

June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022

This letter is to express our full support of the visionary multi-phased pilot project, *ReHemption: The Revitalization of Crops, Community, and Climate Smart Practices*, anchored by the solutions-driven Think ReHemption organization in deep partnership with the 1890 land grant institution, NC A&T State University, Emory University, and the Black Legacy Farmers Network. After decades of governmental and institutional neglect, *ReHemption*, will provide a viable economic pathway for Black legacy farmers to re-enter agriculture utilizing ecological practices to grow industrial hemp and contribute to a suite of value-added revenue streams including hempcrete, a low to carbon negative building material, and wearable textiles.

Moreover, we are impressed with the leadership, work ethic, and community values of Patrick Brown, fourth-generation farmer of Brown Family Farm, a 157-year-old, 70-acre farm committed to regenerative agricultural practices, and owner of Hempfinity, a medicinal CBD online retail company with long-term contracts with various clothing/retail conglomerates—both located in the Hecks Grove community in Warren County, NC. Mr. Brown has been quoted sharing this wisdom, “*My ancestors gave me this opportunity. I can’t let them down by not utilizing this land for good. To use what we already have to expand and produce jobs. To bring economic development to this area, to heal, clothe, and feed our community and give people a second chance at life.*”<sup>1</sup> This wisdom was also passed down to us from our ancestors and it is the very reason why we continue to fight for the return of our ancestral farmlands from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as well as uproot institutional discrimination that persists within USDA, the Office of Civil Rights, the Farm Service Agency county offices, and the county committee system.

This year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the *Pigford v. Glickman (Pigford I)* class action racial discrimination lawsuit filed by Black farmers against the USDA for decades of anti-Black racism in the delivery of loans, subsidies, disaster assistance, and other program benefits. Back then, we were fighting for the return of our farmlands, debt cancellation, federal and state tax relief, access to non-extractive capital to rebuild our farms, and to be treated as Americans—not second-class citizens. Due to the disastrous implementation of the *Pigford I* Consent Decree, most of us were left with contested, unconscionable debt, looming farm foreclosures, and no legal recourse to save our family farms. The \$1B settlement was paid out mostly in \$50,000 cash payments and only 4.8 percent of the settlement went to partial debt cancellation. At the time of the lawsuit, over 1.5 million acres of Black farmland was wrongly held in USDA inventory; yet only one Black farmer, William Miller (deceased) from Marshallville, GA, received his farm back.

Over the last two decades, thousands of Black legacy farmers, too many of our dear friends and mentors, transitioned without any compensation from USDA and/or no farmlands to transfer to their descendants including the most recent transitions of Elders Bernard Bates (Nicodemus, KS); Janie Bell Bemby (Hawkinsville, GA); Vernon Breckenridge (Hennessey, OK); Willie Gordon (Hawkinsville, GA); and Eddie Wise (Whitakers, NC). Until the passage of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021, Black farmers had their tax refunds, social security, disability, and subsidy payments garnished through debt offsets. In a recent interview addressing the white farmers’ lawsuits that halted the debt cancellation program for farmers of color, Gary Grant, President of Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association, reminded Americans, “This wasn’t done to Black farmers under the rebel flag, it was done to Black farmers under the American flag.” The two pivotal sections of the ARPA that would lessen the economic suffering of Black legacy farmers, debt cancellation for farmers of color and direct payments for farmers of color who experienced past and ongoing racial discrimination, have failed to be implemented.

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Band. “Fourth Generation: Warren County son is repurposing family farm.” *The Warren Record*. July 8, 2020, available at [https://www.warrenrecord.com/news/article\\_ee46bcc2-c11b-11ea-9b0c-23092b6b5700.html](https://www.warrenrecord.com/news/article_ee46bcc2-c11b-11ea-9b0c-23092b6b5700.html).

According to the recently published investigative report, “How the Government Helped White Americans Steal Black Farmland,” Nathan Rosenberg et al. conservatively estimate that Black farmers’ loss of land and income amounts to \$326B today. USDA should fully fund *ReHemption*, an innovative proposal that addresses the numerous objectives of the USDA Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities Program and is led by Black farmers who have despite the odds have advanced a promising framework rooted in restorative land justice, community building, and climate mitigation.

Peace, Justice, & Equality,

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