

House Bill 262

By: Representatives Lewis-Ward of the 115th, Beverly of the 143rd, Jackson of the 128th, and Gilliard of the 162nd

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

1 To amend Title 2 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to agriculture, so as to
2 establish the Office of Equity in Agriculture; to provide definitions; to provide for purpose;
3 to provide for training; to establish and provide requirements for the Georgia Farmers
4 Council; to provide for purpose; to provide for related matters; to provide for a short title; to
5 repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

6 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

7 **SECTION 1.**

8 This Act shall be known and may be cited as the "Georgia Racial Equity in Agriculture Act."

9 **SECTION 2.**

10 Title 2 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to agriculture, is amended by
11 adding a new chapter to read as follows:

CHAPTER 24

"2-24-1.

As used in this chapter, the term:

(1) 'Agricultural easement' means a nonpossessory interest of a holder in real property imposing limitations on the use of the property strictly to agricultural purposes.

(2) 'Eligible person' means a natural person who is a resident of this state, is at least 21 years of age, has previously identified as Black or African American, and has at least one parent of African ancestry.

(3) 'Qualified entity' means an organization which has a fiscal sponsor who is exempt from taxation pursuant to Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986; which has a minimum of three years of experience providing agricultural services, business assistance, legal assistance, or advocacy services to socially disadvantaged farmers; and in which at least one-third of the members of the organization's board of directors are members of a socially disadvantaged group.

(4) 'Socially disadvantaged farmer' means a farmer who is a member of a socially disadvantaged group.

(5) 'Socially disadvantaged group' means a group of people whose members have been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as a member of a group without regard to their individual qualities.

(6) 'Training' means a program of training approved by the Commissioner that provides an eligible person with the basic skills to operate a farm profitably with a primary focus on regenerating the soil, ecosystem, and local community; provides a course of study that is equivalent to no less than 30 academic credit hours of study, which may be provided as direct in-field instruction; focuses on low capital-intensive techniques and technologies; and studies local and regional food systems and the market opportunities those systems present.

38 2-24-2.

39 (a) There is created the Office of Equity in Agriculture within the department to support
40 current members of socially disadvantaged groups and to encourage the growth of
41 members of socially disadvantaged groups into the field of agriculture. The Office of
42 Equity in Agriculture shall administer the provisions of this chapter.

43 (b) The purpose of the Office of Equity in Agriculture is to:

44 (1) Implement measures to address discrimination and promote equity in the distribution
45 of government programs, loans, and other assistance to members of socially
46 disadvantaged groups in this state, including, but not limited to, investigating and
47 redressing discrimination complaints from members of socially disadvantaged groups and
48 implementing training and education programs to promote industry competency;

49 (2) Promote the success of members of socially disadvantaged groups with training,
50 mentorship, and education programs, including, but not limited to, technical assistance,
51 marketing, and business development support;

52 (3) Encourage the development, promotion, and marketing of specialty crops and
53 nontraditional farming techniques in this state;

54 (4) Develop partnerships with businesses and organizations committed to supporting
55 disadvantaged farmers' livelihoods to increase access to markets, capital, and technology;

56 (5) Work with state agencies, local governments, and community based organizations
57 to develop partnerships and programs to promote the success of members of socially
58 disadvantaged groups;

59 (6) Develop financial assistance programs to provide aid to members of socially
60 disadvantaged groups are affected by natural disasters;

61 (7) Develop educational programming for use in schools, community centers, and other
62 public venues, to raise awareness about the importance of supporting members of socially
63 disadvantaged groups and their contributions to the agricultural industry and
64 communities; and

65 (8) Maintain and make available statistical data regarding loan applications, programs,
66 assistance rendered, complaints lodged, and the outcomes resulting from such.

67 2-24-3.

68 There is established the Georgia Farmers Council within the Office of Equity in
69 Agriculture. The purpose of the Farmers Council is to study and offer practicable solutions
70 to redress the root causes of discrimination and other barriers members of socially
71 disadvantaged groups face."

72 **SECTION 3.**

73 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.