

## Black farmers to receive \$5 billion in COVID relief bill: '400 years past due'

*Exclusive: John Boyd, head of the National Farmer's Association, says billions are needed to revive the industry*

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President Biden's allocation of \$5 billion dollars in the [American Rescue Plan](#) (ARP) has Republican Senator **Lindsey Graham** of South Carolina upset. Well, the more accurate term for his anger is that he is having a temper tantrum about the sum of money earmarked for Black Farmers to help them survive.

Overall, \$10.4 billion is earmarked for the nation's farmers and half of that is going to Black farmers. **John Boyd**, head of the **National Black Farmers Association**, says those billions are needed to help sustain and revive a dying industry. Boyd acknowledges, " we're quite frankly, faced with extinction. If we can't get a new generation of young people involved in agriculture and farming, Blacks and other farmers of color into farming, you won't see it."



*(Photo by Dan Kitwood/Getty Images)*

Counting the number of Black farmers in this nation currently, he says "forty-six thousand Black farmers are left in this country according to the U.S. Census. We're down from one million farm families at the turn of the century. And we were killing 20 million acres of land. We're down to about four and a half million acres of land."

While Senator Graham is [vocal](#) about his displeasure for the earmark calling it reparations for Black farmers, **John Hope Bryant**, the founder and head of **Operation Hope**, says this is “a long time in coming and over 400 years past due. You can’t compare it to White farmers because Black farmers were the only ones enslaved. This is not just about COVID but it is the right thing to do.”

Black farmers had their share of financial ruin and devastation at the hands of the U.S. government. During the 1990’s, Black farmers filed a lawsuit against the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for discrimination in the loan program. Then-President **Bill Clinton** authorized the payment for the discriminatory practices for the Black farmers.

However, the full restitution was not paid until the Obama presidency.



*Workers pick tomatoes at a farm owned and operated by Pacific Tomato Growers on February 19, 2021 in Immokalee, Florida. The workers, who are in the country on an agricultural visa, are mostly from Mexico. (Photo by Spencer Platt/Getty Images)*

The ARP legislation provides another \$1 billion fund to support the USDA to end systemic racism, provide technical and legal assistance to agricultural communities of color, and fund under-resourced programs that will shape the future for farmers and communities of color.

USDA’s Senior Advisor of Racial Equity **Dewayne Goldmon** says the money targeted for the USDA is meaningful “debt relief” for farmers that have been “long underserved.” According to Goldmon, it serves as an attempt to achieve equity.

The ARP language on how debt relief will be enacted by the USDA for the Black farmers is still being worked on.

However, Goldmon, an Arkansas farmer himself, reveals from a farmer’s perspective, “farming is a very capital-intensive profession.” Most farmers impacted by the ARP will have access to three or four different types of loans from the USDA. This plan focuses on farmers who have operating loans, equipment loans and farm ownership loans.

Goldman believes if this is done correctly, it “should make black farmers sustainable producers.”

The \$1 billion fund for the USDA will include:

- Grants and loans to improve land access & address heirs’ property issues;
- Support for one or more legal centers focused on agricultural legal issues of farmers of color;
- Pilot projects that focus on land acquisition, financial planning, technical assistance, and credit;
- A racial equity commission and related activities to address systemic racism across USDA;
- Support for research, education, and extension at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other institutions of higher education that historically serve communities of color;
- Scholarships at 1890’s land grant universities and for indigenous students attending land grant institutions;
- Outreach, mediation, financial training, capacity building training, cooperative development training and support, and other technical assistance; and
- Assistance to farmers, ranchers, or forest landowners of color that are former farm loan borrowers and suffered related adverse actions, or past discrimination or bias