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John W. Boyd, Jr. the president and founder of the National Black Farmers Association, has asked USDA Secretary Mike Johanns to place at least 38 USDA employees, including Carolyn Cooksie, Deputy Administrator of Farm Loan Programs, on leave pending an urgent investigation into whether their actions violate the Hatch Act and other federal laws. USDA has not responded to Boyd or media on this matter.

Gannet has a story out on this today. Please see press release below, then Gannet story below that.

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<http://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070807/BUSINESS/708070305/1003>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, August 6, 2007
Contact: John Boyd, (804) 691-8528

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Last week the Associated Press reported the following about the measure that is now before the Senate: “The farm bill moving through Congress would reopen a landmark discrimination settlement that black farmers reached with the Agriculture Department eight years ago, giving more than 70,000 claimants a new chance in court. The bill, which passed the House Friday, could lead to a new class-action lawsuit from farmers who missed an earlier deadline and also would open a streamlined process for farmers to seek expedited awards capped at \$50,000.

Employee efforts are apparently being coordinated with USDA’s Carolyn Cooksie, Deputy Administrator of Farm Loan Programs, as well as numerous USDA employee groups including the National Association of Credit Specialists, the National Association of Support Employees of the Farm Service Agency, and agency management. Some actions

appear to violate the Hatch Act while other actions may need to be clarified by the agency.

“Is the USDA’s Deputy Administrator of Farm Loan Programs directing an illegal lobbying campaign intended to prevent Black farmers from every receiving payments for discrimination the USA itself admitted occurred for decades,” Boyd is asking.

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NACS just spoke with Carolyn Cooksie concerning the inclusion of another Pigford Bill attached to the House's version of the Farm Bill. She said it is "awful" and will allow some 73,000 late filers in and we will probably have another class action suit.

The agency will be required to submit a boatload of information within 60 days of anyone filing which will bury us! Not to mention, most of this information we don't have. Carolyn is doing a lot of legwork in the Senate trying to stop it but NACS, NASE, and other FSA employees need to contact their Senators and work hard to get it stopped. The contacts need to me made before the debate starts in the Senate.

PLEASE CONTACT YOUR SENATOR TODAY CONCERNING THE FOLLOWING:

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Members, please step up and make your voice heard in this Farm Bill debate.

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They should be fiscally responsible and at the same time listen to their constituents!

WE CAN STOP THIS IF
WE RISE UP TOGETHER AND MAKE OUR VOICE HEARD! KEEP CONTACTING THEM
UNTIL THEY HEAR YOU! MAKE SURE THEY RECEIVE YOUR MESSAGE, FAX, E-MAIL,
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Remember, don't make contacts using the office telephone or computer. Send your contacts from home or from another location other than the office, but send them! It would also be great to have others contact them as well. Tell you friends, CED's, and farmers what's going on in this Farm Bill debate and they may wish to make contacts as well. Especially those that have influence with their Senators!

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USDA employees called on to lobby against black farmers

August 7, 2007

By Mike Hasten, Gannet News

BATON ROUGE — An e-mail message urging U.S. Department of Agriculture employees to lobby the U.S. Senate against a farm bill provision favoring black farmers has alarmed farm groups and an environmental justice group.

The farm bill has a provision that would reopen consideration of late applications filed by black farmers seeking awards from a discrimination lawsuit filed against USDA in 1998. A 1999 settlement reached in the case awarded \$50,000 and a percentage of loan forgiveness to all black farmers who had been wrongly denied loans or received them too late to make successful crops, but more than 70,000 applications were rejected as being too late.

Circulated among employees of a USDA branch that works with farm loans, the e-mail message quotes Carolyn Cooksie, deputy administrator for farm loan programs, as saying it would be "awful" to allow 73,000 late filers to qualify for awards and it would probably clear the way for another class action suit.

Attempts to contact Cooksie and failed.

"This shows what black farmers have been going through for decades," said John Boyd, president of Black Farmers of America. "It's really disgusting for a U.S. government official to block programs for black farmers."

The e-mail says Cooksie, a 32-year veteran of the USDA, has already started working the Senate but needs help.

If the bill passes as it is, "The agency will be required to submit a boatload of information within 60 days of anyone filing which will bury us!" the message says. "Not to mention, most of this information we don't have.

"Carolyn is doing a lot of legwork in the Senate trying to stop it but NACS (National Association of Credit Specialists), NASE, and other FSA (Farm Service Agency) employees need to contact their senators and work hard to get it stopped. The contacts need to be made before the debate starts in the Senate," the message says.

Boyd said the USDA attitude is "very disheartening. Black farmers' lives are ruined" by USDA actions, "and they're worried about their workload."

The original lines in the note show how USDA employees feel about black farmers, he said.

After stating "IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED!" the message says "As you all know by now, the House version of the Farm Bill will reopen the Pigford lawsuit to allow late filers to be considered. I was really surprised by this. It makes me wish I was not part of this agency. If I feel this way, I'm sure others do too."

Cook and Boyd said they contacted people on the e-mail list and verified that it was real.

"There's no way black farmers can get a fair shake across the country when the people doing this are the very people administering the program," Boyd said. "It's discriminatory."

Besides concern that the USDA was opposing a provision that would allow more farmers to qualify for awards, Boyd and Ken Cook, president of the Environmental Working Group, point out that the government employees were breaking the law. They said lobbying Congress and using federal office equipment to circulate messages to that point violate the Hatch Act.

The message even cautions that federal employees should "Remember, don't make contacts using the office telephone or computer. Send your contacts from home or from another location other than the office, but send them!"

The original author of the message is unclear. Attempts to contact Kim DePasquale, a Fredericksburg, Va., FSA employee who forwarded the message she received on her Farm Service Agency, were unsuccessful.

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