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Testimony Submitted by

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Before The New York State Senate's Joint Public Hearing:

Diversifying Agriculture and Addressing Food Justice alongside

Continuing Inequalities on our Food Systems

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Good afternoon. My name is Melanie Allen and I am the Program Director at Black Farmer Fund. I grew up on Long Island and I currently reside in Brooklyn. I am here today, representing Black Farmer Fund and Black Farmers United NYS. Black Farmer Fund is a community investment fund that invests in black farmers and food businesses in NY. This year we have raised close to \$1M of integrated capital that we will be deploying over the next several months to black farmers and food businesses across the state. These farmers and businesses will uplift the values of Black Farmer Fund investment process around building economic justice, community wealth building and managing environmental and ecological impact.

We are here today because we have been disappointed in the lack of funding, that is targeted specifically for black farmers and how the generalization of pooling together veterans, women, black, and indigenous farmers within the disadvantaged farmer category has been ineffective.

This work is personal for me. Farming is a part of my culture and identity, my grandparents grew up in Jamaica, where their parents were farmers, and well into their 90's, my grandparents continued to grow their own food. My history, my story, is similar to many of my colleagues testifying today, where being in right relationship with the land and food sovereignty is our right, and our legacy. We are tired of being excluded from accessing resources, accessing land, being left out of decision making spaces and the historical discriminatory practices that have kept our



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communities from building generational wealth; and this is the inspiration behind the community governance model of Black Farmer Fund--to center the lived experiences of Black farmers into the decision making process; to challenge the extractive nature of traditional funding vehicles; and to ensure that the loans and grants offered to farmers, set them up for success rather than create more hardship.

We belong to a community of farmers through Black Farmers United NYS of over 30 farmers, and the stories of farmers that have been able to take advantage of funding through any NYS budgets are few and far between. We are asking that you all create a pool of over \$10M specifically for black farmers to be distributed through Black Farmer Fund. This pool from the state has the ability to support at least 56 black start-up farms, established farms, food distributors, and value-added companies. We are asking this of you because in In New York State's \$42 billion agriculture and food industry, the disparities between black farmers and white farmers are best summarized by the startling data we currently have on black farmers in NY--only 139 black farmers among the over 57,000 farmers in New York State. It is important to recognize that this number is not because Black folks do not have a deep connection to the land and want to farm professionally; rather it is because there have been intentional, discriminatory practices that have kept us from staying on the land.

The black farmers in New York have a total net cash farm income of -\$906, while for white farmers it is \$42,875. Changing these statistics means New York State needs to become more specific and targeted about efforts to increase diversity in our food system through funding opportunities. Directing state funds to Black Farmer Fund to redistribute to our community is essential; it is truly the only way; for Black farmers to be able to build sustainability and wealth for our communities.