

Testimony

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United States Senate

**Agriculture Nutrition & Forestry
Committee**

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By

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**REPORT ON THE STATE OF CIVIL RIGHTS
AT THE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**



**Prepared For Secretary Dan Glickman
by the
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I. Overview

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Coalition of Minority Employees (The Coalition) was founded in 1994. A multi-racial and multi-cultural organization, its primary mission is to work toward the eradication of historical and systemic discrimination at USDA, identify issues/concerns and to recommend solutions. The Coalition's goal is to eradicate barriers to equality found in employment and program delivery. Issues of concern include discrimination, hostile environments and reprisals against employees; lack of management accountability; mismanagement in program delivery; and glass ceilings for people of color, women, persons with disabilities and others.

USDA continues living up to its reputation as a bastion of **racism and sexism**, guilty of wholesale reprisal and discrimination. It embodies the "slave-owner" mentality and is aptly called, "**The Last Plantation.**" USDA officials try to subjugate employees by manipulating the work environment, denying promotions and inflicting physical and emotional pain. These supervisors deal with USDA employees disparately and capriciously and are rarely held accountable for the misery they inflict on others. Solutions have been proposed. However, the culture, behavior and attitudes have not changed. To date, USDA continues its pervasive acts of reprisal, intimidation and hostile environment for those who seek justice.

Report after report has been authored by USDA officials and others documenting USDA's discriminatory culture: the Blue Ribbon Task Force, 1996; the D.J. Miller Report, 1996; the USDA Civil Rights Action Team (CRAT), 1997; the CRAT Listening Sessions, 1997; the USDA Civil Rights Implementation Team (CRIT); USDA/Coalition sponsored seminar, "Race and Diversity in the Workplace and America," 1998; the NAACP Federal Sector Task Force Interim Report, "Discrimination in the Federal Government," 1998; the NAACP Federal Sector Task Force Interim Report, "Employment Discrimination and Abuses in the Federal Workplace, Practices, Patterns, Issues and Findings", January 2000; U.S. Civil Rights Commission Reports and many others. In March 2000, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) published a report describing USDA's civil rights programs, policies and practices as ineffective, chaotic and poorly administered. USDA "leaders" write "reports" to deceive others into believing that change is imminent, but are in fact, maintaining the "status quo."

USDA has failed miserably in its responsibility to its customers and employees. At the 1997 CRAT Listening Sessions, Black farmers and USDA employees expressed concerns regarding the lack of diversity. Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Persons with Disabilities, women and others reported that those trying to use USDA's EEO process were retaliated against. **The charges communicated in 1997 are identical to the charges conveyed in 2000—harassment, fear, reprisal, and intimidation.** Nothing has changed. The missing ingredient for bringing about lasting institutional change at USDA is **ACCOUNTABILITY.**

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2000, three years after Secretary Glickman's "Listening Sessions" employees and customers still suffer due to:

- **Disparate Treatment** - USDA's personnel rules, regulations, and policies are applied differently for women and minority employees; and programs are delivered inequitably to minority customers.
- **Lack of Career Growth** - Employees are refused permanent positions, developmental assignments, training and awards.
- **Retaliation for employees filing Complaints** - Multiple complaints are often filed because of reprisal.

- **Glass Ceilings** - Promotions are denied to minorities with specialized degrees or educational achievements.
- **Hostile Work Environments.**
- **Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault.**
- **Widespread Nepotism and Favoritism;** and
- **Few Accommodations for Employees with Disabilities** - Lack of Reasonable Accommodations prevents competent employees from carrying out and completing assignments.

II. State of Civil Rights

A. EMPLOYEE COMPLAINTS

Important EEO data being reported to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and Congress is skewed to misrepresent the true state of USDA civil rights.

Since USDA began its civil rights improvement plan, the number of cases filed has increased. From October 1999 - May 2000, cases increased by 10 percent. Complaints are being filed faster than the Civil Rights Office can handle them.

From FY 1996 to FY 1999 there was a 48 percent increase in formal complaints filed.

Complainant's cases languish in the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) for years. USDA refuses to resolve individual complaints. Complainants are denied Alternative Dispute Resolution, despite a mandate by the Secretary to resolve complaints in the early stages of the process.

B. CLASS ACTION COMPLAINTS

USDA refuses to resolve class action complaints. In FY 1999 there were 15 class action complaints. To date USDA has approximately 20 class action complaints pending including:

Hispanic - The California class action *Brionez v. Glickman*, has been active for 10+ years with no resolution. Members of the Forest Service-wide Hispanic Class (*Sedillo v. Glickman*) filed in 1999, have attempted to initiate dialogue with the Department but have been refused.

Gender - The California class action *Donnelly/O'Connor v. Glickman* has been active for 6+ years. After 3 years of negotiations USDA and plaintiffs reached settlement in September, 2000.

African American - The USDA African American Class, *Spencer v. Glickman* was filed in May 1999. USDA has tried to derail the Class, introduced incorrect information and has tried to manipulate existing and potential class members. A new class action has been filed (*Reed v. Glickman*), due to USDA deliberately delaying action on African American employees' formal complaints - backlash from the Spencer Class.

On July 10, 2000, Administrative Judge Rebecca L. Dickinson issued an order to produce complaint files for *Reed v. Glickman*, including reports of investigation. The Agency responded on July 21, 2000, stating that the cases had been held in abeyance because they were subsumed in a class complaint, *Spencer v. USDA*. On August 24, 2000, Judge Dickinson issued a response to the Agency. The Prehearing Order stated, "The Agency is incorrect that this is the proper procedure. Individual complaints that may possibly be subsumed in a class case should not be held in abeyance but should continue to be investigated." The Agency was ordered to investigate the cited complaints and produce a report to Judge Dickinson and the complainant within forty-five days.

Meaningful dialogue must begin for all classes. In order to settle the numerous class action complaints at USDA, the Department and Office of the General Counsel (OGC) must agree to come to the table.

C. DYSFUNCTIONAL COMPLAINT PROCESS

Because of USDA's lack of effective civil rights leadership, employees and customers filing EEO complaints endure an extremely chaotic system.

- **Lack of Responsiveness** - USDA's Office of Civil Rights - No response calls or letters regarding status of cases.
- **Sloppy Record Keeping** - Cases are misplaced and sometimes lost. Data and information are misreported to give the appearance of improvement.
- **Non-Compliance with Settlement Agreements** - Appeals can go on for years.
- **Time Limits** - Complainants must meet time limits. Failure by one day results in cases being dismissed. Yet, employees wait years to hear anything about their cases. *USDA rarely meets deadlines and is not penalized for tardiness.*
- **Systemic Issues Not Addressed** - USDA settles some complaints but is not interested in dealing with the cause of the problems. OCR's only motivation is getting cases off the books, and legitimate issues of discrimination remain unaddressed.

D. ACTS OF HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

Egregious incidents of racism and sexism at USDA remain uninvestigated or subject to minimal inquiry. Charges continue to be ignored. Perpetrators are not held accountable. USDA questions the existence of many of these events. Some refuse to admit that discrimination is alive and well at USDA!

Racist and Sexist Incidents

- "Hangman's Nooses" have been displayed on USDA property. Employees and customers are victims of racial slurs and foul language.
- Allegations filed stating that one of the highest political appointees in the Clinton Administration at USDA (a Black female) was called "Wonder Monkey" and "Jungle Bunny" by top management employees. No disciplinary action has been taken to date!
- NAACP - "NOW APES ARE CALLED PEOPLE" written on USDA headquarters bathroom walls.

- A USDA employee (found guilty of discrimination against Black farmers) was given only a one day suspension for bringing a gun to work on government property.
- Not one employee found to have engaged in discriminatory practices or named as a discriminating official has been punished as a result of the recent Black Farmer Class Action Settlement.
- Allegations that evidence was purged from files to cover-up a host of sexual harassment charges brought against a former USDA Civil Rights Director.
- A woman was asked to perform indecent sex acts by her supervisor.
- A woman lost her unborn child due to a hostile environment.
- A woman had salad dressing spread on her breasts.
- A woman's underwear was displayed by male coworkers on a moving vehicle.
- Women have suffered mental breakdowns, lost their homes and children.
- Women have been physically assaulted, stalked and threatened.

E. ACCOUNTABILITY

There is a lack of **ACCOUNTABILITY** for managers and employees who perpetuate harassment, discrimination and reprisal. USDA touts its **ACCOUNTABILITY** record of 13 employees removed for discriminatory actions. This is a dismal figure compared to the thousands of complaints filed. Additionally, all 13 employees removed were discharged on the basis of sexual harassment, *completely disregarding the discrimination against thousands of Black farmers and employee cases classified by race and other bases.*

LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY

- USDA continues to violate civil rights laws, i.e., Titles VI and VII and does not hold those persons found guilty of discrimination **ACCOUNTABILITY**.
- USDA's **ACCOUNTABILITY** Policy Implementation Document was purposely stalled for over a year by top officials.
- USDA's April 2000 report entitled, "Commitment to Progress" is a "Document of Deception."
- Increased reprisal, retaliation and hostile work environment continues and goes unchecked by USDA.

III. The Coalition's Actions

The Coalition has attempted to work with USDA officials to eradicate the systemic discrimination in the USDA. The Coalition participated in former Secretary Espy's Blue Ribbon Task Force and other major civil rights initiatives. Coalition members attended Listening Sessions and members assisted in developing the CRAT report. History was made when USDA and The Coalition worked together in cooperation and partnership to present the seminar, *"Race and Diversity in the Workplace and America."* USDA

officials, employees and customers came together to explore innovative approaches to civil rights issues. The Coalition has resolved individual and class action EEO complaints. The Coalition has been vigilant for the past six years in identifying civil rights issues and providing solutions. Despite The Coalition's actions, little progress has been made to reduce complaints of discrimination and widespread reprisal against those who speak out against discrimination.

A. THE COALITION SOUGHT EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE

The lack of civil rights improvement forced The Coalition to seek assistance from external resources.

1. FIRST CONGRESSIONAL MEETING

During the week of **January 12, 2000**, Coalition advisors, members, supporters, and USDA class agents traveled to Washington, D.C. *The objective of the visit was to meet with congressional representatives to obtain support and assistance, and to resolve widespread civil rights violations in USDA.* The Coalition met with staffers representing Senators Charles Robb (D, VA), Conrad Burns (R, MT), John McCain (R, AZ), and congressional representatives, Patrick Kennedy (D, RI), Earl Hilliard (D, AL), Maxine Waters (D, CA), James Clyburn (D, SC), John Lewis (D, GA), Eva Clayton (D, NC), Elijah Cummings (D, NC), Joe Skeen (R, NM), the Congressional Black Caucus, and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. Leroy Warren, Jr. of the NAACP and John Boyd of the National Black Farmers Association attended some of the meetings in support of The Coalition's efforts. That same week, Coalition members participated in the NAACP's Federal Sector Task Force Summit.

The Coalition also requested to meet with the Secretary, but the request was denied.

For six months after the congressional visit, no progress was made by USDA toward resolving individual or class action complaints. The **Accountability Policy** was not released. Class Agents continued to be victims of retaliation. Secretary Glickman's report, "Commitment to Progress" was seen by many as an "Act of Deception." The Coalition decided to take a proactive stance to gain attention to USDA civil rights violations and again, asked Congress for assistance.

2. SECOND CONGRESSIONAL MEETING

During the week of **June 19 through June 23, 2000**, The Coalition members traveled again to Washington, D.C.

On **June 20, 2000**, Coalition presidents, advisors and supporters met with senators, congressional representatives and their aides to discuss the issues of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination and reprisal at USDA. The Coalition's objective was to update the senators and congressional representatives on the continuing systemic problems giving rise to new civil rights complaints and preventing the resolution of existing complaints. Additionally, The Coalition requested congressional support and assistance to correct USDA's dysfunctional civil rights administration and provide much needed oversight.

The Coalition delegation met with Senators Charles Robb (D, VA), Barbara Boxer, (D, CA), congressional representatives Patsy Mink (D, HI), Joe Skeen (R, NM), Heather Wilson (R, NM), staffers Mason Williams and Laura Chaney representing Senator Mitch McConnell (R, KY), and Mark Edwards representing Senator Bingaman.

The Coalition's delegation included Lawrence Lucas, The Coalition President; Allen Spencer, lead class agent, *Spencer v. Glickman*; Joe Sedillo, Southwest chapter president and lead class agent, *Sedillo v. Glickman*; Lesa L. Donnelly, CA chapter president and lead class agent, *Donnelly/O'Connor v. Glickman*; Cathy Peralta-Messerschmitt, Coalition legislative advisor; Barbara Reed, lead class agent, *Reed v. Glickman*; Susan Powell, Coalition Law Enforcement and Investigations advisor; and Dennis Montoya, co-counsel for *Sedillo v. Glickman*. Howard Wallace and Steve Scott of the Equal Employment Opportunity Network joined the group later in the day. Arun Basu, *Basu v. Glickman*, and Farouk Sait joined the group at Congresswoman Patsy Mink's office.

A packet of information was provided to the Senators, Congressional Representatives and their staffers. The packet included information on harassment, discrimination and reprisal at USDA; a press release on discrimination issues at USDA; EEO data that refutes the Secretary's Accomplishment Report; letters from Senator Robb and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus to Secretary Glickman; media articles on civil rights issues at USDA; and affidavits from abused employees.

Issues Discussed

- **Lack of Accountability at USDA.**
 - The policy governing penalties for those who discriminate has been held up in the Secretary's office.
 - Officials have not been held accountable for resolving class actions and individual complaints.
 - Racist and sexist behaviors continue unabated with no one punished. Often "disciplinary promotions" are provided to the abusers.
 - Millions of taxpayer dollars have been wasted because of dysfunctional EEO processes and failure to remedy complaints.
 - Reprisal against employees who speak up or file complaints is rampant. Officials who retaliate do not receive disciplinary action.

- **USDA Office of Civil Rights Has Been Virtually Shut Down.**
 - Cases are not being processed.
 - The Office of the Inspector General report recommendations have not been implemented.
 - The lack of emphasis on civil rights is shown by the failure to place competent and qualified personnel in OCR at the Department level. As an example, there have been approximately eighteen civil rights directors in the last several years. Job vacancies in the Civil Rights Office that have been recommended and funded by Congress have not been filled.
 - The Secretary's Accomplishment Report on civil rights was a misleading document that belies the fact there have been very few accomplishments in civil rights.

- **Backlog Complaints of Harassment, Discrimination and Reprisal.**
 - There are approximately 20 class action complaints filed in the USDA.
 - The number of formal complaints filed has increased since the Civil Rights Action Team.
 - USDA Civil Rights and the OGC refuse to come to the table to resolve the complaints.

- **USDA Office of General Counsel's Control of Civil Rights Policy.**
 - Arbitrary and capricious application of civil rights laws and policies prevents expeditious resolution of class complaints and individual complaints.

- **The Secretary's Civil Rights Action Team Report Recommendations Have Not Been Fully Implemented.**
 - There has been no change in the organizational structure, i.e. no separation of Civil Rights and Human Resources functions.
 - There is still inaccurate civil rights report processing and data tracking.
 - An accountability policy for harassment, discrimination and reprisal has not been implemented.

Request for Assistance

The Coalition asked the Members of Congress and/or their staff to:

- Contact Senator Lugar and request congressional hearings on employment discrimination and employee abuses in USDA.
- Sign a letter of support asking that USDA come to the table to resolve class complaints and individual complaints.
- Support Congressional Oversight of Civil Rights and Human Resources administration at USDA.
- Support the legislative package introduced by Representative Eva Clayton, and Representative Bennie Thompson. These bills are The USDA Accountability and Equity Act of 2000; The Small Farmers Civil Rights Protection Act of 2000; and the National Employment Dispute Resolution Act of 2000. Additionally the legislation from Senator Conrad Burns was discussed and supported.
- Request that President Clinton meet with The Coalition to discuss issues of widespread discrimination at USDA and to gain his support of the Coalition's request for oversight.

Congressional Response

There was a good understanding of the issues of racism, sexism and reprisal. Some had discussed discrimination issues with Secretary Glickman in the past.

There was general support for congressional hearings and a commitment to contact Senator Lugar to request congressional oversight.

The Coalition was asked to provide a memo outlining structural changes for Senator Bingaman.

There was interest in halting the waste of taxpayer dollars due to USDA's failure to resolve complaints.

One representative stated that the federal government should set an example for the rest of the country. She felt that federal employees should be able to trust that the system will not be used against them.

There was concern about the lack of **ACCOUNTABILITY** in USDA and disagreement with USDA's practice of reassigning the victim to another location in lieu of halting the discrimination. It was recommended that *The Coalition provide President Clinton with a Bill of Particulars on issues of discrimination and the failure to correct the problem.*

Senator Robb and Congresswoman Mink enthusiastically supported the idea of The Coalition meeting with President Clinton. Both agreed to work toward that goal.

3. PRESS CONFERENCE AND MEDIA ATTENTION

On **June 21, 2000**, The Coalition held a press conference on the U.S. Capitol grounds. In attendance was a large group of Coalition members, attorneys, class members, and supporters from almost all of the USDA employee resource groups. Congressional representatives spoke on behalf of The Coalition. Kim Anderson, representing Senator Chuck Robb and Congresswoman Patsy Mink gave eloquent presentations. They pledged full support for a meeting between The Coalition and President Clinton.

On **June 22, 2000**, an article was published in the Washington Post titled, "*USDA Workers: Bias Persists.*" The article was subtitled, "*Minority Employees Seek Meeting with Clinton.*" Lawrence Lucas was quoted, "There is continued widespread discrimination at USDA. We demand that President Clinton meet with The Coalition to resolve this." See article in appendix.

B. THE COALITION MEETS WITH USDA OFFICIALS

1. SUB CABINET MEETINGS

At the request of Secretary Glickman, on **June 21, 2000**, The Coalition met with the Secretary's staff and others.

USDA Attendees:

Clyde Williams, Chief of Staff, Secretary's Office; Paul Fiddick, Assistant Secretary for Administration; Charlie Rawls, General Counsel; Rosalind Gray, Director, Civil Rights; Dr. Catherine Woteki, Under Secretary, Food Safety; Miley Gonzalez, Under Secretary, Research, Education and Economics; Dr. Enrique Figueroa, Deputy Under Secretary, Marketing and Regulatory Program; Inga Smulkstys, Deputy Under Secretary, Rural Development; Kevin Kennedy and Jeremy Anderson representing Anne Kennedy-Keys, Deputy Under Secretary, Natural Resources and Environment. No Farm Service Agency representatives attended the meeting.

Coalition Attendees:

Lawrence Lucas, Allen Spencer, Cathy Peralta-Messerschmitt, Joe Sedillo, Arun Basu, Lesa L. Donnelly, Barbara Reed, Susan Powell, Charles Sims, Ivory Walker, Brad Yamauchi, attorney, Minami, Lew and Tamaki, LLP; Alex Talmadge, Jr., attorney at law.

Coalition President Lawrence Lucas opened discussion by thanking Secretary Glickman for responding to The Coalition's request to meet with top USDA officials. Mr. Lucas discussed the events of the week with the attendees, including the previous day spent on Capitol Hill. *Mr. Lucas informed the group that Senator Chuck Robb and Congresswoman Patsy Mink would be making a request to President Clinton to meet with The Coalition.*

Mr. Lucas stated that President Clinton is sensitive to civil rights, however, the attitude of USDA bureaucrats and political appointees is not consistent with President Clinton. This is manifested by the influx of discrimination cases, the benign neglect of employees and the lack of **accountability**. Mr. Lucas identified the Black Farmers' lawsuit and settlement as an example of the lack of accountability for discriminating officials. *Despite over a billion dollars for the Black Farmers' settlement, not one USDA employee has been held accountable.*

The Blue Ribbon Task Force Report, the Civil Rights Action Team and Civil Rights Implementation Team, the recent Office of Inspector General reports and other reports have identified the problems and solutions, however, the Office of Civil Rights has not acted. **The Office of Civil Rights is dysfunctional and complaints are not being processed.** Despite the millions of dollars provided to the Office of Civil Rights, it is worse off now than it was in 1995.

Mr. Lucas described the Class Agents and advisors as loyal employees who have been forced to take action on discrimination and reprisal issues because the USDA would not do so. Mr. Lucas told the officials present, "It is you all who have made them advocates."

Issues Addressed by Mr. Lucas

- **Accountability for Managers is Lacking.**
Managers who harass, discriminate and retaliate are being given "disciplinary promotions" rather than being held accountable for their actions. [*A recent CA Forest Service disciplinary promotion situation was provided as an example.*]
- **The Accountability Policy.**
The Accountability Policy has been sitting in the Secretary's office for over a year. This is an example of the arrogance against our people. This policy needs to be released and implemented immediately.
- **The Office of General Counsel.**
The predecessor to Charlie Rawls, OGC Director, was hostile and insensitive to Civil Rights. It is the same now. OGC will not come to the table to resolve cases, i.e. the Black Farmers' complaints and more recent employee class complaints. This is arrogant and unacceptable. Secretary Glickman said to settle the cases, OGC said "NO".
- **Outreach Programs.**
The Forest Service Hispanic/Asian outreach programs were approved and funded. The Agency has since dismantled the programs. The programs should be implemented.

USDA officials and The Coalition members spent a considerable amount of time discussing issues. The Coalition members are cautiously optimistic that action will occur from this meeting. See appendix for detailed comments.

2. USDA FOREST SERVICE MEETING

On **June 22, 2000**, Coalition members met with Hilda Diaz-Soltero, Associate Chief for the Forest Service. Ms. Diaz-Soltero initially refused to meet with the group and wanted to only meet with Lawrence Lucas. She relented when Mr. Lucas asked her to contact the office of Anne Kennedy-Keys, Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources. The group discussed Law Enforcement and Investigation issues, the Civil Rights/Human Resources structure, program delivery of Hispanic and Asian programs, disciplinary promotions in the Forest Service, reprisal against complainants, and Region 3 and Region 5 management officials' refusal to enter into mediation and settle complaints. Ms. Diaz-Soltero advised she would relay the information to Deputy Chief Phil Janik. The Coalition requested follow-up on the issues.

3. DISCUSSION WITH SECRETARY GLICKMAN

On **June 23, 2000**, Lawrence Lucas spoke with Secretary Glickman. Mr. Lucas and the Secretary discussed events of the past week and The Coalition's desire to work in partnership with the USDA to resolve the civil rights problems. Mr. Lucas and Secretary Glickman agreed they should meet on a month-to-month basis to discuss progress. As of September, the Secretary's office has not scheduled one meeting.

IV. Secretary Glickman's Response

On **June 29, 2000**, Secretary Glickman called USDA employees together to speak about the state of civil rights at USDA. His speech was entitled, "Civil Rights 2000: A Continuing Journey." Secretary Glickman spoke of civil rights as a human relations issue. The Secretary announced several actions "to further enhance our ability to enforce civil rights and improve human relations." Many of the actions have been emphasized by the Secretary in the past with little-to-no results.

V. Solutions

Secretary Glickman stated on June 29, 2000,

"We also understand that there are those who want to change things, who want to solve these problems, whose hearts are in the right place, but they don't know how. We must show each other the way."

The Coalition is a solution-oriented employee advocacy group. The Coalition has offered to participate in problem solving in the past and continues to believe we can assist Secretary Glickman with his vision of making USDA "The People's Department." **It is time for the Secretary to include The Coalition in his circle of advisors.**

Establish an Independent Monitoring Team. The Secretary's new action items (June 29, 2000,) lack a compliance mechanism or monitoring process. For example, it is not a new direction to evaluate managers' performance under civil rights and human relations. The problem in the past has been no monitoring for compliance of this directive. Additionally, Secretary Glickman's "zero tolerance for harassment and reprisal" has not been enforced due to a lack of monitoring. A Monitoring Team (**consisting of Class Agents and Coalition employees from around the United States**) will assist the Secretary in monitoring, evaluating and assessing real progress.

Charter The Coalition Advisory Team to provide the Secretary with solutions to the identified problems such as escalation of individual and class action complaints, civil rights organizational structure and processes, reprisal issues, and accountability.

Place The Coalition Advisory Team members on the newly established advisory committees and the Diversity Council. Coalition members have been working within the civil rights arena for a number of years. They work in the field with USDA employees and are knowledgeable and skilled in civil rights problems and problem-solving.

The USDA Office of General Counsel must be ordered to cease its interference with settlements of individual and class action complaints. Individual and class action complaints should be expeditiously resolved, especially the African American cases being held in abeyance. There is a need to correct the institutional causes that gave rise to these complaints.

A White House Oversight Committee should be appointed for the duration of this Administration. The Oversight Committee will monitor civil rights administration, to include the accountability process, insuring that those who discriminate are held accountable. At minimum, a Congressional Oversight committee should be appointed for USDA.

The Office of Civil Rights should answer directly to the Secretary, not to the Assistant Secretary of Administration. The present system needs to be restructured to assure Human Resources (Personnel) does not have the oversight/control of USDA Civil Rights.

USDA must fill the approximately 42 vacant positions in the Office of Civil Rights.

Fully implement the Civil Rights Action Team and Office of Inspector General recommendations to improve civil rights.

Re-establish an Accountability Unit that is independent of the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Human Resources.

Examine the rating system of the Agencies in regard to Civil Rights. Currently there is a flaw with the ratings due to political appointees subverting the ratings issued by the Office of Civil Rights and The Coalition.

Hispanic program outreach should get approvals from the Secretary's Office for Forest Service implementation.

Changes must be made within the next 30 days. If change does not occur, The Coalition will request removal of individuals creating historical and immediate problems at USDA.

Action must be taken now! Secretary Glickman must not wait to see if his June 29, 2000 action items will resolve the severe civil rights problems in the USDA. *As time passes employees continue to work in hostile environments. The consequences - more complaints are filed, class action lawsuits are filed, more taxpayer dollars are wasted, additional external resources become involved and the USDA continues its spiral downward.* With the right solutions and **Accountability** a cultural change will occur. The Coalition will continue in its efforts to be a part of the solution.

On **October 11, 2000**, The Coalition will hold a Press Conference at The White House on Pennsylvania Avenue as a **show of solidarity against continued oppression of civil rights at USDA**. Attendees will include Coalition chapter presidents and members, class agents, employee groups, unions, and USDA employees and customers. The theme, "**Walk in Our Shoes**", will convey the seriousness of the pain and suffering in USDA around the nation. USDA employees, customers and "**Silent Victims**", (i.e. their husbands, wives and children) from all over America have been encouraged to send shoes to the Press Conference to cry out to the conscience of the American people.

Exposing discrimination in our Federal Government is essential for maintaining a free and democratic society. The diversity in our country compels us to remember that disregard for people based on race, religion, sex, nationality, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, etc. has led to disastrous consequences. The historical discrimination against Black farmers and USDA employees has become a national disgrace for America and the world.

The Coalition and its supporters on The Hill have requested a meeting with President Clinton to discuss the "State of Civil Rights at USDA." It is our hope that President Clinton and the Congress will step in and take charge of civil rights at USDA and hold officials ACCOUNTABLE for implementing change.

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