

BLACK FARMERS & AGRICULTURALISTS ASSOCIATION



& The Land Loss Fund

P.O. Box 61
Tillery, NC 27887

Ph. 252-826-2800

Fax: (252) 826-3244

E-mail: Tillery@aol.com

<http://www.coax.net/people/lwf/bfaa.htm>

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Via Fax: 202-720-9286

Re: Your Appointment and Black Farmers

The Honorable Mike Johanns
Secretary of Agriculture
USDA - Whitten Building
14th & Independence Avenue
Washington, DC 20029

Dear Secretary Johanns:

First, I extend to you congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of Agriculture for the United States Department of Agriculture. You have an awesome task and a great job considering the economic impact agriculture has on the United States and indeed the world.

According to your official biography, you grew up doing chores on a farm in Iowa, which I assume was a "real family farm," and some of the legislation you pushed through when you were Governor of Nebraska was quite progressive, supporting hydroponic vegetable production, value-added agriculture, ethanol production, and other programs that could help family farmers in their efforts to diversify and sustain their operations. This shows you have an understanding of the global economic impacts on small family farmers and the need for farm programs to be available to meet the challenges that are changing the way farms operate.

It will be important to see if in your new role you continue to focus most of the department's resources on supporting large-scale, corporate farming, agri-business enterprises or whether you will bring that progressive agriculture agenda to a national level. Your leadership will be evident if the Department continues and expands special support programs to small family farmers and low-resource farmers so they don't have to seek protection under the "Endangered Species Act." These programs range from

outreach, education and technical assistance support--especially through full funding of the 2501 program -- to special programs that support sustainable agriculture, alternative or niche crops, risk management, and other programs that will keep our Black farmers in business, just as all farmers have been supported over the years. We will also be watchful to see if you will address the issue of hypocrisy of offering loans to Black farmers that they know they will not qualify for because of low commodity prices due to the removal of crop subsidies. These programs are of the utmost importance since in 1997 25% of all Black farmers were over the age of 70, and only 4% were under 35 years of age.

First and foremost, though, it will be important to truly settle the *Pigford v. Johannis (Glickman)* by getting full settlement payments, and debt relief promised, into the hands of all the Black farmers who have been approved under the lawsuit, so we can see whether the current farm policies and programs will truly benefit those Black farmers who are still in business. We have received many promises, but very few payments, and even less debt relief. It will be a true measure of your leadership if those who have been promised settlements under *Pigford v. Johannis* but have had to wait for years, were to receive what they were promised, immediately. It will also be interesting to see if you will work to stop the slaughter of Black farmers by discontinuing the current actions at USDA of taking disaster payments, off farm IRS returns, and program payments, and taking portions of peoples meager social security checks, which farmers need to keep their farms going while navigating the maze of *Pigford v. Johannis (Glickman)*.

BFAA would like to challenge you to send out all payments within six months of taking office to farmers who have already qualified in *Pigford*: that will be a true measure of leadership, and it will be a measure of your commitment to doing the job and serving the American public. If the USDA can get timely relief payments to farmers during a drought, then it will be a measure of your true leadership if payments and debt relief are finally made to those Black farmers who have suffered for decades under financial drought conditions, imposed by the USDA in the first place, or will the USDA keep its identity as being the "last plantation" in this country.

Finally, I challenge you to immediately up date the data on the *Pigford Class* found at www.usda.gov/da/status.htm, which has not been updated since July 9, 2003, **and** to keep it current. Or does this mean that no farmer has been paid since that time?

I look forward to hearing from you and meeting you soon to discuss the issues laid out here as well as others that continue to plague the Black farmers in this country.

Yours for the Survival of Black Farmers,

Gary R. Grant, President

cc: Stephon Bowens
BFAA Board of Directors