

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
FORT WORTH DIVISION**

SID MILLER, et al.,

Plaintiffs,

v.

**TOM VILSACK, in his official capacity as
Secretary of Agriculture,**

Defendant.

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Civil Action No. 4:21-cv-0595-O

ORDER

Before the Court are Plaintiffs’ Motion for Class Certification (ECF Nos. 12–13), filed June 2, 2021; the Government’s Response (ECF No. 28), filed June 11, 2021; Plaintiffs’ Reply (ECF No. 41), filed June 18, 2021; Plaintiffs’ Motion for Preliminary Injunction (ECF Nos. 17–18), filed June 2, 2021; the Government’s Response (ECF No. 27), filed June 11, 2021; and Plaintiffs’ Reply (ECF No. 42), filed June 18, 2021. Plaintiffs seek a preliminary injunction to enjoin the Department of Agriculture from providing loan forgiveness to farmers and ranchers on the basis of race or ethnicity. *See* Inj. Mot., ECF No. 18. Having considered the briefing, relevant facts, and applicable law, and for the reasons set forth below, the Court **GRANTS** both motions.

I. BACKGROUND

Plaintiffs are Texas farmers and ranchers seeking to enjoin the United States Department of Agriculture from administering a recently enacted loan-forgiveness program under section 1005 of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA). That Act appropriated funds to the USDA and required the Secretary to “provide a payment in an amount up to 120 percent of the outstanding indebtedness of each socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher as of January 1, 2021,” to pay off qualifying Farm Service Agency (FSA) loans. ARPA, Pub. L. No. 117-2, § 1005 (2021). To be

eligible under the program, an applicant must be a “socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher” as defined in section 2501(a) of the Food, Agriculture Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (codified at 7 U.S.C. § 2279(a)). *See id.* That statute provides that a “‘socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher’ means a farmer or rancher who is a member of a socially disadvantaged group.” 7 U.S.C. § 2279(a)(5). It defines “socially disadvantaged group” as “a group whose members have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities.” *Id.* § 2279(a)(6). In announcing a Notice of Funds Availability, the USDA stated that those groups include but are not limited to “American Indians or Alaskan Natives,” “Asians,” “Blacks or African Americans,” “Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders,” and “Hispanics or Latinos.” Notice of Funds Availability, 86 Fed. Reg. 28,330 (May 26, 2021).

Plaintiffs held qualifying FSA loans on January 1, 2021 but are white, making them ineligible for the funds under the Act. *See* Inj. Mot. 1–2, ECF No. 18-4; 1–2, ECF No. 18-5; 1–2, ECF No. 18-6; 1–2, ECF No. 18-7. On April 26, 2021, Plaintiffs filed a class action to enjoin the program as a violation of equal protection under the United States Constitution and a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. *See* Compl. 6, ECF No. 1. In the alternative, Plaintiffs argue in Claims Two and Three, that, as a matter of statutory interpretation, “socially disadvantaged group” must be construed to include white ethnic groups that have experienced discrimination and individuals who have any discernible trace of minority ancestry. *See id.* at 7–9. After filing their Complaint, Plaintiffs filed the present Motion for Class Certification and Motion for Preliminary Injunction on June 2, 2021. *See* Class Cert. Mot., ECF Nos. 12–13; Inj. Mot., ECF Nos. 17–18. After responses and replies, the motions are ripe for the Court’s

consideration. *See* Class Cert. Resp., ECF No. 28; Inj. Resp., ECF No. 27; Class Cert. Reply, ECF No. 41; Inj. Reply, ECF No. 42.

II. LEGAL STANDARD

A. Class Certification

The class action is “an exception to the usual rule that litigation is conducted by and on behalf of the individual named parties only.” *Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. v. Dukes*, 564 U.S. 338, 348 (2011) (quoting *Califano v. Yamasaki*, 442 U.S. 682, 700–01 (1979)) (internal quotation marks omitted). The party seeking class certification “bear[s] the burden of proof to establish that the proposed class satisfies the requirements of Rule 23.” *M.D. ex rel. Stukenberg v. Perry*, 675 F.3d 832, 837 (5th Cir. 2012). “The decision to certify is within the broad discretion of the court, but that discretion must be exercised within the framework of rule 23.” *Castano v. Am. Tobacco Co.*, 84 F.3d 734, 740 (5th Cir. 1996) (citing *Gulf Oil Co. v. Bernard*, 452 U.S. 89, 100 (1981)). A district court must “look beyond the pleadings to ‘understand the claims, defenses, relevant facts, and applicable substantive law in order to make a meaningful determination’” of the certification issues. *Stukenberg*, 675 F.3d at 837 (quoting *McManus v. Fleetwood Enters., Inc.*, 320 F.3d 545, 548 (5th Cir. 2003)).

Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 23 governs whether a proposed class falls within this limited exception. “To obtain class certification, parties must satisfy Rule 23(a)’s four threshold requirements, as well as the requirements of Rule 23(b)(1), (2), or (3).” *Maldonado v. Ochsner Clinic Found.*, 493 F.3d 521, 523 (5th Cir. 2007). Rule 23(a)’s four threshold requirements are

- (1) the class is so numerous that joinder of all members is impracticable;
- (2) there are questions of law or fact common to the class;
- (3) the claims or defenses of the representative parties are typical of the claims or defenses of the class; and
- (4) the representative parties will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the class.

Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a). These four threshold conditions are “commonly known as numerosity, commonality, typicality, and adequacy of representation.” *Flecha v. Mediacredit, Inc.*, 946 F.3d 762, 766 (5th Cir. 2020) (citing Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a)) (additional citation and internal quotation marks omitted). Additionally, the Fifth Circuit has articulated an “ascertainability” doctrine implicit in Rule 23. *John v. Nat’l Sec. Fire & Cas. Co.*, 501 F.3d 443, 445 (5th Cir. 2007) (“The existence of an ascertainable class of persons to be represented by the proposed class representative is an implied prerequisite of Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 23.”). “To maintain a class action, the class sought to be represented must be adequately defined and clearly ascertainable.” *DeBremaecker v. Short*, 433 F.2d 733, 734 (5th Cir. 1970) (per curiam) (citations omitted).

Rule 23(b)(2) applies where the four threshold requirements are met and “the party opposing the class has acted or refused to act on grounds that apply generally to the class, so that final injunctive relief or corresponding declaratory relief is appropriate respecting the class as a whole.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(b)(2). This requirement is satisfied “when a single injunction or declaratory judgment would provide relief to each member of the class.” *Wal-Mart*, 564 U.S. at 360.

B. Preliminary Injunction

To prevail on an application for a preliminary injunction, the movant must show: (1) a substantial likelihood that the movant will ultimately prevail on the merits; (2) a substantial threat that the movant will suffer irreparable injury if the injunction is not granted; (3) that the threatened injury to the movant outweighs whatever damage the proposed injunction may cause the opposing party; and (4) that granting the injunction is not adverse to the public interest. *See Canal Authority of State of Florida v. Callaway*, 489 F.2d 567, 572 (5th Cir. 1974); *Nichols v. Alcatel USA, Inc.*, 532 F.3d 364, 372 (5th Cir. 2008).

To qualify for a preliminary injunction, the movant must clearly carry the burden of persuasion with respect to all four requirements. *See Karaha Bodas Co. v. Perusahaan Pertambangan Minyak Dan Gas Bumi Negara*, 335 F.3d 357, 363 (5th Cir. 2003). If the movant fails to establish any one of the four prerequisites to injunctive relief, relief will not be granted. *See Women’s Med. Ctr. of Nw. Hous. v. Bell*, 248 F.3d 411, 419 n.15 (5th Cir. 2001). A movant who obtains a preliminary injunction must post a bond to secure the non-movant against any wrongful damages it suffers as a result of the injunction. *See Fed. R. Civ. P. 65(c)*.

The decision to grant or deny preliminary injunctive relief is left to the sound discretion of the district court. *Miss. Power & Light Co. v. United Gas Pipe Line Co.*, 760 F.2d 618, 621 (5th Cir. 1985) (citing *Canal*, 489 F.2d at 572). A preliminary injunction “is an extraordinary and drastic remedy, not to be granted routinely, but only when the movant, by a clear showing, carries the burden of persuasion.” *White v. Carlucci*, 862 F.2d 1209, 1211 (5th Cir. 1989) (quoting *Holland Am. Ins. Co. v. Succession of Roy*, 777 F.2d 992, 997 (5th Cir. 1985)). Even when a movant satisfies each of the four *Canal* factors, the decision whether to grant or deny a preliminary injunction remains discretionary with the district court. *Miss. Power & Light*, 760 F.2d at 621.

III. ANALYSIS

A. Class Certification

Plaintiffs move to certify two classes under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 23(b)(2):

Class	Class Representatives
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