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For Immediate Release

USDA Releases Landmark Equity Commission Report

The United States Department of Agriculture has just released the final report of the USDA Equity Commission during first-ever National Equity Summit at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC. The report is available here: <https://www.usda.gov/equity-commission/reports>.

Rural Coalition commends the dedicated members of the full Equity Commission and its Agriculture and Rural Development Subcommittees for their wisdom and diligence in crafting this comprehensive and substantive 91-page report, which for the first time also addresses the needs of this nation's farmworkers. We will comment in more detail when we more fully review the report and the related action plans.

"It was encouraging to me that the Secretary is still paying attention – this was not just another commission – one of the many USDA commissions over the years. But this is the first time we have heard a Secretary of Agriculture make the public commitments we heard today," said RC Chairperson John Zippert

"This commission has launched us on a journey, the map of the future has been crafted...I am proud to accept this report and even prouder to accept the challenge this report creates," said Secretary Tom Vilsack. This is now the report of USDA, he acknowledged and "USDA needs to be about implementing these recommendations."

Rural Coalition and its members and partners will be reviewing this report in the light of our just completed work assisting farmers to apply for the Discrimination Financial Assistance Process authorized under Section 22007 of the Inflation Adjustment Act. During these 7 months, with support from USDA, our partners and next generation leaders held over 500 meetings. We heard thousands of stories of producers who experienced everything that has been wrong in the delivery of USDA services over decades.

As we await the outcome of that process, we will continue, as we have for almost 5 decades to push for real accountability and change to end the tragic and unnecessary loss of thousands of farms and illness and deaths of thousands of workers who should now be feeding and sustaining their communities and our society. We fervently hope the full implementation of this report will mean we never again witness such injustices.

“To those who criticize,” said Secretary Vilsack this morning, “I simply say take the blinders off. When you provide equity to one you are essentially providing it to all. You are making this country... a fairer and more just place.”

The Secretary in his comments, made a reference to the Book of Matthew in the Bible, which suggests that a measure of success in establishing equity in USDA is "how you did to the least of these" in rural America. The Rural Coalition was founded and has worked for its entire 47-year existence to assure that the benefits of public policies and government programs in rural America do go to improve and enhance the lives of people at the bottom of the economic and social ladders in our nation.

Rural Coalition joins the Equity Commission in their continuing support to assure USDA at every level fully implements actions that will transform our agriculture and food system to one that values and supports equitably every farmer and rancher, every farm and food worker, and every rural and tribal community. And we will work in this 2024 Farm Bill process to assure additional statutory changes are made to promote and ensure equity.

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The Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural is an alliance of farmers, farmworkers, indigenous, migrant and working people working together since 1978 toward a new society that values unity, hope, people, and the land.

With our strong roots in the movements for human, civil, indigenous, and farmworker rights, Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural members share the belief that rural communities everywhere can have a better future and that community-based organizations who have long served the needs of rural communities and people have a fundamental role in building that future. Investments in their work will provide important returns to our economy, our environment, and our society.