

**SUBSTITUTE FOR
HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 233**

1 A resolution to declare February 26, 2020, as Black Farmers
2 Awareness Day in the state of Michigan.

3 Whereas, Since the antebellum period, black farmers in
4 Michigan have fought continuously to acquire self-determination of
5 their lives, and that of their families, through the attainment,
6 retention and cultivation of farmland; and

7 Whereas, By 1920, almost one million, or 14.3%, of the
8 nation's farmers were black and they owned nearly 16 million acres
9 of farmland; and

10 Whereas, By 1997, the number of the nation's black farmers hit
11 an all-time low when the census revealed that only 18,541 were left
12 and they comprised only 1% of the total number of farmers in the



1 country; and

2 Whereas, The huge number of economic and racially-
3 discriminatory obstacles placed in their paths, including the
4 untimely delivery of operating loans, insufficient information
5 about program availability, and racist treatment in many United
6 States Department of Agriculture (USDA) offices, has resulted in
7 the declination of their numbers at a rate nearly three times that
8 of white farmers and the loss of more than 50% of black-owned
9 farmland since 1910; and

10 Whereas, A collaborative, grassroots efforts of black farmers,
11 their families, legal teams, and social justice organizations
12 finally sued the USDA for their racially discriminatory policies
13 and practices, and enjoyed victory in 1997 when they received over
14 \$1 billion in damages after winning the class-action lawsuit
15 *Timothy Pigford et al., v Dan Glickman*, resulting in what was then
16 the largest class-action civil rights settlement in the history of
17 the country; and

18 Whereas, During the 10 years it took to complete this lawsuit,
19 many black farmers lost their land, homes, livelihood, health, and
20 hope in their government, which has had a devastating and negative
21 impact on; and

22 Whereas, When the loss of farmland became more noticeable,
23 black farmers and civil rights activists initiated action to stave
24 the land loss by acquiring land to farm collectively as a means of
25 reducing food insecurity in black communities, striving toward food
26 sovereignty, controlling the means of production and distribution
27 of food, and furthering the economic development of blacks; and

28 Whereas, There has been a resurgence of black farmers in
29 Michigan. A 2018 report showed that since 2002, the number of black

1 farm operators had increased from 243 to 356, accounting for 0.5%
2 of the farm operators in Michigan; and

3 Whereas, Michigan's rural black farmers have worked closely
4 with black urban growers to establish farms in cities like Detroit
5 and Flint and are united around the common issues of food
6 sovereignty and self-empowerment through food production; now,
7 therefore, be it

8 Resolved by the House of Representatives, That the members of
9 this legislative body declare February 26, 2020, as Black Farmers
10 Awareness Day in the state of Michigan. We recognize the trials,
11 tribulations and accomplishments of Michigan's black farmers and
12 urge the citizenry to learn more about the richness of their
13 history and the fight to attain food security and food sovereignty
14 in Michigan's underserved communities.