ABSTRACT

RAMSEY, ELISABETH Q. From Mountains to Coast: Black Women Farmers' Resilience in North Carolina's Agricultural Landscape (Under the direction of Dr. Annie Hardison-Moody and Dr. Catherine E. Sanders).

Black farmers in the United States face systemic barriers that shape their agricultural experiences, including challenges related to land access, financial resources, community support, and institutional discrimination. Black women farmers, in particular, remain significantly underrepresented, comprising only 500 producers in North Carolina. This study aims to amplify the voices of Black women farmers by providing a platform to share their lived experiences in agriculture. Through narrative inquiry and in-depth interviews with 10 Black women farmers, this research highlights their challenges, resilience, and contributions to American agriculture and cultural heritage. Findings reveal that participants experience unique challenges shaped by both race and gender, including difficulties in accessing resources, navigating predominantly white farming spaces, and securing financial stability. Despite these obstacles, they expressed a strong commitment to building a supportive community with other Black farmers, fostering mentorship, and inspiring future generations of Black women and women in general to pursue farming. These insights underscore the importance of community-building, increased representation, and improved resource accessibility for Black women farmers. By bringing attention to their experiences, this study contributes to broader discussions on equity and inclusion in agriculture.

From Mountains to Coast: Black Women Farmers Resilience in North Carolina's Agricultural Landscape

by
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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

Agricultural Education and Human Sciences

Raleigh, North Carolina
2025

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DEDICATION

To Black women farmers in North Carolina and beyond. We aren't going anywhere.

BIOGRAPHY

Elisabeth Ramsey is a North Carolina native and NC State alumna who returned to NC State two years after earning dual bachelor's degrees to pursue her master's degree. Her research focuses on amplifying the voices of Black and Brown farmers through oral histories and qualitative methods, exploring themes of land access, cultural heritage, and community resilience. Elisabeth hopes to continue her advocacy by pursuing a Ph.D. and, in the future, establishing an educational farm dedicated to teaching children of color about the rich histories and contributions of Black and Brown farmers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my advisors and committee for believing in me and my ideas and for helping carve the path to this research project that means so much to me. Your guidance, patience, and encouragement have shaped not only this thesis but also my growth as a scholar and researcher.

To the Black women farmers who generously shared their stories—this work would not exist without you. Your resilience, knowledge, and dedication to the land are a testament to the power of Black agriculture, and I am honored to help amplify your voices.

To my friends, thank you for your support, for reminding me to rest when I needed it, and for believing in me even when I doubted myself. Your love and encouragement carried me through every challenge.

Finally, to every Black woman who has ever worked the land—past, present, and future—this is for you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Black women remain significantly underrepresented in the agricultural sector, a disparity shaped by a myriad of historical and contemporary factors. To comprehend the nuanced experiences of Black women farmers, this research delves into the historical significance of their experiences, unraveling how past circumstances continue to impact their role in agriculture today. Through engaging in conversations and sharing stories with Black women farmers, the aim is to uncover the enduring effects of historical challenges and identify emerging obstacles that impede their growth within the agricultural landscape. Beyond the stereotypical image of a woman tending to her garden, a Black woman farmer embodies a diverse spectrum — from those rooted in ancestral farming, striving for land ownership, to those already managing land alongside partners or family. Whether cultivating a backyard garden box or envisioning a future homestead, each woman has a unique narrative. This research embarks on a journey to unveil and share these stories, illuminating the multifaceted experiences of Black women in agriculture.

Theoretical Framework

In examining the experiences of Black women farmers in the context of agriculture, this thesis is grounded in the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Critical Race Theory, a framework originating from legal scholarship and later extended to various disciplines, offers a lens through which to analyze the intersection of race, power, and societal structures (Delgado, 2001). In the agricultural landscape, the application of CRT can allow for a nuanced exploration of how systemic racism influences the experiences, challenges, and resilience of Black women farmers.

CRT challenges traditional approaches to understanding race by asserting that racism is not only an individual act but is also deeply embedded in legal, social, and economic structures

(Delgado, 2001). It recognizes the historical and ongoing impact of racism, emphasizing the need to consider how race intersects with other social categories, such as gender and class. In the context of agriculture, CRT provides a framework to critically examine the unique challenges faced by Black women farmers, recognizing the role of historical and contemporary racial dynamics in shaping their experiences.

By employing CRT, this research aims to move beyond surface-level analyses and explore the underlying power structures that shape the experiences of Black women in farming. CRT - and intersectionality theory, which examines the interlocking oppressions that shape the lives of Black women - allows for an in-depth examination of how race, gender, and class intersect in the agricultural sector, shedding light on both the resilience of Black women farmers and the barriers they confront (Collins, 2018; Crenshaw, 1991). In the subsequent chapters, this theoretical framework will be a guide to the analysis and interpretation of data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play in the lives of Black women farmers.

Historical Context

For many Black farmers, their agricultural lineage finds its roots in the oppressive history of slavery. But beyond that is an ancestral history of African farmers cultivating the land before their forced relocation to the Americas. Originally, agriculture was a familial endeavor, characterized by collective efforts in planting, weeding, and harvesting. However, the advent of slavery disrupted this agricultural unity, separating households and altering the traditional familial roles (Flora, 1985). Women and children, who were once integral to the agricultural process, were now compelled into forced labor on plantations.

The transition to plantation life stripped many Black and African farmers of their access to land, particularly affecting women who were coerced into labor outside their roles as farmers (Flora, 1985). Even after the abolition of slavery, Black farmers found themselves exploited as sharecroppers, enduring continued challenges such as limited educational opportunities for their children and expectations to farm for plantation owners. The historical trajectory of Black farmers has been marked by systemic disadvantages stemming from discriminatory lending practices by government entities like the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA, 2022) and the enduring trauma of slavery and sharecropping (Pilgeram, 2022).

Black women's experiences in agriculture cannot be fully comprehended without acknowledging the broader historical impacts on Black farmers. Their encounters are shaped not only by their race but also by their gender and class, presenting significant obstacles to their advancement in the agricultural field (Collins, 2018; Crenshaw, 1991). Throughout history, women in agriculture have been underestimated, perpetuating systemic challenges (Green et al., 2023). The oppressive history, coupled with discriminatory practices, has resulted in the underrepresentation of Black women in agriculture (Joseph et al., 2023). Despite this historical erasure, it is crucial to highlight the stories of those who have challenged these barriers, even when such narratives are limited in historical records.

One such example is Fannie Lou Hamer, whose work as an agricultural activist sought to address these disparities and empower Black farmers. Hamer's advocacy, symbolized by her creation of the Freedom Farm Cooperative, sought to counteract the detrimental effects of discriminatory practices, providing a platform for marginalized farmers and challenging the oppressive systems that hindered Black women's progress in agriculture (White, 2018). As we

delve into the narratives of Black women farmers, it is imperative to recognize the profound impact of history and strive for change within the agricultural industry.

Women in Agriculture: Fannie Lou Hamer

In the realm of prominent historical figures in agriculture, names like Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, and W.E.B. Du Bois often take center stage. However, a common thread among these notable figures is their gender – they are all men. George Washington Carver was acclaimed for advocating organic farming practices, Booker T. Washington for promoting agricultural education among Black farmers, and W.E.B. Du Bois for his contributions to studying agrarian life of Black farmers (White, 2018). These men received recognition for their advanced and formal education, positioning them as prominent figures in agriculture. Yet, even when the work of Black agriculturalists was a part of the record, the contributions of women, who played critical roles in the agricultural history of Black farmers, went largely unrecognized by both these men and the broader society of their time (Pilgeram et al., 2022). This oversight reflects the intersections of race, gender, and class oppression, highlighting the need for an intersectional approach to understanding agricultural history and the diverse contributions within it.

Female historical figures in agriculture often do not receive the recognition they deserve, despite their indispensable contributions to the success of agriculture today. Historical archives provide evidence of Black women actively participating in farming, attending conferences, and being part of Carver's school demonstration wagon (White, 2018). Despite their significant involvement, the narrative of Black women in agriculture remains largely overlooked. Among these remarkable women is Fannie Lou Hamer, who made substantial strides in agriculture for Black farmers. While lacking the formal education of figures like Washington and Carver,

Hamer, rooted in sharecropping and domestic work, possessed a well-rounded agricultural expertise (White, 2018). Her impact as an agriculture activist was transformative, with the creation of the Freedom Farm Cooperative offering solace to the unemployed and homeless while providing a platform for farmers to enhance their skills (White, 2018). Designed as an act of resistance, Freedom Farm aimed to demonstrate to white supremacists that Black agriculture was a lasting force. Through organized education and mobilization of rural farmers, Hamer asserted the permanence of Black farming, forcing recognition and challenging the notion of its disappearance. However, the historical record of Black women in agriculture remains limited, contributing to their continued erasure. This gap underscores the need for research that documents and amplifies the voices of Black women farmers today, ensuring that their contributions are recognized and preserved for future generations.

Statement of the Problem

Women's voices, especially those of Black women, have not been included in histories of agriculture. Their contributions to the field of agriculture have been marginalized, signaled by the absence of their voices in historical record. Given the decline of Black farmers to less than 1.2%, it is crucial for research to correct the record and include Black women’s voices (USDA, Census of Agriculture, 2022). This research should be publicly accessible, highlighting and showcasing the significant contributions of Black farmers across the United States. Understanding the experiences of Black women farmers in agriculture is essential for grasping the challenges they confront and appreciating their ongoing resilience in a field where they constitute a minority. This study is driven by the hope that these women's stories will be valued, serving as inspiration for the next generation of Black farmers who will carry forward the resilience of those who came before them.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to give Black women farmers a platform to share their experiences as women of color in the agricultural field. This research seeks not only to amplify the voices and experiences of Black farmers but illuminate their invaluable contributions to American agriculture and cultural heritage. The research allowed these women to share their stories and experiences as Black farmers in agriculture as well as inspire future Black farmers.

In addition to offering a platform for Black women farmers, this study will generate accessible materials for individuals within and beyond the agricultural community.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. Explore the historical roots and evolving cultural impact of Black women in farming, examining the intersectionality of race and gender in shaping their agricultural experiences.
2. Investigate the challenges faced by Black women in farming, analyzing their resilient strategies and acts of resistance against historical and contemporary adversities.
3. Conduct in-depth oral history sessions with Black women farmers to document and analyze personal narratives, anecdotes, and intergenerational transmission of agricultural knowledge.
4. Examine the social structures and networks within Black women farming communities, exploring the role of community support, collaboration, and shared resources in shaping their experiences.

The research seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Black women farmers define their identity and the significance it holds for them?

2. How do the intersectional identities of Black women farmers influence their experiences in agriculture?
3. What characteristics and practices do Black women exhibit that contribute to their overall resilience in the agricultural field?

Significance and Stakeholders

This study is imperative to draw attention to the diminishing diversity in agriculture (Pilgeram et al., 2022). Black farmers make up less than 1.2% of all farmers in the United States (USDA, Census of Agriculture, 2022). Black women producers specifically represent 1.02% of all female producers and 0.37% of all producers nationwide (USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2022). In North Carolina, Black women producers account for 1.9% of all female producers and 0.65% of all producers, with the state representing 4.5% of all Black producers in the country (USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2022).

Narratives shared by Black women in agriculture will contribute to raising awareness about aspects of the agricultural field that require adjustment for the creation of a more inclusive environment for people of color. The pronounced lack of diversity in U.S. agriculture is evident, as women comprise only one-third of all farmers, and within this demographic, Black women farmers represent merely 23% (Pilgeram et al, 2023).

Limited research has been conducted with Black farmers, with even fewer studies specifically centered on Black women farmers. Existing studies often explore the broader experiences of Black individuals in agriculture, covering aspects from slavery to sharecropping to roles as extension agents (Hunte, 1992; Schor, 1992). When it comes to studies focusing on women farmers, they frequently involve comparisons with white women, failing to adequately highlight the unique experiences of Black women in agriculture (Pilgeram et al., 2023). A more

comprehensive understanding is crucial to identify who Black women farmers of this century are, their specific experiences in agriculture, and how to facilitate the growth of women of color in the farming sector. This research is undertaken to amplify the voices of Black women farmers, sharing their stories of triumph, struggles, and resilience in order to advocate for their support and recognition.

This study plays a crucial role in enlightening those unfamiliar with the experiences of Black farmers, particularly Black women in agriculture. Given the noticeable lack of research dedicated to this demographic, it is essential to provide comprehensive material addressing their unique experiences. The potential audience for this research extends to researchers, agriculture experts, and the general public, all of whom stand to gain valuable insights from its depth. Considering the paramount significance of agriculture in providing our basic necessities—food, clothing, and shelter—there is an urgent need to direct more attention to the contributors of these daily essentials. This is especially relevant for Black women, whose history and ancestry are deeply rooted in farming, yet their representation diminishes as people of color participate less in agriculture.

Limitations and Assumptions

Limitations

This research will address certain aspects and issues with potential applicability beyond the participating Black women farmers. However, the results cannot be universally generalized, given the individuality of each woman's experience. The intent is to inspire and encourage other women of color in agriculture, even if their experiences differ. Given the regional focus on Black women in the southern U.S., not all shared experiences may be directly applicable to Black women farmers across the entire country. The study includes the following limitations:

1. The study's limited time period restricts the number of participants due to the constrained timeframe.
2. Conducting interviews during the summer, a peak busy season for farmers, poses challenges in securing available time from participants.
3. The short duration allotted for the study may impact the depth and breadth of data collection.
4. Participants may exhibit hesitance in collaborating with a researcher, influencing the openness and candidness of their responses.
5. Findings may be contextually specific and primarily applicable to Black women farmers situated in the southern United States.

Assumptions

The study makes the following assumptions:

1. The study assumes the existence of an extensive population of Black women farmers in the southern U.S.
2. The study assumes that Black women farmers will be willing participants who are open to both audio and visual recording during the research.
3. The research operates on the assumption that the researcher will maintain objectivity throughout the study to ensure the generation of reliable, accurate, and unbiased data.

The study assumes that the researcher will successfully manage emotions to avoid interference with data collection, using emotional awareness to enhance the connection with the participants.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review delves into critical concepts essential for comprehending the history of Black farmers. I examine topics such as the historical significance of Black land ownership, including land ownership as a central issue in the economic empowerment and self-determination of Black farming communities. Additionally, this review explores the intricate intersectionality of race, gender, and agriculture, shedding light on how these intersecting identities shape the experiences of Black individuals in farming (Collins, 2018; Crenshaw, 1991). Furthermore, it examines the unique experiences and challenges faced by Black farmers, highlighting issues of access to resources, discrimination, and resilience within the agricultural sector. Through this exploration, the literature review seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical context and contemporary challenges faced by Black farmers in the United States.

Black Land Ownership

Agriculture in the United States has a deeply intertwined history with slavery (Schulman et al., 1985). Enslaved Africans were valued for their agricultural skills, enduring harsh treatment until they were granted freedom (Balvanz et al., 2016; Hinson & Robinson, 2008; Touzeau, 2019). After emancipation, many moved to the North seeking refuge from discrimination and better opportunities, yet something drew them back to the South (Schulman et al., 1985; Touzeau, 2019). The former slaves of the South worked tirelessly on Southern acreage, a testament to their resilience and perseverance. The promise of "40 acres and a mule" symbolized hope for economic independence and land ownership, a promise that remained unfulfilled (White, 2018).

The decline of Black farmers in agriculture became more pronounced with the end of sharecropping and the mechanization of farming (Balvanz et al., 2016; Hunte, 1992). Historical practices such as slavery, sharecropping, and tenant farming were deliberately designed to limit Black land ownership, creating lasting barriers that persist today through heirs' property disputes and discriminatory lending practices (Schulman et al., 1985). The U.S. government and white landowners have systematically favored large-scale farms, disadvantaging smaller Black-owned farms and restricting their access to resources and economic stability (Balvanz et al., 2016). Discrimination within the USDA further compounded these challenges, hindering Black farmers' ability to secure essential loans for farm maintenance and expansion (Balvanz et al., 2016; Brown & Larson, 1979). Court cases such as Pigford v. Glickman and Love v. Vilsack demonstrate the efforts Black farmers made to challenge the USDA's unfair treatment and discriminatory funding practices (Layman & Civita, 2022). The increasing diversification and mechanization of agriculture has become additional barriers for Black farmers seeking land ownership (Hinson & Robinson, 2008). Access to credit and complex tax laws have been historically used as discriminatory tools, presenting significant obstacles for Black farmers (Hinson & Robinson, 2008). This complex web of challenges continues to obstruct Black landownership and highlights the urgent need for comprehensive solutions to support Black farmers in securing and maintaining their land.

Many Black farmers express a strong desire to keep their farms within the family, highlighting the importance of passing down their land and legacy to future generations (Balvanz et al., 2016; Touzeau, 2019). However, there is growing concern among Black farmers about the potential loss of their land and the disconnection of future generations from farming (Balvanz et al., 2016; Hinson & Robinson, 2008; Schulman et al., 1985). The increasing challenges within

the industry make farming an increasingly daunting career choice for younger generations. This loss of land ownership not only affects the economic stability of Black farmers but also results in a lack of visibility for their contributions to agriculture.

Being a Black Woman in Agriculture

The agricultural journey for Black agriculture professionals has been marred by discrimination. Historical legacies of slavery, unfair treatment of sharecroppers, and the challenges faced by Black extension agents illustrate the uphill battle Black individuals have endured in the agricultural sector (Schor, 1992). These inequalities and racial discrimination have contributed to the decline of Black farmers and agricultural professionals in the industry (Schor, 1996).

However, the erasure of Black women within this agricultural narrative is particularly pronounced. Factors such as systemic racism, discrimination, and land loss among others were causes of this erasure (Brown & Larson, 1979; Woodard-Davis, 2023). While Black women have long participated in agricultural work, their labor has often been rendered invisible (Layman & Civita, 2022). During and after slavery, many Black women were relegated to domestic roles, such as household labor and caregiving, rather than being recognized as agricultural laborers or farmers (Hartman, 2017). When married to male farmers, these women were typically categorized as "farmers' wives" rather than farmers themselves, despite actively contributing to farm operations, crop production, and livestock care (Jones, 2009; Sachs, 1983). This erasure was not merely a social oversight but was systematically reinforced through census records, agricultural documentation, and societal perceptions that linked farming with men and domestic work with women (hooks, 2014).

Black women's agricultural labor was, however, essential for family subsistence and community survival, particularly in the South, where sharecropping and tenant farming systems exploited entire families' labor (Carter et al., 2024). But even in these contexts, women's contributions were diminished, with credit, land ownership, and farming identities overwhelmingly assigned to men (Gilmore, 1996). The resulting exclusion of Black women from official records and agricultural narratives has had long-term implications, contributing to their underrepresentation and marginalization in contemporary agricultural spaces.

Black women have experienced the colonization and erasure of their agricultural knowledge (Carter et al., 2024; Layman & Civita, 2022). Rather than being recognized for their expertise, this knowledge has been passed off as part of white male narratives, leading to a decline in visibility and recognition for agricultural practices that were inherently Black (Layman & Civita, 2022). For example, as Layman and Civita (2022) highlight, rice cultivation in South Carolina was carried out by African women who were forcibly taken from West Africa specifically for their specialized skills in rice farming. Their knowledge helped advance white plantation owners and their families, yet these African women received no credit for their contributions to U.S. rice production.

Even community gardens have experienced gentrification. From the “Block Beautiful” movement led by Black women in Detroit to the popularization of urban farming by white farmers, the symbol of resilience and community that these gardens once represented in Black neighborhoods has been co-opted (Layman & Civita, 2022; Washington, 2007). White farmers have taken an idea rooted in Black communities and reshaped it into an “amenity” for white neighborhoods and communities (Layman & Civita, 2022; Penniman, 2018; Washington, 2007). Although these agricultural knowledges have been appropriated and reframed as white, Black

women and their ancestors continue to preserve and share them with future generations. Through documentation and storytelling, they ensure that the real history is never lost—providing future generations with the truth of where this knowledge originated and inspiring change in agriculture.

Despite these challenges stripping Black women of rightful recognition for their agricultural knowledge, they remained steadfast in making a difference in the agricultural world. Through community building and activism, they preserved and advanced their agricultural legacies. Fannie Lou Hamer, for example, established her own farming cooperative, paving the way for Black communities to receive the support they deserved (Carter et al., 2024). Hamer's Freedom Farm Cooperative was not the last cooperative led by Black farmers. Carter et al. (2024) found that Black women farmers have historically played a vital role in supporting their communities through food production and mutual aid efforts, yet these contributions remain under-researched. Today, Black women farmers continue to establish cooperatives and collectives, creating spaces that support both fellow farmers and the broader community (Layman & Civita, 2022).

Intersectionality of Race & Gender in Agriculture

Black women farmers have not been discussed in agricultural disciplines or histories as much as they should be. Their stories have been diminished or removed from agricultural narratives, resulting in these histories being passed down primarily within families and Black farming communities rather than being widely documented. When Black farmers are included in agricultural history, discussions often center around slavery or compare the decline in the number of Black farmers to the success and growth of white farmers. This framing neglects the

broader experiences of Black farmers and erases the specific challenges Black women farmers face.

Key issues such as discriminatory lending practices, lack of land access, and the struggles of Black women farmers to be recognized have been largely excluded from mainstream agricultural narratives. The representation of women in agriculture is already disproportionately low and continues to decline. In 2017, women accounted for only one-third of the farming population (Pilgeram et al., 2022). Among these women, 56% were women of color, with Black women making up just 23% of this group (Pilgeram et al., 2022). Notably, many Black women farmers serve as primary operators of their farms, particularly in the southern and southeastern states (Pilgeram et al., 2022).

Agricultural studies that focus on gender have largely centered white women farmers, often portraying them as primary farmers while overlooking the contributions of women of color, particularly Black women farmers (Pilgeram et al., 2022). The dominant narratives in agricultural research have recognized white women's struggles for visibility in farming but have failed to extend the same recognition to Black women, reinforcing a narrow understanding of who is considered a "farmer." Historically, Black women have played a crucial role in agriculture, yet their knowledge, labor, and expertise have been systematically ignored in both historical and contemporary scholarship (Layman & Civita, 2022; White, 2018). Despite their longstanding presence in farming—likely among the first agriculturalists in the U.S.—Black women's agricultural histories remain largely undocumented, furthering their erasure from the field (Layman & Civita, 2022). The absence of literature highlighting their voices not only contributes to their invisibility but also fails to acknowledge the unique challenges they have overcome to remain in agriculture today.

Shifting the focus away from predominantly white farming narratives is essential to addressing the inequalities Black women farmers face. They experience layers of marginalization that remain unrecognized in agricultural history and scholarship. Bringing their voices into these discussions is critical for acknowledging their contributions and advocating for greater visibility and support in the agricultural sector.

An intersectional approach is essential to understanding the experiences of Black women farmers. Intersectionality provides a framework for analyzing how overlapping identities—such as race, gender, and class—interact with power structures and social inequalities (Collins, 2015). As Pilgeram et al. (2022) noted, "understanding women's experiences in farming requires understanding broader historical patterns to see how their gendered and racialized identities structure women's experiences as farmers and ranchers" (p. 1351). While their analysis applies to all women in agriculture, this perspective is particularly critical when studying Black women farmers, whose contributions remain largely absent from mainstream agricultural discourse.

Black women farmers exist at the margins of public discussions about agriculture, making an intersectional framework especially necessary for addressing their unique challenges. As members of a historically overlooked population, they face not only erasure from agricultural narratives but also systemic barriers to land ownership, resources, and economic support. Intersectionality allows researchers to examine these compounded inequalities, ensuring that Black women farmers' stories are not only recognized but also integrated into broader agricultural scholarship (Collins, 2015). By applying this framework, we can illuminate their significance in agriculture and challenge the structures that have long marginalized their voices.

Summary

Black farmers in America have endured a tumultuous history marked by inequalities and discrimination, factors that have contributed to their decline within the agricultural field. Existing literature extensively examines the history of Black farmers, their struggles with land ownership, and the intersection of race and gender in agriculture. However, despite the abundance of literature, many studies tend to offer a broad overview rather than a focused examination, leaving significant gaps in the narrative, particularly regarding the experiences of Black women farmers. This gap underscores the need for a more nuanced and targeted approach, which this research aims to fulfill by delving into the narratives and stories of Black women farmers. While existing literature provides an overarching view of the challenges faced by Black farmers, this study contributes to the literature by offering a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Black women in agriculture.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Perspective and Research Design

This study is guided by the principles of grounded theory, which focuses on the generation of theory through the systematic collection and analysis of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Unlike traditional ethnographic methods that involve long-term immersion in a community (Creswell, 2018), grounded theory emphasizes a more iterative approach to data collection and theory-building directly from participants' lived experiences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The participants in this study are Black women farmers from North Carolina. Although they represent different regions of the state, they share a common identity and face similar challenges within the agricultural field. Grounded theory's inductive approach is particularly well-suited for identifying patterns and developing theoretical insights grounded in these participants' experiences (Charmaz, 2014).

In conducting the research, I used qualitative interviews with participants as the primary method of data collection. These semi-structured interviews allowed for an open-ended exploration of their personal narratives, providing rich data for developing categories and themes. Through the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I analyzed the data to identify emergent themes and to build a framework that represents the collective experiences of Black women in agriculture.

Supplementary materials, such as articles and other publications, were also incorporated to contextualize the participants' experiences within broader social, cultural, and historical frameworks. These sources provided additional depth and context to the emerging theory and

helped to refine the categories and concepts that were identified through the interview data (Creswell, 2018).

Procedures

Participants

Participants for this study included ten Black women farmers who are sole proprietors, farm partners, or farmers' wives. Each participant was actively engaged in farming activities in North Carolina. This smaller participant pool enabled a more focused exploration of each woman's story, fostering a deeper understanding and more comprehensive representation of their experiences (Creswell, 2018). It also provided the opportunity to travel and immerse myself in their farming operations, gaining firsthand insights into their daily practices and environments (Creswell, 2018). A smaller sample facilitated a more personalized approach, ensuring that quality time was devoted to each participant to fully understand, frame, and articulate their narrative in a way that authentically reflects their lived experiences.

Participants were identified through a combination of personal, academic, and community-based networks. This included recruitment through a Black farmers market, academic connections, and established relationships within Black farmer organizations. Additionally, community ties and broader social networks played a significant role in participant identification. Three participants were recruited through snowball sampling, where existing participants referred others within their networks, further expanding the reach of the study (Creswell, 2018).

To engage potential participants, emails were sent detailing the purpose of the research, participant requirements, and the steps to indicate interest in the project. Additionally, participants identified through a Black farmers market were approached in person, where the

research project was explained to them. At a later date, these participants received a follow-up email with the project details to reconfirm their participation. Prospective participants were invited to engage in face-to-face conversations or email exchanges about the research to gauge their interest. They were given the opportunity to ask questions, review the consent forms, and make an informed decision about their involvement in the study.

Prior to the interview, participants received an email detailing the research objective along with broad consent, exemption consent, and member-checking forms (See Appendix A, B, and C for the consent forms and recruitment email). They were asked to confirm their participation, and interview scheduling was primarily coordinated via email, text, or over the phone. Interviews were conducted on participants' farms to provide an immersive experience and better understand their farming practices in context. As a token of appreciation for their time and contributions, participants received an honorarium of $100. This compensation reflects the respect and value placed on their time and insights.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

	Farming Experience	Type of Farm	Farming Role	Family History?
Farmer 1	< 1 year	Rural	Sole Proprietor	Yes, grandparents
Farmer 2	5 years	Rural/Home Garden	Sole Proprietor	Yes, parents farmed/gardened
Farmer 3	5 years	Urban	Sole Proprietor	Yes, Great-grandma, gardener; great-great-grandparents, sharecroppers
Farmer 4	5 years	Rural	Co-owner/operator	No
Farmer 5	4 years	Urban/Rural	Sole Proprietor	Yes, fifth generation farmer
Farmer 6	NA	Rural	Farmers wife	No
Farmer 7	7 years	Rural	Farmers wife/Co-operator	Yes, grandparents
Farmer 8	5 years	Urban	Sole Proprietor	Yes, grandfather was a sharecropper
Farmer 9	5-6 years	Urban to Rural	Co-owner/operator	Yes, grandparents were sharecroppers
Farmer 10	6 years	Rural	Co-owner/operator	Yes, grandparents and aunt

Data Collection

This study was approved by the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board (IRB # 27056). The data collection process utilized narrative inquiry, specifically through audio and video recordings of participants. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand and represent lived experiences through storytelling, recognizing that individuals make meaning of their lives through personal and collective narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999). This approach is aligned with the study's goal of capturing the depth and complexity of participants' lived experiences and then presenting them artistically through a short film. The incorporation of both audio and visual elements not only preserves the nuances of

their expressions but also emphasizes the importance of storytelling and cultural authenticity in understanding their perspectives.

The data was collected on the participants' farms to ensure they did not need to travel to a different location and so I could see their operation. This decision allowed for an immersive experience, providing context to the participants' farming practices. I traveled to their farming locations to conduct the interviews, which were recorded using a Zoom H1n Handheld Recorder for audio and a FujiFilm X-T Series Mirrorless Camera for video. A backup recorder was used for audio to ensure data integrity.

I utilized video to authentically capture data-as-stories and explore the lived experiences of Black women farmers, ensuring their narratives were conveyed in their own voices and contexts. Video facilitated a more comprehensive analysis of participants' narratives by capturing vocal tone, facial expressions, and body language, providing deeper insight into their experiences and perspectives. The interviews were conversational in nature, with my questions serving as a guide to encourage organic and authentic exchanges.

Participants were encouraged to lead the discussion, allowing their stories to unfold naturally. Before starting the interviews and turning on the camera, I took time to explain my intent—I wanted to hear their stories, share them respectfully in my work, and ensure they understood the goals of the research. Most importantly, I emphasized that this was their story to tell. To help them feel more at ease, I provided an opportunity to review the questions beforehand. Given the video-recorded format, I prioritized creating a comfortable and conversational atmosphere where participants could speak openly and authentically.

Interview Guide

The interview guide was developed to create a space where Black women farmers could share their personal stories, challenges, and triumphs in their own words (See Appendix D for the guide). The structure of the guide moves from broad, introductory questions to more reflective ones, helping participants ease into the conversation before discussing deeper, more personal topics. This progression was intentional, as it allowed participants to build comfort and rapport before exploring more complex and emotional aspects of their farming experiences.

The questions reflect the core objectives of this research: to understand the motivations, barriers, and significance of farming in participants' lives while capturing the cultural and social dimensions of being a Black farmer. The guide includes questions about participants' pathways into farming, their daily routines, and the factors that sustain their passion for agriculture. Additionally, the questions address the challenges participants face and how these experiences have shaped their farming journeys.

A focus on diversity and the impact of representation within North Carolina agriculture is also woven into the interview guide. Questions that address the lack of diversity aimed to uncover how identity, community, and systemic factors influence participants' experiences and perceptions of farming. By encouraging participants to reflect on what it means to be a Black farmer, the guide seeks to elevate their voices and provide insights into their contributions to agriculture.

The open-ended nature of the questions allowed for flexibility during the interviews. Additional questions may be asked organically to follow the flow of the conversation and ensure that participants' unique perspectives are fully captured.

Interview Protocols

To prioritize the comfort of participants, I conducted interviews on their farms or at their residences if their farming took place offsite. I worked with each participant to select a location with minimal distractions, ensuring clear audio and video recordings. These familiar settings helped participants feel at ease, enabling them to share their experiences openly.

Before each interview, I introduced myself and provided the participant with information about the study, including an explanation of the interview's purpose and structure. I informed them that their responses will be audio and video recorded, and I outlined the interview's duration and format, allowing them to ask any questions or voice concerns before we began. This approach ensured that participants were fully informed and comfortable before starting the conversation.

At the conclusion of each interview, I expressed my gratitude for the participant's time and contribution. I offered them the opportunity to share any additional thoughts or questions that were not covered during the interview and reassured them that they could reach out to me afterward if needed. This ensured the conversation ended on a respectful and appreciative note, acknowledging the value of their participation.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study followed a qualitative approach aimed at identifying recurring themes, patterns, and relationships within the interview data. The process began with transcribing the audio recordings of the interviews (n=10) using Otter.ai transcription software. After the initial transcription, each transcript was reviewed by the researcher while listening to the corresponding audio to ensure accuracy and to correct any errors introduced during automatic transcription. This process was vital in ensuring that the participants' spoken words were

accurately represented. To maintain participant privacy, all identifiable information was removed from the transcripts, and a master list linking transcripts to participants was stored on a separate, password-protected hard drive. A password-protected hard drive was used for storing de-identified data and coding outputs to ensure data security and participant confidentiality.

With the transcripts prepared, the next step involved developing an initial codebook. Three transcripts were independently reviewed by the researcher, and three transcripts were reviewed by the thesis co-advisor. Both reviewers highlighted recurring themes, patterns, and notable excerpts from the transcripts (Saldaña, 2015). Following this preliminary review, the researcher and advisor met to discuss their findings and collaboratively developed an initial set of codes. The initial codes identified were: Farming History, Resource Access, Community, Ancestral Farming Practices, Proud Moments, Challenges, Race/Ethnicity, Farming Methods, and Future Impact.

To ensure the initial codes were fitting for the data, the researcher and advisor applied the codes to two selected transcripts through Dedoose software (SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC, 2024). This step provided an opportunity to assess the application of the codes and verify their relevance to the data. Following a quality check meeting, where the researcher and advisor compared their coded excerpts and discussed areas of alignment and divergence, several refinements were made. These adjustments included changing “Farming History” to “Personal Farming History” to more accurately reflect the participants' personal farming experiences rather than their family histories. The definition of “Ancestral Farming Practices” was also expanded to include ancestral practices interviewees used, any mention of ancestry, and the farming history of their family members. Additionally, two new codes were added:

“Journey” to capture the interviewees' path to farming and their prior experiences, and “Stand Out Quotes,” to highlight particularly meaningful or significant quotes from the interviews.

After refining the codes, all ten transcripts were carefully examined and coded in Dedoose (See codebook in Appendix E). The codes were applied systematically to participants' quotes, ensuring consistency and accuracy in the representation of their experiences. Once coding was complete, the code co-occurrence function in Dedoose was utilized to identify which codes appeared together most frequently. The top co-occurring codes were Race/Ethnicity x Challenges (29 occurrences), Race/Ethnicity x Community (26 occurrences), and Race/Ethnicity x Future Impact (33 occurrences). These co-occurring codes were chosen as parent themes for further analysis, as their high frequency indicated their central importance to the participants’ narratives.

For each parent theme, all associated excerpts were examined further to identify subthemes within the transcripts. This iterative process allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the data while ensuring the analysis remained focused on the most prominent patterns. Through this approach, I was able to synthesize the themes, developing a cohesive narrative that reflected the shared and individual experiences of the participants. The analysis highlighted how race and ethnicity intersected with challenges, community, and future impact in the context of Black women farmers' experiences.

Member Checking

Member checking involved reviewing footage with participants to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the data. They had the opportunity to review their transcript, video, audio, or all of the above, allowing them to clarify, add, or amend any details that might have been missed. This collaborative approach not only emphasized the participants’ active role in the research but

also ensured that their voices were accurately represented. By having the final product approved by the participants, the research process became a shared effort, making it as much their project as it was mine.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, data was collected through one-on-one interviews with participants, supplemented by peer-reviewed sources if necessary. Conducting these interviews in person added credibility, as participants' stories were captured on video, providing a visual representation of their experiences in addition to the textual account. As noted above, member checking was employed to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the information presented in the videos. The research procedure and methodology were documented to ensure the study can be replicated and to ensure transparency. These measures collectively aim to bolster the credibility and reliability of the research findings.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the ethical conduct of this research, all participants were fully informed that the study would result in public-facing media. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before any recording took place (see Appendix B and C for the consent forms). Any data from their experiences was included in the written report, with all identifying information removed to protect their privacy.

The comfort and well-being of participants remained my highest priority. If participants requested to omit certain parts of the recording, those requests were respected. This approach ensured that participants felt comfortable and that their stories were represented in a way that was both respectful and appropriate for them. The research was conducted in a manner that upheld participants' privacy and honored their requests regarding their involvement.

Role and Background of the Researcher

As a first-time researcher, my motivation for conducting this qualitative study comes from a profound passion for amplifying the voices of Black farmers, especially women, whose stories are often marginalized. While I may lack extensive research experience, I approached this study with dedication, aiming to conduct it with precision and empathy. My goal is to ensure that the narratives of Black women farmers are not only heard but also respected and uplifted.

While this is my first time leading a research project, I have valuable experience assisting with focus groups as a notetaker. This experience provided me with insights into facilitating group conversations, which were beneficial in conducting one-on-one interviews for this study. While my direct experience as a researcher may be limited, my passion for this topic drives me to execute this research meticulously. My goal is to honor and uplift Black women farmers by ensuring their stories are heard, and their struggles, successes, and resilience are recognized.

In this study, my role as the researcher was multifaceted. Firstly, I was an active listener, creating a supportive environment for the women participating in the study to freely share their experiences. I was responsible for collecting their stories through one-on-one interviews and interpreting them to identify common themes. Subsequently, I plan to use these themes to create a public-facing media presentation that authentically highlights the stories of these women in agriculture.

My background as a Black woman in agriculture likely influenced my approach to the study significantly. As a member of this demographic, I understood firsthand the challenges and isolation that Black women in agriculture often faced. This understanding fueled my interest in conducting the study, as I was deeply motivated to explore the barriers that Black women farmers encountered and how they navigated and overcame these challenges, ultimately choosing

to remain in this field. My personal experiences shaped my passion for this research. I was driven by a desire to see agriculture become more inclusive and diverse. I believed that sharing the stories of Black individuals in agriculture was crucial, as these narratives could inspire and empower the next generation of agricultural students of color. My background informed my approach, ensuring that I conducted the study with sensitivity, empathy, and a commitment to uplifting the voices of Black women farmers.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Three key themes emerged from the data: Race/Ethnicity and Challenges, Race/Ethnicity and Community, and Race/Ethnicity and Future Impact. Each of these overarching themes was supported by several subthemes, which provided deeper insights into the participants' experiences. For Race/Ethnicity and Challenges, the subthemes included stereotyping and bias in agriculture, intergenerational trauma, and resource access. Under Race/Ethnicity and Community, the subthemes were searching for community in a landscape lacking diversity, community building and solidarity among BIPOC farmers, and growing, feeding, and healing their communities. Lastly, for Race/Ethnicity and Future Impact, the subthemes highlighted increase in Black farmers and visibility, legacy building for future generations, and hope for a bright and inclusive future. These themes and subthemes together reflect the complex and multifaceted nature of Black women farmers' experiences in agriculture.

Race/Ethnicity x Challenges

Navigating the agricultural landscape as a minority presented unique challenges for participants, both culturally and professionally. For the Black women farmers I interviewed, the experience of being "melanated" in predominantly white spaces brought a significant shift in how they were perceived and treated. As Stephanie shared, “Being melanated is different because it was a whole shock and transition, you know, culturally going into our [local] farmers market.” By 'our' farmers market, Stephanie was referring to the market where she vended, which was predominantly white, further highlighting the cultural divide and the adjustment required for Black farmers to navigate such spaces. This cultural adjustment underscored the complexities of being a minority in agriculture, where the industry’s norms and expectations often did not align with the lived experiences of Black farmers. Natasha reflected on the weight

of this reality, stating, “It is not easy being in the minority in the agricultural community, but… we're needed.” Despite the hardships, Natasha acknowledged the critical role that minority farmers play within the industry.

These experiences of exclusion and discrimination underscore the need for greater representation and inclusion in agricultural spaces, where Black farmers are essential to diversifying and enriching the field. Within the theme of Race/Ethnicity and Challenges, several subthemes emerged that shed light on the specific barriers faced by Black farmers. These included *stereotyping and bias in agriculture*, which highlighted the prejudices and assumptions they encounter in farming environments; *intergenerational trauma*, which revealed the lasting impacts of historical injustices on Black farmers; and *resource access*, which underscored the difficulties in obtaining the necessary tools, funding, and support to thrive in agriculture. These subthemes collectively illustrate the multifaceted nature of the challenges Black farmers face and provide a deeper understanding of the systemic issues within the industry.

Stereotyping and Bias in Agriculture

Being a minority in agriculture often means facing the burden of stereotypes and biases that hinder career advancement and limit opportunities. These preconceived notions are deeply embedded in the industry, where judgments are made based on appearance, race, and gender. As Natasha explained,

> Being slept on [by] people, assuming that you don't know what you're talking about, because you're black, because you're a woman you know, or because you are not a century farmer, because you don't have a whole lot of land.

Such assumptions reflect narrow, outdated views of who is deemed "worthy" of participating in farming. These biases often ignore the depth of knowledge and expertise that Black women farmers bring to the table, further marginalizing their contributions.

The effects of these biases are not only personal but structural, as Natasha continued: "A lot of times, unfortunately, we don't get a lot of credit for all the knowledge that we do have, and we sometimes get pushed aside." For many Black women farmers, these assumptions contribute to missed opportunities and overlooked potential, as their capabilities are dismissed in favor of stereotypes. This results in significant barriers to both financial and social capital, as well as recognition within the farming community.

Erica provided insight into the historical nature of such bias, noting, "I feel like a lot of white farmers are pushing a lot of Black farmers out. That's historic." While acknowledging the long-standing exclusion of Black farmers, Erica refused to let this discrimination define her path. "It actually just may push me a little bit harder, knowing that people don't take me seriously. Knowing that I am serious—if you guys want to second guess me, that's fine, but I'm going after it," she asserted. Erica's words highlighted how bias and exclusion, though deeply ingrained, can serve as powerful motivators to prove one's worth and to challenge the status quo.

However, the stigma associated with farming does not only stem from the broader agricultural community—it can also be found within families. Teri, who did not grow up in a farming family, recalled her own internalized resistance to the idea of becoming a farmer:

> I didn't come from a family of farmers. You know, the stigma that comes with farming is usually hard work, being in the field, sweating, and not making a lot of money. So it definitely wasn't something that I thought I would ever want to do.

For Teri, farming was associated with physical labor and financial instability, making it an unlikely career choice. Sharon echoed this sentiment, stating, “Farming is viewed as dirty.” These perspectives suggest that, for some participants, negative perceptions of farming were not just external but also shaped by cultural and familial influences.

These shared experiences reflected the layers of bias that not only challenged Black women farmers externally but also shaped their internal perceptions of what it means to be a farmer. Yet, despite these pervasive stereotypes and challenges, many continued to push forward in defiance of these limiting views.

Intergenerational Trauma

While some Black women farmers did not come from farming backgrounds, others discovered histories of farming in their families that were previously hidden, often due to the painful memories these stories evoked. Natasha shared that her grandparents’ story was:

> A heartbreaking story, and so the family doesn’t discuss it a lot…it was riddled with violence and tragedy. And so it’s not a story that is easy for my family to tell. And so it was not a story that I was familiar with until I got older.

Natasha’s path into farming became the catalyst for her family to share this painful history with her. As she embraced farming in a positive light, her family found a way to transform their trauma into something constructive, as they watched their grandchild pursue a path that, though tied to difficult memories, was now taken in a more impactful and hopeful way.

Sharon shared a similar experience in her family. She reflected on how her family was able to reconnect with farming in a positive way through her own farming journey:

> Growing up, that information, that experience and that knowledge, was not passed [down] until now. Like now they’re sharing it. Now I feel like… it’s not as depressing as

> it was when they were going through it. It's easier for them to tell the story. It's easier for them to share it, where we can smile and have fun and, you know, enjoy picking okra together.

Sharon's experience illustrated how farming, once associated with hardship and loss, became a source of joy and connection, allowing her family to revisit and reclaim their past with a sense of positivity.

Wendy also reflected on the pain of ancestral stories but emphasized the importance of sharing these histories, despite the emotional weight they carry. She shared,

> And so I think… you forget what you can do, what you have, in a way, and you forget those stories, and you also attach the pain of those stories, you know, to this activity. And so if there's no sort of positive situation that's coming from it, you know, why would you continue to talk about it? Why would you tell, you know, your grandchildren about it? So I, you know, I don't, I understand why I didn't hear about it growing up.

Wendy's perspective showed how the lack of a positive outcome or a meaningful connection to the past can prevent these stories from being passed down, but it also emphasized the importance of reclaiming those stories to build a more empowered future.

Resource Access

Access to resources remains a significant barrier for Black farmers, encompassing challenges related to land acquisition, funding, and support from government organizations. For many, navigating the agricultural world requires overcoming numerous obstacles, often creating an arduous path to success. These barriers can be particularly difficult for new farmers or those who did not grow up in farming families, as Erica explained: "I didn't grow up farming… [I do] not really [know] where to go to for resources." Access to information is another major hurdle,

as Stephanie highlighted, “so there’s cliques and groups that you have to get into. You gotta knock on some doors…” To gain the support and resources they need, farmers often find themselves “kicking open some doors” in the agricultural community, as she further stated.

Land access remains one of the biggest challenges for Black farmers, as both Stephanie and Diane reflected in their own experiences. While Diane was fortunate to have secure land, saying, “that’s something that I don’t have to kind of think about,” Stephanie’s journey was more difficult: “Quality land… you know we had to scrape for money in order to purchase the farm.” Each farmer’s story of how they gained access to land is unique, but the broader history of land acquisition for Black farmers has been marked by significant obstacles. Despite these challenges, many farmers found creative ways to farm and make the best of what they have.

Funding was also a significant barrier, affecting not only land access but also the infrastructure necessary to run a successful farm. Stephanie, Wendy, and Diane all described struggles with securing financing for their operations. Diane shared her experience with loan applications: "[It’s] something that I've experienced, and it's really common for a lot of farmers that I know as well." While Stephanie had not faced outright discouragement, she still grappled with the high interest rates and repayment terms on loans: “The loans that were offered, you know, the amount that you have to pay back and the interest rates are so high, it’s not helping.”

Beyond the challenges of accessing funding, Black farmers also face systemic issues that complicate the process. Diane shared her frustrations with dealing with government agencies, particularly when it comes to heirs' property: “Dealing with people who don’t… care to know about issues that impact Black farmers, particularly when it revolves around heirs' property... I’m explaining things to them because they don’t care to know about these unique issues.” The lack

of understanding and willingness to help from organizations that are supposed to provide support further exacerbates the difficulties Black farmers face.

Wendy also discussed the challenges of securing financial resources, noting that although there has been more attention on Black and BIPOC farmers in recent years, there are still significant barriers. “Getting capital to do things, getting capital to put up tunnels, getting capital to buy tractors… these are things that are difficult to come by.” She also pointed to a lack of flexibility in funding, saying, “There’s a gap in terms of funding that is flexible… funding that is unrestricted… so having programs and support that meet you where you are is something that’s needed.” Diane elaborated on another critical issue: delays in accessing resources. She recalled her experience with Farm Service Agency (FSA) farm numbers and the frustration of receiving contradictory information: “I was just constantly told different things, well, we can’t answer that for you… you can’t have a farm number.” This delay, combined with a lack of clarity, further hampered her ability to access necessary loans and resources.

At the core of these issues is the sense of being dismissed or not taken seriously. Erica’s experience reflected this when she shared: “I would say, because I didn’t grow up farming as well, people not taking me seriously... I’m just following up [and they say], ‘Oh, I didn’t think you were serious.’” This lack of validation from others added to the emotional toll, making it even harder for Black farmers to access the resources they need to succeed.

Race/Ethnicity x Community

Participants recognized the collective challenges they faced as Black farmers and the necessity of solidarity to survive and thrive in an industry where they were often marginalized. The barriers they encountered—from systemic discrimination to limited access to resources—underscored the importance of strong, community-based networks. These networks served as

vital support systems, offering knowledge-sharing, mentorship, and access to opportunities that might otherwise have been out of reach. For many, these connections were not just about professional advancement but about survival in an industry where Black farmers have historically been excluded. Whether through local cooperatives, online groups, or in-person gatherings, these networks provided farmers with a means to combat isolation, access emotional and financial support, and advocate for systemic change.

Searching for Community in a Landscape Lacking Diversity

For the Black women farmers in this study, especially those in rural areas or new to agriculture, finding and building a supportive community was challenging. Without a strong local network, participants often turned to online spaces or traveled outside their immediate area to connect with other Black farmers. Terry captured this experience, sharing,

> I find myself leaving the area to have that companionship or to have that camaraderie, and then, you know, I get my cup filled up there to be able to come back here and do what I need to do on my own personal farm.

This sentiment reflected a broader pattern among the women interviewed, who often described the need to seek out spaces where they felt understood and supported. These connections, whether found online or at events outside their local area, provided the emotional and mental recharge necessary to continue their work in environments where they were often one of few, if not the only, Black farmers present.

This longing for community was not just about social support—it was also about finding spaces that reflected these farmers' identities, values, and approaches to land stewardship. The absence of diversity in participants' immediate surroundings made it even more meaningful when they connected with like-minded farmers. Wendy spoke to this sense of inspiration, saying,

> I'm just inspired by those spaces, and I'm also just inspired by the fact that the small number that are here, the way that they have created their own ecosystems to exist in, and are thriving and are happy and are taking care of their families and their communities—like that's that's enough to me.

For these farmers, community is not just a support system; it is a vital source of strength, resilience, and affirmation in a profession where they are often underrepresented.

Community Building and Solidarity Among BIPOC Farmers

For many Black farmers, building a supportive network is essential to their success and well-being. Farming can be isolating, especially when surrounded by those who do not share the same background or experiences. Natasha emphasized the importance of having a community of people who look like her, explaining how her own farming experiences have shaped her journey. "It taught me the importance of developing community and building community," she shared, "I'm super proud of the really tight-knit community of Black farmers that I've worked to be a part of and the space I hold in community with those folks." Having other farmers who understand her struggles and can offer support has given Natasha the confidence to grow in her farming journey.

Diane echoed this sentiment, describing how farming in a way that reflects her identity and values feels like a form of liberation: "The ability to... farm and commune in a way that is important to us and impactful, without dealing with barriers," she explained, is deeply meaningful. Being in community with other Black and Brown farmers is not just beneficial—it was necessary for her because it provided a sense of belonging, support, and shared understanding in an industry where Black and Brown farmers often face systemic barriers.

Beyond viewing farming as a liberatory practice, participants emphasized the necessity of mutual support to sustain their work. Wendy highlighted how these farming communities create a system of shared resources and collaboration. “[You can] use other folks around you,” she says, “to sort of fill in those gaps where you don’t have funding.” She described farmers who lack land partnering with others who do, saying, “There’s farmers I know who are not on land, and they’ve asked, ‘Hey, can I just take a plot, a little piece of your property, and grow some stuff?’” This collective sharing among Black farmers helped sustain and expand Black farming communities, ensuring that resources are accessible to those who need them. The spirit of support extends beyond land-sharing. June saw her role as actively uplifting others, stating, “It is my job to help my people, help others of marginalized groups, those who are affected, who don’t have access to planning. It’s my job.” This dedication to fostering opportunities for others is echoed by many Black farmers who see their success as tied to the success of their community.

For some, building community has been an intentional process from the start. Diane knew from the beginning that she wanted to be surrounded by Black and Brown and BIPOC farmers. “I immediately did that,” she said, which led her to join a BIPOC fellowship and participate in a Black farmers market. By actively seeking these spaces, Diane built a farming experience that does not reflect the small numbers of Black farmers in North Carolina but instead surrounded her with a thriving and supportive network.

Terry also found community through structured programs. “I’m part of the Women of Color Farmers group,” she shared. Through her apprenticeship, she worked with a small Black owned farm, which introduced her to even more farmers. “It takes time—time away from [my] farm—to network, build, and meet different people,” she acknowledged. Though many of her connections happened through Zoom, she values in-person meetings and trainings, where they

"come together, see each other, talk about wins, struggles, and solutions." Even for those who have struggled to find in-person community, all of the participating farmers recognized its importance. Natasha envisioned a future where Black farmers continue to build strong networks. "I hope to see us continue to build community, to hold space for one another, to stay networking, to help one another, to always reach back, to lift one another up." She reflected on the challenges of being a minority in agriculture but stressed, "We are needed. We're important. We're valuable." Sharon echoed this call to action: "We just have to continue to come together. We have to continue to take care of each other and uplift each other. We have to be there for each other, support each other." Through intentional efforts, mutual support, and a shared vision for the future, Black farmers ensured that their presence in agriculture not only survives but thrives.

Growing, Feeding, and Healing Their Communities

While their motivations varied—from health promotion to honoring ancestry—all participants shared a deep commitment not just to farming but to feeding their communities. For Black women farmers, agriculture is more than a livelihood; it is a means of nourishment, healing, and empowerment. Their work extends beyond personal sustenance, tackling food insecurity and promoting health within the communities they serve. Importantly, their commitment is rooted in ensuring that Black communities have access to culturally relevant, nutritious foods.

For Natasha, farming is deeply rooted in tradition and identity. She reflected,

> It means growing the foods that nourish me, my family, and my community—things that we enjoy eating, things that are ancestral, things that Black folks have been eating for centuries. Collard greens, okra, Black-eyed peas—foods that nourish our bodies and our community.

For her, the crops she cultivated reflected both the needs of her community and the ancestry she honors. She continued, “I don’t have to only grow kale because a certain community thinks it’s healthier than collards when, in reality, the nutritive content is the same. So I grow collards because that’s what we like.” While Natasha focused on ancestral foods, Erin took a different approach—broadening her community’s exposure to diverse produce. “My market is a specialty,” she explained,

> I’m producing tomatoes, but my tomatoes are Brandywine, Cherokee Purple, Great White, White Cherry, Artisan… I create diversity in what I do. When I’m growing brassicas, it’s not just collards and cabbage—I’m growing Chinese cabbage, arugula, mizuna, some Asian vegetables that aren’t native to our culture, but I’m bringing them in so that we can have more diversity.”

For Erin, introducing new foods is a way to expand the culinary possibilities available to her community.

Sharon also sees farming as a way to address historical and cultural food traditions that have shaped Black communities—sometimes to their detriment. She explained,

> Some of the diseases and illnesses we fight today are rooted in the cooking traditions passed down from how we were treated during slavery. We were given scraps, and in order to make them taste good, we fried a lot of food in lard. Now, those choices are taking a toll on us. That’s really what inspired us to farm—to try to change and heal our community as best as possible.

Her reflections highlighted the urgency of Black farmers reclaiming their foodways in a way that fosters health and well-being.

For Wendy, the desire to feed her community grew out of a realization about the disparities in food access. “Most of my clients were white,” she recalled, “After a few years, I became disillusioned. Who am I producing food for? Why am I growing food for people who can already afford it, instead of supporting those who truly need fresh produce?” This realization led her back to the community she grew up in, where she could directly impact people who shared her background and experiences.

Ultimately, these farmers are not just growing food—they are encouraging others to do the same. Diane expressed this passion, stating,

> That’s really my passion—knowing that I can grow my own food and encouraging others to grow their own in whatever space they have. It’s going to be really important over the next few generations that we have these survival skills.

Terry shared similar sentiments, emphasizing that her “desire to grow food and feed people” fuels her motivation to stay in agriculture. She saw this passion as a spark that could inspire future Black farmers to begin their own journeys.

Together, these women embody the power of agriculture as a means of sustenance, resistance, and empowerment—nourishing not only their communities but also future generations of Black farmers. Despite their varied motivations, from promoting health to preserving ancestral traditions, they are united in their commitment to feeding their communities with culturally relevant, nutritious foods. Whether through cooperative farming, land-sharing, or direct engagement with local markets, their work ensures that Black communities have access to food that reflects their heritage and sustains their well-being.

Race/Ethnicity x Future Impact

As their conversations came to a close, participants were asked to reflect on the future of Black farming—particularly for Black women farmers. What does this future look like? How can their work today inspire the next generation? In response, they focused on a desire for more Black farmers and increased visibility, legacy building, and growing what they described as a brighter future for Black farmers. With their work, each of these farmers made meaningful strides within their communities, carving out space and creating opportunities where few existed before. Taken together, their hopes were that their efforts would not only sustain their own journeys but also lay the foundation for future Black farmers to thrive.

Increase in Black Farmers and Visibility

For Black farmers to continue thriving, participants noted that there must be a significant increase in their numbers and visibility within agriculture. They shared that representation matters—not only to acknowledge the contributions of Black farmers but also to inspire future generations and create stronger networks of support. For example, Wendy, who farms in a rural area, observed a shift toward greater Black farmer representation. She shared,

> From what I'm seeing and what the folks that I know who are farming, who [identify as Black], is that they're just making a way in that and that those numbers are going to continue to increase, and we're going to continue to continue supporting each other, and you're going to continue to find us in rural areas, and it's just going to be really quite beautiful.

This increase is critical for farmers like Sharon, who worries about Black farmers being overlooked. She explained,

> I don't want to be lost in the midst … you could talk about a lot of professions, and I'm quite sure [Black people will] … be less than 2% within that occupation. But when you think about the world as a whole … it's always a small portion of the population, yet farmers have to feed everybody in the world.

Participants emphasized that visibility plays a crucial role in expanding opportunities for Black farmers and worried that if their numbers grow but they remain unseen, what does the future hold for them?

For Black women farmers who participated in this project, visibility as Black farmers, but in particular as Black women farmers was important. Historically, women have been relegated to household duties rather than recognized as primary farmers. Erin noted that women are increasingly stepping into leadership roles on farms, stating,

> Women [are] coming out of the kitchen now and house cleaning, and they are preparing to take on the role right beside their husbands—or without their husbands—to be able to run the farm. So I know this is a journey that has already started to increase, not just for minority women, but for all women.

The participants in this study emphasized the significance of leadership, as it reflects the ongoing shift in agriculture, where women are increasingly recognized as primary farmers rather than being confined to traditional domestic roles.

Participants noted that even if some women were not working directly in the fields, they contributed to their farms in other vital ways. Grace highlighted the role of women in agricultural innovation:

> Women … are breaking the glass ceiling, and I see more women… not necessarily into the boots on the ground and all of that, but I see a lot of research. Long goes the days of

> walking behind a tractor, behind a mule donkey. But the research is phenomenal… I think about the chemistry, the technology, and it's just really limitless.

Women's participation in all aspects of farming is important, whether they are directly working the land or supporting their partners in other ways. For women like Grace and Erin, whose roles as farmers' wives are equally significant, their support is essential in advancing their partners' farming journeys.

Despite the progress made, the participating farmers acknowledged that farming still carries negative connotations in the broader community, a perception they actively sought to challenge and change. Sharon explained,

> I feel like farming, there's another side of farming that has not been shown. I think, when it comes to farming, [it] is viewed as dirty, or do you have animals…it's physical, you know, labor…. But there's proper ways of, you know, farming, there's, there's proper ways of making agriculture look good.

Participants expressed a desire for Black women farmers to be seen in a different light. Terry expands on this idea, emphasizing that farming should not be defined by traditional images of tractors and overalls. She said,

> We have to get out of that box of thinking that the high tunnel makes you a farmer, or the tractor makes you a farmer, or the overalls make you a farmer. Your willingness, ability, and desire to grow food and feed people—that's it. That's all you really need.

Ultimately, these farmers shared the same vision as Erica, who hoped more Black people would return to farming: "That's our roots here, you know?" The deep historical connection between Black people and agriculture was a driving force for participants to ensure that Black farmers not only exist but thrive for generations to come.

Legacy Building for Future Impact

Participants expressed that passing down knowledge, resources, and opportunities was essential to sustaining the growth, representation, and visibility of Black farmers. Key components of legacy building, as highlighted by the participants, included preserving ancestral knowledge, creating lasting opportunities for future generations, and fostering a deep connection to the land. They felt that future generations must understand the past, present, and future of Black farming to continue this legacy.

Wendy emphasized the importance of this historical awareness, explaining,

> We can't forget that our people have been doing this for a long time. We have cultural technologies in farming that are ingrained in us, ingrained in our communities. Not forgetting that means recognizing that you can be a good farmer, a successful farmer, by continuing the practices of our fore parents.

Natasha shared a similar passion for honoring ancestral knowledge, stating, “There should be a reclaiming of that ancestral knowledge and our rightful place as knowledgeable folks in this industry.” For Terry, being a Black farmer was an opportunity to connect with her roots and honor those who came before her. She reflected, “It gives me the opportunity to love and live in the moment, to put my hands into something so beautiful and creative.” This deep connection to the land and appreciation for Black farming history was something participants hoped to pass down to future generations.

Participants expressed that in addition to knowing history, legacy building was also about paving the way for those to come. Stephanie and June were committed to creating opportunities for the next generation while honoring their ancestors. Stephanie shared, “My daughter is looking at me, and she sees that I don’t have to check in with anybody—people check in with

me. I'm building something lasting, a legacy for my children." She also recognized the responsibility of carrying forward the wisdom of those who came before her, adding, "So I can't go anywhere, because the next generation needs us—the stories of our elders. You know, I keep those stories, and one day I'm going to be the elder to share those stories." June, who feels called to be a steward of nature, believed it is her responsibility to help others in marginalized communities thrive in agriculture. She explained, "It's my job to help my people, to help others from marginalized groups." By preserving traditions, sharing knowledge, and creating new opportunities, these farmers are ensuring that Black farming continues to flourish for generations to come.

Hope for a Bright and Inclusive Future

Participants expressed that the future of Black farming relies on the encouragement and support of the current generation of farmers. They saw mentorship, visibility, and redefining what it means to be a farmer as essential to ensuring that Black farming continues to thrive. For these Black women farmers, being a source of encouragement was a responsibility—they wanted to ensure that young women in agriculture saw themselves represented and knew that Black women farmers existed.

Wendy believed that part of her role is showing the next generation that farming is a viable and fulfilling path. She emphasized, "It's okay to be a farmer. It's okay to farm mushrooms, to do whatever—there are so many different things that farming can be beyond the traditional ideas we have." For Wendy, as a mother, it is particularly important to demonstrate that farming and family life can coexist. She shared,

> Young women who want to farm need to know that, yes, you can farm, and you can be an excellent farmer, and you can also have a family and be a wonderful mother. Those things are not mutually exclusive.

Others emphasized a more expansive view of what a farmer is and could be. For example, Sharon shared a similar perspective, hoping that farming would one day be viewed as just as prestigious as other mainstream careers. She said, “I hope to get to a point where kids think about farming just as much as they think about being a doctor, being a lawyer, or being a nurse.” Participants felt that encouraging the next generation was essential and felt responsible for representing what a farmer could be for future generations. Wendy stressed the importance of representation, saying, “Maybe there’s a high schooler interested in farming, but because they don’t see themselves in it, they won’t pursue it.” She was committed to staying in the field “so that other young women—whether in high school, middle school, or college—have an example.” June shared this sense of responsibility: “Instead of farming being just a passion, it also now feels like an obligation. I have to do it for the next generation.” These reflections demonstrate the participants' shared commitment to changing the narrative around farming and ensuring the next generation sees it as a viable and rewarding path. By offering representation and mentorship, they aim to inspire young people, especially women, to pursue farming with confidence and pride.

Participants noted that they understood why farming may feel intimidating for young Black women, given the painful history associated with it. Erin acknowledged this reality, stating, “Farming has been equated with slavery, but it's no longer that way now.” Terry believed it’s critical to acknowledge this history while also helping the younger generation see farming’s potential:

> The youth and the younger generation …need to understand… how important it is, how it can be financially rewarding…if we just bow down and back out, where are we going to get the new generation of farmers that look like us?... So I think it's very important, you know, for us to show up, even when it's ugly, even when there's a struggle, even when there [are] hard days, just to show the youth and the upcoming generation and even some of our ancestors that we haven't just let it go.

Despite the challenges, these farmers hold onto hope for a thriving, inclusive future in agriculture. Sharon believes in the progress already made and the potential for even more: “I feel like it's going to get better… We are in a better place than our ancestors were, and I hope the same for my daughter, my granddaughter.”

Natasha envisioned a bright future for Black women farmers, stating, “The future of farming for us is a hopeful one.” She was dedicated to inspiring and encouraging future Black women farmers. Erica likewise highlighted the importance of breaking barriers for Black women in agriculture. She shared, “There is such a small number of Black women farmers. Don’t let the fact that you’re a Black woman hold you back from trying something new or different from those around you.”

For participants in this project, farming is not just a profession—it was essential for survival. Grace put it plainly: “Farming feeds you three, four, five times a day. And what can you do if you do not have agriculture?” Together, these farmers saw themselves as cultivating a legacy of resilience, inclusion, and opportunity, ensuring that the next generation has the knowledge, support, and inspiration to carry the torch forward.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study explored the lived experiences of Black women farmers in North Carolina, addressing a significant gap in the literature on the intersectionality of race, gender, and farming. While much of the existing research has focused on the decline of Black farmers, particularly Black men (Touzeau, 2019), the specific challenges faced by Black women in agriculture remain underexplored (Elufisan, 2023; Pilgeram et al., 2022; Woodard-Davis, 2023). This study aimed to fill that gap, providing a nuanced understanding of how Black women navigate systemic barriers, access resources, and cultivate community within the agricultural sector.

The findings highlight that the Black women farmers interviewed faced significant structural and intersectional barriers, including racial and gender discrimination, limited access to land and financial resources, and the minimization of their contributions to agriculture (Tshabalala, 2024; Woodard-Davis, 2023). However, participants did not describe these barriers as insurmountable. The study revealed that community-based networks and a strong desire to create lasting change for future generations of Black farmers are crucial drivers of their persistence in the agricultural field. These networks, both within and outside their communities, serve as essential sources of support, solidarity, and shared knowledge.

Additionally, the study underscores the profound connection between identity and resilience. The identity of Black women farmers is deeply intertwined with their sense of purpose, community, and commitment to future impact. Their intersecting identities—shaped by race and gender—significantly inform their experiences within agriculture The experiences of Black women farmers reveal how race and gender intersect to shape their challenges in agriculture, exposing both racial barriers and gendered expectations within farming communities. While race was the most frequently cited challenge, the data reveal clear gendered dynamics—

for instance, women farmers with male partners were often taken more seriously than those farming independently. This reflects longstanding patriarchal structures within agriculture (Riley & Sachs, 1984), where men are often positioned as the "serious" farmers, while women, particularly Black women, must fight for legitimacy. The necessity of spaces like the Women of Color Farmers group underscores this reality, echoing Beth Richie's (1996) argument that Black women have historically found themselves navigating both male-dominated racial justice spaces and predominantly white feminist movements, necessitating their own intersectional organizing. These farmers' experiences affirm Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) framework of interlocking oppressions, where systemic barriers related to both race and gender create unique challenges in accessing land, credit, and agricultural networks. Yet, their participation in collectives and mutual aid groups highlights how representation, community-building, and shared knowledge serve as acts of resistance—critical strategies for addressing resource disparities and reshaping who is seen as a farmer in America.

Through this study, the unique resilience of Black women farmers emerged as a central theme, providing a richer understanding of how their intersecting identities shaped their experiences and practices within the agricultural landscape. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on diversity and inclusion in agriculture, emphasizing the need for more equitable support systems, resources, and opportunities for Black women in the field.

Discussion

Race/Ethnicity x Challenges

Being part of the farming community presents numerous barriers, particularly for Black women farmers. Although these women expressed pride in their profession and resilience in overcoming obstacles, they were transparent about the challenges they faced due to their

intersecting identities. As Pilgeram (2022) notes, “understanding women's experiences in farming requires understanding broader historical patterns to see how their gendered and racialized identities structure women's experiences as farmers." Participants in this study echoed this sentiment, sharing how their identities as Black women often led to being dismissed or denied opportunities because they did not fit the mold of a "typical farmer." Despite many having deep farming roots, their family histories—often tied to sharecropping or slavery—were viewed as a stigma rather than a source of knowledge and experience.

Family histories of farming were frequently clouded by trauma, which led to a loss of generational knowledge. White and Redmond (2018) highlight how this trauma shapes perceptions of Black farmers, stating, “We tend to be more familiar with the history of slavery, sharecropping, and tenant farming... full of pain, trauma, exploitation, and even death. But the blossoming of the current African American urban agricultural movement encourages us to dig deeper... and expand what we thought we knew about Black people's relationship to the land." Building on this, participants discussed how the trauma tied to their family histories often led to silence, with stories of farming withheld from younger generations. Despite this silence, many participants sought to reclaim their agricultural heritage by redefining farming as an act of healing and empowerment. Their efforts to reconnect with the land became a way to honor their ancestors' experiences while transforming past trauma into a source of strength and resilience.

Resource access remains a major barrier for Black women farmers, particularly when seeking government support. Consistent with findings by Carter and Alexander (2020), who observed that participants were “distrust[ful]...toward the USDA and its related policies and practices,” participants in this study shared similar experiences of systemic discrimination. Although they did not explicitly name the USDA, they spoke of being discouraged from

applying for loans, denied access to resources, and struggling to secure land, underscoring the institutional barriers they continue to face. As Balvanz et al. (2016) noted, these experiences reflect the longstanding history of discrimination Black farmers have faced in obtaining the resources necessary to sustain and grow their farms.

Race/Ethnicity x Community

Farming can be isolating, particularly for Black women farmers, who face challenges in building community due to their minority status in both race and gender within the agricultural industry. Despite these obstacles, the Black women farmers in the current study made deliberate efforts to connect with like-minded individuals, forming supportive communities with other farmers of color.

Many of the participants interviewed, living in rural areas, struggled to build local connections. To overcome this, they sought broader networks of Black farmers beyond their immediate surroundings. As Woodard-Davis (2023) highlighted, *FarmaSis*, an all-Black women farming collective, exemplifies how "increased social interactions" foster a sense of belonging and support for Black women farmers.

Layman and Civita (2022) observed that "women and BIPOC farmers are increasingly disrupting notions of individualism by forming cooperatives, collectives, and coalitions with other farmers as well as with the broader community." This was reflected in the current findings, as many participants not only sought community with other BIPOC farmers but also created spaces of their own to share with others.

In addition to building community for themselves, participants felt a responsibility to uplift their communities. Carter et al. (2024) noted that Black women have historically been vital to agricultural education and community empowerment. They wrote, "throughout the mid-

twentieth century, Black women were at the forefront of agriculture education efforts in their communities, developing 'leadership skills, entrepreneurial spirit, sisterhood, and a concern for community uplift' as home demonstration" (Harris, 2009, p 91). The experiences of the Black women farmers in this study illustrate how their community-building efforts provide support while continuing a long tradition of mutual care and empowerment within Black agricultural spaces.

Race/Ethnicity x Future Impact

The Black women farmers interviewed expressed a strong commitment to increasing the presence and visibility of Black farmers, particularly Black women, to expand their community and inspire future generations. Reiss (2024) highlights this issue, quoting a Black farmer who observed, "the media often frame Black farmers as being non-existent… many people have told me, 'I didn't even know there were Black farmers.'" This underscores the importance of representation; without visible role models, younger generations may struggle to envision themselves as farmers.

Beyond visibility, these women were deeply committed to creating a legacy for their families and future generations. Participants stressed the importance of sharing historical knowledge and preserving traditional farming practices. Balvanz et al. (2016) support this, noting that "sharing…stories [is] one way to address this history of discrimination and curtail potential future practices." The women viewed storytelling and passing down agricultural knowledge as vital ways to honor their heritage and inspire future Black farmers.

Looking ahead, these farmers hoped for a more inclusive future in agriculture, not only for Black women but for all BIPOC farmers. They expressed a desire to inspire young women, especially high school students, to see farming as a viable and respected career. Hester (2024)

shares a similar perspective through Jamila Norman, a Black woman farmer, who states, “It’s important for people to see that farming is a viable career. Women can start farms. Black people can do it, too.” The aspirations of the farmers in this study closely mirror Norman’s, reinforcing their commitment to building a more equitable and empowered future in agriculture.

Limitations

Existing literature highlights land access as a significant barrier for Black farmers (Schulman et al., 1985; Touzeau, 2019). Given this prevalence in the research, the initial literature review and interview structure accounted for landownership as a likely central theme in discussions with Black women farmers. However, findings from this study revealed that while land access was acknowledged as a broader challenge for Black farmers, it was not a unanimous concern among participants regarding their personal experiences.

Only two participants directly addressed land-related challenges: one discussed difficulties navigating heirs’ property issues, while another shared struggles in finding land within her price range. The remaining participants referenced land access as a systemic issue affecting Black women farmers but did not personally cite it as a major barrier in their own farming experiences. This discrepancy suggests that while land access remains a critical issue in the broader discourse on Black farming, its impact may vary based on individual circumstances, farming models, or access to alternative resources. Consequently, this study’s findings may not fully align with existing literature on landownership struggles, highlighting the need for further research into the diverse pathways Black women take to secure and sustain their farms.

Implications

The findings of this study underscore key implications for the experiences of Black women farmers, particularly in the areas of community-building, representation, and resource

accessibility. As exemplified by participants, the following key implications for future work and research emerged: the importance of building community, representation, and addressing disparities in support and resources.

Building Community Matters

A strong sense of community is essential for Black women farmers, providing them with emotional support, shared knowledge, and economic opportunities. Many participants emphasized the importance of connecting with other Black farmers, often seeking out local, regional, and online networks to foster collaboration and resilience. These findings highlight the need for increased investment in community-based agricultural programs, mentorship initiatives, and farmer cooperatives that center Black women's experiences.

Representation Matters

The visibility of Black women in agriculture plays a crucial role in inspiring future generations and challenging dominant narratives about who belongs in farming. Participants expressed that seeing and connecting with other Black women farmers reinforced their sense of purpose and legitimacy in the field. This suggests that media, policymaking, and educational programs should prioritize amplifying the voices and contributions of Black women farmers to ensure their stories are included in agricultural history and discourse.

Disparities in Resources and Support

Black women farmers continue to face systemic disparities in access to financial, technical, and institutional resources compared to their counterparts. Participants noted challenges in securing grants, loans, and agricultural support services, which hindered their ability to scale their operations or implement sustainable practices. These findings point to the need for targeted policy interventions that address racial and gender disparities in agricultural

funding and land access, as well as greater advocacy for equitable resource distribution within agricultural institutions.

Broader Implications

These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersectional challenges Black women farmers face and reinforce the necessity of structural changes in agriculture. Addressing these issues through policy reform, increased visibility, and community-driven support systems can create a more inclusive and equitable agricultural landscape. Future research should continue to explore the long-term impacts of community-building, representation, and resource access on the sustainability of Black women's farming practices.

As part of this effort, I recorded both audio and video during the interviews, transforming these recordings into public-facing digital stories to engage broader audiences. These videos highlight the voices and experiences of Black women farmers through narrative storytelling, serving as a platform to amplify underrepresented voices, challenge stereotypes, and foster broader conversations about equity in agriculture. By bridging research with creative media, I aim to contribute to broader systemic change and ensure that these farmers' narratives reach and resonate with diverse audiences.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Research on Black Women and Black Non-Binary Farmers

Dear [Name],

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Elisabeth Ramsey, and I am a master's student at North Carolina State University conducting my thesis research on the experiences of Black women and Black non-binary individuals in agriculture. I am reaching out to invite you to participate in this important study.

Participant Requirements:
- Identify as Black/African American or biracial with one of their races being Black/African American
- Identify as a woman or non-binary individual
- Be a farmer, sole proprietor, or farm owner/operator's partner
- Be located in North Carolina

The purpose of this research is to amplify the voices and experiences of Black women and Black non-binary farmers in North Carolina. Your participation will involve engaging in a one-on-one interview where you will have the opportunity to share your experiences, challenges, and successes in the agricultural field. This interview will be audio and video recorded to capture your stories authentically and respectfully. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Your perspective and insights are invaluable, and your participation will contribute to a better understanding of the unique challenges and triumphs faced by Black women and Black non-binary individuals in agriculture.

If you are interested in participating please follow the steps below:

1. If you are interested in participating, please respond to this email or contact me at (919) 348-3977.
2. We will schedule a convenient time for the interview.
3. Prior to the interview, you will receive a consent form detailing the study's purpose and your rights as a participant. Please review the form. Forms will be signed at the scheduled interview.
4. At the scheduled interview time, we will conduct an in-person, one-on-one interview at your farm. The interview will be audio and video recorded.
5. After the interview, you will receive compensation of $100. To receive full compensation, it is necessary to complete the scheduled interview.

If you would like more information about the study, please feel free to contact me at eramsey@ncsu.edu or (919) 348-3977. Your voice is important, and I would be honored to hear your story and experiences.

Thank you for considering this invitation. I look forward to the possibility of working with you and learning from your experiences.

Best regards,

Elisabeth Ramsey

Appendix B

Exempt Consent Form

Interviews, Focus Groups, and Benign Behavioral Interventions

Title of Study: From Mountains to Coast: Black Women and Black Non-Binary Farmers' Resilience in North Carolina's Agricultural Landscape
IRB Protocol: 27056
Principal Investigator(s): Elisabeth Ramsey, eramsey@ncsu.edu, 919-348-3977; Annie Hardison-Moody, amhardis@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8478; Catherine Sanders, catherine_sanders@ncsu.edu, 919-513-5936
Funding Source: None
NC State Faculty Point of Contact: Annie Hardison-Moody, amhardis@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8478; Catherine Sanders, catherine_sanders@ncsu.edu, 919-513-5936

You are being asked to participate in a research study about Black women & non-binary farmers' experiences in agriculture. Participation is strictly voluntary. You must be 18 years of age or older, reside in the United States, identify as Black/African American or biracial with one of your races being Black/African American, and identify as a farmer, sole proprietor, or farm partner to participate in this study.

If you participate in this study, you will be invited to engage in an in-person, semi-structured interview about your experiences as a Black woman or non-binary person in agriculture. During the interview, both video and audio recordings will be conducted to capture the conversation for research purposes. Agreeing to be recorded is required for participation. If you choose not to agree to be recorded, we will be unable to include you in the study. The interview will discuss your motivations, challenges, and future in agriculture. Your questions and clarifications are encouraged.

You can choose not to participate in the study or stop participating at any time by informing the researcher during the research activities or afterward. During the research activities, you can simply indicate your decision to stop participating, and the interview will be concluded. If you wish to stop participating after the interview, you can contact the researcher to request that your data not be included in the study. Your decision to stop participating will be respected, and there will be no penalty for withdrawing from the study.

Participants and their farms will be photographed, audio recorded, and video recorded during the research activities. If you do not want this information collected, you cannot participate in this research. We would like to use these recordings and your image for transcription purposes, to create a video interview as part of a storytelling and public-facing media project, and to use your images throughout the project. You will be directly identifiable in these videos, so please share only what you are comfortable with being made public. We will keep these recordings and images indefinitely.

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

You will receive $100 for participating in this research. In order to receive full compensation, you must complete the scheduled interview, which will be recorded, and provide the research team with a mailing address to receive compensation.

If you have any questions about the research or how it is implemented, please contact the student researcher, Elisabeth Ramsey, at eramsey@ncsu.edu and 919-348-3977. You can also contact the faculty advisor for this research, Dr. Annie Hardison-Moody, at amhardis@ncsu.edu and 919-515-8478. Please reference study number 27056 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 at https://research.ncsu.edu/administration/compliance/research-compliance/irb/irb-forms-and-templates/participant-concern-and-complaint-form/

If you consent to participate in this research study, please sign and date the consent form below. Your signature indicates that you have read and understood the information provided and that you agree to participate in the study.

Video recording of study interviews

Video recording will be used for transcription and to create a video interview as part of a storytelling and public-facing media project. Your image may also be used throughout the project. If you choose not to consent to video recording, you will not be able to participate in this study.

I consent to video recording:

Yes _____ No_____

Audio Recording of Study Activities

Audio recording is required for transcription purposes to capture the details of your interview and to ensure the accuracy of our research findings. If you choose not to consent to audio recording, you will not be able to participate in this study.

I consent to audio recording:

Yes _____ No_____

Photographing of study participants/participants surroundings

Photographs may be used as part of the research project, including in presentations, reports, or publications. If you choose not to consent to photos, you will not be able to participate in this study.

I consent to photographs:

Yes _____ No_____

_____

Name

_____

Today's Date

Appendix C

Participant Broad Consent Form

Title of Study: From Mountains to Coast: Black Women and Black Non-Binary Farmers' Resilience in North Carolina's Agricultural Landscape
IRB Protocol: 27056
Principal Investigator(s): Elisabeth Ramsey, eramsey@ncsu.edu, 919-348-3977; Annie Hardison-Moody, amhardis@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8478; Catherine Sanders, catherine_sanders@ncsu.edu, 919-513-5936
Funding Source: None
NC State Faculty Point of Contact: Annie Hardison-Moody, amhardis@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8478; Catherine Sanders, catherine_sanders@ncsu.edu, 919-513-5936

In this study, we are collecting data that is considered identifiable and private. Your data is identifiable because it includes your video interview, name, image, race/ethnicity, age, gender/gender identity, education, employment, and personal experiences. Your data is considered identifiable even though we are removing your last name and other direct identifiers. We are unable to remove every piece of information that would allow your identity to be figured out.

We would like to keep, use, and share this identifiable, private data for future unspecified research. The specific research is currently unknown and could be unrelated to the purposes of the current study. This is why we need to ask you for additional consent, called "broad consent."

Please know that you do not have to provide broad consent in order to be in the original study. Your decision will not affect your participation or compensation in the current study. It is not a condition of your enrollment or employment at any institution. Providing broad consent is completely optional and there is no personal benefit for you. You may indirectly benefit, as your data will be used for research that can support or improve many areas of life, such as sharing your story to encourage the next generation to get involved in farming.

<u>If you provide broad consent:</u>
We will do the following with your identifiable, private data:

- Store and maintain your data (for an indefinite period of time)
- Use your data for future research purposes (for an indefinite period of time)
- Share your data with other researchers or entities for their research use. The other entities may include research, academic, and medical institutions, Drug and device companies, Biotechnology companies, and others

Your data will be used for medical, scientific, and other research. However, you will not be told the purposes, results, or any other details of the specific research studies that will use your data. You will also not be asked for consent each time your data is used or shared. This means your data could be used for studies that you may not have consented to if you were asked.

Your data may also be used to create products or to deliver services. These products or services may be sold and/or make money for others. If this happens, there are no plans to tell you, pay you, or give any compensation to you or your family.

The main risks in providing broad consent are that in the future, you may not agree with how your data will be used, your identity could be figured out, and your data could be accessed by unintended parties. We will manage who can access your data and store it using regularly updated security plans. However, we will be unable to control what happens to the data after we share it with others.

If you don't provide broad consent or complete this form:
We will not store, use, or share the identifiable, private data collected from you beyond the purposes stated in the previous consent form that you agreed to and signed for the From Mountains to Coast: Black Women & Non-Binary Farmers' Resilience in North Carolina's Agricultural Landscape study. If you do not complete this form, we will assume you are not providing broad consent.

If you want to withdraw your broad consent
Please contact the researcher, Elisabeth Ramsey, at eramsey@ncsu.edu and 919-348-3977. You can also contact the faculty advisor for this research, Dr. Annie Hardison-Moody, at amhardis@ncsu.edu and 919-515-8478.

If you want to withdraw your broad consent and have your permission revoked for the use of your data for unspecified future research, we will delete your data from our records so that we can no longer use your data for future research. However, if your data has been shared with others for other research studies, we may not be able to affect how others use your data.

If you have questions:
Please ask the research team to explain anything in this form that you do not clearly understand. Please think about this broad consent, ask questions, and/or discuss it with family or friends before making the decision to say "Yes" or "No" to broad consent.

If you want to discuss your rights as a person who has agreed to, refused, or declined to respond to an offer of broad consent or believe that your rights were violated as a result of your agreeing to this broad consent, please contact the NC State IRB Director at IRB-Director@ncsu.edu, 919-515-8754, or fill out a confidential form online at https://research.ncsu.edu/administration/participant-concern-and-complaint-form/.

Please select one option and provide your name and today's date

Yes, I would like to provide broad consent. My identifiable, private information can be kept and used for future research studies. I acknowledge that I have read this form and any questions have been answered. I have been informed that I can withdraw my consent at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

No, I do *not* want to provide broad consent. I do not give permission for my identifiable, private data to be kept or used for other research studies. I acknowledge that I have read this form and any questions have been answered.

_____

Name

_____

Today's Date

Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. My name is Elisabeth, and I am a graduate student at NC State University conducting research for my master's thesis. Your insights will be valuable to my study. All responses will be video and audio recorded. The interview will last approximately two hours, during which I will ask you a series of questions. To protect the privacy of others, please avoid referring to other people by name during our conversation. Do you have any comments or concerns before we start?

Starter Questions:

- Could you introduce yourself?
- What inspired you to start farming and how long have you been doing it?
    - Did you grow up knowing about farming or that you wanted to farm?
    - Did anyone in your family farm?

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about a typical day working on your farm/garden.

a. Can you describe your farming role and responsibilities?

2. Tell me about some of your proudest moments as a farmer.
3. What are some barriers you have experienced as a farmer?

a. How have these moments, either positive or negative, influenced your farming journey?

4. What drives your passion for farming?

a. With the lack of diversity in farming in NC, what keeps you in this agricultural space?

b. Does the lack of diversity in farming in NC impact your desire to continue farming?

5. How do you see your work inspiring others to do what you do?
6. To begin to wrap up our time together could you tell me…What does being a black farmer mean to you?

Closing Questions:

- What do you envision for the future of farming for Black women and non-binary farmers?

Outro:

As our conversation comes to a close, I want to extend a thank you for sharing your experiences with me. Your participation has been incredibly valuable to my master's thesis. If you have any further thoughts or questions, please feel free to reach out. Thank you again for your time and contribution.

Appendix E

Codebook

Code: Personal Farming History

Definition: When a participant talks about their personal past experiences with farming; any experiences that they had/learning about farming growing up

When not to use: Do not use this code when participants discuss broader cultural farming practices; this code denotes personal history. For cultural farming practices OR family farming practices, use Ancestral Farming Practices

Cross Code: Ancestral Farming Practices

Code: Resource Access

Definition: When a participant talks about access or lack of access to financial or technical assistance resources related to farming. Includes challenges and successes related to accessing resources, including financial, technical support, or land access

Cross Code: Could cross with barriers when resource access is defined as a lack of resources or access to resources

Code: Community

Definition: Anytime a participant talks about their work as it relates to community-building or creating community out of their farming experiences

Code: Ancestral Farming Practices

Definition: When a participant talks about the history of afro-indigenous farming practices, and ties to ancestral farming practices. This includes family experiences of farming/history of the family that farmed in any capacity

When not to use: Do not use this code when participants talk about their personal farming practices; instead, use Personal Farming History

Code: Proud Moments

Definition: When a participant talks about moments of pride or success in their farming practices, including how these moments make them feel and any concrete impacts from those successes

Code: Challenges

Definition: Use this code when participants talk about barriers they face in their farming practices, building farming community or connecting with other farmers. This also includes discussions of systemic challenges or barriers that farmers face, as well as identity-related challenges.

Cross Code: Resource Access, Race

Code: Race/ethnicity

Definition: Any mention of their racial or ethnic group or observable characteristics of individual phenotypical markers of race (e.g., hair texture, skin color) or beliefs/perceptions/stereotypes about groups based on their race, ethnicity, or place of origin. Apply this code when participants identify themselves as a certain race or ethnicity. Also, apply this code to discussions of beliefs or stereotypes about groups based on their race, ethnicity, or place of origin. This code should also be used to talk about experiences of racism or racial injustice and protests and movements related to racism and racial injustice (as defined OR implied by the participant - note that some participants may use coded language to refer to racism or racial assumptions, and these should be coded as RACE/ETHNICITY if the researcher can make a reasonable assumption that participant is referring to race/racialization/racism).

Cross Code: Challenges, Resource Access

Code: Farming Methods

Definition: Any time a participant talks about how they farm, including tending the land, farming or agricultural practices, selling, bartering or donating produce

Code: Future Impact

Definition: Any time a participant talks about their impact on the field of agriculture and the future of agriculture; this includes discussions of representation, activism, or the desire to have an impact on the future of agriculture

Code: Journey

Definition: Any time a participant talks about the journey or path that got them to farming or their career path before they began farming

When not to use: Do not use this code when they talk about how they learned about farming or their farming history; this is a more general code to understand background pathways to farming

Code: Stand out quotes

Definition: Any quotes that are particularly meaningful or important; try not to flag more than 1-2 per transcript