

ABSTRACT

DANIELS, MIKAYLA A. Exploring the Diverse Perspectives of Non-Rural Black Individuals Engaged in Agricultural Careers. (Under the direction of Dr. Joy Morgan).

Black representation in agriculture remains a pressing issue. As urban areas expand and the agricultural workforce declines, African Americans—who are more likely to reside in growing metropolitan areas—hold a unique position. Engaging these populations presents an opportunity to enhance diversity and representation in the field while also introducing them to agricultural careers and opportunities they may not have previously considered or had access to. Non-rural Black minorities who choose to engage in agriculture navigate distinct experiences shaped by both their racial identity and their non-rural background. This research explores the experiences of Black individuals from non-rural areas who pursue agricultural careers, examining how their identities and backgrounds influence their journey. Highlighted are key implications for recruitment, retention, and representation for non-rural Blacks in agriculture. This phenomenological qualitative study is guided by three objectives: 1) to explore motivations, 2) to identify barriers, and 3) to describe the impact of non-rurality on Black individuals' engagement in agriculture. Participants were identified through purposive sampling, and data collection involved semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis, along with open, axial, and selective coding methods, was used to analyze the data. Findings indicate that non-rural Black professionals encounter unique pathways into agriculture, often shaped by mentorship, programming initiatives, and personal drive. However, they also face distinct challenges related to their dual identity as Black and non-rural individuals, including experiences of racism, microaggressions, and isolation. To navigate these challenges, participants relied on resources such as faith, resilience, and support systems. They also expressed the need for additional resources, including a stronger sense of belonging, cultural competency, and institutional or

programmatic support. While their non-rural background fostered opportunities through increased open-mindedness, adaptability, and contributing to diverse perspectives, it also caused others to be skeptical about their contributions and seemed to be the cause of negative perceptions of agriculture within their communities. Despite these obstacles, participants remained committed to reshaping agricultural narratives, increasing awareness, and fostering inclusive spaces for future generations to come. Recommendations from this research emphasize the importance of tailored outreach efforts, strong mentorship and support systems, and active engagement with families and communities. Additionally, providing immersive experiences, scholarships, and professional and personal development opportunities is essential for creating inclusive and supportive environments for non-rural Black communities. Strengthening HBCUs, increasing Black leadership in agriculture, and conducting further research on the implementation of these improvements can further drive long-term engagement and success in the field.

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Exploring the Diverse Perspectives of Non-Rural Black Individuals Engaged in Agricultural
Careers

by
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the non-rural Black communities integral to my being. Your resilience, strength, and commitment to preserving and uplifting your communities will endure, now hopefully through the lens of agriculture, as we work to reclaim the strength that history has long sought to deny us all. This research is but a step toward that reclamation. I pray that, just as the narratives, heritage, and opportunities in agriculture have inspired me, you too will be inspired to claim your rightful place and equitably reap the benefits of pursuing this space.

BIOGRAPHY

Mikayla A. Daniels is a second-year master's student in Agricultural Extension and Education at North Carolina State University. She earned a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Science from North Carolina State University. As a research and teaching assistant, her work centers on the experiences of underrepresented groups in agriculture. Much of her research focuses on Black historical contributions to agriculture, leveraging heritage to empower Black minorities to engage in the field, and understanding individuals from metropolitan areas similar to herself who engage in agriculture. As a teaching assistant, she has taught a course on presenting professional presentations in agricultural organizations. She has also co-led a club aimed at building community among rural students at her flagship institution and holds an additional position supporting an online cohort by building a sense of community through NC State distance education resource sharing and weekly communications. Her efforts align with her broader goal of increasing a sense of belonging for various underrepresented groups and Black minorities in agriculture.

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I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to those who have been instrumental in my journey, offering support, mentorship, resources, and encouragement. Without these individuals and their efforts, my journey would be different.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	vii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Problem Statement	2
Purpose and Research Objectives	2
Significance and Stakeholders	3
Limitations and Assumptions	4
Operational Definitions	6
Chapter 2: Literature Review	8
Black Experiences in Agriculture	10
Influences on Choosing Agriculture	14
The Challenge of Non-Rurality on Agricultural Engagement	20
Chapter 3: Methodology	28
Research Design	28
Participant Selection	30
Data Collection	32
Data Analysis	35
Ethical Considerations	39
Role and Background of Researcher	40
Chapter 4: Results	58
Objective 1 Results	59
Objective 2 Results	63
Objective 3 Results	73
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations	90
Conclusions	90
Recommendations	100
References	113
Appendices	132
Appendix A	133
Appendix B	137
Appendix C	138

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Praveena & Sasikumar's (2021) Summation of Colaizzi's Method for Data Analysis
..... 38

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Search Terms Used for Literature Review	10
Table 2	Participant Demographics	32
Table 3	Summary of Themes	58

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The hands comprising agriculture have been growing older and older with only a limited number of younger generations moving to step in (Halvorson, 2023). For this reason, in a country of 334 million (United States Census Bureau, 2024), urgency is being placed on recruiting younger generations to ensure that agriculture can continue. Within these efforts, surely, we have prioritized the need, and room, to recruit those of all backgrounds, races, and ethnicities... right? The reality is stark. Blacks comprise less than 2 % of the 3.4 million agricultural workers (National Center for Farmworker Health, 2022; USDA NASS, 2017). Even worse, the number of Blacks in agriculture continues to plummet (USDA NASS, 2017). While there is importance in addressing a youthful labor force in the agricultural field, there is also a need to emphasize the lack, and even declining amount, of Black diversity within it.

The 2 % of Black Americans engaged in agricultural work (Cox & Tamir, 2022) are likely to both be versed in agriculture and account for the meek numbers of Blacks in the field. This could be attributed to their environments which serve as the hubs for commodity production (Ajilore & Willingham, 2019). However, as urban sprawl persists, both land and the number of Blacks adept in agriculture decreases, suggesting a need to expand diversity beyond those more likely to be experienced in agricultural spaces (Farley, 1984; Talbert & Larke, 1995). With over four-fifths of America's Black population residing in the expanding urban and suburban areas (Cox & Tamir, 2022), Blacks hailing from non-rural environments may have the potential to drive diversity and expansion in agriculture (Roberts & Ramsey, 2017; White et al., 1991). However, without proper acknowledgment of their experiences, this opportunity remains distant.

Many Blacks currently engaged in agriculture have described it as mirroring that of other industries—failing in equitable support for their Black communities (Aminetzah et al., 2021). However, some non-rural Blacks still choose to pursue careers in agriculture even when they continue to persist as the minority. Why? The reasons for non-rural Black agricultural engagement are unique and may add value to recruitment initiatives within this domain.

Problem Statement

Non-rural Black minorities involved in agriculture possess specific motivations that present a special opportunity; however, they also face very distinctive challenges within their engagement in the field. Due to a growing awareness of the need for Black diversity in the agricultural workforce (Gonzalez, 2022), current literature needs to explore non-rural Blacks' reasons for pursuing and maintaining agricultural careers. Rouse (1980) explains that Black engagement in agriculture relies on their interest in the profession and effective recruitment efforts. Overlooking non-rural Blacks may be irresponsible because their unique motivations and experiences might identify ways to significantly diversify and bolster the agricultural industry. Beyond enhanced recruitment strategies that establish avenues for non-rural Black minorities to enter the agricultural landscape, this study may offer insight for initiatives aimed toward promoting equity and justice so that Black minorities can also excel in the vocation.

Purpose and Research Objectives

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of non-rural Blacks who have pursued or were currently engaged in agricultural careers. The researcher aimed to gain insight into understanding the influence of non-rurality on Black minorities choosing agriculture and what implications this may have for recruiting, retaining, and representing Black diversity in agricultural professions. The following research objectives steered the study:

1. Describe the influences of non-rural Blacks to pursue careers in agriculture.
2. Explore the unique challenges non-rural Blacks engaged in agriculture experienced during college and/or since being in their career(s), to identify potential curricular and professional barriers to entry in the field.
3. Describe the impact and/or implications of hailing from, and living in, a non-rural area on Black minorities pursuing the agricultural industry.

Significance and Stakeholders

This research holds significant implications for both agricultural and non-rural Black communities. Agricultural scholars and researchers stand to benefit from these insights by expanding the knowledge base on diversity and inclusion efforts within the profession. Researchers can contribute to meaningful advancements by developing effective strategies and making suggestions for curriculum, which scholars can then integrate (Clark et al., n.d.) to encourage greater participation among non-rural Black individuals. Extension agents play an important role in translating research into actionable strategies for communities (North Carolina State University, n.d.). By leveraging findings from this study, extension agents can tailor their outreach efforts to address the specific interests and experiences of non-rural Blacks. Collaboration between extension agents and other stakeholders can further facilitate positive change within agriculture.

Responsible government stakeholders, including policymakers, lobbyists, and agencies, are vehicles by which policies are implemented (Glied et al., 2018). By incorporating insights from the study into agricultural policy and workforce development initiatives, major government stakeholders can address barriers to entry for non-rural Blacks looking to enter the field. The

study may also inform government agencies of initiatives, studies, and programs that support Black communities, in which they should invest (National Academy of Sciences et al., 1999).

In addition to extension agents, scholars, and the government, Black communities are also key stakeholders in this research. By shedding light on the experiences and perspectives of non-rural Blacks in agriculture, this study aims to empower Black communities and open for them, new avenues of interest, aspiration, and opportunity.

The significance of this research lies in its commitment to addressing blind spots that have hindered the inclusion of Black and African-American communities in agriculture. This study holds potential to both facilitate succession planning for a new generation of agricultural workers and promote greater diversity within the field. Further, given that Black minorities often grapple with issues of food insecurity and economic development (Morales et al., 2021), this research highlights the need for equitable opportunities that enable non-rural Black individuals to thrive and contribute to their overall well-being and sustainability. Ensuring an inclusive agricultural landscape for non-rural Blacks provides a platform for diverse perspectives to be represented and resources to be allocated more equitably across the growing communities who need it.

Limitations and Assumptions

Limitations

This study is subject to the following limitations:

1. The low number of participants limits the transferability of results along with factors such as region, culture, and norms of various geographical regions, further limiting the applicability of the findings.

2. Self-reporting bias may increase the possibility that participants reported socially desirable responses or underreported sensitive information about their experience in agriculture, impacting the validity and reliability of data collected.
3. Resource constraints may impact the breadth and depth of the study.
4. The cross-sectional design may limit the ability to apply these findings throughout and across time.
5. The study is limited by its focus on the experiences and resiliency of successful non-rural Black individuals in agricultural careers, as it only includes participants who are college graduates and established professionals in their respective fields. This excludes individuals who may have abandoned their agricultural pursuits, whether due to personal choice or lack of support, thus skewing the findings.

Assumptions

Assumptions that informed this study are as follows:

1. Non-rural Black minorities hold specific motivations for engaging in agriculture that differ from their rural counterparts.
2. There is a growing awareness of the need for Black diversity within agriculture indicating a need and willingness of academia to explore issues related to non-rural Black participation.
3. Non-rural Blacks represent a significant potential resource for diversifying and bolstering the agricultural field.
4. Understanding factors influencing non-rural Blacks' decisions to pursue agriculture can lead to the development of effective recruitment strategies that bridge research and practice.

5. Black non-rural communities stand to benefit from increased career opportunities and representation.
6. Collaboration between academia, extension, and the federal government to make use of these findings, set in motion the creation, and implementation, of actionable strategies that promote diversity and sustainability for non-rural Black communities.
7. While the study may provide valuable insights or provoke new recruitment ideas, it is subject limitations that should be considered when interpreting and applying the findings.

Operational Definitions

1. Agricultural Careers/Field(s)/Industry/Occupations/Opportunities/Work: These terms refer to any or all occupations within the field of agriculture, including but not limited to farming, ranching, agribusiness, agricultural research, or education (National Center for O*Net Development). For the purposes of this research, terms related to agricultural careers and professions refer to the broader field of agriculture as a whole, rather than being limited solely to production agriculture.
2. Blacks: An African-American or any person(s) of African descent no matter nationality (National Archives, 2024).
3. Challenges: Obstacles, barriers, or difficulties (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), experienced by non-rural Blacks.
4. Non-metro: According to the USDA, “rural” is defined under the term nonmetropolitan (nonmetro). Nonmetro areas are measured by county, lie outside of larger metropolitan (metro) areas, and consist of 10,000 – 49, 999 residents or less

- (Sanders & Cromartie, 2024). For the purposes of this study, rural and nonmetro will be used interchangeably.
5. Metro: This term will be used interchangeably with “non-rural” and refers to urban and suburban areas (Sanders & Cromartie, 2024). The USDA defines metro areas as counties consisting of populations of 50,000 residents or more, including outlying counties should more than 25 % of said county’s residents commute inside metro boundaries for work or if 25% of the central county’s workers commute to the outlying county (Sanders & Cromartie, 2024).
 6. Non-rural Black Minorities: Refers to Black or African-American individuals who hail from metro areas consisting of 50,000 residents or more.
 7. Recruitment Strategies: Methods or initiatives to attract and retain non-rural Blacks in agricultural occupations.
 8. Sustainability: In context, this refers to the preservation of agriculture through the efforts of employing future generations of workers.

Chapter Summary

This chapter highlights the urgent need to diversify the aging agricultural workforce. While current efforts focus on recruiting youth, they often overlook the unique experiences, motivations, and challenges of non-rural Black individuals who choose agricultural careers despite an array of systemic, personal, and environmental barriers. These individuals represent a unique resource for driving diversity and by exploring those who’ve persisted in their agricultural pathways, this research seeks to inform recruitment efforts that promote equity, representation, and sustainable inclusion of Black communities in agriculture.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Non-rural Blacks constitute a significant proportion of the Black population in America (Cox & Tamir, 2022), and as large cities become more prevalent, the aspect of non-rurality presents significant challenges as this population of Blacks is uniquely distinct (Trotter et al., 2004). However, their concentration in urban areas also presents a unique opportunity to mobilize them within agriculture. Therefore, when considering factors that influence non-rural Black engagement in agriculture, attention is drawn to exploring what elements might contribute to, or deter, participation (Fraze et al., 2011). This literature review aims to shed light on the intricate relationship between Black experiences and the pursuit of agricultural careers, providing insight into the potential factors that either deter or encourage non-rural Black engagement in agriculture.

This research explored the experiences of non-rural Blacks engaged in agriculture by investigating factors influencing their pursuit of agricultural careers, the challenges they faced, and the impact metropolitan backgrounds had on their agricultural endeavors. The purpose of this chapter is to review relevant literature and provide further evidence for the necessity of this study within a theoretical framework grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT), asserting that race is a socially constructed concept intertwined with systems of power and oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Treviño et al., 2008), potentially explaining the failure to enable Black and African-American success and participation, as well as their disinterests, in agriculture.

CRT often contends that people of color are marginalized within society due to the persistence of race-based hierarchical structures and practices that perpetuate discrimination

(Treviño et al., 2008). As articulated by scholars such as Delgado and Stefancic (2000), CRT aims to “study and transform the relationship among race, racism, and power,” through factors such as “economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious” (p. 3). Leveraging the social context of America, both past and present, this literature review investigates aspects of race, agricultural engagement, and urbanization through a critical lens analyzing race and equity—or lack thereof—that shape the experiences of Black individuals and their engagement in agriculture.

In their proposal to analyze career development through the lens of CRT, Hunt and Rhodes (2021) build on the work of Diemer (2007), who asserts that racially constructed barriers in society significantly shape how Black youth develop career interests and aspirations. Historically, institutional racism has marginalized Black individuals by perpetuating the “racialization of different careers” (Hunt & Rhodes, 2021, p. 103), particularly those in STEM fields (Terrell & Terrell, 1981). However, Hunt and Rhodes (2021) argue that frameworks like CRT are essential for analyzing career development processes among marginalized groups because it centers race and power, allowing for the examination of systemic barriers' influence on minority career pathways. Even more, CRT helps highlight the role of critical consciousness and sociopolitical control—one's belief in their ability to challenge and change social and political systems—as key drivers of career commitment for Black minority youth (Diemer & Blustein, 2006). Understanding this, CRT provides a necessary framework to systemic barriers shaping career aspirations and choices among Black populations in relation to agriculture.

The engagement of *non-rural Black/African Americans*, specifically, is a relatively novel topic, as reflected in the limited literature available. For instance, a search in the Journal of African American Studies yielded zero relevant results for the term “non-rural Blacks.”

Similarly, in popular agricultural research databases such as Agricola, CAB Abstracts, Web of Science, and Pub Med, only a few relevant findings were uncovered. Despite this limitation, the researcher explored adjacent topics relevant to Black experiences and urbanization in agriculture.

The literature review incorporated primary and secondary sources, including peer-reviewed articles, personal testimonials, historical artifacts, government census data, etc. Various databases such as, but not limited to, North Carolina State University Libraries, Google Search Engine, Academic Search Complete, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Pub Med were utilized to gather relevant information. Efforts were made to prioritize findings from the last decade, with older sources included only when necessary to provide relevant context for the study. However, given the emerging exploration of urban Black minorities participating in agriculture, the literature extended beyond this timeframe to incorporate sources that could provide meaningful insights into this topic. The search strategy, illustrated in Table 1, outlines the terms and keywords used to identify relevant articles.

Table 1

Table of Search Terms Used for Literature Review Search

Exploring Diverse Perspectives of Non-Rurality on Agricultural Engagement

Literature Review Domain	Search Terms to be Used
Terms Describing Ethnicity	("Black*" OR "African-American*" OR "Minority" OR "People of Color" OR "POC*" OR "Person of Color*" OR "Ethnic*" OR "Racial Minority" OR "Non-white*" OR "Racial")
Non-Rural	("Non-rural*" OR "Urban*" OR "Suburban*" OR "City*" OR "Metropolitan*" OR "Municipal*" OR "Densely Populated*")
Perspective and Engagement	("Perspectives*" OR "Experiences*" OR "Engagement*" OR "Views*" OR "Attitudes*" OR "Outlook*" OR "Involvement*" OR "Awareness*" OR "exposure*" OR "Familiarity*" OR "Participation*" OR "Association*" OR "Contribution*")
Agriculture Careers	("Agriculture*" OR "Agricultural*" OR "Industry*" OR "Careers*" OR "Job*" OR "Field*" OR "Work*" "Profession*" OR "Occupation*" OR "Business*" OR "Service*" OR "Company*")

This chapter is organized into three sections: Black Experiences in Agriculture, Influences on Choosing Agriculture, and Challenges of Non-rurality on Agricultural Engagement. Each section contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping the experiences of non-rural Blacks in the agricultural domain.

Black Experiences in Agriculture

In the annals of American history, the tale of Black minorities has been one of exploitation and erasure, nowhere more evident than in agriculture. Layman and Civita (2022) underscore the entrenched legacy of exploitation, highlighting. This narrative of how agricultural industries have historically served the interests of the majority while muting the voices and contributions of Black Americans marginalization, rooted in centuries of systemic oppression, persists today, shaping the landscape of agricultural engagement for people of color (POC) (Layman & Civita, 2022; Russell et al., 2021). From the dark shadows of slavery to the ongoing struggle against racist land policies, Black communities have faced formidable barriers, resulting in a complex and challenging context for African American participation in agriculture (Horst & Marion, 2019). This section explored the historical injustices and discriminatory practices that have defined Black experiences in agriculture, providing insight into the enduring impact of these forces on contemporary agricultural landscapes.

Black American History. “Land of the Free” is one of the biggest contradictions and hypocrisies of American ideology. In 1619, the practice of Black enslavement began in colonial America, marking the beginning of a deplorable era, where four *million* Black individuals were enslaved to serve the interests of White dominance and economic gain (Fickelman, n.d.; Horst & Marion, 2019; Snyder, 2013). Slavery, in its essence, was the epitome of hell, where Blacks were subjected to unimaginable horrors, from being whipped and beaten, torn apart by vicious hounds,

and even forced into barbaric “Nigger fights” (Blume, 2017; Lussana, 2010, p. 901; Pearson, 2012). African American slaves found themselves relegated as property where they engaged in backbreaking agricultural labor on plantations, mercilessly tasked with harvesting cotton, tobacco, and other commodities amidst inhumane conditions (Gruber, 2021).

Even following the “end” of slavery, the African American race continued under White rule as they faced troubles in securing education, capital, finance, and land that led to practices of sharecropping and indentured slavery (Daniels et al., 2023; Horst & Marion, 2019). However, a glimmer of hope dawned for the Black community as leaders such as Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, and others, quite literally, mobilized African American success in the South through the dissemination of agricultural education and skill (Daniels et al., 2023; Horst & Marion, 2019). Success would be evident as Blacks, expanding on their agricultural knowledge, applied it so diligently that by the early 1900s, the race would make up 14% of the agricultural workforce with over 15 million acres of Black-owned land (Horst & Marion, 2019; Price, 2023; Williams, 2006). Nonetheless, this progress was abruptly stunted in the 20th Century as institutional racism and discriminatory practices replaced the overt forms of White supremacy to plague agricultural success for Blacks (Black Land Loss, 2024; Horst & Marion, 2019; Price, 2023).

Agricultural Policies and Practices. Black minorities faced one of the steepest declines in farmland ownership and agricultural engagement between 1900 and 2017, with their acreage plummeting from 15 million to 2 million, and their representation in the agricultural labor force dropping from 14% to a mere 1.4% (Black Land Loss, 2024; Congressional Research Service, 2021; Horst & Marion, 2019; Price, 2023). These statistics tell the tales of racial disparities attributed to racist policies and practices that intentionally failed in support of Black and African

American communities (Black Land Loss, 2024). Underscored are broader patterns of systemic oppression, wherein the American system continually sought additional ways to perpetuate cycles of poverty and unjust treatment among Black individuals.

From the shackles of slavery emerged the chains of segregation, denying Black Americans access to resources and opportunities enjoyed by their White counterparts. Organizations, banks, and government agencies exploited White racial hierarchy to systematically strip Blacks of their opportunity and property (Francis et al., 2023). Notably, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) played a pivotal role in this erosion of Black land ownership (Bustillo, 2023; Francis et al., 2023).

By turning a blind eye to years of discriminatory practices, the USDA employed intimidation tactics, perpetuated the denial of farm credits, and ignored grievances from Black farmers (Cowan & Feder, 2013; Francis et al., 2023). This neglectful approach resulted in forced partition sales and other injustices, stripping Black individuals of land and opportunities. (Cowan & Feder, 2013; Francis et al., 2023). Amidst the USDA's scandalous practices, the infamous *Pigford v. Glickman* case emerged in 1999, pitting Black farmers against the USDA and resulting in a 100-million-dollar settlement for Blacks in 2008 (Cowan & Feder, 2013). However, numerous Black farmers faced hurdles in receiving their rightful payouts due to unclear guidelines, bureaucratic red tape, and missed deadlines (Francis et al., 2023). A subsequent settlement of 1.2 million dollars was issued two years later, yet still, many missed out on compensation due to rigorous processing procedures and denial (Bustillo, 2023; Cowan & Feder, 2013). The economic impact of Black-owned land loss is substantial, with the potential to represent a significant portion of a country's GDP. For example, in 2020, such losses could amount to figures that would rank a country 41st out of 231 countries worldwide in terms of

GDP (Francis et al., 2023). While some strides have been made to rectify the impact of these injustices, little has been done to adequately support Black farmers (Bustillo, 2023).

Historical and ongoing systemic oppression has marginalized thousands of Black individuals in agriculture, leading many to lose interest in, and connection to, the industry (Reynolds, n.d.). Those who remain involved are often older, less educated, and operate small-scale farms, struggling to compete with larger agricultural enterprises (Lyson, 1980). Advocates and Black agricultural workers have stressed the importance of increased representation of POC in agricultural decision-making roles, recognizing that such representation is crucial for advocating for Black rights, driving change, and ensuring Black success in the field (Bustillo, 2023; Cowan & Feder, 2013). The history of Black experiences in agriculture has undeniably shaped African American perceptions of and engagement within the industry. This reality underscores the crucial need for a thorough examination of the factors contributing to the current landscape of agricultural influence on Black young adults and youth.

Influences on Choosing Agriculture

Agriculture faces a crisis. Despite a growing number of job openings, there is a significant shortage of individuals willing to enter the industry (Daynard, 2010). Even further, compounding the issue of an aging workforce, with the average agricultural worker surpassing the age of 40, there is a glaring lack of diversity (Alston et al., 2019; Ikner et al., 2023; Touzeau, 2019). As society hurdles into a rapidly expanding and evolving world, there is a pressing need to address the reluctance of younger generations to pursue careers in agriculture (Touzeau, 2019). Although research in this area is still limited, recent studies have begun to explore the various factors influencing the career and educational choices of young Americans (Touzeau,

2019). While some of these factors relate to physical resources, others are more closely tied to personal sentiments or emotional aspects (Ikner et al., 2023; Touzeau, 2019).

Various factors, down to gender, can have sway on who pursues agricultural careers (Touzeau, 2019). Therefore, it is important to examine aspects that might discourage or prevent youth and young adults from entering agricultural spaces. Through a questionnaire, Ikner et al. (2023) employed quantitative methods to examine factors influencing enrollment in agricultural career pathway courses among high school students. They found engagement was shaped by an array of elements including environmental factors, genetics, and skill. Analyzing influencers in career and curriculum choices amongst youth may help identify specific challenges related to the current context of agricultural recruitment and pursuit (Ikner et al., 2023).

Within young adult populations, one significant barrier is the challenge of accessing land and capital (Key, 2019). Land ownership and financial constraints are primary struggles faced by younger generations seeking to enter the field, leading to substantial mental and financial stressors that dissuade this demographic even further from pursuing the profession (Ikner et al., 2023; Key, 2019). Additionally, young individuals often find it challenging to develop emotional connections with the land compared to older generations (Touzeau, 2019). While not a physical barrier, the lack of attachment to agriculture among young populations is noteworthy as it aligns with current literature highlighting cognitive and personal factors influencing the career and curriculum choices of youth and young adults (Ikner et al., 2023; Touzeau, 2019).

Lack of interest, knowledge, and perceptions of agriculture profoundly influence how younger generations view and engage with the industry. Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (1980) elucidates the role of intrinsic motivators in pursuing agriculture, potentially explaining why interest, or the lack thereof, often hampers recruitment efforts as students and

young adults remain disenchanted with the idea of agriculture. Classes featuring engaging content related to agricultural concepts are typically more likely to develop students' interest in pursuing agricultural studies and careers (Ikner et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the challenge lies in addressing the prevailing lack of engagement in agricultural curricula, which has hindered efforts to increase the participation of younger generations in the agricultural sector (Ikner et al., 2023; Touzeau, 2019).

Research has also shown that formative years play a crucial role in knowledge development (Fraze et al., 2011). During this period, education aids in shaping perceptions and guiding youth exploration of, and exposure to, potential careers (Fraze et al., 2011; Talbert & Larke, 1995). The concept of utilizing early childhood as a means of exposure to various careers and potential interests offers an intriguing perspective on addressing the lack of interest in agricultural landscapes by first focusing on methods to engage them with agricultural curricula. (Talbert & Larke, 1995). While identifying factors influencing youth and young adult engagement is a great start, it is not enough to mobilize a new generation of agricultural leaders. Factors influencing agricultural pursuit are multifaceted and convoluted, and addressing each aspect is essential.

Research indicates that ethnicity is another significant factor in shaping agricultural pursuits (Talbert & Larke, 1995). Non-minority students are typically more inclined to choose agricultural paths, driven by perceptions of fewer barriers, greater career opportunities, and fewer negative stereotypes compared to their Black counterparts (Talbert & Larke, 1995). This dynamic reveals a new layer of complexity in the field, particularly in addressing the shortage of both manpower and diversity. Therefore, it becomes imperative to identify both the motivators and barriers to agricultural pursuit specifically for Black individuals to ensure inclusive success.

Black Minority Influences on Choosing Agriculture. In response to enduring barriers in the South that continually impeded progress for the Black community, a significant demographic shift unfolded during the 1900s known as the Great Migration. This migration witnessed a large-scale movement of African Americans from the rural South to the North, driven by a quest for opportunities beyond the confines of agriculture, often tied to their painful historical experiences (Touzeau, 2019). For Black individuals, barriers to agriculture were not just perceived; they were tangible and systemic aspects that continually challenged their success (Talbert & Larke, 1995). Barriers such as land loss, economic disparities, discriminatory practices, and a lack of government support and funding have a long history tied to influencing the thoughts, perceptions, and pursuit of agriculture for African Americans. Today, these challenges continue to exert influence on subsequent generations, shaping their paths and opportunities in agriculture (Touzeau, 2019). The prevalence of negative associations, emotions, and opinions among Black individuals regarding agriculture, coupled with their underrepresentation in today's agricultural workforce, underscores the need for a nuanced examination that distinguishes their experiences from those of other racial groups.

Numerous factors contribute to Black participation in agriculture, yet underlying these are Black perceptions and attitudes, shaping the decisions made regarding agricultural pursuits. In a 2002 study by Wingbach and Cummings, Black individuals rated their perceived opportunities in areas of structural power and leadership within agriculture as the lowest compared to their White and Hispanic counterparts. However, in a study by Ikner et al. that explored students' interests in agricultural career pathways in 2023, Blacks displayed the highest average interest in structural power systems and reform. In exploring the factors shaping Black

engagement in agriculture, it becomes evident that the desire to emancipate oppressive elements within the field significantly influences their pursuit (Ikner et al., 2023; Touzeau, 2019).

The Black agrarian frame is unique, and much of its power lies in the desire of some to oppose oppression and reclaim what has been historically stolen from them (Touzeau, 2019). Simply put, Blacks' need to hold power comes from their long history of having none (Ikner et al., 2023; Wingbach & Cummings, 2002). Despite the negative associations of agriculture with slavery and systemic oppression, the idea of autonomy serves as a positive motivator for Black minorities, allowing them to take charge and control of their narrative, reclaiming agency over their labor, land, and success (Touzeau, 2019).

This shift in perspective invokes a "call to home" as Blacks seek social, economic, and figurative independence through agricultural work (Touzeau, 2019, p. 47). Many are motivated to work outside traditional agricultural norms, becoming agents of diversification and change (Touzeau, 2019). Blacks engaging in agriculture perceive themselves as champions of historical justice and contributors to territorial liberation (Touzeau, 2019), potentially inspiring others to join the agricultural industry. The ability to find empowerment and a sense of independence in agriculture despite a traumatic past serves as a powerful motivator for Black and African American communities, but various factors still limit Black agricultural engagement and success.

Agricultural curriculum that incorporates Black heritage narratives and history is instrumental in bridging Black populations with agricultural careers. By highlighting the significant legacy of agricultural contributions made by Black communities, such education empowers individuals to realize their potential and pursue careers in agriculture (Atkins, 2013; Daniels et al., 2023). However, a disheartening lack of culturally relevant agricultural curriculum often leaves Black populations ignorant or apprehensive about the opportunities in this domain

(Watkins, 1993). Relevant cultural schooling has been shown to play a large role in exposure to potential careers in agriculture and increases the personal experiences and connections Blacks make for themselves without relying on long-held generalizations (Daniels et al., 2023; Talbert & Larke, 1995). Yet, many educational resources, from farms to classrooms, present White-washed, Eurocentric narratives lacking accurate representation and historical truths essential for Black empowerment and courage (Brown et al., 2022; Lerner, 2022; Talbert & Larke, 1995; Watkins, 1993).

To foster positive outlooks among Black individuals, it is essential to provide opportunities for immersive learning experiences that build agricultural competencies and increase access to diverse career pathways (Brown et al., 2022). However, African Americans often lack access to such opportunities due to disparities in agricultural education and outreach efforts (Brown et al., 2022; Frazee et al., 2011; Frick et al., 1995). Agricultural initiatives, organizations, and careers tend to prioritize reaching White audiences, leaving Black individuals, students, and youth neglected and overlooked (Touzeau, 2019). Even instrumental youth development programs in agriculture that both expose and educate students to the industry, such as 4-H, frequently fail to reach Black and African American populations (Talbert & Larke, 1995). For example, a National 4-H Index Study surveyed over 2,100 youth across 14 states, representing regions from the West and East Coasts to the Central U.S. (Gagnon, 2023). The study found that more than 86% of respondents were White, while Black participants made up only 3% (Gagnon, 2023). Additionally, Black youth were more likely to be new members and had lower overall involvement rates (Gagnon, 2023).

Without access to these opportunities, it is unrealistic to expect Black perceptions of agriculture to improve. To make agriculture an attractive and viable career choice for Black

Americans, addressing issues such as underrepresentation in education and lack of exposure to agricultural experiences should be top priority. Fostering environments that nurture passions and empower Black individuals within the field is crucial for creating meaningful change (Brown et al., 2023; Frick et al., 1995).

Effectively marketing agriculture could prove useful in attempts to establish such passion and empowerment (Borck & Bell, 2010), particularly for Black individuals. When provided experiences that foster interest through representation, Black individuals can see themselves reflected in, and resonate with, Black professionals engaged in agricultural careers (Thompson, 2023). Therefore, marketing techniques that highlight Black participation serve as powerful strategies for promoting agriculture and emphasize the importance of strategic advertising and representation when attempting to engage with and reaching specific communities.

However, the absence of role models of similar racial backgrounds within agricultural contexts places significant limits on what Black students and youth believe that they can achieve (Chen & Davis, 2014; Harris & BrckaLorenz, 2017; Reiter, 2020). Studies have demonstrated that positive role models of the same race can significantly increase student interest and participation in academic and career pursuits, particularly among Black youth (Chen et al., 2014; Harris & BrckaLorenz, 2017; Reiter & Reiter, 2020; Talbert & Larke, 1995). Thus, prioritizing the advancement of Blacks in professional and educational settings within agriculture could do more to bolster current interests and participation in the field. Interestingly, the absence of representation, despite being a negative factor, also serves as a positive motivator for Black participation in agriculture. Some Blacks recognize the need for positive role models for youth to look up to, inspiring them to illustrate the "true color of agriculture" for Black minorities themselves (Touzeau, 2019, p. 56). The natural passion to inspire and advocate for minority

groups through representation holds an advantage, however only when the majority of the audience can be reached where they are predominantly located.

The largest concentration of the Black population lives in urban areas where access to agriculture is more than limited (Talbert & Larke, 1995). This not only complicates efforts to recruit experienced Blacks in agriculture but also introduces a unique set of challenges and motivations specific to non-rural groups (Talbert & Larke, 1995). Research that explicitly explores this population is essential to identify the distinct challenges and motivations unique to urban and suburban populations holding an interest in agriculture (Touzeau, 2019).

The Challenge of Non-Rurality on Agricultural Engagement

Society's traditional distinctions between the "farm and non-farm sectors" have been gradually eroded by industrialization over the past century, leading to a blending of the two distinct spheres (Paarlberg, 1978, p. 769). With urbanization continuing to expand, the once-dominant influence of agriculture on American life has waned, necessitating rapid adaptation to shifting landscapes and societal structures (Paarlberg, 1978). This calls for a critical assessment of the potential of non-rural residents in increasing agricultural occupational outlooks.

Metropolises, characterized by their dense populations, offer diverse economic activities and a plethora of career opportunities (Scott & Storper, 2015). However, the absence of direct interactions with agriculture in these non-rural areas excludes residents from valuable agricultural experiences (Frick et al., 1995). This lack of access to agricultural culture, land, and involvement has significant implications for agricultural literacy and perceptions which, in turn, influence the pursuit of agricultural careers for non-rural residents (Frick et al., 1995; Ikner et al., 2023; Talbert & Larke, 1995; Touzeau, 2019; Wingbach & Cummings, 2002).

Urban agricultural engagement is not a new topic; for years, researchers have discussed the challenges of engaging urban communities in agriculture, yet these difficulties persist. Urban environments present unique circumstances, from community involvement to education, that shape the way agricultural programs are implemented. Warner and Washburn (2009) identified key challenges faced by urban agriscience teachers in a Delphi study, highlighting difficulties in involving both the broader community and parents in agriscience courses. Urban-specific factors were likely to contribute to these challenges. For instance, the study found that students in urban settings were more likely to live in single-parent households, unlike their rural counterparts, making parental involvement and engagement in agricultural education more difficult struggles (Warner & Washburn, 2009). This lack of parental engagement may also contribute to a broader lack of awareness about agriculture among urban families.

Urban lifestyles often come with additional obstacles, such as financial instability and the pressures of single-parent households, making it even more challenging for parents and the community to engage with agricultural education while juggling everyday struggles (Warner & Washburn, 2009). Communicating the relevance and opportunities of production agriculture to urban students is particularly difficult because, as Warner and Washburn (2009) note, “agricultural programs in urban schools are not isolated from the issues related to the family that is faced by general education in urban areas” (p. 112). This is a significant barrier, as the success of urban agricultural programs “can be strengthened with parental support” (Warner & Washburn, 2009, p. 113). The role of urban community engagement in sustaining agricultural education has been explored by other researchers as well. Jayarante et al. (2019) and Anderson (2013) examine how community involvement, or lack thereof, may hinder recruitment efforts in agricultural spaces for urban students, citing various urban-specific challenges.

The role of Extension is pivotal in engaging urban communities in agriculture. A historical research study examined the evolution of urban Cooperative Extension efforts, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities unique to urban environments, which often require distinct approaches within the Cooperative Extension System (Campbell & Edwards, 2024). The study found that while Extension has made efforts to adapt its mission to include urban areas and address urban stakeholders, significant challenges remain. Chief among these is the need to actively engage urban populations and challenge the prevailing perception that Extension primarily serves rural, White communities—an obstacle that must be addressed to foster greater urban involvement in agricultural initiatives (Campbell & Edwards, 2024).

A common issue perpetuating these challenges, as identified by researchers, is the lack of knowledge and schema related to agricultural concepts within urban communities (Fraze et al., 2011; Henry et al., 2014; Jean-Philippe et al., 2017; Warner, 2006). Many studies emphasize the role of literacy in shifting perceptions and behaviors. One study examined how agricultural knowledge could create opportunities for urban students by exploring the perspectives of individuals directly involved in agricultural education at an urban charter school. Researchers found a general belief that increasing agricultural literacy could expand career opportunities for urban students (Henry et al., 2014). Participants noted that addressing knowledge gaps could reshape urban students' perceptions and awareness of available agricultural opportunities (Henry et al., 2014). While the lack of agricultural knowledge in urban communities presents a challenge, researchers believe it also offers an opportunity to introduce innovative educational approaches that enhance agricultural literacy.

Efforts to expand urban agricultural curricula have sparked discussions on both traditional and non-traditional agricultural education. Yopp et al. (2018) sought to challenge

stereotypes surrounding urban “non-traditional” agricultural programs, emphasizing that while a lack of agricultural knowledge in urban communities presents a challenge, it also offers an opportunity. The authors argue that the novelty of the subject matter, combined with urban students’ limited exposure to agriculture, creates a space for exploration. These programs introduce students to new opportunities, which are often perceived as exciting and engaging (Yopp et al., 2018). While typically seen as a barrier to implementing agricultural education in urban areas, the lack of prior experience can actually serve as a foundation for incorporating traditional agricultural content, such as hands-on experiences, because students tend to find the unfamiliar subject matter intriguing (Yopp et al., 2018). Other researchers also discuss how this challenge can be reframed as an opportunity to build upon students’ existing perceptions and develop more holistic understandings of agriculture, moving beyond common misconceptions held by urban populations (Hess & Trexler, 2011).

A 1996 study by Mabie and Baker explored the impact of agricultural experiential instruction in an urban elementary school and examined its effects on students’ understanding of science-related cognitive applications. The findings indicated that experiential activities positively influenced the development of core science skills, enhancing STEM and critical thinking abilities necessary for academic success (Mabie & Baker, 1996). This suggests that providing agricultural experiences may not only increase urban students’ interest and knowledge in agriculture but also enhance the skills necessary for them to consider it a viable career path in the future (Mabie & Baker, 1996). Mabie and Baker (1996) recommended student-centered experiential learning as a means to support decision-making processes related to urban students’ learning and success.

Hess and Trexler (2011) both support and caution the use of experiential learning in agricultural education. Their study examined urban elementary students' understanding of agri-food systems after participating in agricultural experiences and found that, despite exposure, students generally lacked a well-developed schema for understanding agriculture. This held true regardless of whether their experience came from school field trips (Hess & Trexler, 2011) or personal gardening ties (Trexler, 2000). These findings imply that while experiential learning can be valuable, experience alone is not sufficient to develop a strong conceptual understanding of agricultural concepts.

Other research explores factors beyond merely providing access to knowledge and experiences that may be essential for successfully implementing agricultural literacy in urban areas. A descriptive study by Anderson and Kim (2009) examined leadership development preferences among urban students involved in FFA, revealing the importance of offering urban youth opportunities to grow as leaders. Similarly, Anderson (2013) and McKim et al. (2017) identified personal development opportunities in agricultural programs as key motivators for urban minority students to pursue agricultural curricula, emphasizing critical areas to address when engaging these audiences. Additionally, agricultural programs have been shown to provide alternative pathways for at-risk youth. Dickey et al. (2020) highlighted adolescence as a pivotal time to engage urban minority populations in agriculture. Their qualitative study on the impact of an urban agricultural program for at-risk youth found that participants experienced transformative growth—shifting from isolation and destructive behaviors to developing skills in collaboration, leadership, and confidence. This study illustrates how agriculture can serve as a powerful tool for empowerment and opportunity within urban minority communities.

While research has explored either urban or minority involvement in agriculture, there remains a gap in examining the unique experiences of non-rural Black and African American populations specifically. These groups represent a more distinct and nuanced subset of urban and minority demographics, requiring targeted approaches to engagement.

The challenge of non-rurality for young Black adults and youth is critical to address (Tarpley & Miller, 2004). However, the notable oversight in focusing recruitment initiatives for agricultural programs in Black non-rural areas hinders efforts to increase diversity in the field and contributes to disparities in both perceived and realized agricultural opportunities for African Americans, further exacerbating inequities in access (Fraze et al., 2011; Jean-Philippe et al., 2017). Acknowledging the uniqueness of both metro areas *and* the Black communities that reside within them is crucial to achieving true integration of African Americans into agricultural spaces (Campbell, 2016; Sherman, 2023).

Non-rural Black minority populations require targeted efforts that move beyond surface-level or unsubstantiated attempts, as their environments and identities necessitate more intentional engagement. While education is often proposed as a means to encourage Black participation in agriculture, minorities in non-rural settings frequently lack access to agricultural curricula and the motivation to pursue them, leading to deficiencies in agricultural knowledge, interest, and skills (Fraze et al., 2011; Jean-Philippe et al., 2017; Warner, 2006). Limited exposure to agriculture continues to pose a significant barrier to recruitment efforts, reinforcing long-held negative perceptions, attitudes, and opinions toward the field (Jean-Philippe et al., 2017).

However, despite these challenges, the concentration of Black urban youth in inner-city areas presents an opportunity to cultivate positive perceptions and encourage agricultural career pathways within this demographic (Henry et al., 2014; Warner & Washburn, 2007). Recognizing

these dynamics, this thesis explored the engagement of non-rural Black individuals in agricultural careers despite their limited educational and experiential opportunities in agriculture and examined their continued interest in pursuing agricultural pathways (Fraze et al., 2011).

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviews existing literature to explore the experiences of Black individuals in agriculture, focusing on factors that influence their career paths, the challenges they encounter, and the potential impact of non-rurality on agricultural pursuits. It aims to provide evidence supporting the need for this study, framing it within the context of CRT to understand how race affects the success and participation of Black individuals in agriculture.

The literature review examines the historical and current context of race, agricultural engagement, and urbanization. It analyzes equity issues that have shaped the experiences of Black individuals in agriculture, including systemic barriers and discriminatory practices that have marginalized and disconnected the race from the industry. The review also addresses factors influencing career choices in agriculture, such as limited access to land and capital for youth, and the increased challenges of engaging non-rural students in agricultural spaces, from due to distinct differences in education and career pathways.

In light of these challenges, Chapters 1 and 2 justify the focus on non-rural Black individuals' engagement in agriculture by describing the influences on their pursuits, exploring their curricular and career experiences, and examining the implications of their non-rural backgrounds on their journeys.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This qualitative research explored the experiences of non-rural Black minorities engaged in agricultural careers. The research objectives that follow guided the methodology of this study:

1. Describe the influences of non-rural Blacks to pursue careers in agriculture.
2. Explore the unique challenges non-rural Blacks engaged in agriculture experienced during college and/or since being in their career(s).
3. Describe the impact and/or implications hailing from, and living in, a non-rural area has on Black minorities pursuing the agricultural industry.

This chapter will specify the following: the theoretical perspective of the study along with its design, procedures for data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, and a statement of position from the researcher.

Research Design

Qualitative research can be defined as “an iterative process in which improved understanding...is achieved by making...distinctions resulting from getting closer to the [observed] phenomenon” (Aspers & Corte, 2021, p. 599). Its nature to understand the dimensions of human experiences relies on subjective narratives that detail and explain the essence of humanity (Fossey et al., 2002). This study employs a qualitative research design that aims to understand the nature of a particular phenomenon (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 718) resulting in non-rural Black engagement in agriculture.

A phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to focus on studying lived experiences to understand and acquire objective observations regarding this occurrence

(Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology, as described by Stanford University (2013), explores the appearances of things [phenomenon] as they appear in our [subjective] experiences, which sheds light on the meanings attributed to those experiences. This philosophical approach is particularly relevant to this qualitative research as it places the lived experiences of non-rural Black minorities at the focal point (Creswell, 2007; Henry et al., 2014; Neubauer et al., 2019) for a comprehensive exploration of the interplay between race, non-rurality, and agricultural engagement.

The rationale behind using this method is supported by current literature that addresses similar concerns. For example, Woodward-Davis (2023) conducted a study examining the lived experiences of 19 Black women engaged in agriculture in the Southern United States and the influence their post-secondary education had on that involvement. The researcher attributed the “dissecting [of]...experiences” to a phenomenological approach which uncovered five key themes including, a sense of belongingness, safety, education, and needs of both the psych and esteem of participants (Woodward-Davis, 2023, p. 3). Similarly, McBride (2023), employed a phenomenological approach by which he aimed to make meaning of Black professionals engaged in the agricultural industry and their “embeddedness experiences at work...” (p. 49). McBride details his use of the phenomenological approach as a means to explore “how participants made sense of their...experiences and...transformed [their] experiences into consciousness” (McBride, 2023, p. 51; Patton, 2015).

Schütz (1970) views researchers as responsible for analyzing how individuals behave within society to interpret the ways they give meaning to social phenomena, as outlined in his philosophy of sociological phenomenology. By adopting a phenomenological approach, the researcher enables the voices and stories of individuals, allowing for more personal and detailed

descriptions of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2002). The prevalence and support of phenomenological approaches in similar research and literature justified the use of this methodological approach to inform and guide the data collection process for achieving the study's objectives.

Participant Selection

Wood (2014) references the insights of Erlandson et al. (1993), who argue against the use of “random or representative [sampling] in naturalistic inquiry,” contending that such methods fail to account for the individualistic nature of participants. Instead, Erlandson et al. (1976) advocate for techniques such as purposive sampling to maximize the “discovery of patterns and problems” within the specific context being studied (Wood, 2014, p. 58). The purpose of purposive sampling is to carefully select participants who closely match the specific goals of the research with the aim of strengthening the study's trustworthiness of outcomes (Campbell et al., 2020). Emphasized is quality over quantity, suggesting that sample size, while important, should place less emphasis on how large or small a group is and more emphasis on ensuring those participating in the research are truly indicative of the experiences one wishes to study (Wood et al., 2014).

Campbell et al.'s (2020) analysis of the purposive sampling approach elucidated fundamental aspects including its: (1) credibility, through member checking and logical participant selection, thereby enhancing the transparency of the study, (2) the transferability enabling researchers to evaluate the extent to which findings can be applied to other populations, facilitated by clear criteria for participant selection, (3) the dependability of results, ultimately enhancing (4) the confirmability of the research process and interpretation of findings (Campbell et al., 2020). The data collection process for this study followed patterns observed in

phenomenological qualitative work within the field which utilized this sampling method to guarantee information-rich responses from targeted, and knowledgeable, audiences.

Henry et al. (2014) analyzed the perceived perceptions and challenges of agricultural education within urban school settings and utilized purposive sampling to gather comprehensive insights from individuals with specific, and relevant, expertise regarding agricultural education in urban high schools. White et al. (1991) aimed to address declining enrollment in agricultural majors in post-secondary education and the potential to rectify such issues through the recruitment of inner-city high school minorities. This study, which also employed purposive sampling, underwent deliberate attempts to identify those most meaningful to the study's objectives (Kerlinger, 1964; White et al., 1991). Furthermore, Frazee et al. (2011) employed this sampling technique in a study aiming to explore the perceptions of urban high school students regarding agricultural careers and majors following their participation in a summer agricultural communications workshop. In line with both related literature and the specific inclusion criteria for participation in the study, the researcher applied purposive sampling methods to identify participants who meet the study's requirements and fulfill its objectives. Additionally, personal connections and snowball sampling were employed to further identify candidates for the study. Participants included Black individuals who had graduated from a four-year degree-awarding institution in any subject area, were from a metro area in the United States, and were engaged in an agricultural career.

Table 2, inspired by a similar chart illustrated in a study by Yost (2018) and Touzeau (2019), details participant demographics, including the metro area from which they were raised/lived, their occupation, the title of any degrees held, and the number of years they were engaged in agriculture.

Table 2*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Metro Background	Current Occupation(s)	Title of Degree(s)	Total Yrs. Engaged in Agriculture
Nia Tilman, PhD	Major City in North Carolina	- Research Scientist at [University]	- Ag Economics - Ag Education	20
Casey Greens, PhD	Major City in Tennessee	- Faculty Member at [University]	- Ag Education - Ag Communication Ag Education	10
Elijah Bale, M.S.	Raised in Multiple Major Cities	- President at [Agricultural Company]	- Ag Economics - Ag Education	30
Thomas Hayes, M.S.	Major City in Illinois	- Co-Founder of [Consulting Company]	- Ag and Consumer Economics - Ag Extension and Education	29
Anthony Fields, PhD	Raised in Multiple Cities	- Executive Director of [State] Commission for Agricultural Education - Executive Director of [Non-Profit Organization]	- Agriculture - Management and Organizational Leadership - Organizational Leadership	20
Jordan Forage, B.S.	Major City in Tennessee	- Conservationist for [Federal Agency]	-Ag Business	10
Stephanie Lands, M.S.	Major City in Illinois	- HR for [Agricultural Company]	- Biosystems and Ag Engineering - Horticulture Biology -Plant Sciences - International Ag and Rural Development	18

Data Collection

Data collection commenced after receiving approval from North Carolina State University's Institutional Review Board on August 21, 2024. Candidates for the study were identified and contacted via email, or by phone, to advertise participation (Petrescu, 2017). The researcher recruited seven participants, as the nature of phenomenological studies prioritizes an

in-depth data collection process of human experience over a large sample size (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015).

All participants were directed to fill out an informed consent form prior to participation. Informed consent is the process of informing potential research participants about the study and obtaining their permission to take part in it (Macklin, 1999). The signed informed consent form serves as evidence that the researcher provided relevant information regarding the study and confirms that the participant acknowledged receiving it (Macklin, 1999). However, a signed form does not equate to participant understanding; therefore, informed consent is a communication process between the researcher and participant that takes “time and effort” to ensure understanding (Macklin, 1999, p. 83). The researcher remained diligent in this process by allowing participants to ask questions until clarification was reached. To ensure participant confidentiality and to allow for transparency regarding ethical considerations in subsequent stages of the data collection process, pseudonyms were assigned to disguise any partaking in the study (Heaton, 2017) as data was collected over 16 weeks in the fall semester of 2024.

Semi-structured interviews can be explained as open-ended “template questions asked in a specific order” (Petrescu, 2017 p. 38). They have been widely employed in qualitative research to elicit responses reflective of participants' personal experiences (Henry et al., 2014; Merriam et al., 2009). The core aim of this methodology is to examine the emotions, perceptions, and subjective experiences of individuals, with the intention of transferring the ultimate findings to a broader scope of interest/phenomenon (Petrescu, 2017). These interviews provide structured guidance while keeping the focus of the responses aligned with the aims of the study (Barriball, 1994). Denzin (2009) proposed that the validity and dependability of this method in qualitative research stems from the capacity to standardize the open-ended questions for participants, to

elicit responses pertinent to the study's focus, while still granting participants freedom to articulate their experiences using wording and expressions resonating most accurately with their personal. By standardizing questions and providing structured flexibility to accommodate variations in participants' experiences, researchers can accurately compare responses across all participants, resulting in the emergence of themes and results that are more reliable (Barriball, 1994; Petrescu, 2017). This study employed three, 90-minute semi-structured interviews per participant, and consisted of a combination of open- and closed-ended questions (Smolski & Shulman, 2024). These interviews adhered to the interview protocol outlined in Appendix A.

The questions outlined in the protocol are derived from prior research on similar topics and are designed to comprehensively address all aspects of the phenomena under investigation (Petrescu, 2017). By reviewing existing research, interview questions were crafted to align with established gaps in the literature which helped guide the development of an interview protocol designed to address those areas. Additionally, the protocol includes probing questions to ensure clarity and depth of information for both the interviewer and the interviewee. Probes are used in interviews to elaborate on responses to provide more detail and understanding of the participant's feelings, thoughts, experiences, actions, etc. (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023).

Examples could include "Tell me more about *X*", "Can you explain what you mean by *Z*", or "What I hear is that by *X*, you feel *Z*, is this correct? Please explain." Probes can be both verbal and non-verbal. Kallio et al. (2016) offer examples of verbal probing, such as "repeating the participants' point" or "expressing interest," and illustrate a non-verbal probe, such as silence, to encourage further thought and expression from the interviewee (2016, p. 2060). This approach facilitates the interviewee's understanding, and engagement, with the interview process (Kallio et al., 2016). While probes were pre-formulated, the semi-structured nature of these interviews

allowed for “spontaneous” probing depending on the interviewee’s responses (Kallio et al., 2016).

Vignato et al. utilized audiotapes to capture “the entire experience of participants” in their study which aimed to give voice to the experiences of women living with a chronic coronary condition of the heart (2022, p. 914). Similarly, the research utilized both video and audio recordings during Zoom interviews to enable “playback” of information (Rosenblum & Hughes, 2017, p. 29) for accurate and in-depth transcription of participants’ experiences (Bullock et al., 2021). Field notes were employed alongside these interviews to further the agenda of capturing accurate insights along with providing contextual insights, including observations of non-verbal cues such as body language, which can offer valuable understanding of participants' emotional states that enrich the depth and meaning of their responses (Bullock et al., 2018; Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018; UTPB, 2023). These elements were crucial in capturing valid and reliable data for the study, though further considerations were also taken to ensure the accurate summation of participants’ experiences.

Longhurst (2012) emphasizes the significance of ensuring participant comfort during semi-structured interviews. This involves using warm-up questions to ease participants into more challenging discussions and conducting interviews in quiet, secure locations away from workspaces and public ear, to encourage respondents to provide answers reflective of their complete truth (Longhurst, 2012; Petrescu, 2017). Interviews were conducted via Zoom, where the researcher encouraged participants to situate themselves in areas where they feel free to discuss topics openly in private environments to facilitate a conducive atmosphere for open discussion.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, much contention lies around the nuances of true rigor applied to data analysis methods (Church & Prokopy, 2019). Thus, many believe it to be imperative to employ various methods that aid in the analytical interpretation of data (Church & Prokopy, 2019). Adjacent literature can potentially be used to support findings as, while obviously not all but much, discourse is “grounded in evidence” (Bryman & Burgess, 1994, p. 5). The acknowledgment of existing literature to data, where applicable, solidifies/supports truth and consistency in one’s findings. In light of this, the researcher used adjacent literature—comparing studies on similar topics to the findings—to either confirm or challenge the data collected.

Similarly, document analysis which is the process of analyzing any printed or electronic documents (Bowen, 2009), such as related posts, blogs, awards, etc. coinciding with the participant’s experiences, was employed. Researchers have typically used document analysis in tandem with other qualitative methods to triangulate data and strengthen the credibility of data (Denzin, 1970). Web searches led to resources that facilitated the examination of publicly available profiles on LinkedIn, social media platforms, and professional websites. This process helped corroborate the accomplishments and experiences of participants by ensuring data accuracy through the analysis of implicit and explicit meanings within images, post descriptions, captions, and other digitized content.

Additionally, member checking, a process whereby “results are returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences” (Birt et al., 2016 p.1802), moves to uphold the validity of analysis (Merriam, 2009). To ensure trustworthiness and accuracy of the data, the researcher engaged in member checking by frequently emailing participants throughout the research process. Participants were updated on the study’s progress and asked to verify information shared during their interviews. Additionally, the researcher shared the preliminary

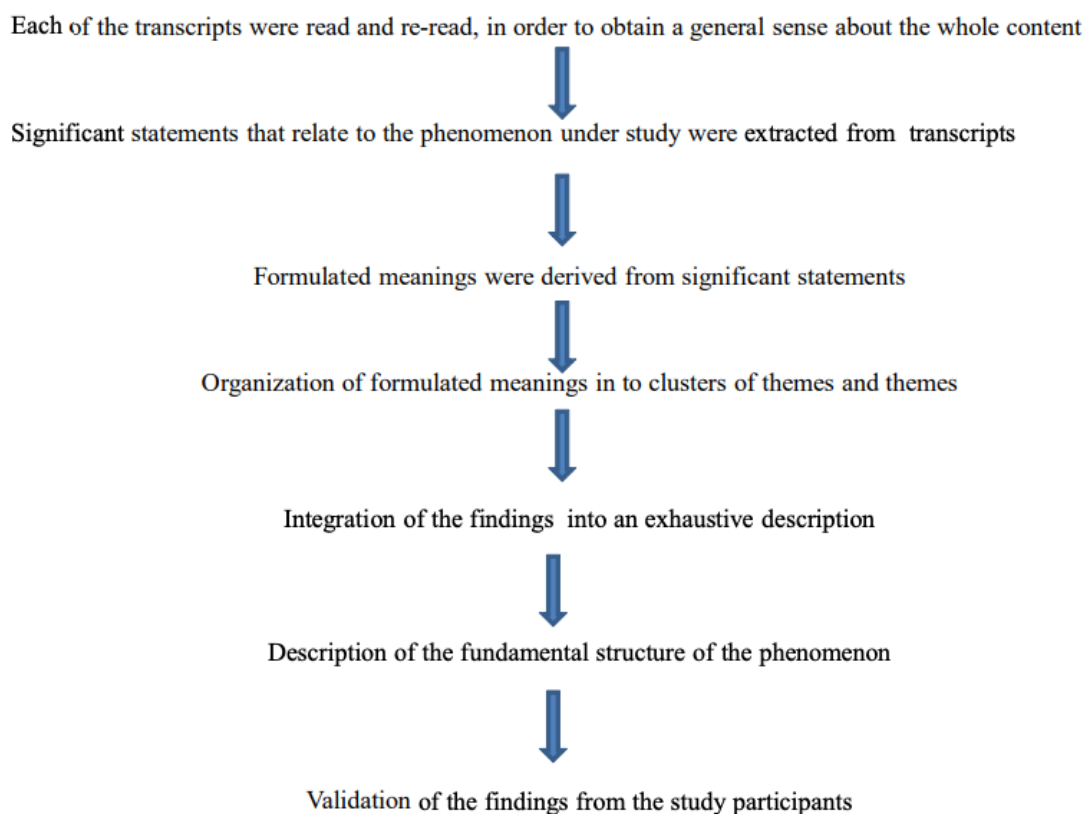
themes with participants, inviting feedback on whether the themes accurately reflected their experiences. Ultimately, no changes were necessary, as participants confirmed the themes aligned with their perspectives. The researcher applied each of these methods, along with others, such as the use of outside researchers further attempts to remove inaccuracies and bias (Bryman & Burgess, 1995) to aid in the trustworthiness of the study.

An unbiased expert researcher was consulted throughout the study to support inter-rater reliability and strengthen the triangulation of findings. This expert provided valuable insights into emerging themes and helped maintain objectivity during data interpretation. Their involvement ensured that participants' voices remained central to the analysis while upholding the integrity of the research process at every stage, from data collection to analysis.

Colaizzi's model for phenomenological data analysis is grounded in Husserl's descriptive phenomenological approach (Vignato et al., 2022), which highlights three key principles: (1) intentionality, which evokes the consciousness of experiences for participants, (2) essence, detailing those experiences to capture their core meaning, and (3) phenomenological reduction, also known as bracketing, which requires the researcher to explore the human experience without bias by suspending preconceived notions, beliefs, assumptions, or feelings toward participants to enable understanding the essence of their experiences without external influence (LeVasseur, 2003; Praveena & Sasikumar, 2021; Vignato et al., 2022). Colaizzi's method for data analysis breaks the latter principle down into multiple steps, which can be repeated until data saturation is achieved (Vignato et al., 2022). These steps, depicted in Figure 1 are pulled from Praveena and Sasikumar (2021) and are summarized as the repeated analysis of transcripts for accuracy in the identification, analysis, and determination of themes and meaning of a given experience.

Figure 1

Praveena & Sasikumar's (2021) Summation of Colaizzi's Method for Data Analysis



According to Vignato et al., step one includes gaining a clear understanding of transcripts by reading and re-reading the content (2022). Step two prompts the researcher to use their judgment to identify, and pull, important statements that speak to the participants' experiences as a whole (Vignato et al., 2022). Steps three, four, five, and six formulate and organize the meanings of these statements into themes that can be confirmed or disputed by participants in member checks to uphold the validity of interpretations (Merriam, 2009; Vignato et al., 2022).

It is essential to systematically code participants' responses to analyze data, draw conclusions, and discern emerging themes (Henry et al., 2014; Vignato et al., 2022). The researcher established the rigor of the summation process by beginning with Colaizzi's model to unearth themes. The researcher then used open, axial, and selective coding, along with thematic

analysis, to “identify core themes and patterns” (Smolski & Schulman, 2024, p. 58) using features of a transcription tool called Temi. Using the digital software was secure and aided in transcribing keywords and phrases from transcripts that are uploaded to its software (Vignato et al., 2022, p. 1120). This helped to aid in the triangulation and the accuracy of participant responses and, ultimately the identified themes (Vignato et al., 2022).

Ethical Considerations

The emphasis on rigorous data analysis methods not only stems from a need for reliable and accurate data, but because of the nature of subjectivity in qualitative research impending bias for participant and researcher, it also stems from the ethical nuances in which data is interpreted (Introna, 2005), and therefore, communicated and displayed. Phenomenology, however, “provides a more contextual approach to ethical decision making through probing, uncovering, and interpreting the meanings of ‘stories’...[which] in turn, provide...a more coherent and genuine application of ethical principles...” (Greenfield & Jenson, 2010, p. 1185). Ethical considerations protect human participants involved in the study by carefully considering the implications and uncertainties of the research and critically examining various applications, including the impact of "our ideas and beliefs," to mitigate these complexities as much as possible (Deigh, 2010, p. 1). The researcher has considered “ethical issues...throughout all stages of [this] qualitative study to keep the balance between the potential risks of research and the likely benefits of the research (Arifin, 2018, p. 30).

By providing informed consent forms and the commitment to ensure participants understand the research, its process, and their roles, the researcher enabled the competency of all parties involved in the study. In an article by Arifin (2018), the author elaborates on various methods that ensure ethical consideration in research. They state the importance of ensuring that

participants are “adequately informed about the research” and “comprehend the information” to exercise their “power of freedom of choice...to decide whether to participate [in the study] or decline” (Arifin, 2018, p.30). The act of ensuring the comprehension of participants follows the requirements of informed consent which necessitates that participants can understand all that which they are participating in (Arifin, 2018). Further ethical consideration is taken on by disguising participant involvement through the use of pseudonyms. Along with being able to understand what they are participating in, the article also articulates that individuals have the right to privacy in the process of disseminating findings (Arifin, 2018). Therefore, pseudonyms address the ethical concerns of privacy as they redact identifiers throughout the “data collection, analysis, and reporting of the study’s findings” (Arifin, 2018, p. 30).

The researcher furthered plans to establish an ethically just study by communicating to participants that they may withdraw from the study at any point, and by guaranteeing the proper handling of information, whether hard or soft copies, which were safeguarded and/or disposed of in places inaccessible to others. Moreover, the researcher limited external researchers consulted for validity purposes due to the sensitive nature of responses and information (Arifin, 2018). The subsequent section explores the need for reflectivity of the researcher throughout the research process to further navigate ethical concerns of bias and skewness, impartially.

Role and Background of Researcher

Conducting research inherently involves navigating biases, as it may prioritize certain perspectives over others. Drawing from the insight of Stoddart (2007), as a Black individual, I am more keenly aware of power structures, given the historical dominance Whites have exerted over minority groups (Almeida, 2015; Doerr, 2009; Picower, 2009). Naturally, I am inclined to conduct research that aligns with my identity and desire for racial justice (Cox & Tamir, 2022).

As an African American, particularly in the context of the historical struggles imparted upon Blacks, I also naturally question "the innate moral character of the White race" (Bay, 2000, p. 9) and thus the injustices rooted in American society, including racial disparities impacting the knowledge and access Black individuals have, or fail to acquire, in agriculture. However, irrespective of what I perceive to be right or wrong, morally just or deliberately vindictive, socially equitable or racist, I must acknowledge my unintentional tendency to prejudge the intentions of systems due to my predisposition and lens that identifies perceived acts of White hegemony. This acknowledgment is crucial to avoid reporting results that align solely with my beliefs or feelings. Therefore, I devoted myself to a process of self-reflection, recognizing my potential biases and stance, to ensure an objective view.

Reflectivity is a practice widely used in qualitative research (Mortari, 2015) and involves mindfulness in identifying factors that impact the research process, including "issues of dominance, gender, sexuality, class, age, and race" (Brurman, 1990; Riley & Cahill, 2003, p. 2). Several studies, such as Riley & Cahill (2003), explain that for research to exhibit quality, clarity, and trustworthiness, a researcher's reflectivity must be established and maintained throughout the entirety of the research process. This deliberate and critical process increases the likelihood of enhanced validity by criticizing areas of potential contention, thereby raising awareness of one's biases so they may implement strategies to manage them ethically (Mortari, 2015; Riley & Cahill, 2003). Reflectivity informs readers that "results are passed on, and reflective of, the information gathered from the participants and not the interpretations or biases of the researcher" (Johnson et al., 2020, para. 17).

Critically examining my own positionality allows me to acknowledge the limitations arising from my identity as a researcher. Beyond this acknowledgment, I become aware of areas

about myself where disengaging from my personal feelings of race may be necessary to maintain the authenticity of the findings (Dodgson, 2017). Some research suggests, however, that it is impossible to completely separate oneself from oneself own self (Moustakas, 1994) which includes "feelings, experiences, and knowledge" (Dodgson, 2017, p. 357). While some argue that it is risky not to be able to fully dissociate, others contend this is not a complete disadvantage to the research. Instead, it allows the researcher to present their unique outlook, enabling readers to contextualize the information from the researcher's point of view (Dodgson, 2017).

Providing context is essential for readers to understand potential biases that, if left unaddressed, may hinder the research, and compromise its validity (Creswell, 2009; Wood, 2014). Therefore, I offer the following narrative of my background, presenting inherent or learned dispositions that I take up and commit to challenging them in light of the nuances of navigating identity in research:

My positionality, interpretation of responses, and even my desire to pursue this subject are inherently influenced by my intersecting identities, including race, gender, and social class, which inform my worldview (Crenshaw, 1989). I am a Black woman researcher at North Carolina State University. Hailing from Charlotte, NC, an urban area, my knowledge, let alone passion, for agriculture wasn't forged until I attended NC State as an undergraduate student. It would be there, that I first learned of opportunities outside of the white-collar vocations impressed upon me by my urban upbringing. Prior to my time at State, I was just a young, Black, city girl with hopes of becoming a veterinarian.

Since my earliest memories, dogs have held a special place in my heart. Growing up in a household where my dad always kept dogs around, I naturally developed a strong affection for canines, especially pit bulls. These dogs were often misunderstood, prejudged, and marginalized, as evidenced by the restrictive regulations imposed by apartment complexes, public establishments, and rental agreements targeting so-called 'aggressive breeds'. Even as a child, I was keenly aware of this unjust treatment, drawing parallels to my own experiences as a Black individual navigating the world. Confronting the sad reality of discrimination based on skin color was something I had to grapple with from an early age, and sadly, it continues to persist, even today.

Growing up, my mom always reminded my older brother and me to stay true to ourselves while being mindful of our surroundings. We learned the unspoken rules of dressing and speaking differently depending on the situation and location. Around police, we had to be cautious, and backroads weren't to be taken when traveling unless necessary. We were taught to work hard to (although we shouldn't have to) prove our worth because doubt would surely follow us wherever we go and through whatever we achieve.

Mom's lessons went beyond self-preservation, however; they were about standing up for what was right and having the courage to call out what was wrong. She made it clear that as African Americans, we might face unfair treatment and judgment based solely on our race. From childhood to early adulthood, being aware of my race was a constant. My mother taught me that my awareness of it should always be the top priority, never an afterthought—because in America, our very lives could, at any moment, depend on it.

As a result, I naturally began attributing many aspects of my life, including my career interests, to my race, as being Black forms the core of my identity. Even as a child, I distinctly remember telling myself that I wanted to become a veterinarian to advocate for pit bulls and challenge the negative stereotypes society imposed on them. This desire to educate and demand better treatment for these animals stemmed from the parallels I recognized between their plight and my own experiences.

The younger version of myself cherished the idea of pursuing such a prestigious career, one where I could create spaces of fairness and justice for pit bulls. Looking back, I realize that my desire to become a vet wasn't solely fueled by my love for animals; rather, it originated from an unconscious passion born out of my personal experiences and struggles in life, seeking a role that would empower me to be competent, influential, and respected, regardless of my race, yet also because of it.

My testimony, as detailed and intricate as it is, holds significant importance as it encapsulates the culmination of both my racial experiences in life and my urban upbringing. During my formative schooling years, Charlotte City experiences and curriculum mostly overlooked the idea of agriculture, rarely even addressing it, if not mentioned in the context of slavery. While I cannot speak to the differences between North Carolina's rural and non-rural school systems, based on my own experience, Charlotte provided minimal opportunities for urban youth to engage with agriculture, beyond a field trip elementary school students took to the Latta Plantation, a site traditionally utilized by Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools. However, this changed in 2021 when the plantation faced controversy over an event titled "Kingdom Coming" held on Juneteenth. Participants reportedly portrayed "White refugees" and Confederate soldiers,

perpetuating troubling narratives of the Civil War, including quotes such as "the massa himself" (Coleman, 2021, para. 3). Following that troubling incident, the plantation closed down, leaving me to question the kind of educational experiences with agriculture children in Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools today receive, if any.

Apart from the infamous Latta Plantation, Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools offered few opportunities for me to explore agriculture or gain a comprehensive understanding of its complexities. Throughout my years in grade school, I remained unaware of programs such as 4-H or FFA, which could have exposed me to facets related to my interest in animals and provided valuable experience in agriculture and animal science. However, growing up in an urban environment, I honestly had no clue that I lacked awareness and access to such experiences and education. I simply thought it was normal to find myself "wingin' it" as I searched for a route to achieve my goal of pursuing veterinary medicine. It is evident how profoundly one's education and experiences can shape their opinions, knowledge, and understanding of agriculture. For Charlotte city youth, this was especially true when plantation tours were implemented every couple of years, providing a point of view that reinforced agriculture's association with slavery and nothing else. Interestingly, the site manager who aimed to implement the racist event at Latta Plantation was a Black man named Ian Campbell, who failed to accurately depict his own ancestral lineage. He referred to Black people as "freedmen" but neglected to acknowledge that "they were enslaved for nearly 250 years" (WBTV Web Staff, 2021, para. 5). Instead, the historical plantation's site referred to slaves as "former bondsmen" and aimed to present narratives from the perspective of Confederate soldiers (WBTV Web Staff, 2021, para. 5). The fact that such a scandal would occur so recently, and was

ignorantly advertised by a Black man himself, leads me to question whether the limited education and exposure to agriculture through Charlotte's school system that I did receive was even accurate.

Fast forward, and there I was, still holding onto my teenage aspirations of becoming a veterinarian, despite lacking real-life experience beyond watching YouTube videos of abscess and botfly larvae removals on pets. I was now old enough to feel the weight of societal expectations and stereotypes associated with pursuing such a career. I feared that others might doubt my competence because of my race, yet I felt all the more determined to aim for a veterinary career and prove them wrong. I was resolute in showcasing why I, a Black girl, could excel in veterinary medicine and share a bit of my “Black Girl Magic.”

I vividly remember attending a fair where various CMS schools showcased themselves to prospective middle school students and parents. Among the options, I was drawn to a school that emphasized health science. Though its focus was primarily on human health, it seemed like the closest match to content that could equip me with skills and knowledge relevant to my future pursuit of veterinary school. So, with this in mind, I enrolled in the school and excelled in my health classes, eventually graduating as valedictorian. Additionally, I became a certified nursing assistant through my high school, which offered classes allowing us to experience the healthcare field and complete clinical hours at a nursing home. I figured that while the curriculum centered on human biological processes, it at least acquainted me with the general foundations of biology, anatomy, and physiology that would be presented later on in college.

Before my high school graduation, my senior year was consumed with discussions about completing college applications, searching for scholarships, obtaining fee waivers for application costs, and striving to achieve impressive SAT scores. More importantly to me, senior year was about the colleges you got accepted into and the decisions you ultimately made. With vet school as my ultimate goal, I applied to universities with extensive veterinary programs, including Tuskegee University (little did I know how significant it would become for me in the years to come) and NC State. Ironically, I even applied to other land-grant universities, such as North Carolina A&T University, without fully understanding what they were at the time. I made sure to prioritize universities with a college of veterinary medicine to enhance my chances of acceptance when the time came.

If my memory serves me correctly, I received acceptance letters from every school I applied to, including Tuskegee and NC State. Naturally, the first thing I considered was finances. Tuition at Tuskegee was upwards of \$20,000 a year, although I vaguely recall being offered some sort of scholarship. However, it wasn't enough to sway my decision, especially when compared to the slightly more than double cost of attending NC State with in-state tuition. Next, I weighed the advantages of each institution. After touring NC State's veterinary school and witnessing the array of opportunities available, from resources to recreational activities, I felt drawn to what it had to offer. Although I was initially enticed by the idea of attending a historically Black college or university (HBCU) like Tuskegee, where I could contribute to the legacy of Black excellence and become one of the Black veterinarians Tuskegee was known to produce, NC State seemed like the better fit for me. It was close to home and offered many more resources

that I believed would enhance my engagement with and passion for the material I would be learning.

In the end, I chose NC State. However, I didn't receive admission for the Fall term and was instead deferred to the Spring due to the high number of incoming freshmen. Additionally, I wasn't initially admitted to the Animal Science program, so I opted for interdisciplinary studies—a major that politely communicated, "I'm figuring things out." My plan was to remain in that major for a semester or two, establishing a foundation in my core courses and proving myself capable before switching to Animal Science.

However, I found myself struggling with chemistry in college, despite excelling in it during high school. I came to realize that college presented a whole new challenge. Despite my best efforts, chemistry got the best of me, not once, but twice. Nevertheless, I refused to give up on my dreams of attending vet school.

My determination was reignited when I discovered I could retake chemistry one final time with university approval. I was determined to succeed this time around. With so much riding on this last chance, I couldn't afford to fail. After all, they say the third time's a charm, right? Not to my advisor. She kindly explained that I had no real chance of getting into the program, even with the successful completion of my third attempt at chemistry, and suggested I begin looking for alternative careers and paths.

In turn, my mother, both because this woman told her baby what she couldn't achieve, and because it came from a White woman in a position of power at a PWI to a young Black girl, not so nicely broke a few things down for that advisor to understand. She explained to my advisor that her statements were not only inappropriate, inaccurate, and based on her predisposed opinions, but downright unacceptable and uninformed

about the things my mother knew that I could achieve. She promptly contacted the school, expressing her concerns and demanding a change of advisor- one of my most notable “You go, Ma!” moments.

I have found that even in the realm of education, we as Black individuals must always consider that certain actions, like that advisor's attempt to discourage me, whether intentional or not, carry greater weight and significance simply because of our race. There seemed to have been no consideration on her part that perhaps she could have offered guidance on alternative paths to achieving my goal of changing my major to Animal Science, informed me of resources to aid in my difficulties, or provided support in navigating the requirements for the Animal Science program. After all, I was only a freshman with plenty of time to recover. The university even offered resources such as the option to redact up to two courses from my GPA with a grade exclusion—an option she hadn't even told me was available and at my disposal. It didn't seem like she knew to consider potential reasons for my struggles, tried to understand my true capabilities, or even considered my identity as a Black woman while advising me.

As a Black student at a predominantly White institution (PWI), already feeling isolated and marginalized, did it ever occur to her the additional burdens I may have been carrying, both academically and socially? Perhaps she should have refrained from attempting to discourage me and instead offered encouragement. Did she realize the weight I was already bearing as a Black girl, without any familiar faces at school, struggling to make connections in an environment where people like me were few and far between? I was like a child gaining their footing for the first time. You would think she'd be mindful of other factors potentially causing my trouble adjusting to the curricular

demands of college while navigating such a culture shock of complexities instead of summing it up to my capability to achieve.

To my mother's heartache and disappointment, the advisor's attempt to undermine me succeeded. I no longer had the confidence to remind myself I had what it took to become a veterinarian. If I couldn't pass chemistry, what business did I have being responsible for operating on someone's pet? However, I still harbored a strong desire to work with animals. The dilemma remained: how could I pursue this passion if I couldn't change my degree to Animal Science, the most obvious choice and path to a profession involving animals? Perhaps if I had been properly advised, I would have been informed of other paths and options.

Luckily, during my junior year of college, somehow, some way, I stumbled into Agricultural Science, a major in the Department of Agricultural and Human Sciences in North Carolina State University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Through this major, I discovered that I could not only pursue Animal Science curriculum but also minor in it due to the required hours needed for one's chosen concentrations with the Ag Science degree program. Despite knowing next to nothing about agriculture beyond its association with farms, animals, and slavery thanks to good ol' city living, I embraced the Ag Science major and concentrated in Animal and Poultry sciences, excelling in both. This decision to pursue Ag Science, despite my initial lack of understanding, led me to meet an advisor, and later a professor, and so many others in the Department of Agricultural and Human Sciences at State, who truly saw me for who I was. They advocated for education and experiences that spoke to both my identity and my dreams, even though their classes hadn't been filled with many individuals like me.

The Black race epitomizes triumph in America, yet there is a persistent focus on Black subjectivity and White supremacy (Zhao, 2020). Despite our numerous accomplishments, often overshadowed or accredited to others, the American educational system perpetuates White-serving practices that undermine Black successes (Mulcahy & Irwin, 2008; Ware & Ware, 1995). Whether taking credit for our achievements or diminishing them to the point of erasure, the system fosters a narrative where Americans are taught to accept the White perspective on the Black experience, as exemplified by Ian's portrayal of history at Latta Plantation. This reduction in knowledge and positive perception is nowhere more evident than in agriculture. Despite our significant contributions to this field, our stories are often overlooked or omitted from the narrative of American history and culture.

Literature demonstrates that in America, the curriculum exhibits a partisan bias that upholds Eurocentric values, morals, and ideologies. As of 2007, this bias was particularly pronounced, with 91% of educational works and narratives in schools being authored by White males (Zhao, 2020). This phenomenon, known as epistemicide, involves the suppression and erasure of diverse perspectives and informational sources to knowledge, perpetuating "Eurocentrism" (Zhao, 2020). These actions further reinforce hegemonic practices that enable White individuals to acquire, retain, and wield power (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Such efforts persist in modern educational contexts, with educational systems themselves manifesting as racial microaggressions, aimed at undermining and discouraging minorities while promoting the standardization of curricula. Knowledge bases and practices covertly legitimizing hegemony ensure the "persistence of discrimination" (Mulcahy & Irwin, 2008; Ware & Ware, 1995, p. 1151).

While I cannot generalize my experiences, is it really necessary to have an exhaustive reference list to acknowledge that it hasn't been standardized to learn about significant contributions like the Black Panther's Free Breakfast for Children Program, which influenced today's versions of government-provided free food provision for children and communities (Senescall, 2022)? What about Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver's invention of the Jesup Wagon, the *true* first act of extension on U.S. soil (Daniels et al., 2023; James, 1971; Jones, 1975)? Instead, credit for the act is often attributed to the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 and Seaman A. Knapp, the "Father of Extension," who, you guessed it, was a White man! I am not discrediting the significance of these acts or the involvement of White individuals, but completely erasing the foundational contributions of Black individuals impedes the perceptions, awareness, attitudes, and actions of Black Americans toward their own history and achievements, which, in many cases, laid the groundwork for America's success. This is not only an injustice to the race, but also a means to disconnect us from that which we STEM (you'll come to understand the pun).

This is significant because education serves as the gateway to exposing and encouraging minorities to opportunities they may have previously overlooked due to negative stereotypes associated with fields in agriculture and STEM (Atkins, 2013). I bet many are unaware, at one point myself included, that teaching heritage in STEM has been found to positively influence the participation of Black and minority youth in STEM-based curriculum (Atkins, 2013). It is remarkable how one's perspective becomes clearer with true, unbiased, and comprehensive knowledge through education. My experience in a non-rural setting significantly contributed to perpetuating my ignorance and lack of

awareness regarding agricultural opportunities. Hindered by a curriculum that failed to address holistic approaches to agriculture, including the successes and contributions of Black individuals within the profession, my understanding and potential interests were limited. Even if not all aspects of Black history within agriculture are positive, there is value in acknowledging and learning from experiences beyond the lens of slavery.

Therefore, my notable experience at NC State is where my passion for agriculture was sparked. Despite setbacks and obstacles, I came to learn about diverse opportunities within agriculture beyond traditional farm and fieldwork and its unfortunate historical association with slavery. It may sound surprising, but I had no idea that professions in education, engineering, government and politics, and even research, could all fall under the umbrella of agriculture. And with courses such as AEE 323: Leadership in Ag & Life Science and AEE 435: Professional Presentations in Agricultural Organizations I was provided with invaluable opportunities to expand my knowledge and understanding and learn even more.

I remember one of my first presentations in the AEE 435 course. It was an assignment where students were tasked with choosing three items, moments, or pictures that spoke to who we were and how it related to agriculture. I believe the assignment was called “The Big Three.” For my presentation, I opted for a Google Slides format. I spoke about my love for animals, sharing a picture of my dog, and emphasized the importance of my loved ones in supporting my decisions, accompanied by a picture of me and some of my closest friends. On the final slide, in bolded red text, I shared a striking statistic that I had stumbled upon while researching Black representation in agriculture in a class where only one other girl, besides myself, was Black. The statistic, provided by the

USDA, revealed that only 1.4 % of over 3 million agricultural workers were Black. That fact has stuck with me ever since and is even what shifted my interest away from pursuing work with animals.

Even though I have no formal connections to agriculture, I often find myself emotional thinking of the statistic as it illustrates that even centuries past slavery, we still suffer from being regarded as less. In today's time, 1.4 % should be nothing surprising, which, in my opinion, is what makes it sadder and more pathetic that such a statistic has been allowed to persist. The AEE 435 course I took during my senior year of college marked the beginning of a steadfast commitment to pursue agriculture where I could advocate for the lived experiences of Blacks in agriculture. However, it was during graduate school that I learned how to give voice to that passion.

The Black race, my race, boasts a legacy of achievements that spans generations. As I continue my journey towards a Master's degree in graduate school, I find myself deeply immersed in research and writing, often exploring topics that shed light on overlooked aspects of Black agricultural history. One such instance arose when my professor mentioned an invention known as the "Jesup Wagon." I must admit, as a Black individual, I was embarrassed to admit that I had no prior knowledge of it. However, this sparked my curiosity, and I embarked on a journey of discovery that uncovered the remarkable story of this Black artifact's pivotal role in extension work.

Through my research, I came to realize that my lack of knowledge about the Jesup Wagon was not a personal failing, but rather a symptom of the shortcomings of our education system. Urban areas, like the one where I grew up, often suffer from a negative perpetuation of the standards of American curriculum, which restrict access to

knowledge, particularly in fields such as agriculture, and overlook the vast contributions of Black individuals within it. This limited exposure led me to oversimplify agriculture and associate it solely with negative connotations of slavery.

However, as I delved deeper into the project and explored the extensive history of Black contributions to agriculture, I felt a profound sense of empowerment through its connection to my heritage. Just as minorities find empowerment in tying their heritage to contributions in STEM-related careers, I felt a renewed sense of pride in reclaiming my place in a space that my ancestors helped shape with their literal blood, sweat, hands, and tears. Despite the obstacles, intentional or unintentional, that may have deterred me from pursuing agriculture, I felt a deep calling to honor my heritage and contribute to a space that has been integral to the Black community for generations.

Now, as I continue in my graduate program to obtain an M.S. in Agricultural Extension and Education, I am determined to advocate for the work and needs of Black minorities in agriculture through my research and professional endeavors. I am driven to prove that despite every attempt to hinder the progress of the Black and African American race,

In the immortal words of Maya Angelou, "and still, I rise."

In the comprehensive background provided, I aimed to depict the journey that has led me to my current pursuit in the agricultural field, where my goal is to advocate for and represent Black minorities and youth, expanding their access to agricultural opportunities, education, and appreciation. Additionally, I sought to elucidate the personal factors that have fueled my

passions, including advocating for Black youth through reforms in non-rural school curricula and pursuing a Ph.D. to broaden my impact in post-secondary education. My lived experiences, particularly as a member of an underrepresented group who aligns closely with the study's selection criteria, inevitably influence my perspective and approach to this research. It is crucial to acknowledge the potential for bias in the research process stemming from my identity, requiring careful consideration of my own biases and assumptions throughout the study.

In light of the cultural sensitivity inherent in this research, the research committed to maintaining an objective stance throughout interactions with participants, data collection, analysis, and the presentation of findings. The researcher consciously set aside identified biases and concerns during data collection and analysis, ensuring objectivity through rigorous methods such as member checks, document analysis, external validation, and the utilization of technology, to confirm or refute emerging themes. This approach aimed to ensure an accurate portrayal of the perspectives and experiences of the participants. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between non-rurality and Black engagement in agriculture.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology for a qualitative study exploring the experiences of non-rural Black minorities engaged in agricultural careers. A phenomenological approach was adopted to center lived experiences and uncover the deeper meanings participants attributed to their engagement with agriculture. The study employed purposive sampling to select participants who met specific criteria. Seven Black professionals from metropolitan areas across the U.S. were recruited for in-depth, semi-structured interviews, during which data saturation was achieved. These interviews, conducted via Zoom, were supplemented with field notes and

audio/video recordings to ensure accuracy and reliability of interpretation. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and participant confidentiality, were prioritized throughout the process. Data analysis involved comparing findings with existing literature, document analysis, member checking, and expert consultation to enhance rigor and validity while identifying themes reflective of participants' unique perspectives on agricultural careers.

CHAPTER 4

Results

While the results are not meant to represent the general public, they offer insight into the importance of addressing challenges in recruiting, retaining, and supporting non-rural Black individuals in agricultural careers. Through thematic analysis, nine themes emerged from the data and were organized by research objective, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of Themes

Objective	Themes Present	Meaning
Objective 1: Influences on Agricultural Exposure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Mentorship and Programming on Exposure 2) Desire to Empower as Influence on Pursuit 	Mentorship and programs like internships, MANRRS, and extracurricular activities helped expose non-rural Black individuals to agricultural opportunities. These opportunities led participants to discover personal aspirations to grow and empower others through agriculture.
Objective 2: Curricular and Career Challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Navigating Exclusion 4) Being the Only 5) Identified Support, Strategies, and Resources 	Participants faced cultural and systemic exclusion, often being the only Black person in their field, which created barriers to connection, recognition, and resources. Despite these challenges, they identified coping strategies and envisioned changes such as greater cultural competence, organizational reforms, and increased institutional support. Their perseverance was driven by personal determination, faith, and community support.
Objective 3: Implications of Non-Rural Upbringing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6) Opportunities Associated w/ Non-Rural Upbringings 7) Challenges Associated with Non-Rural Upbringings 8) Perceptions and Levels of Awareness in Non-Rural Black Communities 9) Advancing Equity, Empowerment, and Legacy for Non-Rural Black Communities. 	Participants viewed their non-rural backgrounds as beneficial for maintaining open-mindedness, adaptability, and acceptance of diversity. However, they also faced challenges, such as negative perceptions of agriculture in urban communities, difficulty bridging agricultural knowledge, skepticism about their abilities, limited hands-on experience, and even ridicule for pursuing agriculture. While some communities are beginning to see agriculture in broader terms beyond traditional associations, participants noted a lack of programs specifically targeting non-rural Black engagement, though resources like scholarships, the USDA 1890's National Scholars Program, MANRRS, and others have been helpful. Ultimately, they aim to create a more inclusive and supportive agricultural space for future non-rural Black professionals.

Objective 1: Describe the Influences of Non-Rural Black Individuals to Pursue Agriculture

The first research objective examines the factors that influenced participants' initial exposure to and pursuit of agriculture. Two key themes emerged: the impact of mentorship and programming, and the role of personal passions and interests in motivating participants to pursue careers in agriculture.

Theme 1: Mentorship and Programming on Exposure to Agriculture

When asked about their initial exposure to agriculture, participants rarely identified primary or secondary curriculum as the primary pathway. Instead, informal experiences, mentors, and programs often played pivotal roles in sparking their interest and engagement.

Programming. Participants frequently credited various programs, both formal and informal, to introducing them to agriculture. For example, Elijah highlighted how an extracurricular golf program outside of secondary school eventually led to his exposure to agriculture through turf management, which he later pursued in college. Jordan talked about his interest in gardening and how a horticulture work-study program opened his insights to the possibilities and wonders of growing within agriculture both figuratively and literally. These programs, though varied in focus, played a critical role in igniting participants' interests and connecting them to agricultural opportunities.

For some participants, the combination of formal and informal learning experiences solidified their interest in agriculture. Dr. Anthony Fields and Stephanie Lands exemplified this through their excitement to pursue agriculture due to involvement in programs like FFA and vocational studies, which bridged the gap between formal education and informal exposure. Dr. Fields notably talks about the excitement of events like Envirothon and the blue corduroy jackets indicative of FFA membership as his initial reasons for his pursuit:

Yeah, so there was a competition called Envirothon [...], it's an extension program that does a lot of work with 4-H's across the country and FFA chapters. But essentially Envirothon has six different components, and it was like soils, animal science, forestry, wildlife, special topics, and there was one more. Essentially, you had to get a team of six people, and you all had to focus on a specialty area to compete for your particular part in the contest. And so, it was broken down by counties or regions of your state. And then through that experience, is when I saw the different components, right? You know, we're not doing any farming, we're looking at soil profiles or we're doing water quality tests, things like that. And because I like to be engaged, when I saw there was multiple different activities, I was like, "Oh, we got something here."

And later discussing:

It was literally just as simple as when you're a part of FFA, you get a blue corduroy jacket, right? I still have mine to this day. And the only reason I got involved is, literally every week those blue corduroy jackets were running out the building again on a bus. Like, people laugh at me when I tell them that, but it literally was just like, "I'm an honor student in middle school," and some of these kids...they were lazy, but they were always on a field trip. And I was like, "What do I have to do to get out of class?" That literally was my exposure. And then I got on the bus and they let me use a jacket that didn't really have a name on it, and I was like, "Oh! This is interesting."

Dr. Greens highlighted how her veterinary aspirations led her to courses later on in college that provided hands-on agricultural experiences, such as dairy cattle labs, which initially deepened her connection to the field. Dr. Nia Tilman shared her experience with a summer program held at a local 1890 land-grant institution, which provided hands-on learning opportunities and exposure to agricultural research, but also connections to mentors who would later guide her during her college years:

I was in a summer program for high school students [...] it was at [1890 Land-Grant Institution] and they bring high school students to campus for four weeks and you learn about [...] different careers in agriculture and you get to do research, and you get paid at the end of the four weeks. [...] I stayed on campus. I met friends and got to know campus and got to know people in the different departments [...]. I did it for two summers. The first summer was before my senior year of high school, and I did natural resources. They had me outside in the creeks. They didn't tell me we were going in the creek, so I did not enjoy that as much. So, then the second summer I did ag education. I didn't really care about the research I was doing for that, but more importantly, I really liked the people that I worked with. That's where I met [Professor in Agricultural Department at 1890 Land-Grant Institution] and some of the other faculty in the department. And it just felt

like a family. Like you knew people were going to be looking out for you when you get there. And so, then I changed my major. I had originally gone in for math and so I changed my major [...]. But yeah, that was how I was introduced to agriculture.

Dr. Fields and Elijah also spoke about the importance of college mentors who later introduced them to an organization designed for minorities engagement in agriculture, Minorities in Agriculture Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS), and how those mentors and their connections to the MANRRS programs maintained their interest in agriculture, offering an interesting take on the importance of mentorship and exposure to agricultural opportunities.

Mentorship. Mentorship emerged as a crucial element in participants' journeys into agriculture. Both Stephanie and Thomas discussed how mentors introduced them to a high school in their home state known for producing Black agricultural professionals. Steered by guidance counselors, the participants' parents were encouraged to allow them to attend the school, which offered unique formal educational opportunities to engage with agriculture—an experience specific to these two participants. For others, mentorship extended beyond primary and secondary school, with college advisors, colleagues, and peers playing vital roles in supporting their newfound interests in agriculture. Dr. Casey Greens, for instance, credited her mentor with encouraging her throughout her pursuit of agricultural studies as she navigated the transition from her original aspirations of pursuing an animal science degree:

“[...] my advisor, I joke and call him my White Granddaddy [...] he was just so nice, [...] he would let me come in and get tutoring [...]. He would help me. [...] Having him, especially at that very delicate time of me entering the ag program, probably was really, really important for me to stay.”

Other participants also emphasized the importance of mentorship, whether professional or personal, through family and friendship, in helping them apply to graduate programs, providing references, and offering time and support beyond formal obligations. Mentors and

families served as consistent sources of upliftment throughout participants' journeys and even as sources of encouragement to continue on in their pursuits.

One interesting perspective, unlike most of the other participants who were guided by structured programs or mentors, is that of Thomas, who described his journey as unanticipated. He consistently expressed a lack of interest in agriculture but found himself continuously drawn into the field through internships, job opportunities, and connections with individuals who kept him engaged. Despite these circumstances, Thomas, like many participants, acknowledged a personal desire to contribute to his community, which ultimately aligned with his inevitable involvement in agriculture. Dr. Greens also discussed the importance of personal motivation, crediting her family's stories of land loss as a driving force. She was empowered to use this knowledge to help other families avoid similar challenges caused by misinformation about the value and opportunities related to land. These personal desires and motivations to pursue agriculture went beyond programmatic and mentor/familial support, emerging as a theme in its own right across many participants.

Theme 2: Desire to Empower as Influence to Pursue Agriculture

While programs and mentors introduced participants to agriculture and provided support and encouragement, it was their personal desire to make an impact that solidified their commitment to continue in their professions. Many participants' motivations stemmed from a deep desire to empower and uplift Black communities through problem-solving and community-building. Agriculture, in their view, served as a tool they could use to address societal challenges and empower others— "it's an untapped resource."

Several participants emphasized that agriculture offered a tangible way to combat real-world issues. As Dr. Tilman and Stephanie Lands put it, agriculture provides a way to "feed the

world." All participants viewed agriculture as a means to feed populations but also recognized other aspects of agriculture beyond its tangible utility to solve food insecurity. Beyond Food, Elijah noted that even the aspect of technology and innovation in agriculture offered exciting ways to explore and approach problems, provide solutions, and embrace the empowering idea of doing more with less:

[...] I feel like food can solve a lot of problems. There is something about food—it doesn't matter where you are in the world [...] food has a way of bringing people together [...]. Another reason is the tech and innovation [...], it is about doing more with fewer resources, and that's exciting.

Elijah and Jordan shared views and aspirations to build wealth in agriculture along with building a sense of community which was an idea many of the other participants also explored. Participants typically spoke of desires to offer alternative solutions for marginalized communities, often specifically identifying ways to aid urban youth. For example, both Jordan and Dr. Greens saw agriculture as a way to engage youth in positive activities and prevent them from being drawn into the struggles often tied to low-income urban environments, shedding light on the desire to challenge and change oppressive systems as central to many participants' motivations.

A common thread connected to this theme was the desire to improve conditions for others, particularly Black individuals, by addressing inequities participants themselves had faced. Dr. Tilman, for example, focuses on critical studies that explore how race and gender influence experiences in agriculture. Her motivation to pursue a career in agriculture stemmed from the lack of representation of Black individuals in the field, particularly at professional conferences, where she expressed marginalized voices are often excluded. This absence of engagement and visibility fueled her desire to expose and challenge these failures.

Thomas also expressed a desire to challenge systems and programs by equipping others with the tools to recognize and address Black experiences in agricultural spaces. Although his current work is not directly related to agriculture, he consults for an agricultural youth program as he aims to create more equitable spaces for marginalized communities, like himself. Thomas reflected on his own experiences with racial injustice when he was coming up in the program and throughout his journey in agriculture, such as facing racial slurs, experiencing hate crimes, and often feeling excluded from the agricultural community. These experiences, compounded by the lack of actionable support from bystanders, deeply shaped his desires and work.

While many participants reflected on the difficulties they faced as motivation for their desire to pursue agriculture, they all acknowledged the immense potential of the field to build community. They recognized that agriculture holds the power to foster strong relationships across cultural, professional, national, and international lines. Agriculture is not only a tool for empowerment and personal growth but is simply important. After learning about agriculture, participants realized its vast significance and emphasized that this importance should be communicated to everyone, regardless of who participates in the practice.

Objective 2: Explore the unique challenges non-rural Blacks engaged in agriculture experienced during college and/or since being in their career(s), to identify potential curricular and professional barriers to entry in the field.

The following themes explore the challenges non-rural Black participants faced while navigating the agricultural field, with a focus on exclusion, isolation, and limited access to resources and support. This section examines their lived experiences in academic and professional settings, highlighting feelings of being overlooked or dismissed and the added pressure of often being the only Black individual in these spaces. It also outlines the strategies

participants used to persist, including utilizing existing resources and identifying those they wish were available, in order to advocate for greater inclusivity in the field.

Theme 3: Navigating Exclusion as a Challenge in Pursuit of Professional Goals

Professional and academic spaces as a non-rural Black individual in agriculture come with distinct challenges that extend beyond technical expertise. Nearly all of the participants recounted feeling excluded in one way or another, whether through overt dismissal or the subtle ways their contributions were undervalued. Compounded by persistent racial stereotypes, their qualifications and leadership capabilities were frequently questioned forcing them to work twice as hard to gain the same level of respect as their White counterparts. These experiences, coupled with the weight of isolation and microaggressions, took a toll on their mental well-being, leading to struggles with imposter syndrome, anxiety, and frustration. As they persevered, many found themselves balancing the need to advocate for change while also protecting their own mental and emotional resilience.

Participants frequently shared their experiences of exclusion and the emotional toll of navigating predominantly White spaces, both in academic settings and professional environments. The lack of inclusion often left participants feeling isolated, with instances of being overlooked or dismissed, especially during conferences or within academic settings where their research and contributions were undervalued. For example, Dr. Greens and Dr. Tilman noted how White colleagues in academic spaces only engaged with their work when it had received prestigious recognition or was attached to large research grants. Dr. Tilman explained, “It’s an interesting experience to go to those conferences and either be ignored or like what annoyed me even more, was then having a distinguished paper and now suddenly people want to talk to me...Now I’m important? Now you want to talk to me?” She spoke of the difficulty of

attending professional agricultural conferences, where she presents research and watches as no one engages with her or in the material, which usually focuses on Black involvement, noting that the experiences tend to feel both isolating and invaluable, “Some will say hello, but largely being ignored when you go, like you just wasted several hundred dollars just to come sit by yourself the whole time.”

This sense of invisibility was a common experience among all participants, as they felt their contributions were frequently overshadowed, leading to frustration and a sense of marginalization. Jordan shared his experience at an 1890 land-grant institution, where he found it surprising that White students from outside institutions were the ones considered for work-study opportunities and internships, despite him being a student at the 1890 land-grant.

[...] Like trying to get on with work-study for research [...], [they would select] somebody [White] that does not even go to [1890 Land-Grant Institution], going to a whole other school, but they're part of that program... Why? I don't know, you know? But those kinds of things.

He also highlighted subtle acts of exclusion that was not explicitly stated but implicitly felt, such as the failure of White students at predominately White institutions to interact with him and his peers at professional conferences/events, and in the same manner they engaged with other White students:

So, during college, some of the obstacles I would face were... what's the best way to put it? The side-eyes... and just the abrupt look on people's faces when you would go to different universities. [Even] the opportunities presented... I'm not trying to say like, “oh, it's just super bias,” or anything like that, but it is definitely something where it's kind of like who you know, rather than what you know, some of the times. Even being in certain rooms, you can feel the energy kind of just change, like, “why are you there?” So, there's been instances where we've gone to other schools and had seminars, and those [White] students weren't interacting with us [...]. And we were diverse already as it was, so we had no problem interacting [with others], but being around other students—sometimes like at [1862 Land-Grant Institution] or something like that, when we had ag seminars—they wouldn't interact as much. So, you can kind of see the kind of difference with that [...].

This form of exclusion, while not overt, carries “racial undertones” as Dr. Greens puts it, leaving a lasting impact, and contributing to feeling a lack of support for Black communities.

The same participant gave an example of what she meant by experiencing situations where race had not been explicitly identified as the lead cause for challenges she faced in her career, but tacitly felt, providing the following encounter:

When I worked at [University], there were some negative things. One thing that happened that I felt had racial undertones was when I was a communication specialist for our ag department... There was this story about [University]’s remarkable goat research program... the news station came, and they interviewed our people. I was really just there facilitating, checking it out as a comm person, taking pictures. When they ran the story, they completely left [University]’s name out. [University] is our 1890 land-grant institution, our ag school, but they didn’t mention us at all. So, I called our PR director for the entire university and said, “Hey, I noticed that they ran the story, but they didn’t even mention that [University] is sponsoring these goats to clean off the property in the city.” They interviewed our person but completely left that out. She said, “Yeah, that’s kind of normal; that doesn’t surprise me.” So, I contacted the person directly with the news outlet and said, “You ran this story, and you didn’t acknowledge our School of Ag for sponsoring this whole program.” I also asked if they could update the website and other after-the-fact media because they can’t rerun the story. He was like, “Oh, so you want some recognition?” or something like that. It was so condescending, and I was like, “Yeah, I actually do because this is an 1890 land-grant institution that one, a lot of people don’t even realize is an ag school, and two, it’s positive media coverage because you never leave out [University] when it’s negative media coverage.” That encounter made me feel like the news wasn’t trying to help change the negative perception people may have about [University]...

Thomas explains his experience with the unspoken animosity he received after taking a faculty position at a land-grant university:

[...] well, you never know what the underlying conversation is really about. Right? So, you mad that I didn’t teach ag before? Although obviously, I know a lot about ag education, and I have my master’s in it. You just never know, because it’s one of those things if it was another White person [would there be] that same level of rife, you know, [or] animosity towards it if it was another White person. So, there are things that sometimes you don’t know for certain, but you know the feeling of it.

Another significant challenge that many participants faced in professional and academic spaces was the persistence of stereotyping and typecasting based on their race. This often

manifested in the questioning of their qualifications and leadership potential. As participants navigated predominantly White environments, their abilities, and accomplishments were frequently viewed through a racialized lens, leading to biased assumptions about their competence and suitability for certain roles. For instance, Dr. Fields spoke about his own experiences of being stereotyped based on his appearance. He shared that others in his profession often assumed that his role or position was lesser than what it actually was. This typecasting was not only frustrating but also undermined his professional worth, as his leadership and accomplishments were frequently questioned until others saw him leading meetings or taking on high-level responsibilities. In these moments, his colleagues' demeanor and approach toward him changed dramatically, highlighting the stark contrast between how he was perceived initially and how he was respected once his authority was established.

Similarly, Stephanie and Elijah shared examples of being stereotyped. At Stephanie's job, when she expressed an interest in science applications, a colleague responded by rattling off her "pedigree" in an attempt to justify her qualifications after others seemed surprised that she would be interested in such work. Elijah also reflected on how his race affected his professional experiences. He noted that how he is perceived by others, even internationally, would warrant very different reactions if he had not held such a prestigious title within his company. The typecasting these participants experienced was not always overt, often coming in the form of non-verbal expressions and unspoken assumptions. While these interactions may have seemed innocuous, they suggest deep-seated biases that persist in many professional spaces, where Black professionals are often scrutinized, minimized, or dismissed because their presence does not align with preconceived stereotypes about who belongs in agriculture, thus highlighting the navigation of microaggressions as another pervasive challenge.

These ongoing issues with isolation, a lack of support, and dealing with microaggressions proved to be mentally taxing. Participants spoke candidly about the mental health challenges they faced, including imposter syndrome, anxiety, and even depression. Their experiences with these challenges compounded feelings of self-doubt and frustration as they navigated spaces that were not designed to support their success. Dr. Fields stated, "...you're expected to do your job with no support, so now there's frustration, and you're trying to stay positive because you're doing it for the people coming behind you, but how do you do it for yourself while you're in the role?"

Theme 4: Being the Only in Agricultural Spaces

Many of the participants explained the struggles of the profession, often finding themselves alone while facing unique trials. The idea of "being the only" created conflicts as individuals balanced their professional aspirations with the weight of representing their race and building meaningful connections and support.

Most participants frequently shared experiences of being the only Black individual in academic, professional, or social spaces within agriculture. This often amplified pressure to perform and excel, as participants felt a responsibility to represent not only themselves but also their race. "There's this feeling that you have to continually prove yourself," Stephaine expressed. Dr. Tilman stated, "We have to study harder, work harder, try harder, to prove that you are just as good, if not better than, everyone else," when discussing the challenges of being the only Black professional in spaces compounded with implications of being devalued as the only professional hailing from a non-rural background.

The pressure to excel was intensified by the need to dismantle stereotypes for future Black professionals in agriculture. Dr. Fields explained, "You're trying to stay positive because

you're doing it for the people that are coming behind you, but how do you do it for yourself while you're in the role currently?" Stephanie discussed the responsibility she felt to model behavior for other Black professionals, acknowledging that her responses influenced how White colleagues would view future Black professionals.

This pressure also led to internal conflicts about encouraging other Black individuals to enter agricultural vocations, especially given the challenges of being the only one in agricultural spaces. Dr. Tilman frequently spoke about the emotional toll of being "the only," noting how it hindered her ability to connect with White colleagues and receive meaningful engagement at professional development events. She questioned whether her presence, as the sole representative of her race, even had an impact. However, participants recognized that moments of acknowledgment—whether from students, colleagues, or mentors—reinforced the importance of their work, showing them that their presence, even as "the only," made a difference.

Being "the only" resulted in barriers to inclusion within both educational and professional environments. The absence of peers who shared their cultural backgrounds created further challenges in building meaningful connections and accessing support. Many participants found it difficult to build connections with peers and colleagues in their academic and professional environments, often feeling isolated as they struggled to establish community. When asked how he was able to "shake off" some of the challenges he faced as the only Black individual in his college agricultural fraternity — including the racism he encountered — and whether that resilience was learned through his circumstances or if he had always been the type of person to persevere through difficult challenges, Thomas replied:

It was definitely something I learned being in FFA. I recognize that my path to life has been different than most so, when I was in high school, [...] I got very involved [in FFA] for whatever reason and so every position I had in the organization, I was the first Black. So first Black president and first Black state officer. While I was state officer, there were

parts of the state they feared for my safety going to, [so] I wasn't invited to the parts of Illinois. So yeah, I mean part of it was just being conditioned. [...] I think all those things conditioned me so that when I moved into that house and went to college, I was 18 or 19 by age but definitely not by life experience.

While overt mistreatment was rare, they recognized largely subtle disparities as a result of their identities—such as limited opportunities and unequal support—that impacted their ability to fully engage and succeed with the majority. This lack of community made it difficult for participants to utilize the support systems typically available in their departments or workplaces, forcing them to seek support outside of these spaces or build solutions for themselves. However, despite these challenges, participants' experiences also motivated them to envision resources and propose solutions aimed at fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for future Black professionals in agriculture.

Theme 5: Support, Strategies, and Resources to Overcoming Challenges in Agriculture

In overcoming the challenges of navigating the agricultural journeys, participants identified key strategies such as personal growth, faith, and the establishment of supportive communities. They also emphasized the importance of tangible resources, ranging from mentorships to user-friendly professional applications, in supporting their journey. However, despite these efforts, participants still called for enhanced institutional support, improved recruitment practices, and a more inclusive environment for Black professionals in agriculture.

Participants identified personal growth, faith, and community as key factors in conquering obstacles. To address issues such as a lack of community or relevant subject matter that reflected Black experiences they could resonate with, many took an active role in creating solutions, particularly by building their own support networks. Dr. Greens explained how she navigated these challenges in post-secondary schooling: “I was able to separate myself from it. I found the spaces where I felt comfortable and spent my time there.” Others also described

forging their own paths to success through intentional efforts to establish a sense of community for themselves. Dr. Tilman, who previously discussed feeling excluded at professional conferences, shared how these experiences motivated her to be more intentional about fostering connections with other Black professionals at agricultural events, ultimately creating the supportive network she envisioned. By leveraging their experiences, participants actively worked to improve their journeys. Elijah provided the perfect summation of this:

[...] just understanding the challenge for what it is and not letting it kind of get in the way and try to, instead of focusing on the problem, focus on the solution [...] Either be part of the solution, like get involved [with the solution] or build it.

Faith also played a central role in sustaining motivation and overcoming doubts. Many participants described their religious beliefs as a source of reassurance, reminding them of their purpose. Dr. Fields explained how he overcame a lot of his challenges, “I attributed a lot to favor [...] those that stay diligent, stay faithful, stay true to their purpose and their why— you know, it may not come when you want it, but it's going to come when it's supposed to.” Jordan shared that faith helped him through depression after moving to a rural town with no community. “God did get me through it,” he explained. Even Stephanie described how her connection to God through her church community helped her persevere after wanting to give up on her degree due to experiencing racial challenges on campus.

[...] and I did get involved with local churches, so I had that community that helped... like [they] sent vans to our dorm to pick us up, to bring us to church, you know, and they cared about the college students, so it was a mixture of all of those, and my aunt just kind of reminding me, “You're smart,” “God gave you that scholarship.” “He brought you here, you can do it.”

As participants actively sought to improve their experiences and persevere in agriculture, a sense of community—whether with like-minded individuals, Black peers, or faith-based organizations—proved to be an invaluable resource. These connections provided guidance,

emotional support, and validation while also granting access to more tangible resources such as mentorship, formal programs, and structural support opportunities.

Supportive peers and community networks, particularly within Black agricultural circles, played a crucial role in validating experiences and fostering collaboration. However, mentorship emerged as an especially vital resource, providing not only emotional support but also guidance on navigating the agricultural field.

Jordan, for instance, leaned on his faith but also found strength through the connections he built with other Black agricultural professionals in his state. Through these relationships, he opened up about his struggles and discovered that others had faced similar mental health challenges. Their shared experiences helped him form the mentorship and support networks he needed to endure that difficult period. Similarly, Stephanie described how a professor's mentorship shaped much of her undergraduate experience. Beyond offering academic guidance, he played a critical role in helping her build community with other Black students, access key resources, and develop the skills necessary to succeed in agriculture. Beyond formal settings, mentorship often extended into personal relationships with family, friends, and community members. These informal mentors provided encouragement and guidance, further underscoring mentorship as a consistent driving force in participants' success.

Apart from abstract concepts and resources, participants had the chance to highlight structural resources that aided their curricular and/or career experiences. Elijah spoke about the benefits of applications like Globe Smart and ELC, which offer training in navigating cross-cultural challenges and building global cultural fluency. Stephanie and Dr. Fields discussed business resource groups that provided professional networks, supported Black professionals, and offered resources for empowerment and career growth. Thomas spoke about DEI trainings,

workshops, and inventories that helped educate individuals in cultural competency. Additionally, formal internship experiences were recognized as valuable resources that supported Black professionals in agriculture by providing educational opportunities, job experiences, and practical skill-building. These experiences helped fill gaps in knowledge, enhanced career readiness, and ultimately reduced feelings of unpreparedness and imposter syndrome. Elijah's mentor introduced him to MANRRS, where he became one of the first inductees of his university's chapter. This experience reflected a broader trend in which MANRRS, Black Student Unions, FFA, and other programs helped to provide access to networks of professionals that could guide non-rural Blacks in agricultural spaces.

These organizations and programs reinforced the importance of tangible resources in fostering a sense of belonging and career growth just as much as mentorship to aid Black professionals in agriculture. However, beyond a few explicitly identifiable programs and resources, there was an overall lack of tangible support or awareness of available opportunities. As a result, participants offered ideas for new resources and strategies to improve the experiences of Black professionals in agriculture.

Participants proposed several key improvements to enhance support for Black professionals in agriculture. A significant concern among most of the participants was the lack of structural support available to African American professionals, who typically receive little to no institutional/programmatic backing or resources. Jordan highlighted the burden of managing an entire program alone, expressing frustration over being expected to accomplish so much with minimal aid and manpower. Similarly, Dr. Greens spoke about her experiences with recruiting Black individuals into the agricultural program at the university where she works, explaining the

need for funding and strategic planning to aid her in addressing the systemic barriers associated with the work.

Participants also underscored the need for Black individuals to assume leadership roles if real structural change were to ever occur, stressing the need for collective action through organizational change. Dr. Greens highlighted the importance of internal assessments, stating that “companies [need] to canvas their own environments” to identify factors that may negatively impact or fail to support Black individuals.

Beyond structural support, participants emphasized the need to challenge racist and conservative biases while increasing White professionals' competency regarding Black experiences to foster cross-cultural support. In his DEI work, Thomas described the difficulty of engaging White professionals in critical conversations about race, noting that “the greatest issue is that people say nothing.” He explained, “I can have a conversation with a group, leave it open for conversation, questions, and comments, [and] get nothing... Everybody wants to sit on the sidelines and complain and be in their feelings, but they don't want to address it, you know?” His point was that without acknowledgment of these issues, meaningful change would continue to remain impossible. Overall, participants suggested more intentional efforts to equip agricultural spaces with the knowledge and resources needed to support and engage with Black professionals. They emphasized the importance of building cross-cultural relationships, allocating resources that reflect the workload, and fostering open dialogue as essential steps toward addressing racial challenges in agriculture.

Ultimately, while participants actively sought solutions through personal growth, community, and mentorship, their responses also highlight the urgent need for institutional

change, greater resource allocation, and a more inclusive agricultural landscape that genuinely supports non-rural Black professionals finding their footing in the field.

Objective 3: Describe the impact and/or implications hailing from, and living in, a non-rural area has on Black minorities pursuing the agricultural industry.

Agriculture is often perceived as a field rooted in rural traditions, but for Black individuals from metro backgrounds, their experiences bring a distinct and valuable perspective. While some view their urban upbringing as an advantage, allowing them to approach agriculture with fresh ideas and open-mindedness, others face challenges tied to negative stereotypes and limited exposure to the field. Such factors impact access to resources, representation, and professional opportunities, shaping how non-rural Black individuals perceive and engage in agricultural spaces. However, participants discussed a shift in awareness and suggested improvements to increase efforts to broaden the understanding of agriculture within Black urban communities through personal desires to engage the next generation in ways that go beyond traditional narratives.

Theme 6: Opportunities of Open-mindedness Due to Non-rural Upbringing as an Advantage to Non-rurality

The experiences of individuals with non-rural backgrounds in agriculture highlight how their unique upbringings shape their approaches and contributions to the field. Participants expressed the advantages they perceive in navigating new environments, the value of diverse perspectives in addressing industry challenges, and their roles as advocates for underrepresented communities. The discussion also explores the barriers faced by Black, non-rural communities in engaging with agriculture and how these individuals seek to bridge those gaps through their distinct perspectives and experiences.

For Elijah and Jordan, their non-rural upbringing provided an opportunity to “parachute out,” stepping into spaces and experiences beyond what they had previously imagined. Elijah noted that his non-rural upbringing made him more comfortable with learning and trying new things, a mindset that not only shaped his approach to agriculture but also positioned him for lucrative career opportunities. Similarly, Jordan spoke about the advantages of stepping into new spaces as a Black urban professional, noting that his identity alone often opens doors in agriculture due to the industry's growing need for candidates with his background and perspective.

Beyond stepping into new experiences, participants also highlighted how their backgrounds provided a fresh vantage point—one that others in agriculture may not always consider. Thomas spoke about diversity as an advantage, explaining that his urban upbringing gave him the ability to engage with people from different backgrounds—an experience he felt rural upbringings often lacked. Similarly, Dr. Tilman emphasized the value of diverse knowledge and perspectives, noting that her non-rural background allows her to bring insights to her teams that might otherwise be overlooked:

[...] You bring a different perspective to it, and so that is kind of important when they talk about having diverse teams, that's one of the important parts... having [...] people with different perspectives who can bring different knowledges and different ways of thinking to solving issues.

Stephanie expanded on this idea, describing her background as an “asset” in shaping her approach to customer relations and the types of questions she asks.

Dr. Greens and Dr. Fields echoed these perspectives, recognizing the opportunities their non-rural upbringings provided for fostering open-mindedness and contributing fresh outlooks to the workplace. They also emphasized how these perspectives allow them to advocate for the communities they come from. Dr. Fields shared. “[...] it opens up a whole new possibility of

knowledge and experiences, but the flip side of that is, it gives you an opportunity to take these concepts or opportunities and take them back to your communities to inspire others.” Dr. Greens reflected on how her background allows her to connect with those unfamiliar with agricultural concepts, stating, “[...] it gives me an advantage in trying to build relationships with people who don’t understand because I once was there, and I can speak to them in a way that would hopefully lead them to see the importance of it.” She went on to explain, “I found that to be very valuable in my career, just pouring back into... others in my community.”

These quotes illustrate how participants viewed their upbringings as an advantage in shaping their approach to agriculture and the unique contributions they bring to the field. Whether it was tackling new environments with eagerness and open-mindedness to pave the way for success or offering diverse perspectives that highlight overlooked experiences, their backgrounds provided a fresh lens for innovation, recognizing how their urban upbringing positioned them to elevate themselves in agriculture and address pressing challenges. However, they also acknowledged the hurdles and barriers that exist within other Black, non-rural communities when it comes to understanding and engaging with agriculture.

Theme 7: Negative Stereotypes and Perceptions as Challenges of Non-rural Upbringings

The multifaceted experiences of Black professionals from urban backgrounds who have entered the field of agriculture highlight a paradox: while urban upbringings often foster open-mindedness, valuable perspectives, and exposure to diversity, they can also create significant challenges for those pursuing careers in the field. Persistent stereotyping and negative misconceptions, challenges with building credibility or feeling secure without traditional agricultural experiences, combined with a lack of awareness about agriculture’s potential,

emerged as significant challenges for Black participants from non-rural backgrounds pursuing agricultural careers.

Thomas highlighted both the advantages and disadvantages of his urban upbringing. While it exposed him to diverse peoples and cultures, it also meant encountering challenges when engaging with those who lacked similar exposure—especially in agriculture, where many seem to come from rural backgrounds. He explained, “The more you’re exposed, the more different you show up, and if you’re not exposed and don’t see much, you don’t know how to show up. So yeah, there are people who have really conservative viewpoints because they haven’t experienced much outside of that.” While navigating conservative views was difficult, it also fueled his motivation for the work he does now.

Dr. Fields shared how these limited perceptions create inequitable opportunities for communities like the one he came from. He explains that people often assume that Black urban communities are uninterested in agriculture, which results in opportunities being extended only if someone from the community returns with knowledge to share. He stated:

The disadvantage to communities like mine from non-rural areas is, unless there’s someone who’s been in it and comes back and gives back that knowledge, that’s the only way you would know. Other than that, people perceive that you won’t be interested because you don’t look historically like the people that have been engaged. And because of that assumption, you don’t get equitable access to resources, opportunities, and mainly the funding, right? The funding is a huge part of why a lot of people of color from when I was coming up didn’t pursue ag, because they didn’t know that there were scholarships for minorities in agriculture.”

His perspective highlights how misconceptions about who belongs in agriculture impact access to resources and the opportunity to enter the field. Stephanie shared how her urban upbringing, when combined with a lack of Black representation in agriculture, sometimes left her feeling insecure. She recalled, “[...] there were very few people who looked like me, and I was very young when I first got into this, so, you know, sometimes that cast doubts about if this

[was] really where I [was] going to end up because representation is important. [...] seeing is believing.” The challenges of non-rural upbringings extend far beyond simply navigating conservative mindsets and perspectives; they also involve how these viewpoints—whether conservative or uninformed—can shape the accessibility of the field and further exacerbate inequitable opportunities for minorities seeking to engage in agriculture.

Although it fostered open-mindedness, a major disadvantage of non-rural upbringings was that they rarely provided the hands-on agricultural experience often seen as essential for a career in the field. Many participants expressed that they wished they had been exposed to agriculture earlier to better understand its significance. While internships and extracurricular opportunities provided some exposure later in life, they still lacked the lived experience needed to form relatable connections with others in the field and, at times, to feel secure in their positions.

Dr. Greens, as a Black professional in agriculture, shared her concerns about the challenges of building meaningful connections with students and colleagues whose backgrounds were vastly different from her own. She reflected,

I know there’s not a lot of Black people in ag just more broadly, so I wonder if that could be a barrier. And then on top of that, I can’t connect to those ag stories, whether it’s being part of FFA or 4-H or the fact that I grew up on a farm [...]. So, I was pretty concerned that that would be a barrier or an area of contention where students or professionals that I work with [...] would say, “I could tell she’s never really been on a farm like that” or “What does she really know to be telling us about the agricultural world?”

However, she found that being open and honest about her background actually created more opportunities for connection, ultimately easing prior insecurities she faced. Her willingness to share her experiences allowed others to invite her into new learning opportunities and share their own stories, which strengthened her credibility.

Other participants echoed the sentiment of using their openness to establish their credibility despite not having adequate lived experiences in agriculture, while some saw that, regardless, they were still the outsider. Dr. Tilman spoke about the challenges she faced, noting that while her education supported her knowledge, she felt her lack of direct farm experience may have cost her job opportunities. She also highlighted the exclusionary nature of certain agricultural organizations like FFA, where she perceived a rigid in-group dynamic—feeling the “cliquish” nature of agriculture where “you’re either in or out” — which contributed to the barriers she faced in the field.

Participants encountered skepticism from within their own Black urban communities at times as well. Dr. Greens stated, “It seemed like my Black friends teased me about [pursuing agriculture], they didn’t understand it.” Dr. Fields explained pushback he received from his mother about his agricultural interests and engagement where she told him “You are just doing it because you want to be White.” While they often described receiving support from their community, they also faced confusion, laughter, or outright disbelief about their decision to pursue agriculture by fellow Blacks as well. These complex and nuanced experiences led to the exploration of how participants believed other non-rural Black individuals might perceive the field and the challenges that come with being in a space where they are underrepresented.

Theme 8: Perceptions and Levels of Awareness for Non-Rural Black Youth in Agriculture

Participants noted that many non-rural Black community individuals tend to associate agriculture with its historical ties to racism and hard labor, often overlooking its broader significance. This limited perception is particularly evident among Black youth in non-rural areas, where exposure to agriculture is scarce and influenced by factors such as location, upbringing, and access to resources. While some progress is being made through generational

shifts and targeted initiatives, agriculture remains largely unfamiliar in these communities, according to participants.

Participants, to the best of their knowledge, shared their perspectives on how Black urban communities perceive agriculture. Across the board, they expressed that these communities largely associate agriculture with farming, hard labor, and its historical ties to slavery—often seeing little beyond that. They acknowledged that Black urban communities recognize the “direct connection to slavery” and the racism that has shaped African American experiences in the field.

For the most part, however, participants expressed uncertainty about whether these communities even have a clear understanding of what agriculture truly encompasses. Responses ranged from concerns that “Black kids are not getting the connection and information to grow their knowledge in [agriculture],” to observations that “they’re not thinking of the full importance of it,” and even that “there’s still a significant percentage that still don’t know [about agriculture].” One participant summed it up by stating, “I think non-rural Blacks don’t understand, [...] we’re very limited in what we think agriculture is.” The consensus was that agriculture remains an unfamiliar or unexplored concept in many Black urban communities—“they don’t know about it because it’s not part of their world.”

When considering Black youth specifically, many participants struggled to identify initiatives that truly engage non-rural Black students in agriculture. They voiced uncertainty about how effectively the field is being introduced to these populations, emphasizing the need for more targeted outreach and visibility. Jordan, one participant, explained,

That’s kind of hard to say because they might not know about it. It just depends. Some places teach it; some places don’t. Here in [State], they teach it. In places like [State], they don’t in those city areas, you know. [...] So, yeah, I do feel like that’s kind of hard to answer, given there being a cultural difference [between states] in some respects.

Others built on this, noting that exposure to agriculture often depends on upbringing, location, and access to resources. While some city youth may have access to schools like the Chicago High School of Agriculture, which actively promotes the profession in urban areas where agriculture is less visible—and where Black participation is even more so—it may remain entirely off the radar.

Despite this, some participants noted a slow but evolving shift in understanding, particularly among non-rural Black youth. One participant observed, “Some shifting happening to what non-rural Black people think agriculture is.” She went on to highlight the growing generational gap between those with direct familial ties to slavery and those without, expressing curiosity about how this shift may be influencing perceptions of agriculture and engagement with the field. Others echoed the idea that generational differences play a role in changing mindsets, though they also acknowledged the persistent weight of agriculture’s historical context in Black communities. There were some that expressed that this shift might also be due to recruitment programs or initiatives that begin to introduce agriculture to these communities, though, ultimately, they expressed that agriculture struggles to reach non-rural Black youth in a meaningful way. While some awareness is growing, there is still a pressing need for intentional outreach and educational opportunities to bridge the knowledge gap and reshape perceptions of agriculture in these communities.

Theme 9: Advancing Equity, Empowerment, and Legacy in Black Communities as an Aspiration

This theme highlights a powerful movement among Black agricultural professionals to create inclusive, supportive spaces within the industry. These individuals are driven by a deep desire to reshape the narrative of agriculture for Black communities, emphasizing the importance

of representation, legacy, and empowerment. Their efforts focus on building welcoming environments and cultivating community, preserving and honoring Black agricultural history as a source of strength, increasing representation and mentorship opportunities, along with addressing systemic inequities and promoting equity in agriculture.

Through these initiatives, Black professionals are working to transform agriculture into a field where their communities can thrive, contribute, and build their own legacies. Participants aspired to achieve continuous personal and professional growth, aligning themselves with their purpose and dedicating themselves to making a meaningful impact on Black communities, regardless of the field they pursue. The participants desired professional growth and impact, striving for long-term, sustainable growth and continued learning. Most also felt a strong sense of spiritual and personal fulfillment in alignment with their career goals, where they felt a sense of God-given purpose as personal reward and fulfillment in engaging with youth and Black communities. Participants also expressed deep desires, whether through cultivating community, inducing empowerment, promoting representation, or simply aiming to ameliorate inequitable systems as motivation to continue their work to advance Black non-rural communities.

Creating welcoming and supportive spaces was at the forefront of most participants' to-do lists. They held a deep desire to create environments where Black individuals felt welcomed and supported in agriculture. Aspirations to build a community for Black professionals and foster support focused on cultivating actionable allyship and improving inclusivity in agricultural spaces. Support from both in-group and out-group communities seemed to be pivotal in participants' views of changing the system for Blacks seeking to pursue ag. Dr. Tilman spoke about the need to support Black communities in agriculture, especially because the communities are sparse, exclaiming, "It's so important for us to show up for each other in this space." Dr.

Green talks about how she envisions giving back to her community by giving Black youth and children the space to experience the things that she was never able to in her own youth. She also talks about the rewarding nature of engaging in community building for the Black farmers she worked with, saying her engagement with such communities “lets me know that I am doing something that’s bigger than my day-to-day clock-in work.”

Thomas talks about the importance of cross-cultural community building in order to make space for Blacks in agriculture. He explains that,

the biggest way we can change any of this is, how, as a Black kid from Chicago, can I engage with a White girl from Central Illinois, and we recognize we have differences, but by talking and becoming friends, we both grow, and we become better people? [...] Where we’re forced out of our comfort zones and forced to have to listen to [and] talk to each other, and because of that, relationships grew [...]

Here the participant underscores that this work to build a communal space whether in FFA or agriculture in general, for African Americans, cannot be done alone. Dr. Fields seconds this notion as he too explains the importance of cross-cultural relationships in changing the motion as he explain his plans to collaborate with a White colleague and professional on a project together:

And what we actually saw was like, [...] [you can show] people what you can truly do when you take words and put them into action, when you have people from different walks of life that share so many similarities and take that and create something that changes the game.

Whether through a community built for themselves by people like themselves or through cross-cultural connections, there was value in being able to envision communities where Blacks are empowered through collective action.

Legacy and empowerment emerged as key themes, emphasizing the need to preserve and honor Black agricultural history as a source of strength and inspiration. The Black, non-rural professionals expressed a desire to empower the next generation of Black individuals in

agriculture by reconnecting them to their agricultural roots and reshaping the narrative of agriculture as a positive career choice. Dr. Greens stated:

[...] there should be some respect placed on the resiliency of Black people to really survive that and build an industry that I benefit from, [that] everybody benefits from [...]. I think it's something to be proud of. That history and that resiliency. Because if [our ancestors] didn't survive that, we wouldn't be here. So, I just want to continue to share the story as well, in a lens that is that of resiliency and empowerment, to where we know our history and know that if our history was [...] painted in this light to where we see our contributions, then we [would] know we belong here as well.

This quote underscores the importance participants place on Black heritage in agriculture. Despite the dark history of slavery, many participants view Black agricultural history as a tool for empowerment, shifting the focus from a history of oppression to one of strength and resilience. Rather than allowing this history to reinforce exclusion, they seek to use it to inspire and uplift their communities. This mindset was shared across participants, as many expressed a commitment to creating lasting legacies for future generations.

Elijah captured this desire for legacy to “take a generational step forward,” a phrase that reflects the common goal among participants to build something that will continue to inspire and empower beyond their own lives. Stephanie expressed similar sentiments, stating that she wanted to “raise up the next generation of leaders,” while Jordan described his ambition to “pay it forward” and pass on his success to future generations, particularly his grandchildren. For Jordan, he repeatedly expressed “I’m not doing it for my first name, I’m doing it for my last,” where agriculture represents a way to leave a legacy that extends well beyond his lifetime, offering opportunities for his community long after he's gone. These shared goals of using heritage to empower and leave legacies are not only about individual success but also about breaking cycles of exclusion and providing opportunities for others to thrive. By embracing their

history and legacy, these individuals felt they would be reshaping the narrative of agriculture, making it a space where Black professionals could contribute, succeed, and build their own legacies for future generations.

Building a lasting legacy in agriculture involves establishing a contemporary presence by increasing the representation of Black minorities in the field. Representation emerged as vital for participants in their desire to serve Black communities, whether by providing resources or advocating for structural changes within leadership roles. One major focus was equipping the next generation of Black leaders in agriculture, with participants offering themselves as resources for Black individuals choosing to pursue careers in this field. As Dr. Greens shared, “I want to be a sounding board or a space that’s going to keep it real and encourage them to choose what’s best for them and hope they stay in the industry. But if nothing else, hope that agriculture has brought some kind of element to their world that is positive.”

Dr. Tilman spoke of the deep-seated responsibility she felt to support Black professionals in agriculture, especially because it is difficult for African Americans to “imagine themselves in the [field]” without representation. Similarly, Stephanie expressed her eagerness to serve Black youth interested in agriculture. She actively seeks opportunities to engage with children about the field, emphasizing the importance of giving back. As she said:

Whenever I see the opportunity, I’m like, “YES, sign me up!” [or] “Oh, we have students coming? I will be there.” [...] So that’s something that I clear my calendar for because I feel it was such a part of my journey and why I was able to be sustained myself, because so many people did that for me. So many. So, I know, from experience, the value of [pouring into others].

This desire to serve and provide mentorship highlights the critical role of representation in agriculture. By increasing visibility and creating spaces for Black individuals to “see themselves” in the field, participants felt they could help to build a future where Black leaders

can thrive and continue the work of advocating for change. Representation, therefore, becomes not just an aspiration but a necessary component for fostering growth, leadership, and sustainability in the agricultural sector. As such, participants also emphasized the need to create opportunities for future Black leaders through increased presence and representation, particularly in leadership roles. Most participants believed that leadership is a critical factor in driving systemic change. Without Black advocates in positions where change is possible, they felt that meaningful progress for Blacks seeking to engage in agriculture would be limited.

Overall, participants proposed various efforts to advance equity and address systemic inequities, using agriculture as a tool to correct the disparities affecting Black communities. Many expressed a desire to help others avoid the challenges they themselves have faced or may still face. Whether dealing with the impact of their personal experiences or seeking ways to build systems that are safe and welcoming for Black individuals entering the profession, participants were focused on creating secure spaces for Black people—especially non-rural individuals—connecting with agriculture. Their ideas aimed to bridge the gap between agriculture and their communities.

Chapter Summary

Participants were introduced to agriculture through various mentors and programs like internships, MANRRS, FFA, and extracurricular activities. These opportunities sparked their interest in agricultural careers and fueled a desire to empower others through the field's potential.

However, their journeys were marked by cultural and systemic exclusion, often being the only Black individual in academic or professional spaces. This isolation created barriers to connection, recognition, and resources. Despite these challenges, participants developed coping

strategies, persevered, and envisioned changes such as greater cultural competence among White peers and stronger institutional support.

Participants viewed their non-rural backgrounds as an asset, offering adaptability, open-mindedness, and a unique perspective—whether advocating for non-rural communities or embracing diverse knowledge systems. Yet, their backgrounds also presented challenges, including negative perceptions of their agricultural engagement from both urban and rural counterparts, imposter syndrome, and difficulty building confidence and connections due to limited hands-on experience.

Still, participants found strength in their heritage, struggles, and hopes for future generations. Their resilience fueled a commitment to addressing systemic inequities and fostering empowerment within their communities. They stressed the need for programs specifically designed for non-rural Black individuals, acknowledging the impact of existing resources like scholarships, the USDA 1890 National Scholars Program, and MANRRS, though still calling for broader engagement efforts.

Participants saw agriculture as a powerful tool and aimed to challenge negative perceptions of agriculture in urban spaces and bridge knowledge gaps, all while working to create equitable pathways for future non-rural Black professionals. Their work was driven by a desire to leave a lasting legacy, paving the way for the next generation.

Ultimately, while their journeys were filled with both hardships and moments of joy, their stories serve to model the importance of recruiting, retaining, and representing Black diversity in agriculture.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions

Urban minorities face unique challenges in pursuing agricultural careers within the rural-dominated space, where obstacles “are not necessarily academic” (Helsel & Hughes, 1984, p. 31). Supporting their success requires a holistic approach that considers their curricular, career, and personal experiences. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of non-rural Black professionals engaged in agricultural careers, where insights could be drawn related to the impact of their upbringing and Black identities on their exposure and engagement in agriculture. The three main objectives of the study were to 1) describe the influences of non-rural Blacks in pursuing careers in agriculture, 2) explore the challenges of non-rural Blacks engaged in agriculture during college and since being in their careers, and 3) describe the implications of hailing from a non-rural background on agricultural pursuit. Ultimately, nine themes were identified as significant contributors to the participants’ lived experiences, as summarized in Table 3.

Objective 1

Objective 1 examines the factors that influenced exposure to agriculture. Mentorship from academic advisors, agricultural organization leaders, and family and friends, along with informal experiences such as internships, MANRRS, and extracurricular activities, played a significant role in introducing non-rural Black individuals to agricultural opportunities and curricula. Participants identified academic advisors, family, and peers as both key support systems and initial sources of exposure to agricultural opportunities. These influences introduced them to scholarships for agricultural programs, internships, organizations like MANRRS and

FFA, and curricular opportunities that ultimately led to their pursuit of agriculture-related studies in college.

Similarly, a phenomenological study conducted by McKim et al. (2017) examined the perceptions of students in a multicultural scholars program to identify their perceived challenges and support systems. The study found that participants' support was deeply tied to relationships built with peers, faculty, and advisors, and further, the support from such relationships yielded benefits that were both emotional and academic (McKim et al., 2017). Scholarships, club and organizational membership, and mentorship were identified as key opportunities that resulted from these connections (McKim et al., 2017). Additionally, a study by Outley (2008) highlights the importance of personal connections with family and high school and college counselors, in influencing MANRRS students to pursue agricultural careers.

Beyond mentorship and programming as influence on exposure to agriculture, participants' initial commitment to staying the course was driven by more personal factors. McKim et al. (2017) and Outley (2008) found that minority students developed a personal drive to pursue agriculture, whether through a passion for saving the environment, acquiring new skills, leadership development, or advancing minority legacies in the science. Similarly, participants in this study were driven by personal desires: to empower others through agriculture. They expressed a deep commitment to personal growth and using agriculture to address community challenges, from tangible issues like food insecurity and financial stability to broader goals like youth development and leadership. Ultimately, their motivation stemmed from a desire to challenge systemic barriers and improve conditions in urban Black communities.

Objective 2

Objective 2 examined the curricular and career challenges faced by non-rural African Americans in agriculture. As the field becomes increasingly diverse, it is essential to address the unique challenges these individuals encounter to better engage and support those from urban and suburban backgrounds (Outley, 2008). Many participants in this study faced obstacles related to cultural and systemic exclusion, challenges with race posing barriers to building meaningful connections, being valued, and accessing the same resources and opportunities as their White counterparts.

Participants experienced both overt racism and subtle microaggressions that reinforced negative stereotypes about their identities as Black men and women. A lack of cultural sensitivity often led to feeling isolated and difficulties in building meaningful connections with peers and colleagues. Jayarante et al. (2019) found that genuine connections between faculty and peers play a crucial role in recruiting and retaining minority students in agricultural programs. In the context of this study, these findings suggest a need to assess how Black communities value authentic relationships in pursuit of their goals. Similarly, Outley (2008) identified barriers for minority students that align with participants' experiences, including a lack of cultural sensitivity, challenges associated with being required to relocate to remote areas, a lack of inclusion in academic and professional settings, discrimination, and limited support—concerns echoed directly in this study

Beyond this, participants expressed concerns about working in environments where their presence was often questioned, and their contributions were devalued due to their identity or the nature of their work. This led to feelings of frustration, lack of confidence and preparedness, and imposter syndrome. Hesel and Hughes (1984) identified similar challenges in engaging urban students in agriculture, noting issues such as lower confidence compared to rural students, denial

of job opportunities due to limited hands-on experience, and having their capabilities questioned. These challenges were further exacerbated by participants' experiences of being “the only” Black individual in many spaces, creating additional burdens, deepening feelings of isolation, and highlighting the lack of support specific to navigating the singularity of their experiences.

While participants acknowledged challenges, they also identified coping strategies and envisioned changes within their respective agricultural fields to better support those like themselves. Whether through increased cultural competence among White counterparts, internal organizational changes, greater institutional and programmatic support with funding, or staying committed to their authentic identities, participants outlined key factors necessary for increased support and engagement. Outley (2008) identified strategies for improving recruitment for minorities in agriculture, including building community, providing scholarships, and exposing minorities to outdoor opportunities, all aligning with participants' experiences in this study. Participants highlighted the importance of resources that aim to build building cultural competence among their counterparts and that support cross-cultural relationships to aid in building a sense of community and inclusion. Participants emphasized the need for institutional and organizational cultures to be more culturally responsive to diverse student and employee needs (Outley, 2008) and called for increased dialogue on culture, race, and identity.

Scholarships played a crucial role in encouraging participants to engage in agriculture during college, but as they advanced in their careers, they recognized the need for sustained financial support and resources to succeed in their roles. Additionally, participants valued continued opportunities to develop their skills and expose future generations to agriculture. Programs such as MANRRS and informal initiatives provided critical support, helping them navigate challenges and better prepare for their careers. Despite facing skepticism due to their

backgrounds, participants found that genuine and intentional engagement often led to more positive receptions of their identities and experiences. While they may have lacked certain hands-on agricultural experiences compared to their peers, their commitment to being their authentic selves served as a valuable tool in building the relationships they desired.

Objective 3

The last objective highlights the implications of hailing from a non-rural area on one's pursuit of agriculture. With this came various opportunities, challenges, and motivations where participants saw their urban and suburban backgrounds as beneficial in maintaining an open mindset, being able to adapt quickly, being accepting of diverse people, and offering a unique approach to their contributions. However, some negative aspects of non-rurality included the lack of positively associated perceptions surrounding agriculture, participants having their capabilities questioned due to urban upbringings, and a lack of hands-on experience, which led to feelings of being inadequately prepared compared to peers. Some even faced ridicule from close family or friends for pursuing agriculture; one participant recalled his mother believing he "just wanted to be White" because of his interest in FFA and agriculture. Prior research has similarly noted that agriculture is not commonly perceived by Blacks as a field *for* Blacks (Helsel & Hughes, 1984; Jayarante et al., 2019), which may contribute to the persistent negative perceptions of the opportunities available in the field.

Other challenges participants spoke about were the difficulties in bringing agricultural knowledge to urban communities and the challenges that come with this effort. Wiley et al. (1997) explored the attitudes of minority high school students who attended a five-day agricultural workshop, using Swanson's (1972) framework of Assumed Relationships Among Education, Knowledge, Attitude, and Behavior. Their findings indicated that education about

agriculture influenced students' perceptions of the opportunities available to them in the field. This aligns with other research suggesting that a lack of information or exposure to agriculture contributes to negative perceptions and misconceptions, particularly regarding the "prestige," or perceived lack thereof, associated with the field (Outley, 2008, p. 147). One participant encapsulated this challenge by explaining that urban communities often remain unaware of agricultural opportunities unless individuals like him—who come from these communities and pursue agriculture—bring that knowledge back. He also noted the assumption that individuals from urban and suburban areas are inherently uninterested in agriculture, a stereotype that reinforces the lack of exposure and access to agricultural pathways. These uniform and often misguided assumptions contribute to the widespread ignorance of agricultural opportunities, limiting perceptions of the field's prestige and potential. Participants recognized that informing and challenging these misconceptions is an opportunity to reshape attitudes toward agriculture in urban communities.

There was a noted shift in perception, particularly among younger generations, who were less likely to associate agriculture strictly with slavery due to the growing generational distance from that history. Participants believed that while some non-rural Black communities were beginning to show interest in agriculture, the greater issue was a general lack of awareness about the field. When asked about specific programs targeting non-rural Black engagement in agriculture, participants pointed to initiatives like MANRRS and various nonprofit organizations. However, most struggled to identify specific efforts designed explicitly to engage non-rural Black youth in agriculture, highlighting a gap in targeted outreach and programming.

Ultimately, despite the challenges they faced, participants expressed a strong desire to make a difference and create pathways for non-rural Black individuals to follow in their

footsteps. They found empowerment in using their talents, careers, and research to make agriculture a more welcoming and supportive field where non-rural Black individuals, especially youth, can thrive. Participants viewed agriculture as an opportunity for Black minorities and were committed to carving out the space for future generations to build lasting legacies in the field. Table 3 summarizes the nine themes by objective.

Table 3

Summary of Themes

Objective	Themes Present	Meaning
Objective 1: Influences on Agricultural Exposure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Mentorship and Programming on Exposure 2) Desire to Empower as Influence on Pursuit 	Mentorship and programs like internships, MANRRS, and extracurricular activities helped expose non-rural Black individuals to agricultural opportunities. These opportunities led participants to discover personal aspirations to grow and empower others through agriculture.
Objective 2: Curricular and Career Challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Navigating Exclusion 4) Being the Only 5) Identified Support, Strategies, and Resources 	Participants faced cultural and systemic exclusion, often being the only Black person in their field, which created barriers to connection, recognition, and resources. Despite these challenges, they identified coping strategies and envisioned changes such as greater cultural competence, organizational reforms, and increased institutional support. Their perseverance was driven by personal determination, faith, and community support.
Objective 3: Implications of Non-Rural Upbringing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6) Opportunities Associated w/ Non-Rural Upbringings 7) Challenges Associated with Non-Rural Upbringings 8) Perceptions and Levels of Awareness in Non-Rural Black Communities 9) Advancing Equity, Empowerment, and Legacy for Non-Rural Black Communities. 	Participants viewed their non-rural backgrounds as beneficial for maintaining open-mindedness, adaptability, and acceptance of diversity. However, they also faced challenges, such as negative perceptions of agriculture in urban communities, difficulty bridging agricultural knowledge, skepticism about their abilities, limited hands-on experience, and even ridicule for pursuing agriculture. While some communities are beginning to see agriculture in broader terms beyond traditional associations, participants noted a lack of programs specifically targeting non-rural Black engagement, though resources like scholarships, the USDA 1890's National Scholars Program, MANRRS, and others have been helpful. Ultimately, they aim to create a more inclusive and supportive agricultural space for future non-rural Black professionals.

Conclusions Explored Through Critical Race Theory

It is important to acknowledge a key limitation of this research, that the narratives and experiences examined are based on individuals who were ultimately successful and resilient in their pursuit of agricultural careers. This study does not explore the experiences of those who were unable to secure equitable support or resources, which may have led to an unsuccessful or abandoned pursuit of the field. This limitation should be considered when analyzing the results and their broader implications.

While participants in this study demonstrated resilience and the ability to navigate these challenges by finding solutions that worked for them, the reality remains that they shouldn't have to navigate these challenges. They should not have to endure racism, inequitable support, limited opportunities, or restricted resources to access and pursue this—or any—field. The same ease with which others navigate their opportunities should be naturally afforded to non-rural Black individuals as well. Critical Race Theory provided a lens for interpreting these findings by highlighting the role of race and systemic inequalities in shaping the experiences of Black individuals in agricultural professions.

Findings from Objective 1 align with CRT by highlighting the role of mentorship and community-based support in counteracting systemic barriers faced by marginalized individuals. CRT emphasizes how racism is embedded in societal structures, including education and professional fields (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Treviño et al., 2008), often limiting access to resources and opportunities for Black individuals. In this study, mentorship and informal experiences provided participants with essential support systems—offering space, resources, critical opportunities, and emotional encouragement—that empowered them to navigate and challenge predominantly White agricultural systems. These support networks served as a means

of resistance, helping participants persist in a field where systemic inequities might otherwise hinder their success.

In Objective 2, CRT emphasizes the “permanence of racism,” a concept articulated by author, professor, and civil rights activist Derrick Bell (1992) who asserts that racism is not merely an occasional occurrence but a constant, underlying force shaping the experiences of people of color. Scholars such as Bobo and Kluegel (1993) further support this argument, stating that racism is persistent and omnipresent in U.S. society, even stating that race influences both individual and systemic experiences—particularly when White individuals dominate and shape structures based on their own racial and self-interests.

Milner (2017) expands on this by explaining that racism manifests both intentionally and unintentionally in spaces, appearing overtly or subtly. Regardless of how it presents itself, racism remains a persistent issue that marginalized individuals must navigate. This reality was reflected in the challenges faced by participants, reinforcing how deeply embedded racial and social barriers shaped their experiences, and influenced their journeys in agriculture. Recognizing this, it becomes critical to identify strategies for meaningful support, ensuring that participants can navigate and overcome these systemic obstacles. Without such efforts, their identities—specifically as Black individuals in a predominantly White field—become an unjust burden placed upon them.

This challenge is further compounded by the fact that they are not just Black individuals; they are Black men, women, and non-traditional participants who exist at multiple intersections of marginalization within agricultural spaces. For Objective 3, CRT is best explained in convergence with the concept of intersectionality, which recognizes that individuals hold multiple, overlapping identities—such as being Black, from a city or rural area, or being a

woman—and that these identities shape how they experience both discrimination and privilege. Gilborn (2015) argues that intersectionality is essential to understanding racial inequity, as it explains how race interacts with other social identities in ways that can compound the challenges individuals face.

In discussions of intersectionality, scholars highlight how marginalized groups often experience heightened forms of exclusion due to the multiple identities they hold—such as being a woman, transgender, Jewish, or belonging to other historically marginalized communities (Mercat-Bruns, 2018; Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006; Weldon, 2008). Exclusion occurs when these identities are perceived as incompatible with dominant societal norms, positioning individuals as outsiders (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006; Weldon, 2008). Similarly, participants in this study and their communities were often perceived as not belonging in agriculture—a field historically associated with rural, White identities. The compounded effects of intersectionality align with CRT’s concept of white supremacy and privilege, wherein dominant Eurocentric ideologies shape agriculture in ways that marginalize non-rural, non-traditional, and minority individuals. As a result, these individuals encounter systemic barriers that reinforce the perception that agriculture is not meant for them, ultimately making it more difficult to engage with agricultural spaces or view it as an equitable playing field.

Deci and Ryan’s Self-Determination Theory provides insight into why, despite these systemic barriers, participants continued to pursue agriculture. SDT suggests that individuals are motivated by three core psychological needs: autonomy (a sense of control or agency), competence (feeling capable and skilled), and relatedness (a sense of belonging) (Ryan & Deci, 1980). Even in the face of exclusion, participants found empowerment by pushing back against stereotypes, continuing their pursuits, and reshaping how their communities view agriculture. In

doing so, they became agents of change, advocating for the inclusion of marginalized voices and working to create a more equitable and inclusive future for non-rural Black individuals in agriculture.

Overall, participants encountered significant barriers that, although they managed to overcome and make meaning from, should never have been obstacles in the first place. These findings highlight how marginalized individuals navigate and confront White-dominated systems within agriculture, and how their experiences are systematically shaped by their identities and backgrounds. Critical Race Theory underscores that racism is deeply embedded in societal structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Treviño et al., 2008), creating a persistent issue for non-rural Black individuals engaged in agricultural careers that demands continuous solutions, as further explored in the section below. Ultimately, these findings point to the need for a more inclusive, equitable approach in agricultural systems that acknowledges and dismantles systemic barriers.

Recommendations

Research suggests that engaging urban minority populations in agricultural programs requires addressing the unique challenges they face. The following recommendations are not an exhaustive list of the ideas and changes needed to improve urban Blacks' engagement in agriculture, but yet, are a starting point for idea generation, future research, and actionable approaches to solving such challenges. Proposed ideas address negative perceptions and narratives, providing community and support, and other ideas for improving tailored approaches, programs, experiences, and research for non-rural minority communities to engage in agriculture.

Recommendations for Practice

Negative Perceptions and Narratives. A major challenge in recruiting non-rural Blacks is overcoming negative perceptions and historical stigmas. Talbert and Larke (1995b) found that a lack of knowledge about agricultural opportunities contributed to minority students' negative attitudes towards agriculture. Similarly, Jayarante et al. (2019) argue that minority students do not often see agriculture as a viable career option due to limited representation and negative cultural associations. It is recommended to tailor recruitment strategies to the specific interests and experiences of minority youth (Jayarante, 2019). The first step is redefining agriculture beyond its traditional focus on production jobs. Many people do not realize the field encompasses careers in medicine, engineering, analytics, technology, education, and more. If we continue framing agriculture in such a narrow light, we risk excluding non-rural and Black individuals whose interests may not align with production-focused roles, reinforcing the misconception that agriculture is not for them. However, redefining agriculture is only part of the challenge—urban minority interests must be understood and addressed to avoid floundering applications of traditional agricultural outreach models typically designed for rural and/or White individuals. Additional work will be required to effectively communicate how the broad scope of agriculture aligns with this specific community's skills and aspirations. By showcasing the diverse opportunities agriculture offers and connecting them to existing interests, agriculture careers will be viewed as more attractive, and just as prestigious, as any other industry for non-rural Black communities.

Increasing the visibility and accessibility of agricultural career pathways for non-rural Black students might be another essential step in shifting negative perceptions. Talbert and Larke (1995b) argue that agricultural knowledge and career opportunities must be publicized in urban and suburban settings to successfully recruit minority students who may otherwise lack

exposure, leading them to conclude that seeing agriculture firsthand is crucial in reshaping its appeal as a career (Talbert & Larke, 1995b). One way this may be achieved, according to Helsel and Hughes (1984) who argue that students must see themselves as active participants rather than spectators in agricultural education, is to increase immersive experiences for students. Outley (2008) also suggests that exposure through youth programming and college visits can be instrumental in guiding students toward agricultural careers. Talbert and Larke's (1995b) findings support these ideas, revealing that urban minority students with prior involvement in programs like 4-H held more positive associations with agricultural opportunities. Such experiential opportunities not only increase awareness but also helps students visualize themselves within the field, making agriculture a more tangible and viable career option.

In light of this, increasing youth exposure to agriculture through diverse field trips is essential. Even more, rather than limiting experiential learning trips solely to traditional production-based professions, schools should adopt a broader approach that highlight the wide range of careers within agriculture. This could include visits to companies like John Deere, where students can learn about the technological innovations that drive the company, or lectures on college campuses such as NC State and A&T, where students can engage with educators who explore various ethnic contributions in the field of agriculture, or even touring establishments like Zoetis to discuss the applications involved in medicine and vaccine production. Experiential learning opportunities, whether in formal or informal educational settings, should be designed to align more closely with the interests, motivations, and aspirations of non-rural Black students, showcasing careers that resonate with their goals and expanding their understanding of agriculture's many pathways.

Anderson (2013) emphasizes that recruitment efforts should extend beyond students to include their surrounding communities, as family and support systems significantly influence both perceptions of and retention in agriculture. Similarly, Jayarante et al. (2019) highlight the role of parents in shaping minority students' career interests, suggesting that shifting perceptions requires a broader, community-focused approach. These findings provide valuable insights that align with the results of this study. While not the case for every participant in this study, some described the challenges of facing ridicule and negative perceptions from their communities and family members. Participants understood the full scope of agriculture, yet their friends or relatives often did not. This aligns with research advocating for a more holistic approach that engages not only students but also their broader communities, as these groups serve as some of the strongest influences on students' decisions to engage in agriculture (Jayarante et al., 2019).

Engaging communities, parents, and friends of those targeted for recruitment will be paramount. Hosting interactive, community-wide events that highlight agricultural careers may help involve key stakeholders and attract attention. This could take the form of an event showcasing local products, food, and career opportunities—appealing to both high school students preparing for graduation and parents and community members considering a career change. The key is to make these events relevant to both recruits and their families by incorporating engaging elements such as family and consumer science agents offering home and family improvement advice, 4-H camp sign-ups with hands-on activities for younger children, or even on-site internship interviews and career discussions for high school students.

Beyond one-time events, sustained engagement is necessary, even if it requires persistence and learning from failed attempts. Schools and extension programs can collaborate to send out quarterly newsletters advertising family-friendly extension events, allocate more

funding to immersive, low-cost learning experiences, and create accessible opportunities for community participation. For example, instead of requiring youth and families to visit the county extension office to explore events and resources, primary and secondary schools could host canning or planting workshops on their campus, or extension agents could set up interactive activities in public parks where people can join without registration, travel, or cost barriers. Ultimately, there are countless ways to engage communities and use communal learning as a means in reshaping non-rural Black communities' understanding of agriculture and expanding their perception of who belongs in the field.

Additionally, participants in this study highlight the importance of reshaping historical narratives surrounding Black involvement in agriculture. Some expressed that the traditional linkage between Black agricultural participation and slavery is weakening over time, creating an opportunity to shift perceptions within Black communities. While acknowledging the historical context of slavery remains essential, narratives must also emphasize success stories of Black individuals in agriculture to counter negative perceptions.

By highlighting stories of empowerment and achievement, like that of Fannie Lou Hamer, Thomas M. Campbell, or the Exoduster Movement, minority youth can engage with content that showcases agriculture as a viable and rewarding career path for Black individuals. Providing historical examples that challenge the idea of slavery as the sole connection to Black agricultural participation in school curriculum and content allows for a reframing of lineage and heritage—not as reasons to distance oneself from the field, but as sources of strength and inspiration to pursue it (Atkins, 2013). Those in education and extension may find particular value in this information, as incorporating Black historical narratives and increasing the visibility

of Black leaders in the space—*genuinely*, may enhance engagement among minority communities.

Building Community and Support. Another key factor in the process of engaging urban Black populations may be the role of academic advisors, who, when actively fostering belonging and mentorship for minority students, positively influence participation (Jayarante et al., 2019). Participants in this study echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that relationships with advisors were crucial in their decision to explore agricultural opportunities. McKim et al. (2017) similarly found that advisors who understand and respond to the specific challenges faced by minority students provide essential support for their retention and success.

This underscores the need for stronger emotional support from advisors who must be equipped to recognize and address the unique barriers that minority students face, more specifically among non-rural Blacks. Jayarante et al. (2019) argue that retention in agriculture is more likely when students have meaningful, authentic relationships that extend beyond academic advising alone. Researchers such as Ladson-Billings (1994) and Jones and Bowen (1998) similarly emphasize the importance of intentional and genuinely sustained mentorship in encouraging minority students to persist in agricultural programs. Given this, academic advisors and high school counselors must take on more proactive roles in building connections that go beyond academic achievement and create a sense of belonging for their minority students. Non-rural Black individuals already navigate numerous racial and social challenges, compounded by their non-rural backgrounds and the impact these factors have on their confidence entering predominantly White agricultural spaces. The most fundamental recommendation is simple—be genuine, intentional, and compassionate in building relationships, whether as advisors, educators, or organizations.

The value of community and relationship-building through organizations and programmatic initiatives should not be underestimated. Organizations like MANRRS may serve as essential resources for minority students, providing mentorship-, networking-, and industry-specific opportunities that reinforce Black engagement in agriculture (Talbert et al., 1999). Such organizations play a vital role in ensuring that recruitment efforts extend beyond access and into long-term retention for minority individuals by creating communities of support for students as identified by both researchers and participants in this study.

Improving Recruitment Approaches. In line with building community, other recommendations include considering potential implications for urban SBAE teachers who may face unique challenges in bearing the weight of the programmatic and emotional support required to engage urban students. Roberts and Ramsey (2017) identify five key factors influencing SBAE educators in urban settings that shape their professional experiences and effectiveness in engaging minority students: 1) the sense of individualization—feeling different from other ag educators, 2) self-connection—finding community with others who share similar experiences, 3) contribution—supporting students beyond academics, 4) unification—balancing work and personal identity, and 5) coping—developing resilience despite challenges. The findings suggest that urban SBAE teachers might also require tailored resources, where professional development, mentorship, and institutional support should be individualized to navigate the complexities of their roles. Without strong support systems and adequate preparation, urban SBAE teachers may struggle to engage students who have no prior exposure to agriculture and an array of other experiences unique to their environments. Systemic improvements, rather than individual efforts alone, will be necessary to retain urban SBAE teachers and ensure their effectiveness in the classroom and in their urban communities.

Professional development workshops that help teachers understand their urban environments, communities, and students are essential for ensuring that SBAE educators are knowledgeable about the communities they serve, responsive to students' experiences, and better equipped to engage both the youth and the broader community in meaningful ways. Stronger connections between urban SBAE teachers and extension services may also be necessary to promote community engagement, a key factor in successful agricultural outreach. This could include resource sharing, collaborative projects, joint events between urban SBAE educators, student-led assignments, and county extension offices. Additionally, school systems should allocate more resources to support the unique responsibilities of urban SBAE teachers. This means increasing funding, hiring additional staff, and granting educators greater creative authority in engaging their students and communities. Personal support is also essential, providing mental health resources, competitive pay, and workplace flexibility may help prevent burnout and ensure these educators have the tools they need to thrive in their roles.

Recruitment and retention strategies for urban minority students must also focus on increasing motivation and providing meaningful opportunities. Anderson (2013) highlights the importance of motivating students, while McKim et al. (2017) suggest that opportunities to develop skills and take on leadership roles can serve as strong incentives. Their studies find that urban minority students were particularly motivated by skill-building experiences, which contributed to their decision to pursue agricultural programs (Anderson, 2013; McKim et al., 2017). Therefore, increasing non-rural Black youth opportunities to serve in leadership roles through programs like FFA, MANNRS, in-school clubs, and extension-based initiatives may prove helpful. Close collaboration between teachers, counselors, and extension agents will be required to communicate these opportunities to potential participants.

Examples of this may include primary and secondary schools implementing low-stakes, in- or after-school agricultural engagement programs that recognize and reward student participation in activities that showcase their talents and their academic and/or professional prowess. Additionally, extension programs could expand youth development opportunities, through things such as youth county commissioner experiences or similar opportunities and collaborate with high school academic/career counselors to promote these programs. These initiatives would not only introduce students to agricultural career paths but also help develop them as leaders and strengthen their confidence to pursue the space.

Additionally, McKim et al. (2017) emphasize that scholarships play a critical role in alleviating financial barriers and reinforcing students' commitment to pursuing agricultural careers. Providing financial assistance to participants in leadership activities—particularly those that are cost-intensive—communicating scholarships for post-secondary agricultural programs and offering monetary incentives for participation in community-wide or school events could increase interest and participation among both non-rural Black youth and community members.

While efforts to improve recruitment are essential, there is also a need to improve support for those already engaged in agriculture. Other recommendations include focusing on improving support for the institutions carrying the load for much of the work— notably Historically Black Colleges (HBCUs). Both the participants in this study and Outley (2008) emphasize the importance of increasing institutional support for HBCUs due to their ability to attract and engage minority students in agriculture. Participants expressed that sustaining progress in minority recruitment requires investment in institutions, programs, and organizations such as MANRRS, land-grant HBCUs, and other initiatives that are already making strides in this area but often lack sufficient funding and institutional backing. Smaller minority-serving institutions

with fewer matching dollars especially need greater support. Strengthening these institutions would not only enhance recruitment efforts but also ensure the long-term success of minority students and professionals already engaged in agriculture. Closely aligned with this is improving institutions and organizational context and culture.

There is a need to improve the workplace environment within agricultural spaces. This includes encouraging culturally responsive and inclusive spaces, discussion, and professional and personal development opportunities to ensure individuals can feel supported in their professional roles and relationships. Even addressing gaps in Whites' lack of cultural responsiveness is necessary to help position minority professionals for success. Additional recommendations to address such challenges include implementing *mandatory* cultural competency training, team development workshops, and even performance reviews to assess workplace inclusivity and responsiveness to cultural differences. These measures would help initiate conversations about diversity and move organizations from mere recognition of the issue to genuine acknowledgment and understanding.

Another critical strategy for long-term change is increasing Black representation in leadership positions. Beyond serving as role models, Black leaders are uniquely positioned to understand the needs of their communities and implement strategies that effectively address their concerns. Prioritizing diverse leadership can help ensure that the issues affecting minority professionals and students are acknowledged and addressed in meaningful ways.

It will become essential to explicitly target non-rural Black individuals in agricultural outreach, engagement, and retention practices. One participant noted the hesitancy among some in the field to directly "say Black" when discussing engagement efforts, arguing that there should be no stigma or reluctance in intentionally shifting the focus to non-rural Black minorities as

long as the efforts are genuine. More targeted aims could refine strategies, ensuring that the specific needs and interests of this demographic are addressed, allowing education and career pathways to become more attractive, accessible, and inclusive for non-rural Black minorities.

Recommendations for Future Research

Despite these insights, non-rural minority populations still face significant gaps in knowledge and access to agricultural opportunities. Further research is needed to understand why non-rural Black individuals choose agriculture and how tailored approaches can better support and engage these communities. Additionally, this research highlights the aspirations, challenges, and motivations of *successful* participants, it is limited by the need for future research to explore the experiences of non-rural Black individuals who were unable to overcome these barriers, ensuring a more inclusive and supportive agricultural landscape. Expanding research to include the dynamics of non-rural environments, incorporating engaging quantitative measures, exploring cultural differences among Black individuals to understand specific populations, and understanding ideologies that impact perceived safety and comfort in agricultural spaces could provide deeper insights into fostering meaningful engagement and retention.

One potential starting point is investigating the role of genuineness in relationships to better understand where and how non-rural Black individuals are retained in agriculture and pursue careers in the field. This might include examining the environments and connections that support their continuation and success. By exploring the *how* of mentorship, cultural connections, and inclusive support systems, institutions, professionals, and organizations can analyze the substance of these relationships to assess the key factors needed to cultivate environments non-rural Black individuals seek, thrive, and remain engaged in. This understanding can inform approaches to long-term participation and retention in agriculture.

Additionally, research may also benefit from exploring ways to increase engagement amongst urban community members, parent figures, and other influential stakeholders when implementing urban curricula or programmatic efforts (Anderson, 2013; Jayarante et al., 2019; Warner & Washburn, 2009).

Further research may also be needed to examine the perspectives of White counterparts regarding their role in addressing the challenges faced by Black colleagues and students. Without understanding their role in the "how" of these approaches, efforts to change institutional and organizational culture will not be effective. Other research that may be beneficial in this regard should aim to understand the full picture, going beyond qualitative work and using quantitative or mixed methods research to employ strategies, tools, workshops, and resources that can be implemented and assessed for their effectiveness in creating more inclusive and supportive environments.

Additionally, studies could explore differences in engagement between Black and African American individuals, where cultural distinctions may shape experiences and perceptions of belonging. Furthermore, through exploring conservative viewpoints and the historical and social contexts in which these ideologies operate, a stronger understanding of the role of engagement could be broadened by research assessing how prevalent such views are within the field and how they shape environments for Black professionals. Understanding the prevalence of these ideologies can provide insight into factors such as perceived safety, ability to connect, and other factors when navigating predominantly White spaces.

Through the use of such measures, the goal is to create professional spaces in agriculture where Black individuals feel valued and supported, rather than isolated, unequipped, and undervalued. By encouraging inclusive environments and providing targeted resources, the full

potential of Black individuals to engage in agricultural spaces can be unlocked, leading to a more diverse and innovative industry. Beyond working to support Blacks in agriculture this research and expanded efforts will also contribute to a more equitable, resilient, and productive agricultural field.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Protocol:

Thank you for your participation in a phenomenological study contributing to the discourse surrounding Black engagement in agriculture. My name is Mikayla Daniels, and I am conducting this interview as part of a qualitative thesis project that focuses on understanding the experiences of non-rural Black individuals in the agricultural industry. For the purposes of this study, "non-rural" refers to any place of densely populated residence such as suburban and urban areas, not resembling the characteristics of rural areas. The purpose of this research is to gain insight into the motivations, challenges, and unique perspectives of non-rural Black minorities who have pursued or are currently engaged in agricultural work. The interview is expected to take approximately 90 minutes, and your participation is voluntary. The interview will be audio recorded, solely for transcription and analysis purposes. Your verbal consent for the recording will be obtained before we begin. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential as each participant will be given pseudonyms to disguise their identities. If you have any questions or concerns about the research study or the interview process, please feel free to ask at any time. Your feedback is valuable and will help ensure a positive experience for both of us.

Do you consent to the audio recording of this interview?

Do you have any questions?

Thank you once again for your participation, and let's begin the interview.

Introductory Questions:

1. Can you please start by telling me a bit about yourself? For example, your name, age, where you grew up, and any information you feel comfortable sharing.
2. Where do you currently reside and what is your connection to that area?
3. What is your current career or occupation within the agricultural industry?
 - a. How long have you been involved in agriculture?

Research Objective 1: Describe the influences of non-rural Blacks to pursue careers in agriculture.

1. What contributed to your knowledge and understanding of agriculture?
 - a. How and when did you first learn about agriculture?
 - b. Explain the role of your primary and secondary schooling in influencing your exposure to agriculture, if any at all.
 - c. Before learning about current agriculture, what came to mind when you heard the word “agriculture”?
 - d. Knowing what you know now, how would you describe agriculture to an urban middle schooler?
2. Describe what initially sparked your initial interest in pursuing a career in agriculture.
 - a. Were there any specific moments or experiences that solidified your decision to pursue agricultural work?
 - b. Can you describe the impact of any mentors or role models along your journey?
3. Explain the factors contributing to your continued pursuit of agriculture.
 - a. What personal values/beliefs drive your dedication to the agricultural field?
 - b. What specific aspects of agriculture do you find most fascinating or rewarding?
 - c. What keeps you motivated in this field?

Research Objective 2: Understand the unique challenges non-rural Blacks engaged in agriculture experienced during college and/or since being in their career(s) to identify potential curricular and professional barriers to entry in the field.

1. Explain how post-secondary schooling has influenced your agricultural journey, if at all.

- a. Can you discuss any obstacles you may have faced during your college education and training in agriculture?
- b. How did you overcome these issues in your pursuit?
2. What challenges, if any, have you encountered since being in your agricultural career?
 - a. What resources are available to you to navigate these challenges?
 - b. If able, elaborate on any specific instances where you felt your identification as a Black individual presented unique barriers in your agricultural career.
 - c. If able, elaborate on any specific instances where you felt your background hailing from a non-rural area presented unique challenges or barriers in your career(s).

Research Objective 3: Describe the impact and/or implications hailing from, and living in, a non-rural area has on Black minorities pursuing the agricultural industry.

1. Explain how non-rurality impacted your agricultural opportunities and exposure.
 - a. What was your experience like living where you grew up?
 - b. Discuss what you believe to be the advantages and disadvantages of a non-rural upbringing on one's experience, knowledge, and/or pursuit of agriculture.
 - c. To the best of your knowledge, how do you believe other non-rural Blacks perceive agriculture?
2. What do you perceive to be the current awareness of Black youth specifically, living in non-rural areas about agriculture?
 - a. Where do you see agriculture struggling to reach young Black minorities in non-rural areas the most?

- b. What do you believe can improve their awareness, engagement, and interest in agriculture?
3. How do you think the agricultural industry can better support and integrate non-rural Black individuals into the field?
 - a. Where do you feel recruitment efforts are made within non-rural Black communities?
 - b. Can you describe any initiatives, resources, etc. that currently aim to achieve this?
4. Are there any particular goals or aspirations you have related to your career in agriculture?

Before we conclude, is there anything else you would like to add or any questions you have for me? Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview and share your valuable insights. I truly appreciate your willingness to contribute to this study. I want to assure you again that your responses will be treated with the utmost confidentiality, and your identity will remain protected through the use of pseudonyms. Once this interview is transcribed, I will email the transcript for you to look over for accuracy. This will also be a time for you to request I redact any information you do not want shared that you did not express the need to during the interview. You will have 5 days from the date I send, after which if no action or comment has been made, I will assume the transcript is an accurate depiction and use the totality of it when reporting findings. If you think of anything else you'd like to share after the interview has ended, or if you have any further questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out to me via email or phone. I wish you all the best, and I look forward to the possibility of connecting with you again in the future.

Appendix B

Recruitment Email:

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Research Study on Non-Rural Black Individuals in Agriculture

Dear Potential Participant,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Mikayla Daniels, and I am a student researcher at North Carolina State University. I am reaching out to invite you to participate in an important research study focused on understanding the experiences of non-rural Black individuals in the field of agriculture.

As someone with valuable insights and perspectives regarding this topic, your participation in this study would be immensely valuable. Your experiences can help shed light on the unique challenges and motivations faced by non-rural Black individuals pursuing careers in agriculture.

If interested, you will be directed to read an exempt consent form and then provide your informed consent via an online survey to participate in the study. This will help me gather essential information about your availability and preferred methods of interviewing. Interviews can be conducted either in person at a secure and private location on the NC State's campus or via video conferencing on Zoom, whichever is more convenient for you.

Your participation will be treated with the utmost confidentiality, and your identity will remain protected throughout the study. Your insights will directly inform research seeking strategies to enhance recruitment, retention, and representation of non-rural Black individuals in agricultural careers.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about the study, please don't hesitate to contact me at madanie5@ncsu.edu or (980) 250- 4840.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to contribute to research aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion in agriculture. Your perspective matters and I sincerely hope you will join this important endeavor.

Warm regards,

Appendix C

Exempt Informed Consent Form:

Exempt Consent Form

Interviews, Focus Groups, and Benign Behavioral Interventions

Title of Study: Breaking Ground: Exploring Diverse Perspective of Non-Rural Blacks Engaged in Agricultural Careers

IRB Protocol: 27279

Principal Investigator(s): Mikayla Daniels, madanie5@ncsu.edu, (980) 250-4840

Funding Source: Dr. Joy Morgan

Collaborating Researchers: North Carolina State University – Joy Morgan

jemorga2@ncsu.edu, 919-515-6077; Dr. Wendy, wendy_warner@ncsu.edu, 919-515-6080; Dr. Travis Park, travis_park@ncsu.edu, 919-515-944; Dr. Michael Schulman, mdschulm@ncsu.edu, 919-515-9016

Dear Participant,

You are being asked to participate in a research study about exploring the experiences of non-rural hailing, Black minorities, who engage in agriculture. Participation is strictly voluntary. The criteria for participation are as follows: 18 years of age or older, reside in the United States, have been raised in a metro-defined area, identify as Black/African-American, is currently engaged, or at any point had been engaged in an agricultural career, and have graduated from a four-year degree awarding institution to participate in this study.

If you participate in this study, you will be interviewed regarding the challenges, motivations, and perceptions of your agricultural pursuit. The interviews will be held in person or via Zoom and will be audio and video recorded solely for transcription purposes. You should not participate if you feel uncomfortable being recorded.

You may choose not to participate or stop participating at any point by indicating that you would like to cease the interview. Even after the interview participants may indicate, via an email to me, that they and their responses are to no longer be included in the study. It is advised that participants only share what they're comfortable with others knowing.

Participants will be audio and video-recorded, if you do not want this information collected, you cannot participate in this study. We would like to use these recordings for transcription purposes and will keep these recordings until transcripts have been verified, by you the participant, within one working week.

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this research. There are no direct benefits for you from participating in this research.

Due to my role as a student researcher, I have an obligation to report sexual abuse, sexual discrimination, and sexual harassment of an adult aged 28 years old or younger. This means that if I observe instances of, or you tell me any information implying such acts, I am obligated to report that to student ombuds. The risks associated with reporting this information include your identification.

You will not receive any payment for participating in this research. If you wish to participate in this research study, please use [this link](#) to access the informed consent form, to provide your informed consent. You will be directed to provide your name, and identify your race, metro status, contact information, and preferred mode of interviewing should you choose to participate.

If you have any questions about the research or how it is implemented, please contact the student researcher, Mikayla Daniels, at madanie5@ncsu.edu and 980-250-4840. You can also contact the faculty advisor for this research, Dr. Joy Morgan, at jemorga2@ncsu.edu and (919)-515-6077. Please reference **study number 27279** when contacting anyone about this project.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or are concerned with your treatment throughout the research process, please contact the NC State University IRB Director at IRB-Director@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8754, or [fill out a confidential form online](https://research.ncsu.edu/administration/compliance/research-compliance/irb/irb-forms-and-templates/participant-concern-and-complaint-form/) at <https://research.ncsu.edu/administration/compliance/research-compliance/irb/irb-forms-and-templates/participant-concern-and-complaint-form/>