

FARMER EQUITY PROJECT

FARMER EQUITY

A NATIONAL SURVEY OF OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES



SEPTEMBER 2022

Prepared and presented by the National Center for Appropriate Technology

**ASSESSING THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FARMERS OF
COLOR AND LIMITED RESOURCE FARMERS ACROSS THE UNITED STATES.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Farm Equity National Assessment Project serves as an assessment to better understand the needs and challenges of farmers of color throughout the United States. Through this project, the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) and its partners highlight farmers barriers, constraints, and innovations through storytelling.

The project team consists of a diverse group of agriculture specialists from NCAT, partners from the Intertribal Ag Council and Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, and several professionals who comprise the project's Advisory Council. The information gathered through the project offers a window into specific challenges and opportunities, which will serve to inform institutional partners and organizations to better support farmers of color through their services and investments.

The objective of this project was to catalog the FOC throughout the nation, examine challenges and barriers, identify opportunities, determine what is needed for systemic change, identify systemic change already occurring, and highlight case studies of successes, best practices, and lessons learned. We captured 24 farmer stories of resilience while examining barriers and challenges. We also surveyed 22 organizations that serve Black and Indigenous people of color (BIPOC). Lack of access to local government agencies, as well as to resources, labor, and tools, are just a few of the challenges experienced by farmers of color in this assessment. Their stories can be found on the ATTRA website and are publicly

available with the hope that they will inspire other farmers of color and organizations to collectively work side by side for more equitable and resilient food systems.

This project was originally intended to be a data-driven nationwide survey that was to culminate in a national conference that brought together farmers of color and organizations that support those farmers. The COVID-19 pandemic that swept the nation, as well as criticism from a network of concerned farmers and organizations, caused the project team members to redesign the original planned tasks and deliverables. Amidst the pandemic, a strong resurgence in the racial equity movement occurred because of several events, including the murder of George Floyd, creating a shift in the project to focus more on the stories and experiences of individual farmers of color. Simultaneously, grassroots organizations were promoting representation as an essential component in the leadership of organizations that do work in communities of color. Rather than funding organizations that are less representative of people of color, funding was focused on organizations that share a lived experience and ethnic background similar to the groups being studied, including NCAT.

INTRODUCTION

It is critical to understand the challenges farmers of color face and to document the opportunities that could result from understanding each other's experiences, successes, and challenges.

Farmers are a diverse group and not all have had equitable access to the resources and information that would allow them to successfully run their businesses.

The USDA defines *socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers* (SDFRs) as those belonging to groups that have been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice, including Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Hispanic or Latino, and Asian or Pacific Islander. Some, but not all, USDA programs include women in the SDFR category. SDFRs who have faced discrimination come from all backgrounds, though ethnic background is documented to be a primary indicator for discrimination. As institutions and government agencies begin to address these inequities, the need for accurate and effective investment will be paramount.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) conducts a nationwide survey every five years identifying potential agricultural operations, called the Census of Agriculture. In the 2017 survey, of the 2,042,220 farms reported, the average government payment to farms with Black/African American producers is almost half the payment for other ethnic groups. The USDA NASS survey has some limitations as it is conducted every five years, is completely voluntary, and is mailed out to registered farms and ranches. It's possible that BIPOC producers running urban and small farms are not captured by this survey. In the 2017 Advisory Committee on Agriculture and Statistics Summary and Recommendations, the Committee recommended that USDA NASS in 2016 increase sampling and reporting for diverse areas in agriculture, including small-scale farmers and urban

agriculture in the Census of Agriculture (USDA, 2017). Regardless, it provides a picture of the stark difference between ethnic groups, which highlights the racial gap that is a direct result of historical discrimination in the United States.

Farmers from socially disadvantaged groups have been shown to experience “significant nationwide disparities in farming by race, ethnicity, and gender persist in the U.S. In 2012–2014, white people owned 98% and operated 94% of all farmlands. They generated 98% of all farm-related income from land ownership and 97% of income from farm owner-operatorship. Meanwhile, People of Color farmers (African American or Black, Asian American, Native American, Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and Hispanic farmers) were more likely to be tenants rather than owners, owned less land, and generated less farm-related wealth per person than their white counterparts.” (Horst and Marion, 2018). Additionally, “The USDA’s systemic bias

against Black and minority farmers is well documented and affirmed by the 2010 Pigford vs. Glickman class action lawsuit, which resulted in a \$1.25 billion settlement. Black farmers continue to experience discrimination in access to credit, seeds, and other assistance, and face foreclosure at six times the rate of their white counterparts” (Figueroa and Penniman, 2020).

This is a recognized issue by the U.S. government and other public serving institutions as they have sought to implement studies, programs, and targeted funding to address the race disadvantage gap. While there has been some success with farmers of color benefiting from programs such as the USDA EQIP, many still feel there is gatekeeping and racist sentiments by those leading social equity programs. As many farmers can attest, including those who shared their experiences in this report, there are many associated challenges that still require much more attention.

FEATURE FARMER: ANDREA TOWNSEND

Andrea Townsend is a small-scale farmer who operates a quarter-acre farm out of her home in Hephzibah, GA. She began farming out of a desire to grow her own food and help people to eat and access healthy organic food.



Her garden set-up has grown to include 52 raised beds and hopes to further expand into her front yard, doubling her production space.

Originally, Andrea had hoped to purchase a parcel of land to expand production. She tells a story about a reasonably priced 10-acre piece of land in a residential area that was zoned for agriculture, which she could afford. Another buyer offered more than double the asking price, effectively pricing Andrea out of the opportunity. The new owner then went on to rezone the property.

Another obstacle Andrea has encountered pertains to scale-appropriate resources that can help with farm planning. She has found that most of the available technical assistance and resources are geared toward larger farms and are prohibitively expensive.

Andrea is a resilient and positive personality with the desire to continue learning, experimenting, and connecting with community members. She continues resiliently forward with what she has and continues to cultivate relationships with mentors; not only are they assisting her with technical information, but they have also formed an unofficial buyer cooperative through which they purchase certain farm supplies in bulk to reduce costs.

PROJECT DESIGN

NCAT and Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University worked with the advisory council to design and develop the project.

The project team decided that there was a need to focus on real people and their stories in order to compare their interview answers with what the broader data has shown, as well as to identify factors leading to growth and development and the types of local, regional, and national resources being accessed by particular farmers. Another important component of this project was to identify the primary challenges of farmers of color. Two survey instruments were created, one for organizations that serve farmers of color and another for the farmers themselves. Some farmers surveyed were selected to be included in follow-up interviews based on the following series of questions:

- Demonstrated Resilience:** Does the farmer show a capacity or method for addressing challenges?
- Innovation:** Is the farmer creative in problem solving? Do they take advantage of any available resources? Are there any notable business, management, or production practices mentioned?
- Community Involvement/Support:** Has the farmer demonstrated previous involvement with community-based organizations, public-service volunteer positions, or local community members? *Consider: affiliations with community-based organizations, membership in*



farmer/producer organizations, community integration/involvement on the farm.

Use of Connections/Networking/Resources: How well does the farmer access assistance of other farmers, public officials, community leaders, and others to help the applicant’s farm or other local farms? How has the applicant demonstrated use of outside resources such as governmental, institutional, community-based resources? *Consider: grants and loans received by the applicant, interns supervised by the applicant, use of community volunteers by the applicant, stories told by the applicant about how they achieved assistance from other farmers and organizations.*

Transferability/Replicability: Does the farmer share experiences that can be replicated elsewhere? Can other producers learn from and adapt the examples given? *Consider: scalability and potential reach across cultures, production practices, and landscapes.*

PRODUCER SURVEYS

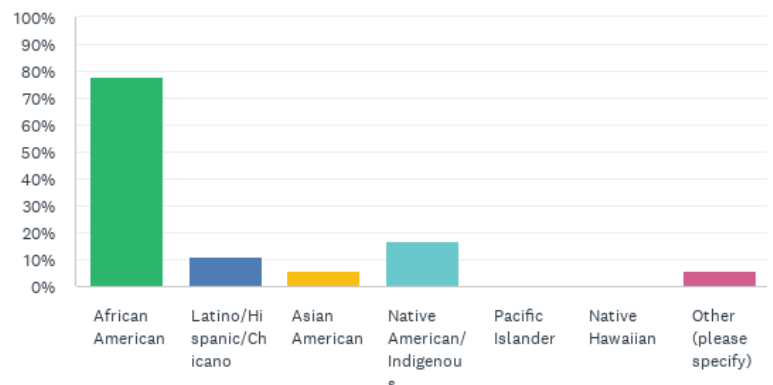
We surveyed 36 farmers of color, 24 of whom graciously agreed to share their personal stories via recorded interviews and case studies written by NCAT staff and Dr. Jennifer Taylor, our partner from Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University.

We decided to survey these individuals to assess their current experience as farmers of color. Additionally, we interviewed them because their unique experience navigating agriculture as farmers of color is important to share so that organizations could better understand how to more successfully support them.

We designed the survey with questions in the following four categories:

1. Background and cultural/ethnic affiliation?

We requested information including name, location, and contact information. Ethnic affiliations were identified as follows:



About 78% of producers identified as African American.

2. Primary challenges as a farmer

To gain insight on the challenges farmers of color currently face, we asked them to explore challenges they have experienced and, if applicable, how those challenges were overcome. Based on the answers, we were able to identify a trend in the following areas:

- Access to land
- Access to capital
- Access to marketing information and markets
- Access to existing resources, technical assistance, and appropriate technology

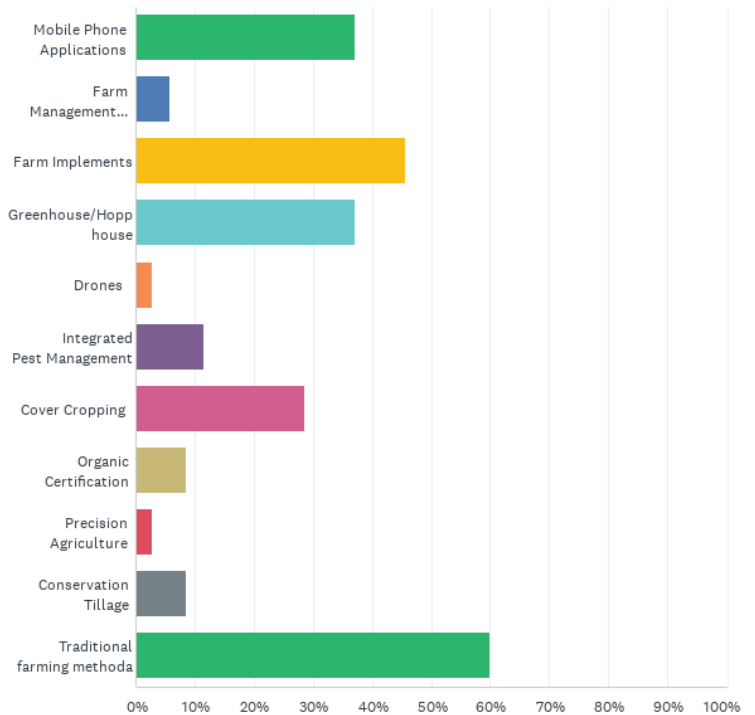
3. Greatest or most persistent areas of need

We additionally asked respondents to self-assess the most persistent areas of need. We asked this question to better understand if the challenges they had described correlated in any form to the areas they personally needed assistance with. The answers followed a similar trend to question 2 above, with the majority of individuals identifying access to capital and existing resources, technical assistance, and appropriate technology as their greatest areas of need.

4. Tools, innovations, or management approaches that have contributed most to farming success

Finally, we asked farmers to choose specific management approaches that have contributed to their success to better understand if these approaches could

aid in the challenges others described. The responses were distributed as follows:



Sixty percent of producers identified “Traditional farming methods” as being key to their success. In this particular case, traditional farming methods refers to farming practices associated with their heritage, such as indigenous low-synthetic-input methods.

PRODUCER INTERVIEWS

Twenty-four of the 36 farmers surveyed share their personal stories via recorded interviews and case studies written by NCAT staff and Dr. Jennifer Taylor, Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University. Their full interview can be found on the ATTRA website.



We designed the survey with questions around the following four categories:

1. General information about their production method

We asked the farmers to share with us their production system, system of management, and whether they had any notable management practices. Of the 24 interviewed, 40% utilize traditional practices and methods to promote good soil health and plant health. While several were beginning farmers and had not yet adapted a fully developed management system, some shared that routine management of their operation requires good recordkeeping.

2. Notable challenges and overcoming those challenges

Farmers were asked to expound on notable challenges faced in their operation, and over 80% responses identified financial challenges. Producers shared that accessing funding was difficult at all levels through state and federal government, and nonprofit organizations. Some expressed that networking and building relationships in their communities were great attributes to building “know how” to access funds, while others expressed that they would rather be self-sufficient rather than rely on entities that oftentimes prove to be untrustworthy or lack follow-through.

3. Benefits from participating in networks (e.g., relationships with nonprofits, educational institutions, businesses, and government agencies; sources of funding such as grants and financing)

Networking and building relationships among other community producers through local producer/

agricultural programs were shown to be key components in learning how to access funds. At least 70% of the farmers interviewed stated that they have been introduced to regenerative and/or organic farming practices while participating in local farmer groups and organizations. Local organizations were identified as being among the most beneficial networks for the farmers.

4. What networks could do to help the farming community overcome barriers

Producers expressed that there are not enough organizations that support farmers of color. Identifying and applying for programs are challenging because a lot of farmers simply do not have access or fully understand the technology needed to participate.

There were also significant responses indicating that financial institutions should be included in programmatic structure.

FEATURE FARMER: DIANN WOODS

Diann Woods has been farming for the past 22 years in Wharton County, Texas. She graduated from the Texas Woman’s University with a Bachelor of Science in Food Science and Nutrition and then worked for the Texas Health Department.



Through her work and studies, she realized that the only way at the time to learn about farming was to get into farming, so she began [Milliesbarn Veggie Farm](#). Throughout her agricultural journey, Diann has continuously adapted to nature by learning and trying different farming techniques. Additionally, Diann started her own CSA and began selling to restaurants in response to the bank’s reluctance in giving her a loan. After managing the CSA for a while, she began seeing farming as a business, and she wished she had known about the taxes and IRS Schedule F. Currently, the greatest challenges for Diann are acquiring the right equipment and adjusting to climate change. Regardless, after 22 years of farming, Diann considers herself very successful as her farm has been profitable. She is a big advocate for local foods and often tries to convince her family and neighbors to grow food themselves. Diann would like people in her community, regardless of race, to realize that anyone can do what she did, and that they could form a community partnership and grow together.

ORGANIZATION SURVEY

We surveyed 22 organizations serving SDFRs to identify and describe the challenges, barriers, successes, and opportunities of their members.

We chose to survey these organizations because, by definition, they represent collections of BIPOC producers that are created to represent and assist many individuals who decide to come together to pool their efforts and resources. The people who run these organizations should know what their members do, what they don't do, what they would like to be doing, and what they need to become more successful.

We designed the survey with questions in the following four categories:

1. Generic information about the organization

We asked the organizations for data such as organization name, who are the members, what is the service area of the organization and how is the organization legally incorporated. Of the 22 organizations that answered the survey, the great majority operate in the Southwest or Southeast. Over 80% of the organizations surveyed serve Black farmers and over 70% serve Latino farmers. Incorporated as a non-profit organization was the predominant form of organization for the survey respondents.

FEATURE FARMER: DOLORES MILLER

Dolores Miller's personal connection to conservation practices stems from being part of a Modoc Indian Tribe family that shares a similar philosophy about land stewardship.



Located in Bandon, Oregon, Miller Ranch has been in the Miller family since 1886. They have 300 acres in production and raise sheep, wool, and timber. As Dolores prepares to fully take over the day-to-day management, her journey has been full of learning about sustainable agriculture practices and connecting with nature to overcome barriers.

Dolores has worked on a variety of sustainable agriculture projects and is very involved in the Sand County Foundation. She has also received USDA grant assistance for transportation and feed, as well as valuable information through Extension offices. While these organizations have been tremendously helpful, Dolores says there is still a lack of knowledge in her area, especially for small-scale BIPOC farmers and ranchers. In addition, accessing resources is a challenge for small producers who are often wary of being involved in government programs. Dolores believes there are a lot of people who would benefit from these programs, and organizations can diversify the way they promote them, such as running ads in the local paper and being more available to provide technical assistance. There are a lot of barriers to farming. By addressing the lack of knowledge about sustainable practices and financial-aid programs with success stories, people can see the benefits and would be more willing to apply for these programs and learn new practices.

2. Services and assistance offered by the organization to its members or that should be offered

To gain insight into what the organizations feel are important areas of development for their members, we asked a question that listed a number of activities that the organizations could address to help improve the viability of their members. From the surveys, a large majority of the organizations chose three areas of concern that they actively address: farm production technical assistance, business management assistance, and on-farm training/incubator opportunities. Other areas of concern, although not as often addressed as the first three, were: land access, workforce development, and marketing assistance.

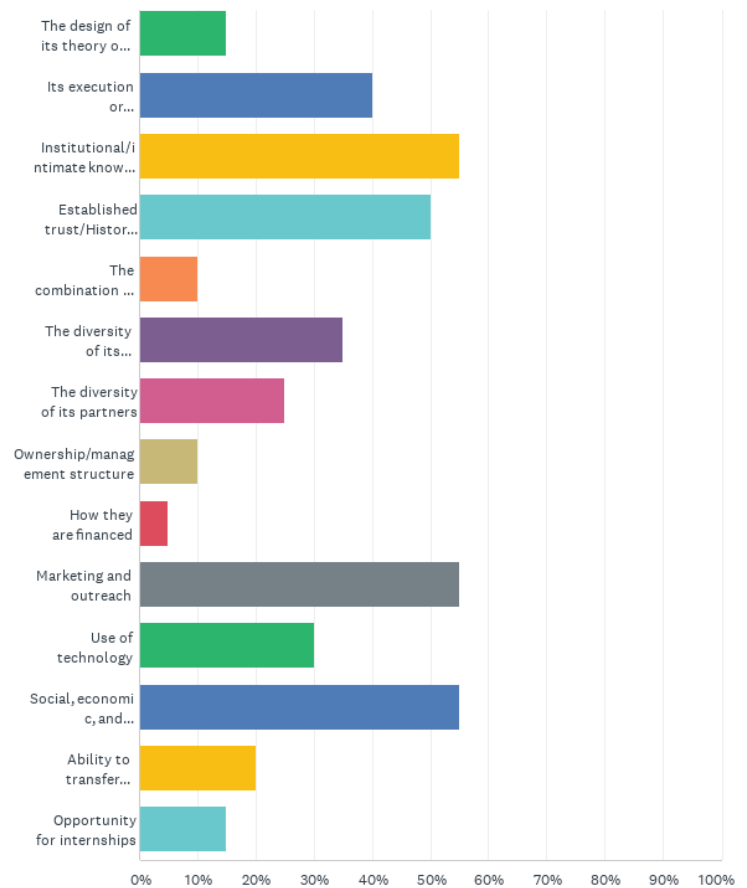
Coming at this issue of member development from a different angle, we also asked the organizations to list the challenges that individual farmers face that could be addressed by the organizations. Eight areas of assistance/training were overwhelmingly chosen by the respondents:

- Marketing
- General access to technical experts
- Engagement with ag industry leaders
- Conservation/soil health information
- Financial management/recordkeeping
- Working capital access
- Land access
- Production planning assistance

3. How the organization would evaluate its “value,” or level of service, to its members

We approached the topic of organizations evaluating their value to their members from a couple of different directions. The goal was to understand what the organizations think their strengths and weaknesses are, based on areas of concern the organizations don't currently address but would like to. Identified problem areas not being adequately addressed by the respondents include land access (including heir property issues), access to capital (particularly governmental funding), farmer networking and mentoring, and understanding of farm production technologies.

We then asked the organizations for their suggestions about underutilized opportunities for increasing the success of farmers of color. Their answers reflect areas of opportunity that they feel are not being adequately addressed by their efforts. Some interesting ideas included agritourism enterprises, marketing to local food banks, development of food hubs and/or farmer cooperatives, value-added enterprises, and farm incubators.



We also asked the organizations to identify their key attributes (e.g., methods, catalysts, intrinsic values) that may be responsible for their successes in working with farmers. By far, the following four attributes were the most common:

- Intimate knowledge of the targeted community
- Marketing and outreach to the local community
- Social and economic sustainability of projects undertaken
- Established trust, based on history of successful projects

4. Other observations or comments that would be helpful to this project

We asked the organizations for any other comments, suggestions, or observations they might give us to help increase the quality of our project findings. Some suggested other organizations and individual farmers we should survey. We indeed did follow through on this recommendation earlier in the project with recommendations given to us by organizations surveyed within the first and second cohort. Several insightful quotes follow.

“One thing we do well is offer immersive, comprehensive programming, but there is a certain level of privilege that someone needs to have to be able to commit 5 months of their time to a program

such as ours. With more funding we could offer living stipends to BIPOC prospective farmers to make it easier to access this training.” - Farmshare Austin

“Time is a challenge. FSA is the source that can best help the farmers, but they take an extreme amount of time to process the loans which makes it difficult for the farmers. Having the ability to loan farmers the funding to start their crop, like the EQIP program, would be more beneficial.”

“More networking of successful practical manner, not in theory. Sometimes it is easier for a person to believe it when they see it.”



CHALLENGES AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

With each of the primary challenges identified, there appear to be existing models, programs, groups, and resources that already exist, which would serve to address primary challenges identified through this process.

One challenge discussed by several farmers that falls outside of “farmers ability to access” pertains to experiences of prejudice, racism, and unconscious bias. In that regard, all institutions that participate in serving SDFRs, particularly farmers of color, would do well to take part in training that addresses these damaging and insidious deficiencies.

“When...I went on the property I was being harassed by some of the people who live in the area; some folks didn't believe that I purchased the property. I was told that I was being watched. 'It's Klan country, and you're being watched. Beware that they shoot near this property, and they don't try to shoot people but sometimes accidents happen.'”

— Brandi Wallace

ACCESS TO LAND

The United States has a long history of resistance movements that rise against crises and structural adjustment.

However, there has been a steady consolidation of agricultural land and loss of farmers, who now represent less than 1.5% of the national population (Holt-Gimenez, 2017). As we observe the steady consolidation of farmland across the country into fewer and fewer hands along with increasing land prices, the opportunity to purchase land or secure long-term leases has diminished for many SDFRs.

Whether it is access to long-term lease arrangements or the purchase of affordable land, farmers of color are often forced to operate their farms on lower-quality land that is rented. The threat of lease termination and short rental windows may see farmers forced to minimize investment in conservation practices, soil health, and infrastructure, which further impact the sustainability of their farming operations. Several farmers included in our survey and interviews cited high land prices as a limiting factor in accessing both the scale and quality of land desired. As access to the loans necessary to purchase land is also limited for these groups, some of the farmers interviewed were forced to make

compromises, including seeking opportunities on vacant city lots, collaborating with partners who have existing access to property, and using their backyards for food production.

Shakera Raygoza of Terra Preta Farm said this about access to capital necessary for land access and ownership: “There is a limited number of lenders willing to work with small-scale farmers. Unfortunately, because we were able to acquire a high-interest, owner-financed loan, we can't take advantage of FSA farm ownership loans.”

For those able to access farm loans, there is a chance that interest rates will be high, adding another burden to business in an industry that is notorious for low margins and high overhead costs.

When leasing is the only option, long-term arrangements are essential for effective business management, implementation of conservation practices that regenerate the landscape, and other long-term investments.

There are several existing areas of potential investment that explore creative solutions and methods to address these barriers. As Growing Augusta: Arts, Ag, and Agency mentioned, “BIPOC farmers have a unique opportunity to utilize their land for agritourism: music festivals, pick-your-own operations, etc. However, BIPOC farmers MUST be able to protect their land in the process.” Some of these proposed solutions and areas of investment include conservation easements, cooperative land use agreements and land leases, mission-driven lenders, and business literacy education.

- Land Trusts/Community Land Trusts
- Farm Link Programs
 - There are around 50 farm link programs across the country that provide a variety of services for farm owners, land seekers, and beginning farmers. Farm link is independently operated and generally serves to facilitate land purchase and transition in various ways. Many manage property posting websites, and some facilitate and mentor parties through the transaction process. Many also provide educational activities and resources, and several include farm

succession advising and beginning farmer training. One (California Farm Link) also operates as a Community Development Financial Institution that focuses its loan program on socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers.

- CDFIs
 - Community development financial institutions (CDFIs) are lenders with a mission. Often, their goals involve providing financing to rural communities that mainstream finance doesn’t traditionally reach.
- Investment in organizations that provide outreach and education based around:
 - Creative Leasing
 - Ground Leases
 - Equity-Building Lease Provisions
 - Lease-To-Own
 - Leasing from Public Land
 - Leasing Land with Conservation Easements and/or
 - Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value
 - How an Attorney Can Help
- Investment firms that focus on investing in sustainable farms

FEATURE FARMER: SHAKERA RAYGOZA

Shakera and Juan Raygoza started [Terra Preta Farm](#) in Edinburg, Texas, 14 years ago, and they have accomplished a lot while staying connected to the local community.



Their farming journey has not been easy, but they have overcome obstacles through hard work, networking, and constantly adapting to consumer markets and nature. Through their local networks of farmers, they have learned about the local conditions and how to manage pests. They have also relied on books and print resources provided by the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Additionally, they have received USDA financing programs and grants, such as the Texas Young Farmers Grant. They attend conferences when possible and always take the opportunity to gain experience with new tools and with becoming more efficient while still nurturing the environment. There are many barriers to successful farming, such as harsh climate, lack of local markets, no access to equipment and supplies, and sometimes language and education barriers in applying to grants and loans. While organizations were beneficial, there is always room for improvement in serving BIPOC farmers. Shakera says there could be more research done in the Rio Grande Valley Texas, and more technical assistance to help apply for funding resources such as USDA programs that help small farmers navigate climate catastrophes, marketing, and bookkeeping.

ACCESS TO CAPITAL

Given monetary constraints and a fundamental need for general operation, tools, and technology among SDFRs, there is a need for access to appropriate tools, technology, infrastructure, and the financing that makes those investments possible.

For the purpose of this report, access to capital also includes access to grants offered by federal and state governments and other institutions.

In commenting on the challenges that farmers face when accessing and trying to apply for services and programs, Kigwana Cherry mentioned that there needs to be more outreach and access to information. The farmers who are ready to begin applying for certain benefits end up waiting

due to the lack of awareness around things like farm tract numbers and recordkeeping. In reflecting on the nature of government resources, Kigwana suggests that the money and support offered to the farming community doesn't make it out to the farmers of color as much as it should.

Another area related to access to capital discussed by farmers in this study was the need for good scale-appropriate information that addresses general farm management and selection of tools and technology.

FEATURE FARMER: JASON PURYEAR

Jason Puryear of Meadville, Pennsylvania, got his start in the food world through the restaurant industry. As relationships with the farmers in his area began to grow, and the number of small farmers started to dwindle, the idea of producing vegetables started to take hold.

Eventually, Jason began attending farmer training programs and it was through one of those experiences that Jason met another prospective farmer with whom he was able to develop a partnership. Jason's farm partner had excess land and the desire to develop it into a working farm. With similar goals in mind, such as the desire to produce sustainably and in concert with the surrounding

environment, they set off to break ground and begin their farming journeys together.

Currently, the farm produces 22 varieties of garlic, as well as a wide variety of niche crops, including turmeric, ginger, and lemongrass, among many others. There is a woodland on the property where ginseng and ramps have been planted. In the coming year, they would like to include wildflowers to serve as habitat for an apiary.



Given Jason's skills in the kitchen and his access to a commercial kitchen, he dedicates most of his time to a catering business that also serves to add value to the crops produced on the farm. In addition to marketing through the catering business, he sells through two farmers markets and local grocery stores. While Jason prioritizes his efforts on the catering side, his partner works the farm full-time. Having this partnership has given the farm a greater capacity to overcome challenges. The most valuable resource that Jason has been able to access is the other farmers in the area. Jason observed that general access to farmer-facing organizations and personnel tends to be lacking. He commented on the difficulty of setting meetings with the local NRCS office and the clunky nature of securing and receiving funding from the government. He hopes to see more solidarity among those organizations that support farmers and believes there should be more support for and acknowledgment of farmers of color.

This is particularly important when one considers the necessity of capital investment and access to loans that many farmers face. If a farmer can make good decisions around appropriate technology based on their goals, values, products, and scale, many would discover that there is information and technology out there that addresses the needs of the production system while also being less capital-intensive than previously assumed. Given the general lack of knowledge among technical service providers in the area of small-scale farm tools/implements and technology, many farmers end up assuming more risk by investing in tools they don't need.

The purchase of farm equipment is the second largest capital investment, after land, for all farmers in the United States (Koenig, 2016). Typically, small-scale and biologically diverse farming operations require a greater variety of equipment, which can be very costly (Carlisle et al., 2019). For example, the cost of equipment for a 45-acre strawberry farm on the central coast of California is about \$800,000. The cost of equipment is a significant financial burden for a small-scale farmer (Bolda et al., 2016). According to the Natural Resource, Agriculture, and Engineering Service, small-scale farmers have limited cash flows to justify major purchases. We include this focus on small-scale farming due to the correlation between farmers of color and the proportion of whom operate relatively smaller farms when compared to their white counterparts (NASS Census of Agriculture, 2017).

Potential areas of investment can increase capital access for farmers of color and help address the government funding gap (Sloss and Jackson, 2021). As stated by the Hmong American Farmer Association, "Equitable access to government funding/resources and federal programs are not created to support specialty crop producer and more so align with commodity production." Solutions like funding



nonprofit lenders can help support small producers who don't farm commodity crops. The following list highlights potential areas of investment:

- Private lenders that participate in educational training and/or partner with other organizations to increase business literacy
- Nonprofit lenders (examples below):
 - The Carrot Project, a nonprofit based in Somerville, MA, helps facilitate loan programs between private lenders and farmers that are connected to technical assistance.
 - Shade Fund is a nonprofit that provides small loans to farm operators and other green businesses.
- CDFIs offer farm operating loans
- Crowdsourcing
 - Based on lending practices from ancient times where people relied on their community for support, crowdsourcing is becoming a more common method for building the capital necessary for a farm business.

ACCESS TO MARKETING INFORMATION AND MARKETS

Socially disadvantaged farmers need access to the markets (and options therein) that can make their businesses profitable.

Some 41% of the farmers surveyed identified marketing as a persistent need, offering many stories of associated challenges, some spurred on by the pandemic, and others caused by logistical hurdles. Whether it is a hurdle in the road, a change in scale of farming, or catering a marketing mix to best suit a particular farm, there seems to always be a need for farmers to be familiar with multiple methods of marketing their product.

Here we have compiled a list of possible solutions suggested by the participating farmers and organizations and supported by available literature:

- **Marketing Cooperatives**
A marketing cooperative is a business entity owned by farmers and designed to collectively sell their products. By bypassing one or more middlemen in the

market channel, cooperatives allow producers to have more say over their products as they make their way to consumers and allow members to capture more of the returns that would otherwise go to others.

- **Farm Incubators**

Farm incubators like the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) in California provide beginning BIPOC producers with the land and equipment at a subsidized price, in addition to education on compliance and marketing to ensure competitiveness when entering markets.

- **Business planning organizations and institutions**

that provide educational services in entering different markets such as:

- Direct to Consumer Markets
- Intermediated Markets
- Wholesale Markets

It is crucial for farmers of color to have knowledge of different markets. As Diann Woods stated, “[It is critical to develop] streams of income that can carry the load of the farm if one system falls back.”

- **Social Media/Web Development Education**

For producers selling directly to consumers, social media and website capabilities play a big role in increasing profit and visibility. “Social media platforms and free workshops have encouraged us to think outside the box and start where we are and use what we got. Connecting with a local organizations and

“We also had the challenge of scaling up our farm production from direct marketing on 7 acres to wholesale farming on 20 acres to meet our mortgage. We had been selling at farmers markets and through a CSA program for several years and moving to a larger property meant a bigger mortgage. Our retail sales were not enough so we had to put all of the new land to work. We applied for FSA operating loans and microloans to fund the expansion. We were in the middle of our first season when the pandemic hit. Most of our products were going to one wholesale buyer, a major state grocer. The buyer halted all organic sales for almost a month, and it left us with lots of crops in the field. We had to pivot our operations and reach out the local market again. We marketed veggie boxes, home delivery, and u-picks to minimize our losses.” —Shakera Raygoza

individuals has been a pivotal part of our beginnings,” explained Chisa Brigham.

Organizations are able to use grant funds creatively in the projects they bring to a community. For example, Growing Augusta brought together the Soul & Soil Concert series, a series of concerts on local farms as an agritourism promotion. It brought together musicians, farmers, customers, and lovers of music, all in an effort to support, promote, and expose local farms to the broader community.

“BIPOC farmers need to be better organized to strengthen their marketing position.” — Central State University Extension

“Our overall marketing strategy has been to focus on growing niche, high-value products that are in demand. While we have had to identify more of these products as competition has grown, it is a strategy that has been successful for us over the years.” — Brennan Washington

ACCESS TO EXISTING RESOURCES, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, AND APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY

For many of the farmers interviewed, accessing technical assistance was identified as a persistent need, created by a number of factors, including lack of internet access, need for more exposure to organizations and institutions that support farmers, and lack of familiarity with resources on appropriate technology for small operations.

Because they do not know these resources exist, farmers of color might miss out on successfully securing funding and continuing sustainable agriculture practices.

Sustainable agriculture requires an understanding of the balance between economic realities and environmental stewardship. A critical piece in this balance relies on appropriate farm equipment. The purchase and use of

economically effective and appropriate farm tools, based on the size and specific needs of a farm, will ensure the most efficient use of labor, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and increase the overall sustainability of a farm business.

Individuals from government organizations (e.g., Natural Resource Conservation Service), Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs), nonprofits, Extension professionals,

and certifiers, are responsible for providing farmers with relevant information and resources to ensure farmers are making practical and well-informed decisions. However, with continued consolidation of farms, many agricultural organizations focus on larger-scale producers. The emphasis on larger-scale production results in agricultural professionals who are ill-equipped and lack an understanding of the tools and technology necessary for small-scale production, leaving them unable to effectively provide support to small-scale farmers.

Using appropriately scaled farm tools, based on the size and complexity of a farm, can have a beneficial return on

investment. Many new technologies and tools have been developed to maximize labor, reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, increase soil health, and ensure long-term farm viability (Searchinger et al., 2019). Typically, small-scale sustainable farm practices are more knowledge intensive (Gliessman, 2016) and often lack reliable technical support and resources catered to their practices and systems (Miles et al., 2017; DeLonge and Basche, 2017; DeLonge et al., 2016). Agricultural professionals such as government agents, nonprofit representatives, and many others, are responsible for providing up-to-date information and resources to help farmers make practical and well-informed

“Connecting with community experts and independent research has allowed for many of our successes.”

—Chrisa Brigham

“Resilience can be built in by making it a priority to avoid farmers in bankruptcy. It means teaching financial literacy for producers and creating pathways for success, so everyone is not reinventing the wheel.” —Deydra King

FEATURE FARMER: CETTA BARNHART

Cetta Barnhart is a Florida farmer who inherited a life of agriculture after attending Florida Agriculture & Mechanical University.



She farms on a family farm in Monticello, Florida, along with her husband and husband’s family. The family farm, Seed Time Harvest, is a multi-operational farm that serves as a CSA, demonstration site for Florida Agriculture & Mechanical University’s Extension, and a network hub for local farmers. Cetta helps to maintain seven growing towers and a field of planted goods such as tomatoes, broccoli, collard greens, cabbage, and some exotic fruits and vegetables. She observes that a lot of health issues and concerns that we currently have are the result of straying from our diets of origin. Getting back to healthy diets and meeting community needs of supplying fresh produce are the two main driving forces behind her work. Cetta believes in good food through best practices for natural growing. She uses a no-till method but says it can be challenging at times not having access to equipment in a timely manner and she also uses the harrowing method. With best practices in mind, Cetta is intentional about networking with other local farmers who have similar or same practices to provide the community with the best products. There is a need for knowing farmers in the area and Cetta says that there should be a local farmer marketing campaign. She says that when local farmers are thriving and communities are becoming more knowledgeable about their health and acting on it by eating healthy food makes her feel like she is doing a good job.

A word to the wise, Cetta says: “Grow something, because you need to learn how to sustain yourself, and get to know your local producers.”

decisions for the success of their small-scale operations. Small-scale beginning farmers rely on the knowledge and resources provided by agricultural professionals for their success, especially farmers facing challenges with changing weather, climate, and pest pressure (Carlisle et al., 2019).

The following is a list of possible solutions to challenges faced by farmers of color, suggested by participating farmers and organizations:

- Farm incubators
- Local farmer-serving organizations
- National programs, institutions, and nonprofits
- Access to skilled farm labor
- Access to recordkeeping assistance
- Access to legal assistance



FEATURE FARMER: MICHAEL STEPHENS

Michael Stephens, an Army veteran, operates [5 A's Veggies and Produce](#), located in Waynesboro, Georgia, along with other family members.

He is a fifth-generation farmer who wanted more for the farm and his family when he saw the need for both healthier foods and income during the pandemic. He says that the pandemic inspired the family farm to produce commercially as the local community suffered a “produce drought,” and that there was a need to find alternative income for workers on the farm who are 99% family. Michael was in the corporate world before farming full-time and decided

to dedicate himself fully to farming after he was given an ultimatum by his employer to relocate or be terminated.

Unlike many other commercial farms, 5 A's Veggies and Produce does not rely on government oversight. The farm grows a variety of produce, purple hull peas, corn, watermelon, peaches, bell peppers, making it a full-range farm. Michael spearheaded shifting the farm operation to a digital presence online. He says that the lack of internet

or broadband in the area of Georgia where the farms is located is one of the reasons their practice has always been limited but when he and a few other family members got together to discuss broadening the farm's operation, their willingness to pivot from their comfort zone to something unfamiliar brought positive and successful changes.

Michael shares that his success is being able to cater to his mom and her needs, being able to provide for and help his sister when she is in need, supporting the mother of his kids, and being able to support his children in their needs.



CONCLUSION

According to responses from our surveys and interviews, there is great value in the work being done already, and there is great opportunity for investment in BIPOC-led grassroots organizations and institutions.

Investments, such as programmatic support in providing technical assistance and establishing programs that promote sovereignty of farmers of color, were emphasized as farmers feel more comfortable working with BIPOC-led organizations. Across many of our interviews, we heard farmers refer to the importance of and value derived from local networks and organizations that have served to support, educate, and provide a sense of community within groups of farmers of color. Furthermore, of those organizations surveyed in this report, more than half indicated that the most important factors for success can be attributed to some form of trust and personal investment between the farmer and the organization.



Through the trust and history shared with local organizations and their members, many of the farmers surveyed expressed the outsized benefit that results from being a part of a local network. Regular access to mentors, technical information, grant application assistance, and community building were all mentioned as primary benefits of working with local grassroots organizations. Fundamental to addressing each of the challenge areas is exposure and access to the information and education necessary for understanding their own context, as well as appropriate methods that address their challenges. Farmers benefited from subsequent access to training programs and experiential learning that immerses farmers in a manner that allows for in-depth exploration of models and methods for organizing themselves and accessing the specific resources necessary for progress.

Many farmers who participated in this project alluded to the belief that those best suited to facilitating investments, expanding local networks, and distributing information and grant funds are already in the communities that need those resources; institutions need to provide more funding opportunities and outreach to local grassroots organizations and networks in order to expand the stored potential within and encourage the growth of new organizations in communities of color.

“Trust, follow through, feeling of belonging”
– HOPE for Small Farm Sustainability

“Providing one on one meetings and technical assistance, bilingual bicultural training and increased marketing opportunities.”
– Hmong American Farmers Association

“Understanding of cultural narrative, farmer-led programs, leadership experience in the local food system, established networks”
– Sentli Center for Regenerative Agriculture

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