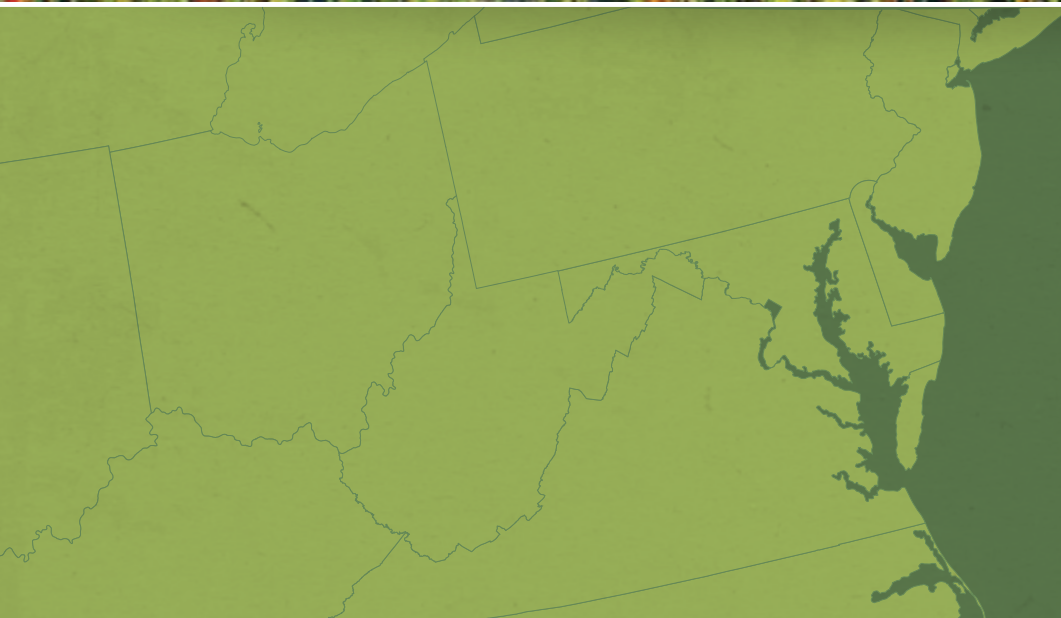


Needs Assessment of Black Farmers on the Delmarva Peninsula

New Research to Recommend Intervention Priorities



Black Dirt Farm





Needs Assessment of Black Farmers on the Delmarva Peninsula

Authorship

The Common Market is a Philadelphia-based non-profit local wholesale food distributor. The mission of The Common Market is to connect communities with good food from sustainable family farms. Since 2008, The Common Market has worked to connect sustainable family farmers in the Mid-Atlantic region with urban communities, striving to improve food security, farm viability, and community and ecological health. As a component of its mission, The Common Market aims to advance racial equity in the food system, for both consumers in food access and farmers in market access. This needs assessment of African American farmers exposes opportunities for The Common Market and others to support the viability of producers in Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia along the Delmarva Peninsula. The Common Market recently launched a second chapter in Atlanta, Georgia as part of its strategy for national expansion.

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Maryland farmers in the Help Ourselves Project.

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Introduction

This assessment presents, at least in part, the resources, needs, and challenges of African American farmers on the Delmarva Peninsula and recommends several opportunities for intervention. The needs of African American farmers are, in many cases, aligned with the needs of small to mid-scale growers and other minority growers generally. Therefore, we anticipate that the findings and recommendations in this report may be useful to a range of social justice and sustainable agriculture interventions.

Study Overview

To conduct this assessment, The Common Market staff worked with allies in Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia to understand the crops, limitations, and future plans of African American farmers.

The project methodology included:

- 1) A review of literature addressing black, minority, and resource limited farmers in the region and nationally;
- 2) An analysis of agriculture and population census data in the region;
- 3) Interviews of key informants in the region, including three non-profit program officers, two USDA extension agents, two food hubs, a startup cooperative, and three small-scale farmers of color.

Unfortunately, more farmers were not able to participate in the assessment due to privacy concerns and limitations of the research team. We were therefore reliant on the expertise of interviewees who work closely with farmers and provided detailed secondary accounts. Increasing the number of farmer interviews is a recommendation the research team has for future assessments.

“The Common Market aims to advance racial equity in the food system, for both consumers in food access and farmers in market access.”



The Chesapeake Bay west of Delmarva.

Background

African American Agricultural History of Discrimination

In 1920, African American farmers numbered close to one million in the United States, accounting for 17 percent of all farmers and owning 15 million acres of land (if not more considering the historic undercounting of black communities in government surveys)¹. By 1959, black farmers had declined to 272,500 and accounted for only 7.3 percent of all farmers. The number of black farmers has continued to decline, and in 2012 there were only 22,954 in the U.S., just 1.4 percent of farmers. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights recognized the severity of decline in 1982, at that time predicting there would be “virtually no blacks operating farms in this country by the end of the next decade”². In all practical senses, this prediction has come true.

The atrocities experienced by black landowners and farmers in this nation has a long and egregious history. At the end of slavery in 1863, four million African American became citizens of the U.S. yet had bleak economic prospects for survival and owned few possessions beyond their cloths and perhaps agricultural tools³. For about 100 years following the Emancipation Proclamation, black citizens and landowners faced racial discrimination in every form including in government legislation⁴. Though the Civil Rights Movement abolished much of the discriminatory language in U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) law, black farmers still receive little government assistance compared to other farmers and are often faced with a high level of insensitivity to their needs. For example, in 1984 and 1985, the USDA lent \$1.3 billion to farmers nationwide to buy land; of the almost 16,000 farmers who received those funds only 209

1. U.S.A. U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. Census of Agriculture Publications. 2012. Web and Print. <<https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/index.php>>

2. U.S.A. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. The Decline of Black Farming in America: A Report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights. By Arthur S. Fleming, et al. Washington, D.C., 1982. Web and Print. <<https://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/cr11b562z.pdf>>

3. Marable, Manning. “The Politics of Black Land Tenure: 1877-1915.” *Agricultural History*, Vol. 53, No. 1, Southern Agriculture Since the Civil

War: A Symposium. *Agricultural History Society*, Jan. 1979. pp.142-152. Accessed on JSTOR.

4. U.S.A. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Business- Cooperative Service. *Black Farmers in America, 1865-2000. The Pursuit of Independent Farming and the Role of Cooperatives*. By Bruce J. Reynolds, Washington, D.C., 2002. Print.

5. United States. Cong. Senate. Pigford Settlement. S. Rec. Vol. 156, No. 188, 2010. S6836-6837. Web. From the Congressional Record Online through the Government Publishing Office [www.gpo.gov]

were black⁵. In the class action lawsuit *Pigford vs. Glickman* in 1999, followed by *Pigford II* in 2010, over 60,000 minority farmers filed claims against the USDA for loan discrimination, winning a combined \$2.21 billion settlement⁶. Many consider the *Pigford* victory as a first step in the reparations owed to black and minority farmers, particularly when considering that many who filed claims waited over a decade to receive their settlement and there remains disagreement as to whether the settlement truly compensated for the cost and number of cases of discrimination.

African American farmers have been classified under a number of government terms including socially disadvantaged, minority, limited resource, and historically underserved. Section 2501 of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 serves as the only Farm Bill program dedicated to addressing the specific needs of minority farmers. The 2501 program is designed to serve “socially disadvantaged” groups, “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”⁷. The racial and ethnic groups covered under the 2501 Program include African Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans, Latinos, and most recently military veterans.

Geography and Culture of the Delmarva Peninsula

The Delmarva Peninsula, or Eastern Shore, is a Mid-Atlantic region on the eastern coast of the United States that is composed of 14 counties across Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. The peninsula is bounded by the Chesapeake Bay to the west, the Delaware Bay to the northeast, and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. The region is approximately 180 miles north-south and 60 miles east-west at its widest point⁸. The peninsula is relatively undeveloped, in commercial terms. The dominant land use is agriculture, about 48 percent, followed by woodland and coastal wetlands⁹. Urban land was reported to cover only 7 percent of the total land in 2004. The largest city is Wilmington, DE (population of about 71,000), followed by Dover, DE (population of about 37,522), then Salisbury, Easton, and Cambridge, Maryland¹⁰. Towns on the Atlantic coast, such as Ocean City, are also well-traveled vacation destinations for east coast residents. The population for the whole Eastern Shore was estimated at 1,444,288 in 2014.

The climate of the Delmarva Peninsula is relatively moist and moderate in temperature, far more than the mainland to the west¹¹. Snow and ice, for example, rarely lasts for more than a day. Droughts too are rare. This climatic feature of

6. Cowan, Tadlock and Jody Feder. The Pigford Cases: USDA Settlement of Discrimination Suits by Black Farmers. Report Prepared for Members of Committees of Congress: Congressional Research Service, 29 May 1013. Web. Rep no. 7-5700, RS20430. <<http://nationalaglawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/crs/RS20430.pdf>>

7. “Limited Resource Farmer and Rancher - (LRF/R) Socially Disadvantaged Farmer Definition.” Limited Resource Farmer/Rancher Self Determination Tool. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, 01 Nov. 2010. Web. <http://lrftool.sc.egov.usda.gov/SDFP_Definition.aspx>

8. “The Delmarva Peninsula.” Delmarva USA: Life, the History and the

Heritage of the Delmarva Peninsula. ShoreToBeFun.com, 2010. Web. <<http://delmarvausa.com/>>

9. U.S.A. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey. Water Quality in the Delmarva Peninsula Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia, 1999–2001. By Judith M. Denver, et al. Reston, VA, 2004. Print and Web. Rep circular 1228. <<http://pubs.usgs.gov/circ/2004/1228/pdf/circular1228.pdf>>

10. U.S.A. U.S. Census Bureau. 2010–2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Generated by Hannah Jo King, using American FactFinder, 2014. <<http://factfinder2.census.gov>>



the Delmarva is due in part to the region's lower topographic elevation, the result of an asteroid collision south of the Chesapeake Bay 35 million years ago¹². On both the Atlantic Ocean and Chesapeake Bay sides of the Peninsula, fish and waterfowl thrive, including "trout, flounder, bluefish, crabs, oysters, clams, tarpon, muskrat, ducks and geese"¹¹. The climate and rich aquatic life in combination with the proximity to large markets in Baltimore, Washington D.C., and Philadelphia has historically made the peninsula an ideal place for fishing and agriculture. The largest segments of the Delmarva economy are agriculture, aquaculture, sports hunting and fishing, and tourism⁸.

Before the central Chesapeake Bay Bridge and the southern bridge-tunnel were built in the 1950's and 1960's, the only way onto the peninsula was by ferry or by traveling through the northern peak at Wilmington, DE. This partial isolation since its colonization in 1608 has led to unique cultural elements on the Delmarva Peninsula, such as the well-maintained plantation homes and numerous towns and villages with names such as Accomac, Oxford, and Wicomico that are representative of its Native American and English past. On the peninsula, and particularly in the far southern Virginia counties, there are many homes and farms have been owned by the same family for over 200 years.¹¹

There is a large African American population on the peninsula, encompassing nearly 22 percent of the population overall and approaching 40 percent or more on the Lower Eastern Shore¹⁰. The large African American population has been present since the slave era,

11. Ayres, B. Drummond, Jr. "Delmarva: The Island on a Peninsula." The New York Times. The New York Times Company, 12 Sept. 1982. Web. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1982/09/12/travel/delmarva-the-island-on-a-peninsula.html?pagewanted=all>>

when many blacks were made to till the Eastern Shore's rich soil and harvest from the abundant ocean and bay¹².

Agricultural History of the Delmarva Peninsula

Agriculture on the Delmarva Peninsula has changed dramatically since the early 1900s and through the Industrial Revolution. In the early 1900s, farmers grew a diversity of staple produce crops, or "truck crops," including sweet potatoes, tomatoes, green peppers, snap beans, lima beans, cucumbers, watermelons, sweet corn, cabbage, strawberries and spinach. Dairy cows, livestock, and orchard fruits such as apples, peaches and pears were also grown throughout the Shore. A large fruit and vegetable cannery sector thrived and was able to utilize the excess farm harvest. Before the Depression, the Delmarva Peninsula was economically robust with the agricultural and cannery businesses supporting the local economy.¹³

Between 1930 and 1950, the poultry industry sprang up on the Delmarva and much of the truck crop production was replaced with the then new industry of broiler farming (chickens raised specifically for meat production) as well as corn and soy production for poultry feed. The first broiler plant was built in 1937 and since then the broiler industry has overtaken the majority of other livestock farming on the Eastern Shore. The harsh conditions of the boiler industry are well documented, known

for practices such as locking farmers into low-pay contracts and leaving farmers encumbered with high start-up infrastructure costs and debt which inhibit their future abilities to switch practices or leave the industry. Nationally, poultry growers lost money 10 of the 15 years between 1995 to 2009¹⁴. On the Eastern Shore today, poultry operations are concentrated on fewer and larger farms, while corn, wheat and soybeans have grown up as the most common commodity crops.¹³

The Food & Water Watch estimated that if the Eastern Shore region cultivated the same proportion of land in vegetables, melons and strawberries in 2007 as was grown before the rise of the poultry industry, farm sales on the Shore would be about \$137 million higher and about 60,000 acres would be shifted out of corn and soybean production. Although this transition back to truck crops is not simple—requiring infrastructure changes, capacity investments and cultural shifts—it is promising. Rebuilding the regional food system could involve "new terminal collection points, delivery options, developing contracts between groups of farmers and the supermarkets that operate in nearby metropolitan areas (including Baltimore, Philadelphia, Trenton, Washington, D.C. and Wilmington) and reinvesting in a vegetable cannery sector"¹³. Currently, there are a few groups on the Delmarva Peninsula that are working to strengthen the regional food system; more opportunities for supporting small- and mid-scale local agriculture are outlined at the end of this report.¹³

12. "The Chesapeake Bay Bolide Impact: A New View of Coastal Plain Evolution." USGS: Science for a changing world. U.S. Department of the Interior, 9 Jan. 2013. Web. <<http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/fs49-98/>>

13. The Economic Cost of Food Monopolies. Rep. Food & Water Watch, 2 Nov. 2012. Web and Print. <<http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/insight/>>

[economic-cost-food-monopolies>](#)

14. Taylor, C. Robert and David A. Domina. Restoring Economic Health to Contract Poultry Production. 13, May 2010. Web. <<http://www.dominalaw.com/documents/Restoring-Economic-Health-to-Contract-Poultry-Production.pdf>>



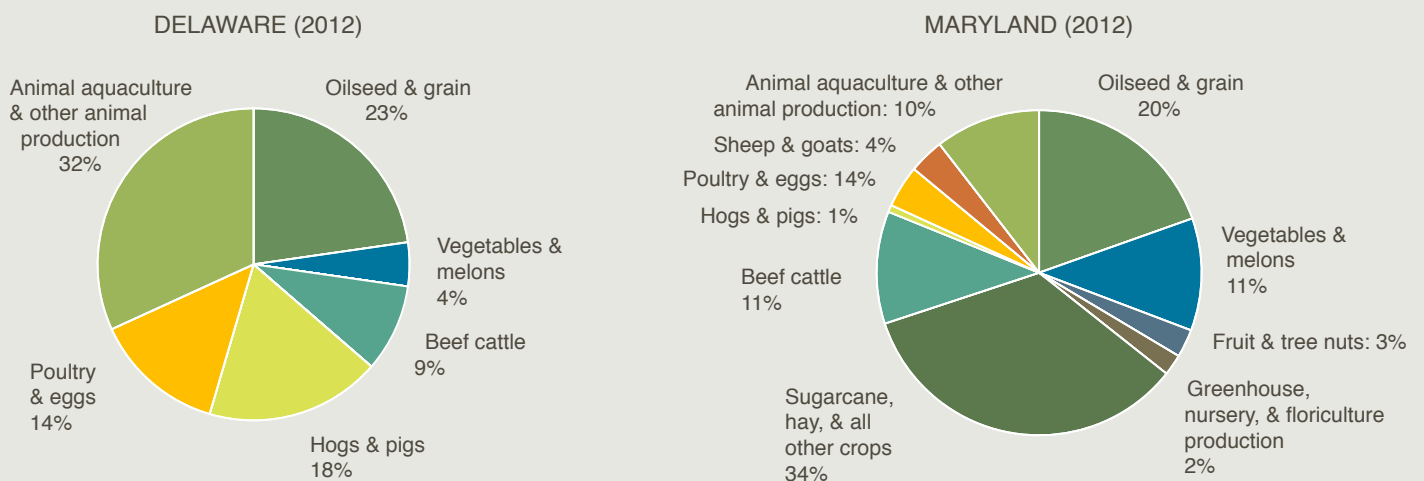
USDA Crop and Demographic Data

Challenge of limited data

- It is crucial to know that the U.S. Agricultural Census data from USDA on African American farmers and ranchers is an incomplete representation of the population. Our assessment revealed discrepancies between U.S. Agricultural Census data and on-the-ground information, a common challenge among researchers studying minority farmers¹⁵. Discrepancies are due to factors such as outdated information, the over-counting of minority landowners who rent to non-minority operators, or, conversely, the under-counting of minority operators who rent from non-minority landowners.
- The most recent (2012) state-wide data was used to estimate the farm sizes and types of crop and animal products cultivated by

WHAT ARE BLACK FARMERS PRODUCING?

Farms with African American principal operators by agricultural sector (NAICS industry)



The top agriculture products cultivated by African American growers on the Delmarva Peninsula are grain and non-broiler poultry according to interview findings and the 2012 U.S. Agricultural Census. There is also significant beef cattle ranching, hog farming, and vegetable, melon, fruit and nut operations. Although the Census indicates aquaculture to be a dominate industry, interviewees noted that most aquaculture production has been lost. These graphs represent state-wide agriculture in Delaware and Maryland (only 9 of 23 Maryland counties are on the Delmarva Peninsula) as Delmarva region-specific data is not available. Source: USDA Census of Agriculture 2012 Publications.

15. Kingslow, Marcia E. Limited Resource Farmers in Southern Maryland: Factors Affecting the Use of Soil Conservation and Agricultural Alternatives. Rep.: The University of Maryland- Eastern Shore School of Agricultural Sciences and Kingslow Associates, 1990. Print.

African American operators on the Delmarva Peninsula. More granular county-level crop and land size data was not available by race of the operators, as is sometimes the case in USDA publications where sub-sets of data are not shared publicly in order to protect the identity of individuals in a small farming population group.

cattle ranching and hog farming. Vegetable, melon, fruit and nut operations were also present among those operations captured by the Census. Although the Census indicates aquaculture to be a dominate industry, interviewees at the University of Maryland Extension and Virginia State University Extension informed us that most aquaculture production has fizzled out over the past 7-8 years. (See figure on previous page.)

Crops and Agricultural Goods

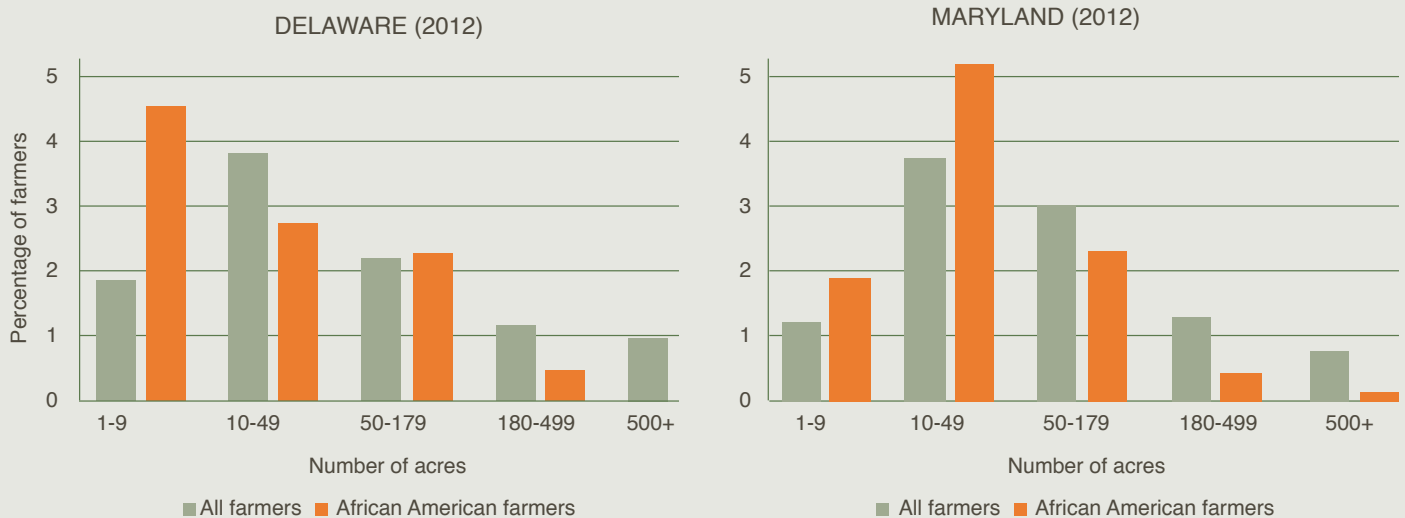
- Today on the Delmarva Peninsula, the top agriculture product cultivated by African American growers is grain, followed by non-broiler poultry according to the 2012 U.S. Agricultural Census and interview findings¹. Finding indicates there is also significant beef

Demographics

Farms with black operators tend to be smaller, with lower sales and fewer acres. For example, in 2012, black-operated farms represented 1.4 percent of all U.S. farms but accounted

BLACK FARMERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO OPERATE SMALL FARMS

Farm size by race of principal operator (percentage)



In 2012, the average size of African American-run farms was estimated to be 52 acres in Delaware and 67 acres in Maryland, according to calculations of this research team (data is not available at USDA). The average farm size overall was 208 acres in Delaware and 166 acres in Maryland. These graphs represent state-wide acreage, as Delmarva region-specific data is not available. Source: USDA Census of Agriculture 2012 Publications.

for only 0.4 percent of all farmland and only 0.2 percent of all U.S. farm sales. The average black-operated farm was 125 acres, compared to 434 acres for all farms¹⁶. Only 6 percent of black-operated farms had annual sales greater than \$50,000 compared to 25 percent of farms overall¹⁷. On a positive note, the number of black farmers in the U.S. was reported at 44,629 in 2012 which is a 12 percent increase from 2007¹⁸.

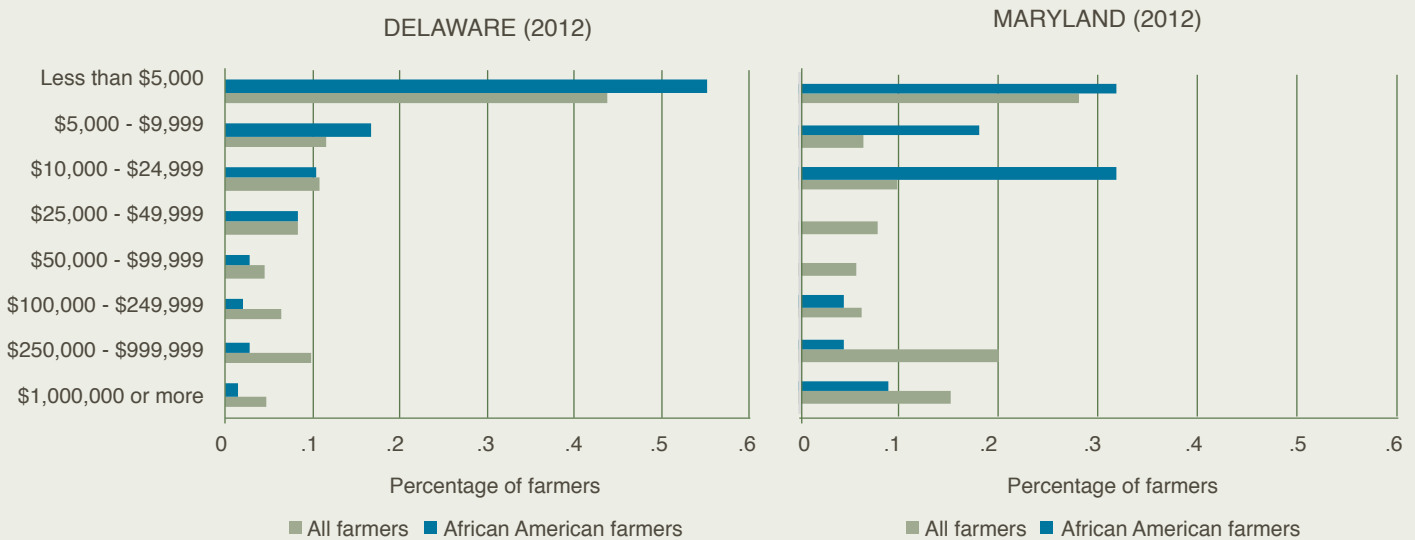
- Population: According to 2012 Census data,

1.3 percent of farms in the Delmarva region are operated by African American farmers, 86 principal operators out of 6,882. The Lower Eastern Shore regions of Maryland and Virginia have the largest number of farms by African American principal operators on the Peninsula (see table on next page).¹

- Age: Black farmers on the Delmarva Peninsula are older than farmers overall. In 2012, the average age for all principal operators in the U.S. was 58.3 years

BLACK FARMERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE LOW EARNINGS

Market value of agricultural goods sold by race of operator (percentage)



Farms with black operators in the Delmarva Peninsula tend to be smaller, with lower sales. In 2012, 81.8 percent of black farmers in Delaware and 82.5 percent of black farmers in Maryland had sales of less than \$25,000 per year. While many farmers on the Delmarva Peninsula are earning at a subsistence level, black farmers are experiencing economic limitations in greater proportion than the average farmer. These graphs represent state-wide earnings in Delaware and Maryland, as Delmarva region-specific data is not available. Source: USDA Census of Agriculture 2012 Publications.

16. U.S.A. U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. Race/ Ethnicity/ Gender Profile. 2012. Web and Print. <https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/Race_Ethnicity_and_Gender_Profiles/cpd99000.pdf>

17. U.S.A. U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. Preliminary Report Highlights: U.S. Farms and Farmers. Feb. 2014.

Web and Print. <https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Preliminary_Report/Highlights.pdf>

18. U.S.A. U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. Highlights: Black Farmers. 2012. Web and Print. <https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/Highlights/Black_Farmers/Highlights_Black_Farmers.pdf>

compared to black principal operators in Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia whose average ages were 61.6 years, 63.1 years, and 63.2 years.¹

- **Acreage:** The overwhelming majority of acres are operated by white farmers with an estimated 1.3 percent operated by black farmers (see figure below).¹

- **Income:** In 2012, 81.8 percent of black farmers in Delaware and 82.5 percent of black farmers in Maryland had sales of less than \$25,000 per year (see figures on preceding page).¹

It is important to recognize that a substantial part of the U.S. farm community, 68.2 percent, are earning less than \$25,000 in

HOW MUCH OF THE DELMARVA PENINSULA IS BLACK FARMER OPERATED?

Number of farms and acres by race of principal operators in Delmarva counties

Number of farms with:

Number of acres with:

Delmarva Counties	African American Principal Operator	All Principal Operators	Percent African American	African American Principal Operator	All Principal Operators	Percent African American
Kent, DE	8	863	0.9%	516	172,251	0.3%
New Castle, DE	4	374	1.1%	(D)	64,169	(D)
Sussex, DE	10	1,214	0.8%	(D)	272,232	(D)
Caroline, MD	3	658	0.5%	(D)	150,357	(D)
Cecil, MD	2	496	0.4%	(D)	76,667	(D)
Dorchester, MD	15	423	3.5%	2,825	126,420	2.2%
Kent, MD	0	367	0.0%	0	133,201	0.0%
Queen Anne's, MD	3	530	0.6%	(D)	156,941	(D)
Somerset, MD	4	286	1.4%	307	65,212	0.5%
Talbot, MD	2	328	0.6%	(D)	119,481	(D)
Wicomico, MD	3	510	0.6%	(D)	83,739	(D)
Worcester, MD	6	374	1.6%	(D)	99,304	(D)
Accomack, VA	9	226	4.0%	910	77,389	1.2%
Northampton, VA	17	147	11.6%	3,428	56,050	6.1%
TOTAL	86	6,796	1.3%	(D)	630,523	*0.99%

(D) Data not published by USDA to protect individual identities

*Estimate based on available data

Black farmers are vastly underrepresented on the Delmarva Peninsula. In 2012, 86 principal operators out of 6,882 were African American, according to the U.S. Agricultural Census. The Lower Eastern Shore regions of Maryland and Virginia had the largest number of farms and acres with black principal operators, particularly Northampton, Accomack, Somerset, Worcester, and Dorchester Counties. Black ownership of land and the number of black farmers has been declining dramatically across the U.S. since the 1920s. Source: USDA Census of Agriculture 2012 Publications.



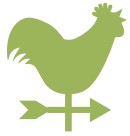
A Maryland farmer in the Help Ourselves Project.

annual farm sale per year; 46.4 percent are farming at a subsistence level earning less than \$5,000 per year in farm sales¹. Many farmers are experiencing economic hardship; but black farmers experience economic limitations in greater proportion than the average farmer.

Additionally, there is a large migrant farmworker population on the Delmarva Peninsula.

A migrant council in the region has organized with the support of El Comité de Apoyo a Los Trabajadores Agrícolas (CATA or The Farmworker Support Committee) around issues of discrimination and lack of identification. The sectors that migrant farmworkers work in are “chicken processing plants, the crabbing industry, agriculture, landscaping and nurseries, and other industries”¹⁹.

19. “Methodology & Programs.” CATA: El Comité de Apoyo a Los Trabajadores Agrícolas: The Farmworker Support Committee. Web. < cata-farmworkers.org/ >



Interview and Literature Review Findings: Challenges and Needs

The findings of this report reflect the observations of writers, researchers, and historians that came before and honor the voices of this study's interviewees, which ground truth and distinguish the situation of black farmers on the Eastern Shore. This research team does not claim to speak for an entire minority group nor assume that all black farmers represent the position of these findings. We do, however, aim to highlight the needs of the community as we have observed them. Let these findings serve as an entry point to solution-crafting rather than a stereotype for a group which has already for centuries been so deeply misunderstood.

Challenges

The following challenges were uncovered through the assessment. They can be used as points of entry for intervention to support the viability of black farmers on the Eastern Shore.

Aging and Shrinking Minority Farmer Population

Family members of elder farmers are often either unable or uninterested in continuing the business. A low rate of passing the knowledge and livelihood of farming on to the next generations contributes to the quickly declining and aging African American farming population on the Eastern Shore. As of 2012, the USDA reported only 1.3 percent of farmers (86 principal operators) on the Delmarva Peninsula to be African American with an average age of about 62.6 years. Today, in 2016, the numbers would be more exaggerated.¹

Necessity of On-the-Ground Outreach Techniques

Interview respondents remarked on the challenges of establishing partnerships and relationships with black farmers on the Eastern Shore. This is the case for a variety reasons. First, there are no convenient databases for locating or acquiring the contact information for black farmers. Second, the effective types of communication and outreach on the Eastern Shore include word of mouth, pamphlets, community bulletin boards, and in-person gatherings, "the things people did 10 years ago." Outreach through virtual interaction is less useful. Third, farmers have specific schedules and limited flexibility. One respondent recalled attending a meeting meant to address minority farmers which was held in the middle of the day during the week. Awareness of when farmers are available to convene is an essential consideration for outreach.

Privacy in Relationships

Interview respondents noted that many of the older farmers highly value their privacy and may be non-disclosing about their activities. This is possibly related to experiences of discrimination from outsiders or the government. Possibly it is just a desire to have a quiet, uninterrupted life. Interview respondents told us that black farmers on the Eastern Shore can be difficult to maintain relationships with and are sometimes “siloe d” within the farming community. When asked to share the contact information of black farmers in their networks, most interviewees declined in order to honor the farmers’ desires for privacy.

Distrust of the Government

Due to a history of discrimination—whether in seeking loans, fair interest rates or land reparations—many black farmers in the United States have formed a legitimate distrust of banks, the government, and the USDA. This distrust can encompass programs and schools that are funded by the government as well, such as farm extension programs.

Moving Beyond Conventional Crops

It is common for farmers to follow the example of their family background and stick to “reliable” agricultural practices, such as growing conventional, commodity crops that utilize a regimented and predictable system of inputs. Switching to ecological agriculture is labor, management, and information-intensive. Eco-agriculture also tends to be less popularized as a viable type of agriculture for business in the black community. A study by Kingslow Associates and The University of Maryland Eastern Shore, School of Agricultural Sciences in 1990, for example, discovered that limited resource farmers on the Eastern Shore were generally unfamiliar with terms such as “low-input” and “sustainable agriculture”¹⁵. This is not to suggest that the knowledge of low-input or sustainable practices is not present, simply the popular language to describe it. There is, in fact, traditional knowledge of ecological farming practices in the African American community on the Delmarva Peninsula and it is common for people, even conventional farmers, to cultivate small “kitchen gardens” using ecological practices.



High tunnels are among the greatest infrastructure needs.



Needs

In order to support African Americans in agriculture and scale up the acres of production in sustainable farming, there were numerous expressed needs of both farmers and food systems actors revealed through this assessment.

Product Viability

Running a farm is a business like any other, and in order to grow or raise a product, farmers need assurances that the final product will have a market. Often times, farmers are contracted with a buyer even before the growing season begins, assuring them with a market. A common remark from interviewees was that farmers will not shift their production into specialty crops (the USDA term for non-commodity crops, such as fruits, vegetables and nuts) without proven market viability for the products. One strategy towards assuring product viability is to connect farmers with larger markets where there is demand for local or sustainable food.

Marketing and Market Access

Strong marketing is a tool that all small farmers need. Marketing can be a time-consuming

activity, but connecting to the right markets secures farmers with fair prices and thus the viability of their operations. Other actors in the food system, such as food hubs, can be allies in farm-side marketing—an opportunity which will be discussed further in the Success Stories section.

Seeding demand with farm-to-consumer transparency is an important marketing strategy. For example, one interview respondent explained the frustration of trying to sell direct to large supermarkets. Although a supermarket would be a great customer to have because of their purchasing volume, the particular store the respondent worked with would not maintain the farm name, values or growing practices, not even communicating to customers that the product was grown locally. The product was devalued by not communicating the food's story to consumers. Another respondent explained that the story of the food is part of what makes the products marketable and memorable. The fact that these products are "regenerating black roots in eco-agriculture" is a huge market and value-add. This type of visibility towards the farmers' stories and their growing practices shares a

narrative that can generate demand among customers.

Knowledge of and access to new customers and markets, particularly outside their geographic region, is another need. Currently, interview respondents explained, farmers will most commonly sell at road-side stands if they sell direct-to-consumer. While road-side stands help farmers to maintain consistent, local customers, it is a limited consumer pool. Farmers who are scaling up their productions may participate in urban/regional farmers' markets or CSA-style programs. Generally, having more heterogeneous market access and sales increases the resilience of any food business operation.

"That's the bottom line. If they can get a market they'll be able to have the financial capacity to fund their own operations," said one interview respondent.

Transportation

The interview respondents who were small growers selling consumer-direct, such as to farmers' markets, remarked on the significant amount of time that is required to do direct sales. Driving back and forth to farmers' markets in Baltimore, D.C. or Philadelphia and conducting sales is a full day of work not spent on the farm. Although consumer-direct markets offer higher prices than wholesale, they are not without costs to the business. One respondent from the Help Ourselves Project is working to launch a black farmer cooperative on the Delmarva Peninsula this year. This respondent remarked on how many farmers need assistance in distribution to distant markets, which is one role the

cooperative hopes to fill. Furthermore, if farmers are selling to customers with high food safety standards (such as hospitals or universities), there can be significant capital costs involved with transportation and the need for refrigerated trucks.

Access to Infrastructure

A vibrant regional food system relies on many types of infrastructure such as high tunnels, hydro-coolers, wash stations, cold storage units, aggregation sites, trucks and distribution equipment; in addition to the soft infrastructure such as managers of marketing, logistics, customer relations, and financials. Not all of these costs need to be shouldered by farmers, and there are many opportunities for food systems partners to help creatively balance the costs of infrastructure.

The primary pieces of infrastructure highlighted by respondents in this assessment were high tunnels (also known as hoop houses or greenhouses) and other advanced infrastructure for growing into the colder seasons. High tunnels allow farmers to extend their growing (and sales) season as well as increase the quantity and quality of the production. The Help Ourselves Project also discussed the advantage that a cold storage

“There are many opportunities for food systems partners to help creatively balance the costs of infrastructure.”

facility would play, where farmers from the co-op could drop-off food for easy storage and access for distribution.

Access to Capital

Funding is one limitation that was commonly heard in the assessment. Respondents discussed the challenge of having programs which would receive a source of start-up funding then not get renewal at the end of the period. This slowed down or even halted projects as leaders had to redirect their time towards securing new sources of funding.

Interview respondents also noted the need to have access to debt-free capital and infrastructure. Given the history of loan discrimination towards the African American community, particularly in agriculture, the hesitation for black farmers to take on debt is not surprising.

Access to Labor

Reliable labor and capital for labor was a repeated need among interview respondents. Similar to infrastructure, adding capacity through hired help will increase yields long-term but bears an upfront cost. Respondents explained that the challenge is both a financial shortage on the part of farmers and a labor shortage on the part of their communities. One respondent explained the case of a farm which recruited family members from across

the country for a summer. Another respondent was relying on a friend who would come in from out of town to help during the growing season. Out of town labor adds another stain with the need for housing. A placement program like Americorp could be a solution, one respondent remarked, although it does not solve the housing. Ultimately there is a need for more reliable and affordable seasonal labor and the engagement of the community in agriculture.

Municipal and Government Allies

Allies in local government, especially around zoning and development, are valuable for preserving black landownership. Interview respondents spoke about the issue of rapid development consuming rural land, a trend happening nationally. As property values rise in their area, farmers are increasingly selling their land to commercial developers. Local zoning boards are important allies in the conservation of farm and natural land.

Additionally, having partners in the USDA extension offices is a great asset. Maryland, Virginia and Delaware have USDA Offices of Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Program (the 2501 Program). The USDA Outreach programs have both the funding and the mandate to support small and minority farmers and are an asset for training and connections to resources.



Success Stories

Small Farm Outreach Program Connects Small Farmers with USDA Resources

The University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) is a historically black university and an 1890 land-grant university. The UMES Extension Small Farm Outreach Program is funded by the USDA's 2501 program and led by Berran Rogers. The goal of the Small Farm Outreach Program at UMES is to improve the economic conditions of small-scale, limited-resource and socially disadvantaged farmers by providing technical assistance, training, and improved access to USDA farm programs. The program serves the entire Eastern Shore of Maryland, Virginia and Delaware (as well as Southern Maryland), with a targeted focus on the Lower Eastern Shore counties. They organize hands-on-workshop series, grant information sessions, and an annual fall conference which is well-attended. Their other innovative outreach methods include farm visits, one-on-one technical assistance, farmer focus groups, trials and demonstrations, and targeted scheduling strategy. The educational programs are planned to meet the interests of farmers and provide updates on USDA programs and production methods. UMES Small Farm Program also has scholarships available for the conferences and workshops.^{20, 21}

Public and Private Partners Collaborate to Build High Tunnels on Small Farms

Virginia State University in collaboration with the Eastern Shore of Virginia Resource Conservation and Development Council in Accomack County (ESR CDC) and Future Harvest CASA was able to fund a high tunnel investment. Building the high tunnel was a 2-day bilingual workshop (English & Spanish) and the completed high tunnel was donated to the Mighty Thundercloud Edible Forest, a black-operated permaculture farm in Virginia's Lower Eastern Shore. In that example, the project was educational while providing much needed investment in the small and minority farm community. The Common Market was similarly also able to support a high tunnel investment for Black Dirt Farm in Preston, Caroline County, MD with funding from RSF Social Finance's Shared Gifting program. Black Dirt Farm is now able to grow diverse vegetables in the high tunnel to sell at farmer's markets, pop-up markets, and in a multi-farm CSA. These are two examples of how advocates can collaborate to creatively support the viability of minority farmers on the Eastern Shore. collaborate to creatively support the viability of minority farmers on the Eastern Shore.

²⁰"Small Farm Outreach." School of Agricultural and Natural Sciences, University of Maryland Eastern Shore. University of Maryland Eastern Shore, n.d. Web. <<https://www.umes.edu/sans/extension-program-SFO.html>>

²¹Tubene, Stephan L., O. B. White, O. B., and M. Rose. "An Innovative Approach for Meeting the Needs of Underserved Populations." Bridging the Gaps in Programs and Services. Conference paper. Small Farm Institute, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Glen Burnie, MD, 2009. Print.



Future Harvest CASA high tunnel construction; UMES workshop on farm equipment.



Private Foundations Make Diverse Regional Investments

Private foundations have an important role to play in building an equitable and sustainable Chesapeake regional food system. The Town Creek Foundation, for example, has been a major supporter of agricultural and environmental reform in the Maryland. Their grant making programs in climate, food systems, sustainability, and the Chesapeake Bay have supported an impressive range of impactful groups including Future Harvest CASA, the Land Conservancy, Food and Water Watch, and The Common Market.

Future Harvest CASA's Affordable Training for New Farmers

Future Harvest CASA is a non-profit working in West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware to provide education, networking and advocacy towards building a sustainable foodshed. Future Harvest CASA runs a peer-to-peer education program that is successfully training beginning farmers through on-site "field school" apprenticeships. At the training farms in Virginia and Maryland (some on

the Eastern Shore), trainees gain hands-on learning in farm management including: business planning, crop planning, production techniques, marketing, and financial opportunities. The program is tuition free and has a limited number of mini-grants that trainees can apply for. A number of young African American trainees are participating, which is leading to new African American farm entrepreneurs in Maryland and on the Shore. Future Harvest CASA also recently hired an Eastern Shore Program Manager, Aleya Fraser, who will be focused on expanding the educational opportunities for farmers, ranchers, land owners, and food advocates on the Shore.²²

Faith Centers Connect Communities with Food and Land

Churches and farmers have come together successfully in a variety of ways that utilize church land and the community gathering. The Black Church Food Security Network in Baltimore, for example, is connecting black urban and regional farmers with historically African American church congregation to create fresh produce markets and support black urban communities. They are also expanding

22. Future Harvest CASA: Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture. 2014. Web. <<https://www.futureharvestcasa.org/>>

gardens on church-owned land, which is a source of skill building in agriculture and Afro-ecology.²³

Environmental Organizations Offer Technical and Financial Assistance for Conservation Practices in Agriculture

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) assists farmers and forest land owners to protect the health and productivity of their land under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Agricultural Management Program (AMA). EQIP programs are active in Maryland, Delaware and Virginia; AMA programs are active in Maryland and Virginia. Under the EQIP program, one of the most popular Farm Bill conservation programs, NRCS offers technical and financial assistance for planning and installing conservation practices (such as improving soil quality, water quality and wildlife habitat). NRCS also offers AMA assistance with water management, irrigation systems and seasonal high tunnels. Among those applying for NRCS support, socially disadvantaged, limited resource, veteran, Tribal and beginning farmers and ranchers have eligibility for a higher payment rate. In 2014, NRCS provided more than \$10 million in EQIP contracts to Maryland farmers.²⁴

The Eastern Shore Land Conservancy protects farmlands on the Shore with a range of conservation easement options. The Land Conservancy is currently expanding their

efforts to include black, minority, and small farm owners in their conservation work. Similarly, The Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Foundation administers a no-interest loan program that provides land acquisition opportunities for young farmers that dedicate their new land as permanent agricultural conservation easement sites²⁵.

Waterkeepers Chesapeake, a coalition of nineteen programs on the Eastern Shore, works to protect the Chesapeake Bay and coastal waters. One methods of remediation that organizations within the coalition practice is to work with farmers in planting trees and buffer strips to slow erosion and capture nutrient run-off. Large farmers are mainly the target of such programs.

Cooperatives and Collectives Have Historically Been a Form of Self-Sufficiency and Empowerment

African American farmer cooperatives have been in existence in the United States at least since the 1930s and informally since at least the late 19th century. Early cooperatives formed to purchase farm inputs and products, while others were focused on marketing. In some cases, cooperatives served as a means to participate in markets and circumvent discrimination. The activities of black cooperatives took a visible place in the public eye during the Civil Rights Movement and remain an important form of organizing

23. Black Church Food Security Network. 2014. Web. <<http://www.blackchurchfoodsecurity.net/home.html>>

24. Important Deadlines Set for Maryland Conservation Programs. News Release: USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Maryland, 19 Dec. 2014. Web. <<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/md/newsroom/releases/?cid=STELPRDB1266439>>

25. "Delaware Young Farmers Farmland Purchase and Preservation Loan Program." Farmland Information Center. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and American Farmland Trust, 2016. Web. <<http://www.farmlandinfo.org/delaware-young-farmers-farmland-purchase-and-preservation-loan-program>>



The Common Market delivering tomatoes; Help Ourselves Project event.



and collecting power in black farming communities, particularly in the south.²⁶

In Delaware and northern Maryland, a startup black farmers' cooperative is taking form with support from the Help Ourselves Project. Currently, this is a cohort of about 8 farmers aiming to launch the collective distribution of their products to the Philadelphia market. Another example is a farm collective CSA-style program that Black Dirt Farm supplied this summer in cooperation with two other farms.

Food Hubs Expand Markets and Infrastructure for Small Farmers

A food hub is a business or organization that supports or manages the aggregation, distribution, and/or marketing of regionally source-identified food products²⁷. Food hubs connect regional farmers to local markets and often provide transportation, cold storage infrastructure, product marketing, and/or logistical management. Food hubs can also open major market opportunities for

farmers through their established customer relationships, which may include grocery stores, hospitals, schools, restaurants, and workplaces.

Chesapeake Harvest is a food hub located in in Easton, Talbot County, MD with a specific mission to source from Delmarva farmers. The hub started two years ago and is advancing their operations to do distribution, in addition to marketing and aggregation for Delmarva farmers.

The Common Market is another food hub aggregating from a warehouse in Philadelphia and delivering to markets in the Philadelphia, Baltimore, and D.C. metropolitan areas. The Common Market also offers crop planning and projected demand for their farmers to provide some security around market viability. Thus, food hubs can serve a strong role in meeting the variety of marketing and logistical challenges that small farmers face. As one farmer interview respondent said, food hubs are "a model that can showcase and justify changing production models for the surviving farmers."

26. Reynolds, Bruce J. A History of African-American Farmer Cooperatives, 1938-2000. Rep. USDA/RBS/ Cooperative Services, 31 Oct. 2001. Web. <<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/31817/1/cp01re24.pdf>>

27. "Food Hub Center." National Good Food Network. Wallace Center Winrock International, 2009. Web. <<http://ngfn.org/>>



Locust Point Farm, Elkton, MD.



Conclusion & Recommendations

While the challenges in supporting black and minority farmers are diverse and perhaps dense, there are some main themes uncovered in this assessment. The following are key recommendations for intervention as perceived by the research team.

First of all, given that the average age of the black Delmarva farmer is estimated at 62.6 and that black farmland ownership is estimated at 1.3 percent of all Eastern Shore farmland, the trend of aging farmers and land loss is of crucial to address. Resources need to be made accessible for young black farmers to both find and finance arable land—as it is also the case that numerous Delmarva acres remain as fallow or abandoned farmland. Strategies for linking new or transitioning farmers back to land include beginning farmer training and recruiting programs as well as creative financing options such as revolving loan funds and conservation loan programs. For black families dealing with the risk of their property

loss—another phenomena displacing black land ownership nationwide—there is a need for legal support to manage settlements and defend family land from deceitful developers.

Access to affordable and/or debt-free capital, infrastructure and labor were the greatest needs of black farmers expressed in interviews. Parallel to this need, was the recurring sentiment that black farmers are proportionally disinterested in working with the government or assuming debt. This begs the question, how can farm businesses be viable if black farmers don't change their attitudes? More sincere outreach has to be done to assure black farmers of the viability of new practices such as getting certifications, selling to new markets, or switching to specialty crops. Moreover, it is the responsibility of program officers, lending agencies, and educators to ensure their programs are truly nondiscriminatory by race or class. Parties that are interested in supporting black farmers or seeing them

switch to sustainable agriculture will need to demonstrate their sincere and reconciliatory intentions by assuming the financial risk of loans, increasing grants towards black-owned food system infrastructure, and making participation in government programs truly accessible. The start-up costs of shifting into alternative or sustainable agriculture, in addition to the knowledge and technology-intensive production strategies, can be a barrier to entry. There are many opportunities for food systems partners to creatively balance the costs and partners need to demonstrate that commitment.

Finally, with the limited job opportunities on

the Eastern Shore and the major agricultural and industry consolidations the region has experienced in the last 60-80 years, providing business incubation and entrepreneur support in all aspects of food business, from production to packing or processing to marketing, will be a means to revitalizing the whole regional economy in addition to the viability of farmers. Furthermore, a variety of resources, training programs, market channels, and pieces of infrastructure are necessary to a diverse and thriving food system. Stakeholders should support small food businesses with interventions that are flexible to evolving opportunities, knowledge, and social and environmental changes.



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