

## Celebrating Black History Month by Advancing Nutrition Security and Health Equity

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Every February, the United States honors and celebrates the rich, cultural heritage of African Americans, including their triumphs and adversities that are integral to our nation's history and success. To pay tribute to those who came before me and cultivate a better future for my three daughters, I share some of my journey to advance nutrition security and health equity through public service and highlight ways I hope each of you can join me in these efforts.



My late father Ernest C. Jackson, Sr. served as the director of community empowerment for the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Change.



As a child, I benefitted from the achievements of the Civil Rights era. I attended school in Buckhead, an affluent neighborhood, home to the governor's mansion. Every school day, I got on the bus in my modest Adamsville neighborhood where there weren't many restaurants serving healthy meals, destined for a picturesque neighborhood featuring abundant food options. Though Adamsville didn't have posh restaurants, we had each other. My mother ensured our meals were rich with vegetables from our garden, the nearby supermarket, or Mr. Bell's neighborhood produce truck. I was so lucky to grow up in a neighborhood where neighbors and friends looked out for and cared for one another. As I explained in this video, at the time I didn't truly understand how differences in access to healthy retail food outlets affected our quality of health – really, our quality of life.

Now, with nutrition security as my focus, I am honored to continue my parents and neighbors' legacy by working to ensure everyone in this country has consistent and equitable access to healthy, safe, and affordable foods. In my role at USDA, it's such a pleasure to remember my roots and blossom in my ability to engage people from all demographics and life stages. So please join me in partnership to advance food and nutrition security. Everyone can put on their imaginary backpacks and "get on the bus" so we can collectively ensure that no child ever wonders why their neighborhood lacks healthy food choices. USDA's suite of 16 federal nutrition assistance programs already reaches 1 in 4 Americans. And with your help, we can reach even more and prevent ZIP codes from defining life expectancy. We have the collective power to ensure everyone in this country is set up to thrive.

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