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HOUSE RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, Farming as a family-owned and independent business has been an important part of the social and economic development of Illinois and the United States; and

WHEREAS, Black farmers in America have had a long struggle to own land and operate independently; for more than a century after emancipation and the ratification of the 13th Amendment that abolished slavery, various economic and social barriers were discriminatorily applied towards Black farmers, and the few existing civil rights laws were rarely enforced; and

WHEREAS, Pembroke Township, founded by self-emancipated, escaped enslaved people, was once home to the largest community of Black farmers in the north; and

WHEREAS, In 1920, Illinois had 892 Black farmers, and African Americans owned 14 percent of the nation's farmland; and

WHEREAS, According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Statistics Service, as of April 2019, Illinois had 72,000 farms, covering 27 million acres, which is approximately 75% of the State's total land area; and

1           WHEREAS, As of the 2017 USDA Agricultural Census, there  
2 were 188 individually Black-owned farms, which are a combined  
3 40,412 acres; out of the 116,417 agricultural producers in  
4 Illinois, 267 are Black; and

5           WHEREAS, As farming has become a big business, it has  
6 become one of the least diverse business sectors in our State,  
7 and the pressure to consolidate has reduced the ranks of  
8 family and independent farmers for the past century; and

9           WHEREAS, The scarcity of African American farmers stems  
10 from the troubled history of the U.S.; for sharecroppers,  
11 farming was associated with the poverty and the backbreaking  
12 labor of slavery; for those who owned land, unequal treatment  
13 made it difficult to retain property and earn a living, and  
14 racial discrimination played a major role in driving Black  
15 farmers off of their land; as recently as the mid-1990s, Black  
16 farmers who agreed to sell crops would routinely be offered  
17 lower prices at market than white farmers for equivalent  
18 products; and

19           WHEREAS, In a landmark legal settlement, the U.S.  
20 Department of Agriculture acknowledged that it had abused  
21 Black farmers for generations when agents approved only a  
22 fraction of financing requests, delayed loans until after the  
23 planting season, and withheld other key payments; and

1           WHEREAS, Movements in Illinois and across the country have  
2 fought to rectify historic discrimination against Black  
3 farmers and to develop interest in farming in young people and  
4 have worked to innovate in the farming space, including the  
5 development of Black-oriented urban agriculture, vertical  
6 farming, and microfarms in order to deliver fresher and  
7 healthier foods to communities and consumers in need of better  
8 food choices; and

9           WHEREAS, Black farmers can play a leading role in building  
10 local healthy food systems and creating regional networks of  
11 jobs, food, agricultural goods, and related opportunities;  
12 therefore, be it

13           RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE  
14 HUNDRED THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that  
15 we declare April 23 through April 29, 2023 as Black Farmers  
16 Week in the State of Illinois; and be it further

17           RESOLVED, That we encourage the people of Illinois and  
18 their representatives in government to learn about the history  
19 of Black farming communities and the contributions made by  
20 African Americans to agriculture in the United States; and be  
21 it further

1           RESOLVED, That suitable copies of this resolution be  
2 presented to the Illinois Department of Agriculture and the  
3 National Black Farmers Association.