



The Modern-Day Freedom Fighters for Farmers

National Women in Agriculture Association Expose Discrimination and Advocate for Equality Change the Smith-Lever Act to get Money to Youth

A multi-generational black farmer in Texas, Deydra Steans, is an educator who had to pivot her career to help her family's farm. Deydra, a single mom and is the president of the Texas chapter for the **National Women in Agriculture Association** [NWIAA - 13 years old and the largest association for Women in Ag, started by Dr. Tammy Gray Steele in Oklahoma.] And now, people are dubbing Tammy and Deydra as the **Modern-Day Freedom Fighter for Farmers** - *why?*

Deydra has proof of the retaliation and blatant discrimination she experienced at and above the county level. Deydra is getting her Master of Jurisprudence and holds an Honesty Bond - an official title designated to someone who goes through an approval process with insurance companies to detail the truth of claims. Deydra was approached by black farmers in the community surrounding her farm who have no understanding of certain processes to gain funding through the FSA [Farm Service Agency.] Deydra has begun holding workshops to educate these farmers. One particular farmer, who has the equivalent of a 3rd grade education, reached out to Deydra to help him with technical assistance - maneuvering through applications for programs and grants. Many of these rural farmers do not even have computers. In 2019, he appointed Deydra as power of attorney. He lost cattle during Hurricane Harvey and is trying to recoup funds through disaster relief in order to rebuild. No one was paying attention to him at the county exec level - simply put, the system is broken and corrupt. She submitted on his behalf - nothing was reported. She followed up with phone calls and experienced discrimination. She has proof - in writing and taped audio documenting - of being lied to and yelled at by county officials. One woman at the state executive office level completely misrepresented her job description and position on a call with Deydra. She then approached the county officials and there was retaliation - Deydra can provide proof - for going above the county level. She was removed as the power of attorney - county execs called the girlfriend of this farmer and convinced her that Deydra should be removed. She has proof of this phone call from the elderly farmer who explained to Deydra: "I did not want to cause trouble and needed help, so I was told to have you removed, without permission." Deydra is still trying to help him and working to be reinstated as power of attorney, but she is facing extreme resistance from the county to accept her signature.

The funds with the FSA are not being distributed to people in desperate need – farmers, who are living in underserved communities. Agriculture extensions for these farmers are being removed for no reason. It seems to all start with roadblocks at the county level - and now, we need to look at the commissioners and the larger system. These inequities are also reflected in the imbalance of funding under the **1914 Smith-Lever Act** which was initially intended to assist urban Black farmers, but predominantly benefited white farmers. NWIAA has been pursuing new legislation for the past 13 years, introducing **The Minority Women & Children Equality Inclusion Act** to increase targeted funding for Land-grant colleges, which currently share only 6% of the annual \$300 million Smith-Lever appropriation. NWIAA is advocating for the sustainable support of minority and women farmers who are NOT currently being reached by the USDA's valuable extension program.

It is time for the discrimination and wrongdoing to be exposed!

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