

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 18, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

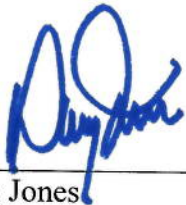
We write to urge you to direct the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to expeditiously implement a key provision in the *Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018* (PL 115-334): Sec. 12615 Eligibility for Operators on Heirs' Property Land to Obtain a Farm Number by Developing Official Directives to be Used by Field Offices. Specifically, this provision ensures fair access to USDA programs for farmers and ranchers operating on land with undivided interests, thereby bolstering rural land value and leveling the playing field for countless minority farmers and ranchers who have been locked out of our federal support programs for far too long.

Heirs' property overwhelmingly impacts African-American land ownership, of which 60 percent is projected to be heirs' property.ⁱ Because a significant portion of U.S. minority-owned rural land was passed down through generations as heirs property, often without a legal title, these farmers and ranchers have been unable to obtain farm numbers and subsequent access to a multitude of USDA programs. The inability to participate in USDA programs has not only contributed to a startling negative trend in African-American land ownership but has also hindered African-American farmers and ranchers from experiencing economic equality. As representatives of states that are largely considered to be ground zero for this issue, timely and efficient implementation is paramount for heirs' property owners.

In addition, Section 12607 of the *Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018* authorized USDA's National Agriculture Statistics Service to study the various ways in which unresolved land tenure issues preclude heirs' property interest holders from successfully operating farms and ranches. Proper implementation of this provision will finally provide us with critical data deciphering the challenges still facing some of our nation's most vulnerable agricultural producers.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter, we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Doug Jones
United States Senator



Tim Scott
United States Senator

ⁱ <https://www.ruralco.org/press-releases/2018/8/31/federation-of-southern-coops-leads-research-and-advocacy-on-heirs-property-august-2-2018>