

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 233

Reps. Cynthia Johnson, Love, Brixie and Hoadley offered the following resolution:

1 A resolution to declare February 23-28, 2020, as Black Farmers
2 Awareness Week in the state of Michigan.

3 Whereas, Since the antebellum period, black farmers in
4 Michigan have fought continuously to acquire self-determination of
5 their lives, and that of their families, through the attainment,
6 retention and cultivation of farmland; and

7 Whereas, By 1920, almost one million, or 14.3%, of the
8 nation's farmers were black and they owned nearly 16 million acres
9 of farmland; and

10 Whereas, By 1997, the number of the nation's black farmers hit
11 an all-time low when the census revealed that only 18,541 were left



1 and they comprised only 1% of the total number of farmers in the
2 country; and

3 Whereas, The huge number of economic and racially-
4 discriminatory obstacles placed in their paths, including the
5 untimely delivery of operating loans, insufficient information
6 about program availability, and racist treatment in many United
7 States Department of Agriculture (USDA) offices, has resulted in
8 the declination of their numbers at a rate nearly three times that
9 of white farmers and the loss of more than 50% of black-owned
10 farmland since 1910; and

11 Whereas, A collaborative, grassroots efforts of black farmers,
12 their families, legal teams, and social justice organizations
13 finally sued the USDA for their racially discriminatory policies
14 and practices, and enjoyed victory in 1997 when they received \$__
15 billion in damages after winning the class-action lawsuit *Timothy*
16 *Pigford et al., v Dan Glickman*, resulting in what was then the
17 largest class-action civil rights settlement in the history of the
18 country; and

19 Whereas, During the 10 years it took to complete this lawsuit,
20 many black farmers lost their land, homes, livelihood, health, and
21 hope in their government, which has had a devastating and negative
22 impact on; and

23 Whereas, When the loss of farmland became more noticeable,
24 black farmers and civil rights activists initiated action to stave
25 the land loss by acquiring land to farm collectively as a means of
26 reducing food insecurity in black communities, striving toward food
27 sovereignty, controlling the means of production and distribution
28 of food, and furthering the economic development of blacks; and

29 Whereas, There has been a resurgence of black farmers in

1 Michigan. Since 2002, the number of black farm operators has
2 increased from 243 to 356, accounting for 0.5% of the farm
3 operators in Michigan; and

4 Whereas, Michigan's rural black farmers have worked closely
5 with black urban growers to establish farms in cities like Detroit
6 and Flint and are united around the common issues of food
7 sovereignty and self-empowerment through food production; now,
8 therefore, be it

9 Resolved by the House of Representatives, That the members of
10 this legislative body declare February 23-28, 2020, as Black
11 Farmers Awareness Week in the state of Michigan. We recognize the
12 trials, tribulations and accomplishments of Michigan's black
13 farmers and urge the citizenry to learn more about the richness of
14 their history and the fight to attain food security and food
15 sovereignty in Michigan's underserved communities.