review the things that had been suggested in the past that actually were not published or actually adopted by the committee because we did not have the ability to adapt any of the recommendations that we had come up with the last Minority Farmers Union Committee. I think, we probably have great work out there that needs to be looked at again by committee members and updated. We are really set to check this off and hit the ground running with the committee. The problem has been that we haven't had any real time to organize ourselves and to really get to know the committee members and what their specific interests are? The little knowledge that I have of the committee members, we have a wide variety of expertise on this new committee and I think, we should be able to have some real impact on the USDA and come up with some clearly and probably radical because we need to think outside of the box. We should be able to come up and really address these issues head-on. That's about all I have to say, I don't know if

I do have some recommendations that we've talked about in terms of doing setting up the committees as an initial step. I don't know what other people think and how they would like to proceed. Harvey, do you want me to go forward and suggest some of the committee assignments so that we could break up this huge agenda that we have in front of us, or do you want to save that for later?

Harvey: Bill, we could save this for later because we have some tentative things that we have already listed. Can you hear me?

Bill: I hear you.

Harvey: Okay, all right, I just wanted to make sure. First, I want to thank the 10 new people that came on board. That's the most important one, because those of us who were there before, we all know one another and we have done a lot of things together but for those of you all, just coming on board, you have to really get adjusted to us because we're strange and unusual because we were there before and we're sorry that we had a short time for us. But now we're coming back with a new vision to get this thing done. What I need to do is to find out and with Mr. Miller, find out more about where everybody fits?

What we did, we did a tentative thing on the scheduling of the committee that would have you, but that may change. It's only tentative and we don't know exactly where everybody fits. But one of the things that we were really looking at is that since we are working with approximately six agencies, excluding civil rights and veterans, out of those six agencies, we tried to assign two committee members to each agency for them to go and draw them to that to see exactly what all has been going on, and what all need to be done and what have you? But it's nothing wrong with crossing from one agency to another to assist one another. Now, I would like to look out to Goldman and also Dr. Evans, if they would share the two subcommittees with challenges of different agencies, to allow our new members a chance to see exactly how things are operated, and what we have to go through, especially when you're trying to follow the Federal Protocols.

Since we have more experience, but I'm actually there to do that because we are all here for one year, at this time, some of us are eligible for a third time, but nevertheless, we have just one year under our belt. We want to make sure that the 10 new members that are coming on board get a clear picture about how to sort things or how you can integrate this with your normal daily work. Maybe, some issues that you all have been working on prior to getting here that may be applicable to what we need to hear because it's going to be some challenges and we must ask a lot of questions.

We don't want to bother and be thin-skinned about asking questions or saying that we're going to just upset somebody because they may interfere with our brand. I realized one thing, you're not just representing your community, but you're representing over a quarter of a million people that are out there. I'm just being conservative because I am not even counting the veterans and everybody of color. Our main goal is to try to tear down this wall of the socio-economic status that we have right now. I think the last two speakers we had from Dr. Taylor and Mr. Reed from the Federation made a big difference to let you know at the end. These things

are strong and those individuals that gave the comments lately, the last comments, these are things we must look at, real hard. You are going to be challenge out there with regards to what's going on.

Our job is to provide advice and recommendations to cure certain things that has been plaguing us for a long time. Because, we had that autonomy to ask those questions and to make recommendations. If it wasn't for us, then wouldn't be agriculture, because we're the ones who make up agriculture. Therefore, they're here because we're here doing the work that they need to do to maintain those federal regulations as well. I just want to let you all know where we're about to go off and want to be quite interesting, educational and you want to make a lot of friends and don't want to make a lot of enemies. But nevertheless, know that you represent not just your local, you represent everyone that's out there, in the highways and the byways and the backyards and along the riverfronts.

There's a lot of people out there that have not been touch, especially for those who fear going into a service area. They refuse to go into a federal office, USDA office; they fear that when they go in there, they don't get the revolving door. That's why we impressed that the receipt for services is highly important; we can go and get a receipt for service.

This is what we're about to do in the next couple of days. They received some information from both Mr. Miller and I, because I'll be working with Mr. Miller on some things to make sure that you all have easy access to things. We're trying to make the job for Mr. Eston Williams, a lot easier and I understand what we're trying to do, because we are going to be challenging some of his colleagues and they may not like you, later on, but that's the job we have. But our job is to try to break down these walls of socioeconomics.

Personally, I don't like social disadvantage, I don't like it at all, because as long we're going to be socially disadvantaged, all our lives, our kids, and grandkids will be. I look at the socioeconomics, so that's where I stand. I'm going to turn this back over to whoever. Are there any committee members out there, please say something because I want to hear from everybody? You're going to hear from us a great deal, so we want to hear from you as well and I'm going to stop right there.

Eston: Okay, are there any other committee members that want to come forward and say something? [01:09:04 crosstalk]. Go ahead, Bill.

Bill: I just want to say that in the past, we always had the advantage of meeting in person and really getting to know each other and our strengths and the burning issues that we wanted to address. It was easy to fit people into a subcommittee that really met what they were and had some real passion. We are at a disadvantage that is because of COVID-19 and our inability to not get together and to really have some real knowledge about each other, so it's going to be difficult to work through this process.

People are going to have to speak up and express what their concerns are and where they would believe they best fit in, in terms of organization to address these issues. I understand that the subcommittees can work, and I guess what Mr. Williams need to and serve because there was a process in place in the past where we could, as

subcommittee people, meet and discuss issues that had been raised in the public forum. But we were limited in that and then when we came back as a committee, it had to be as a public forum and that's where, we then could debate and actually work on a consensus for the overall committee.

But I'm not sure what this process is now? Am I correct? I think there needs to be all of us, committee members, to understand how we proceed with working on and developing responses to a lot of these great questions that have come up but also to generate our full committee recommendations to the Secretary of Agriculture.

Eston: Vice Chair, you are so spot on with that and we will be in touch with you and the chair for our next move on how to go about to address those things. I will echo in a climate that we're in with the COVID, it does not play to our advantage but we're going to do the best we can, virtually and move forward, so that we can address the needs and the concerns that has been out there.

[01:13:21 inaudible] and Chair, Reed will be the forerunner of this to make sure that we provide everything that we need to give feed back to the public, the minority, social disadvantaged, veterans ranchers and farmers. This will be done so one can feel comfortable about what this committee stand for and to move them forward as well. We know that this will take place. Okay, is there's anything else from the committee, this is your time to share anything that you would like to share with us before we close out.

Bill: Hi, this is Bill again and I still have another question. Are we permitted to have discussions among ourselves, by a conference call or whatever? I mean, I don't understand what the regulations for proceeding are going to be over the next week or so.

Eston: I will get that out to you all so you can have it in writing, I will send it out to the committee.

Bill: Okay, great.

Eston: Is there anything else from the committee?

Duncan: Yes.

Eston: Go ahead, we hear you.

Duncan: Oh, you can hear me, okay. This is Duncan Chembezi. I'm listed as somebody who's been reappointed to this committee, but the point I wanted to raise. As we look back at what the previous committees have done, is there a way we can cross over to some other committees like the beginning farmer's committee, that I was on, in previous years. I looked at what that committee may have done, especially when it comes to land or land issues, the two speakers talked about this morning. I think there was a lot that was discussed in the beginning farmer's committee that may be beneficial to this committee. I looked at what took place and what it is that you must be focusing on, given the fact that some issues may already have been resolved. I don't know where that is, or it is something that we can do to go to other committees and look at what they did?

Looking at both issues that relate to this committee and then see if there are some issues that need to be identified. There are some issues that were not completed at that time, that need to be examined again, as we move forward. It's just a question that I don't know the answer to, but maybe somebody that was here in the previous committee or our leader might be able to tell us if that is something that can be done, looking at other meetings.

Harvey: I would like to answer a question, if you don't mind.

Duncan: That's okay.

Harvey: I think, and I know for a fact, crossing over to other committees and seeing what's going on, because some committees seem as though that they are duplication of efforts and they all are similar to what's going on and what we're trying to do. Our job is to provide advice to the Secretary and try to remedy some of the things that are happening. Looking at other committees and see where their faults are with MD, give us an idea on what's taking place, because if the pattern is still the same, it can fester to other committees and the next thing is, regions have a problem that's going to be systemic.

I don't see anything wrong with the other committees and see what it has done because they can be looking at us also for advice; they're going to be paid. They're going to have barriers and guardrails where they can't cross. I think with us, we have much more autonomy to do much more than what they're doing right now. So, I think, there's nothing wrong with that, by you being previously on one committee and you saw some things that was problematic and is still part of agriculture. I think we have every right to investigate that and see exactly how we can remedy that situation.

So yes, we can do it. I will say yes, we'll do it. If there aren't any guardrails or barriers up there, we're going to take the leap to do it. Our job is to venture off into those areas that need to be handle. I will say go with it.

Duncan: Great, thank you.

Harvey: You are welcome.

Elsa: This is Elsa Sanchez; I have a question about the previous recommendations from the committee. I also noticed one of the commenters said that the links to those recommendations on the website are broken and I was wondering if those could be restored? Or if we could have those recommendations so that we can build on them, and just know the history of what the committee has worked on in the past?

Harvey: Can I answer that question, that comment or statement? Elsa, yes, we can. We will have that information designated. If even though it was broken, but still written documents on there, as well. Some of the committees submitted reports that was never really revealed, so this can't exist. These are the things that will be happening for the committee's new members, so you'll have access to all of that. I think whatever we do for any agency that we're working with; everybody will have access to that because you need to get an overview of what's going on. You never know what day you'll be doing some things in that particular area there, because we have

six committees, we have six agencies that we are working with and we have the civil rights as well as we have the veterans.

But, if we can concentrate on that and for whatever, Elsa, anything that you all think that we need, don't hesitate to ask for it because we can always pull this information. It's not a question that we must do for you or anything else like that. All that is a letter because we have those statutory authorities to get those things done. Remember one thing, this organization, this committee is statutory. Congress created this committee back in 2008, to do the things that need to be done right now, and we don't want to fall short on that at all. Yes, Elsa [01:20:46 crosstalk], you can make your request; we can take care of it.

Elsa: Thank you.

Bill: There are two things that I see, the subcommittees had worked on and produced several recommendations that were never official because they were never voted on by the full committee or aired at a public hearing. I do not believe that they would be on anybody's website because for those things, there was never a follow-up public meeting to air those recommendations or have them voted on. If there are records there in our portfolios, I don't believe there's anything official about them.

Eston: Okay, let me jump in here to speak to the Federal Register, we can't get into the recommendation, comment, or deliberation. I know that was in the past, but we must stay clear of that. We can yield this time for a discussion or for planning purposes. We must stay in compliance; we cannot talk about the recommendations and go into deliberation about recommendations. If we stay clear of that, it would be good. Thank you.

Harvey: Yes, we can stay clear of that at this time, but if the issues come up again, we must address it as well. We may not have physical access to it, but I think between Mr. Miller, Dr. Goldman, and Dr. Evans, who were here previously, I think you still have something between our two years that we can expound on, give us some guidance, some directions, even though it happened then but it may have accelerated during that time. It needs to be re-addressed right now. If it must be readdressed right now, we have no problem. I think that our committee is set up right now, which is good. I like the way it's all set up and the diversity in our committee. The way it is set up, is good because everybody brings some attributes to the committee, that we can bring those issues up, there's no problem at all. Because if it happened then, it's still there, it didn't die actually in a group. Let's see how much it has grown before we go after it, we can do it.

Eston: Thank you.

Harvey: I think it's possible, we can do it.

Eston: Okay, is there any more discussion from the committee? We are approaching our time for the committee to regroup in the next step discussion; it is at 1:45. At this point, we can close out at any time if there are not any more comments from our discussion from the committee. I do not want to rush you; you do have time if you have any more discussion before we adjourn.

Bill: My question is, and I know you said you would address it in the email, but the issue is we shouldn't wait until we received your email about how we can proceed and how we can discuss the issues; the ones that were raised today as well as the old issues, this is my understanding.

Eston: Yes, there's a process that must take place with that. The group cannot meet amongst themselves to do that, but I will provide those steps to you on how to proceed due to the Federal Register.

Bill: Yes, okay. Thank you.

Eston: I know that [01:25:42 crosstalk]. I'm sorry, go ahead.

Harvey: Mr. Miller and I still be working on the committee assignments, and even though it's all tentative, but also, we need to have a breakdown and historical thing on each one of those agencies that we're going to be looking into. Nobody won't go into it blindly and trying to feel the way through. We'll have all that information ready for our committee members. That's outside of the purview of what the Federal Register requires us to do. But they still need to know exactly who we are looking at and what needs to be done and they could find out more about it. We'll have our lists, and our guidelines, and everything is already drafted up and we will know exactly what approach to take without violating the law.

Eston: Good deal. Okay, is there any other discussion from the committee?

Harvey: Another thing I want to say, when Mr. Williams begin to give our Bios out to Agri-Pulse, Mr. Williams, did you give everybody's updated Bios?

Eston: Yes.

Harvey: Because as Agri-Pulse get it, they're going to use it the way they want to use it. I want to advise a committee that's listening right now; you may get a call from Agri-Pulse to get comments. Agri-Pulse like to get comments that's contrary to what's going on right now. But just be careful if they call you or whatever.

Eston: Okay.

Harvey: [01:27:16 inaudible], they would call; they get comments so they could publish it beforehand before anything else gets done, so we don't want to skew our process.

Female Speaker: Can you provide that name again, please?

Harvey: Agri-Pulse, A-G-R-I - Pulse.

Female Speaker: Okay, thank you.

Harvey: Yes, right. They're good people, but at the same time, you don't want your name tarnish and anything else like that. Because whatever the way you turn it over to them, they're going to publish it and they're going to publish the way, they want to publish it. Let's make sure that they publish the correct name and that everybody is looking good, so we don't get old Bios, so we had a question early on, on updated

Bios. If you can get this taken care of and give it to them quickly because if you have not, they don't start digging.

Eston: Thank you and we've been updating them as they come in. So, for the committee members, if you know there are some changes need to be updated, please share it with me. I just updated the Bios yesterday, so please read your Bio and get it to me ASAP. I can make those updates and it will be in a PDF file so that no one can change it. Please get that to me. Okay, well--- Hello, somebody talking? Hearing no more discussion. As the Federal Register requires me as DFO, I must open the meeting and close the meeting. Currently, are there any more discussion? I don't need to hold you on, if you have anything else, we have the call until two o'clock. Once again, I will ask again, are there any more discussion from the committee? Are there any more discussion from the committee? Are there any other discussion from the committee?

Male Speaker: I am [01:29:37 inaudible]

Eston: Hearing none, at this time.

Female Speaker: Hi, this is...

Eston: Hello...

Female Speaker: Can you hear me?

Eston: Yes.

Female Speaker: I was just wondering about meeting in person. Is it a possibility maybe in the coming year if things get better? Do you foresee us possibly meeting in person maybe even next year?

Eston: Yes, I would say, part of the process calls for us to meet in person, but dealing with the pandemic now, we'll have to wait and see how things will pan out.

Female Speaker: Okay.

Eston: But yeah, as soon as I learn more about that, I will share it with the committee.

Female Speaker: Okay, thank you very much.

Eston: Okay.

Claud: Can you hear me?

Eston: Yes, go ahead.

Claud: Okay, Claud Evans and for the last 15, 20 minutes for some reason, the system shut me out and I couldn't get in to comment on anything. I want at this point, but I do want you to know that I heard everything that was going on, but I just couldn't respond because the system cut me out.

Eston: Oh, wow.

Claud: I couldn't get back and I even went back and redialed and the operator says, well, you'll be in listening only mode and that's where I've been until just then and just back up.

Eston: Okay, sorry about that. It was announced throughout the call, how to come off listen mode. I do apologize for that.

Claude: [01:31:37 crosstalk] I've been looking forward. It's good to be back on the committee. I was surprised when I got a call, asking if I would be willing to serve again [01:31:58 crosstalk]

Harvey : I think we all got a surprise.

Claud: We all got surprised. Yes. I'm looking forward because someone asked a question earlier about previous recommendations, there were recommendations made. When we can legally and properly get into that, we need to get a copy of it so that we don't have to re-invent the wheel again.

Eston: Yes, a lot was done at the last meeting.

Claude: Right, that was a good meeting.

Male Speaker: Yes, so that was on that. I know we will be able to obtain that, that's no problem at all. I got something for you to do for me, Claude, you can call me. Is Dwayne out there? Dr. Goldman.

Claude: Dr. Goldman, is he there?

Harvey: It's okay, all right. By the way, committee members you all going be getting calls from me because since you' all are so talkative this morning, I have to give you all a call and see exactly what you all sound like as well. That's no problem at all. We'll do it like that. I'm going to stop again, I will finish again.

Male Speaker: And I am gone.

Eston: Okay, are there any comments from the committee? It seems like this committee just hates to leave each other. I understand, it's been a long time, but let me say before I adjourn, I appreciate you all. I know this is something near and dear to your heart and that's why you are serving and I'm sure that you will serve well. I just want to thank you and please allow me to grow up some with you guys and ladies, because it's new for me too, and we will grow together. I am here as the DFO to provide anything that I possibly can to make this task flow smoothly for us. With that, being said, let me thank you all again. If there are not any more comments at this time, I'm going to knock three times just to make sure we are clear. Are there any more comments from the committee? Are there any more comments from the committee? Are there any more comments from the committee?

Male Speaker: No.

Eston: None, I do call this meeting adjourn, at 1:55pm. Thank you all.

Male Speaker: Thank you.

Female Speaker: Thank you.

Operator: That concludes our conference. Thank you for using AT&T Event Conferencing Enhanced.  
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Designated Federal Officers

  
MFAC Chairman

Date:

Date: 8/26/2020