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Dr. George Washington Carver

Good morning,

When President Abraham Lincoln established the U.S. Department of Agriculture more than 150 years ago, he called it "The People's Department."

The moniker stuck and began to inform USDA's mission over generations to be a federal agency that made a positive impact in the lives of all Americans in different ways every day. Some of the most dramatic and impactful results brought to American society were made possible by Black scientists, foresters, farmers, conservationists, and other Black Americans who were employed or collaborated with USDA.

Each February, we have the honor of recognizing and celebrating the history, culture and achievements of Black Americans as part of Black History Month. It is also a month to call attention to the fact that the fight for equality-which began centuries ago and continues to this day-is ongoing for Black Americans. USDA is committed to ensuring equity across the Department, removing barriers to access, and building a workforce more representative of America.

This year, we choose to honor Black History Month across all offices and agencies by sharing content and stories online. Throughout the month, we'll also announce programs, policies and personnel to help advance our mission to truly become the People's Department as President Lincoln intended-an institution that welcomes, serves, and includes all people.

Today, I want to begin the celebration by honoring and recognizing one of the greatest agricultural scientists in history, Dr. George Washington Carver (for whom our Agricultural Research Service headquarters building is named). Dr. Carver was an agricultural scientist, inventor, and educator at Tuskegee University who not only famously popularized the peanut-but gave modern agriculture a roadmap for soil health and conservation.

Soil health is all the buzz these days-it is central not only to regenerative agriculture; it is also one of the main methods for mitigating and managing the impacts of climate change and poor production practices. In fact, we owe many of the early breakthroughs in soil health to Dr. Carver. He promoted the practice of using compost to reintroduce nutrients and add organic matter to the soil-a practice central to organic farming. In addition, his efforts to revitalize southern soil that had been stripped by cotton-naturally a nitrogen depleting crop-led to the development of the peanut as a popular rotational crop and its many uses!

In August 1935, Dr. Carver became an official collaborator with USDA and served in this position until the year prior to his death in 1943. He wore a flower in his lapel every day he went to work.

I could go on and on about Dr. Carver. He was a great American who made a positive difference in the lives of billions of people all over the world.

I anticipate President Biden and the White House to begin their celebration of Black History Month today. The theme for Black History Month in 2021 is, "The Black Family: Representation, Identity, and Diversity". USDA will share materials from the White House, host our own events and discussions, and look for ways to amplify our announcements in honor of Black History Month. I encourage you to visit the website of the National Museum of African American History and Culture to learn more about their virtual event series throughout the month of February: <https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/celebrating-black-history-month>.

Thank you,

Kevin Shea  
Acting Secretary