

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 14, 2022

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

The *Inflation Reduction Act* (IRA) will deliver billions of dollars in resources to help fight inflation, reduce healthcare costs, and notably provide relief to economically distressed farmers. Section 22006 of the IRA grants the U.S. Department of Agriculture broad authority to provide debt relief to at-risk farmers, but many farmers are concerned as to whether they will be able to access these resources. We urge you to quickly implement the small farm debt relief program in a way that ensures as many small farmers as possible are included in this necessary relief, consistent with our original legislation.

As staunch advocates for farmers across New York State, we introduced the *Relief for America's Small Farmers Act* and have worked tirelessly to ensure that financially distressed small farmers can obtain the relief they need to continue the essential work critical to our economy and many local communities. Language from the *Relief for America's Small Farmers Act* was even included in the House-passed *Build Back Better Act* and provided up to \$150,000 in relief to small farmers with Farm Service Agency (FSA) loans. The eligibility criteria for IRA forgiveness should be based upon the framework included in the *Relief for America's Small Farmers Act*, which defined eligible borrowers as those who had an annual adjusted gross income under \$300,000 for the previous 5 years. This criteria was specifically created to capture as many economically distressed farmers as possible and should be used as the framework of IRA implementation. We know firsthand the diligent work it took to include this incredible relief in the IRA, and we want to ensure that it will reach all farmers for whom the program was designed.

This debt relief program will help thousands of farmers across the country. The USDA needs time to design and implement the program; however, many farmers have loan payments due before the end of the year that they will not get back even though their loans will be forgiven once the debt relief program is implemented. Many farmers are struggling to complete their payments as it stands but have not yet defaulted, and they deserve to be included within USDA regulations. Therefore, we urge the USDA to establish a dedicated program for farmers who will qualify for this program for the 2022 season and to expeditiously issue the criteria and eligibility guidelines.

We have heard stories from many farmers across New York struggling to make ends meet or considering selling their farm because of their debt. The inclusion of this debt relief in the IRA has the potential to prevent this and help thousands of families in our state. We must ensure that small farmers will not be left out of this process or forced to wait for additional rounds of assistance that may not come. We wrote the original legislation to target *all* small farmers who are saddled with burdensome FSA loans, and we hope you will honor that intent as the USDA works on guidance for this debt relief program. While we

understand the importance of helping our most at-risk farmers, it is imperative that USDA take into consideration economically distressed farmers who are on the brink of defaulting.

Our offices stand ready and eager to work in partnership to ensure we can do the most good for the most people with the resources allotted for this program. Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Sean Patrick Maloney
Member of Congress



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator