

ABSTRACT

IBRAHIM, ALEJANDRO ANWAR ALBERT. *Cultivating a Better Community: The Role of the New Farmers of America (NFA) in Black Food Injustice.* (Under the direction of Dr. Nishani Frazier).

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the activities of New Farmers of America (NFA) in North Carolina as it pertains to black food justice between 1927 to 1965. The NFA was an organization created in 1926 to educate young African American men in the profession of agriculture. Their efforts to establish food sovereignty and food security are noteworthy in the history of African American agriculture in North Carolina. This study will analyze three major areas. The first chapter discusses African American agricultural policy before the inception of the NFA, and how African Americans were excluded from food policies. The second chapter studies the methods the NFA employed to address food insecurity in their communities and their success. The third chapter covers possible solutions to the current problems in black food policies and how the NFA policies can address them. This study can be used to add to the rich history of African Americans and agriculture. It can also be used for black food policy efforts.

**Cultivating a Better Community: The Role of the New Farmers of America (NFA) in
Black Food Injustice**

by
Alejandro Anwar Albert Ibrahim

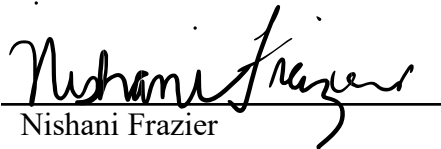
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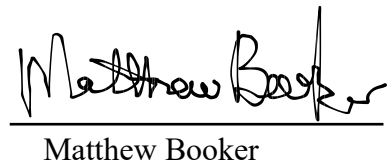
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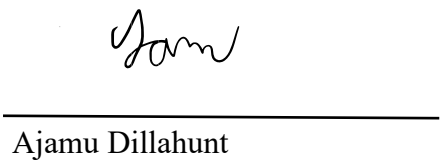
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Dr. Mohammed Jimo Ibrahim, and my son, Maika
Kolawole Samir Dion Ibrahim.

BIOGRAPHY

Alejandro Ibrahim is an advocate for the preservation of African diaspora history and culture. In 2020, Alejandro Ibrahim graduated from Walter Hines Page High School, and in 2023, he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in History from North Carolina Central University. While attending North Carolina Central University, he served as president of the NAACP chapter and as Vice President of the State NAACP Youth and College Division. While at North Carolina State University, Alejandro served as the Vice President of Graduate Student Affairs for the Association of Student Governments (ASG) and as a graduate student representative for NC State's Student Government. Alejandro's research interests are African diaspora agriculture history, black environmental history, and Black education history. Alejandro Ibrahim is also an avid farmer and helps with his family farm in Reidsville, North Carolina. After graduation, Alejandro plans to attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to further his education by pursuing a PhD in Africana Studies.

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Introduction

On January 24, 1946, *The News of Orange County* published in North Carolina had a heading entitled, “WINNER IN CONTEST.”

“Congratulations are in order and go to Russell Watson, a student at O.C.T.S., who won third place in the state contest and holds first place in the district in the production of sweet potatoes. The award will be presented at the NFA Sweet Potatoes Growers Banquet in Raleigh Friday, Jan. 4, and was sponsored by the state Department of Vocational Education and the Plant Food Institute of North Carolina and Virginia. NFA Members taking part in the contest totaled 255. B. F. Garrett is the local vocational teacher at O.C.T.S.”¹

Competitions, like the one Watson participated in, reflect efforts by agricultural leaders to increase agricultural production in the state. Beginning from the late 1800s to the 1960s, the focus turned to Black farmers’ agricultural development and healthier crops. With the onslaught of the Great Depression, these educational and agricultural development efforts became more important, and vegetables like sweet potatoes became an ideal crop for income during this economically depressing period.

Watson’s win spoke to a new, larger movement within the southern agricultural progressives led by Seaman Knapp in 1902. Southern progressives tasked Knapp with transforming southern agriculture.² Agricultural experimental stations rose throughout the South to research better farming practices. To disseminate the information discovered in experimental

¹“Winner In Contest” *The News of Orange County*, January 24, 1946, <https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn93007672/1946-10-03/ed-1/seq-5/#words=contest+NFA+potato+%20potatoes+sweet>

² GILBERT C. Fite *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980*. 1st ed. University Press of Kentucky, 1984. 1

research stations, the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 created the Cooperative Extension Service to educate farmers on better farming techniques.

Watson's victory was also partially due to his membership in the New Farmers of America (NFA), an organization created during the 1920s for young African American male farmers. The NFA conducted food policies through food production and preservation, along with the raising of livestock. Their food policies helped provide support to African Americans from the late 1920s to the early 1960s.

Today, the Sweet Potato is the State Vegetable of North Carolina and is also the most common vegetable grown in the state. The Watson success story was one of many pivotal steps in the changes in NC agriculture.

The efforts of African Americans to address food insecurity and sovereignty in North Carolina did not start with the NFA, but the NFA represented a historical trend. Judith A. Carney, in her manuscript *In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World*, describes how enslaved African Americans planted their food for consumption on the slave plantations that held them in bondage.³ This act of food sovereignty aided enslaved persons in controlling their food systems and diets.

The NFA operated and carried out the same activities of ensuring food security and food sovereignty in Black communities. The NFA did not act in the manner of an independent body. However, as their ancestors did, they worked together to provide better health to their communities. The NFA practiced growing fruits and vegetables, raising dairy cattle, and canning foods for community consumption.

³ Judith A. Carney., and Richard N. Rosomoff. *In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2009. 104-109

The efforts of the NFA to help feed their communities were transformative. They introduced a new era in which African American communities began to change the tide of food policy. Food sovereignty efforts proved fruitful during the 1930s to 1950s. After the 1950s, however, the NFA lost momentum and in 1965 merged with the Future Farmers of America (FFA).

The current state of African American food insecurity and food sovereignty requires a revisit of the NFA. African Americans nationally and in the State of North Carolina are currently going through a similar phase of food insecurity. This occurred when the NFA emerged in the 1930s. Revisiting the policies enacted by the NFA can change the agricultural landscape in the present day.

Food insecurity and food sovereignty are problems for the African American community that partially stem from current commodity crop-driven policies. Historically, the NFA encountered similar challenges in the cotton and tobacco era. These issues dominated agricultural production from the 1800s to the 1930s. In today's society, the same issue occurs with over 60 percent of farmland utilized for livestock and commodity crop production versus less than 5 percent for specialty crops.⁴

The problem of food insecurity and food sovereignty is a calamity that has persisted throughout the years. Currently, African Americans are at a greater risk of heart disease and stroke than any other group of Americans, most of which results from inhibited access to healthy foods. African American food insecurity transpired from 1927 to 1965. Studying NFA methods can aid in current efforts to stop the rise of heart disease.

⁴“ Farm Specialization” Farms and Farmland, 2022 Agricultural Census, US Department of Agriculture, March 2024, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Highlights/2024/Census22_HL_FarmsFarmland.pdf

The lack of African American farms directly correlates to the fractured food systems that African Americans fall victim to. Teaching students how to run a farm and the benefits of one was one of the major successes of the NFA. This allowed farming to continue in the African American community. Today, African Americans account for less than two percent of farmers nationwide. This statistic has major implications for the high rates of food insecurity among African Americans.

This thesis is a study of how the NFA in North Carolina was part of the pursuit of African Americans' access to healthy food and control of their food systems. The chapters tell the story of the African American struggle with food insecurity in North Carolina and the efforts they made to empower food access, defining health for themselves. The NFA may no longer exist, but African Americans still suffer from racially divided food policies and are the most food-insecure ethnic group in North Carolina. However, NFA policies are part of a long trajectory of independent efforts to ensure food access to African American communities in North Carolina.

Chapter One provides a historical review of African Americans who addressed the need for better diets and agricultural policies. This chapter sets a foundation for the rest of the paper, pointing to history and African American Studies as interventions to influence better food policies for African Americans.

Chapter two centers the NFA's intervention in addressing food security in the communities that they serve. This chapter analyzes methods used, specifically analyzing their methods in food production and preservation, and livestock management. Their success in the long struggle for food sovereignty and food justice in North Carolina's African American population. The work of the NFA will be observed as a form of agricultural policy.

Chapter three argues for a modern reboot of NFA food policies, which were the production of food crops and food preservation, and raising livestock. NFA food policies brought food sovereignty to African American communities. In contemporary times, their policies can be used to address current black food justice problems.

Scholars have wrestled with the history of food insecurity in North Carolina and its effects on African Americans. *The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region* by Marcie Cohen Ferris chronicles the history of food in the South to the present day. Ferris starts with slavery and takes the reader on a journey through the era of sharecropping to the Civil Rights Movement and the present day. Her work gives credence to the contributions and struggles of African Americans' journey to attain food sovereignty and food security.

Historian Adrienne Monteith Petty, in her book *Standing Their Ground: Small Farmers in North Carolina since the Civil War*, gives a specific historical analysis of small farmers in seven counties in southeastern North Carolina. She navigates the hardships that small farmers encountered in an ever-changing agricultural landscape, growing towards mass production. She investigates the extent to which small farmers were constantly facing struggles, including the right to grow food crops. Her work is a testament to the rich agricultural history of North Carolina.

Scholar Monica M. White, in her book *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance And The Black Freedom Movement*, follows the efforts of African Americans since emancipation to achieve the right to healthy food. White studies movements from North Bolivar County Farms Cooperative to Detroit Urban Gardeners in the present day. White positions African American

agriculture as an act of resistance against the white power structure seeking to control the food systems of America.

Historian Frederick Douglass Opie, in his book *Hogs and Hominy*, studies the evolution of African American foodways in the United States, specifically the cuisine of Soul Food. Starting from the African influence on Europe, Opie charts the course of Soul Food to the 1970s. Opie's book does not strictly stay within the context of African Americans in the south, rather pivots to the unique path Soul Food has encountered economic, social, and political issues in the United States.

Black Food Justice Matters: Racial Justice in the Wake of Food Justice brings to light the collective power of black efforts in tackling food justice. Editors Hanna Garth and Ashante M. Reese confront the fractured United States food system with acts of resilience and resistance. *Black Food Justice Matters* pays homage to past movements and applauds current efforts to create a better system for people of African descent in America.

Pete Daniels's manuscript *Dispossession: Discrimination against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights* tells the story of African American farmers' fight for civil rights. Daniel follows the racism that African American farmers encountered in their pursuit to farm. *Dispossession* is a prelude to the current farming disparities among African Americans. Daniel consistently demonstrates the government policy of exclusion towards African American farmers, causing many to abandon the farming profession. Daniels' manuscript has strong implications for the state of food insecurity in the African American community.

Gilbert C. Fite's manuscript, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture 1865-1980*, follows the rise and fall of agricultural progressivism in the southern United States. Fite holistically confronts the Southern agricultural system, delving into the farming systems that dominated the South. Fite uses the South's dependency on the cash crops of cotton and tobacco as reasons for poor health and poverty in the South. Fite notably engages with the racism in agriculture, acknowledging its impact and future implications among African Americans.

This paper adds to the field of literature by focusing on the role that the NFA played in food accessibility efforts in North Carolina. Including the NFA into the scholarship of African American food Justice of North Carolina allows scholars to look at the movement through a new lens. The NFA's food policies of food production and preservation, livestock production, and the diversification of crops changed their communities, returning the power of their diets to them. Racist agricultural policies in North Carolina excluded African Americans from using progressive agricultural methods on their farms. Food policies of the NFA empowered African American families to have better diets and improve their health, increasing their ability to have balanced diets.

Additionally, it offers a unique methodological component by incorporating Public History Advocacy in the final chapter. Public history operates as a change-making tool for understanding historical inequities and prompting social change through the use of public engagement. This thesis analyzes the struggle for food security and sovereignty within North Carolina's African American community by analyzing methods applied by the NFA. This research exhibits how past approaches to combat food insecurity can advise current agricultural policy reform by unearthing historical strategies and their outcomes. This analysis will reveal the

persistent challenges in food security and sovereignty in the African American community in North Carolina and the potential of solutions enacted by the NFA.

Chapter I: The History of Black Food Insecurity in North Carolina

This chapter examines African Americans' early struggles and methods to create food security and establish food sovereignty in North Carolina. Another important phenomenon that this chapter will cover is the beginning of North Carolina's agricultural landscape, which promotes commodity crop monoculture. North Carolina's commodity crop agriculture undermined the ability of African Americans to determine their food systems. This chapter seeks to provide the history of this undergirding issue.

Enslaved Africans were forcibly brought to North Carolina in the 1680s to act as a free labor source for white colonials. The Coastal Plain region contained the majority of enslaved Africans. The land in Piedmont and the western part of North Carolina was less suitable for large-scale crop production. The hindrance of crop production in these regions did not stop the practice of slavery; however, by the mid-1800s, the Piedmont region produced tobacco.⁵

Slave owners centered on profitability, which translated to reduced expenditure on slave necessities, including food. This translates as poor diets that mostly consisted of corn and pork fat. Pork fat was cheap to acquire, and slave owners believed slaves would also benefit from it.⁶

In The American Cotton Planter and Soil Doctor, J. No. Wilson said,

“Yet these fatty articles of diet are peculiarly appropriate on account of their heat producing properties; they generate sufficient heat to cause the wheels of life to move glibly and smoothly, without drawing on the stores of fat deposited in the cells of the body, and hence negroes who are freely supplied with them grow plump, sleek and shiny;...”⁷

⁵ William S. Powell *North Carolina Through Four Centuries*. University of North Carolina Press, 1989. 131-138

⁶ Kenneth F., and Virginia H. Kiple. “Black Tongue and Black Men: Pellagra and Slavery in the Antebellum South.” *The Journal of Southern History* 43, no. 3 (1977): 411–28.

⁷ John S. Wilson, “The Negro-His Diet, Clothing &c” *The American Cotton Planter and Soil*, 197, July, 1859.

Wilson then goes on to say that fat bacon and pork are “the most nourishing of all foods”.⁸ Wilson’s belief that pork fat and corn are nourishing foods for African Americans is rooted in ignorance and justification for providing inadequate health to enslaved people. Wilson’s assertions were more in line with the beliefs of slave management, spending the least amount of money on production.⁹ Allen Parker, an enslaved African American born in Chowan County, recalled the rations slaves received. Parker said his diet entailed “the common allowance of a slave was four quarts of Indian meal and five pounds of salt pork, sometimes one quart of molasses per week and all the sweet potatoes that they wanted.”¹⁰

However, these belief systems regarding slave diets had the opposite effect on good health. Slaves developed diet-deficient related diseases, with one of them becoming Pellagra.¹¹ Inadequate niacin (Vitamin B-3) consumption, followed by a deficiency in tryptophan, an essential amino acid used to synthesize niacin, causes Pellagra.¹² Niacin turns food into energy; without it, humans can not maintain homeostasis. Pork and corn did not contain amounts of niacin or tryptophan to help slaves nutritionally. The effects of Pellagra on the body were painful and were associated with the four D’s known as diarrhea, dermatitis, dementia, and death.¹³ Victims of Pellagra often experience constipation, skin lesions, weakness, and possibly mental instability.¹⁴ While pellagra did not occur in well-documented massive levels, slavery offered a prequel to the rise of Pellagra in the early 1900s.

⁸ John S. Wilson, “The Negro-His Diet, Clothing &c” *The American Cotton Planter and Soil*, 197, July, 1859.

⁹ *Ibid*, 197.

¹⁰ Allen Parker, *Slave Recollections by Allen Parker*, (Massachusetts, CHAS W. BURBANK & Co. Printers, 1895), 15

¹¹ *Ibid*, 15.

¹² Karen Clay, Ethan Schmick, Werner Troesken, “The Rise and Fall of Pellagra In the American South” Economic Bureau of Research, 5, https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w23730/visions/w23730.rev0.pdf

¹³ <https://www.cdc.gov/immigrant-refugee-health/media/pdfs/Pellagra-WHO.pdf>

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

The imbalanced diets forced slaves to create slave gardens.¹⁵ Slave gardens represented one of the earliest instances of African Americans providing food security and establishing food sovereignty. By growing their food, enslaved African Americans could exercise control over their diet in a system that rendered them powerless. One of the most important crops grown in the slave garden was vegetables, which acted as their strongest source of nutrition.¹⁶ Vegetables provide far more nutrients than pork fat and corn.

The Slave Garden, though beneficial, was not available to all enslaved people in North Carolina. Many slave owners allowed slave gardens because it eased the responsibility of providing food to slaves.¹⁷ Additionally, many slave owners could not guarantee a constant supply of food on their plantations and any food outside of rations. Allen Parker mentions in his narrative that obtaining food outside of rations resulted in the theft or selling of rations.¹⁸ A slave garden decided whether an enslaved person ate or not. Louisa Adams, another enslaved person in antebellum North Carolina, reinforced Parker's memories, saying in her slave narrative, "Master worked us hard and gave us nothing. We had to use what we made in the garden to eat."¹⁹

Enslaved African Americans also used the slave garden as a place of health. Enslavers often did not give good medical treatment to those they held in bondage, and the slave garden was an area that could hold some medicinal value. George W. Harris was enslaved on a

¹⁵ Herbert C. Covey, Dwight Eissach, *What Slaves Ate: Recollections of African American Foods and Foodways from the Slave Narrative*, (California, Greenwood Press, 2009), 73

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 73

¹⁷ Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2003), 55

¹⁸ Allen Parker, *Slave Recollections by Allen Parker*, (Massachusetts, CHAS W. BURBANK & Co. Printers, 1895), 15

¹⁹ "Interview with Louisa Adams" by T..Pat Matthews. In *Slave Narratives Volume XI North Carolina Narratives Part 1, 1936-1938*, the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of North Carolina. 2-7

plantation in Jones County and said, “ Most o’ de time when we got sick our mother doctored us with herbs which she had.”²⁰ Sarah August, an enslaved woman who was born near Fayetteville, North Carolina, witnessed the same actions with her grandmother, who says, “She grew hops and other herbs and grew many people of this disease.”²¹ The disease that she is referring to is Rheumatism.²² The ability of enslaved people to provide their medical treatment, combined with food sovereignty, to ensure overall health, is an achievement.

The ability for enslaved people to grow their food when permitted also made way for an informal economy. Gardens provided an economic means, and some slaves sold their produce. Doc Edwards, who was formerly enslaved in Stagville, says in his WPA interview, “ I had a little garden an’ does what I could to earn a little somethin’.”²³ Slaves also sold meat and vegetables to poor whites who were also looking to supplement poor diets.²⁴ This is also particularly true with pork, which was a sought-after protein.²⁵ Slaves did not make large sums of money from this informal economy, but this economy allowed many enslaved people the ability to have a form of self-sufficiency. Selling fruits, vegetables, and meat generated money to acquire different foods and help with other needs.

²⁰“Interview with George W. Harris” by T..Pat Matthews. In *Slave Narratives Volume XI North Carolina Narratives Part 1, 1936-1938*, the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of North Carolina. 373-374

²¹ “Interview with Sarah Louise August” by T..Pat Matthews. In *Slave Narratives Volume XI North Carolina Narratives Part 1, 1936-1938*, the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of North Carolina. 53-56

²² *Ibid*, 53-56.

²³ “Interview with Doc Edwards” by Daisy Whaley. In *Slave Narratives Volume XI North Carolina Narratives Part 1, 1936-1938*, the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of North Carolina. 296-297

²⁴ Jeff Forrett. “Slaves, Poor Whites, and the Underground Economy of the Rural Carolinas.” *The Journal of Southern History* 70, no. 4 (2004): 783–824. <https://doi.org/10.2307/27648561>. 790

²⁵ *Ibid*, 790.

Louisa Adams and Sarah August represent how African American women were the primary cultivators of slave gardens. Historically enslaved women facilitated food and its production during slavery, from the slave ship to the plantation. Enslaved African women used indigenous knowledge of agriculture in the plantation society for survival.²⁶ The antebellum period ushered in an uptick in agricultural production and the beginning of longstanding issues of crop monoculture. One of the crops that became more popular in cultivation was Tobacco. For the colonial period of North Carolina's history, tobacco was not a prime crop to grow due to the dark, heavy leaf of tobacco grown in the state. In 1839, an enslaved African American by the name of Stephen in Caswell County was able to perfect the curing method of Tobacco to create a bright yellow leaf.²⁷ This yellow leaf became known as Bright Tobacco. With the discovery of Bright Tobacco, the Piedmont region flourished with an increase in production due to the fertility of the soil.²⁸

Slavery made the growth of the tobacco industry profitable. Over 60% of Tobacco grown in Wake, Orange, and Alamance counties was from slave labor.²⁹ By 1860, the slave owning plantations of the same three counties produced over one million pounds of tobacco compared to non-slave-owning tobacco farms, which produced under three hundred pounds.³⁰ Cotton was another crop that was important to the agricultural landscape of North Carolina. With the invention of the Cotton Gin by Eli Whitney, the cotton industry in the South exploded with

²⁶ Judith A. Carney, and Richard N. Rosomoff. *In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2009. 69-73

²⁷ William S. Powell *North Carolina Through Four Centuries*. University of North Carolina Press, 1989. 311

²⁸ Roger Biles. "Tobacco Towns: Urban Growth and Economic Development in Eastern North Carolina." *The North Carolina Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (2007) 156-90. 158, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23522906>.

²⁹ Daniel L. Fountain, "A Broader Footprint: Slavery and Slaveholding Households in Antebellum Piedmont North Carolina." *The North Carolina Historical Review* 91, no. 4 (2014) 416, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44113225>.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 416.

production. Cotton production increased, but lacked the boom effect that tobacco created. The fluctuation of prices, coupled with the advancement in tobacco cultivation, limited cotton production. However, it did increase with the creation of cotton mills within the state. By 1860, North Carolina had the most cotton mills in the South and produced over one hundred thousand bales of cotton.³¹

Just as slave labor affected the production of tobacco, the same occurred with the production of cotton, which was just as, if not more, labor-intensive. Enslaved labor produced over eighty percent of cotton in Alamance, Wake, and Orange counties.³² Enslaved labor ensured that tobacco and cotton would determine the economics of the state well into the 1900s.

The post-antebellum period brought a shift in agricultural production and agricultural policy in the state. The Civil War overthrew “King Cotton,” but this was only temporary. Slavery sustained North Carolina agriculture. The abolition of slavery liberated the enslaved labor force. White landowners would now have to find a way to establish a workforce if they wanted to maintain the monoculture agricultural enterprise.

Wealthy landowning white elites created a new agricultural system to continue the economic viability of the state. This system is sharecropping and tenant farming. Sharecropping was a system of agriculture in which farmers allocated parcels of land from landowners to plant crops.³³ At the end of the growing season, sharecroppers then gave a piece of their crop to the landowner. Many African Americans became sharecroppers after the abolition of slavery

³¹ William S. Powell *North Carolina Through Four Centuries*. University of North Carolina Press, 1989. 311

³² Daniel L. Fountain, “A Broader Footprint: Slavery and Slaveholding Households in Antebellum Piedmont North Carolina.” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 91, no. 4 (2014) 416, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44113225>.

³³ Edward Royce. *The Origins of Southern Sharecropping*. Temple University Press, 1993. 2

because they had few options as freed individuals. Sharecropping also allowed a chance at survival in a society that was not in favor of African Americans.

Tenant farmers, unlike sharecroppers, paid rent to the land owner and had rights to the crop.³⁴ North Carolina was a southern anomaly. The passage of the 1876-1877 Land and Tenants Act gave ownership of crops produced to the landlord indefinitely.³⁵ Thus, making tenant farmers similar to sharecroppers in that they both lacked legal standing for the crops they produced.

Sharecropping is detrimental to the well-being of African Americans because of the crop lien system. Across the South, southern legislatures passed crop lien laws that strengthened white business owners and further impoverished African American sharecroppers.³⁶ North Carolina passed their crop lien laws in 1867. Crop liens allowed sharecroppers to take out credit on their crops from landowners and merchants. Crop liens existed in theory to keep sharecroppers afloat, but instead forced them into a cycle of debt. Sharecroppers did not have the capital to buy farm supplies such as fertilizer, seeds, and even food, forcing them to put a portion of their crops on credit.³⁷ A complication of this was that the landowner and merchant could manipulate the prices, making the sharecropper fall into more debt.³⁸ At the end of the growing season, sharecroppers had virtually no capital gained and instead were in debt.

³⁴ Harold D. Woodman "Post-Civil War Southern Agriculture and the Law." *Agricultural History* 53, no. 1 (1979): 319-37. 325

³⁵ Ibid, 325.

³⁶ Wesley Alan Riddle. "The Origins of Black Sharecropping." *The Mississippi Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (1995): 53-71. 60-61, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26475959>.

³⁷ Gilbert C. Fite "Southern Agriculture since the Civil War: An Overview." *Agricultural History* 53, no. 1 (1979): 3-21. 6

³⁸ Roger L. Ransom., and Richard Sutch. "Debt Peonage in the Cotton South After the Civil War." *The Journal of Economic History* 32, no. 3 (1972): 641-69. 642

The Sharecropping system fed the recovering economy of North Carolina post-Civil War. Sharecroppers were held in bondage economically. In light of this, a new agricultural era had begun in a post-slavery society. Rupert Vance, a sociology professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, described North Carolina as the “seat of the antebellum cotton plantation,” where sharecroppers and tenant farmers were the labor force driving the economy and gave up in some cases half of their crop to landlords.³⁹ He then goes on to describe a somewhat feudal system created with merchants, landowners, and banks controlling the wealth and livelihoods of sharecroppers and tenant farmers.⁴⁰

Cotton production soared to new heights, reaching levels not seen. “King Cotton” revived with record numbers of production. In 1870, North Carolina produced 145,000 pounds of cotton compared to 390,000 pounds of cotton in 1880.⁴¹ Cotton achieved higher yields than it did during the antebellum years, but it did not become the dominant crop in North Carolina. That position went to tobacco production.

Tobacco production expanded outside the Piedmont region due to poor cotton prices. Cotton, which was grown primarily in the eastern part of the state, began to falter in price, and landowners looked for an alternative crop to grow.⁴² With the discovery of tobacco growing efficiently in the eastern part of the state, farmers began to plant more tobacco, making it the dominant crop in the state by the 1890s.

³⁹ Roger L. Ransom., and Richard Sutch. “Debt Peonage in the Cotton South After the Civil War.” *The Journal of Economic History* 32, no. 3 (1972): 641–69. 642

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 642.

⁴¹ William S. Powell, *North Carolina Through Four Centuries*. University of North Carolina Press, 1989. 417

⁴² Roger Biles. “Tobacco Towns: Urban Growth and Economic Development in Eastern North Carolina.” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (2007) 159-160

In 1870, North Carolina produced 11 million pounds of tobacco. By 1880, the state had produced 27 million pounds.⁴³ The eastward expansion did more than just force landowners to grow crops; it created a growth of industry in urban towns that processed them. Technological advancements also enhanced cigarette production, creating a stronger tobacco market.⁴⁴ This caused North Carolina businessmen to invest in building warehouses and the creation of tobacco companies that controlled the state's economy.⁴⁵ Many people left the countryside for jobs in the city, triggering population surges in Durham and Winston-Salem.⁴⁶ The economic reliance on cotton and tobacco was at the expense of African American sharecroppers/tenants' right to establish food security and food sovereignty. African American sharecroppers/tenants were in no position to control their food systems because of the debt they owed landlords and merchants. Landlords often forced their debtors to take out credit on tobacco or cotton crops instead of food crops.⁴⁴ As landless farmers, African American sharecroppers had no control over the land they toiled on and were at the mercy of landlords.⁴⁷ This was another driving force in the monoculture system of agriculture that ignored the production of food crops. When African American sharecroppers had the opportunity to grow their produce, they often could not do so because of the lack of funds.⁴⁸

⁴³ William S. Powell, *North Carolina Through Four Centuries*. University of North Carolina Press, 1989. 417

⁴⁴ Roger Biles. "Tobacco Towns: Urban Growth and Economic Development in Eastern North Carolina." *The North Carolina Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (2007) 156

⁴⁵ Ibid, 156.

⁴⁶ Roger Biles. "Tobacco Towns: Urban Growth and Economic Development in Eastern North Carolina." *The North Carolina Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (2007) 157

⁴⁷ Adrienne Monteith Petty 'You Can't Eat Tobacco: The Politics of Self-Sufficiency', *Standing Their Ground: Small Farmers in North Carolina since the Civil War* (New York, 2013; online edn, Oxford Academic, 26 Sept. 2013) 78

⁴⁴ Ibid, 78.

⁴⁸ Marcie Cohen Ferris. *The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region*. University of North Carolina Press, 2014. 100

Stock laws added to the economic hurdle that African American sharecroppers and tenant farmers faced in providing food. Local county boards implemented stock locals in North Carolina. They forced farmers to fence in their livestock and not allow them to roam freely. Since North Carolina was a colony, livestock generally roamed freely around with the supervision of farmers who gathered them for slaughter.⁴⁹ This was especially common with hogs, the primary source of meat grown by farmers. Stock laws sought to repeal this historical method of animal husbandry. One reason for a push for stock laws was the railroad system. With the expansion of the railroad, livestock became a liability to railroads, whose trains often hit livestock, causing railroad companies to pay damages to owners.⁵⁰ Stock laws eliminated the possibility of compensating farmers.

Cash crop landowners were another group that favored the laws because they stopped livestock from possibly eroding their land. The laws made it harder for sharecroppers and tenant farmers to acquire livestock because farmers did not have the resources to raise them.⁴⁸ The range offered the chance for livestock to eat their food from the open land, but now livestock owners would have to provide feed for them. This caused the overall population of livestock to go down.⁵¹ Stock laws forced increased production of cash crops, undermining the diets of African Americans.⁵²

⁴⁹William A. Link, *North Carolina: Change and Tradition in a Southern State* (Harlan Davidson, Inc, 2009), 247

⁵⁰ Adrienne Monteith Petty, *Standing Their Ground: Small Farmers in North Carolina since the Civil War* (New York, 2013; online edn, Oxford Academic, 26 Sept. 2013) 60-61

⁵¹ Adrienne Monteith Petty, *Standing Their Ground: Small Farmers in North Carolina since the Civil War* (New York, 2013; online edn, Oxford Academic, 26 Sept. 2013) 74

⁵² *Ibid*, 74.

The previous slave diets that African Americans had eaten while in bondage became the same diet that sharecroppers had to eat. African Americans often ate poor food options to avoid taking out more credit.⁵³ During slavery, enslavers gave low grades of pork and corn to African Americans. This same diet persisted throughout the sharecropping and tenant farming era. Gardens were not common on sharecropping and tenant farms. Rupert Vance mentions the lack of food crops or livestock when he toured eastern North Carolina in his monograph, *Human Geography of the South*.

“First in the nation in its combined production of cotton and tobacco, no other area produces cash crops of such value; no area has increased its tenancy rate so rapidly, and in no area do livestock, milk, and home-grown vegetables play so little part in farming.”⁵⁴

The agricultural conditions Rupert Vance referenced created a fertile breeding ground for pellagra.⁵⁵ The disregard for food production resulted in disease. A modern study published in 2017, conducted by the National Bureau of Economic Research, shows a direct link between increased levels of pellagra and an increase in cotton production.

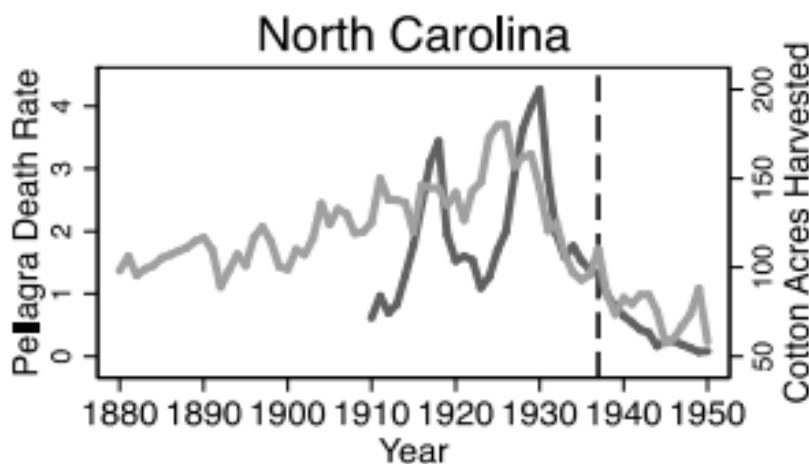


Figure 1: Cotton Acres Harvested in North Carolina

⁵³ Ibid, 74.

⁵⁴ Rupert B. Vance, *Human Geography of the South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932.

⁵⁵ To receive a better understanding of Pellagra please reference page number 9

Karen Clay, Ethan Schmick, Werner Troesken, "The Rise and Fall of Pellagra In the American South," Economic Bureau of Research, August 2017, 28, https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w23730/visions/w23730.rev0.pdf, Fig 2.

In the 1910s, pellagra declined with the invasion of the boll weevil.⁵⁶ The Boll Weevil is a tiny beetle Native to Central America.⁵⁷ It was originally spotted in Texas but eventually made its way up the Atlantic seaboard by the 1920s.⁵⁸ It feeds on the leaves of the plant until reaching the boll that stores cotton fiber. This caused a decrease in cotton production, simultaneously increasing the production of food crops in communities.⁵⁹ When cotton production began to pick up after the boll weevil, pellagra cases increased.

By 1930, pellagra reached 1,000 deaths a year. Government eradication programs contained the boll weevil, and the increase in cotton production spiked pellagra-related deaths. This research is important, detailing a correlation between cotton production, the boll weevil, and pellagra.

Agricultural Reform

The Boll Weevil and Pellagra epidemics forced Southern agriculture reformers and scientists to change agricultural practices. The 1900s brought agrarian progressivism in North Carolina. Nationally, there were changes to information dissemination among agricultural practitioners. This era would see the struggle of North Carolina to hold onto their agricultural dominance in cotton and tobacco. At the center of agrarian progressivism was the diversification of crops. This would help African Americans achieve the much-needed food security and food

⁵⁶ Karen Clay, Ethan Schmick, Werner Troesken, "The Rise and Fall of Pellagra In the American South" Economic Bureau of Research, August 2017, 8, https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w23730/visions/w23730.rev0.pdf

⁵⁷ Lange, Fabian, Alan L. Olmstead, and Paul W. Rhode. "The Impact of the Boll Weevil, 1892–1932." *The Journal of Economic History* 69, no. 3 (2009): 688, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3742876>.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 688.

⁵⁹ Karen Clay, Ethan Schmick, Werner Troesken, "The Rise and Fall of Pellagra In the American South" Economic Bureau of Research, 14, https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w23730/visions/w23730.rev0.pdf

sovereignty. Despite efforts to diversify agriculture, African Americans still found themselves victims of racist agriculturalists.

Science was a major driving factor in diversification. Scientists stressed the need for restored soil in the South after years of constant tobacco and cotton production weakened the soil.⁶⁰ For example, unlike peanuts, cotton did not strengthen the soil, instead, it caused erosion.⁶¹ Cotton was not the only crop that did this. Tobacco was another equally guilty culprit that depleted soils, especially in North Carolina, a tobacco-dominant state.⁶² The poor quality of the soil forced sharecroppers and tenant farmers into more debt.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) began to invest more in research to show farmers alternative crops. Land Grant institutions accommodated experimental stations to conduct research for farmers in the region. Research stations proved to be positive for crop diversification, which promoted the cultivation of fruits and vegetables. One research conducted at the Louisiana Agricultural Experimental Research Station showed tenant and sharecropper farmers in the south could make a profit growing crops such as watermelons, potatoes, and cabbage, and increase their income.⁶³ Studies proved that African American sharecroppers and tenant farmers could increase their income by producing food that could help them control their food systems, the solution was evident. The problem lay in the hands of white agricultural reformers who controlled the land.

⁶⁰ Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980*. 1st ed. University Press of Kentucky, 1984. 69

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 69.

⁶² Drew A. Swanson. *A Golden Weed : Tobacco and Environment in the Piedmont South*, Yale University Press, 2014. 4

⁶³ Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980*. 1st ed. University Press of Kentucky, 1984. 69

North Carolina agricultural reformers took the findings of agricultural scientists and experimental stations to push farmers in North Carolina to grow specialty crops. They often turned to newspapers to express their beliefs. Some reformers preached dire consequences if diversification did not become a priority. *The Charlotte News and Evening Chronicle* said, “The News firmly believes that prosperity in North Carolina can be assured by no other means than by persuading the farmers of the state that their economic salvation lies in the diversification of their crops.”⁶⁴

Reformers saw crop diversification as the only way to move forward because of food importation, which stopped local production. *The Progressive Farmer* mentioned in one of its editorials that North Carolina imported about \$780,000 worth of meat from the western part of the nation.⁶⁵ The belief that reformers held to counter the importation of food was that farmers had the means to produce food in the state for markets within the state. A reformer, in the *Mooreville Enterprise*, stated, “The markets for cream, milk, poultry products, fruits, and vegetables are ample. The South is enjoying great expansion in industries, resulting in greater demand for these everyday food necessities.”⁶⁶ Agricultural reformers made the case for why crop diversification was necessary and how it could improve the overall quality of food for North Carolinians.

White agricultural reformers in their newspaper editorials often focused on white audiences and ignored African American sharecroppers and tenant farmers. Clarence Poe bought

⁶⁴ “Diversification, -An Illustration” *Charlotte News and Evening Chronicle* July 26, 1915, <https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn91068256/1915-07-26/ed-1/seq-4/>

⁶⁵ Clarence Poe, B.W. Kilgore, C.W. Burke, “The West’s Lost and the South’s Gain” *Progressive Farmer* June 28, 1906, <https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn92073053/1906-06-28/ed-1/seq-8/#words=780%2C000>

⁶⁶ “Cotton Not Sole Reliance of Farmers of the South” *The Mooreville Enterprise* Nov 4, 1926, <https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn93064798/1926-11-04/ed-1/seq-4/>

the leading southern agrarian paper in the 1920s, called the *Progressive Farmer*. Poe preached the message of crop diversification in his newspaper; he also attacked African Americans, whom he felt were threatening whites. In one editorial that he published entitled “What is Justice Between White Man and Black?”, Poe rants about how African American farmers are hurting white farmers,

“My point is that the handicapped and disadvantaged man in the force industrial struggle is not the Negro but the white farmer and laborer who must compete with a race with lower living standards. Whose white social life throughout the rural South is impoverished if not imperiled by the almost universal sandwiching of white and Negro farmers.”⁶⁷

Clarence Poe’s racist beliefs were not just specific to him but to the white agricultural reformers who voiced their opinions about agrarian diversification. African Americans were not their priority; rather, they were their competition.

African American Methods of Agricultural Reform

Agricultural reformers invigorated white farmers, concurrently disregarding African Americans. African Americans still found a way to create educational institutions that could serve as havens of scholarship and research, with the most famous one being the Tuskegee Institute. Booker T. Washington was one of the leading African American voices in the postbellum South, and his legacy is directly tied to establishing the Tuskegee Institute in 1881.⁶⁸ Tuskegee Institute became a center of research and higher education for African Americans.

One of their biggest success stories was the creation of the Agricultural Experimental Station. The Hatch Act was passed in 1887, providing federal research grants to fund Land Grant

⁶⁷ Clarence Poe, “What is Justice Between White Man and Black” *The Progressive Farmer and Southern Farm Gazette*. August 14, 1915, <https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn92073052/1915-08-14/ed-1/seq-9/>

⁶⁸ Gardner, Booker T. “The Educational Contributions of Booker T. Washington.” *The Journal of Negro Education* 44, no. 4 (1975): 502–18. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2966635>.

institutions in the state.⁶⁹ Booker T. Washington procured funds for the Experimental Station and instructed George Washington Carver to head the station.⁷⁰ Carver wanted to increase the living standard of African American farmers in Alabama, knowing that they suffered from poor nutrition and lack of funds. The cycle of debt did not make the attainment of agricultural methods feasible, so Carver conducted farm projects that would help small farmers, sharecroppers, and tenant farmers with little economic cost.

He discovered that he could help African American farmers improve their soil and their diets using peanuts, historically associated with poverty. The peanut provided a source of protein to farmers, and being that it is a legume, it helped add nutrients to the soil.⁷¹ In his bulletin that he created for peanuts, he also states that the peanut “exerts a dietetic or medicinal effect upon the human system that is very desirable.”⁷² George Washington was carrying on the legacy of his ancestry by looking at food as a source of medicine. The peanut's level of protein was a nutritional game changer for African American farmers, with most of their protein coming from poor grades of pork, the peanut could supplement for lost nutrition and improve health.⁷³

Carver is well known for the peanut, but he conducted research and studies on other crops. Carver believed the cowpea could change the lives of African American farmers. Cowpea

⁶⁹Linda O. Hines. “George W. Carver and the Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station.” *Agricultural History* 53, no. 1 (1979): 71–83. 72, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/374286172>

⁶⁵Linda O. Hines. “George W. Carver and the Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station.” *Agricultural History* 53, no. 1 (1979): 71–83. 73, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3742861>.

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⁷¹ George W. Carver, *How To Grow The Peanut: And 105 Ways Of Preparing It For Human Consumption*, (Experiment Station Tuskegee Normal And Industrial Institute Tuskegee Institute, Alabama) <https://archive.org/details/CAT31355406/page/n1/mode/2up>

⁷² George W. Carver, *How To Grow The Peanut: And 105 Ways Of Preparing It For Human Consumption*, (Experiment Station Tuskegee Normal And Industrial Institute Tuskegee Institute, Alabama) <https://archive.org/details/CAT31355406/page/n1/mode/2up>

⁷³ Linda O. Hines. “George W. Carver and the Tuskegee Agricultural Experiment Station.” *Agricultural History* 53, no. 1 (1979): 71–83.79, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3742861>.

had a multifaceted effect on farms, supplying nutritional benefits to farm families and livestock.⁷⁴ Cowpeas can assist farmers to feed their livestock in the wake of stock laws. Carver recognized the same qualities of the cowpea in the Sweet potato, saying, “The vines make an excellent quality of hay, which chemists find to be in composition about the same as that of succulent cowpea vines.”⁷⁵

Carver was a tactician in finding new ways to encourage healthier diets among the African American community. In his writing, *Nature’s Garden for Victory and Peace*, Carver names weed plants such as Pokeweed, Prickly Lettuce, Curled Dock, and Lamb’s Quarter for edible nutritional value.⁷⁶ Carver's ability to find overlooked plants for better diets attests to the ingenious spirit that African Americans have in agricultural knowledge.

Carver did not want to shelve his research. He put his findings into bulletins, which he distributed among the community. Carver's dissemination of bulletins amplified his quest to establish food security and sovereignty. The bulletins gave instructions on how to cook foods from the crops he believed could improve the nutrition of his people. Carver disseminated his findings to all states with the help of the USDA. Both black and white agriculture leaders in North Carolina used their food policies to combat food disparities.

The North Carolina state government decided to create a program to combat the rising issue of food insecurity. Dean I.O. Schuab, who was the director of extension and the school of agriculture dean at North Carolina State College of Agriculture and Engineering (Now known as

⁷⁴George W. Carver, *Some Possibilities of The Cowpea in Macon County, Alabama*, (Experiment Station Tuskegee Normal And Industrial Institute Tuskegee Institute, Alabama 1910)

<https://archive.org/details/CAT31355486/page/n1/mode/2up>

⁷⁵ George W. Carver, *Some Possibilities of The Cowpea in Macon County, Alabama*, (Experiment Station Tuskegee Normal And Industrial Institute Tuskegee Institute, Alabama 1910)

<https://archive.org/details/CAT31355486/page/n1/mode/2up>

⁷⁶ George W. Carver, *Nature’s Garden for Victory and Peace*, (Experiment Station Tuskegee Normal And Industrial Institute Tuskegee Institute, Alabama 1942) <https://archive.org/details/CAT31355423/page/n1/mode/2up>

NC State University), created the “Live At Home Program” in collaboration with the state Department of Agriculture.⁷⁷ The Live-at-Home program encouraged farmers to produce the foodstuffs they needed for home consumption. World War I saw a rise in demand for textiles and cigarettes to help troops overseas, and markets were lucrative for cotton and tobacco.⁷⁸ After the war, a massive drop in cotton prices occurred, and the market returned to previous levels.⁷¹ The Live at Home program aimed to reduce levels of tobacco and cotton production to stabilize the markets.

Governor Max O. Gardner took the program under his wing, which gave it more momentum. By 1930, all public schools in North Carolina had a Live At Home Program implemented in their schools' curriculum.⁷⁹ Students learnt the importance of canning, crop diversification, and livestock husbandry, and also created scrapbooks showcasing what they learned.⁸⁰ The “Live at Home” program also had a luncheon at the Governor's mansion, showcasing food grown in North Carolina, encouraging farmers to grow food crops.⁸¹

The “Live at Home” program was a strong attempt by reformers to change the agricultural landscape of the state and to bolster food security and food sovereignty. Statistics show that there was an increase in canning throughout the entire state, producing over 10 million jars of canned food.⁸² White farmers and families felt the benefits of the program, but many

⁷⁷ Marcie Ferris Cohen. *The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region*. University of North Carolina Press, 2014. 162

⁷⁸ Adrienne Monteith Petty, *Standing Their Ground: Small Farmers in North Carolina since the Civil War* (New York, 2013; online edn, Oxford Academic, 26 Sept. 2013) 84

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 84.

⁷⁹ Marcie Cohen Ferris *The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region*. University of North Carolina Press, 2014. 162

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 162.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 162.

⁸² *Ibid*, 162.

African American sharecroppers and tenant farmers did not. The “Live at Home” did not address several key aspects of the agricultural economy of North Carolina that needed rectifying. The program never confronted the racism of landowners nor the credit system of merchants that kept African American farmers in debt. A study in 1923 showed that African American farmers needed to obtain 32 percent in credit compared to 21 percent for white farmers.⁸³ Landowners and merchants continued to force African American farmers to take out higher rates of credit with the condition that they often grow cotton or tobacco. This made African American farmers producing their food even more hard to secure.

Max O. Gardner himself was racist in his approach to agricultural diversification. In his address to farmers in Cleveland County on better agriculture practices, he spewed racist rhetoric about African American farmers:

“Now you take the colored people over here, why is it they can raise as much cotton as anybody, although many of them may be illiterate, unable to read and write; yet they can raise as much cotton per acre as any white man. Why is it? Because cotton is the one crop that requires less intelligence and will take more punishment than any crop on earth.” He then went on to say this was the main reason why African Americans could not grow corn because “ you can’t get a colored man to understand how to plow corn”.⁸⁴

Gardner's reasoning for why African Americans were primarily planting cotton completely ignores the racist agricultural system that forced many African Americans to grow cotton. His comments nevertheless reinforced racist stereotypes of African Americans and followed the racist pattern of white agricultural reformers such as Clarence Poe. Interestingly, Gardner gave

⁸³ Adrienne Monteith Petty, *Standing Their Ground: Small Farmers in North Carolina since the Civil War* (New York, 2013; online edn, Oxford Academic, 26 Sept. 2013) 84

⁸⁴ Mr. O. Max Gardner, “Gardner Urges “Better Farming.”, *The Messenger and Intelligencer*, January 20, 1927, <https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn97064505/1927-01-20/ed-1/seq-7/>

this speech before he assumed the role of governor, implying that he was never concerned about the plight and welfare of African American farmers.

Another shortcoming of the “Live at Home” program was that it ignored the power that landowners and merchants had over African American farmers. Telling sharecroppers and tenant farmers to grow livestock and vegetables, who did not own the rights to the land, did not empower them to grow food crops. The crops that sharecroppers or farmers grew were solely up to the landowner. The lack of legislation created to support sharecroppers and tenant farmers' right to food sovereignty made the program a shortcoming.

The last and most important problem was that cotton and tobacco were still being produced in mass quantities. Many farmers were skeptical about growing crops other than tobacco, even if it meant possibly making more money. Merchants and landowners created the credit-led agricultural system.⁸⁵ An editor in the newspaper, *Mechanic and Farmer* said bluntly, “

A want diversification, we seek diversification; but we don't know how to diversify, and the main reason why it is impossible is because credit is absolutely fixed on cotton. In other words, before we can get self-supporting agriculture and diversification, the bankers and merchants must diversify.”⁸⁶

The banks, merchants, and landowners controlled the system, and it would take the federal government's intervention to make a change to the system. Until then, many African Americans had to continue with their diets being controlled by whites.

⁸⁵ Gilbert C. Fite *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980*. 1st ed. University Press of Kentucky, 1984. 85

⁸⁶ “A Self Supporting Agriculture” *Farmer and Mechanic*, April 20, 1915, <https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn99061556/1915-04-20/ed-1/seq-9/#words=absolutely+because+Cotton+cotton+credit+diversification+diversified+diversify+don%27t+fixed+how+impossible+know+knows+main+reason+seek+want+wants+We+we+Why+why>.

The Great Depression added more layers of stress for African American farmers. Tobacco and cotton prices were already plummeting, and the Great Depression was an added pressure for agricultural markets. The New Deal sought to provide relief to people across the country. For farmers, the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) provided this relief.⁸⁷ The AAA, like the “Live at Home” program, sought to stabilize southern markets and improve farmers' lives. Under the AAA, farmers cut their production of cotton and tobacco by paying farmers to reduce the acreage that farmers produced. This would stabilize the market and provide income to farmers, it also brought forth a federal policy that emphasized diversification.⁸⁸

The AAA placed diversification at the forefront of farming, but also harmed the ability of African Americans to establish food security and food sovereignty. Many landowners received the program's benefits but did not pass on their funds to their sharecroppers. Instead, they often took them for themselves.⁸⁹ African American small farmers who owned their land were left at a disadvantage. Some farmers collected their funds from the program, but they still had to compete with large farmers who now had more money. Large-scale farmers continued to grow instead of small-scale farmers, who made just enough to survive. African American farmers faced greater acreage cuts compared to white farmers. No matter the direction they turned, African American farmers faced a hurdle, even from the AAA meant to provide relief rather than a headache. The AAA would be the beginning of the attack on African American farmers. The racist acreage cuts would persist for decades to come, and federal policies slowly pushed out African American farmers. African Americans never acquiesced in their efforts to achieve food security and

⁸⁷ Petty, Adrienne Monteith, *Standing Their Ground: Small Farmers in North Carolina since the Civil War* (New York, 2013; online edn, Oxford Academic, 26 Sept. 2013) 104-105

⁸⁸ *North Carolina Change and tradition in a southern state* 346-347

⁸⁹ Petty, Adrienne Monteith, *Standing Their Ground: Small Farmers in North Carolina since the Civil War* (New York, 2013; online edn, Oxford Academic, 26 Sept. 2013) 108-109

sovereignty. Their struggles since enslavement persisted into the postbellum period without much success in transforming their communities.

The historic suppression of African American food sovereignty and food insecurity would prove critical to the founding of the NFA. Birthed based on guiding young African American men to become farmers and rural leaders, the NFA took the mantle of civic duties to African farm families of North Carolina. The NFA built their food policies of crop diversification, livestock rearing, and food production and preservation on the work George Washington Carver conducted.

Chapter II: The New Farmers of America (NFA) in North Carolina, (1927-1965)

I believe that rural organizations should develop their leaders from within; that the boys in rural communities should look forward to positions of leadership in the civic, social, and public life surrounding them.

-NFA Creed

The New Farmers of America (NFA) was an organization that directly confronted the issues of food insecurity and food sovereignty in North Carolina. Despite racist agricultural officials and programs that forced many African Americans to abandon farming, the NFA was able to establish food security and food sovereignty. They employed methods such as livestock rearing, community canning, and growing food crops to teach young African American future farmers and their community how to farm and provide for their community. This chapter seeks to analyze the methods employed by the NFA in their efforts to combat food insecurity and food sovereignty and their impact during the period.

The early beginnings of the NFA started with the Vocational Agriculture Act of 1917. The act granted funds and support to teach Vocational Agriculture at the school level.⁹⁰ Booker T. Washington's philosophical ideas aligned with this, and he believed the African American community should institute them. Federal records suggest that between 1910 and 1920, more African Americans became farm owners.⁹¹ The teaching of vocational agriculture allowed African Americans the chance to increase future farm ownership and assist the next generation of farmers in their agricultural pursuits.

⁹⁰David Carleton, *Student's Guide To Landmark Congressional Laws On Education*, (Westport, Greenwood Press,2002) 63

⁹¹ "Race Nativity, And Sex Of Farmer: Per Cent Distribution Of Farm Operators In Each Color And Nativity Class, By Tenure, By Divisions And States: 1920 And 1910" 1920 Agricultural Census.

In the 1926-1927 the North Carolina Association of New farmers was founded at Negro Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina (now known as North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University) ⁸⁶ This chapter was not the first of its kind. The first chapter of what would be known as the NFA was founded in Virginia in 1927. The founder of the NFA in North Carolina was S.B. Simmons, who was also the director of Vocational Agriculture for African Americans in the state of North Carolina.⁹²

While North Carolina had their state NFA chapter, there was a plan to create a national chapter that could incorporate all states. Dr. H.O. Sargent was a Federal Agent for Agricultural Education who began to attain support for the creation of a national NFA organization that could serve African American young men nationally.⁹³ In 1935, the first meeting of the National NFA commenced at the Tuskegee Institute (Now known as Tuskegee University) and created a constitution and bylaws.⁹⁴ The creation of a state chapter was just as monumental because it allowed African American students access to agricultural education geared towards the state of North Carolina.

Agricultural reformers were adamant about the diversification of agriculture in North Carolina. They deemed it necessary for the state to engage with, and the future of the state depended on it. Despite agricultural policies within the state that turned a blind eye to African Americans, the NFA would be an advocate for agricultural diversification in the state.

⁹² “The Dedication Program The S.B. Simmons Camp New Farmers of America Hammock Beach, Swansboro Beach, North Carolina, June 20, 2025, https://ncffa.org/Web%20Files/ncHistory/NFA/simmonscamp_dedication.pdf

⁹³ “New Farmers of America: 25 Years of Accomplishment” New Farmers Of America, Accessed February 1, 2025.

<https://ncffa.org/Web%20Files/ncHistory/NFA/25%20Years%20Of%20Accomplish>

⁹⁴ Ibid, “New Farmers of America: 25 Years of Accomplishment”.

NFA members grew gardens to produce more food for the communities that they served. The growing of gardens in the World War II era fell in line with the national government's food production program. The government established the Victory Gardens Program to ensure citizens continue to eat healthy and nutritious food despite wartime rationing.⁹⁵ Rationing was a complicated process with canned foods, meats, and sugars not readily available as they once were because of limits on how much consumers could buy.⁹⁶ Victory Gardens offered families a chance to grow their food, and preserving it through canning would allow farmers a year-round supply of food.

NFA members emphasized the importance of Victory Gardening as a form of sustainability during food rationing. For example, the Henderson NFA chapter members pledged to cultivate Victory Gardens and to give a portion to their families.⁹⁷ The Dudley High School Chapter of the NFA produced 152 bushels of vegetables from their victory garden in 1943, and the NFA created a total of 225 gardens.⁹⁸ These 225 Gardens produced 22,500 quarts of vegetables, and this helped those who were struggling due to rationing.⁹⁹ The Gardens that NFA members cultivated ensured food security when the ability to eat healthy food was not easily accessible. For rural families, especially, gardening could help farmers avoid taking on more crop lien debt.

⁹⁵ "Victory Gardens on the World War II Home Front", National Park Service, accessed February 1, 2025, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/victory-gardens-on-the-world-war-ii-home-front.htm>

⁹⁶ "Food Rationing on the World War II Home Front", National Park Service, accessed February 1, 2025, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/food-rationing-on-the-world-war-ii-home-front.htm>

⁹⁷ Meredith Greene, "Plant A Victory Garden" *The Campus Herald*, March 1, 1943, <https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/2018236503/1943-03-01/ed-1/seq-8/>

⁹⁸ Charles F. Hudson. "New Farmers Of America In Local Program." *Future Outlook*, July 10, 1943. <https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn97064597/1943-07-10/ed-1/seq-8/>

⁹⁹ Ibid, "New Farmers Of America In Local Program."

Raymond Moore also shared the same success as Jefferies, he was able to can his beans, corn, and cucumbers and make ketchup from his cabbage and onions.¹⁰⁰ Another interesting observation is the array of vegetables that both young men were able to grow. They mention butter beans, squash, tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage, and peas as some of the crops they grew.¹⁰¹ Jefferies and Moore not only had control over the diets of their respective families but also received a diverse diet based on the crops grown. Squash, tomatoes, and lettuce were a contrast to the foods that many African Americans ate during the 1940s. Jefferies' selling to others in his community is a testament to how NFA members were not only nourishing themselves but also their communities.

Canning vegetables was a strong way for members of the NFA to establish food security and food sovereignty in their communities. It allowed them to produce food for themselves and others and to improve the nutrition of their diets. This was during a time when many African Americans did not have access to healthy food due to the racist sharecropping and tenant farming system.

The NFA's work with canning stemmed from the United States government's promotion to boost local food production in southern rural homes. The creation of the Cooperative Extension program flooded the rural south with home demonstration agents whose jobs were to help the rural families.¹⁰² They promoted clubs for boys and girls in canning and taught families how to grow gardens for better diets.¹⁰³ The NFA adopted the canning technique as well, with

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, "New Farmers Of America In Local Program."

¹⁰¹ Ibid, "New Farmers Of America In Local Program."

¹⁰² Marcie Cohen, Ferris. *The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region*. (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press) , 2014. 110-113

¹⁰³ Ibid, 110-113

canning becoming an important element in their education. Canning increased during and after World War II. This left many of the country's citizens, particularly women, with the task of canning food for home consumption.

African American canning communities are representations of self-determination at the highest order, allowing them to resist the economic attacks of a monoculture system of agriculture. The NFA's involvement with canning was a concerted one with the goal of community cooperation and sustainability. In the pamphlet entitled "Vocational Agriculture in Negro Public Schools of North Carolina" it notes that members did most of the canning for the lunch rooms at the schools they attended.¹⁰⁴ This allowed students to have access to fruits and vegetables when they may not have had the opportunity to eat such foods at home. Canning was not just an NFA effort for the schools they attended; NFA members also canned for families in their communities and could even receive payment for their services.¹⁰⁵ The canned food that the NFA canned for farmers could also be sold to bring in supplemental income.¹⁰⁶ Cooperative Extension agents in the 1941 state report mention how an acre of garden could bring in more income than corn or tobacco in the same acreage.¹⁰⁷ This could help farmers bring in supplemental income to support their families. It would help them not rely solely on cotton or

¹⁰⁴“ Vocational Agriculture in Negro Public Schools of North Carolina 1917-1918 to 1946-1947” North Carolina Association of New Farmers of America, July 1, 1947, https://ncffa.org/Web%20Files/ncHistory/NFA/VocAg_publicschools.pdf

¹⁰⁵Ibid

¹⁰⁶Ibid

¹⁰⁷John W. Mitchell, “Gardens For Health and Wealth” 1941 Annual Narrative Report, 1941, https://d.lib.ncsu.edu/collections/catalog/ua102_002-002-cn0057-113-027#?c=&m=&cv=1&xywh=-4323%2C-1%2C13558%2C3488

tobacco crops as the sole provider of income, and aid in the diversification of crops in North Carolina.¹⁰⁸

The NFA had much success with canneries, and this is evident in the institutions they built. In 1946, the NFA had 43 canneries in operation. The NFA instructors operated these canneries.¹⁰⁹ The NFA-led canneries processed over 800,000 cans throughout the state and served on average 56 families.¹¹⁰ Black newspapers were fond of the efforts of the NFA. The African American newspaper *Future Outlook* praised the NFA and said it “has taught minority groups to grow independent as to their actual needs, and to contribute something worthwhile to their respective communities.”¹¹¹ The African American community noticed canneries in both the role of self-reliance and community help.

The North Carolina NFA chapter insisted on giving back to their communities and supporting efforts globally. The NFA donated canned foods to the orphanage during World War 2 when the country was going through rationing to support the war efforts. The State NFA The McIver School cannery operated in Littleton, North Carolina, serving 183 families and producing over 70,000 cans a year.¹¹² In 1945, the NFA, in collaboration with the Home Economics Girls, hosted a can drive for starving people in post-war Europe.¹¹³ Working cooperatively with families, the NFA and Home Economics Girls raised 500 cans from their community cannery to

¹⁰⁸ “Vocational Agriculture in Negro Public Schools of North Carolina 1917-1918 to 1946-1947” North Carolina Association of New Farmers of America, July 1, 1947, https://ncffa.org/Web%20Files/ncHistory/NFA/VocAg_publicschools.pdf

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, “Vocational Agriculture in Negro Public Schools of North Carolina 1917-1918 to 1946-1947

¹¹⁰ Ibid, “Vocational Agriculture in Negro Public Schools of North Carolina 1917-1918 to 1946-1947

¹¹¹ Charles F. Hudson. “New Farmers Of America In Local Program.” *Future Outlook*, July 10, 1943. <https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn97064597/1943-07-10/ed-1/seq-8/>

¹¹² Ibid, “New Farmers Of America In Local Program.”

¹¹³ “Canned Foodstuff Donated To War Relief” *Roanoke Rapids Herald*, Thursday, November 1, 1945, <https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/2017236974/1945-11-01/ed-1/seq-9/>

donate to Europe to help them rebuild after the war.¹¹⁴ Collectively, the state NFA chapter raised 23,000 cans.¹¹⁵ The reach of the NFA to Europe showed the power of how African Americans could collectively work together to determine their food systems. *The Roanoke Rapids Herald* acknowledged the impact of the cannery on the community, writing “The community cannery has not only served the Community in helping conserve food products, but it has been an instrument in teaching the advantages of cooperative activities.”¹¹⁶

After World War II, food preservation and production persisted among NFA chapters. The NFA founded the Pender Porter cannery in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, in Edgecombe County.¹¹⁷ Regarded to be one of the best canneries in the state, the Pender Porter Cannery was instrumental in Edgecombe County producing over 50,000 cans of fruits, vegetables, and meats a year.¹¹⁸ Canning became an essential part of rural North Carolina African American life in the 1930s-1950s. The North Carolina NFA’s act of community canning was not just an individual venture in the state of North Carolina. It spoke to the wider struggle of how African Americans sought to find a solution to food insecurity. Historian Debra A. Reid, in her article “Locations of Black Identity: Community Canning Centers in Texas, 1915-1935,” emphasizes how African Americans in Texas worked collectively to can fruits, vegetables, and meats.¹¹⁹ Reid also points out that canning communities did act as a means of defense for African American farmers and

¹¹⁴Ibid, “Canned Foodstuff Donated To War Relief”

¹¹⁵Ibid, “Canned Foodstuff Donated To War Relief”

¹¹⁶ *Roanoke Rapids Herald*, “Canned Foodstuff Donated To War Relief”

¹¹⁷ Vocational Agriculture in Negro Public Schools of North Carolina 1917-1918 to 1946-1947” North Carolina Association of New Farmers of America, July 1, 1947, https://nceffa.org/Web%20Files/ncHistory/NFA/VocAg_publicschools.pdf

¹¹⁸“Food Preservation By Adults”, Combined Annual Report of County Extension Workers Edgecombe County 1947, https://d.lib.ncsu.edu/collections/catalog/ua102_002-002-cn0057-170-015#?c=&m=&cv=&xywh=-6339%2C-197%2C15268%2C3927

¹¹⁹ Debra Anne Reid, “Locations of Black Identity: Community Canning Centers in Texas, 1915-1935” *The Keep*, 42-43, <https://thekeep.eiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=localities>

caused them to work collectively to can their food.¹²⁰ The collective work of African Americans canning is the same as African Americans working together to cultivate gardens in slavery. It also speaks to a larger and broader theme in the African American community of self-determination.¹²¹ Canning represented African Americans taking control of their destiny as it pertained to their farms and diets. In contrast to the “Stay at Home Program” that the State government implemented in the 1930s, the NFA’s participation in canning was an act of policy that gave the keys to food security and sovereignty to African American communities.

One of the ways that the NFA participated in agricultural diversification efforts was the growing of the Sweet Potato. The Sweet Potato is a tuber crop that originates from the Americas and was spread around the world with the surfacing of the Columbian Exchange.¹²² Sweet potatoes became a prized New World crop, and enslaved Africans in the Americas began to cultivate them in their slave gardens as a way of providing a diverse diet. The ending of the antebellum period brought in the search for new crops to replace the South’s reliance on cotton. As mentioned earlier, George Washington Carver focused on growing new crops, and he believed that would do well was the Sweet Potato.¹²³ He believed that the sweet potato could do well in the south because of the climate and soil, and most importantly, its marketability as a food crop, and could help southern families combat food insecurity in their communities.¹²⁴ The Sweet Potato also contains Vitamin C, a vitamin that African American agriculture professionals

¹²⁰Ibid, 42-43

¹²¹ Chinwe Latanya, Obijiofor. “Connecting Kwanzaa and Literature to Build a Classroom Community.” *The Reading Teacher* 57, no. 3 (2003): 287–90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20205357>.

¹²² Bennett, Bradley C. “Subsistence Farming in Southern Florida (1840–1940): The Importance of Sweet Potato—In Memory of Daniel F. Austin.” *Economic Botany* 69, no. 2 (2015): 185–98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24825906>.

¹²³ George W. Carver, “Possibilities of the Sweet Potato in Macon County, Alabama” Experiment Station, Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1910, <https://archive.org/details/CAT31355484/page/n3/mode/2up>

¹²⁴Ibid, “Possibilities of the Sweet Potato in Macon County, Alabama”

strongly advocated for families to consume.¹²⁵ Southern agricultural progressives were also pushing the Sweet Potato as a prime crop to grow because of the Boll Weevils' destruction in the south saying in the *Progressive Farmer* "The Sweet Potato is fast becoming a commercial crop of much importance in the South, the boll weevil having put many farmers on the run."¹²⁶ The reliance on cotton proved to be more of a gamble than a guaranteed profit, and farmers needed to access crops that could bring in an extra income if cotton did not prove successful.

The NFA contributed to the proliferation of Sweet Potatoes in North Carolina, particularly by participating in the Sweet Potato Contest. The Sweet Potato Contest taught students how to grow sweet potatoes, but also made them competitive. Students grew their sweet potatoes following guidelines from the USDA.¹²⁷ Students carried out their Sweet Potato projects through the NFA's Supervised Farming Program, which allowed students to farm with the aid of their teachers.¹²⁸ Sweet Potato contests proved a big success, and newspapers mentioned the winners, showcasing their victories. The contest also showed the economic viability of the production of Sweet Potatoes. James Jenkins, who was a member of the Bellhaven NFA Chapter, had earned \$630 from 350 bushels per acre.¹²⁹ Statewide Sweet Potato production increased

¹²⁵Bessie B. Ramseur, "Food Conservation And Nutrition" North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service Annual Report for 1955, January 28, 1956

¹²⁶ L. T. Rhodes, "Marketing Sweet Potatoes" *The Progressive Farmer and Southern Farm Gazette*, Saturday July 18, 1914, <https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn92073052/1914-07-18/ed-1/seq-5/#words=sweet+potato+SWEE%20T+POTATOES+sweet+potatoes>

¹²⁷ "New Farmers of The Week" *The News of Orange County*, October 3, 1946, <https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn93007672/1946-10-03/ed-1/seq-5/#words=contest+NFA+potato+%20potatoes+sweet>

¹²⁸S.B. Simmons, *Activities of the New Farmers of America*, June 1942, <https://ncffa.org/Web%20Files/ncHistory/NFA/Activities%20of%20NFA.pdf>,

¹²⁹ "Bellhaven Boys Win Honors At State N.F.A. Convention" *The Hyde County Herald*, Thursday June 16, 1955, <https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn99061533/1955-06-16/ed-1/seq-4/#words=Contest+contest+NF%20A+potatoes+sweet>

among African Americans. The Craven County 1955 African American Extension report, written by O.E. Evans, said, “ Many farmers are going all the way on quality Sweet Potatoes.”¹³⁰

Another report in the Johnston County 157 African American Extension report credits 3500 acres of farmland dedicated to Sweet Potato production.¹³¹ Tobacco is referenced for sweet potato production increases.¹³² Tobacco allotments from the Federal Tobacco program started in the AAA controlled the acreage of Tobacco grown, limiting profits. Sweet Potatoes offered farmers supplementary income and nutritional benefits.

The NFA and livestock husbandry

The growing of livestock reinforced principles of addressing food insecurity and establishing food sovereignty. This process introduced students to the care and production of livestock and poultry.

Pigs were the most frequently grown livestock by NFA members. Historically, North Carolina has grown hogs as a source of protein since the time of early settlers in the state. During the creation of the NFA, new stock laws made it difficult for African American families to maintain livestock.¹³³ The NFA teachers sought to correct these measures by helping students grow pigs for consumption and also profit from them. Pork was a part of North Carolina culture, the whole pig was used in a household.¹³⁴ Pigs were also easy to raise, with NFA member Perry Noble saying, “ I carry a project every year and my project consists of Swine. Why do I carry

¹³⁰ O.E. Evans, “Sweet Potatoes” North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service Annual Narrative Report, 1955.

¹³¹ L.R. Johnson, M.E. Reddick, Lucy A. Toole “Sweet Potatoes” North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service Annual Narrative Report, 1957.

¹³² L.R. Johnson, M.E. Reddick, Lucy A. Toole “Sweet Potato”

¹³³ Adrienne Monteith, Petty, *Standing Their Ground: Small Farmers in North Carolina since the Civil War* (New York, 2013; online edn, Oxford Academic, 26 Sept. 2013) 60-61

¹³⁴Thompson, Michael D. “‘Everything but the Squeal’: Pork as Culture in Eastern North Carolina.” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 82, no. 4 (2005): 464–98.467, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23523182>.

Swine? I have found that Swine is very profitable and requires less work.”¹³² Many African Americans still ate pork as their source of meat, originating from the pork and corn diets of slavery.¹³³ The difference with the NFA was that their interest in pork production was in sustaining the food system with pork and providing quality pork.¹³⁴

NFA instructors sought to introduce better-bred stock of swine to their students. Many farmers owned swine of feral origin, which were not the most profitable, and instructors began to introduce purebred breeds of swine to their students.¹³⁵ Members also worked cooperatively to own their swine; an example of this is the Logan Boar Association. Started by instructor M.M. Woodson in 1941 with first-year students, the association worked cooperatively to secure swine for the students.¹³⁶ The Eastmen NFA Chapter received local attention via the *Carolina Times*, a prominent African American newspaper at the time. The *Carolina Times* published their hog-rearing methods and credited the chapter for introducing a “superior strain” of purebred pigs.¹³⁷ Purebred swine would bring in better pork yields, enriching farmers' marketability.

The swine project took the NFA in North Carolina by storm, with many students engaging in swine production. In 1928, there were 75 swine projects with 126 hogs, but by the year 1941, 894 swine projects were producing over 1 million pounds of pork.¹³⁸ Swine proved to be another important source of food that students could feed their household. In the *Future Outlook* article on NFA projects, almost all students specifically mentioned having swine

¹³⁵“ Vocational Agriculture in Negro Public Schools of North Carolina 1917-1918 to 1946-1947” North Carolina Association of New Farmers of America, July 1, 1947, https://ncffa.org/Web%20Files/ncHistory/NFA/VocAg_publicschools.pdf

¹³⁶S..B. Simmons, *Activities of the New Farmers of America*, June 1942, <https://ncffa.org/Web%20Files/ncHistory/NFA/Activities%20of%20NFA.pdf>,

¹³⁷ “ Eastman NFA Chapter Starts Swine Chain” *Carolina Time*, Saturday October 8, 1949

¹³⁸ S..B. Simmons, *Activities of the New Farmers of America*, June 1942, <https://ncffa.org/Web%20Files/ncHistory/NFA/Activities%20of%20NFA.pdf>,

projects.¹³⁹ Grady Bethel, in his project writing, mentions how when he butchered his hog, it weighed 108 pounds and provided 15 pounds of sausage and 10 pounds of lard for his family.¹⁴⁰ Providing sausage for one's family as an African American strayed away from the poor diets that African Americans tended to face. The poverty that many African Americans endured led them to eat poor grades of meat, but in the case of Grady Bethel, because he owned swine, he could determine the grades of meat he decided to eat. The consumption of meat was also limited during the time of the article because of World War II rationing, and the ability to consume meat was regulated by the government. William Perry mentions this in his writing, saying, “ I am planning on getting two more as quickly as possible, and kill the other two because to raise your own meat will be rather handy at the moment”.¹⁴¹ NFA member Perry Noble also shared that his reasoning for him conducting a swine project was because he could not get meat due to rationing. He goes on to say that he got 30 pounds of lard and 27 ½ pounds of sausage from the two pigs he raised.¹⁴² Students learning how to properly feed their swine enabled them to provide more protein for their family and community despite stock laws. North Carolina would continue to grow in Swine production after the 1960s.¹⁴³

¹³⁹W.T. Johnson “Jordan Sellars High School of Burlington are Training New Farmers Of America ” *Future Outlook*, Saturday January 23, 1943,<https://newspapers.digitalnc.org/lccn/sn97064597/1943-01-23/ed-1/seq-4/#words=22+Agriculture+agriculture+am+Berkshire+bought+chose+file+first+High+HIGH+high+hog+hogs+I+i+JORDAN+Jordan+My+my+MY+project+PROJECT+projects+School+SCHOOL+school+second+Sellars+student+students+Students+swine+two+X+Year+year+year%27s+years>

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, “Jordan Sellars High School of Burlington are Training New Farmers Of America ”

¹⁴¹ Ibid, “Jordan Sellars High School of Burlington are Training New Farmers Of America ”

¹⁴² Ibid, “Jordan Sellars High School of Burlington are Training New Farmers Of America ”

¹⁴³ More research needs to be conducted on African American Swine production in the south. This research will better mitigate the success of the NFA in Swine production.

The NFA was an instrument for introducing dairy cattle to rural African American families. Dairy cattle offered NFA members the opportunity to change the local and regional food systems in the area. Dairy cattle produce milk, a food that could combat pellagra in farm communities. Many southern diversification proponents encourage milk production for white farmers but omit to aid African American farmers. African American farmers, NFA members who engaged in the raising of dairy cattle, were combating the agricultural system, providing dietary improvement to their communities. Members participated in the capacity of innovators, increasing the quality of dairy cattle available in the community to achieve optimum production.

While swine and cattle were different animals, both are capable of livestock exhibitions. The NFA instructors organized dairy cattle shows with the goal in mind of educating African American members on how to maintain dairy cattle and educating the public on the necessity of dairy cattle. The 1951 Tri-County Negro Junior Dairy Cattle Show bulletin describes how Dairy shows sought to educate the collective black community,

“Milk does more for the body than any other food. It provides high quality protein, calcium, and Vitamins A and G cheaply. Every person, young or old, should drink milk. Milk contains a large variety of nutritional constituents and considering costs per pound more food for the money than any other food material available.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Tri-County Negro Junior Dairy Cattle Show, September 6, 1951, 4-H

The bulletin emphasized that if rural families grew more dairy cattle, it could increase the consumption of milk and could expand milk consumption in North Carolina by reaching urban markets.¹⁴⁵ Dairy Shows had a positive effect on African American farm families. The African American Cooperative Extension agent, dairy specialist R. L. Wynn, credited dairy shows in his 1947 annual report, and said,

“As for handling of the family cow or farm dairy cattle, the dairy show training program was of great importance. Agents reports indicate that Negro farm people are becoming and more conscious of the treatment given to the family cow. These better handling practices seem to be resulting 4-H Club and NFA training programs.”¹⁴⁶

In 1953, the same agricultural agent referred in their report to the increase in interest in African American farmers in dairy production, stating that they needed another dairy specialist.¹⁴⁷ NFA participation in better dairying practices inspired farmers to properly grow dairy cattle in the wake of limiting stock laws. Demonstrating to farmers the importance of better dairy cattle maintenance allowed them to understand the necessity of producing milk for their families.

Raising dairy cattle was a dynamic way of ensuring food security and sovereignty in North Carolina, which had much success. Statistics from 1953 show that over 8,000 African American farmers were utilizing better feeding practices, and over 11,000 farmers were using

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¹⁴⁶Tri-County Negro Junior Dairy Cattle Sow, September 6, 1951, 4-H

¹⁴⁷R.L. Wynn, “Introduction”, Agricultural Extension Service State of North Carolina Annual Report 1953, January 30, 1954, ii

veterinary services.¹⁴⁸ Over 4,000 farm families sought assistance in helping with marketing day products.¹⁴⁹ The success happened because dairy shows engaged with the community.

Vocational Agricultural Instructors and the FFA Merger

The most important chess piece in the NFA's ability to establish food sovereignty in their communities is the instructors who taught them. Teachers of the NFA spanned almost the entire state from as far west as Cleveland County and Catawba County, to the far east in Perquimans and Pasquotank County. Their leadership in agricultural education played a crucial role in providing distressed communities with the education they needed to continue farming throughout the ever-changing world of agriculture. NFA educators were meticulous in educating students and introducing new methods of agriculture and leadership skills to them. The teaching methods they wielded truly inspired future farmers with over 6,000 students farming after their education.¹⁵⁰

In May of 2001, Dexter Wakefield published a dissertation entitled *Impact of the New Farmers of America (NFA) on selected past members: A historical Narrative*. In his study, Wakefield analyzed how the agricultural educators impacted the members of the NFA. One of the former members that Wakefield interviewed was Dr. A.P. Bell, who would become a vocational agricultural educator himself and a professor Emeritus at North Carolina A&T.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, ii

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, ii

¹⁵⁰ Vocational Agriculture in Negro Public Schools of North Carolina 1917-1918 to 1946-1947" North Carolina Association of New Farmers of America, July 1, 1947,

¹⁵¹ Dexter Bernard, Wakefield. "Impact of the New Farmers of America (NFA) on Selected Past Members: A Historical Narrative." PhD diss., Purdue University, 2001. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. 151-152, <https://proxying.lib.ncsu.edu/index.php?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/impact-new-farmers-america-nfa-on-selected-past/docview/304724173/se-2>.

When Wakefield asked Dr. Bell what role the NFA played in the community, he responded and said:

“The NFA played very significant roles because their people were in rural communities and many people were not mindful of the activities that were a part of the NFA. The teacher of agriculture would travel throughout the community, visiting homes with the students, working with adults bringing them into the program, and then they became familiar with activities of the NFA and developed an appreciation for what it was doing for their sons. Unfortunately girls were not a part of the NFA at that time.”¹⁵²

NFA educators had a strong relationship with the community, and this was essential to carry out food sovereignty efforts.

The Civil Rights movement executed sweeping changes to institutions in the United States, and one of the primary targets was education. The NFA existed in North Carolina because of the institutionalization of segregated education. The 1964 Civil Rights Act made segregation illegal and kick-started the process of integrating schools. Banning segregation in education looked positive at first, but it would not occur equitably throughout the state. The Future Farmers of America (FFA) was an all white version of the NFA founded in the early 1920s.¹⁵³ Letters were sent to both organizations to merge or face the possibility of funding cuts.¹⁵⁴ The merger creates some chaos in the field of vocational agriculture. African Americans were not leading desegregation, instead, it was whites, and many of the decisions being made were disenfranchising African Americans. In a letter to John W. Gardner, who was the secretary for

¹⁵² Ibid, 152

¹⁵³ The New Farmers of America” North Carolina FFA Association, Accessed January 31, 2025. <https://ncffa.org/about-us-north-carolina-ffa/about-nc-ffa/north-carolina-new-farmers-of-america#:~:text=Brief%20History%3A&text=The%20NFA%20was%20similar%20in,Civil%20Rights%20Act%20of%20196>.

¹⁵⁴ Dexter Bernard, Wakefield. "Impact of the New Farmers of America (NFA) on Selected Past Members: A Historical Narrative." PhD diss., Purdue University, 2001. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. 182, <https://proxying.lib.ncsu.edu/index.php?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/impact-new-farmers-america-nfa-on-selected-past/docview/304724173/se-2>.

the Department of Health, Education, & Welfare, attorney Julius L. Chambers stated his frustration with the current state of the merger:

“It is my understanding that three negroes have been appointed as supervisors in the state vocational program, none of whom has been given specific role or function. It is assumed that white supervisors in the area formerly supervised by Negroes are now to assume the role of the former Negro supervisors. Further Negro supervisors are customarily assigned to supervise Negro schools. Integration in the administrative staff beyond the supervisor level has not take place. Negro students in vocational agriculture have not been intergrated into the program.”¹⁵⁵

The exclusion of African Americans from leadership roles in the NFA ignored the voice of African American agricultural education leaders who conducted a successful organization. For more than 30 years, black agricultural educators built relationships with communities that were critical to sustaining food systems. Engaging community members bonded them to the NFA, making the NFA a community-led institution. The merger initiated the collapse of this bond, putting whites in charge of a community institution that they did not interact with. Dr. Bell addressed these sentiments in his interview and said, “ The Blacks were demoralized. The morale went down, because they felt as if they had lost something.”¹⁵⁶ Dr. Bell asserted that many African Americans saw the integration process not as a merger but as an “absorption” with whites taking in the NFA .¹⁵⁷

One area where the effect would have long-lasting impacts was in the number of black instructors who would continue to teach. Wakefield interviewed Marvin Roundtree, who was a

¹⁵⁵ Dexter Bernard, Wakefield. "Impact of the New Farmers of America (NFA) on Selected Past Members: A Historical Narrative." PhD diss., Purdue University, 2001.ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. 185-186 <https://proxying.lib.ncsu.edu/index.php?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/impact-new-farmers-america-nfa-on-selected-past/docview/304724173/se-2>.

¹⁵⁶ Dexter Bernard, Wakefield. "Impact of the New Farmers of America (NFA) on Selected Past Members: A Historical Narrative." PhD diss., Purdue University, 2001.ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. 84 <https://proxying.lib.ncsu.edu/index.php?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/impact-new-farmers-america-nfa-on-selected-past/docview/304724173/se-2>.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 85.

former NFA president and taught vocational agriculture for over 30 years. He said in his interview,

“We sort of had a guarantee that we would have someone in one of those positions that they were going to put a Black beside a White. It was a promise in the beginning and then around two years down the road they sort of forgot about that promise that was made.”¹⁵⁸ Roundtree elaborates in his interview how racial power came into play, saying that black supervisors could not exercise their leadership position over whites they supervised.¹⁵⁹ Actions such as the one Roundtree described continued to push African American educators out of the profession. Despite being qualified and experienced, race was a determining factor in who could lead the FFA after the merger. This is why African Americans make up less than 10% of the FFA in the present day.

The Merger was another blow to food sovereignty efforts in North Carolina. The 60s saw a more industrialized food system with many African Americans migrating to northern cities and leaving the rural South.¹⁶⁰ African American farmers who stayed in the state, particularly cultivated small acreages of land and could not compete with the increased commercialization of agriculture, and many farmers could no longer afford to be full-time farmers.¹⁶¹ The gospel of diversified farming occurred by switching commodities, moving away from cotton and tobacco, replacing them with soybeans, livestock, and poultry.¹⁶² The switch to diversified commercial

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 126.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 127.

¹⁶⁰ Hanna Garth, and Ashantee M. Reese, eds. *Black Food Matters: Racial Justice in the Wake of Food Justice*. University of Minnesota Press, 2020. 86

¹⁶¹ Gilbert C. Fite *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980*. 1st ed. University Press of Kentucky, 1984. 208

¹⁶² Ibid, 204.

agriculture did not address the needs of the small farmer, putting more emphasis and care on necessary industrialized operations. The merger made the condition for African American farmers worse, with no community-led institutions available for them to raise the next generation of farmers. The merging of the NFA with the FFA was a good idea in theory, but when practiced undermined the agricultural intellectual knowledge of African Americans. It did not take into account the cultural importance of the NFA; on the contrary, it stripped the NFA of its culture, forcing African American students and educators into a majority white organization. Most notably, it dismantled an important resource in the fight for food justice in North Carolina.

The NFA was a revolutionary effort that empowered young African American men to take servant leadership in their food systems. This was critical during the 1930s to 1950s because of the agricultural shifts that were beginning to occur in North Carolina. Stepping up to the challenge presented to them, NFA instructors and members did their best to guide African American communities through the challenges they faced.

Instructors and members of the NFA exemplified the belief that institution-building is key. Establishing 43 community canneries by the mid-1940s is no small feat. Community members recognized the canneries' significant role in community cooperation and for their families' survival in the racist agricultural system. The community entrusted instructors and students to help with canning and understanding the crucial role of servant leadership in food sovereignty. The success of canning communities emphasizes the youth involvement necessary to sustain food sovereignty efforts.

Canning also went hand in hand with the production of food crops and sweet potatoes by the NFA and encouraged the growing of food amongst the community. Schools and families would later use and can food. The production of food crops and sweet potatoes by the NFA

encouraged the growing of food amongst the community. Schools and families can later use and grow the food. Growing food crops strayed away from the monoculture system of North Carolina Agriculture and fostered self-reliance. The 1955 African American Nutrition of North Carolina reports said that only 16% of farm families did not cultivate a garden.¹⁶³ The NFA helped make food production in North Carolina through small farming successful.

The NFA's role in increasing dairy cattle is a success because of the inspiration farmers in the community drew from their showmanship of cattle. NFA members conveyed to farmers the ability to properly raise dairy cattle. The community supported the NFA's cattle shows, thousands of African American farm families attended dairy shows, supporting the NFA and drawing inspiration for cattle rearing for their own families.¹⁶⁴ NFA Swine projects also helped establish food sovereignty and food security, giving farm families another healthier source of protein. This was important, especially during the War era. Not only did the NFA show farmers how to manage swine, but they also introduced improved varieties of swine to farmers.

The NFA's success in establishing food sovereignty and security is a commendable act. The merging of the NFA and FFA deconstructed a community pillar of self-reliance and determination. In present times, when African Americans are facing increased food insecurity and sovereignty threats, researchers, farmers, and advocates must take a step back and study the policies of the NFA.

¹⁶³ Ramseur, Bessie B. "Food Conservation and Nutrition." *North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service Annual Report for 1955*, January 28, 1956.

¹⁶⁴ R.L. Wynn, "Introduction" *Agricultural Extension Service State of North Carolina Annual Report 1947*, February 16, 1948

Chapter III Policy Solutions for African American Food Insecurity and Food Sovereignty in North Carolina

In the present time, the NFA implores innovative methods that we need today to strengthen African American food systems and establish food sovereignty. The scourge of sharecropping and tenant farming is no longer in effect in North Carolina, agriculture still operates in a system of monoculture and mass production that undermines African American communities to be self-sufficient in food production. In a state where agriculture is the #1 industry, 21% of African Americans are food insecure.¹⁶⁵ This chapter seeks to compare the current agricultural policies to past policies described in Chapter Two. Solutions are also a key tenet of this chapter in describing ways to rejuvenate the methods of the NFA and create an equal food system in North Carolina.

Current Problems in African American Food Policy

The early 1900s represented a transformative time in agriculture, when the call for diversification spread throughout the South. The NFA was a strong proponent of agricultural diversification and the production of food crops because it provided a more balanced diet and a healthier food system. Agricultural diversification has made strides in the past, but today, agricultural diversification is greatly needed in an agricultural system hooked on monoculture production. In North Carolina, agricultural diversification is nearly non-existent, with the production of fruit and vegetable crops only making up 2.6% of all farm cash receipts in the state.¹⁶⁶ Poultry and livestock account for the majority of farm cash receipts in the state, representing 3/4ths of the state's agricultural production and generating 74.3% of agricultural

¹⁶⁵ "Food Security in North Carolina" NC State University Institute for Emerging Issues, accessed January 20, 2025, <https://iei.ncsu.edu/2024/01/22/food-security-in-north-carolina/>

¹⁶⁶Source of Farm Cash Receipts, North Carolina, 2023," 2024 North Carolina Agricultural Statistics, accessed January 20, 2025,

income.¹⁶⁷ The statistics listed are a testament to the rise of poultry and livestock agriculture during World War II. Farmers faced increased pressure to diversify. The Federal Tobacco Program was successful in awarding farmers tobacco allotments, but income was not sustainable for a profit-making endeavor. Farmers then turned to poultry and livestock to make up for tobacco losses and grow their industry. This resulted in large farmers establishing broiler and egg-laying houses and large hog farms.¹⁶⁸ Large farmers were successful in their animal production endeavors, but this pushed out small farmers who could not compete with large agribusiness. With increased meat consumption and the rise of fast food, North Carolina now ranks #1 in the nation in poultry production and #3 in hog production.¹⁶⁹

Poultry and Livestock are good for food systems because they house important proteins. The problem lies in the overconsumption of meat, specifically processed meat. Studies show that African Americans had the highest rate of meat consumption compared to whites, Hispanics, and far east Asians.¹⁷⁰ The consumption of meat can lead to increased levels of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and an increase in colon polyps.¹⁷¹ The system of agriculture currently operating in North Carolina is an appetite for disease and the proliferation of a more unequal

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, “Source of Farm Cash Receipts, North Carolina, 2023,”

¹⁶⁸ Adrienne Monteith, Petty, *Standing Their Ground: Small Farmers in North Carolina since the Civil War* (New York, 2013; online edn, Oxford Academic, 26 Sept. 2013) 178

¹⁶⁹“Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold,” 2022 Census of Agriculture State Profile, accessed January 20, 2025, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/North_Carolina/cp99037.pdf

¹⁷⁰Sung Eun Choi, Kyou Jin Lee, “Ethnic Differences in attitudes, beliefs, and patterns of meat consumption among American young women meat eaters,” 2023 Feb;17(1):73-90 <https://doi.org/10.4162/nrp.2023.17.1.73> pISSN 1976-1457· eISSN 2005-6168

¹⁷¹Keren Papier , Georgina K. Fensom, Anika Knuppel , Paul N. Appleby , Tammy Y. N. Tong , Julie A. Schmidt1 , Ruth C. Travis , Timothy J. Key and Aurora Perez-Cornago, “meat consumption and risk of 25 common conditions: outcome wide analyses in 475,000 men and women in the UK Biobank study” Papier et al. BMC Medicine (2021) 19:53 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-021-01922-9>

food system. Just as the mass production of cotton and tobacco during the early 1900s saw high levels of malnourishment, in present-day mass production of poultry and livestock has caused an uptick in chronic disease, especially among African Americans.

Despite North Carolina being ranked 9th in the nation in production of vegetables and 14th in production of fruits, North Carolina still dedicates over 1 million in acreage to soybean production, which is more than fruits and vegetables combined.¹⁷² The overproduction of soybeans poses a risk to food security and sovereignty for African Americans for several reasons. Farmers use just over 70% of the soybeans produced for animal feed, and this continues the reliance on animal production-based agriculture.¹⁷³ The food industry uses 15% of soybeans for human consumption, primarily as cooking oils. Studies have shown that high intake of soybean oil is unhealthy, and can lead to an unhealthy gut, facilitating the growth of an invasive type of *E. coli*, and preventing the growth of good bacteria.¹⁷⁴ Soybean does more harm than good to the food system, and the growing of specialty crops can be a healthy alternative.

Another harm that the system of North Carolina agriculture has caused is environmental injustice in the African American community. The rise of mass hog farming has not only increased the level of meat production, but it has also created unsafe environments. Hog operations are mainly present in eastern North Carolina and are located in areas that are poor and

¹⁷² “Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold,” 2022 Census of Agriculture State Profile, accessed January 20, 2025,

¹⁷³ “USDA Coexistence Fact Sheet Soybeans” US Department of Agriculture, accessed January 23, 2025, <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/coexistence-soybeans-factsheet.pdf>

¹⁷⁴ “Widely consumed vegetable oil leads to an unhealthy gut,” University of California, Riverside, accessed January 23, 2025, <https://news.ucr.edu/articles/2023/07/03/widely-consumed-vegetable-oil-leads-unhealthy-gut#:~:text=Hi%20gh%20consumption%20of%20soybean%20oil,inflammation%20of%20the%20large%20intestine>.

communities of color. These areas also have the highest rate of disease and access to poor medical care, along with food insecurity.¹⁷⁵ Hog farms release pollutants into the air, and the communities that inhabit those areas inhale them. Untreated hog waste fills hog waste lagoons in these communities, and these lagoons release gas into the air and contaminate wells.¹⁷⁶ Hog companies also spray hog waste onto nearby fields, saying that it is good for the environment, but they cannot support their claims. This presents a challenge for African Americans to create food security and establish food sovereignty because the unhealthy environment may also harm the food they seek to produce. Hog production has become just like cotton in the 19th and 20th centuries in that it is a detriment to the health of African American communities.

The hog industry may be a detriment to the environment, but it does not pose a rival to the environmental impact the poultry industry has in North Carolina. The Poultry industry is a billion-dollar industry, bringing in roughly 39 billion to the state's economy. It is also the nation's number-one producer of poultry and eggs.¹⁷⁷ Farmers' expansion of their farm base beyond the tobacco industry in the 1950s fueled the rise of the poultry industry.¹⁷⁸ North Carolina, which once relied on tobacco to drive the state's economy, now relies on poultry production. With it come terrible consequences for African Americans as it pertains to the environment in which they live. The poultry industry produces more waste than the hog industry, and people tend to

¹⁷⁵Wing, Steve, Dana Cole, and Gary Grant. "Environmental Injustice in North Carolina's Hog Industry." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 108, no. 3 (2000): 225–31. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3454438>.

¹⁷⁶"North Carolina's Hog Problem" Southern Environmental Law Center, last modified January 26, 2023, <https://www.selc.org/news/the-sinister-hog-industry-of-eastern-north-carolina/>

¹⁷⁷Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold," 2022 Census of Agriculture State Profile, accessed January 20, 2025, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/North_Carolina/cp99037.pdf

¹⁷⁸Adrienne Monteith, Petty, *Standing Their Ground: Small Farmers in North Carolina since the Civil War* (New York, 2013; online edn, Oxford Academic, 26 Sept. 2013) 178.

dump this waste in minority communities. The problem there lies in the fact that the state government does not regulate it, and the waste can pollute the groundwater of African American communities.¹⁷⁹ Toxic pollutants are also released from poultry waste, and this can cause an increase in respiratory diseases. In Robeson County, where there are more than 100 poultry plants, the rate of asthma in children is double that of the state.¹⁸⁰

The reasons for high rates of food insecurity among African Americans are largely because healthy, nutritious food options are not available in African American communities. Fast food is often the only available food source in African American communities. Fast food restaurants are unhealthy because they often engage in the sale of processed food that is not very nutritious. Fast food consumption leads to obesity and also raises rates of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and metabolic syndrome.¹⁸¹ This is because fast foods have high concentrations of fats and salts.¹⁸² African American consumption of fast food is high; a study conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services found that 42.9% of African Americans consume fast food, which is the highest percentage when compared to other races.¹⁸³ This is directly correlated with African Americans having the highest rates of obesity,

¹⁷⁹“Pollution from N.C.’s Commercial Poultry Farms Disproportionately Harms Communities of Color” Southern EnvironmentalLawCenter,lastmodified,January26,2023. <https://www.selc.org/news/the-sinister-hog-industry-of-eastern-north-carolina/>

¹⁸⁰ “Nobody’s listening:’ NC Department of Environmental Quality fails to regulate water and air pollution from poultry farming,” UNC Media Hub, last modified March 25, 2024, <https://mediahub.unc.edu/nobodys-listening-nc-department-of-environmental-quality-fails-to-regulate-water-and-air-pollution-from-poultry-farming/>

¹⁸¹ Zahra Bahadoran, Parvin Mirmiran, Fereidoun Azizi, “Fast Food Pattern and Cardiometabolic Disorders: A Review of Current Studies” . *Health Promotion Perspectives*. 2016 Jan 30;5(4):231-40. 236, doi: 10.15171/hpp.2015.028.

¹⁸² Ibid, 236.

¹⁸³ Cheryl D. Fryar, Jeffery P. Hughes, Kirsten A. Herrick, and Namanjeet Ahluwalia, Fast Food Consumption Among Adults in the United States, 2013–2016, National Center for Health and Statistics. Cheryl D. Fryar, Jeffery P. Hughes, Kirsten A. Herrick, and Namanjeet Ahluwalia, Fast Food Consumption Among Adults in the United States, 2013–2016, National Center for Health and Statistics

cardiovascular disease, and diabetes in the nation. The term “Food Apartheid” describes the current food systems that African American communities face. “Food Apartheid” is the term coined by Karen Washington, who has been an advocate for fixing African American food systems for over 30 years.¹⁸⁴ The term comes from the belief that race, class, and geography are the reasons why African Americans are suffering from an unequal food system.¹⁸⁵

The NFA aimed to educate the next generation of future farmers in the United States. This proved successful with hundreds of African American male students in North Carolina receiving agriculture education. NFA members and instructors were successful in educating African American future farmers.¹⁸⁶ However, the merger with the FFA deteriorated institutional building and the establishment of healthy food systems in their communities. In 2022, African Americans only made up 5% of the FFA.¹⁸⁷ African American youth are unengaged with agriculture in the school system, furthering the struggle to achieve food sovereignty and security.

NFA and New Food policies

The problems in agriculture may be vast and complex, but the NFA has food policies that can be implemented in modern times to tackle these issues. These are: diversification of crops, using small farms for food production, and investing in African American Agriculture education.

¹⁸⁴“ Hands to Soil “My Story” Karen Washington, last accessed January 30, 2025,
<https://www.karenthefarmer.com/about>

¹⁸⁵ “Food desert’ vs. ‘food apartheid’: Which term best describes disparities in food access?” School For Environment And Sustainability University of Michigan, last accessed January 30, 2025,
<https://seas.umich.edu/news/food-desert-vs-food-apartheid-which-term-best-describes-disparities-food-access>

¹⁸⁶ “The New Farmers of America” North Carolina FFA Association, Accessed January 31, 2025.
<https://ncffa.org/about-us-north-carolina-ffa/about-nc-ffa/north-carolina-new-farmers-of-america#:~:text=Brief%20History%3A&text=The%20NFA%20was%20similar%20in,Civil%20Rights%20Act%20of%20196>.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, New Farmers of America”

To aid in agricultural diversification, North Carolina and the federal government must take several steps to increase alternative crops. The NFA diversified crop production and did this by growing gardens and cultivating crops such as sweet potatoes for profit. One way is to diversify agriculture by expanding crop insurance and subsidies to specialty crop growers and allowing them to have greater access. Federal farm subsidies are available to all farmers, but most farmers who receive them produce crops such as tobacco, cotton, soybeans, and corn.¹⁸⁸ The farm subsidies also benefit large farmers who can often recoup from their losses, versus small farmers which most African American farmers are.¹⁸⁹ Increasing farm subsidies will not only aid farmers in growing more specialty crops but can also attract new farmers interested in crop diversification. The AAA programs offered the same solutions but were racist towards African Americans. The program never sought to correct the racist agricultural system. Provisioning a similar program that helps incentivize farmers to grow specialty crops can be a game-changer.

Animal-based farming creates environmental and dietary challenges for African American communities. There must be legislation created to regulate the industries to protect the lives of African Americans. The North Carolina Department of Agriculture must also prioritize the health of the state over the billions of dollars created from animal production. Failure to do so will continue to exacerbate the public health crisis of food insecurity.

Small Farms offer a solution to fix food security and to establish food sovereignty in African American communities, whether they are rural or urban. Small farms were once the

¹⁸⁸ Edwards, Chris “Cutting Federal Farm Subsidies” Cato institute, August 31, 2023. 1

¹⁸⁹ Tia M. McDonald, Anil K. Gril, Dipak Subedi, “African-American-operated farms were smaller and more focused on livestock than other farms in 2018-2020” USDA Economic Research Center, march 3, 2024.<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note/chart-detail?chartId=108740#:~:text=African%2DAmerican%20farms%20operated%20an,halfof%20their%20production%20value.>

driving force of African American agriculture before the 1930s in North Carolina. NFA food production occurred on small-acreage farms and did not entail industrial farming methods. The New Deal began to push out small farmers, and African American farmers with limited resources could not continue to farm, with many leaving the business. Today, the majority of farms are small family farms, which make up 86% of all farms but only account for 17% of production in the United States.¹⁹⁰ Small family farms are a key to bolstering local food production because they seek to serve their localities with nutritious food.

The NFA's policies of food preservation and production occurred on a small farming basis, and not on an industrial level or scale. Producing food locally reduces reliance on the racist food system and sustains African American foodways. By promoting small family farms, African American communities have a better chance of securing food security and sovereignty and can fill the void of food supply, especially in rural areas. Rural parts of the state engage in agriculture, but most of this agriculture is in animal production or commodity crops and is not sustainable. Small Farms also provide better nutrition by directly selling to consumers. Imported Fruits and vegetables are a major problem in food production. California, for example, produces 41% of the fruits and vegetables throughout the nation. The transportation of vegetables from coast to coast causes fruits and vegetables to decrease in nutritional value over time and does not ensure consumers an adequate product.¹⁹¹ The United States overall is importing more fruits and vegetables internationally, replacing the need for local food production.

¹⁹⁰ "Distribution of farms, acres operated, and value of production by farm type, 2023" USDA Economic Research Center. Accessed January 31, 2025, https://ers.usda.gov/sites/default/files/_laserfiche/Charts/110694/Small-Farms.png?v=91061

¹⁹¹ Holly Hill "Food Miles: Background and Marketing" ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture, Accessed January 31, 2025, <https://attra.ncat.org/publication/food-miles-background-and-marketing/>

The Justice For Black Farmers Act offers solutions for African American agricultural education. This bill offers a program to train African American future farmers on how to work the land.¹⁹² This is very similar to the NFA’s supervised farming program, in which agricultural leaders taught students how to properly run a farm and how to generate a profit. The apprenticeship program is very important in the time we are in, not only because of farmland loss, but also because the age of farmers has increased. The average age of a farmer in the United States is 58, and with 38% of farmers over the age of 65, there is going to be a significant transfer of farm ownership.¹⁹³

One of the strengths of the NFA’s crusade to involve African American education in agriculture was the utilization of HBCUs in training agricultural educators. S.B. Simmons, who headed the NFA in North Carolina, was also a graduate of the college known today as North Carolina A&T University. His leadership ensured the longevity and success of the NFA for years to come. The NFA also had a long partnership with North Carolina A&T in creating agricultural leaders and educating future students.¹⁹⁴

In the present day, HBCUs house centers for change, such as the Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Policy Research Center at Alcorn State University, and the Agroecology Center housed at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University.¹⁹⁵ HBCUs have become

¹⁹² Congress.gov. “S. 209 - 118th Congress (2023-2024) Black farmers for Justice Act.” February 24, 2023. <https://www.congress.gov/help/citation-guide>

¹⁹³ “Snapshot of U.S. Producers, 2022” 2022 Census of Agriculture, Accessed February 2, 2025, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Highlights/2024/Census22_HL_FarmProducers_FINAL.pdf

¹⁹⁴ “Vocational Agriculture in Negro Public Schools of North Carolina 1917-1918 to 1946-1947” North Carolina Association of New Farmers of America, July 1, 1947, https://ncffa.org/Web%20Files/ncHistory/NFA/VocAg_publicschools.pdf

¹⁹⁵ “Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Policy Research Center” Alcorn State University, Accessed, February 2, 2025, <https://www.alcorn.edu/discover-alcorn/socially-disadvantaged-farmers-and-ranchers-policy-research-center/>

institutional pillars in the fight for food security and sovereignty. The *Justice For Black Farmers Act* protects the funding of HBCUs and proposes funding for new courses and studies to expand studies to focus more on careers in agriculture.¹⁹⁶ This can open up agriculture to more students and also increase African American participation in farming.

Another solution is recreating the NFA to bridge the gap between African Americans and agriculture. While this may seem like a radical approach, it is necessary to change the current state of African American agriculture in the nation. The merging of the NFA capitulated over 30 years of African American agricultural leadership and mentorship, which focused on creating the next generation of farmers and rural leaders. With the breakdown in agricultural education among African-American youth, it is no coincidence that the percentage of African American farmers has declined.

Policies beyond the NFA.

NFA food policies are valuable in addressing present-day issues, but are not all applicable to the current shifts and trends in contemporary black food justice issues. NFA food policies did not address crop biodiversity and preservation, black urban populations, and black land loss. This requires the creation of new policies to fit the current time. A modern version of the NFA must utilize new policies.

Preservation of African American crops and farming methods

One of the biggest problems with the current food system is that it is built on a handful of crops and lacks agro-biodiversity. Despite 150 crops being cultivated around the world, only twelve crops provide 80% of dietary needs, with 60% coming from rice, wheat, maize, or

¹⁹⁶ Congress.gov. "S. 301 - 118th Congress (2023-2024) Black farmers for Justice Act." February 24, 2023. <https://www.congress.gov/help/citation-guide>

potatoes.¹⁹⁷ This is unsustainable in that 12 crops do not produce a balanced diet. The NFA dealt with the same difficulty in their era, which they combated by growing a diverse array of fruits and vegetables. The same must occur in a modern-day NFA, but by cultivating a heritage variety of fruits and vegetables that also have ties to African American communities. The growing and preservation of heritage crops related to African Americans can provide better food security and establish food sovereignty in African American communities, who will be able to control their food systems.

African Americans have historically acted as botanists in their agrarian pursuits in North Carolina and the broader United States. One of the crops brought over with enslaved Africans on the slave ship was okra.¹⁹⁸ Okra has gone through cross-breeding methods by African Americans, and today, many varieties of okra exist. One is the Catawba Freeman Okra, which originated from African Americans and the indigenous people of the Catawba Nation.¹⁹⁹ The indigenous Catawba people inhabited the states of South Carolina and North Carolina, and some members owned slaves.²⁰⁰ The name of the plant originates from this interaction. While this occurred in the Piedmont regions of North Carolina and South Carolina, enslaved Africans in Georgia created a different variety of okra called Sea Island Red Okra, bred by the Gullah Geechee people of the Carolinas and Georgia.²⁰¹ Preserving the heritage varieties of plants

¹⁹⁷ Gonzalez, Carmen G. “Climate Change, Food Security, And Agrobiodiversity: Toward A Just, Resilient, And Sustainable Food System.” *Fordham Environmental Law Review* 22, no. 3 (2011): 493–522. 496

¹⁹⁸ Judith A. Carney., and Richard N. Rosomoff. *In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa’s Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2009. 136-138

¹⁹⁹ “Catawba Freedman Okra” Sistah Seeds, Accessed February 2, 2025, https://sistahseeds.com/products/catawba-freedman-okra?_pos=1&_psq=cat&_ss=e&_v=1.0

²⁰⁰ Martha M. Bently “The Slaveholding Catawbans.” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 92, no. 2 (1991): 85–98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27568212>. 92-93

²⁰¹ “Sea Island Okra” Sistah Seeds, Accessed February 2, 2025, https://sistahseeds.com/products/sea-island-red-okra?_pos=2&_psq=island&_ss=e&_v=1.0

connected to African American culture, such as Okra, is a sign of self-sufficiency and preserves African American foodways and food systems. Efforts to preserve, and most importantly, produce these crops can also increase food security among African Americans in North Carolina.

Another important method in solving the issue of food insecurity and establishing food sovereignty is revitalizing agricultural practices utilized by African American ancestors in Africa. The African traditional farming system of polyculture can be used.²⁰² Polyculture is the act of growing multiple crops on one piece of land. It also adds nutrients back to the soil, which monoculture does the opposite of. Polyculture also reduces weed control in contrast to industrial agriculture, which combats weeds with the use of pesticides. Pesticides can have dangerous effects in that they can decrease biodiversity in the ecosystem.²⁰³ Pollinators that are essential to crops such as watermelons and squash are affected by the use of pesticides.²⁰⁴ Honey Bee colonies, for example, are also at risk because pesticides can affect their production. The most alarming risk of pesticides is that they can also be found on fresh fruits and vegetables that are available for purchase.²⁰⁵ Polyculture offers farmers a chance to rely less on pesticides and more on natural methods to control pests among their crops.

²⁰² Uzo M. Igbozurike, “Polyculture And Monoculture: Contrast AND Analysis.” *GeoJournal* 2, no. 5 (1978): 443–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41142140>. 445

²⁰³ “Land Use, Land Cover, and Pollinator Health: A Review and Trend Analysis” US Department of Agriculture, June 2017, https://ers.usda.gov/sites/default/files/_laserfiche/publications/84035/ERR-232.pdf?v=52021

²⁰⁴ Ibid, “Land Use, Land Cover, and Pollinator Health: A Review and Trend Analysis”

²⁰⁵ El-Sayed A. El-Sheikh , Mahmoud M. Ramadan , Ahmed E. El-Sobki , Ali A. Shalaby , Mark R. McCoy , Ibrahim A. Hamed , Mohamed-Bassem Ashour I and Bruce D. Hammock, “Pesticide Residues in Vegetables and Fruits from Farmer Markets and Associated Dietary Risks,” *Molecules* **2022**, 27(22), 8072; 1, <https://doi.org/10.3390/molecules27228072>

Another indigenous method used by farmers of African descent is the African Dark Earth (AfDE) method of managing the soil. AfDE is the process of adding charcoal, food scraps, and waste into the soil that crops will be cultivated in.²⁰⁶ This resulted in the soil becoming a haven for organic carbon and created nutrient-rich soil that would produce high yields of crops. AfDE is now being studied as a climate-friendly solution for good production in the age of climate change. Instead of releasing carbon, AfDE traps it, and this can be a game-changer in the battle to create more sustainable farming systems in the age of climate change. One farming system that can offset the effects of climate change and is culturally connected to African Americans is Agroecology. Agroecology emphasizes positive interaction between plants, animals, and human beings and operates within a system of food justice and food sovereignty²⁰⁷. An essential part of this farming system is farming culturally relevant food for communities.

Increasing African American land ownership

For African Americans to create self-sustaining food systems, there must be an increase in African American land ownership. Agricultural teachers taught NFA members to produce food for themselves and their community. Without land, food cannot be made. African Americans were historically landowners with around 16 million acres of land, and 14% of farmers were African Americans.²⁰⁸ This is a stark contrast to the present, where

²⁰⁶ Dawit Solomon, Johannes Lehmann, James A Fraser, Melissa Leach, Kojo Amanor, Victoria Frausin, Søren M Kristiansen, Dominique Millimouno, James Fairhead, “ Indigenous African soil enrichment as a climate-smart 71 sustainable agriculture alternative”, *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, 2016; 14(2): 71–76, 71, doi:10.1002/fee.1226

²⁰⁷ “What is Agroecology?,” Agroecology Fund, accessed January 29th, 2025, <https://agroecologyfund.org/what-is-agroecology/>

²⁰⁸ “Black land Loss in the United States” FoodPrint Issue, February 28, 2024, <https://foodprint.org/issues/black-land-loss-in-the-united-states/>

African American farmers only account for 1.4% of farmers in the United States today.²⁰⁹ In North Carolina, only 1,891 farmers are African American out of the 72,479 producers.²¹⁰ Yet, in 1920, there were over 20,000 African American farm owners.¹⁹¹ A modern-day NFA must take up the position of advocating for the right to land ownership. Agriculture was once a way of life for African Americans in North Carolina, and has turned into a pariah. Black land loss in North Carolina is also occurring during a time when farmland loss is a major issue. North Carolina is set to lose 1 million acres in 2040.²¹¹ One of the causes for African American land loss is discrimination that occurred between the USDA and African American farmers. Many farmers were denied loans and access to programs. That would help them sustain their farms in an ever-increasing world of industrial agriculture.²¹² This case was eventually taken to court with the *Pigford V Glickman* lawsuit, awarding African Americans over \$1 billion in funds.²¹³ While this was a monumental win for African American farmers, it does not solve the issue of African American land loss.

Another cause for loss of African American land is heirs' property, which is inherited family land but does not have proof of ownership of inheritance in legal documentation.²¹⁴ This

²⁰⁹Black Producers” 2022 Census of Agriculture” accessed January 31, 2025, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Highlights/2024/Census22_HL_BlackProducers.pdf

²¹⁰ “Producers,” 2022 Census of Agriculture State Profile, accessed January 20, 2025, https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/North_Carolina/cp99037.pdf

²¹¹ Brody Milotte, Faith Mynheer, Chase Pierce, Lillian Propst, Henning Schroeder, Aaron Scott, “Executive Summary” Farmland Preservation Comprehensive Report, The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, <https://farmlandinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/01/NC-farmland-preservation-comprehensive-report.pdf>

²¹²“Black Farmers in America, 1865-2000 The Pursuit of Independent Farming and the Role of Cooperatives” US Department of Agriculture, October 2002, 16, <https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/RR194.pdf>

²¹³ “The Pigfords Cases: USDA Settlement of Discrimination Suits by Black Farmers” EveryCRSReport.com, May 29, 2023, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RS20430.html>

²¹⁴ “Heirs Property Relending” US Department of Agriculture, Accessed February 3, 2025, <https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/heirs-property->

causes room for developers to often buy land from African Americans without them knowing, and has contributed to the 98% decrease in African American farmers from 1900 to 1997.²¹⁵ The USDA created the Heirs Property Relenders Program, which assisted landowners in settling their heirs' property disputes to give them legal documentation of ownership. With an impending loss of farmland and a shrinking number of African American farmers, there must be solutions in place to counter the loss of African American farmland. One of the countering moves to increase African American land ownership is found in the *Justice for Black Farmers Act*, which is sponsored by New Jersey Senator Cory Booker in the United States Senate and Representative Alma Adams of North Carolina.²¹⁶ In the bill, some provisions will educate African American farmers on how to run a farm, as well as grant prospective farmers land after they have completed an apprenticeship program.²¹⁷ The bill awards up to 160 acres to African American farmers and emphasizes land conservation practices.²¹⁸ *The Justice For Black Farmers Act* is an example of a meaningful solution to the lack of black land ownership. The passage of this bill can shorten the racial wealth gap and produce the food security and sovereignty that African American communities in North Carolina need.

eligibility/relanding#:~:text=Heirs%27%20property%20is%20a%20legal,ownership%20or%20control%20of%20land.

²¹⁵ Alyssa R. Casey, "Racial Equity in U.S. Farming: Background in Brief", Congressional Research Service, November 19, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R46969#:~:text=Congress%20has%20enacted%20numerous%20policies,population%20and%20U.S.%20farmland%20ownership>.

²¹⁶ "Congresswoman Adams, Senator Booker Introduce Justice for Black Farmers Act" United States Congresswoman Alma Adams 12th District of North Carolina, February 24, 2023, <https://adams.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/congresswoman-adams-senator-booker-introduce-justice-black-farmers-act>

²¹⁷ Congress.gov. "S. 203 - 118th Congress (2023-2024) Black farmers for Justice Act." February 24, 2023. <https://www.congress.gov/help/citation-guide>

²¹⁸ Ibid, "S. 203 - 118th Congress (2023-2024) Black farmers for Justice Act."

Increasing urban agriculture efforts

The creation of tobacco town was the beginning of the burgeoning migration of people to urban spaces. North Carolina cities offered better job opportunities and quality of living than the rural parts of North Carolina had to offer. Nationally, 41% of African Americans describe their community where they live as urban.²¹⁹ Urban North Carolina is continuing the trend of growth that began during the late 1800s. Raleigh, North Carolina, is the second fastest growing urban area in the country, growing by 25% in the past year.²²⁰ 66.7% of North Carolina is urban compared to 33.3% of North Carolinians living in rural areas.²²¹ Raleigh's expansion comes with challenges. Between the years of 2021-2022, 12% of the Wake County population faced food insecurity.²²²

Urban agriculture is an agricultural method that can effectively address food insecurity. Urban agriculture provides fresh foods to urban and suburban areas and lets the farmer come in direct contact with the consumer.²²³ Urban agriculture seeks to rectify “Food Apartheid” and allows communities to establish food sovereignty and control their communities' food systems.

²¹⁹ Kiana Cox, Christian Tamir, “Places and community” April 14, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/2022/04/14/black-americans-place-and-community/>

²²⁰ “Nation’s Urban and Rural Populations Shift Following 2020 Census”, United States Census Bureau, December 29, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2022/urban-rural-populations.html>

²²¹ Nathan Dollar “Did the criteria change lead to a substantial shift in the urban-rural composition of North Carolina’s population between 2010 and 2020?” Carolina Demography, May 5, 2025, <https://carolinademography.cpc.unc.edu/2023/05/25/how-does-the-new-urban-area-definition-affect-north-carolina/#:~:text=that%20the%20percent%20of%20the,2010%20to%2066.7%25%20in%202020.>

²²² “2020 Wake County Profile”, Food Bank Of Central & Eastern North Carolina, 2021, https://foodbankcenc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/2021-2022-County-Profiles_Wake.pdf

²²³ Leyana Casey, “Fields of Opportunity: Exploring the Intersection of Urban Farming and AI Solutions for Food Insecurities in Black Communities” (Congressional Black Caucus Foundation John R Lewis Fellowship Capstone ,2024) 3, https://www.cbcfinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/NREI-Capstone_Fields-of-Opportunities_L.Casey1_.pdf

Fast food outlets frequented African American communities. Urban agriculture provides a healthier alternative food source.

In Detroit, a farming group called “Sisters of the Soil” uses vacant land to grow fruits and vegetables within the city.²²⁴ Raleigh has more than 15,000 acres of vacant land available for farming.²²⁵ Utilizing farming methods such as hydroponics and aquaponics can provide year-round production and provide communities with an array of food that is accessible, including fish via aquaponics. Urban farming is more climate-friendly, reducing the time it takes to transport food.²²⁶ Urban farming accounts for 15% of all farms in the United States, and the urban growth of North Carolina will demand increased attention to urban farming in the state. Urban farming may not be an NFA food policy, but it addresses local food production and preservation just as the NFA did.

²²⁴ Monica M. White “Sisters of the Soil: Urban Gardening as Resistance in Detroit.” *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 5, no. 1 (2011): 13–28. 15 <https://doi.org/10.2979/racethmulglocon.5.1.13>.

²²⁵ “Existing Land Use and Zoning” Land Use. 3-2, 2014, <https://cityofraleigh0drupal.blob.core.usgovcloudapi.net/drupal-prod/COR22/CPUSection03Land%20Use.pdf>

²²⁶ Jermaine Hinds “Best Practices for the Sustainable urban farm” Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, 2023, <https://www.sare.org/resources/best-practices-for-the-sustainable-urban-farm/>

Conclusion

The North Carolina Chapter of the NFA laid out the blueprint on how to achieve food security and food sovereignty, and it is up to modern-day food justice efforts to implement it. Investigating the methods of the NFA and how they conducted their research has shown three ways in which they established food sovereignty in their communities in North Carolina.

North Carolina needs to confront its monocultural agricultural system for food sovereignty to prevail. Growing diversified crops instead of cotton or tobacco challenged the system of agriculture, which steered the state towards increased food production. When NFA members diversified their farms, they opened opportunities to create self-sustaining communities that did not have to rely on white owned businesses to buy food. The post-war years were also a testament to this because of the industrial agricultural rise; despite this, the NFA continued to promote small farming practices that not only benefited members but also their broader communities.

Education is arguably the most important way the NFA was able to achieve food sovereignty. Vocational agricultural educators engaged with their members to pass on intellectual knowledge on how to farm for not just themselves but for the community. Teaching African American boys to preserve their vegetables and to adopt better farming techniques prepared the future generation of farmers to become more economically and nutritionally successful. Former members of the NFA went on to become agricultural leaders in the education streamlining, a pipeline from student to future educator. Off of this foundation, the survival of efforts to maintain food sovereignty persisted.

The current federal administration has begun to steer away from climate-smart farming and has turned towards the proliferation of industrial farming. Recently, the USDA has begun to

cancel funding for climate-smart farming.²²⁷ This puts farmers at risk of not only losing profit but also their farms. Agriculture can be a cause of gas emissions and a victim of them. Livestock-based agriculture contributes nearly 15% of greenhouse gas emissions and spawns deforestation along with pollution.²²⁸ The cessation of funding to adopt better farming practices only creates a breeding ground for more climate-related challenges for farmers and the world. To go even further, the government is erasing the data on climate change's relation to agriculture.²²⁹ Thus, it makes it harder for meaningful agriculture policy.

The government has not stopped with gutting climate change initiatives, but is attacking institutions that can help African American farmers make a resurgence. The government has issued a pause on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives (DEI), which directly impacts the mobility of African American farmers. Efforts for creating better food access in African American communities are taking a hit, and educational institutions are on the chopping block as well. The USDA sponsors the 1890 Scholars program and grants full-ride scholarships to students who attend HBCU Land Grant Universities. This program initially was suspended by the current presidential administration but has been reinstated due to public pressure.²³⁰ This is a

²²⁷ Lisa Held “Updated: USDA Cancels Climate-Smart Commodities Program, but Some Projects May Continue” Civil Eats, April 14, 2025, <https://civileats.com/2025/04/14/usda-cancels-climate-smart-commodities-program-but-some-projects-may-continue/>

²²⁸ Karlie Conzachi “It may be uncomfortable, but we need to talk about it: the animal agriculture industry and zero waste” University of Colorado Boulder, March 15, 2022, <https://www.colorado.edu/ecenter/2022/03/15/it-may-be-uncomfortable-we-need-talk-about-it-animal-agriculture-industry-and-zero-waste>

²²⁹ Annabelle Timsit “Farmers sue USDA after agency deletes climate change data” *The Washington post*, February 25, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2025/02/25/farmers-lawsuit-usda-trump-climate-change/>

²³⁰ Elizabeth Crisp, “Under pressure, White House reinstates HBCU scholars program”, *The Hill*, February 25, 2025, <https://thehill.com/homenews/education/5163666-usda-resumes-hbcu-agriculture-scholarship/>

victory in preserving agricultural institutions. It is a warning of how far the administration is willing to go to dismantle years of agriculture policy.

Recently, the most disheartening action by the USDA is the cancellation of the Local Foods for School Program (LFS), which provided federal funds for schools to purchase food grown locally from farmers.²³¹ This program provided much-needed fresh food to schools versus imported produce from out of state. LFS creates regional food systems and gives aid to small farmers who can sell their produce directly to consumers and provide food with nutritional value. The dissolution of the program not only puts a hole in regional food systems but strips children of the much-needed nutrition in a state where 1 out of 6 children are food insecure. This program could be a tool in creating food sovereignty, instead, it further hurts farmers who will take losses from the closing of a lucrative market.

Given the current lack of organized agricultural support for African Americans, communities need to foster food security and food sovereignty outside of government channels. The fact that the government overlooks the difficulties African American communities face in accessing healthy food is significant. Instead, it serves as a catalyst to fuel community-led efforts. There are two ways in which African Americans can achieve food sovereignty in their communities.

One of the most important ways is by promoting food production and food preservation. The industrialized food system controls the diets of African Americans. True food sovereignty entails the planting and production of food for African Americans by African Americans.

²³¹ Aimee Picchi, “USDA cancels \$1 billion in funding for schools and food banks to buy food from local suppliers” *CBS News*, March 13, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/usda-cancels-local-food-purchasing-food-banks-school-meals/>

Instituting gardens in both rural and urban areas can be beneficial to sustaining local and regional food systems. Small-scale livestock management is necessary as well. The NFA utilized small-acreage farming, a method that people can still use today through market gardening. The production of food crops will be supported by agricultural diversification. Agricultural diversification will support the production of food crops. Farmers will grow an array of crops that will help rectify the problem of food security and food sovereignty in North Carolina.

The NFA, most importantly, represented an educational institution with the sole purpose of educating young African American males. In modern times, establishing agricultural education in African American communities for youth of both male and female can keep the African American farming traditions in practice. African American men and women both have historical roles in agriculture, and the new version of the NFA must engage with both roles. Agricultural leaders saw the merger of the NFA and FFA as enacting equality. The reality is that the merger was a disintegration of an institutional pillar in the African American community. This also brings into question the effects of segregation on African Americans. Segregation stifled the success of African Americans, but the NFA thrived in being an exclusively black organization. There is clearly strength in organizations that specialize in specifically training African Americans in the field of agriculture. A modern version of the NFA must arise that includes both men and women.

With the preservation and cultivation of food crops and the creation of institutions in agricultural education, African American communities in North Carolina can determine their food systems. This does not mean that there will not need to be a political element to maintaining food sovereignty long term; rather, the foundation must be community-based. Communities must also seek political power locally to maintain institutions and secure long-term funding for food

sovereignty efforts. While the federal government has opted out of supporting local farmers, local governments have a role and a duty to pick up the mantle to continue these efforts.

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