

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IN FARM PROGRAMS

Excerpts from

**An Appraisal of Services Rendered
by Agencies of
the United States Department of Agriculture**



U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

John A. Hannah, Chairman
Eugene Patterson, Vice Chairman
Frankie M. Freeman
Erwin N. Griswold
Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.
Robert S. Rankin

William L. Taylor, Staff Director-designate

The United States Commission on Civil Rights is a temporary, independent, bipartisan agency established by the Congress in 1957 to:

- Investigate complaints alleging that citizens are being deprived of their right to vote by reason of their race, color, religion, or national origin;
- Study and collect information concerning legal developments constituting a denial of equal protection of the laws under the Constitution;
- Appraise Federal laws and policies with respect to equal protection of the laws;
- Serve as a national clearinghouse for civil rights information;
- Investigate allegations of vote fraud; and
- Submit interim reports and a final and comprehensive report of its activities, findings, and recommendations to the President and the Congress.

CONCLUSIONS

For decades the general economic, social, and cultural position of the southern Negro farmer and rural resident in relation to his white neighbor has steadily worsened. Whether measured in terms of value of products sold, level of living, land and home ownership, or schooling, most of the 4.7 million Negroes living in southern rural areas are seriously disadvantaged when compared with rural white southerners.

Each census enumeration of population and agriculture has reflected the fact that the Negro farmers have not participated fully in the benefits of government programs and the progress of American agriculture. The continuing reliance of Negroes on cotton, tobacco, and peanuts in an economy where white farmers are rapidly diversifying to other farm enterprises has been shown in Government reports issued every 5 years. Statistics have attested to the shrinking acreage farmed by Negroes. Every 10 years the census has reported a widening gap in income, education, and housing between southern rural whites and Negroes.

Although small farmers, without regard to race, are rapidly decreasing in number and although economic pressures appear to be forcing a reduction in number and an increase in size of farms, there is unmistakable evidence that racial discrimination has served to accelerate the displacement and impoverishment of the Negro farmer.

For more than 100 years—and particularly during the past 30 years—the U.S. Department of Agriculture has administered federally financed programs designed to improve almost every aspect of the lives of low-income farm and rural families. Although other

political, social, and economic factors have simultaneously operated to the disadvantage of the rural southern Negro, it should be a matter of national concern that the gap between Negro and white rural residents in the South has increased during the very period when the programs of the Department were helping thousands of rural white families to achieve substantial gains in income, housing, and education. As the group most depressed economically, most deprived educationally, and most oppressed socially, Negroes have been consistently denied access to many services, provided with inferior services when served, and segregated in federally financed agricultural programs whose very task was to raise their standard of living.

The Commission's analysis of four major U.S. Department of Agriculture programs has clearly indicated that the Department has generally failed to assume responsibility for assuring equal opportunity and equal treatment to all those entitled to benefit from its programs. Instead, the prevailing practice has been to follow local patterns of racial segregation and discrimination in providing assistance paid for by Federal funds. At the same time, the Department has not developed adequate procedures for evaluating the degree to which its programs reach Negro as well as white rural residents.

One result of this failure of responsibility has been the perpetuation of a double standard for southern Negroes and whites affected by the Department's programs. In the Cooperative Extension Service this has led to the creation of separate and unequal administrative structures providing inferior services to Negro farmers, youth, and homemakers. In the Farmers Home Administration, it has meant a different kind of service to the two races, with Negro farmers receiving for the most part subsistence loans with limited supervision, while white farmers received supervised loans for capital expenditures. In the Soil Conservation Service, the result has been little service at all to many Negro landowners in areas where no Negro staff members are employed.

As applied to staff, the double standard has taken various forms in the programs studied. These have included failure to recruit,

employ, or upgrade Negroes, or to permit them to serve white farmers; isolation of Negroes in separate offices or at segregated meetings; and providing Negro staff members with inservice training of shorter duration and inferior content than that given white staff members. In State extension services Negro staff members have often been required to provide to Negro farmers technical services outside their area of training, while white farmers have received assistance from specialists in these areas.

In some programs, effective service to Negroes has been made dependent upon the number of Negroes employed, on the untenable theory that Negro farmers should be served only by Negro staff. This concept has worked to the detriment of both Negro rural families and Negro staff. Operating under this concept, these programs have failed to reach the Negro rural residents most in need of them because of inadequate numbers of Negro staff. At the same time, restricting Negro employees to serving only Negroes has further limited professional development and promotional opportunities.

Underlying much of the failure to provide equal service to Negro farmers in the South has been the preconception, found in the agricultural agencies, that Negro farmers have limited needs, capabilities, and aspirations. Starting with a view that Negroes cannot improve as farmers, many programs have not trained Negroes in the new technology nor encouraged them to diversify, to acquire larger acreage, or to make their small acreage more productive.

Relegated to a separate, inferior, and outdated agricultural economy, too many Negroes have sunk to lower levels of subsistence. When they failed as farmers and became landless, unskilled laborers, the Department has not helped them and their children make the transition to a new way of life.

One of the most serious obstacles barring Negro farmers from the benefits of the Department's programs has been the consistent exclusion of Negroes from the local decision-making process which controls the dispensing of these benefits. Negroes have not been

appointed to State and local committees by the Department of Agriculture.

Prior to 1964, except in a few all-Negro towns, Negroes have not been candidates for locally elected committees. Almost without exception, Negroes do not join white farmers in making plans for the community. Originally built into the programs to assure flexibility and responsiveness to grassroots needs, these local controls have been used in the South to establish and maintain racial differentials in the kinds and amounts of Federal aid available to farmers. Far from discouraging such undemocratic practices in its programs, the Department itself has generally conformed to the discriminatory regional pattern.

The current unanimity of all branches of the Federal Government on the necessity for equal opportunity and equal treatment in the administration of Federal programs leaves no room for uncertainty concerning the aims of national policy as they relate to the Department of Agriculture. Some of the problems found in the Commission's study of the Department's programs will be reached by the requirement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that federally assisted programs be administered without segregation or discrimination. Differential service, training, awards and activities, segregated offices, meetings, training, and competitions are outlawed by Title VI and the regulations of the Department of Agriculture issued thereunder. These regulations generally require immediate compliance, though the State extension services have been permitted a period of adjustment during which States must make necessary changes in offices, staffing and program.

In addition to the Civil Rights Act, the Federal Government has had a longstanding policy against the discrimination in employment which was found so prevalent in the agencies of the Department. Under Executive Order 10925, the policy prohibits segregated assignment of responsibilities and offices, limited promotion opportunities, and exclusion of Negroes from employment in other than menial capacities. Also, a White House

directive against official participation by Federal employees in segregated meetings provides a clear mandate for conducting the educational and informational activities of the Department on a nondiscriminatory basis.

In enacting the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the Congress stated a further national objective: to eliminate "poverty in the midst of plenty in this Nation by opening to everyone the opportunity for education and training, the opportunity to work, and the opportunity to live in decency and dignity." The economically and socially deprived Negroes of the rural South stand in great need of such opportunities.

Federal laws and policies require the termination of segregation and discrimination in federally financed and administered agricultural programs. If the Department of Agriculture is to make its full contribution to the Nation's effort to revitalize rural America and to combat rural poverty, it must engage in a thorough-going critical evaluation of its programs. No rural renaissance is likely for the southern Negro so long as these programs continue to isolate him through entrenched discriminatory practices.

It is the Commission's belief that few of the economic problems now burdening the rural South can be solved until basic changes are made in the Federal programs designed to help bring about solutions. These changes must include the elimination of the segregated structuring of services, the removal of racial limitations on opportunity, and the inclusion in the decision-making process of broad sections of the population previously denied participation. Until these long-deferred changes are made, the South will continue to place a brake upon its own progress and that of the Nation.

FINDINGS

The Cooperative Extension Service

1. The federally assisted State extension services of the South are administered through a separate structure and generally on a discriminatory basis, often with separate and inferior offices for Negro staff.

2. With rare exceptions, at the county level, separate plans of work are usually made for services to Negroes in those counties where Negroes are employed as extension service personnel, and Negro and white staff do not plan extension programs or meet together.

3. Responsibility for work with Negro rural residents, in counties where Negro staff are employed, is assigned almost without exception to the Negro staff and the caseloads of Negro workers are so high as not to permit adequate service.

4. Negro Extension agents are denied access to training furnished their white coworkers and are confined largely to inferior training, except in North Carolina.

5. Many thousands of Negro youth are not served by extension services in counties where white youth are served, are denied access to national programs of the extension services through 4-H Clubs, and are denied the opportunity to compete with white youth for national and State awards of the 4-H program.

6. Many thousands of rural Negro homemakers receive less service than white homemakers in their counties, and in counties without Negro staff additional thousands are provided no service at all.

7. Many thousands of Negro farmers are denied access to services provided to white farmers which would help them to diversify, increase production, achieve adequate farming operations or train for off-farm employment.

8. No review or evaluation is conducted by the Federal Extension Service to ascertain the extent to which Negroes participate in extension service programs.

9. Services to Negroes tend to be limited by the preconception, expressed by many Federal, State, and county extension service officials, that Negroes as a class cannot succeed in agriculture or in productive ways of living.

10. Federal and State as well as local agriculture officials have participated and acquiesced in these discriminatory practices.

The Farmers Home Administration

1. The assistance rendered to Negroes by FHA in the form of loans and technical assistance is consistently different from that furnished to whites in the same economic class: Negro borrowers receive smaller loans, both absolutely and in relation to their net worth, than white farmers similarly situated. While carefully supervised white borrowers receive most of their funds for capital investments, including farm improvement or enlargement, Negroes in the same economic class, with drastically unequal supervision, receive loans primarily for living expenses and annual operating costs.

2. There is reason to believe that the type of loans made and the technical assistance given to Negroes is limited by preconceptions held by county personnel of the FHA that Negroes cannot successfully change the pattern of their farming operations.

3. A segregated service is maintained for those few Negroes employed by FHA in the South, confining them to work with Negroes, limiting their promotional opportunities, and housing them in offices separate from their white coworkers.

4. Negroes, with few exceptions, are not appointed as full members to county committees but are confined to a newly created category of special alternate membership.

The Soil Conservation Service

1. Negroes in southern counties generally receive less service from the SCS than whites, except in those counties where Negroes are employed as professionals.

2. Few Negroes are employed as soil conservationists in the South; among those who are so employed, some are housed in segregated offices and restricted in promotional opportunities.

3. Where Negro professionals are employed by the SCS in the South, they are generally confined to work with Negro landowners, and Negro landowners in these counties are restricted to receiving the services of Negro staff.

4. Negro professionals in the South do not participate in the deliberations of the boards of supervisors through which SCS services are channelled.

5. The SCS takes no responsibility for assuring participation by Negro landowners in conservation district elections for boards of supervisors; in southern counties where such boards are appointed, the SCS has not recommended Negroes for appointment. No Negro has been elected to a board of supervisors in the South.

6. No reviews or evaluations are conducted by the SCS to ascertain the extent to which Negroes participate in SCS programs.

The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service

1. Until 1964, Negroes had not, with rare exceptions, participated in the nominations and elections under the supervision and jurisdiction of the Department for ASCS county committees in the South. ASCS did not assume responsibility for the elimination of discrimination in these elections prior to the winter of 1964. In that year, of 37,000 community committee members in the South, only 75 Negroes were elected. There were no Negroes among the almost 5000 county committeemen in 11 Southern States.

2. Negroes are not employed in permanent Federal or county ASCS positions in the South; nor are they appointed to important temporary positions filled each year by county committees.

3. No Negro has ever been appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture to a State ASC committee in the South.

4. No evaluation is conducted on a systematic basis to measure the impact of ASCS programs on white and Negro farmers or the extent to which farmers of both races participate in these programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission Recommends

I. That the President direct the Secretary of Agriculture to end discriminatory practices in the administration of Department programs, and that the Secretary—

A. Continue efforts to impress upon the administrators and field staff of every agency the necessity of abandoning practices of segregation, unequal treatment, and exclusion which have barred Negro farmers and rural residents from the services and benefits of these programs.

B. Require the assignment to both white and Negro staff of the responsibility for work with Negro clientele participating in these programs.

C. Require the abolition of all racially segregated administrative structures and lines of authority, communication, and responsibility at Federal, State, and county levels.

D. Require that racial segregation of employees in Federal, State, and county offices be eliminated.

E. Require that all meetings connected with Department programs be held on a desegregated basis and that the Federal non-discrimination policy be made known.

F. Enforce Department policy prohibiting employees from attending, participating in, or in any other way giving official support to organizations, meetings, fairs, or other events which are segregated, which exclude either Negroes or whites from membership, attendance or participation, or which are intended for participants of one race only.

II. *That the President direct the Secretary of Agriculture to encourage and extend full and equal participation in Department programs to all clientele without regard to their race or color, and that the Secretary—*

A. Direct every agency to seek increased participation by Negro farm and rural residents in those programs from which they previously have been excluded or in which they have been denied equitable service.

B. Afford to Negro farmers the necessary assistance, information, and encouragement to accord them the equal opportunity to diversify their farm enterprises.

C. Assure that Negroes have the opportunity to participate in elections for local committees and that they are appointed to State, area, and local committees which share responsibility for the administration of Department programs.

D. Provide adequate safeguards to assure that the administration of Department programs by local committees does not thwart the participation of Negroes.

III. *That the President direct the Secretary of Agriculture to assure equal employment opportunities in agricultural programs, and that the Secretary—*

Require that employment, training, assignment, and promotion of all personnel be based on merit and ability without regard to the race or color of the employee or of the clientele to be served.

IV. That the President direct the Secretary of Agriculture to establish methods for review and evaluation of implementation of equal opportunity policy in Department programs, and that the Secretary—

Use the research units of the Department to determine the extent to which agricultural programs are achieving their objectives with respect to individuals of all races and colors. For this purpose racial data and statistics on persons receiving the benefits of Department programs should be maintained as part of an effective reporting and evaluation system. Such data should be used only for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of Department programs and should be maintained under safeguards which will prevent their use for discriminatory purposes.

CCNY

THE WHITE HOUSE
Washington

February 27, 1965

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Acting under its statutory authority, the Commission on Civil Rights, in seeking to determine whether all our citizens are being afforded equal protection of the laws, has appraised several important programs of the Department of Agriculture. I understand that you and the other officials of the Department furnished valuable assistance to the Commission in its study and the Department cooperated fully. I am confident that the close-working relationship developed between these two agencies will prove to be most helpful.

The Commission's report points out that 90% of all Negro farm operators in the United States are located in southern states and thus the Commission centered its attention in those areas. Based on its study and review of the material available to it, the Commission concluded that Negro families have not participated equally in those programs designed to assist our rural population. These programs so essential to our continued welfare and economic growth must reach all in our rural areas if they are to be effective in lifting those areas to full economic self-sufficiency.

Under your strong leadership, the Department has developed new and improved methods of promoting the economic growth and well-being of our rural areas. The new emphasis which the Civil Rights Act of 1964 gives to equal treatment for all persons provides the basis for assuring that the benefits of these efforts will be available to all. Equality of opportunity is essential if we are to achieve the rural renaissance which you so vigorously champion.

In sending this report to you, I am confident it will have your personal attention for I am well aware of your personal commitment to the elimination of racial discrimination. The Commission's recommendations deserve prompt attention and are phrased in an affirmative spirit which I know characterizes your own approach. I hope I may receive within thirty days a report on the recommendations of the Commission and the actions taken or contemplated by the Department.

Sincerely,

(Signed) Lyndon B. Johnson

Honorable Orville L. Freeman
Secretary of Agriculture
Washington, D. C.

COPY

THE WHITE HOUSE
Washington

February 27, 1965

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I appreciate the thoughtful and detailed study which the Commission on Civil Rights has given to racial discrimination in Federal programs of importance to the rural population of our nation. The difficulties faced by many of our rural and farm families are of great concern to the Administration and we recognize that these problems are even more burdensome for those who suffer from the wasteful and divisive practices of racial discrimination. It must be our goal to eradicate these twin evils.

The Commission's recommendations for changes in the Department of Agriculture programs will, I know, have the immediate attention of the Department, and I have asked the Secretary to report to me on this matter within thirty days. Enclosed is a copy of my letter to the Secretary.

I hope you will convey to the other members of the Commission my appreciation for this timely and constructive report. As we proceed in implementing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, I am confident the assistance and wise counsel of the Commission will continue to make a strong and positive contribution to eliminating discrimination in this country.

Sincerely,

(Signed) Lyndon B. Johnson

Honorable John A. Hannah
Chairman
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights
Washington, D.C.

COPY

THE WHITE HOUSE
Washington

March 26, 1965

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

This is in response to your letter of February 27 regarding the U.S. Civil Rights Commission report of racial discrimination in some aspects of Department of Agriculture programs.

Although significant progress has been made in this Department in the past four years in assuring equal opportunity, the report of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission emphasizes the need to re-examine our efforts in this important field and to work even more diligently to assure that all Departmental activities are totally free of discrimination.

The following steps have been taken to implement the recommendations of the Commission's report:

First, the agencies studied by the Commission have reviewed the findings and recommendations of the Commission's study and have reported to me actions they are taking to correct the discriminatory practices indicated in the study.

In addition, I have directed that each of these agencies provide me with periodic progress reports until the reported unfair practices have been eliminated.

Second, all agencies of the Department have been directed to take immediate steps to encourage and increase participation by Negro rural residents on an equal basis in all programs of the Department. This will require a concerted effort to extend assistance and guidance in expanding facilities, operations, and practices to Negro farm families, and to expand programs for rural Negro youth and homemakers. In each agency established program goals and objectives are being reviewed and revised where necessary so that men in the field are supported in their efforts to achieve this.

Third, a task force has been established to conduct an extensive and continuing review and evaluation of Departmental programs to assure that these programs are efficiently accomplishing the objectives established by Congress on a completely nondiscriminatory basis. This task force will utilize all the expertise of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's research units in developing proper evaluation procedures. I have asked that this group submit its first report to me within thirty days with recommendations for changes in present methods where necessary to provide for equal opportunity.

Fourth, all remaining discrimination and segregation in offices and related facilities used in Department programs is to be eliminated without delay. In those instances where immediate action is precluded because new construction or facilities are required, action will be taken as rapidly as possible. All rehousing should be completed not later than December 31, 1965.

A review of Negro professional staff recruitment and assignment as well as training and promotional opportunities is to be conducted to insure the elimination of inequities that may exist in any of these activities. This review will be the responsibility of the Director of Personnel who will report on his survey by June 30, 1965.

Furthermore, the policy of nondiscriminatory service assignments and operations within the Department will be enforced without exception. All Staff, both Negro and white, at every level, will serve all rural residents equally and without regard to the race, color, creed, or national origin of the staff or of the clientele to be served.

Fifth, the Inspector General of the Department has been charged with the responsibility to make continuing and special surveys of agency operations and will report to me immediately any inadequacies in compliance with the Department's policy and directives in this area.

Sixth, all agencies have been directed to take every appropriate step necessary to insure that the democratic process will be guaranteed in all nominations and elections to local agricultural policy and decision-making posts and to assure that all segments of the community are fairly considered for representation on appointive policy and decision-making committees. The same will apply to those committees and boards which are within my authority and discretion to appoint.

The agencies whose programs were reviewed in the Commission's report have already taken significant steps to increase the participation of Negro rural residents on their committees and boards and will continue to review the participation of white and Negro rural residents in these groups.

I have requested periodic reports of the steps taken or to be taken to assure equality of opportunity in this regard. Furthermore, you should know that my review has not been confined alone to the agencies covered by the Commission's study. All agencies of the Department are presently reviewing their programs and activities and are submitting regular reports to me on their progress in achieving equal opportunity.

Seventh, I plan to establish a citizens advisory committee on civil rights consisting of distinguished representatives from a variety of backgrounds and interests to review the activities of the Department with respect to equality of opportunity to advise me of the effectiveness of these program and policy directives and to recommend changes where necessary.

The Department of Agriculture has long had responsibility for helping all the people in rural America overcome obstacles to their full participation in the economic and social improvement in this country. Department activities and programs have made significant contributions to a more stable and prosperous economy and society.

Certainly the rights of all our citizens to participate with equal opportunity in both the administration and benefits of all the programs of this Department, as in all programs of the Government, must be upheld at all times. This is not only legally required but morally right.

This we shall do.

Respectfully yours,

(Signed) Orville L. Freeman
Secretary

COPY

THE WHITE HOUSE
Washington

April 17, 1965

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I have your letter of March 26 responding to the Civil Rights Commission Report discussing a number of Department of Agriculture programs and the manner in which they have been operated. The Commission report pointed out some instances in which discrimination on the basis of race have been found to exist.

It seems to me that the steps the Department is taking are designed to correct these deficiencies. I note, however, that many of them depend upon reports and responses from various units of the Department, and I would appreciate it, therefore, if you could let me know what actual progress has been made as a result of the changes you have instituted. It seems to me that a report 60 days from now on the progress actually made would be helpful.

Sincerely,

(Signed) Lyndon B. Johnson

Honorable Orville Freeman
The Secretary
Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C.

This publication contains the conclusions, findings and recommendations of a larger study conducted by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. The 136-page publication, EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IN FARM PROGRAMS, may be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, for 60 cents.

OTHER CCR SPECIAL PUBLICATIONS

Number 1—CIVIL RIGHTS UNDER FEDERAL PROGRAMS:

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