

A Brief History of America's Black Farmers from the Past to Present

January 31, 2022

by Eric Meredith, Intercultural Competency Consultant

In 2021, [20% of Black individuals](#) experienced food insecurity, which was more than three times the rate of white households. The Black community consistently faces high rates of hunger due to social, economic, and environmental challenges. To address the high rates of [food insecurity](#) amongst Black people, many people in the Black community are returning to their agricultural roots to ensure their neighbors have access to nutrient-rich foods. This post discusses the historical challenges of Black farmers and current opportunities to address food insecurity by controlling their food systems.

Over the past century, Black farmers in America have lost more than 12 million acres of farmland because of systemic racism, biased government policy, and inequitable social and business practices. To address this denial of equitable access to markets, congress recently passed a massive stimulus relief package that will provide five billion dollars to disadvantaged farmers. This relief package will benefit Black farmers in a way that some experts say no legislation has since the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#).

Today, just 1% of farmers in the United States identify as Black [according to the United States Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#). These numbers are down from 1 million Black farmers a century ago. In 1919, Black farmland ownership peaked at 16 to 19 million acres, about 14% of total agricultural land. A century later, 90% of that land has been lost. Even though farmers of color now account for only 2% of the agricultural land, Black farmers are drawing strength from their long history of agricultural production as a strategy to address food insecurity and improve the health of local communities.

In a modern-day example of food justice advocacy, the [Detroit Black Community Food Security Network \(DBCFSN\)](#) took action to ensure residents in Detroit had access to nutrient-rich foods

during the COVID-19 pandemic. On a seven-acre, organic farm known as D-Town Farm, DBCFSN members and volunteers started a seed-sharing program by distributing packages containing common vegetable seeds and providing video tutorials that detailed how to start a garden. DBCFSN collaborated with the martial arts school, [Alkebu-lan Village](#), to create a raised-bed distribution of 4' x 4' garden beds, compost, and topsoil to community members. In another collaborative partnership, [Oakland Avenue Urban Farm](#) and DBCFSN teamed up to provide safe, contactless produce pick-up through a joint online ordering platform.

The food-based resilience practices of DBCFSN, Alkebu-lan Village, and Oakland Avenue Urban Farm can be traced to African women braiding seeds in their hair before enduring the Middle Passage and demanding access to small plots of land to grow foods from their homelands. Similar to the provision grounds of the slavery period, today's Black farmers view nutritious food access as an important strategy to be liberated from social, political, and economic oppression.

Feeding America's "Black Employees of Feeding America" employee resource group helped to inform today's piece.

Eric Meredith is an intercultural competency consultant for Feeding America. He currently serves as a Tribal Relations Specialist at a large government agency. Prior to his current role, Eric was a community nutrition education program manager for the University of Illinois and the federal government.

Search News

or Filter by

