

**Opening Statement of Dr. Jewel H. Bronaugh Before the Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
April 22, 2021**

Thank you, Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman and members of this Committee. I thank Secretary Vilsack for all of his support, and thank you Senator Warner for your warm introduction. First and foremost, thank you for this opportunity. I am here today with the support of my loving husband, Cleavon, a retired U.S. Army veteran, our beautiful children, my parents—two teachers who raised me to become an educator—and so many role models, including Virginia State Secretary for Agriculture and Forestry Bettina Ring, and the farmers, ranchers, and landowners I work for each day.

Happy Earth Day, as we recognize 51 years of effort to protect our environment and restore our earth. I am honored to have been nominated by President Biden to serve as the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture at USDA. I know that, if confirmed, I will be the first Black woman and woman of color to serve as Deputy Secretary. As such, I fully understand the historic nature of this confirmation, along with the responsibilities of my service in this role. I will join thousands of dedicated civil servants at USDA who work in every state and 100 countries around the world. I know from experience how their work touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. I value their work and identify with their selfless commitment.

My parents taught me humility and they encouraged me to treat others with dignity. I went into education because of my parents, but I focused on agriculture because I wanted to inspire young people to build better communities through food and nutrition. I am proud of my career in Cooperative Extension where I was first inspired by young people in 4-H, getting to know the families and communities across Virginia who produced our food, feed, fiber, and fuel. This led to the honor of serving as dean of the College of Agriculture at Virginia State University, where many of my students were first generation college students from rural communities. I am very proud of those men and women who have become outstanding leaders in their fields.

In 2015, Secretary Vilsack appointed me to serve as State Executive Director for the Farm Service Agency, where I led the implementation of Farm Bill programs and personally visited the 41 field offices within my first year of service to learn more about how programs affected farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners. Soon thereafter, I received the appointment as the 16th Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. I was proud to work with other state Commissioners, Directors and Secretaries to prioritize PPE for farmers and farm workers, advocate for federal and state resources to support dairy farmers and poultry producers, expand opportunities for small and mid-sized farmers and ranchers to obtain infrastructure and processing capabilities, and develop strategies to meet environmental and water quality goals for the Chesapeake Bay.

Throughout all these opportunities, it has been personal interactions with farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners that I have found deeply rewarding. I have learned their struggles. I have been in their homes and listened to aging mothers express fear of losing the family farm because the children wanted to pursue careers outside of farming. I spent time with black farmers so inundated with stress resulting from years of farm debt that they gave up hope. I have spoken

with Hispanic workers who, while working someone else's land, fully realized their dream of owning their own farm. And I personally experienced the tears of multi-generational dairy farmers given no other choice but to sell their dairy herd and the farm that had been in the family for 4 generations. What I took away from each experience is the importance not only of listening—but hearing what people are saying beneath the emotion.

What motivates and inspires me is that with all the challenges our farmers and ranchers face today, I have never met one who is not eternally optimistic. Throughout the pandemic I spoke with one agricultural producer after another who somehow found ways to realign their operation to meet the demands of an altered food supply chain. They only required help to provide a voice and assist them in obtaining resources that they needed for financial survival. If America's farmers and ranchers can find a way to stay positive and committed to their work, then I am obligated to use my voice to act—and if confirmed do what I can to provide help and assistance to build our economy back stronger.

Each time I speak with Secretary Vilsack, we discuss equity. I share the Secretary's commitment to take bold action and work with this Committee to address discrimination in all its forms across USDA. In 1862, Abraham Lincoln established USDA. In 1864, he called USDA "The People's Department." I believe it should be just that: the Department for *all* people.

I am here before you today to commit that, if confirmed, I will be a champion for all farmers, producers, families, and rural communities who rely on USDA. I will remain committed to helping lead a Department that serves all Americans equally. I am grateful for your time and welcome any questions you may have. Thank you.