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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

CIVIL RIGHTS LISTENING SESSION

MORNING SESSION

Friday, January 24, 1997

10:00 a.m.

Belzoni, Mississippi

[TRANSCRIPT PREPARED FROM TAPE RECORDINGS.]

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P R O C E E D I N G S
GROUND RULES FOR SESSION

MR. WILKES: I have sitting here Vic Simpson, who will actually be our time keeper for the day. You'll start off. There will be a five-minute presentation. After you get down to one minute, he will have a sign that actually says one minute left, and I hope that we will have the courtesy to summarize and give our other members in the audience an opportunity to speak.

So if you would help me out with that, we will try to get as many people as we possibly can to the podium. This list is steadily growing. We have some 70 names that's on here, but we want to try to give everybody an opportunity to speak.

The second thing is that when you came in, you were given a copy of a program. Hang on to that program because that will be your meal ticket today. After this session is over with, thanks to the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, they are going to furnish a meal here, so hold on to that and that will be your meal ticket.

Also, is there anyone here that is in need of a signer? We have a signer here, and if you need a signer, if you would identify yourself, then we will try to make sure that you can get where that you can see this person.

Having said that, then we've about got everything in order there. I also want to let you know that if you do not wish to submit written comments but still would like to have your voice heard and your concerns met, there's an 800 number, there's an e-mail address as well as a TDD number that should be on your program. I would encourage you to utilize those mechanisms as far as making sure that the Secretary and the team have heard your concerns.

I want to say again, this is an opportunity to listen to you. We won't have a period whereby we can actually have an interaction of comments back, but the Secretary and this team is here to listen to what your concerns are and let's see if we can't let them know what's on your mind.

With that in mind, we are going to begin this session, and the way that I will actually run that is that I will call the name of the person that will come to the mike first and I will also call the name of the person that will be there second. I would like to almost have the next hitter up. We will call that name.

So the first person that I'm going to ask to come to the mike is Mr. Bill Brown from Belzoni, Mississippi. And the second person that needs to be getting ready after Mr. Brown will be Mr. Bobby G. Jones from Mendenhall, Mississippi.

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS ADDRESS

PANEL WITH ISSUES OF CONCERN

MR. BROWN: Mr. Wilkes, thank you for this opportunity. Let me welcome all of you people for being here today, and to our Congressman, I would like to say, a lot of us can't come to Washington and state our grievances, and to the Secretary, Mr. Glickman, and Mr. Wilkes. We want to thank you all for bringing Congressmen from Washington to Mississippi to the catfish capitol of the world,

which is Humphrey's County. Thank you.

My [indiscernible], for the record's sake, my name is Willie F. "Bill" Brown. I live on a family farm south of here, 20 miles, my father purchased November 19, 1919. We are still there farming.

The year of '94, I had a disaster. I went in to the ASCS office here in Humphrey's County to file for disaster. I hold a folder here. Now listen, so you won't think I'm a racist. I've been named everything, but I'm just going to state what I have here in my hand that the man that was there at the time gave me. When I went in, I qualified for the disaster. A young fellow from Mississippi State over there, someone they sent here to be over there yesterday [indiscernible] the local county didn't even know what a farm were. He got the fellow to do the survey and to write them down there.

And in this fellow that I hold in my hand, his [indiscernible], I've got the entomologist report and everything, his remarks to me when I

went in, he said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Brown. We cannot do anything for you even though you are eligible for it." He said, "Your neighbor 49 times, you 47 times," which means if I had afford two more times, I would have been eligible for disaster.

But that's not the main thing here. The main problem here, he left me on bank plus \$10,000. Now, how can I recover from it? I had to go into my saving this year going to pay the interest on it. That's because this gentleman made this decision. He told me I had a chance to come for a public hearing. I go there for a hearing and then they're going to refer me to Jackson. I mean, what's going to happen?

And let me say, and if I'm understanding this new farm bill right, the local ASCS committee member in each county, when you go in to apply for a loan from Farmers Home, you know, you consolidated, you got a new name for them, but we call them Farmers Home, ASCS, and Soil Conservation in the State of Mississippi, but you know you walk through [indiscernible].

Now, the problem is, these fellows in the future are going to look at who will get a loan in the local county and this doesn't need to be that way. Thank you.

MR. WILKES: Thank you, Mr. Brown.

Mr. Jones? The next person up will be Mr. Johnson, Mr. Billy Johnson from Madison County.

MR. JONES: Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being here. Thank you, Mr. Thompson, Mr. Wilkes, and all you others whose interests and efforts have resulted in such a gathering as this.

I have farmed for over 30 years. I am also a Baptist minister, Southern Baptist, a fact that I would be hesitant to mention were it not for the fact that our President is also Southern Baptist.

I'm in the 37th year as pastor of a small rural church. While a ministerial student yet in college, I dedicated my ministry to the rural area. I was moved to do this by the results of a study which had been made which showed that 95 percent or more of the top leadership in every area of

American life came from rural areas or small towns of 2,500 or less.

In the last Presidential election, Mr. Clinton, as we know, is from Hope, Arkansas. Mr. Dole, from Russell, Kansas. Perhaps the Secretary has rural roots, also. I have flown over Kansas. It looked like the whole State is rural.

[Laughter.]

MR. JONES: But the rural area of Mississippi and the small towns are still the most fertile ground which grows and the most--well, least polluted reservoirs from which flows still the best leadership that we have in this great country of ours.

I was wondering where Jerry Rice was raised. I know that Brett Favre was from down here at a crossroads community called Kiln, Mississippi. The rural areas are worth saving, Mr. Secretary. You have indicated that in your speech and by your presence here today.

When I began my ministry in the rural area, cognizant of the noble mandate of the Farmers

Home Administration, and because we had mutual interests, I always felt a kindred spirit with them.

Now, I must state to you some grave disappointments and concerns. It would be unfair, as has already been said, to suggest that the Farmers Home Administration, now the FSA, or any other farm organization, by policy and intent intends to discriminate against anybody, but we know that it happens. Therefore, it follows that the problem lies with some miscreant agents who are short on moral rectitude and long on arrogance and sense of immunity.

I believe for you to be effective in your expressed efforts, Mr. Secretary, you need some specific cases. I have two, and I hope my time will permit me to get to them. My friend Jim lives four miles south of me. He had a 350-acre farm and he was foreclosed. He went to the Farmers Home Administration in his county and he begged to buy his farm back. The Farmers Home Administration in that county offered to sell him his farm back at

the price of \$250,000, which was ridiculous and precluded Jim from any consideration. Jim walked away, dejected.

But the Farmers Home Administration in that county only appraised the farm at \$130,000. I have a copy of the appraisal. And then Farmers Home sold the farm at auction for \$65,000 to a wealthy businessman who was a non-farmer and a member of the Board of Supervisors in that county. Now, my friends, that's wrong.

Now, my other example that I want to use here is entirely personal. For eight years, I have been trying to prevent this same experience from happening to me. In 1987, Congress passed a law which was a godsend through the United States Congress, the 1987 Agricultural Credit Act. I qualified and no one has ever questioned the fact that I qualified for one provision of that law. That provision was net recovery buyback. As a matter and a right under law, I had a right to net recovery buyback. That was more important--that was so essentially important, I can't tell you how

important.

At the same time, I qualified 372 acres for the CRP program, which made the opportunity for me to buy my farm back at net recovery value entirely feasible. I'm here to tell you that I did not get it.

The Farmers Home Administration willfully, intentionally, arbitrarily, capriciously denied my family and me the opportunity to buy our farm back at net recovery buyback. I have the whole record here in my hand that answers every question and removes every doubt regarding the fact that it was willful and intentional.

MR. WILKES: Thank you, Mr. Jones.

MR. JONES: Oh, I'm sorry.

MR. WILKES: We want to continue to get your comments. Mr. Jones, if you would submit those comments, we will be more than happy to get those.

Mr. Johnson, and next up will be Ms. Dorothy Johnson after Mr. Billy Johnson.

MR. JOHNSON: I'm Billy D. Johnson, born

and raised in Madison County. I've been a little farm boy all my life, still planning on being as long as I live, although I've built bridges throughout Mississippi for 37-and-a-half years.

My complaint is they're out of money. They give me the run around. I'll make it short, since he used a little extra time, but he didn't do nothing wrong.

But I signed up to get a little livestock farm on my property. He went out and looked at my land and said I didn't have enough grazing land. I asked him, how about where I lived at Madison had almost 20 acres past the land, house, and garden on down there. Then his story was, we're out of money.

Number two was he sent me over to the Soil Conservation Office, so I met with Mr. Kim Oates. He looked the land over and he said, "Yes, sir," he said, "you qualify." So I got a 'dozer up there and started clearing. I got the--he sent his man out to survey and pond, and, of course, I didn't know nothing about having to go through the board

and get a letter or anything. When somebody tells me, "You can start building a pond," I've been used to--whenever the engineer tells me to build a bridge, that's what I did.

So we started building a pond. We built it and they inspected it and said it lacked about 18 inches, two foot of being tall enough to the specification. The man finished doing it and then I cited it and called them and they came out and inspected it and said everything was okay, to get all my figures together, what I paid the contractor to build my pond and everything and turn it in.

I turned it all in, waited about a month and a half, and hadn't got no answer, so I went up to ask them about it and they said, "Willie, let me look and see. It hasn't been processed." The next time, I went back and they said, well, they said they hadn't gotten the literature to us. Then the next time I went back and they said, well, you hadn't been approved is the reason they hadn't got it to me. I didn't know nothing about the approval, I mean, didn't know by them mentioning it

to me that I had to be approved. So that's my story.

And number two is, Madison County has got a no-till seed machine. It takes a 100 hp tractor to pull the thing. When us little farmers, just small acreage and things, we don't have that tractor and it costs too much to rent a tractor from, say, John Deere, the John Deere people that own the other part. They got it through the county. I asked them last year about maybe getting a small one. So they said, well, we don't see a body [?]. So that's the last thing I heard about it, and I thank you.

MR. WILKES: Ms. Johnson, Dorothy Johnson from Sunflower County. And the next person up is Mr. I.H. Montgomery.

MRS. JOHNSON: I believe I came with the wrong story today. We should have had this meeting several years ago when I was applying in the Farm Credit System.

But today, Mr. Secretary, Congressman Thompson, and distinguished members of the panel,

my name is Dorothy Johnson. I'm a farmer from Sunflower County, Mississippi, where my husband and I farm 1,800 acres of wheat, rice, soybeans, and corn. I also serve as Vice President of Mississippi Women Involved in Farm Economics.

I'm here today to address what I feel the most common complaint regarding USDA services and program delivery. My Representative in the Second District, U.S. Representative Bennie Thompson, has called the problem, and I quote, "a pattern of neglect against small and minority farmers by the Department of Agriculture. Obviously, the race issue is there. There's also a problem to small farmers in general."

This attitude of neglect is demeaning to all farmers, regardless of race or gender. An FSA loan applicant is due the same respect and assistance granted any borrower at any bank in the private sector.

Concerning the delays in getting a loan approved, and those complaints are genuine, we need to know how the processing system could be

overtaxed and backlogged with the computer systems available today and recognizing the fact that the number of farmers, less than two million now, has been decimated in the past ten years, resulting in fewer filed applications. And let me tell you, friends, I came within a heartbeat of being one of those farmers put out of business.

The turnaround time from application filing date to loan closing and fund disbursement far exceeds the 45 days considered adequate for the majority of applications. Some applications filed in February have been closed as late as June and July, causing serious credit problems with suppliers. Not only at the present time but down the road, that credit rating follows you.

Then another one on the paperwork. The forms and regulations a borrower must use for loan application are cumbersome, complicated. The regulations are not readily available to the public and the forms are redundant.

This is discriminatory in that those individuals unfamiliar with the terminology and

forms must pay a consultant to package their loan. A high percentage of FSA borrowers hire assistance, which should be available from their FSA loan officer and for which they have paid in the loan origination fee.

And graduation assistance, FSA offers little assistance to borrowers in graduating them from guaranteed loans to conventional loans. Once the borrower is eligible for a 90 percent guarantee with a three-year line of credit, at the end of that period, the lending institution could provide an automatic graduation to a direct conventional loan with that lender. This would enable those creditworthy individuals to utilize the credit history developed over the past three-year period of guarantee.

Now, women in agriculture. It seems to me, and from talking to my peers, the single largest problem for women is to be taken seriously by the financial community. This seems to be especially true for women who continue to operate the business during the illness, and that was my

case, or after the death of their husband.

Bankers, chemical, fertilizer, and seed companies are often leery of extending credit to widows or women running their own enterprise. I believe that equality is nearly impossible to legislate, whether race or gender, and perhaps the better route for women would be to provide educational tools.

In conclusion, women involved in farm economics recommend that all agricultural lending institutions adopt agricultural lending policies which will ensure producers will be treated fairly and equitably in obtaining credit. In addition, those lending agencies should adopt policies which ensure that all producers have access to fair and competitive interest rates. I don't know what the FSA loan interest rate is, but most banks charge two over prime and that's pretty steep when it comes to farm financing.

We urge all agricultural institutions to develop programs which address the special needs of young, beginning, and/or low-equity farmers. In addition, it asks Congress to pass legislation

designed to assist young, beginning, and low-equity farmers--sorry.

MR. WILKES: Thanks, Mrs. Johnson.

Mr. Montgomery, and when you come, would you please come close to the mike so we can make sure that you are being heard. After Mr. Montgomery, we are going to ask Mr. Walter Roberts.

MR. MONTGOMERY: Thank you. I am not going to take up my time addressing all of you, but to all the dignified guests and all of my fellow people in the same shoes I am, who am I? I'm I.H. Montgomery, Jr. I'm from 30 miles east of here in Holmes County, between Lexington and Durant. I was born on the farm. I grew up with a widow my first ten years of a slave. My grandfather was born in 1861. That was all he did, was farm. I wonder why did I catch so much hell trying to farm in modern times.

I am an 8(a)-certified contractor. I'm not an active farmer now, but I did it a long time. I paid the price. I'm now a contractor and I'm the 1996 Minority Small Business Person of the Year.

To keep in with time, I said that to say this.

About two weeks ago, I was called by a District Director and accused of defrauding the United States Government by not doing some work, which was a \$25 job. With the contracts I got, I would not to defraud the government of \$25. They didn't ask me one question, an acting District Director--

MR. GLICKMAN: Of what, of SBA or of the--

MR. MONTGOMERY: No. No. No. Rural Development.

MR. GLICKMAN: Rural Development, okay.

MR. MONTGOMERY: And Mr. Glickman, I'm going to give you an envelope with a letter from the State Director along with some of my qualifications and some photographs of houses that I have managed and some that others did. The last time I took it to somebody, they let the person who was doing the dirt answer the questions. Mr. Thompson, that's almost like letting the fox answer to the chickens.

I've had experience as a farmer. I never

got a loan from Rural Development or Farmers Home because I had to put up 73 acres of land with tractors and equipment, 35 head of grown cows and two bulls for \$2,200. I didn't need the money that bad. I was blessed to get it elsewhere.

I've been an employee, I've been an Assistant Loan Supervisor, and I've been a contractor since 1986. It's been some incidents that's bad.

I'm reminded of a conversation in Yazoo County at Little Yazoo. My younger son and I were waiting on a farmer to come. This Afro-American came up with a little dump truck and he got a Coke and he said, "What are you doing here?" I said, I'm checking farmers [indiscernible] and crop equipment. He laughed. He said, "You can take a little ribbing. You look like a friendly fellow." I said, "Go ahead." He said, "Forty-seven or eight or fifty," he said, "they're going to run you out of this county, talking about checking a white man's crop."

I laughed, but let me tell you, that laugh

came back to haunt me two or three years ago. They wouldn't let me check a crop. I went to Congressman Thompson's office. They called the State Director. They called the County Supervisor. He told the County Supervisor, he said, they get tired of calling your answering service. Well, my office stayed open there from 8 to 5. I called 36 times to this person's house and they would not answer the phone.

I drove out there after being told by the county office he's out there. I went there because his father said, "Go out there and look at it." You can't do a crop [indiscernible] inspection by looking at it. There are questions you have to ask. I didn't get to check it, although I was paid for it.

My point is, nothing has really changed since 1947. This fellow and I laughed. Nothing has really changed.

Several years ago, I did crop [indiscernible] inspections in Yazoo, Bolivar, and Claiborne County. They did not want to pay me. I

don't want to take up a lot of time. I went to the State Director to get my money that time and it was Mr. Hulk [ph.]. I had a 9:00 appointment. I got there at 8:30. I don't like to be late. The District Director took the invoices down. He said, "But don't go through it, Montgomery, because they're going to get you."

As a result, what he meant by that was I'd never get another contract, and believe you me, I have not. As a result, a lot of contracts were voided under the head the lots are larger in District 2, but they took a count out of the district and it didn't wait.

I have to cut it short, but I will say there are some things. A lady in a county office told me after two months that your money hadn't even been ordered. The County Supervisor in this letter, it was promised that I would no longer have to wait on my money. Mr. Secretary, I have invoices that's five months old in that office right now. I have personally carried them over and everything.

I don't want to go over, and I can talk for a long time, because Mr. Thompson, you are all our representative. I have my business card and my position paper in, Mr. Glickman. I was doing an inspection once and the farmer told me, you don't have to see the tractors. The last one, yes, I know. He took it by telephone. That's why they could always be cheaper than me. I could sit on the telephone and do an inspection.

In conclusion, I'm going to do like the rest of them. Mr. Secretary, because we have a black person does not ever mean that we're going to get equal treatment. Sometimes, it means worse treatment.

In conclusion, the last thing, I'm going to present you this, and I would ask you to take your time and look it over because it's not one word of a lie in there.

MR. GLICKMAN: Thank you.

[Applause.]

MR. WILKES: We have Mr. Roberts, and the next person up will be Sammy Sutton.

MR. ROBERTS: Thank you, Mr. Wilkes. My name is Walter Roberts. I am a practicing veterinarian in several counties here in the Mississippi delta, particularly Humphrey's County. I am a fish farmer and I also farm beef cattle.

First of all, let me give thanks to God almighty, our Congressman, and our Secretary of Agriculture for allowing me this opportunity.

I applied for a loan through Farm Services. At the time I applied, Mr. George Irving was head of Farmers Home. He and I, along with the District, the County Supervisor, we had agreed on the selling price of a piece of property that I had purchased that was in inventory. That application started the summer of 1995. We finally closed that loan October of '96.

But before the closing took place, there was things that was instituted during that process to make the property less desirable. They told me that Mr. Norton--Jackie Norton told me at one point there was no money available to purchase the property, and I couldn't understand that. Why have

me to go through filling out all of those papers and at the very end you tell me there is no money?

The loan application started with Mrs. Jenkins, which was a supervisor here in the Humphrey's County office. Then Mr. Norton came in and took over it when they had to merge Service and Rural Development. At that point, Mr. Norton gave my application to a young man in the Holmes County office. At some point, the application was pretty close to being completed and we were moving pretty good on the application.

Mr. Norton took the application from the young man and sat on it up until December. We met with Mr. Norton at Guaranty Ag Credit office along with members of the Congressman's office. Mr. Norton himself--no one pressured him--he said that we will have this loan closed in February. This was December, December of '95.

We went, we talked to Mr. Norton, we met with him again in January. The application was not completed. That application, that loan--and what I did not understand, he told me that the application

was completed. Then he in turn tells me that there was no money.

Now, my question was to Mr. Norton, if there was no money and you submitted the application, then when we met at Guaranty Ag office, you tell me that the application is not complete. So we go back and we put things in the application that was missing. After those things was added, that application just sat there for several months until I involved the Congressman's office. Then the application started to move along.

Then they came in and told me that, hey, look, we have 120-some acres of wetlands on the property. That was no the original agreement that we had when the property was advertised. The property was advertised one way and they sold it another way. So we had to go to Washington and get the wetlands taken out, which delayed me stocking those ponds, getting my money. Then I had to go back and make another loan. So here I am, thinking that I'm going to pay one price for the property,

ending up paying two prices for the property.

The other thing that I wanted to talk about was the ASCS committees. Someone has already talked about that. There's no way that a minority farmer or socially disadvantaged farmer can succeed in farming at any level if these people sitting on these committees reviewing the loan package, reviewing what's come available in terms--in my case, in the hills, I have erosion on my property. I have applied for assistance, have not been able to get that assistance.

Yes, we do have a minority sitting as an alternate member on these committees, but they don't have any opportunity to vote. Their voice is really not heard. Farming for a minority farmer cannot exist if they don't have a voice and come back and bring information to those farmers that are not in a position to make those meetings and to understand those rules and regulations that is available for them in terms of assistance. Thank you.

MR. WILKES: Thank you, Dr. Roberts.

We have Mr. Sammy Sutton up and the next person after that will be a Mr. Rodalton Hart.

MR. SUTTON: Good morning. My name is Sammy Sutton. I'm the Vice President of the Mississippi Delta Chapter of SCLC, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

To the Honorable Dan Glickman and the Honorable Bennie Thompson and staff, I'm here today to request an immediate investigation into the allegations of discrimination, [indiscernible] practice, and double standards experienced by African-American farmers in Mississippi. This experience by African-American farmers in Mississippi yields especially in regards in the unfair loan practice of the FHA and local lending institutions, after American farmers have historically been denied equal access to programs and Federal dollars administered by your agency in Mississippi.

These discriminatory practices over the years have led to the disproportionate foreclosure and loss of property of many Mississippi African-

American farmers. The Mississippi Delta SCLC considers this matter to be of an emergency nature because of the African-American farmers who have been forced out of business. Thank you.

MR. WILKES: Thank you.

Mr. Hart? The next person who will be up after Mr. Hart will be a Mr. Berlon Brazil.

MR. HART: Mr. Secretary, Mr. Congressman, Pearlie, Homer, and the distinguished staff at the podium, I am Rodalton Hart. We are a farmer in Holmes County. We have a great source of information to present to you. Time will not allow it.

I have in the future dealt with in Congress, present the problems that we are now discussing today. It's on the shelf. It's in writing. We've been in info sharing. We testified before five secretaries prior to you, Mr. Glickman. The information that the farmers are saying across the country is true. It's not that you have not heard it before, not you directly, but your predecessors. It's true.

The problem lies within Congress, the intent in Washington to come from Washington to the state level. When it gets to the state level, your problem lies from the state to your district to your county. Those people are controlling and are implementing the problems that farmers have today.

Example, you all number one priority and you are over every agency there is in USDA, namely OSCS, ASCS, Soil Conservation. The practices for non-point water pollution are there. Your goals and objectives, and this is an example, are to whatever the cost it takes to make sure that you make sure that environment issues are addressed and the practice are performed on farm debt are eligible. Minorities and black farmers are the farmers that you have the most highly non-productive soil in the state. We have to eat peanuts and popcorn when the others can enjoy steak and pork.

My point is that we, my brother and my family, we are four generations of farmers. My family set right there. My grandfather come out of

slavery into New Orleans and come up here, bought property. There left my dad, there left his dad, left my dad, and leaving us, and then my son is there for me not to leave him nothing. We've got five brothers. It was only out of that generation with three sons, with my father was the only son to carry on their legacy and those three brothers got together and hoped that they would have a son, and he produced eight sons.

And out of that eight sons, we have some sons trying to take on what they have put together and the Federal Government is legally destroying us, not only on a local level but they are so impacting until they go to the national level and using Federal people to destroy us, and I would make those comments in the back, which not should be flexible here because of legal allegations.

My testimony is that the ASCS committees, and you look at the farmers that are on there, their farm, if it's grass, if it's old foil pipes [?], if it's water structures, they have not a single erosion problem that runs off into the

stream. It doesn't mean they've got all the oil foil pipes, they go down all the terraces, they got all their divergence. They even got recreation lakes.

When we apply for grass and we apply with the spring, that's the highest priority in USDA, we was turned down. Now, the investigation is in Little Rock, Arkansas, saying that you're not eligible to have grass on lands which the USDA is saying that all you've got to have is at least--all you've got to have is to maintain the practice for five years and all you've got to be is eligible. The same communities, the same organizations, the same board sat on that committee last year and got five practicing board members.

It's time to stop. Time won't allow us to do what we need to do. We've got a serious problem. I've been stating it for the last ten years. We started in 1986 with Congressman Espy and we are continuing it in 1997.

MR. GLICKMAN: Can I just ask you a question? What you're saying is the board got the

dollars for themselves?

MR. HART: The board, the ASCS board is a Farm Service Center board. The people that sit on that committee are the people that receive most of the benefits. Look at their farms, and if OIG would do the investigation, if they investigate right, they would see that those people are the ones that are receiving all the benefits, back up with your payment limitation, back up with your payment limitation on farm operating.

Those farmers that have 10, 15, and 20 entities with grandmothers farming, with children farming, with [indiscernible] farming, with Boy Scouts farming are not investigated. The people that are legal are the ones that they are making examples out of. These things are factual. They are there. What you are doing is putting the fox in the henhouse. The people that own the gins are the ones that makes their yield and that's what draws your payment.

On your minority farmers, when you set the yield payments in 1985 on the '95 farm bill, those

farmers set their yields at 1,000 to 1,200 to 15 pound yields. These are the ones that are collecting the payments. Your farmers that inherit, as in my case, and I'm educated enough to understand procedures and read them and then farm scientifically enough to compete with anybody. All we ask is a level playing field. If you give me the same opportunities that you give the other farmers, I will perform. If I don't have that level playing field, I cannot perform, Mr. Secretary.

These are things that you can't tell in five minutes. These are the problems that are out there. These are the problems that need to be corrected. Thank you.

MR. GLICKMAN: Thank you.

[Applause.]

MR. WILKES: I want to reiterate the fact that it's very important that you speak directly into the mike. The presentations are being recorded because this is information that will be collected and a packet will be put together for the

Secretary. So we want to make sure that you speak into the mike so you can actually be heard.

We have Mr. Brazil up now and the next person that will be coming up will be Mr. Lloyd Schafer.

MR. BRAZIL: Hi. My name is Berlon Brazil. I farm here in Humphrey's County, as well as I'm a member of the Board of Supervisors.

I'd like to bring you back to the year 1995. I'm speaking for others than myself. Nineteen-ninety-five was a disaster year. Some of us, like myself, qualified for this low-interest ELM money. You had to have a percentage of 40 percent or less, or greater, in order to qualify.

The ASCS people here in Humphrey's County, the women are doing a terrific job. We don't have any problem with them whatsoever. We qualified. They gave me the amount that I qualified for.

Then it was turned over to Mr. Jackie Norton at Lexington, during which time he held the case from October until May. During this time, I paid a CPA over \$3,000 in order to get all the

information he was requesting. He led me up to the month of May and then he said, "Well, you can't get the money because you don't pass the test of credit," test of credit meaning if you are able to go out and borrow against your property, your home, or whatever anywhere in the world, you can't get the money from the ASCS, even though it's ELM money, emergency loan money.

Well, my question is, I have a fellow working for me. He put in an application. Now, he had a colored fellow helping him in Lexington. I got Jackie Norton. He got his loan. I didn't get a thing but a \$3,000 bill from the CPA. Do you all think that's right? I mean, I'm glad he got his loan. He works for me, too, but he got his loan. It looks like I'd have been better off if I'd had the black man helping me instead of the white.

The man I'm speaking of is Jackie Norton. You've all heard his name here today and I'd appreciate you all investigating it. I don't know why if you're able to go out and borrow the money, other than the FHA--I asked him point blank. I

said, it looks to me like if a man has tried to accumulate something during his life span, he's punished for doing it. But the man that never have accumulated anything, he's all right. Help him. Don't help the man that's been paying the bulk of the taxes all along.

I appreciate you all letting me speak. I thank you very much.

MR. WILKES: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Schafer? After Mr. Schafer, we're going to ask Michael Travis to come.

MR. SCHAFER: Mr. Wilkes, to Congressman Thompson, the Secretary, and our panel, I am Lloyd Schafer. I'm a farmer in Yazoo County and I'm also President of the NAACP branch.

I did have a lot to say, but I think Mr. Hart kind of summed up my part of it. But what I do have to say, I don't have enough time, pertaining to myself as a farmer in Yazoo County.

In 1992, I submitted an application to the Yazoo County Office of FHA. William "Bill" Love was the supervisor at that particular time, and he

denied my application. A matter of fact, he threw it in the trash.

So I went back out and got another application and I asked to go before the committee, and at the time that I went before the committee, one of the committee members had got the word out that I was a troublemaker of the county so, you know, we've got to be--we're not going to let him have anything.

Well, in 1993, we had a--or 1992, it lingered on, and I finally got a hearing by Congressman Espy. He brought me in and had some of his representatives come over and see what the problem was, but I never was given a direct answer what the problem was with my application. But anyway, they finally gave me a loan. They took my application in April and I finally got my loan in June of '92.

So in 1993, we had a disaster, and by me not getting enough money, adequate enough money or the equipment to operate--I'm going to have to slow down here. You've all got me kind of--I'm trying

to make this five minutes count..

In 1992, in my loan application, I applied for equipment and operating expenses. The supervisor himself, Rodney A. Johnson, cut my loan back to only operating expenses. I was going to farm 106 acres of cotton at that particular time and about 35 acres of soybean. He let me have \$34,000 for that operation, and in that operating, I only had \$1,000 to come out of there to put fertilizer on my land.

At the end of the year, after getting somebody else to plant my crop, I didn't have anything to harvest it with. The late season caused my crop to fail. My yields were real low. The next year, I couldn't come back to borrow any money because I was afraid he would--I'm going to have to go through the same thing.

So finally, I got Congressman Thompson's office in on it. At that particular time, Espy had left and tried to take the Secretary's seat. Excuse me, but I'm trying to make it count.

Okay. From then, 1993 was a disastrous

year. I got my loan late anyway. It was around May when I got my loan. It was May, around May 12 when I got my loan, closed the loan out. We had a disastrous year in Yazoo County. The [indiscernible] worm took over. As a matter of fact, it took 75 percent of my crop. So that put me behind. Here it is, I've got a fertilizer bill I've got to try to keep up with, which was about \$18,000, and then I've got to go back and I've got a loan there for about \$60,000 or \$70,000 I've got to pay.

Nineteen-ninety-four was a pretty fair year but it was still late getting finance. The finance come in again around June. I reported to Mr. James Roe, the state officer, and also George Irving was in there at that particular time, I believe. I talked to him about the situation. Nobody never gave me a direct answer. The only thing it was, about the supervisor. The man is coming out. Okay.

In 1995, I applied for a loan again. You know in 1995, we did have another disaster. I was

late getting the loan. I didn't get the loan until August of 1995, and up until--1996, I went in to apply for an emergency disaster assistance loan, January, and up until this day, I haven't had a reply from that application, whether I was eligible to get my disaster assistance or not. I've been to Congressman Thompson's office several times. Me and Mr. Howen have been over to talk to Mr. Roe about it, and here I am. I'm broke. The bank has come in and collected my equipment. I'm out.

All I ask is, just don't sit and listen to us. Help us.

MR. GLICKMAN: Okay. We're going to make sure you get an answer. That, I can promise you. I can't tell you what the answer is going to be yet, but you are going to get an answer.

MR. SCHAFER: But if you don't stop the actions of the supervisor of that county, Rodney Johnson, him and Jimmy Sullivan and Tim Maynard, somebody is going to get hurt right there in Yazoo County. This is going to be another one of those cases you had over in Oklahoma or wherever that was

when those people that killed all those people over there had that shootout, because those are some rotten, no-good people you have down there.

MR. GLICKMAN: Well, okay. We don't want to talk like that at all. What we want to do is--

MR. SCHAFER: Well, that's the only way we're going to bring it out, Secretary.

MR. GLICKMAN: Wait. Wait. Wait. That's why we're here, too. This man, Randy Webber, would you--he can't see you because he's behind all these cameras. He's going to make sure that he talks to you before the end of the day. He just stood up. You see him. He's up front here. We'll try to make sure you get your answer. But we're going to get these things resolved amicably. Let's not have any talk about anything like that.

MR. WILKES: After Michael Travis, and let's make sure we continue to speak in the mike. After Michael Travis, I want to ask that Paul Pennington, Jr., come forward.

MR. TRAVIS: First of all, I'd just like to say good morning to everyone, to the platform

guests, Mr. Homer Wilkes from the program, Mr. Pearlie Reed, Secretary Dan Glickman, and our home Congressman Thompson. I'd just like to say a special hello to our dean, Dr. Leroy Davis of the School of Agriculture at Elk Horn and our Elk Horn family that are here today.

My concern is that I'm also Acting Assistant Program Director of Small Farm Outreach Training and Technical Assistance Programs. I heard a lot of concerns today about farmers paying \$2,000 and \$3,000 to put together a loan package. Through our Elk Horn State University Technical Assistance Program, we assist farmers in putting together a loan package, assist with record keeping.

And what we need to do, we need to try to expand our programs into other counties. We are currently working with nine counties. I think we need the State of Mississippi, we want 82 counties, and we can work their 82 counties and I estimate maybe a cost of \$2 million if we can get that much, but maybe not 82, maybe 50, and so we can be able

to serve the farmers better, because at the present time, we have 6,000 members and we have to travel throughout the State of Mississippi in assisting small farmers and large farmers and other farmers putting together their loan application package to submit to local banks and farm service agencies.

Also, I'd like to make a brief comment on the extension, on the 1890s. And Dr. Leroy Davis, he will follow, come later, at a later time. But in my opinion, the 1890s, schools like Alcorn State University and Tuskegee and other 1890s throughout the yonder states, we need more funding. We don't have enough funding--we don't get enough money to do our job, so we really need more funding so we can better serve the people of Mississippi.

I'd just like to cite a few examples. Example number one, small farmers really can't afford to pay entomologists to come out and check their crops. That's one example, that we need to hire entomologists. Also, we need to bring on people in the veterinarian business, maybe in the catfish business so we can serve the State of

Mississippi better.

And also, I am proud to be--the 2501 program has transferred to the National Resource Conservation Service and we really appreciate Mr. Homer Wiles and Mr. Pearlie Reed and Mr. Johnson for making sure that program is happening, and also a special thanks to Secretary Dan Glickman for the memorandum that you sent and all those, and we look forward with the two agencies working together, the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the 1890s and other grassroots organizations. We can be able to better serve our farmers, because when the two programs work together.

Let's talk about, for example, maybe the wetlands reserve programs. If we go out and visit a farmer and he might not know about wetlands, so when we go out there and visit a farmer, we can talk about the wetlands reserve programs and maybe he can become eligible for some funding and we can help keep the farmer on the farm.

Also, through this new agreement, we work with USDA [indiscernible], for example, maybe rural

development. We might have a farmer that needs a home. We can contact Mr. George Irving and work together with Rural Development in providing safe, decent homes for the farmers.

So what I'm asking, before I sit today, is we need more funding for our 2501 program for the State of Mississippi so we can be able to serve more farmers--so we can better serve the farmers in the state. And hopefully, we can get the 82 counties for \$2 million, but if not, we'll settle for 50.

And also, we need more funding for our extension programs, the 1890s. We need more funding so we can continue to better serve the small farmers and other family farmers and maybe if we can get the money that we deserve, maybe the farmers won't have to pay \$3,000 and \$4,000 to put together a loan package.

At this time, I'd just like to close and my supervisor, Dr. Jeffrey Hermans, he's not able to be here today but I'm sure if he was here, he would mention the same things.

Also, I'd like to just give a special thanks to all my farmers that I work with. I started working on the program in 1988 and I have learned a lot from my farmers because they have shown me different things. They helped me become a better effective person on my day-to-day activities.

Also, I would like to give a special thanks to two other people. One is Melba Smith, Administrative Assistant, and she always leads me in the right direction and things to do, and also my best friend Ray McGee. We never agree on anything but we always argue against each other, but we work together, so Ray, we're going to continue to keep up the good work, the people that work with small farm outreach. If you need any assistance from Alcorn State University, you can contact our program director, which is Dr. Jesse Hernes at 877-6125 and we'll be glad to say and work with the people.

Also, a lot of farmers, sometimes they contact Congressman Thompson's office and we'll go

out and work with farmers, so they give us leads sometimes, but we want to just continue to serve the farmers in Mississippi and we want to do a good job and we need the \$2 million to pay [indiscernible].

MR. WILKES: Thank you, Mr. Travis.

MR. : Mr. Travis, if I just may say to you, largely through the help of Congressman Thompson and others, we have something called the Fund for Rural America. It was part of the Secretary's money, and Under Secretary Wotecki is here and is well aware of this. We added, I think, \$4.5 million for this coming year specifically to deal with Section 2501 type of activities, which will substantially increase the funding generally. But the one thing I do hear from you is all aspects of agriculture, Farm Service Agency, NRCS, extension, everybody needs to be involved in this effort.

MR. WILKES: We have Mr. Pennington up now and the next person will be Mr. Sheridan Boyd.

MR. PENNINGTON: Hello. I'm Paul.

Pennington, Jr., Tallahatchie County. Here today, I want to thank Secretary Glickman, Congressman Thompson, all the panel members who have come to listen to the farmers' problems.

Secretary Glickman made the comment of the third lie, the Federal Government employee is here to help you. They helped my family, five generations. I would have been the fifth generation farm. They helped us. They helped us out of farming.

In 1972, it was the first year my parents, my grandparents had ever had any trouble. That came with the flood disaster in '72. In '73, at that point in time, the farm was worth approximately \$2 million. We applied through--I think we lost three planting times in '72 and lost two crops in '73. Applied to FMHA, Tallahatchie County. Our paperwork qualified us for approximately \$1 million at one percent money. It was not until August of '75 that we received the first assistance from Farmers Home, and that August of '75 was for the crop season of 1975.

We received loans through Farmers Home from '75 through '80. Virtually every loan was received--I think the earliest loan that was received was mid-June. All these loans that were received were received too late.

In 1984-85, we were basically at the end of our rope. An FHA farmer rented our property. We just found the contract showing that Farmers Home was to collect all rent monies, pay off the first mortgage, lend tax payments. For some reason or another, they didn't do that. It was not caught until '86. The farmer still had the money up at the elevator to pay off the first. The Farmers Home chose not to. They let the land go into foreclosure.

My grandmother was there to pay off the first. A Farmers Service employee advised her that the '87 Act was coming, not to bid on the property, that the write-down buyback program was coming and she would be able to get all her land, house, all properties back for less than what she was to pay there that day.

This didn't happen. She went in to apply, put down the paperwork. Basically, they told her that she would--no need in applying. She was on a fixed income. She didn't have enough money to pay back whatever--the money wasn't there to work anything out.

In 1988, my father--

[Break between sides of recorded tape.]

MR. PENNINGTON: --next door to get the rent contract. The rent contract was not available. Yet, they let another FHA farmer farm the place, the entire place. He farmed it in soybeans. Where that money went that was collected off that, we don't know. Our account reflects a total loan amount with interest, reflects no monies ever paid in.

In 1996, advised that we had no more rights to the place, all of it had been put into wetlands, U.S. Fish and Wildlife. They let me buy, or apply to buy my grandmother's house. I've been going through--I started processing my loan in July of this last year. I just got a letter yesterday

that I had been turned down, had two various appeals and all I understood in the '95 farm bill with the appeal process, that you could have an independent counsel to talk to. The local politics, local bureaucrats followed me all the way on these appeals and assured that I would be turned down.

But basically, what I got up to say, our problem in Tallahatchie County was associated with local politics. They blackballed us from the word go and assured that we wouldn't have money, that we'd get money too late, and, you know, that everything we had going on would be a failure.

MR. WILKES: Thank you, Mr. Pennington. We want to assure you that you can finish those comments up with members of the staff. They will take you back there to make sure that that is in the record.

MR. PENNINGTON: Okay.

MR. WILKES: Is Mr. Boyd available? After Mr. Boyd, we are going to ask that Mr. Harold Wheeler.

MR. BOYD: Good morning, Mr. Secretary, distinguished panel. I'm not going to take up much time because [indiscernible] a lot of staff [indiscernible] in the same office, so--but there's one thing that I'd like to reiterate about these ASCS members. I don't see any need to have ASCS members there to vote on who gets money and who not because it's going to be the good old boy politics. You get it and you don't.

So if the USDA could do one thing, it would just eliminate the ASCS members. If everything is set, if the government set guidelines and procedures, there's no need for each county to have people to vote on who gets what and who does not get what. So that's the main problem that we have in our counties.

I do have some personal problems, but I'll just take it up with somebody afterwards. But there is one thing that I would like to see changed. Just get rid of the whole ASCS members at each county level. There's no need for them. If there's no discrimination there, you don't need

anybody to sit there and vote on who gets what and who does not get what. Thank you.

MR. WILKES: The person that is next coming up is Mr. Harold Wheeler. Thank you.

MR. WHEELER: Good morning. God bless everybody. I thank you all for this opportunity to share a brief family farming story. My family, many of whom are here, have been farming since the 1840s. We struggled through the years, as perhaps all other farmers have had to struggle. Something about farming that's in the blood. It runs fairly deep.

My story is that we continue to struggle but we have the distinction of being the first farmer, black or white, from the State of Mississippi to have all of their ASC payments or to be accused of the Wetlands Act. Of all the farmers in the state, we were the first. I asked my local people why were they coming at us and they said they needed an example. They needed someone to show across the state what they would do to anyone that violated the Wet Act [sic].

Of course, what happened is we went to SCS. We asked for assistance. They said there was no money. We dug a ditch, and to make the story sort of short because of the time factor, I'll have to move along. They said that you were a good example, that besides, you don't just farm. You're a doctor, too, so what's the big deal of us taking your benefits?

So we then began to write to the local people, the district people. We couldn't get very much help there. We finally had to contact some people in Washington, and as a result, we were able to get the people that wrote the Wetlands Act to take a look at the farm and their first statement that, no question, this was proper. They were so wrong about it that, of course, SCS and ASCS, they did apologize.

What they did, though, is no one told us about the wetland violation. What we did is we harvest our crops, we got our gin receipts, our warehouse compress receipts, carried it to the ASCS office, hoping that we would get a loan or advance

on these crop bills, and they took the receipts. A week later, they called my office and said, we're throwing all your receipts out. Come get your receipts.

We did not get any funds for that crop year on cotton until this investigation got completed and that was sometime in March or so. If it wasn't for other resources, we would have been broke.

At the same time that we did this, we developed some enemies. The whole family was investigated. All our bank accounts were reviewed and a detailed OIG investigation of the family was done. OIG got through looking at the family, said nothing was wrong, so they were doing the same thing as all the other farmers were doing. We thought that was over with.

Then in 1993, we had another bad year. We had a disaster like everyone else. I was in a neighboring county, Sunflower County. Right across the road from me was Leflore County. The Leflore County farmers got a disaster payment. A big flood

came, wiped us out. We took it to the Sunflower County office. There, Dave Jenkins and some others that were there decided that, yes, you had a disaster but you shouldn't have had a disaster, and since 1993, we never got any disaster payments in Sunflower County.

Of course, what I'm saying is that here's the road. Here's the farms in Leflore County that got disaster payment. If you crossed the road, ten-feet wide, and we couldn't get a disaster payment.

At the same time, I began to write letters. These letters got some attention and they began another investigation from OIG. This time, they went after my father. My father was like some of the other farmers. He's been farming years and years, and he had accumulated some FHA debt. His debt was large, but in 1987 they said, if you turn in everything, sell out, they'd write you off, and that's what he did.

He sold all the equipment, all the land, his own home. He sold all of this and turned it

into FHA. FHA didn't have anything to say about it, but nevertheless, his lawyer advised him to file bankruptcy. When he filed bankruptcy, and the lawyer did it wrong, OIG decided to turn it into a criminal investigation. Now, my father has been taken to the North District Court. He's been tried. The testimony that was in the court, all of his testimony on his behalf--they threw out all my testimony completely--and he's now convicted and he's looking for an appeal at this date right now as a result of what they said.

The only thing that supposedly he violated was that his lawyer completed the bankruptcy paper wrong. To make the story even worse, to show you the discrimination, they allowed the attorney not to have one--the attorney had no--they didn't charge the attorney that failed the bankruptcy. They let him walk free. My father stood trial and was convicted.

At the same time, after the trial was over, they went back and they told the attorney that he couldn't participate in any Federal Court

and told him that he had to pay--he charged him like \$2,000 to do the bankruptcy and they told him, you overcharged him on that and they got after the lawyer.

But right now, as a result of farming and what the OIG and everyone came back, that came back to my father is now convicted.

Getting back to home--oh, I've got to stop. Thank you.

MR. : Go ahead. Go ahead and just try to finish in a minute, because I want to hear the rest of your story.

MR. WHEELER: Getting back to home, I'm from Greenwood, Leflore County. I've been farming, working hard there. The ASCS offices remain entirely white. We have no representation when you go into the offices. We picked up two farms last year that had good yields. When we took the yields--when the farms got into our name, the farms' yields were reduced. One had about a 1,100-pound yield that was reduced to 800. One that had a 900-pound yield was reduced to 700.

We don't have the kind of representation in the local offices so that when we walk into an office and talk to people, we feel like they're there to help us and we need some better representation in our local offices.

MR. : Thank you.

MR. WILKES: Thank you, Dr. Wheeler.

[Applause.]

MR. WILKES: The next person up is Jimmy Johnson, and after Mr. Johnson, there's a Michael Patterson.

MR. JOHNSON: I'm Jimmy Johnson. I'm from Yazoo County and I've listened to the problems of other farmers and I kind of sympathize with this young man right here.

I went into the Farmers Home Administration office in 1994 to apply for a cattle loan. He sent me over to the Cooperative Extension office. After about three months of running from one office to the other, we finally up at Mississippi State, the Department of Trade, we got some relief from there.

I returned back to the office to take my loan at the--Dr. Pometry sent in specialists to work the loan. The supervisor is Rodney Johnson. As he put the loan into the computer, he alternated the numbers so that it wouldn't cash flow. He changed the numbers and it wouldn't cash flow again. And then he advised me to sign it. I refused to sign it and he said he didn't care if any blacks didn't get a loan.

And I told him, "I know you don't from your attitude," I said, "but one day when you won't have a job behind a desk, you will care." He accused me of threatening him. He called in his secretary to be the witness and said, "This man is threatening me." I said, "Well, you don't have to worry about what I said. I've got a tape recorder in my boot and it's going to reveal what everybody said."

At that point, he ordered me out of his office. I went and filed a criminal complaint against him. They arrested him. We went to court. When we got to city court, his lawyer came. The

jury was asking me, well, where is Rodney? So you can see how the conditions are in Yazoo County.

I finally got the loan, but they sent me over to Madison County. They combined the trouble because they sent him to Madison County, too.

[Laughter.]

MR. JOHNSON: So we have many problems all over the State of Mississippi, but we hope that you don't just sit here and listen as you have done across the years. I realize that it's a long road and it's a hard process, but we in Yazoo County, all we want you to do is just give us the chance that they gave a little old dog on the side of the road down there. It's not strange for people to adopt dogs and give them good homes, but what I'm concerned about, this little dog is a black dog.

[Laughter.]

MR. JOHNSON: His mother birthed these puppies on the side of the road. All the puppies got run over but one. There's a guy that works at the paper plant, goes down the road. He noticed this puppy laying by its mother and he started to

bring this puppy food. As he started stopping to bring the puppy food, the whole community started bringing the food.

And back before Christmas, as the weather began to get cold, they put this dog a house out there. Now, everybody from Yazoo City will go out and put feed at the dog's house. The dog sleeps in the house. In the daytime, he come out in the road and waits for people to throw out stuff.

But what I'm trying to say, the dog is happy. People tried to adopt the dog but they couldn't catch him. They said, well, if we can't catch him to take him home and make him happy, let's make him happy where he is, and that's why they built the house on the side of the road and that's why they come out and feed, because the dog is happy there.

We farmers are like this little dog. All we're asking you to do is address these problems so that we can stay on the land that our mothers and fathers have left us. Thank you.

MR. WILKES: Thank you.

[Applause.]

MR. WILKES: We have Michael Patterson.

MRS. PATTERSON: Margaret. Thank you.

I'm Margaret Patterson from Lee County, and to the honorable and distinguished guests on the panel, right now, I don't have a problem because I have been helped tremendously by the Soil Conservation, except for one problem. I had a great problem with erosion, and this is what they helped me with.

But by the same token, everybody in my community for miles and miles around had the same problem, but they hadn't gotten any help. So after I was made an example of how good a farm would look if you would take it up and do this--it cost me a lot of money, but I was willing to do it--I was made a Deputy Commissioner and I went many, many miles campaigning for the money that we was to get from Washington through the Federal Government and the Soil Conservation.

It was approved, only to be told by, I guess about six or seven months before this all was to take place, there was no money. Of course, this

made me look bad because I had campaigned and talked to everywhere and got people all up in the air about help, only to be told there wasn't any help, and that was about eight or nine years ago and we still haven't gotten any help. This was to be named Tubbalubby Watershed [ph.], but it haven't happened.

And one other thing I would like to say, being a minority and a lady farmer, there are very limited resources. One of mine is I raise beef cattle. When I run out of money, I carry them to the sell only to get 27 cents. This has been devastating to me because I have very limited resources.

So I'm here to ask for money for the watershed that the people in my community in Lee County to be helped and stop the erosion before all the land goes down to Louisiana, because that's where it's headed to. I'm talking about tremendous erosion. And if we can get a better price for our cattle, we could help ourselves, and I thank you.

MR. WILKES: Thank you.

[Applause.]

MR. WILKES: James Minor?

MR. PATTERSON: I'm not sure whether you all called Margaret Patterson or Michael Patterson.

MR. WILKES: I called Michael Patterson.

MR. PATTERSON: I'm Michael Patterson. I farm in Leland, Mississippi. I have a long history of having problems with Farmers Home Administration.

I started farming in partnership with my father in 1972. I farmed in partnership with him until 1982, when he passed. At that time, I assumed all responsibilities and legal obligations to the farm.

Farmers Home Administration, once my father passed, didn't feel--it seems to me, they didn't feel as if they wanted me to farm the property. The first question they asked me when my father passed was, what am I going to do with the farm? My father sent seven children to college from that farm and most of them--five out of that seven was in agriculture.

I decided I wanted to farm. I didn't feel that it was a question of what I wanted to do. I had been farming ten years and it was a profitable farm and still is.

The Farmers Home Administration, they have their ways of if they don't legally turn you down, they can under the table. The last three or four loans that I received from Farmers Home Administration, I received my money in July, August, and September, except for a farm loan, production loan. I managed to--I obtained financing for my equipment in other places. Farmers Home didn't finance my farm equipment so they couldn't foreclose on me with the equipment.

When you are farming and you receive your money in June, July, and August and September, when people are gathering your crop, and when you are one of the first to turn your application in--they start applications, they say in Washington County, February 1. I would be one of the first.

They would set up an appointment for March. Come in, they need one more piece of paper.

They'd set up an appointment for April. They need one more piece of paper. They set up an appointment for July. They need one more piece of paper. August, they--no, application completed. Your loan been approved? We don't have any funding. And if you don't have credit on your own, you know, with the seed companies, the fertilizer companies, or if you don't have other income, you know, you're put out of business. And they systematically will put farmers out of business on delays.

If you can check your records to date, Washington County is one of the largest counties in the state, and if my records are correct, it's about two or three black farmers get a loan from Farmers Home Administration in the whole county. It's something wrong with the land that we have.

I can look anyone in the face in this room with getting my money in June, July, August, and September. My farm records, my farm production is as good as anyone in here. I know how to farm. I was born and raised there. But it's just that

systematic thing. If they don't like you, they're going to put you out of business, and it's done all the time.

Right now, the last loan I obtained from Farmers Home Administration was, I believe, 1988. My files are yet at Farmers Home Administration. I was eligible for the write-down. Like they said, we had bad years back then, which we have them now. We have a couple of disaster loans. My loans, my applications are just sitting there. They haven't attempted to foreclose on me. They haven't attempted to resolve it.

Twice, we went in. They said the computer don't discriminate. We went in. The computer recommended a write-down twice. The supervisor never presented it to the committee. You know, it just sits there. I have my copy. He has his copy. It recommended a write-down. They got nothing.

They said I have a file--no one wants to touch my files--I have a file there nearly two feet high stacked in the corner. The supervisor that's there now said he wouldn't touch it for nothing

because every supervisor that's been there, you know, go in, change this, do this, do that, and don't act on it. It's just sitting there. And so-

MR. GLICKMAN: I want a report of your files, so I want the Farm Service Agency in Washington County to give me a report. So Randy, if you would take care of making sure that's worked its way back down.

MR. PATTERSON: Thank you. That's all I want.

[Applause.]

MR. PATTERSON: Whatever needs to be done, do that, but no--and it's been ten years now and it's just sitting there. If I didn't have other businesses or other ways of making money--I still farm. The first thing they told me was that you're farming too large. I was farming 1,100 acres of land. That's a small farm in Washington County. But my farm was cash-flowing. It cash-flow. I have my application before them. It's cash-flowing.

Why is my farm too large with 1,100 acres of land? I already have the equipment to farm it. I have the credit to get the money. Why am I too large? I'm not asking you for no loans to purchase equipment or nothing. All I need is a production loan. They tell me I'm farming--too large a farmer. Why, I don't know.

It's hard to put 20 years of Farmers Home Administration in five minutes, but it's a problem with the system. It goes back to the ASCS office. As long as there are no minorities with voting power on these committees, we're not going to get any help. We have the minority sitting there, a minority advisor, but he doesn't have any voting power or anything. He can't do anything but sit there and listen to them recommending money to everyone else to improve their farm but us.

MR. WILKES: Thank you, Mr. Patterson, but the five minutes is not up because we do have someone to take the rest of your comments there. So I'll have someone to come and if you would go and finish up your presentation, it will be put in

the file.

MR. PATTERSON: All right. Thank you.

MR. WILKES: Just before Mr. Minor gets started, I would ask that the--

MR. : Didn't you skip Lucias Turner up there around Jimmy Johnson?

MR. WILKES: What was that, sir?

MR. : You should have my name on there around Jimmy Johnson, Lucias Turner.

MR. WILKES: Right. Mr. Turner, you will comment next, but what I'm doing is trying to get a mixture of the whole state. So after Mr. Minor, then we have Mr. Lucias Turner coming. But before Mr. Minor begins to speak, I'm going to ask the members of the media if they would come to this corner and meet Mr. Montrail.

Mr. Minor?

MR. MINOR: I'd like to say good morning, and to the Secretary, Congressman, and other dignitaries and those people that are responsible for this hearing today, I think it's a real good thing and we have needed this for a good while.

I'm James Minor and I'm a retired Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service person and agent from Jones County. Yes, I'm retired now. Some of you don't know what that means. That means a heck of a lot to me because I've served on so many committees and so many different situations where I've tried to assist minority farmers in securing loans as well as the necessary security to stay in business to help them produce their crops as well as their livestock.

It is detrimental when your farmers come back to you and tell you, "I couldn't get anything," especially when you walked them through the paperwork and found that they were eligible under some type of guidelines.

I'm just here to echo what Mr. Boyd and Mr. Brown on the committees and also Mrs. Johnson and Mr. Sutton. I think they have explained it pretty vividly. I'm going to echo what they are saying from my personal experience.

It's not a situation where they look for the information to get you approved. They are

looking for information to disapprove you, and I think this is where we need to start at. That committed, it needs a lot of revamping, and not only the committee. The public sector and the financial agencies are doing exactly the same. Thank you.

MR. WILKES: Thank you, Mr. Minor.

[Applause.]

MR. WILKES: Mr. Turner? After Mr. Turner, I'm going to ask for a Mr. Eugene Townsend.

MR. TURNER: Congressman Thompson, Secretary, and all of you brave people out here, you're really important. This is what makes it go and you should have been doing this a long time ago.

I am not a farmer as such. I have five acres. However, I've been black for 68 years and I know it's discrimination that goes on. What makes me so angry is that you get some black so-called brothers up there or faces. They're the color but they're not the kind and they're going to do exactly what the boss tell them to do because they

own a Cadillac, you see.

I want to ask you a couple of questions. That's all I want to do, Secretary. And I was watching USDA the other morning, Sunday morning, and I didn't see one black person on there, the TV program I watched. Now, I see you have a few sprinkled here and there, but I need to see some blacks when I walk in these offices. I feel more comfortable with my own kind.

So the first question, is it all right for the Yazoo County Conservation Farm Service to be all white?

Number two, is it all right for the Yazoo review board to be all white?

Number three, is it all right for the staff, et cetera, to be related to most of the farmers in Yazoo City?

Five, why do we practice nepotism in Yazoo County? Everybody in the office--I got a list of them that work there and they're cousins and uncles and brothers and so forth, like Rodney Johnson is over Madison County and his mama is a big farmer

there. Shouldn't we do something about nepotism? I think that would help a whole lot.

Now, I participated in erosion. I end up spending more money than what I was offered from the beginning, not knowing, because I didn't have any help. I'm a schoolteacher, you see. But I think if you have a toothache, you can treat it all kinds of ways. But until you pull the tooth, you're not going to eliminate the toothache.

MR. WILKES: Thank you.

[Applause.]

MR. WILKES: Mr. Townsend, and after Mr. Townsend we're going to ask for Mr. Willie Young.

MR. TOWNSEND: Secretary Glickman, panel members, I'm Eugene Townsend from Pelahatchie, Mississippi, in Rankin County. I'm a dairy farmer. I didn't see many dairy farmers here today, but I am a dairy farmer. I managed to get off this morning.

I've been involved with the Farmers Home Administration and in conflict for over 22 years. I served with the State Agriculture Department in

their mediation program as a contract mediator for the entire life of that program. I also served as a Secretary and Treasurer for the Mississippi Farm Law Institute, which is an organization established to help farmers with information on USDA procedures, policies, and farmer rights. I served as a county committee member for four years until the county committee was disbanded.

I would like to say that myself and another man was the first to force a legal election in Rankin County, and we did this by threats of litigation. That's the only way we got a legal committee election in Rankin County.

I assure you, sir, and everybody in this audience today, that the problems with the service programs, delivery, it crosses all racial and gender lines. The man who said back here just a few minutes ago and talked about systematically putting out of business, that occurs to everybody. Another man talked about his father. My father is 72 years old. Systematically, he was put out of business. It crosses all lines.

Progressive Farmer in June and July of 1996 says it best when they use the word "blacklisted". This includes blacks, whites, men, women, people of all races. The county office can send you up the road a fortune or they can send you down the road a foreclosure. It's really their decision.

We need a county office that is more directed to help solve problems than to create them. We need a county office that is willing to advise us of new procedures, not try to conceal them, and I can assure you that this has happened.

My particular problem is that I was foreclosed on and entered into lease-back buyback in 1991. I might also say that Jackie Norton, as an officer of the Federal Land Bank, was the one who proceeded with the foreclosure, so we all, from here to Jackson, we all know Jackie Norton.

[Laughter.]

MR. TOWNSEND: I entered the lease-back buyback program after again threatening litigation. The only reason I did was because I was unable to

obtain finances from anywhere else. At that time, my farm appraised for \$182,000 and capitalized for about the same amount of money. In 1996, when I asked to repurchase the property for the third time, it was appraised and capitalized for \$478,000. That shows you what an appraiser can do. It was up 300 percent when I got ready to buy it.

In January of 1994, I requested to meet with whomever necessary in the state office, the national office, the county office, wherever, to settle my account and get some direction. Until this day, I have not received such a meeting.

As this panel and this administration, this Congress leads us into the year 2000 and beyond, please remember that we whipped USSR not by firing a rocket or exploding a nuclear device, but the fact is they could not feed themselves. This country, this state is made up of people like us, people right here from front to back, family farmers who go out and work from daylight until dark for their family and to produce food for a living. These are the backbones of our country.

This is what, folks, Russia didn't have.

As you develop the policy for the future, please remember these facts and keep in mind that our children not be held hostage to starvation.

MR. WILKES: Thank you.

[Applause.]

MR. WILKES: Mr. Young, Willie Young.

MR. YOUNG: Thank you. Congressman, Secretary, I'm Willie Young, a farmer in Madison County, cattle farmer. My basic complaint is somewhat twofold in that I don't know at this point whether I've been foreclosed against or not. I have not received any information stating to that fact, or have I received any letters or what have you.

One of my primary concerns, in 1993, when I applied for a loan, it took about nine months before I was able to get the necessary information that they needed in order for things to progress. Finally, in June of 1994, I was approved. Of course, now in 1995, the cattle ranchers realized that something drastic happened in the cattle

business. The prices dropped completely.

Basically, the way my loan was set up, or at least the way that I see it, that it was set up, that I was not given enough monies to operate, number one, and when the cattle prices dropped, well, you can show what happened at that point.

But during this time and realizing that this was going to happen, I talked to a Mr. Rick Little--I'm going to call the name, Congressman Thompson, Mr. Rick--Cliff--I'm sorry, Cliff Little in the Madison County office. I began to complete an application, which I believe is 1951-S, complete an application for reconstruction of my loan, realizing that I was not going to have enough monies to pay my loan at the due time.

This went on for several months, or even about a year and several months. Mr. Little continued to tell me, "Willie, everything will be all right. You will not have a problem. Everything will be all right." Well, when I filed the 1995 tax return, something happened. We received a letter from the IRS saying that the

monies that we were going to receive back, which was a little over \$4,000, was going to be applied to our debt.

So I immediately get on the phone and I called Mr. Little, tell him what the problem was. In fact, I faxed him a letter, which I'm holding in my hand. Here's some documentation that I faxed to him, telling him, I said, look, you know we need these monies. You know I'm having some problems. I've lost many cows and I have yet to get you to come out to look at my problem.

I had the [indiscernible] to come out. I had the--I can call his name, he's standing right up against the wall here. I had him to come out to test some water samples for me because I was losing cows and could not understand exactly what was happening.

But Mr. Little on several occasions, either that he was too busy and/or he was sick, that he was not able to come out. I lost some 20 cows, and this was basically, to my understanding, because of not having a pond, which I had requested

at that time, which was rejected, along with some other things that I had requested that were rejected, for fertilizing of the property and what have you.

But getting back to my 1951-S form, as you know, as a period of time goes on, you have to go back and redo all these things, simply requesting from your creditors all the information that you need and what have you, and I believe someone else mentioned earlier about you come in this month and they tell you that you need this piece of paper. A few more months pass, you need this piece of paper.

Well, as of today, I have filed another application 1951-S--this is for the second time--and have yet to hear from the office as to the status of my application. I don't know. I would simply say that I have invested a lot of personal monies into fencing and I don't know at this point where I'm going to stand--where I'm standing. We're just in between. I'm just asking for some help.

MR. WILKES: Thank you.

[Applause.]

MR. WILKES: We're going to--Mr. Young?

MR. YOUNG: Yes, sir?

MR. WILKES: If you would make sure that that gets in, there will be someone to follow up to at least be able to tell you the status of that particular case there.

In the interest of time, we're not going to take a formal break. If anyone needs to stand up, just stand up as people come to the mike. But we're going to continue to have people to come forward because we're trying to get as many people as possible to come forward and make their presentation.

Mr. Lewis Sanders is the next person that will be coming forward, and then I'm going to ask a Mr. Jimmy Lee Lacy.

MR. SANDERS: First, I'd like to thank God for all of us being here. Ladies and gentlemen, I'm Lewis Sanders, a family farmer from Mound Bayou, Mississippi, which is in Bolivar County.

As we enter into the last six years of the

FAIR Act, we believe that years of turning deaf ears to complaints of improper treatment, unfair implementation of policy, sometimes outright fraud, and a basic case of personnel not properly doing their job, that if this hearing is to be an instrument of correction, we would like to see the following items included on USDA's action item list.

Item number one, we think that absolutely no agency employee who shows a history of being accused of unfair execution of policy should be transferred with a promotion or pay increase, as was recently done in Bolivar County. Such is a mockery of USDA and its employees and its client group.

Item number two, witnessing that most of the limited resource funds appropriated by Congress back in the '70s and early '80s went unused because states with high constituent demand did not request new appropriations when their initial funds ran out, we request that USDA disburse the equivalent of those funds to those farmers who are still

actively farming who should have had access to them years ago.

Item number three, we believe that individual complaints should be investigated as to their merits, and when agency personnel show a predisposition to certain acts or actions, the national office should take corrective measures, even to the extent of replacing local committee members.

Item number four, we request that USDA investigate the initial selling of bases and years during the early 1980s. From our tailgate conversations, we hear a trend where we have too many cases of high yield, small base or low yield, big base, which effectively lowered the substantive payment to many of us over the past 17 years. We believe that numbers do not lie. Therefore, USDA should make a basic compensatory payment to those of us who were intentionally disadvantaged for this 20-year cycle of the USDA farm program.

Item number five, when we look at USDA, we see where there is subsidized production through

subsidy payments on the one hand and subsidized consumption through food coupons on the other. We believe that ways should be sought to link these two constituent groups, and there are ways to do it. Thank you.

MR. WILKES: Thank you.

Mr. Lacey?

MR. LACEY: Good morning, Mr. Secretary and the platform guests. I am a black farmer from Holmes County, which I farm in both counties, Yazoo and Holmes County.

I'm speaking about a personal problem of my own that I've been denied of. I have received a loan every year, but some years I receive a loan-- put in for a package, rather, in February and they got my loan processed on particular time. They mailed it out to the county office, which Mr. Rodney Johnson. They never notified me.

Then I went by First National Bank of Pickens. The loan officer told me, he said, "Your loan is in the office in Yazoo County." Then I go down there to ask Mr. Johnson about the loan. The

he tells me that, "I don't have your loan." He take my loan in the year of '95 and mails it back to the state office in Washington.

I'm in particular trying to rent equipment from different agencies to go forward. So then when I get someone to get a word to Washington about my loan, he said, "Yes, we received your loan back, but what we were told, that you weren't going to farm this year, that you automatically sent your loan back to Washington, D.C."

That's all I have to say at the present time. Most has been said, what needs to be said, I think. I thank you.

MR. WILKES: Thank you.

[Applause.]

MR. WILKES: Sir? Sir? Excuse me, Mr. Lacey? We're going to ask Randy Webber to see that your case is investigated, please.

MR. LACEY: Yes, sir.

MR. WILKES: We have up next will be Mr. Bobby Hinson, and after Mr. Hinson, I'm going to ask Mr. Eddie Connison.

MR. HINSON: First of all, good morning, or good afternoon now, and distinguished guests, the Honorable Secretary, and Congressman Thompson, one thing I learned this far in the meeting, that prejudice is not black and white. It seems like it's green or kinfolks.

But one thing I would like to say on a serious note, I had to leave the State of Mississippi in 1960 because I was affiliated with the NAACP. I had a B.S. degree from Jackson State University and I couldn't get a teaching job. I've heard the word blackball used today for the first time. It kind of tickled me for a white man to say blackball.

So, now, I stayed and made a little money out of the state and came back home in 1985. The good thing about coming back in '85, in a few months, the then-lawyer Espy ran for the United States Congress from the Second Congressional District, to me was a great thing. We worked on that campaign and everything seemed good. So I said, well, I don't have to teach anymore. We've

got a black going to Washington. Maybe I can go and apply for a loan. I did.

But the thing that's different from my application than the rest of them, I guess they just turned me down from jump street. I have three sad stories about a loan. The first one, I just related to in 1985.

Again, in 1989, I applied for what you call a dry dam. I own about 159 acres of land that hadn't been farmed in, at that time, in about six years, and it was washing away, eroding bad. So I went to the Conservation Office and I said, if I could get a dry dam, maybe I wouldn't lose all my land. So they said, "Well, you haven't been farming it." And they looked at my name and said, "You haven't farmed here in a long time." I said, "But my dad farmed it." "Well, we'll get back with you." That's the second bad story.

The last bad story was 1996. We got involved in a deal with Alcorn State University and this young man said that, if you come to these sorghum programs, and I brought a couple of my

neighbors and I went myself and they showed us the place where if you farm, we're going to market your stuff at the state fair, and if you need funding, apply for a loan. Needless to say, I applied for the loan. I applied for the loan about March 8, 1996, and I haven't heard from it yet.

The reason I'm here today is just to say, I didn't believe the black folks ever got any money, to tell the truth. But now I understand and I'm pleased that you have loaned some of the brothers and sisters the money. But I just want to know why you haven't even answered--I haven't even gotten to the lying stage. I haven't even gotten to the stage where you say, "You can get it next week."

So, now, in all due respect, I wish you would just record this. You have a lot of farmers, small farmers with less land than myself that have abandoned the whole idea of farming because there's no help. You cannot even sponsor a tomato farm of an \$8 an hour job. It's bad. And another thing you hear, say, well, all farmers must be

millionaires. Huh. Huh.

But anyway, thank you. Just consider, I'm a small boy down in Hines County, and when I say boy, little financially. I'm just as big as anybody you know, manhood. But unless you help me and my kind, we're non-existent. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

MR. GLICKMAN: Can I just ask, you have not received--sir--

MR. WILKES: Mr. Hinson?

MR. GLICKMAN: Can I just ask you, you have not received any response to the--

MR. HINSON: Not any response.

MR. GLICKMAN: Okay. Which county is this, you said?

MR. HINSON: Hines County.

MR. GLICKMAN: Hines County.

MR. HINSON: The most populated in the state.

MR. GLICKMAN: All right. Mr. Webber, would you follow up on that?

MR. WILKES: Next, we'll have Mr. Eddie Connison, and after Mr. Connison, Mr. John Miller.

MR. CONNISON: Thank you to the Congressman, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, to all of the staff and all farmers who are here. We are very grateful and thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today.

I'm representing the Millston Farmers Cooperative, the oldest black cooperative in the United States. I'm also, like many farmers, a fourth generation of the 40 acres and mule concept. My fathers, we've been farming this same farm since Abraham Lincoln developed the 40 acres and mule concept.

To make a long story short, many of the farmers have spoken to many of the complaints that all of us are having with the services coming from the various agencies, ASCS, FMHA, and the others. I would like to focus that the problem has been bad leadership by those who are in charge of implementing the programs. From the county supervisors to the district managers to the state

director, we have had bad leadership.

Number one, delivery. It takes a long time and a lot of paperwork to do loans. It takes - at the beginning of the farming season, we have to wait on your programs to develop. The bank can't do nothing. Your creditors can't do nothing. Nobody can help you until the Congress, the Department, the Secretary develops a program. And on top of that, we get late loans.

My father passed in 1983. I was born and reared on the farm. He raised all of us and educated us and fed us from the farm. The only thing I can remember him having to buy out of a store was salt and pepper. Everything else, we raised.

I learned to plow a mule at age six. As a matter of fact, I have evidence of plowing mules. That's what happened to my eye. I got kicked. I had to try and beat the weather. I should have carried the mule home for lunch and I plowed him through lunchtime and he kicked me.

[Laughter.]

MR. CONNISON: We get, unlike other employees, we get paid once a year as a farmer. We get one check, if we get that one. And we work from sunup to sundown hoping that this one check would come through. Everything that we live for, our families and our kids, depends on this one check.

And here in some of these offices, particularly FMHA, we have supervisors playing with our lives, playing with our livelihood, sending us around the corner and delaying--deliberately, Mr. Secretary--delaying loans, deliberately trying to make us fail, deliberately seeing to it that we get our loans late, in August, in September and October. That is no time to plan.

Let me close. I've got one minute left. When we walk into a Federal office, we expect some degree of trust. If the supervisor tells us to be at a certain place at a certain time, we think that that is what would happen. But often times, they misrepresent the office. They misrepresent their own policies. We are at the mercy of your rules

and your regulations. Many of us don't know what the rules and regulations are, so we depend on that officer or that supervisor to explain it to us.

They had to hire someone from Alabama, after going through all the appeals, to come in to do my application. After an investigation by someone from Washington, I was told in writing that it was impossible for my application to be processed in Mississippi. They sent an FHA director from Alabama to do my application and it was done.

We need some men and women working in those offices that we can feel comfortable with and that we can trust. The problem is trust. The problem is delivery. Thank you very much.

MR. WILKES: Thank you.

[Applause.]

MR. WILKES: Mr. John Miller, and after Mr. Miller, Ms. Janice Crawford. Is Mr. Miller in? Ms. Janice Crawford? After Ms. Crawford, we're going to have Mr. Grover Cato.

MS. CRAWFORD: To Mr. Thompson, Secretary,

and all the other distinguished guests, I'm here on behalf of my mother, Mrs. Cora Love.

I've heard a lot of complaints here today and I know that everybody here has a problem. So do we, and I'm going to tell you what our complaint is. My father farmed all of his life, from 1959 until 1991, and he died. During those years, I hear a lot of the farmers say they can't borrow any money. Well, apparently he did, because they said at the time of his death that he owed Farmers Home Administration \$110,000. Okay. No, I don't think this was all at once, either. I think this was over a period of years.

But anyway, we started working with the office out of Charleston, Mr. Carl Holmes, supervisor, Tallahatchie County, and we started working on this debt to try to get it reduced, written off, canceled, or something, because my mother lives on Social Security and all she has is that Social Security and \$6,500 per year that she have to farm the land because she could not farm it herself.

Okay. So they told us, they met every year. Every so often he would say, come in, bring this, bring that, bring this, bring that, fill out this, fill out that. So finally, in November of last year, he wrote us and he said the most he could do on that loan would be to write it down to \$89,250 and we had 30 days to appeal that.

So that's where we are and that's why we're here today and we would like for somebody to work on that if at all possible, because that's impossible for a person living on a fixed income. And another thing, at 66 years old, I'm pretty sure there ain't nobody going to even loan her \$89,000, so the only alternative would be that she would either have to sell it, lose it, don't have it, or do something, let somebody purchase it or do something that's got \$89,000 in the first place.

Thank you, and somebody else can have my time.

[Applause.]

MR. WILKES: Well, first of all, we don't want the time to run out. If we could, we want to

make sure that you present your case to Mr. Webber. You can come forward right now.

MS. CRAWFORD: I will. Thank you.

MR. WILKES: And I know all of you have heard some of the things, but it concerns me. I was presented a case in Tallahatchie County where our government wrote down over \$1 million to a farmer to less than \$100,000, and when I hear cases like this, I'm very concerned that you take from \$110,000 to \$89,000 and call that a deal when other people are offered ten cents on the dollar or less in terms of the write-down.

So I'm asking the Secretary to also review that policy to make sure that the application or the lease-back buyback provision applies evenly across the board, Mr. Secretary, especially in the situations where many of the farmers here are faced with that dilemma now.

MR. : Excuse me. I want to comment on that [inaudible] he wrote down from \$1 million to \$100,000-and-some [inaudible] how could that farmer go in the hole over \$1 million when

they don't lend [inaudible] \$200,000.

MR. WILKES: It was carry-over debt over a period of time that got it up to that amount. You see, I'm not justifying what they did.

MR. : No. No. No. That's why I'm [inaudible] I was told you can just borrow up to \$200,000 [inaudible].

MR. WILKES: See, these loans--go ahead.

MR. : I can't understand [inaudible].

MR. WILKES: Well, all I'm doing is stating the facts.

MR. : [Inaudible.]

MR. WILKES: Well, it was bad debt all along, interest and penalties and other things. But the point I'm showing and making is that while they say that now, there have been other instances where these have occurred and we want to look at them all.

Is Mr. Grover Cato available? And this gentleman that was asking those questions, make sure that you get the comments in this review

process. Mr. Cato? Mr. Cato is not available?
Mr. Clint Weaver? Is Mr. Cato coming forward? And
Mr. Clint Weaver is next. Oh, this is Mr. Weaver.
Okay.

MR. WEAVER: My name is Clint Weaver. I
farm in Sunflower County.

In 1977, FHA put me in business. I had
graduated from Delta State, so I knew a little bit
about filling forms out, so that wasn't a problem.
In that year, we had a drought. I lost a little
money, \$6,000, \$7,000, \$8,000, I don't remember how
much.

The next year, everything went timely. I
made a good crop. I paid the previous year's debt,
bought a new pickup and paid for it, a new power
unit and paid for it, and lived out of it. The
next six years, I get production loans pretty much
on time. I kind of held my own.

Then in 1986, we had a young man come into
FHA that was not capable of doing the job, and I'm
sure a lot of folks here had the same problem,
because we had a lot of folks in the office with

the same problem. But anyway, the man, Wayne Powers, was to work on my applications.

I would come in time for my appointment and he came up with the excuses of not meeting me. My wife was in the hospital, which is understandable. My neighbor's child is sick. My yard needs to be mowed. Now, somebody made the statement a while ago, they're dealing with our lives, and that's the kind of lame-brained excuses he'd come up with.

Well, finally, they got rid of him. They asked for his resignation. He left FHA and went to the Post Office, still a Federal job, which is fine for him. But he cost me my reputation and a lot of money.

The next year was '87. I went in and got an application filled out. It would cover the prior years indebtedness, where I lost all that money. It showed a cash flow. The application was approved March 1. The man that took the application, the county supervisor at the time, resigned that evening. My application laid on his

desk for a month before I knew he was gone.

My banker called and said, "Clint, do you know that the man's gone from the office?" I said, "No. I've been out here trying to get prepared for the crop. My loan's been approved." He said, "Well, check on it." I went and checked. No application. It's been laying on his desk somewhere for a month. So I had to start the whole process again. Finally, in August, August 11, I got funding for that year's crop. The prior year was July 25.

Now, most of these folks out here know how to farm, and I don't think any of them will tell you you can--

[End of Tape 1.]

-- due to attrition. But most of them were put out by FHA for the same type reason that I just told you my problem.

I came here, and I know a lot of colored folks here, and they know I'm not prejudiced against blacks. I came down here expecting to be in a minority, and, ladies and gentlemen, I am not

in a minority today.

Everybody here is in the same majority with FHA. They screw people around. I've heard a lot of complaints today, and everyone of them that I have heard is valid.

That's all I have to say.

SECRETARY GLICKMAN: Thank you.

MR. WILKES: The next person is Mr. Lonnie Byrd, and I'd ask Mr. Byrd to come forward, as well as Ms. B. Branch. Mr. Byrd first, and Ms. B. Branch next.

MR. BYRD: I'm Lonnie Byrd from Sunflower County, a life long resident. Good morning. Mr. Secretary and other distinguished guests.

My name is Lonnie Byrd, a retired farmer, a commission of my local Soil and Water Conservation District.

As a commission of the Sunflower County Soil and Water Conservation District I am very much aware of the responsibilities placed upon the natural resource conversation service.

In the light of the latest farm bill, I

also want to say that the old Soil Conservation Service and the new NRCS has been a vital part of the conservation program that gets conservation on the ground.

But with all the NRCS experience, and ability to work with the limited resource farmer, I honestly think that the way these programs are written, such as the new EQUIP [phonetic] program, a limited resource farmer just can't compete with the larger farmers when it comes down to the resource availability to apply conservation plans.

Mr. Secretary, it's hard enough for a limited resource farmer to come up with the 25 percent of his part of the cost sharing. How can we compete with large farmers that are willing to take 50 percent cost sharing to apply the same practice?

I would also like to add that the wetland reserve program for limited resource farmers gave new light at the end of the tunnel for those farmers that were about to lose their farms.

The NRCS worked hard to locate these land

owners who desperately needed help, and after these land owners were located, the tunnel was closed because matching funds were not secured.

Mr. Secretary, I know that these programs take time and coordination. When you are facing foreclosure, time is everything. And I'd like to emphasize that.

Mr. Secretary, distinguished guests, I thank you for listening to my concerns this morning about the problems facing our small farmer, and I'm also a commissioner, a minority representative on the ASCS board.

And one thing I think needs to be changed, we do not have any voting rights. We at least need the right to vote on things that's concerning minorities.

And I have the handbook here, and I have outlined that to the congressman.

MR. WILKES: Thank you, Mr. Byrd. Ms. B. Branch. And after Mr. Branch, Mr. Henry Reed.

MS. BRANCH: Congressman Thompson and Secretary Glickman, thank you very much for

allowing the NAACP State Conference of Branches to make some brief comments today.

Secretary Glickman, all of the comments and concerns and issues that have been raised here today truly are real. They are issues that are brought to our attention each and every day in the NAACP state conference office.

Some of the complaints we receive we're able to address, but far, far too many we are not able to address. When Secretary Espy was in your position, he sent some staff persons down to work with us on some of the issues relating to the Rural Electric Power Associations.

Those are some real issues that truly need to be addressed, too, in addition to the farm issue. And I know you can only take on one big issue at a time.

I've been somewhat in your shoes, too, and I know when you're trying to fix problems that have been allowed to exist for many, many decades, and in some cases even centuries, it does take time.

But there are a lot of issues, in addition

to the farm issues, that do need to be raised. And we talk about welfare reform, but it is very clear to me that there is a need, a real need for agricultural reform, and some of the other reforms as it relates to USDA.

Thank you very much.

SECRETARY GLICKMAN: Thank you.

MR. WILKES: After Mr. Reed, I'm going to ask that Mr. John Zipper come forward.

MR. REED: I thank God for enabling this meeting to be possible. And I'm going to ask you gentlemen if you will put God in front, you all will make something happen out of it.

This thing about the FHA has been going on a long time. When I read the article in the paper that Kenny Spencer wrote, I didn't know it was still going on.

I am Henry Reed, Jr. I am a resident of Humphrey's County. When I started with FHA years ago, I was never able to receive any money on time. And whenever I did receive the money, the loan, it was always cut.

So I would have to take whatever they let me have to try and operate at a late date. And going on from there, I contacted--well, I didn't contact. Thad Cochran had mobile units going around. Anybody had complaints could come in and make them.

This was years ago. I came into this court house and told him what was happening to me. I said I'm going in debt, and I'm losing my hand, because I can't get the proper money at the right time to do a good job.

He went in and had someone to investigate. They came in and stirred up the local office. That only made it worse.

They collect--they got attitude toward me. They wouldn't even speak to me when I go in the office. Later on from that, Congressman Espy had an open meeting in Washington County.

There was a gentleman in there made a public statement that FHA supervisors had a thing going on. He was also an ex-FHA supervisor. He said what they do, whenever one supervisor makes a

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decision, the other one will uphold that decision regardless.

Now, what I'm referring to, that same man that made that open statement, he worked in Humphrey's County for a while, as an FHA assistant supervisor.

They turned my loan over to him. The first time I heard from FHA on time was that year. And that was a letter telling me that I did not cash flow.

And I wondered how could they tell me I did not cash flow, and I had not yet submitted an application for a loan.

But then they gave me opportunity to have some hearings on up the line. And we proceeded with those hearings. I hired an attorney, and we went on for those hearings.

And at the end of those hearings, I still got a letter back from them that we're going to uphold the decision made by the local supervisor.

Well, from that [inaudible] I went home to try to do whatever I can to try to keep from losing

everything that we had. So I filed Chapter 12.

And later on, this same young man, which is an ex-FHA, Farmer's Home Administration supervisor, told me that Mr. Reed, you cash flow. He told me this after he was no longer there.

He said you did cash flow, but the local office have their picks and chooses. And I was one of their picks, but not one of their chooses.

Thank you.

SECRETARY GLICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Reed.

(Applause.)

MR. WILKES: After Mr. Zipper, I'm going to ask Mr. King T. Evans to come forward, please.

MR. ZIPPER: Good morning to the listening and the civil rights action team. My name is John Zipper. I'm the director of program operations for the Federation of Southern Cooperatives in Epps, Alabama.

And we basically want to submit at this session the same statement that Mr. Page made in Albany, Georgia, and I guess also in Washington.

But I wanted to emphasize, the reason I

asked to speak here today was to emphasize one part of that statement, which represents perhaps a way to work toward a solution to some of the problems you have heard here, all of which the federation has worked on for years and years, case by case with people.

And I just want to put this in context, and that is to say that in 1982 the Civil Rights Commission said that unless the government's policies were changed, there would be no black farmers by the year 2000 which is coming up pretty soon.

Also, in 1920, there were a million black people engaged in agriculture in the south, and they owned 15 million acres of land. When the federation started working in the 60s, and the emergency land fund, we had 100,000 black farmers left, with out six million acres.

In 1990, the latest figures from 1990 show something like 18,000 black farmers and less than two and a half million acres. This is a continuously declining resource and problem.

All of the agencies have pointed this out. So the real question is, and we applaud you for holding these session, will anything change? Will anything be corrected? Will any real action be taken?

One of the suggestions we make, in addition to checking on all the complaints, in addition to doing the outreach, in addition to enforcing the law, is that you would set up a registry of--and this would be a voluntary registry of minority land owners. That is to say, black, and other people of color land owners throughout this country.

And this registry could be established through the Farm Service Agency. And the basic point that this registry would be, that everyone in this room who owns land would get your name on the list.

And we would establish a baseline of ownership by people of color in this country. And then we would challenge USDA that that level not drop, and that level progressively tried to be

increased, which means that all of these programs and all of these activities that have been discussed here--the Extension Service, the Forestry Service, NRCA, the loan programs--would be in some ways directed and targeted to be sure that that land base was preserved.

Now, we keep up with wetlands. We keep up with historical places. We keep up with endangered species of animals. And I guess what we're saying is that black farmers, people of color farmers in this country had become an endangered species.

And they deserve the kind of registry, the kind of list that we could preserve those farmers. And this lady here who has a problem, perhaps a black person somewhere else would like to buy her land, and get started in farming.

There may be a solution to her problem with this kind of registry in working with black churches, black organizations, people who are interested in saving the land, to use that systematically to hold on to the land, make it productive and target your programs to make a

difference.

This is one of the many recommendations we have, but is one I really wanted to emphasize again to the listening panels. Thank you very much.

SECRETARY GLICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Zipper.

MR. WILKES: Mr. King Evans. After Mr. Evans, I'm going to ask Ms. Odessa Carter.

MR. EVANS: Secretary Glickman, I'm the same old man that was here last year when you were down here last year at Mobile. I told you the problem, and I tried to explain it to you, and you said it was going to be resolved.

Well, now, what--I don't farm. My son farms. And it was cotton planting time, and his loan had not come through. And so I was trying to get him some money to plant his cotton.

So I scraped my money clean up to try to keep him going until he got his loan through. Now, he did not need a write down. All he needed was a loan.

And so, but still he hadn't got his loan

by the time that you were here last year in August. But I told you that Mr. Rowe had told me that he was going to get the loan.

The trouble was two of the people that signing the application, they had different opinions. One man says okay. That's all you need. And then here you think you're going to get a report telling him to come in and close the loan.

And here come--he wants some more information. So it was during that time that you came, and I told you and [inaudible] said it would be resolved. But it was partially resolved.

In other words, the money that I had advanced him to farm, to get started, that was not included in the loan packet. So I don't have any way to get any restitution for that money that I advanced him to try to get started. Thank you.

SECRETARY GLICKMAN: Thank you.

MR. WILKES: Ms. Odessa Carter. What was that, sir?

PARTICIPANT: I'm not Odessa Carter, but I would like to speak--

MR. WILKES: Okay, sir. I'm going to have to keep this--and I'm trying to make sure that the meeting continues to go. But the next person I have up is Mr. Willie Haynes.

So if Mr. Haynes would come forward. But, sir--

SECRETARY GLICKMAN: Could I just ask the gentleman who just spoke, Mr. Evans, if somebody could see him. I know we worked on this. Can somebody give me information about Mr. Evans' situation? Okay.

I'm going to take another look at it, Mr. Evans. I'll make sure I get on top of it.

MR. WILKES: Mr. Haynes?

MR. HAYNES: Mr. Secretary, Honorable Bennie Thompson, this is indeed an honor and a pleasure.

When I was on my way here, I noticed the water we had, it kind of gave me to focus on. That is, the drainage situation. And right now we might be looking at a draught. We might not have any more rain.

And I noticed that--I could tell the black farms from the white farms on the way up here, because of the water situation.

Everybody want to leave here with something. I'm from a county where no blacks have irrigation, to my knowledge. And the drainage situation is where a lot of farmers run poisoned water.

Particularly the farmers who are particularly--the--Mr. Love's farm, right in the adjoining county. Who are my beloved neighbors. And I've had all kind of complaints with those people.

They are poisoning my crops with airplanes and illegal other methods of spraying.

Particularly--and I want to emphasize it. If we don't leave here, myself, with anything else today, ten years from now, you know, at least this year, it look like it ought to be some black folks in Coahoma County with irrigation.

Basically what everybody is saying about these government offices, I've become immune to

depending on other agencies for funding.

So I grow cash crops. And the biggest problems I have--I listen to the fellow talk with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives.

And I've had dealings with them, for my cash--and somebody touched upon the fact that all I had last year was my credit. I couldn't get--I quit trying to borrow money.

But I had credit with some sources. And dealing with one of those programs that the Southern Cooperative claimed that they had in Memphis, my credit got cut off.

And I notice that they passed out meal tickets. Personally, you know, I can't tell anybody else what to do, but I'm not using a meal ticket. I wouldn't accept a meal from them.

And also, among people that won't return phone calls, I got the Federation of Southern Cooperatives number one on the list. I got Cooperative Services out of Washington number two on the list.

And I got the [inaudible] commission

number three on the list. And not to mention my minority advisers in Coahoma County, when I get him, he hang the phone up in my face. And I got Mr. Sam McCrae on the list, also.

And I'd like to go back to the [inaudible] commission and cooperative services in Coahoma County. I know Mr. Thompson told us not to hesitate to mention anybody's name. But I'm not so much mentioning his office's name as I am an office worker.

We, as a minority really want to get away from doing the same things in terms of these affiliates of FHA as what has been handed down to us.

But I say, now, from looking at the weather, you know, it's time--you [inaudible] to tell me that there's anything that this conglomeration can do for me in terms of funding this year.

Because I got to get out there today, tomorrow. We got to do something, you know. It's absurd to depend on this, something to come out of

this forum for this year.

So, what is it, Mr. Secretary, that can be done to offer immediate relief right here and right now?

SECRETARY GLICKMAN: Thank you.

MR. WILKES: I'm going to ask Ms. Carmen Jones to come forward, and as she come--let me make sure that everyone here that has not had a chance to come to the mike, please note that there will be people that will take your comments.

And we also have recorders that there's out there in order to take your comments. But in the interests of time, to try to make sure we get as many people to the mike, we're going to have to cut this off after Ms. Jones, but let's make sure that you get your comments into the people, to the comment box.

There are attendants who will take you to those areas. Ms. Jones.

MS. JONES: Well, it's a privilege to be here today, because I go along with everybody else. The little farmer is looked over.

Before we made it our right, before the rice fields come in, they'd flood us. Then when we turn in, that we had a failure crop, well, they'd say so and so made a good crop.

And I have not heard this mentioned too much. But the airplanes coming over, killing stuff. Killed three huge mimosa trees in my yard that I loved dearly. And our gardens. They can kill our gardens.

And if you say anything, you don't get anywhere. You just have to take it.

And then when the--I quit farming, and decided I'd put my land in the easement, I registered, signed up for it, and I was expecting to hear from them, that summer.

But when I heard from them, I found out that three or four big land owners took all of it.

There was nothing left for the small farmer. So I just go along with these people. I say Amen to everybody. Because when you're in trouble because you're not big enough to defend yourself, you've got to have somebody to defend

you.

So that's what we're all doing here today. We're asking all of you to please, please listen to the small farmers, and give us help.

SECRETARY GLICKMAN: Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Congressman Thomas, Mr. Secretary, Mr. John [inaudible] and other members of the staff. Let me say that I'm certainly appreciative of you for conducting this forum.

I think it is very timely and very important, and we have heard many concerns that have been addressed here today. And I certainly would like to encourage you to be very attentive to those and responsive to them.

I represent Bolivar and Sunflower Counties, which consist of--well, District Thirteen, which consists of Bolivar and Sunflower County.

And as we in the legislature now debate the welfare reform piece, and we talk about the need for additional jobs in the Mississippi Delta,

we are very concerned.

And when we look at this audience here today and the concerns which they are bringing before you, knowing that the possibility of many of these individuals could very well be listed as the needy in the future, based upon their loss of farms or other kinds of problems that may exist, I stand before you today to say that we certainly hope that we will be able to do something to improve the Mississippi Delta, and in particular the small and minority farmer.

But today I also rise to bring to your attention another concern. And that concern has to do with the Land Grant Act. The Land Grant Act, as you know, created two institutions, the 1882 and the 1890.

We are fortunate to have two of those universities here in the state of Mississippi, an 1862 and an 1890. But there have been many inequities that have existed in the funding of those university institutions in the past.

As a matter of fact, the 1890, Alcorn A&M

University, which is predominantly black, has frequently not received its fair share of the funds. That's both at the state level and at the national level.

We, here, in the state of Mississippi are beginning to attempt to address that issue. But we also call upon you, Mr. Secretary, at the federal level, to revisit that act, and to do whatever is necessary to put in place a process that will ensure that equity exists.

Alcorn State University is in a position and in its mission itself dictates that it is in a position to work very closely with the small farmer, and many of the individuals who are here.

But the resources, the resources are truly needed at that university to work toward helping the farmers that we are talking to here today.

Alcorn State University is an institution again with the mission of working toward helping those small farmers to become self sufficient. And as we look at the changes in society and the changes being made in agriculture, we know that

there is a tremendous need for transitional, or looking at alternative crops and other kinds of programs.

Alcorn State University should have the lead role in that, but in order to do that, the resources will be necessary to do that. And those resources are not likely to be coming if the inequities that exist between the 1862s and the 1890 institutions are not corrected.

So as I close, I beg of you to make decisions today, make decisions within your agency that's going to make sure that we impact in a positive way the small farmers, while at the same time we impact an institution like that of Alcorn.

Again, my request to you is that we make the Mississippi Delta an oasis of opportunity rather than a desert of devastation. Thank you and may God bless you.

MR. WILKES: Before we close, or before I turn this back over to the secretary, I would like to say that the Listening Forum was conducted for the benefit of the secretary, to make sure that he

hears the concerns that are out there.

And I want to make sure that anyone in here that does not have a copy of this agenda, make sure you get one, because that is another vehicle whereby if you didn't get a chance to come to the mike on open forum, or you did not get a chance to go to the recorders, that you can call the one eight hundred number, you can e-mail, you can take whatever means you need to in order to make sure that he gets your comments and concerns.

But please take advantage of this opportunity to make sure that he hears your concerns. I'm going to turn this over to Congressman Thompson just before the secretary closes out with final remarks.

I want to thank you for coming, though.

REP. THOMPSON: Thank you very much. Wrapping up, Ms. Odessa Carter was here earlier, and I wish we could have gotten to her in the presentation.

Ms. Carter is 83 years old. It took her nine years to get a Farmers Home loan for a 502

home in Bolivar County.

She lives in Laymont, Mississippi. She was virtually living on the ground. And it took two years of struggle by my office to get Ms. Carter that house.

And I wanted the secretary to hear another problem that goes on within, as most folk know, the Farmers Home Administration, or now Rural Development, in that those country supervisors really mistreat people.

So not only is there a discrimination based on race and gender, there's also discrimination based on age.

So Ms. Carter's financial status did not change for nine years. But it took her that long to finally get that home. And that's unfortunate, because she qualified the first year she made the application.

Second point I want to make is--and I just told the secretary about it--I've been sitting here since 10:00 o'clock. Tried to make it until one, but I had to get up and go to the little boy's

room.

And when I got ready to come back in, the security person stopped me. And, you know, it finally hit me that you can go to Washington, you can sit on the platform with the president when he's sworn in for his second term, you can do everything right, and just because you walk out to get the seat that you've been sitting in for two hours and forty five minutes, you get stopped because you're black.

Now, that's what bothered me. And it upsets me because that also, I would assume, is a Department of Agriculture employee.

So I know how you feel, and so I don't want you to feel like the Lone Ranger when a United States congressman can get stopped who's been sitting here all this time.

So I want to sort of say to you that we're going to work on the problem. But it's a long term solution.

I want to applaud the secretary for coming and listening to your problems, because he, along

with his staff, now understand clearly what people are faced with.

The fact that Mr. Evans mentioned in August that he had a problem. The secretary left here thinking the problem had been resolved. And lo and behold, Mr. Evans is back here six months later, yep, I got my loan, but they changed the conditions on it before I got it.

So that the money I advanced my son to the farm, I can't get back, because they didn't include it in the operating loan for my son.

So, you understand? It's sort of like every time some people learn the game, they change the rules.

And so I want to again thank the secretary for coming, but he has a monumental job to change what some people call the last plantation.

And in order to do that, there has to be a very forthright effort on his part, which I see happening at this point.

Now, by February 15th, there's supposed to be a report issued. Now, I want to make sure that

when the report comes out, I share it with as many people here as possible.

And I want the report to reflect some of the things that were said here, and some recommendations that can lead us toward making sure that these problems don't occur again.

And it's not just black farmers. It's small farmers. It's female farmers. And, yes, it's just some farmers that just happen not to be part of the click.

So I want to assure all those people who are represented here today that we are going to work on your problems as hard as we know how. But if you remember what just happened to me, you'll also understand what all of us are up against as we try to right many wrongs of the past.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

SECRETARY GLICKMAN: First, let me just say a couple of things. One is I want to thank Congressman Thompson for inviting me in his personal role, and making me aware of problems that

I should have been aware of many years ago, but problems that we need to correct now.

I also want to apologize for any attempt to restrict him. When I went into the bathroom, one of the local police officers looked at me funny, as I was coming back in, too.

So I think they were as much trying to protect my security as anything else. But I apologize for this, I want you to know that.

It would have been funny if they had kept me out of this thing. They looked at me funny, though.

Let me just make a couple of comments. Number one, I have to leave, because I have to go somewhere, but the rest of the Civil Rights Action team, including Mr. Reed, is going to be here for a period of time.

And they're the ones that are actually going to make the report to me, so I know there's going to be lunch. But I've talked to Mr. Thompson about this, and I know many of you have specific issues that you will need to discuss.

And so I presume that some of the folks will be here for some period of time, including Mr. Webber, who seemed to have gotten, because the agency he works for, the repository of a lot of complaints, Sam Thornton who works--raise your hand.

Most of you know Sam, he works for my office. He's also here, and he's worked on some of these problems as well.

So they will be here to deal with the problems.

And I want to thank again the action team, because they have gone beyond the call of duty.

Mr. Reed and his team have gone all over the country, and now they have a big task to come up with a report to me that takes into account this meeting, which is the final meeting, and all the other ones that have taken place.

Second of all, let me say that this has been an exceptionally good meeting for a lot of reasons. One is that there are an awful lot of USDA folks who are here.

People from Washington, just scattered throughout this room here, managers, people who work in the programs. And it is extremely healthy for them to hear the kind of discussion which is taking place here.

And I think that that in itself will be very productive. Second of all, we heard a lot of subjects that I hadn't heard at a lot of the other hearings.

Three, I heard what Congressman Thompson talked about, which are some of the problems that people have to deal with, are dealt with by small farmers of whatever color and stripe there are.

And while a lot of the problems are most affecting minority farmers, small and medium sized farmers in this country are having trouble all over America coping with agricultural economic conditions.

It's tough being a farmer. Always has been. But when it's overlaid by a treatment which may not always be 100 percent fair, then it makes it worse.

So that's the kind of thing that we are going to try to correct here. I will tell you this: that as it's been said before, I feel a very great honor having this job.

We've never had to go to war to fight for a shortage of food. This country has always been self sufficient in the production of food and fiber, always. And, you know, I want to keep it that way.

I view this as as important to our national defense as any weapons system. And I'd also like to keep a social structure so you have more than three wheat farmers, three corn farmers, and three livestock farmers left in America at the end of the 20th century.

So this is another important part of that piece as well, is to make sure that we support and have a vibrant, thriving agriculture in America, and all parts of the country. I want to do that as well.

I will have to say this: I know that there are a lot of courageous people who said

personal things that were on my mind. I've said this before, and I want to say it again.

There will be no reprisals or recrimination to what anybody here says. Period. If anybody has any reason to believe that there is, that is occurring, then I want to know.

And I say that just in terms of the fact is that this is a free and open discussion. We're trying to do the best that we can under the circumstances. This is not an attempt to make any personal attacks on anybody, because I'm not doing that.

The report that we're going to get is, I think, probably going to deal with a lot of structural problems in USDA, and maybe funding problems and other kinds of things. I don't want to anticipate what Mr. Reed and his team is going to do.

But I don't want anybody to believe that they will be in any way personally attacked or recriminated against because of what they said. I won't tolerate that, and I presume that everybody

in this room understands what my message is as well.

I would also say that I have talked about a lot of these issues with the president and the vice president as well. So there is an understanding at the highest levels of government that these are issues that we need to work on.

We've got an outstanding system of agriculture in America, but it's got some problems. And we've talked about some of those today.

I look at the glass half full rather than half empty. We're going to fix these problems. We're going to make this an opportunity. It's an opportunity to correct some problems that have existed for a very long period of time.

So I just want to say I want to thank Congressman Thompson. I want to thank Homer for your chairing the meeting today.

We had one of these hearings in the auditorium of the Agriculture Building in Washington earlier this week. And one woman got up. And it was a crowd smaller than this, but

there was a crowd out in the audience.

And we were on the top of the stage, and the woman said it's awful cold down here. Can you do anything with the heat? And I said, it may be cold down there, but it's not very cold up here where I'm sitting.

So, you know, I hear what is being said here today, and we're going to do our best to make sure that we can create an atmosphere where all of our customers and employees will feel comfortable that they are being treated fairly and with dignity.

That's the best thing we can do. So, I thank you, Homer, and I will turn the microphone back to you.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Excuse me. Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY GLICKMAN: Yes?

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: I need to say my piece, please.

MR. WILKES: As the secretary has stated, the team will be here, but he has to go.

SECRETARY GLICKMAN: Give him one minute.

MR. WILKES: One minute.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Okay. What I want to say about FHA, the way I was treated.

I was treated so badly there, I had to--I broke history at Madison, County. I had to get a lawyer to get my loan approved. I know I am the only one in Madison County to get a loan approved by a lawyer.

And the way me and my brother was treated, I don't think I was right. I had a man tell me, if it was left up to him, I wouldn't get a damned loan.

I don't think that was right. And he held my loan up so long, that, in '93, we had a dry season, and we--that year I paid my debt off, we paid the loan back, and the next--I figured, you know, since I paid the loan back, we'd be treated, you know, a little better.

It was worse the next--the second year than it was the first year. I went in debt--I'm about \$350,000 in debt. I even asked--I even asked

Mr. James Rowe come out and take a look at my crop.
I called him several times.

And he told me he would on a Tuesday.
That Tuesday haven't come yet.

Thank you.

MR. WILKES: Sir, would you make sure that
your report gets into this team, and your name
please? Somewhere will escort you to where that--

REP. THOMPSON: Homer, what I would
suggest is that we go ahead and take a 45 minute
break, and the secretary's Civil Rights Action team
will reconvene back here in 45 minutes, and we will
work with anyone who is here.

MR. WILKES: So 45 minutes.

[The Listening Session was recessed.]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

CIVIL RIGHTS LISTENING SESSION

AFTERNOON SESSION

Friday, January 24, 1997

Belzoni, Mississippi

[TRANSCRIPT PREPARED FROM TAPE RECORDINGS.]

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. WILKES: We want to make sure that their message is put into this particular transcript. They will have the opportunity to do that. We will have the same recording process that was taking place earlier. So if we could gather in and go ahead and get started, we can get this process going again.

Nancy, there on the door to my right and your left, will be taking those names down and be giving me that sheet. And I'm going to call them on a first-come, first-served basis there. So let's go ahead on and get started. We're going to go ahead and get started, and the five-minute limitation is the same rule that we had this morning.

The first person up is Mr. Roy Brown from Holmes County. After Mr. Roy Brown, Mr. Dwayne Boyd.

Mr. Roy Brown.

MR. BROWN: Yes. My name is Roy Brown.

MR. WILKES: Make sure your mike is on. I

don't think it's on. Could someone help Mr. Brown out there, one of the attendees there?

It's on now.

MR. BROWN: Hello? Yes. My name is Roy Brown. I'm representing Valerie [ph] Brown farm. Yes. In 1984, they put Valerie Brown--She cash flowed and she got a loan with the Farmers Home Administration office in '89. And one of the loan officers--She was under a supervised account. One of the loan officers took \$1,800 out of her account and bought a ride lawn mower from Peister [ph] Tractor Company in Lexington, Mississippi.

And they have never got back with her on that--Valerie Brown from Holmes County. One of the loan officers stole \$1,900 out of her account and bought a riding law mower with it. He said he bought it for his daddy, but it was her money she had borrowed from the FHA.

And in 1994, she put in a loan with the Farmers Home Administration officer in Lexington, and she cash flowed. And they told her that she had to get a 100-percent guaranteed loan from the

bank.

So at Ag-Guaranty [ph] Bank in Belzoni here, Keith Nolton [ph] approved the 100-percent guaranteed loan for \$200,000. He submitted the application back to the Farmers Home in Lexington, and they hold around on the farmer loan. They said they were going to send it down to the state office for it to be approved. And then when they got it back, before they signed it down there it was July the 15th before they signed it down there.

And Keith Nolton at Ag-Guaranty said they couldn't go with it then because it was too late to plant carrots. And so now she's not farming. Now, they're fixing to foreclose on her, fixing to take all the land that we worked for. My daddy died in '87. Now my mother is 76 years old. Now they're fixing to foreclose on her, take all her land.

Thank you, hear.

MR. WILKES: He's from Holmes County. Mr. Brown, someone will take that information.

Do we have Mr. Dwayne Boyd? Excuse me, Mr. Boyd. The room is kind of empty now, so we

don't have to speak quite as loud in here.

MR. BOYD: Okay. My name is Dwayne Boyd. I guess I'm here as it relates to an OIG complaint that I filed in July of 1990, by Oktibbeha County, the city of Starkville. I guess this would be to the team now, in essence.

My initial complaint at this particular time centers around not only discrimination and the experience that I've suffered through at the hands of USDA officials as it relates to the county office, particularly, and the state office in Jackson subsequently, prior to Mr. Norris Fost's [ph] resignation.

In my complaint, basically, it wouldn't center on discrimination so much as it would corruption. As most of you have seen, most of the speakers prior to myself have been older farmers. As a young African-American farmer coming into the industry, if you don't already have parents or grandparents who were mindful enough to hold onto the land, you find this practically an impossibility to come into seeking government

assistance. It's just not there.

In my instance--And I have to address this for this gentleman here, as it relates to the Federation of Southern Cooperatives. And we still have five minutes with this?

MR. WILKES: That's right.

MR. BOYD: As it relates to corruption, there is so much incentive for fraud, as it relates to ASCS, in the delivery, in the receipt of subsidy payments to the majority-white farmers, that for those who have uncovered fraud, as in my case, to which the administration--I've been through three administrations with this issue: Maddigan, Espy, and now Secretary Glickman.

You need to fire everybody in the Oktibbeha County office. You have here--When my grandmother refused to sign signatures authorizing a white farmer to enroll her land in programs where the CEB director--you asked for names--Judy Abernathy, with her name as signature, authorize white farmers, against my family's approval, to receive payments, advance payments, on her land,

with a COC [ph] waiver of the signature requirement.

Because of my uncovering this fraud, as the only black American meat inspector for the state department of agriculture for the state of Mississippi--and this gentleman right here could testify to this--the corruption goes to the level of the status quo of Oktibbeha County, principally to Sheriff Doff Bryan [ph]; secondly, Ben F. Hilbon, Jr. [ph], the former city attorney, whose father is past president of the Mississippi State; and the Waldrop [ph] family of Waldrop Farms.

I've been kidnapped, had two attempts on my life, been fired from the Mississippi department of agriculture to which right today--And a lot of you black landowners, listen to this. These people sought to literally destroy me because I found a tool of law that could help you recover on behalf of taxpayers any monies fraudulently received from a federal agency. I've been charged with crimes. They just destroyed me.

And if I talk any more as to what these

people did to me--And I have no love for Secretary Espy. And hindsight is perfect vision. If Norris Fost, who sat here and authorized the handling of this complaint in the manner in which he did, to have the white farmers still on my land receiving payments as I speak to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars--And here I come to want to farm my own land, that the status quo prohibits me from doing it.

I would respectfully request at this time that Secretary Glickman--That deal about the fox guarding the hen house, oh. D.G. Goodwin [ph], the regional director? No. They can't do--Bring an independent counsel in to look at what's going on. You can't expect for them to say, "We did wrong."

I'm in court today in Aberdeen, pre-trial conference, on the false claims act. And this matter here, if Secretary Glickman is serious about ending what he finds as discrimination, address the corruption issue and get rid of those people here, the status quo who go along with the "good ol' boy" network, because all this ends up doing is

dispossessing black landowners of their land holdings, and the taxpayers foot the bill.

That's all I've got to say.

MR. WILKES: Thank you, Mr. Boyd.

[Applause]

MR. WILKES: I want to make sure that those comments get into this report. So make sure that you see the recorders. And that gentleman right there can take you to where the recorders are.

Tom, would you identify yourself so people will know?

The next person on the list to speak is Mr. James Foreman. Is Mr. Foreman in?

MR. FOREMAN: I'm James Foreman, Yazoo County. And my reason for being here is to--

MR. WILKES: Mr. Foreman, we can't hear you.

MR. FOREMAN: Which one is it?

MR. WILKES: You're okay now, if you would speak directly into the mike.

MR. FOREMAN: Okay. I said my reason for

being here is for this year, 1997, and then back from 1996, I was denied a disaster loan. And Ronnie Johnson [ph] was the one that I went to to see about my loan. He turned it down. So that made me didn't have nowhere to farm last year.

So then this year, I don't know how I'm going to come out yet because I hadn't went to get, you know, my loans checked out again. So that's why I'm up here to pass the information on to you all. And that's all I have to say.

MR. WILKES: Okay, Mr. Foreman. Mr. Webber--I think I've given your name to him. So someone will be following up with you on that.

MR. FOREMAN: Thank you.

MR. WILKES: Mr. Leonard Brown will be the next person, and after Mr. Brown there will be a Mr. Theus [ph] Hardy. Mr. Leonard Brown.

MR. BROWN: Thank you, members of the committee. I think most of what I had to say has probably already been said. But I would like to just make a comment or two.

I'm from Yalobusha County. And I have

always been concerned--We use the terminology "limited resource farmers, small farmers, and minority." Now, my point is, does that mean the same?

Now, the problem gets to be, if you limit the resource, that means you don't have the resources, in my estimation, of many of the larger farmers. Now, what's happening, we are competing with the larger farmers, and we can't really do it.

The program, the way it's set up, it discriminates based on that basis. Because, for example, a gentleman this morning said he had five acres of land. Well, if you decide you want to plant pine trees, you can only get cost-share [ph] on 20 acres. It has to be 20 acres or more. So therefore, the program wouldn't affect him. If you want to get a pond built, you must have an existing pond already.

Now, the way I see it, if we are limited resource, we should be a percentage of the total number of farmers, the total number of large farmers, we should be that percentage. And I feel

like, whatever amount of money that comes from Washington or wherever, we should receive a percentage based on the population of small farmers on limited resources, whatever you call them.

Now, many of the larger farmers have not probably used good management as to why some of the problems exist. Now, in my case, I have been able to get very little assistance from the agencies in my community, because you don't qualify or, if you do qualify, the forms are not available. So it's that type thing.

And in many cases, to give you an example, back when they had the drought, if you had a large herd of cattle, then you qualified for quite a bit of feed money. I think it was based on a unit system. Now, if you had a small amount--The more you had, the more units you got. But the units were increased. It wasn't exactly a fair way of doing it, I think. But the units increased based on--It was pro rated based on the larger amount. The larger amount you had, the larger the number of units.

And in my case, it didn't even pay me to drive to the office to get what I got. But many of the people are getting huge amounts of money. And that's basically the way the program is today if you are a large operator.

For example, many of the larger farmers, when soybeans got to be a big price in the hill section, they took in all of the hilly land and washed it away. Well, the next year or so, they set up a program where you could put it back in pasture and you could seed it in grass and fertilize it. Well, I didn't qualify because I didn't have any erodible land. But the large farmers did qualify.

My family has been on the same land for over a hundred years, but we have not survived based on what we've gotten from the agency. So I would just like to maybe recommend that somewhere farm plans should be set up.

And I'm not just talking about getting a little assistance from the extension service, or what-have-you, but they should make available the

option to provide these farmers with some way to develop an economical plan, and that plan--You should be able to take that plan to the Farmers Home and they should approve it because you've got somebody that's qualified to help you develop that plan.

I think that would cut out a lot of this fact that you develop a plan and then you can't get it financed, or you can't get financed because you have no plan, or whatever. Thank you.

MR. WILKES: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Theus Hardy?

MR. HARDY: I qualified to become a farmer in '94 under the Young Farmers Beginning Act, and I was funded through Farmers Home Administration in Sunflower County.

The first year I was funded, I was able to purchase 200 acres of land. In '95, I was also funded. I submitted an application for '96 year in February thinking I was going to get funded. My brother helped me set up some charge accounts until my loan came through. I wasn't denied until June

that following year. Then they asked me, "Well, how were you able to plant your crop?" I said, "Well, I was able because I set up some charge accounts to farm." And now they want to accelerate my loan to foreclose on my property that I bought, because I wasn't able to receive the loan for this year.

MR. WILKES: Thank you, Mr. Hardy.

Mr. Perry Woods. And after Mr. Woods, Mr. Michael McNair [ph].

MR. WOODS: My name is Perry Woods. Theus Hardy is my brother. I was funded last year. I have a guaranteed loan through the Valley Bank. And my brother didn't get a loan last year. He submitted his application in February, but they didn't let him know until June that he wasn't going to get no loan.

So when they called him in in June and asked him the status of his crop, he told him that he had planted his crop. And they wanted to know how he planted his crop without any money. So he told him that he had set up, you know, some charge

accounts, you know, for to get his chemicals and seeds for to plant.

And they asked him did I know anything about it. And by me being his brother, he told them, yes, that, you know, I had helped him, you know, to get some charge accounts.

So what the guy at the FSA office did, he called my bank that I was being financed through and told my banker in July that I had financed my brother's operation out of the farm loan that I received through the bank. And really, that was not true. I didn't finance my brother. He got some charge accounts and he was able to go on and plant his crop.

But then I got a letter from my bank stating that I had financed another crop out of my production loan, so that put me in jeopardy with the bank. And this year the bank is counter receptive [ph] about going with me because they said that I financed another crop out of my loan money, which I did not. And I have a copy of the letter here that was written to me from my bank

MR. WILKES: What county? Thank you, Mr. Woods. Make sure that that actually gets in the record. I think we've already got that recorded.

Mr. Michael McNair?

MR. McNAIR: Good afternoon, Michael McNair with Alcorn State University. We've all heard speeches of sad stories today from farmers, legitimacies of concerns from USDA agencies. Since I've been working along with the USDA agencies, there have been some things in the office that I have seen, as well.

Most of the time, it's miscommunication of someone who has forgotten where they've come from, have gone to college. Sometimes we get clientele that do not have a formal education. And in the simple explaining of some things about how the application process works, we've not taken the time to take the time with a farmer, regardless of what background they come from.

These problems exist and keep on existing because simply we come to these forums sometimes and hopefully--I'm praying right now that these

legitimate accusations of discrimination won't fall on deaf ears. But until the people in Washington-- the trail bosses, so to speak--until you start riding herd on these local county officers and county officials, we're going to be eating a lot of trail dust for a long time. And it's just basic home training, most of it: not just taking the time out to help somebody.

And I won't say every story is negative. I've seen some good in the USDA. But until these other million-dollar accounts get off, these people who have been on Farmers Home Administration for ten or 15 years, generation farmers--That wasn't the intent of the Farmers Home Administration. It was the intent for a small farmer to get in there and get hold of his bootstraps and pull them up so he could get to a place of financial stability, and then move off so the next farmer wanting to pull his bootstraps up can come in the door.

Until you start settling some of those million-dollar accounts and moving those people and graduating them off your books, the other farmers,

the small farmers, are going to be by the wayside.

And those are some of the comments that I wanted to make, just to put them before your ears today. Don't just come and listen here today and let these things fall on deaf ears.

Most of the times when I got to meeting, I like for people to pray, because then I combine some things, you know? But you come in here from Washington, you've got your suits on all the time. And these farmers are--They're literally dying on their family farms.

There is no more compassion among men. That's why I no longer put confidence in flesh and what "I tell you." Show me your actions. Don't just come hear me. Show me what you're going to do to change these situations. Show me your good works by your faith. Don't just come here and listen.

Go back to your offices and your bosses and tell them, "Hey, we need to not only investigate these county offices, but we need to start a checklist from Washington on down."

Because when you go to the county offices and the county committees are running everything, you're leaving these people out in the cold without a coat.

And that goes to the state level, as well. You probably have some problems down there, as well. But when the county committee is running everything, these people don't have a chance. You are their hope. You are the people that go in those positions. You are the people that these small farmers have put through school on their tax dollars. So don't just hear them; do something about it.

MR. WILKES: Thank you.

[Applause]

MR. WILKES: Mr. Beard [ph] Moore. And after Mr. Moore, Mr. Jeremiah Blackwell.

MR. MOORE: Thank you, Mr. Wilkes. I'm here on behalf of my father, R.B. Moore. You're very familiar with his case. Mr. Carnegie is very familiar with his case and Mr. Irwin, also, I believe.

To give the rest of you a little bit of information about R.B.'s case, he was offered preservation loan servicing and a lease back/buy back in 1990, October, under the '87 Farm Credit Act. He was called into the state office and given about ten minutes to buy his land back. And when he bought it back, he realized that he had conservation easements on his property with U.S. Fish and Wildlife.

Now, I'm accusing each of you--Mr. Carnegie, the county director in my county, and several in Washington--of not understanding 51S. And I've heard 51S mentioned in here quite a few times today, and I think it's a real problem, from the county level all the way to Washington.

Mr. Carnegie, you recently responded to a letter to my father about 51S, and in it you claimed that, if I remember correctly, 1940, Subpart G, Exhibit M didn't pertain to him, and neither did 1955, Subparts A and B. And I have a copy of 51S here today with me, and I'll challenge you with that today, or anybody else here today,

with that scenario.

51S gave my father lease back/buy back rights to the property and priority rights over U.S. Fish and Wildlife easements. And it gave several others in this room here today the same options, that didn't get those options.

That's my case, and I thank you.

MR. WILKES: Thank you, Mr. Moore.

[Applause]

MR. WILKES: Mr. Blackwell.

MR. BLACKWELL: I'm Jeremiah Blackwell. I'm representing Mrs. Ruthie Parrish [ph], as a farmer since back in 1940 up until the present. And what I want to talk about is the farm number-- farm number.

This is the thing that the county government land office uses. They will not tell you this is a county land office, which is called the ASC office. It's the government county land office, and that particular director is paid directly by the government, and then that particular person tells the little board members

what to do. And the poor little board members don't know, so they do whatever the director tells them to do. And she's paid, or he's paid, by the United States Government, so that let's you know right there what happened.

Now, let me show you what they'll do. They will get together with some good farmers and give the good farmers that number. Then the good farmers will get the \$50 million check, and the little farmer will not get any parity check--which this is the way to cut the little farmers off. The parity took the little farmers' land and then give all the parity check to the great big farmers with \$50,000.

Now, if we were to say anything today about this--For an example, I'm standing here, and bells on [ph]; and I want to call Washington, D.C. on the telephone. I call Washington, D.C. on the telephone. Then they're going to have a record to play, or either the line ain't going to be open, or they'll tell me to push that button.

Now, what I'm saying is, you all open the

line in Washington, D.C. for the people to get in, because it's been tokenism for the last past ten or 20 years. You call on the line; you can't get nothing. You call on the state office; they don't know nobody. You see what I mean?

In other words, you go to the federal building. Then they'll tell you to go out on Highway 55 or something, and won't even tell you where the building is at. You see what I mean?

So what I'm saying is, I hope to God that you all change this thing of communication, because if you call on this telephone you ain't going to get nobody in Washington. And if you call on the local, you ain't going to get nobody.

And when it comes to that farm number, I wish that the United States Department of Agriculture would have an investigation on the farm number and call the people in that own that farm number--which is the farmers, the landlords, and the other people done skimmed them out of it. And that's where it's really at. That's how the land is getting killed.

Now, Ms. Ruthie Parrish did not sign for the farm bill--the lack of understanding. Now, some of the farmers got a \$18 check. I don't know what you all got. I ain't heard none of you all talk about that \$18 check you got from this land farm--In other words, they're going to take control of your land for ten years--till 2000.

I would like for us to come up with this situation to tell us who got a check over \$18 for this here signing up for this farm bill. Thank you.

MR. WILKES: Thank you, Mr. Blackwell.

Mr. Kenneth Smith is up next, and then Ms. Betty Puckett [ph].

MR. SPENCER: Kenneth Spencer.

MR. WILKES: Right.

MR. SPENCER: Okay. My name is Kenneth Spencer, and I've been farming here in Humphreys County for nine years. And before becoming a farmer, I was a truck driver. I've been a trucker and I drove for a company, Lewis Grocery Company.

And I got laid off about nine years ago.

I invested all my savings earned in the farming business. I farm rice and soybeans. I farm approximately 3,500 acres out of my savings that I had saved on the road.

From the first beginning, the first year, I applied for loans through Farmers Home, and they rejected me. On through the past, I applied for a loan through Farmers Home. They rejected me. I had to go all the way to Cedar Falls, Iowa, to a company called Ag-Serve of America [ph]. They sent me an application. Overnight, my application was in the mail. I filled it out. I overnighted it back. In four days, they had approved me for a loan.

In that particular year, I came up short. I had a floor disaster. I came up short. I couldn't pay them back. In '96, I went back to Farmers Home and applied for another loan. My loan has been approved and obligated to Farmers. It's in this package here now.

They give me a letter saying my loan has been approved, give me a letter to go around and

give to creditors. PFiester [ph] Tractor Company, right across the street from Farmers Home in Lexington, Mississippi--I've taken that letter over there. The gentleman let me have everything I need. I went to Rolling Fork, Mississippi, and rented a 7240 [ph], a hundred-and-some-thousand-dollar tractor, waiting on Farmers Home.

Three months later, right here in my home town, the sheriff knocked on my door, told me I've got three days to pay those people or I'm going to jail. Farmers Home--I haven't seen the money from Farmers Home yet.

When I harvested my '96 crop, Farmers Home name was on my check at the elevator. I mean, if they haven't approved me, if they don't owe me any money, what's their name doing on my check? So I mean, something's going on wrong.

I went over to pick up my check, Jackie Norton [ph]--The man [inaudible] done my paperwork. I went over to pick my check up. Jackie Norton stepped out the closet, told the landowner that he wasn't going to give me nothing. I've been farming

for nine years out of my pocket, and I can't get no loan. Here's a tractor right here. Farmers Home supposed to have been paid my equipment, a \$110,000 tractor right here.

I was in the paper three weeks ago, the Jackson Pledge and Ledger [ph]. And the tractor is sitting right down here at the holding yard, the John Deere Company. They rejected my loan.

And now three months later, another jury [ph] is going to be coming out because Farmers Home didn't do what they're supposed to do. And I need you all to look into this.

Now, I'm going to say this. If Farmers Home--If today was Farmers Home's payday, and tell them the computer's down and it's going to be nine days before they're going to get their checks, they'll tear the office up. But I've been waiting nine years for my loan, and I want it. Thank you.

And I'd like to give you all a copy. I've got about four or five more copies. And I want to put it in the right hands, because I want to be called. I've got an 800-number. I'll give you

that before I leave here. It's not on here, but I'll give it to you.

MR. WILKES: I want to make sure that I got your name right. I put "Kenneth Smith." It's Kenneth Spencer?

MR. SPENCER: Kenneth Spencer.

MR. WILKES: Spencer.

MR. SPENCER: I've been living here all my life. I've been farming out my pocket for nine years, and I can't go no further.

MR. WILKES: Mr. Spencer, there's a question from one of the team members.

TEAM MEMBER: Mr. Spencer?

MR. SPENCER: Yes.

TEAM MEMBER: The question I have is, did you ever receive any loan proceeds from Farmers Home Administration?

MR. SPENCER: I've got the letter here when they were in the process--

TEAM MEMBER: Did you ever--

MR. SPENCER: No.

TEAM MEMBER: You did not?

MR. SPENCER: No. The only thing I've seen from Farmers Home is the damage they've done me, and the sheriff knocked on my door. I'm 40 years old. When I was at home with my mother the sheriff didn't come to my house looking for me. And I don't want no sheriff coming to my house now. I'm 40 years old.

TEAM MEMBER: Do you have a copy of the letter?

MR. SPENCER: I've got every document in here; the date they approved it, the date I went over there. And you all just look at it.

TEAM MEMBER: And you say their name was on your check at the elevator?

MR. SPENCER: Their name was on my check at the elevator. I called them. He said, "We can take our name off the check." I might be a little fast here, but I'm trying to beat that card [ph] man.

MR. WILKES: Mr. Spencer, as long as they are asking you questions the time is not running against you. It's our time.

MR. SPENCER: I have proof right here. When I went in the farming business, I bought approximately \$450,000 of equipment, nine years ago. I mean, every year I'm losing. Like this year, this tractor here, \$110,000 tractor, the biggest tractor John Deere makes. It's gone off my farm.

And I need some help. Another month and a half, we're going to be ready to go back to the field. I want a 400-horsepower tractor back at my shop right here in Belzoni [inaudible] As fast as possible, I need some help.

MR. WILKES: Mr. Spencer, when was your loan approved?

MR. SPENCER: April--March the 12th.

MR. WILKES: Of this year?

MR. SPENCER: '96.

MR. WILKES: I mean of '96, right.

MR. SPENCER: Also, I went to North [inaudible] in Jackson down here. And when I went to North's office in Jackson, he got on the phone right in front of me and called up there. And when

he called, he hit his fist on the desk, told them to put this first priority. I didn't get no result. But when he done that, Jackie North started the whole paper trace all over again. He's got the date on my paper, June the 20th, I think. My loan was approved on the 12th. Jackie North wants to start a whole another paper trace all over again.

TEAM MEMBER: Which county are you in?

MR. SPENCER: Humphreys County, right here where we're sitting right here. Humphreys County, Belzoni.

MR. WILKES: Thank you, Mr. Spencer. Someone will definitely be getting--

MR. SPENCER: Also, I could say, if you all can't call me--Call me at home or 800-number. If you're busy in your office, I mean, if you have time when you're laying in your bed, pick up that phone, call me on my 800-number. I want to talk to somebody.

MR. WILKES: Thank you.

Ms. Betty Puckett. And after Ms. Puckett,

Mr. Eddie Ross.

MS. PUCKETT: Hello. My name is Betty Puckett. I am a farm advocate from Lacamp, Louisiana. My work is channeled through the Louisiana Inner Church Conference.

I've been working with farmers for the last ten years. And everything that has been said here today, I can verify, I can document. I can show you documentation of it in the case files that I'm holding, with almost any and every farmer that I represent, irregardless of small, large, or black, or whatever.

Today we need somebody to hold the offices accountable for their actions. They have not been accountable for what they do. And that needs to be done, if anybody's going to ever be treated fairly.

The program delivery has been terrible. With the '87 act and the 1990 act it was terrible. All of a sudden, we had the 1996 Fair Act. That has been being implemented immediately because it strips you of everything the '87 act had and everything the '90 act has. So program delivery

with the '90 [sic] act has been quick.

You heard some farmers talking here today about the time that they've been in their process. It seems like that doesn't matter with the Fair Act. If you didn't have a complete application, if you didn't have the state director sign off on your net recovery buyout before that date, it doesn't matter if you've been there for ten years or seven or eight years in the process. The Fair Act just says you're not eligible for it now. And this is the type program delivery that's been being delivered with the Fair Act. It cuts you out.

Also, under the 1994 Reorganization Act, we had the national appeals division. It's supposed to be a very separate, fairer process under the Secretary. Well, what has happened is, I've done approximately 20 appeals or more since that time. I've had five appeals reversed. I have had none implemented yet. So that process is really not working. The national appeals division is very badly broken.

Before we had the national appeals

division, we had the national appeals staff. Decisions were reversed all the time. I have a farmer in here today who had three decisions reversed--but no implementation. I mean, you didn't have a problem getting the decision reversed. You just couldn't get it implemented.

So what I'm asking the Secretary to do is to really take a very hard look at the problems that we have today. If he needs to call on me, I've got records. I've got records of what has happened here today in my files at home.

As far as the fellow with the OIG investigation and retaliation, I've got stories of that. I've got stories of office of general counsel being involved in calling the shots. If the office of general counsel says, "This is the way it ought to be," then that's the way it is. It doesn't matter about your rights. So the system is very badly broken, as I see it. And I've been in it since 1986 working on the opposite side.

I do have to say, there was a very short time that we had someone as administrator of the

Farm Service Agency, or FMHA, that that situation started to turn a little bit. But then that was stopped pretty quickly, because she was removed from office.

And if anybody wants to call me, I'm open to talk to anybody who wants to talk about their case, who wants to get verification of what anyone has said here today. That's all I think I need to say.

MR. WILKES: Thank you much.

Mr. Ross. And after Mr. Ross, Dr. Marty Daniels [ph].

MR. ROSS: Yes. My name is Eddie Ross. And I'm speaking on behalf of myself, Gregory Irvs [ph], and Anthony Howard. And I'm from Warren County, that's located in Vicksburg.

And basically, everybody that's spoken today has kind of described our situation, to a point, but ours goes a little farther than the average case here today.

Back in the years of '90 and '91, we were all rejected for operating loans. So we went

through the process and filed appeals. We won the appeals. We filed discrimination complaints. They wrote us back from Washington saying, "Yes, you were discriminated against." We have this in writing right here.

But still, the same county supervisors and county committee year after year used the fact that we filed these complaints and that they had to attend civil rights training classes as a reprisal against us, from '91 as to the present.

And what have we received? Delinquent accounts. What has the county supervisor received? He walked out with his 25 years of retirement, leaving us with this debt over our head. And we're getting threatened with 51S foreclosure packets. And until this day, there has been nothing done to justify what they've done to us. And that was, they admitted discrimination took place, but we've never received any kind of restitution from the department.

And on the same case, it's a white farmer from Louisiana. They confirmed discrimination

against him. He was awarded a \$21 million award. And we also have that right here.

So I'm saying today that being here and listening to this problem is one thing; but when you get to the point you've filed the complaints and they write you back and say, "Yes, we discriminated against you. So what?" I mean, that's the end of the road.

If don't nothing be done, then why should we even waste time to keep on? We might as well just quit farming, get out and get us a job, and try to make a living some other way. Thank you.

[Applause]

MR. WILKES: Thank you.

Dr. Mattie--And then we have Andre Matthews.

DR. DANIELS: Thank you. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen and all that are involved. Thank you for this opportunity to speak.

I live in Memphis, Tennessee, but own farm land with my son in Mississippi, around Holly Springs. And this is sort of like a fourth career.

One was nursing. I taught for 32 years in Chicago, because it was easy for me to get a job at that particular time.

My son interested me in agriculture. I'm interested in careers in agriculture, and I don't think I heard anything said about training the future farmer.

I listened here to some of the painful testimonies of how difficult it is to obtain loans. And it appears that the applications are facades for denial in most instances. We need to try to paint the picture to young people of a more positive situation for farmers because if you look around, your grandchildren, great grandchildren, and future children really can't see a need to go into farming at all. Because if they have the same kinds of problems as their dad, grandparent, and the like, you know, it's just not appealing.

I knew a number of guys that had agriculture degrees as I worked in Chicago, but sometimes they didn't want people to know. They taught physical education, and the like.

So we're going to have to stress incentives, scholarships, to begin rather early whereas there will be a good reason to go into farming, and let people have a more positive way.

So I'd like to share some other comments that I wrote. My son just told me that we were coming to this conference late last night. So I'm vice president of Family Farmers Conference. I am especially concerned about the future farmers. So as a retired teacher of 32 years, agribusiness careers are a definite interest.

Basically, I would like to beat the drum for creating more positive images of careers for farmers. The old farmers are dying out. The youth must be directed to understanding some of the successful aspects of marketing, of food production, operation of farm equipment.

Young farmers must be educated in basic math skills, economics, banking, investing, plant and animal sciences, animal husbandry, computer literacy, local marketing, national and international sales.

We must assist the local black farmers to develop local cooperatives and businesses with the food production, distribution, transportation markets. I would encourage you to focus on families, especially children, community economics, local businesses, private sector, and the people of communities. A thrust for unity in a community is necessary for the creation of climate for economic survival.

The municipalities need to be concerned for the citizens' living conditions, for a quality lifestyle. Be more concerned for human life, period. Become more cooperative for your immediate neighbors. This is for farmers. Become more civic-minded. Reach out.

Laws are too difficult. Paperwork bureaucracy is almost insurmountable. Too many farms are lost. We must focus on building strong communities through unity of good job development, collective responsibility, quality education and workplace production, collective work responsibility, self-determination, creativity and,

above all, faith.

Include local people in strategic planning. Remember that jobs control ownership for a strong local community. Agriculture training schools are too far away from most of us. Liberal arts training colleges train teachers, but there's only so many schools so there are only so many jobs for teachers. So why not integrate incentives in schools to develop farmers for the future? Thank you very much.

MR. WILKES: Thank you. I'm going to take one more person. And what I have is that I want to make sure that everyone knows that there's an opportunity to make sure that your comments are actually received by this team as well as the Secretary of Agriculture.

And let me reiterate. The agenda that you got this morning, if you are not able to get your comments recorded here, make sure that you call this particular number. And the local staff will be available this afternoon to continue to take those recordings of anyone who does not get a

chance to be at this forum here.

So this is going to be the last individual that we will hear from. It will be Mr. Andre Matthews. And after we finish that, then make sure that those comments are actually there. Mr. Matthews.

MR. MATTHEWS: Good afternoon to our distinguished panel, special guests, farmers, and supporters. It's a pleasure to be here to speak to you on very important issues. I'm Andre Matthews from the Holly Springs, Mississippi, area. I represent Family Farmers Cooperative.

Our group consists of 25 minority farmers in vegetable production. We're experiencing difficulties and would like to expand our existing business and encourage new business in our area.

Recently, areas of the country have experienced many problems of crop losses and disasters in reference to those disasters that are now in Florida and Mexico. I would like to offer one suggestion. One possible remedy is to empower Mississippi black farmers.

Many products grown in Florida and Mexico could be grown right here in Mississippi. I also view those kinds of disasters as a threat to national security affecting the income and survival conditions of people on fixed and low income. Just as the military groups have reserves, such as Air Force reserves, Army reserves, Navy reserves, how about some farmer reserves? We never know when or where disasters will strike, whether flood or drought.

Mississippi black farmers could be here to help. Please help us feed and provide food for our children, families, neighbors, now and in the future. As we embark upon the 21st century, please help us to acquire info on grants, other sources of funding, equipment, technical assistance, and seeds; also, economic opportunities that would allow us to network with other farmers in the United States.

There are only a few black farmers left, less than 10,000 or 15,000. Most are in Mississippi. Please share your resources so we can

help America. Thank you.

MR. WILKES: Thank you.

On behalf of the Mississippi Food and Agriculture Council, I want to thank each member that has come here today to participate in this listening forum, as well as I want to sincerely show and say thank you to the Secretary of Agriculture, as well as this team that has come here to listen to the concerns that are out in the countryside not only in Mississippi but throughout the whole southeast region.

I hope that each one of you all has a safe and productive year, as well as a safe trip home. This concludes our listening forum as far as the open forum is concerned. Thank you.

[End of Open Listening Forum.]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

CIVIL RIGHTS LISTENING SESSION

ADDITIONAL PARTICIPANTS COMMENTS

Friday, January 24, 1997

Belzoni, Mississippi

[TRANSCRIPT PREPARED FROM A TAPE RECORDING.]

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MODERATOR: What is your name?

MR. COLEMAN: My name is Houston Lee
Coleman.

MODERATOR: Spell it.

MR. COLEMAN: H-O-U-S-T-O-N L-E-E C-O-L-
E-M-A-N.

MODERATOR: What county are you from?

MR. COLEMAN: Bolivar. Bolivar County.

MODERATOR: Okay. State your comment.

MR. COLEMAN: My comment is that I'm a
farmer for Bolivar County. I've been farming all
my life. And my question is--Well, the problem I'm
having, I have some--well, it's family land. And
it fell into the government's inventory.

And I had a lease [inaudible] And all the
time that I was leasing the land and talking with
them about buying the property, they were telling
me of course I farmed at one time. I got a loan
from them in 1974. And because of this, after
years, then I had been bankrupt. And I haven't had
a loan with the government since. But I struggled

some kind of way up until this point, farming on my own.

And I leased this property that was family land. And they were telling me that--In other words, I bankrupted and my wife didn't. So that left the security still standing out there. They were telling me that I need to get rid of the bounds [ph] of the land, for the security, you know, before I'd be able to get another loan to even buy property, or even an operating loan.

And the people that I was talking with that have dealt with me in the office have told me that they hadn't heard of this before. You know, I could see that they didn't believe me. So I kept talking with the supervisor there about the county office. His name was Mike Evers [ph]. I kept up with him.

And I knew my lease was going to end on the 31st of December of '96. Somewhere in the early part of this year I started trying to get an extension on my lease, you know, so when this time comes up that I could keep moving, you know, not

let it slip up on me.

They told me, "Well, just go ahead on, and when that time comes up then come back in here and deal with it," you know. Now all that time I'm talking about buying the property they didn't care about me being bankrupt, that I couldn't buy it, you know.

Some come January [inaudible] And I knew my lease was out, so I had to go in the office and find out what I needed to do. Then this is when they told me that they wouldn't--Well, they had already told me they would extend my lease. They couldn't extend it. If I wanted to buy the land, then I've got to go elsewhere to find the money to do that, you know.

And I told them, I said, well, I didn't think that was fair, you know; that I've worked this land that long, you know, with the lease, and now they just tell me that I need to go find money elsewhere, which I know is going to be kind of hard to just get out somewhere and find some money [inaudible].

But anyway, so the supervisor [inaudible] is Gail Britt [ph]. And this is the day before New Years that I talked with them in the office. And they were off for New Years, so she told me to call her back on Thursday, which was the day after New Years. So I called. She had sent me this package.

This is a package saying--I got a letter along with it, saying that they had allotted money out in the '97 program, or bill, you know

[inaudible] But when I called her that Thursday she said, "Well, I shouldn't have sent you that package because if you have taken Chapter 7 then you are not eligible for that program."

I said, "Well, that don't sound fair because if you basically--That gives you another chance, you know." And I bankrupted in 1985. That was 11 years ago. And that's just where I am. I'm out now trying to find [inaudible] to get money to buy that farm.

MODERATOR: Okay.

MR. BOYD: My name is DeWayne Boyd. That's D-E-capital W-A-Y-N-E Boyd, B-O-Y-D. And

I'm out of Oktibbeha County. That's O-K-T-I-B-B-E-H-A.

MODERATOR: State your comment, sir.

MR. BOYD: Who would I be addressing this to?

MODERATOR: The Secretary of Agriculture.

MR. BOYD: Mr. Glickman, I again thank you for taking this opportunity to allow me to present this issue. I'm the same fellow that met you in D.C. with NABS, John Boyd, and my attorney James Mardon [ph] in the class action.

As I was telling you about this issue here in Mississippi, particularly in my area of Oktibbeha County, discrimination that you can see is a very egregious situation here in the state. But you must be made aware, also, that the corruption issue is just as blatant and well hidden as the issues of discrimination.

And most of the persons here have addressed the issue of discrimination. Mine particularly speaks to the issue of corruption--not eliminating the issue of discrimination in that

regard.

I have been through three administrations now with this issue. And in brevity, I would just put it down to this issue. The entire matter that I'm involved in, as I presented that letter to you to Mr. Grant Buntrop [ph] under OIG Complaint P-as-in-Paul S-as-in-Sam 5099-0013, needs to be investigated by independent counsel Donna Smaltz [ph].

I have letters here from Congressman Benny Thompson addressed to Attorney General Janet Reno, requesting just such an investigation. As you're well aware of the issue of Norris Fost [ph], Mike Espy's state appointee for Consolidated Farm Services, and his recent resignation due to lying on the three-count indictment to a grand jury in the Mitchell matter, which was subsidy fraud, I would respectfully request that you release to my attorneys or authorize to release to my attorneys the administrative decision dated August 30th, 1990, from then-state director James R. Huff [ph] to the national director Laverne Offman [ph] of

FMHA, which outlines the criminal activities that Waldrop [ph] Farms and its principals were involved in as it relates to my family's land in Oktibbeha County.

In relation to this same complaint, as it pertains to Mr. Fost's handling of this, if he lied in that matter, what's to say what he did not do as it relates to my issue. I would respectfully request in my matter that you again forward this matter over to Attorney General Janet Reno for investigation by independent counsel Donna Smaltz; that this entire matter be reviewed; that the entire office of the ASCS in Oktibbeha County, particularly starting with CED [ph] director Judy Abernathy, be fired; that OIG investigator Steve Gaines [ph] be fired, and that the regional director D.G. Goodman [ph] be fired, for their handling of this particular matter in Oktibbeha County.

I have letters and documentation which was discovered. And let me state this to you, Mr. Glickman. Today as we spoke here in Belzoni, I was

informed last night at ten o'clock that this date was also my pre-trial conference on the false claims act to which I'm in federal court here in Aberdeen, Mississippi.

I have been through kidnappings. I have been fired from my state position with the department of agriculture here in Mississippi, because of my efforts to file this false claims act against Ben F. Tilden, Jr. [ph], who was the sovereignty [ph] commission official here in Mississippi, a former sovereignty commission official, and Waldrop Farms, and subsequently against Oktibbeha County sheriff Doss Bryan [ph] and commissioner of agriculture John Buck Ross [ph].

I have documentation that shows indisputably the collusion of ASCS officials that I mentioned in aiding and abetting the fraudulent receipt of subsidy payments on the Wynn [ph] Estate lands in Oktibbeha County, principally being Farm Number 147 and adjoining estate land Farm 143.

I welcome the opportunity to present this

to Department of Agriculture attorneys, even though attorney James Gilliland [ph], general counsel, is involved in this matter, as was Secretary Espy to whom we have subpoenaed for this particular false claims act, as was Norris Fost.

I have no other recourse but the filing of lawsuits to seek justice in this matter. And if the truth of this has to come out in federal court, it would be a very big embarrassment to USDA for their collusive acts on behalf of their officials in this matter. And that's something that I would hope that we can avoid.

I'm scheduled for trial February 13th, 1997. As my letter to you to Mr. Grant Buntrop was dated December 9th, 1996, which I personally delivered to you in that conference meeting there in Washington December 12th--I would hope to hear something from USDA officials as to their intent to reopen the investigation in light of that indictment of Norris Fost, and what the USDA intends to do in relation to preventing the coverup or continuing with the coverup that I uncovered

with the fraudulent actions that I uncovered in this matter.

I thank you for your time, for listening to this. And you can reach my attorney, Mr. Solomon Osborne [ph]. He's at area code 601, 453-0511. He's located in Greenwood, Mississippi. And you may reach me, if need be. I'm in D.C. at (202) 347-2411. And also, to receive any further briefing in this matter you can contact the offices of Congressman Benny Thompson--principally his chief of staff, Charlie Horne [ph]. Thank you for taking this time.

Mr. Glickman, in addition, I just wanted to state that I'll be leaving certain documentation that I have for your perusal. Thank you.

MR. SMITH: My name is Aubrey Smith. I'm from Tallahatchie County. My name is A-U-B-R-E-Y Smith.

My complaint is, at the FHA office in Charleston, I went in to apply for a loan, a cattle [ph] loan, land and cattle purchase, and I was told that they did not have any money to do this.

So I waited about a year, and I go back in to ask for an application, and the man give me an application for a construction loan, and I want to apply for a land and cattle loan. That was my complaint.

On behalf of my brother, Leon Smith, when he moved back from Memphis to Charleston he wanted to apply for a loan, and he was told by the FHA that he was not making enough money to apply for a loan. So about a year later, he got a job at Newsprint South [ph] in Grenada [ph], and he goes back in to reapply for a loan. And this time, he was told that he was making too much money. So on both occasions, it was either/or, he was making too much or not making enough. And that was our complaint. Thank you.

MR. WILLIAMS: Mitchell Williams, Bolivar [ph] County. M-I-T-C-H-E-L-L W-I-L-L-I-A-M-S.

MODERATOR: Okay. Make your comment.

MR. WILLIAMS: The comment is, the problems that I've had with Farmers Home is that for the last 20-some years I've been dealing with

them off and on. But on 99 percent of the occasions the loans were late being processed, or late getting your money, or not at all. In the instance when you got the money, it was too late to do anything.

And I asked them on several occasions would they give me a subordinate to go into a bank or another loan institution and get money to carry me over until the loan is approved, and they would not give it to me in writing. What they did tell me was to go to the bank. I went to the bank, and the bank would call them, it would be "No." So apparently, what they were telling the bank was something different from what they were telling me.

But the bottom line is, I did not get it. And this forced me into bankruptcy. And I tried to get my children to--I had trouble with the local supervisor to let my children, two children, one 25, the other one 23, that they want to continue to farm. And I have three other children that are teenagers.

And she told me upon that occasion, "Yes,

send them down." And once they went down, she told them, "No," they could not be able to farm because of some rule that she told. I don't remember--The bottom line was she was denying.

And I've written them a letter asking for information about the property, that they had been restructured [inaudible] And I will leave you a letter that I wrote to them. I have not yet gotten the information that I asked for in this letter. Thank you for your time and attention.

MODERATOR: Thank you.

MR. BROWN: Ready?

MODERATOR: Yes.

MR. BROWN: My name is Roy Lee Brown, spelled R-O-Y L-E-E B-R-O-W-N, in Holmes County, in the state of Mississippi.

MODERATOR: Give your comment.

MR. BROWN: Okay. I'm representing Valerie [ph] Brown Farms. And in 1994 Valerie Brown submitted an application to Farmers Home office in Lexington. And they told her that she would have to get a 100-percent guarantee loan from

a lending institution.

So she got that 100-percent guaranteed loan from Ag-Guaranty [ph] here in Belzoni. They agreed to loan her a 100-percent guaranteed loan. And then when Ag-Guaranty submitted their application to the Farmers Home, they sit on the application until June the 25th. It was too late to plant anything then. And so she didn't get no loan that year.

And so from then on, she hasn't been farming any more. So now she owed the FHA \$200,000 because she did get a loan in 1994 in order to try to pay the back debt off and pay her existing loans off. And so now that they're getting ready to foreclose on her: want to take her land, want to sell it, giving her the option to buy it back. But she's 76 years old now, and she's not able to get a loan from any other lending institution.

So I would ask that they get her file and write that debt off, because she's too old. She isn't going to be able to get no--ain't nobody going to be able to loan her no money to--you know,

to buy her land back.

MODERATOR: Okay. Thank you.

MR. WILLIAMS: Bennie Williams. And you spell the name B-E-N-N-I-E and W-I-L-L-I-A-M-S, Williams. And I'm from Bolivar County.

MODERATOR: Okay. State your comment.

MR. WILLIAMS: Okay. My comment is totally different from what they had. Mine is about water. We've been here three years in Mississippi. We moved from Chicago to here. Since I've been here, I didn't even know that it was this--you know, this bad down here. People don't even have water in the rural areas.

We're like a mile from every direction, from water. And since, you know, before we moved here we paid the deposit down for the water lines to be run through, down from Sunflower County across over to Bolivar, because we're right by the border line. And we haven't got any water yet.

Every year since I've been here, the same man, Mr. Leon Williams [ph]--he's a contractor--would tell you, "The water is coming. You're going

to get it. You're going to get it." But we never get the water, you know. And [inaudible] I went over to talk to him, me and my father and another [inaudible]. And we talked about the water to him.

And he said at that time--It was about three or four months ago. He said, well, they couldn't bring the water because, you know, the [inaudible] are coming in now and he couldn't do it, they didn't have the funds for the water. And he said but they would get the funds. And that's what he's been saying for the last three years, the funds were there and they were going to run the water down. But up to now we still don't have no water. And we don't know if we're going to get any water from these people.

So we hooked up with--I don't know the guy's name [inaudible]. It's a different water line. We hooked with this guy. We had to pay another fee for this guy. But we figured if we can't get it coming from the east, maybe we can get it coming from north, you know, get somebody to come bring us--you know, would bring a line through

there, because we're right there, you know, surrounded where all the water's at, but yet we just can't get it.

And my wife [inaudible] she has called all the way from [inaudible] to Washington, D.C., several times. Washington sometimes calls back. But, you know, she's the one talked to them. And they assured me we're going to get some water, but yet we haven't got it yet.

And Mr. Leon [ph], you know, he just said it [inaudible] well, it's more than Mr. Leon, Mr. Leon and a few others [inaudible] Mister--What's this man's name? [inaudible] But he said the same thing, you know, the money was coming and they were getting the money, the money's coming in, and we're going to get it. He had assured us we were going to get water. Every time we called, that we were going to get it, we were going to get it. [inaudible] And then, you know, send you over to another year [inaudible]

I mean, you know, we really get sick of it. Now we're thinking about putting a civil suit

[inaudible] If we get this water out of
[inaudible] If they can bring this water in--Now
we just put in for this water just last year. Now,
if we happen to get this water, if we get the loan
from FHA to get the water through there, you know--
They already got a loan for the water, but if they
can get additional loans to bring the water an
extra half-mile over, then we hook up--

MS. : See, what he's not
explaining is the fact that they have gone out
their way to bring water to people that had a
community well. We are on the main road and cannot
get water. They have gone in the boonies to give
people water, and it's all white people that have
gotten this water. And the black community that
sits in the heart of the area, it has gone to four
points around the area just to keep us from getting
water.

It is ridiculous. And when you bring
these points up to, like, Leon Williams and the guy
in Greenville from FHA, I have talked to Benny
Thompson about this. He has helped. But the

problem is not resolved.

I mean, you wait and you wait and--We've just pretty much gotten to the point where we know these white people that are on the river. They just sit up there and tell us--They tell us a story from one end of the year to the next. And that's all we build on, and we hold on to this hope we're going to get water.

His parents, my husband's parents have been on the land--

MR. WILLIAMS: Forty-acre land.

MS. : On 40 acres of land, and they've been there for 70-some-odd years, and they still have not gotten water. When they were taking collections for water, we were one of the first people on the list for water--

MR. WILLIAMS: And the last.

MS. : --and the last people to still receive water. It's the point of they're going totally out of the way to give us water. And it's just really sad. I mean, it's pitiful.

MR. WILLIAMS: I can't understand it.

MODERATOR: All right.

MR. FOREMAN: Okay. My name is James Foreman, J-A-M-E-S F-O-R-E-M-A-N, Yazoo County.

Now, what I want to state now is about my farming. I farm and I was denied on loans, my loans. I had a disaster. I didn't get no help. About three years back, I didn't get no help. And I heard about this meeting here. I wanted to come up here and see if I can get help for '97.

And I've got other bills that I want to try to pay if I can. So that's one thing, number one, I want to try to get into.

MODERATOR: Okay.

[End of Recording.]