INTERSECTIONS OF EQUITABLE FARMING AND ANTI-HUNGER EFFORTS IN KENTUCKY:

LEARNING FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE AND GUIDANCE FOR ALLY ORGANIZATIONS

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This report was written by Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellows Amira Iwuala and Morgan McKinney. We would first like to thank the Congressional Hunger Center for giving us the opportunity to be part of this amazing program and cohort of people committed to ending hunger and poverty in the United States. We would also like to extend our deepest gratitude to our field site organization, Community Farm Alliance, without whom this report would not be possible. Community Farm Alliance’s work has taught us an abundance about the power and importance of grassroots change in the food system, and the members and staff have been critical teachers for us. Additionally, we would like to thank Tiffany Bellfield El-Amin, Cassia Herron, and Kurt Mason for sharing their experience and expertise as food justice advocates for Black farmers and leaders in their communities. The work they do is felt by many and cannot be overstated. We would also like to specifically thank our supervisor, Martin Richards, and Dr. Julie Zimmerman for offering direct feedback and resources for this report and for sharing their vast insights into the Kentucky food and agriculture systems.

“If you want to go fast, you travel alone. If you want to go far, you travel together.”
- Ancient African Proverb
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Farming and hunger are intimately linked and Black farmers in Kentucky are leading anti-hunger work in their communities. Decades of exclusion, discrimination, theft, and disinvestment have led to a near disappearance of Black farmers and Black land ownership in Kentucky, further exacerbating economic inequities across racial groups and contributing to deeply rooted, racist structures that explain the high rates of hunger in the Black community. Ally organizations can take action to promote equity in the anti-hunger and anti-poverty movement by understanding these histories and experiences, and by looking to successful examples of community-driven solutions in Kentucky as guidance for how to support similar initiatives in their own regions.

COMMUNITY FARM ALLIANCE

Community Farm Alliance is a member-based non-profit organization in Kentucky that seeks to uplift and advocate for strong family-scale agriculture in local economies and communities. They do this by organizing and encouraging cooperation between urban and rural communities through leadership development and grassroots, democratic policy action. Community Farm Alliance is a predominantly White institution and in 2019 adopted a commitment to equity where they commit to taking steps that

1. “allow us to regularly evaluate and address equity concerns within our organizational culture and structures
2. help educate us as individuals to better recognize the systems of power and oppression that are at play in our work, both historically and in the present
3. ensure that the voices of historically marginalized and socially disadvantaged populations and affected communities are always elicited, heard, and brought to the forefront of our conversations
4. embrace equity and justice on a broader level by acknowledging the specific barriers that accompany classism, racism, sexism, geography, xenophobia, ableism, etc. in Kentucky
5. prioritize strategic collaborative partnerships with organizations that are addressing issues of equity both within and outside of our sector
6. will help us to determine measures of success for this work, including setting up a system of accountability and periodic re-evaluation of our progress and goals”
**Cooperative Extension Service:** Community and rural education programs that include support for farmers ranging from agricultural research to business development.

**Food Insecurity:** A lack of consistent access to enough food for an active and healthy life.

**Food Sovereignty:** The right of communities to define their own food and agriculture systems with access to healthy and culturally appropriate food grown through ecologically sustainable methods. Food sovereignty rebuilds relationships between people and the land and between food producers and consumers.

**Gatekeeping:** Individuals, organizations, or institutions who hold a set of knowledge and the power to decide who has access to such information, resources, and opportunities. Without intentionally equitable dissemination of this information, gatekeepers are at risk of perpetuating racist systems.

**Heirs Property:** Also known as intestate succession, is the transfer of land that is inherited without a will or official documentation of ownership.

**Land-Grant Institutions:** Institutions of higher education in the United States designated by its state with focuses in agriculture and mechanical arts to deliver agricultural research, education, and extension programs. Land-Grant Institutions receive federal benefits of the Morrill Acts of 1862, 1890, and 1994. 1890 Land-Grant Institutions are historically Black universities that were established under the Second Morrill Act of 1890.

**Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs):** an unofficial designation of any institution in which White-identifying folks make up the majority of members, students, or employees of a given institution.

**Socially Disadvantaged Farmer (SDFs):** Farmers belonging to groups that have been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice. SDFs include farmers who are Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Hispanic or Latino, and Asian or Pacific Islander.
Although African-Americans have played a paramount role in Kentucky’s agricultural development—starting with the deep-rooted ties to and investments in slavery that have contributed to the current economies and industries across the Commonwealth—Black farmers represent less than 450 of the more than 76,000 agriculture operations in Kentucky despite making up 8.5% of the state population. At only .5%, this is less than the national average of Black farmers in the United States of 1.4%. The average farm acreage size for a Black-owned farm in Kentucky is 95 acres, compared to 171 acres for White-owned farms. Furthermore, Black-owned farms average 31% less in their average market value of products sold and their products are valued at just over $10 million in comparison to White farmers whose products are valued at over $5 billion.

According to a 2017 U.S. Department of Agriculture Census of Agriculture report, Kentucky Black farmers earn $82,000 less a year compared with their white counterparts. Given the circumstances of small farm-generated and net farm sales, Black farmers are surviving at or below subsistence level or relying on off-farm income. This experience is reaffirmed by the results of the Black Farmers Needs Assessment conducted by Community Farm Alliance in 2020, where farming was largely reported as a minimal or supplemental source of income, and in many cases, cost farmers more money than their earnings.

In Kentucky, net cash farm income for Black-owned farms was $3,050 compared to $20,892 for White-owned farms. Low net cash farm income and limited acreage contributes to increased off-farm workforce for many Black farmers. Disparities in farm revenue of Black- and White-owned farms and consequential land loss of Black farmers can be largely attributed to non-participation in farm programs due to exclusion, decreased access to resources (including wealth, technologies, equipment, etc.) and institutionalized discrimination within county, state, and federally sponsored programs.
Decades of USDA favoritism toward white farmers expressed through both biased and systematic denial of farm loans to Black farmers have contributed to Black land loss. Black farmers are more likely to face exclusion from federal, state, and county programs as a result of racial discrimination. In 1997, a class-action lawsuit entitled Pigford v. Glickman was filed on behalf of Black farmers against the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The suit alleged that the USDA had discriminated against Black farmers on the basis of race and intentionally neglected to investigate or adequately respond to complaints from Black farmers from 1983 to 1997.

Prior to the lawsuit, for many years, Black farmers had complained of unfair treatment when applying to decision-making local county committees for farm loans or assistance. Black farmers were being denied USDA farm loans or experienced unreasonable longer wait times for loan approval compared to non-minority farmers. Many Black farmers contended that they were battling foreclosure and financial distress because of USDA denial of timely loans and debt restructuring.

In 1999, the USDA admitted fault and agreed to a $2.3 billion settlement— the largest civil rights settlement in history. Although racist and discriminatory language has since been removed from USDA policy, Black farmers still receive little government assistance compared to their White counterparts and often face neglect and insensitivity to their needs as farmers.

Discrimination was widespread beyond the allocation of farm operation loans. Black farmers lacked representation on the Kentucky Department of Agriculture’s local branches and committees in charge of federal loans that were largely run by all-White county committees. This was critical in the success of White-owned farms because extra federally allocated funds would repeatedly go to White farmers while the same financial support was not offered to Black farmers. To this day, many Black farmers deal with having to navigate around the pitfalls presented by racism within their counties in order to maintain farm operations. Despite the well-understood impact of USDA discriminatory practices against Black farmers on Black land ownership, to this present day, there is still a paucity of intentional outreach to Black farmers about federally funded programs that can mitigate the disinvestment in Black farming communities.

Similar to the racial bias many rural Black farmers faced at the hands of federal agencies, many Black farmers in Kentucky experienced group and institutional racism that hindered their ability to access loans and assistance. In a 1992 Oral History Project conducted by the University of Kentucky, many Black farmers recount their experiences with racially biased lending institutions that favored their White farmer neighbors and denied them access to loans. The USDA largely worked with large-scale farmers and landowners and neglected giving small, Black farms the time, energy, and resources for opportunities. White-owned and large farms found out information at a faster rate, giving them more time for advanced planning and preparation for grants and loan applications compared to small, Black farms.
In 1862, Congress passed the Morrill Act which created land-grant universities: an institution designated by its state with focuses in agriculture and mechanical arts. The land-grant universities have evolved through federal legislation and fund matching. This legislative mandate helped extend higher education to broader segments of the U.S. population, particularly in the Rural South. A second Morrill Act was passed in 1890, with the aim to prohibit racial discrimination in admissions policies for colleges receiving land grant federal funds. Despite the passing of the Second Morrill Act, states could evade this provision by maintaining separate institutions where federal funds would be divided “equitably”9. In 1890, Kentucky State University was designated a land-grant college. In Kentucky, there are two land grant institutions: University of Kentucky (1862) and Kentucky State University (1890).

The land-grant university system has a three-fold mission of agricultural education, research, and community extension. With funding from the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, states were allowed to decide which land-grant institutions would administer the state’s Smith-Lever Act funds to establish local extension systems that disseminated scientific agriculture beyond the campus walls to farms and community members and increase government involvement in agriculture. Cooperative Extension Services are community and rural education programs that not only “provide a direct impact to the citizens of each state” but also include programs to “support small farmers and agricultural business development”10.

Community Extension Services are operated to provide non-formal higher education with a focus on farming and mechanical skills to agricultural producers and communities through its networks. Many agricultural innovations and technologies that propelled farming along were spread by hired county agents that exclusively worked with white farmers. The Smith-Lever Act did not mention any racial division of funds, meaning that all government funds allotted for extension research and education in most Southern states went to exclusively white land-grant colleges. These county agents were gatekeepers of vital agricultural education and access to agriculture technologies that helped farmers adapt to market and environment changes.
Up until the mid-20th century, history of anti-black Jim Crow laws and agency-wide discrimination within the Cooperative Extension Service of Kentucky’s land-grant universities contributed to the intentional marginalization of Black farmers. Many Southern protests did not want extension systems to be contained at Black land-grant institutions. Although an 1890 land-grant institution was established in Kentucky, the University of Kentucky was chosen as the administer of the Smith-Lever funds and oversaw the hiring of county extension agents, leading to the hiring of almost exclusively white extension agents. Large disparities in services provided by extension agents between Blacks and Whites existed. Cooperative Extension Services were segregated, and Black agents were hired to only work with Black farmers through Kentucky State University.

Federal extension officials tolerated and supported excluding Blacks from federal assistance from its inception. Seaman Knapp, known as the father of extension work, believed that African Americans should be “co-operators” who farmed under White guidance and believed that whites should be able to determine when or if Black extension agents should be employed in their community. He believed that Black farmers better benefitted from observing White agents conducting demonstrations on White-owned farms as they “would not benefit directly from scientific farming education” due to their dearth of “intellectual capacity for scientific agriculture”.

The popular belief of Black inferiority not only impacted the low employment of Black extension agents, it caused insufficient and untargeted farm advancement and innovation support for Black farmers, further marginalizing Black farmers and their communities. Black farmers were not made aware of farm improvements and agriculture novel technologies that could have strengthened the economic and operational viability of their farms at the same rate as their White counterparts. As county service agents controlled the distribution of federal aid to local farmers, they utilized these funds to systematically eliminate the Black farmer. This further exacerbated the racial economic gap between Black and White farmers in Kentucky.
Farmland ownership also plays a significant role in small farm survival, and issues with heir property ownership have contributed to lower farm survival among Black farmers. Heir property, also known as intestate succession, is the transfer of land that is inherited without a will. Descendants, or heirs, have the right to use the property but lack a clear and marketable title to the property. This means that any of the heirs can force a property sale; making the heir property vulnerable to legal trickery and speculators who wish to acquire a small share of the property. The land speculators can then turn around and force the sale of the entire land, often buying it far below fair market value.

Without a clear title to the land, heirs struggle with eligibility for USDA programs—including lending, disaster relief, and participation in county committees—due to an inability to meet program requirements, such as proof of land ownership to acquire a farm number. Heirs have also struggled with participating in government housing rehabilitation programs and land improvement programs since they cannot utilize their farm as collateral for business loans or contemporary mortgages. Heir property has become the most wide-spread form of land property ownership within the Black community and has been found to be correlated with low wealth in Black communities.

The high incidence of heir property ownership can be traced back to the end of Slavery, when newly-freed African Americans were unable to structure stable ownership due to the inability to access attorneys. In fact, the Federation of Southern Cooperatives estimates that 60% of Black-owned land is held as heirs’ property. In addition, deep-rooted distrust for judicial institutions, lack of proper knowledge of heirs’ property, and decreased interest in land, especially by young rural Blacks, has made Black farmers vulnerable to heir property partition and economic risk position.

This strips Black families of a significant amount of their overall wealth, with land being one of the single greatest assets in the Black community. Ignoring the disparities between Black and White farmers only exacerbates the racial hierarchy within agriculture and further deprives Black farmers and their communities from economic mobility.
SOLUTIONS IN ACTION:
SUPPORTING BLACK FARMERS
To address some of these inequities, Community Farm Alliance (CFA) realized the need for a holistic approach to understand the experiences, realities, and barriers of Black farmers in Kentucky and engaged in a larger conversation about equity in the farm and food system. To begin this work in their own organization, they implemented the Black Farmers’ Needs Assessment in 2020.

The objective of the Black Farmers’ Needs Assessment was to identify the challenges, needs, and resources of Black farmers in Kentucky. In order to find opportunities for intentional intervention to support the viability of Black farms in Kentucky, the assessment provided space for Community Farm Alliance to listen and learn. Prior to the Black Farmers’ Needs Assessment, many conversations between farmers and other stakeholders in Kentucky’s local agriculture system uncovered gaps in resources, communication, and support for Black farmers. These conversations led to the identification of the topics for the Black Farmers’ Needs Assessment.

Topics included understanding current farm operations, production, marketing, business planning and record keeping, and technical assistance and resources that farmers are utilizing. In addition, the assessment also collected information on the impact of climate variability and extreme weather events on small, Black farms in order to assist in finding resources to help build resilient farms. Although there were only 30 participants in the initial needs assessment, the challenges and needs identified aligned with the experiences of minoritized, small-scale farmers in the United States.

Conducting a Black farmer needs assessments can provide a framework to identify where and how resources from local and statewide organizations can be targeted. It starts the conversation on recognizing community needs and advocating for improvement and change.

In Kentucky, there is an insufficient understanding of the challenges facing farmers of color in the Commonwealth, hindering progress towards successfully addressing the needs of farmers of color and connecting them to relevant resources.

Kentucky has abundant existing resources and agricultural organizations tailored to supporting and providing support to farmers; and CFA has established partnerships with these organizations and strives to connect small and minoritized farmers with these resources. This promotes targeted financial support for Black farmers by being responsive to farmer defined needs. Ally organizations can utilize targeted and intentional needs assessment that connects with Black farmers and let them know that their crops and concerns are valued and use their responses to prioritize efforts in supporting Black farmers and black land ownership.

DO YOU KNOW A KENTUCKY BLACK FARMER?

We are striving to appropriately serve our Kentucky Black farmers. Within the many conversations between farmers and Kentucky’s local food systems, we have continued to discover the gaps in the resources, communication and support for Black farmers, exclusively. This assessment is designed to better equip ourselves and other organizations with the tools to better connect with Black farmers.

TAKE THE ASSESSMENT TODAY AT TINYURL.COM/BFNEEDS

FOR QUESTIONS EMAIL: LAURIE@CFAKY.ORG | TIFFANY@CFAKY.ORG
Targeting resources directly to farmers and communities of color is one way ally organizations can redistribute power. With long histories of discriminatory funding in agriculture and economic inequity, setting aside funds to be used specifically by BIPOC communities helps ensure that organizations are being intentional about who is receiving their support.

One of the repeated findings of the Black Farmer’s Needs Assessment was a need for financial assistance. When asked “What are your main production challenges?”, respondents frequently cited things like “cost of extra labor”, “money”, “capital”, and “not having income to pay for employees”. Similarly, 57% of respondents cited funding as a limiting factor in growing their business.

Targeted resources are one strategy being used by organizations like Community Farm Alliance and Black Soil to build equity into the food and agriculture sector. The Kentucky Black Farmer Fund is one example of a targeted resources strategy that recognizes these injustices and seeks to offer direct support. 2020, Community Farm Alliance received funding from Farm Aid for Covid relief, and the CFA Board elected to devote funds to specifically create the Black Farmer Fund that is overseen by a BIPOC Review Committee. Additional funding was also pooled from other sources such as private donations to expand the fund*.

This fund is particularly important in Kentucky because of the low representation of Black folks in agriculture. This means that when funding becomes available, it is often highly competitive grant assistance which can make accessing it especially difficult and can further marginalize and exclude Black farmers.

The Kentucky Black Farmer Fund provides one-time grants of up to $750 to Black-operated, family-scale farmers in Kentucky. This funding is to be used to meet new demands brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to being a Black-operated, family farm in Kentucky, eligible recipients must also have fewer than ten employees, be actively part of the local food system, currently farming, and selling products through local markets such as farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture, roadside markets, farm share, or local restaurants. While this is certainly not a large sum of money, the fund lays the groundwork to expand grants available specifically to BIPOC farmers and acknowledges the historic exclusion from lending and grant funding.

*Farm Aid 12%, CFA General Support 13%, Fundraising campaign 22%, Luther Mason Memorial 1%, Just Transition Fund 10%, Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky 21%, Gates Foundation 21%
2501 Grant Program

For decades, disinvestment in programs and communities of color in Kentucky have made it impossible to build infrastructures that promote health and social equity. Although Kentucky has significant existing resources and agricultural agencies that provide assistance and aid to farmers, many socially disadvantaged farmers (SDFs) who have historically experienced discrimination from USDA programs are unaware of these agencies, resources, and opportunities. This is due to inadequate outreach and assistance efforts by these programs and a history of well known discrimination.

To mitigate the disparity impediments experienced by farmers of color, the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program, also known as the Section 2501 Grant Program, is the only farm bill committed to addressing the needs of minoritized farmers.

The 2501 Grant Program was created through the 1990 Farm Bill to help SDF who have historically experienced limited access to USDA programs and services. The racial and ethnic groups covered under the 2501 Grant Program include African Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans, and Latinos. This grant is provided to assist organizations that assist farmers of color. Kentucky State University was the grant recipient of the 2501 Grant, and CFA is one of their partner organizations.

FOC Support Program

In response to the significant decline of Black farmers in Kentucky and gaps in support for farmers of color, CFA has established the Building a Comprehensive Support System for Kentucky Farmers of Color—the FOC Support Program. In alignment with the priorities of The 2501 Grant Program, the FOC Support Program will undertake a multi-tiered and holistic approach to expand the long-term profitability and sustainability of Kentucky’s socially disadvantaged existing and new farming enterprise. This program is led by CFA and working in close coordination with project partners Black Soil, Kentucky State University (KSU), the Organic Association of Kentucky (OAK), the Kentucky Horticulture Council (KHC), and the larger network of Kentucky farm support organizations.

It will be implemented statewide, including in 73 Persistent Poverty Communities and 144 Opportunity Zones. Persistent Poverty Communities are communities in counties that have maintained poverty rates of 20% or more for the past 30 years. Opportunity Zones are low-income and distressed districts where investors receive significant federal tax incentives for investing in a variety of economic development.
This work will be led by an advisory council constituted of farmers of color. In 2020, the FOC Support Program conducted a comprehensive needs assessment to pinpoint the specific met and unmet needs of Kentucky’s Black farmers and expand overall assessment to all farmers of color in Kentucky. A few of the objectives of the FOC Support Program include:

- creating a holistic support system that will develop statewide strategic plans for tailored technical assistance, outreach, future programming, and connecting SDFs to USDA resources and certifications

- utilizing the voices of impacted farmers to increase visibility of indispensable and vibrant contributions to agriculture in Kentucky by SDFs, through a multi-organizational communications and marketing strategy

- establishing the Kentucky Farmer of Color Capital Fund to expand funding through grants and loans to SDFs with minimal and straightforward reporting requirements

“This work is just a scaffold of the intentional equity work for farmers of color in Kentucky surrounding targeted financial support and intentional partnership with Black farmers. The Patchwork Initiative is just a framework example of how agricultural support organizations can better prioritize the needs of Black farmers through multi-organization collaborative efforts. By including various agricultural organizations, reach is broadened and participation by current and prospective Black farmers is increased. In addition, relationships between Black farmers and USDA’s local, state, regional, and national offices are built and strengthened; as a result, improving participation among Black farmers in USDA programs.

“Diversity is needed—not only socially— but it is critical to the agriculture industry.”

-Ashley Smith (Louisville Courier Journal, 2020
Cofounder of Black Soil Kentucky
Tiffany Bellfield El-Amin, a Kentucky native, farmer, and community food justice organizer, spearheads the work in racial equity at Community Farm Alliance. At CFA, she works on the Kentucky Farm to Table initiative that establishes linkages in the local food value chain in order to promote and support farm-to-institutions. She serves as a liaison between farmers and agriculture agencies and ensures that Black farmers are intentionally invited to participate in federal funding and assistance when it’s available. She advocates for vulnerable Black farmers who have been subject to prejudice and denied loans while explaining the loan process to Black farmers. With capturing and understanding the experiences of Black farmers, Tiffany has led the way in using storytelling to influence social and policy change in Kentucky’s agriculture and promotes the opportunity to partner with Kentucky agriculture agencies to better serve minoritized farmers in the state.
While there are many ways predominantly White institutions disproportionately hold power that uphold systems of oppression, recognition of this power is the first step toward redistribution. One role predominantly White institutions in the food and agriculture sector often hold is that of information and knowledge of resources. For Community Farm Alliance, much of this knowledge is centered on resources for small farmers in Kentucky. While Community Farm Alliance works to disseminate this information to their member base, it is important to recognize that BIPOC communities are often not connected into the same networks as their White counterparts for a myriad of reasons that go beyond the scope of this report. In this way, organizations like Community Farm Alliance hold gatekeeping power and without intentional efforts to disseminate information to minoritized groups, they further uphold systems of inequity. As such, organizations committed to racial equity must be intentional about ensuring BIPOC communities are receiving this information and support.

Equitable resource-sharing is part of the solution to address the disparities in resource access that has historically been both intentionally kept from farmers of color and systematically inaccessible due to the methods of marketing and distribution. In Kentucky, Food Justice Organizer Tiffany Bellfield El-Amin led the effort to compile a toolkit specifically for Black, Indigenous, and other farmers of color in Kentucky. The goal of the toolkit was to create an accessible document that highlights a range of resources for farmers in Kentucky that could help small farmers make their businesses more sustainable, profitable, and connected in their communities. These resources include business development tools, sources of financial support, and even mental health resources. While this document was specific to Kentucky, other states would likely benefit from a similar toolkit tailored to their region.

Importantly, creation of this toolkit began with a deep understanding of the needs and assets of Black farmers in Kentucky. Knowledge was collected through Tiffany Bellfield El-Amin’s own lived experience and expertise as a Black, woman farmer and her understanding of others’ experiences in her community in addition to the results of the Black Farmer’s Needs Assessment.

Other states may use our toolkit as a model for their own, however, they should also construct a process that identifies the unique needs, assets, and histories of farmers of color in their region. Each process may look different, but we will share ours as a starting point to accelerate the development of tools tailored to each unique region.
1. Assess Needs, Assets, and Histories

Construction of a toolkit should be informed by an assessment of the needs, assets, and histories of the targeted community. While resource-sharing through a toolkit should seek to address problems, looking to existing community assets is an important way to leverage more sustainable and effective solutions. For Community Farm Alliance, the toolkit was informed by a combination of lived experience and more formal data collection through the Black Farmers’ Needs Assessment. When assessing the needs, assets, and histories, lived experience should be regarded as expertise and should be taken just as seriously as systematic research results.

2. Analyze Results and Input

Once input is collected, the results need to be analyzed. During analysis, identify the greatest and most common needs, but don’t disregard the others. Even if a need is only identified by a small portion of the community, efforts should still be made to address it.

3. Brainstorm Relevant Organizations and Resources

Pool together a list of relevant organizations and resources that can fill the gaps identified during the assessment phase. Resources should be pooled from members of the organization, partner organizations, and community members to get as many sources as possible.
Identify Points of Contact

Where possible, for each of the identified resources, identify a person who can offer direct assistance if needed and include their contact information in the toolkit. As much as possible, utilize contacts that BIPOC farmers have had good experiences and relationships with in the past! Update contacts as needed.

Organize Resources into Categories

Users of the toolkit should be able to quickly access information that is relevant to them. One way to increase accessibility is to organize the resources into different categories and create a separate page in the toolkit for each category. Our categories were as follows: Business planning, marketing, and branding; education in farming; financial support and grants; legal aid; mental health; community engagement and networking opportunities; local conferences and events for farmers; and contact directories.

Describe Each Resource

For each resource, write a short blurb on what it is and why it is beneficial to farmers. Include a link directly to the resource and list the point of contact if applicable. Focus on brevity and clarity to increase the accessibility of the toolkit. Avoid using acronyms without first identifying what they stand for.

BEST PRACTICES FOR TOOLKIT CREATION

- **DO** look to lived experience as expertise
- **DO** include BIPOC farmers in all phases of toolkit development including planning, assessment, construction, and distribution
- **DO** earn approval from contributing BIPOC farmers before publishing
- **DO** commit to learning the specific experiences and histories of the specific groups of farmers you are targeting (e.g., if seeking to support Black farmers, learn their specific experiences and disaggregate from generalizations of “BIPOC” experiences)
- **DO** be brief and straight to the point
- **DON’T** limit assessment and guidance to formal data collection
- **DON’T** lump together the diverse experiences and histories of BIPOC farmers into one narrow narrative
ADDRESSING RACIAL DISPARITIES IN HUNGER
In 2019, the USDA found that 13.7% of households in Kentucky are food insecure. When thinking about hunger in the Black community in Kentucky, most folks would first think to Kentucky’s largest and most populous city, Louisville—a city still experiencing the lasting impacts of redlining where distribution of resources varies widely across racial lines. Louisville’s redlining maps date as early as 1937 where the city was colored in disjointed chunks of green, blue, yellow, and red. Green and blue neighborhoods were deemed “A” and “B” neighborhoods signaling to potential investors that such neighborhoods were “good” investments, code for “free of Black people and not likely to be infiltrated by such populations.” Meanwhile, red or “D” neighborhoods were those that were predominantly comprised of Black families. They were described as “detrimental influences in a pronounced degree, undesirable population or an infiltration of it. Low percentage of home ownership, very poor maintenance... unstable incomes of the people... areas are broader than the so-called slum districts”. Yellow or “C” neighborhoods were those that physically separated the redlined neighborhoods from the green and blue neighborhoods i.e. the Black neighborhoods from the White neighborhoods.

Although redlining officially ended in 1951, it was quickly followed by a wave of White flight where White families fled to the suburbs in response to unbased fears that their property values would plummet when Black folks moved in. When White folks fled, they took their money, business, jobs, and grocery stores with them, leading to a lasting pattern of disinvestment in Black communities and West Louisville.
This same disinvestment can be seen in Louisville by looking at food access in the city. Across Louisville, more than 120,000 people live within food deserts. West Louisville has many food deserts as major retail grocers in the area have closed in large numbers and refuse to open new locations in the western half of the city. Since 2016, more than a dozen grocery stores have closed down, forcing low-income residents to spend more time and money to get food. Closures of these grocery stores have affected Louisville’s most vulnerable residents as almost 4% of households in the city live in a food desert.

Food insecurity rates in West Louisville are disproportionately higher than those in East Louisville. West Louisville is home to many of the most marginalized residents in the city including 28% of the city’s Black population and 23% of all households without vehicles.

As of 2017, this area had an average individual income of $14,600 and more than 8,000 households relied on federal food assistance. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, one in five people and one in four children are food insecure in Louisville. This lack of access is further exacerbated by the fact that there is a high number of West Louisville residents who are low income and do not have access to a vehicle, making it infeasible to get to the nearest grocery store. For many, they must instead rely on fast food, convenience stores, or take long bus rides to the nearest grocer.

While food deserts and hunger exist in urban centers, rural communities face many of the same problems in Kentucky. There is notably little to no data that disaggregates food insecurity rates in rural counties along racial groups. This fits into a larger trend of erasing Black presence in Appalachia despite their important histories in the region and is something that researchers should undertake moving forward. While beyond the scope of this paper, efforts to document these stories are being undertaken by Black in Appalachia, and more organizations should engage in this work. A key part of applying a racial equity lens to anti-hunger and anti-poverty work is doing the work of collecting data that can be disaggregated by race in order to identify disparities.
Just as the African American experience began with agriculture, African Americans have been pioneering and operationalizing cooperatives as an economic strategy since the first Africans arrived to the United States as indentured servants in the early 17th century. Early forms of cooperation included mutual insurance companies and collective farming. Community-based economic development promotes economic empowerment and security to marginalized communities of color that are victims of institutional racism and economic inequality.

Cooperative grocery stores have proven effective in increasing healthy food access in food insecure neighborhoods and communities while providing community members decision-making power in their local food system. In response to the rising food insecurity rates in West Louisville, community organizers are working to establish the Louisville Community Grocery, the city’s first community-owned grocery store. This grocery store will be operated under a co-op model based on a shared belief that “access to healthy food is a human right and our communities’ self-reliance in providing for our food needs is essential.”

The Louisville Community Grocery is committed to addressing the need for greater access to fresh produce and fighting food insecurity in their community, especially in West End and downtown neighborhoods in Louisville. This cooperatively-owned grocery store supports the local economy by providing healthy and affordable food while utilizing equitable employment and ownership practices. The goal is to build a grocery store that is accountable to the needs of the neighborhood because it is locally-owned and operated by the community. In this way, West End residents are able to be their own pioneering leaders in food justice in their neighborhoods.

Shared ownership of the grocery can be purchased for a small annual fee, however, there are subsidized shares available to those who have been systematically disadvantaged. Those with greater privilege and/or access to financial resources are encouraged to make donations to support a discounted ownership.
This model promotes equity through the redistribution of power and resources to create an environment that gives all community members power and voice and promises more equitable distribution of profits back into the community.

Not only is this co-op likely to curb food insecurity rates in West Louisville, it is also a source of financial and emotional empowerment of the community and can set the groundwork for the expansion of cooperative economies in the community. Having agency in local food systems can build stronger communities, support economic mobility, and promote food sovereignty. This model shows that non-farmers can also play an essential role in local food system development. Consumers can help create a marketspace where small farmers can sell their product.

"The role of cooperative in the Black community and among Black farmers are the same: build power & self sufficiency"

-Cassia Heron
President, Louisville Association for Community Economics

This provides the opportunity to transform the nature of relationships between farmers and city residents and allow non-farmers to have a connection to land, even if they do not own it, by learning where their food is locally sourced from. Cooperative groceries in Black communities promote the collective building of wealth and uplift community health.

Ally organizations can promote these types of community driven co-ops through financial investment and resource sharing. One example of this is the Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development’s guidance for building co-ops. The organization offers a set of online resources to assess business feasibility and tools and resources to get started. They also work with groups organizing cooperatives to assist them with development and connect people to each other.
Black Soil Kentucky, founded in 2017 by co-founders Ashley Smith and Trevor M. Claiborn “Farmer Brown”, is a Lexington-based organization that supports and facilitates agritourism and farm-to-table events for Black farmers around the state. It connects Kentuckians from both urban and rural areas with urban Black farmers and producers with the aim of uplifting Black farming heritage, rebuilding and strengthening the relationship between Black community members—older and younger generations, and reconnecting them with their traditional roots.

Black Soil has also pioneered efforts in diversifying Kentucky’s agriculture and striving for more equity in local agriculture industries by scaling up and building capacity for small Kentucky family-owned farms. From assisting farmers with receiving agriculture and food certifications, to loans and grants assistance to purchase high tunnels and make land improvements, to digital marketing for farm businesses, Black Soil has supported the competitiveness of farmers’ operations and increasing market share for Black farmers. Black Soil teaches that consumers can make an economic impact on local farm industries, providing opportunities to advance agriculture justice and increase food access in food insecure communities.
In December 2021 Tiffany Bellfield El-Amin partnered with Black Soil to host “Moms in Mind” in Lexington. The event was organized to teach mothers receiving SNAP how they could redeem those benefits at Black Soil by either purchasing specific items or registering for their CSA program. They also held a cooking demonstration to show participants different ways to prepare the vegetables they could buy from Black Soil. At this event, many participants shared that they had great interest in eating locally-grown produce, but transportation was a major barrier to accessing healthy, locally grown food. Black Soil’s CSA program serves as one way to overcome the transportation barrier, especially since SNAP benefits can be utilized to pay for the subscription.

This program is being further expanded in 2022 as Black Soil will be a new participant in Community Farm Alliance’s Fresh Rx for MoMs program. This program aims to get healthy, local food to mothers on Medicaid by giving them vouchers to use at local farmer’s markets. Black Soil will be the first participating producer that will offer a CSA option in addition to purchasing in person. By intentionally engaging Black led organizations in partnership, PWIs can look to community members who have a deep understanding of the problems at hand and can support viable solutions to address these issues.
Urban gardens have been shown to cultivate community building and empowerment and support growers in both urban and rural settings, increasing food security through food production in these communities. Russellville Urban Gardening Project, Inc. (RUGP), a small non-profit urban farming program located in Russellville, KY, educates youth on the significance of collective work through horticulture. The program’s inception began in Dr. Nancy J. Dawson’s backyard when she realized youth in her community had no knowledge of gardening and used her personal funds to share her knowledge of gardening.

RUGP was established after receiving a small farm program grant from land-grant university Kentucky State University. Small farm programs help youth understand the gardening aspect of developing urban farms in the community, including how communities can tend to the urban garden and practice better food habits. Volunteers and community members are able to get involved in agriculture by learning best practices to maintain the garden, familiarize themselves with where their food comes from, and participate in health/nutrition and art programs on site. The three-acre garden—now leased to the Urban Gardening Project after the city of Russellville took ownership of the land in 1989 due to neglect and failure of the owners to pay taxes—sits on land that has been in the Black community for more than a century.
RUGP was founded on the principle of “gardening for engagement”, a concept created by Dr. Dawson. It is an approach in which “community organizers, purposely, utilize and revitalize a community, while simultaneously teaching the community to preserve and protect the earth and its natural resources, while ensuring the health and welfare of humankind” 26. The Russellville Urban Gardening Project has catalyzed positive change in the community, been a restorative green retreat for urban dwellers, and educated Black youth in Russellville about the significance of small-scale agricultural production that can support the sustainability of their communities and improve food access.

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LEADER IN FOOD JUSTICE HIGHLIGHT

DR. NANCY J. DAWSON
A contributing factor to rural Black land loss is the growing disinterest in farming in the Black community by young people due to its once dark and exploitative history. Community gardens restore the relationship between Black people and the land, connect community members to nutritious foods, and promote overall health and wellbeing. In order to combat white supremacy in a food system that has long harbored resources for only White and affluent groups of people, sustainable development in local food systems should be defined and facilitated by the community. Urban agriculture, including community farms and gardens, has been largely advocated by middle-class white communities and have generated white spaces in communities of color. Shifting power structures in the food system by instating community gardens dictates equity in land access and tenure for communities of color and empowers these communities to understand and decide what foods can be purchased and grown in their communities. Urban gardens and farms not only stimulate food justice and food sovereignty but foster social capital, support community development, and improve community food security.

"Revitalize a community, while simultaneously teaching the community to preserve and protect the earth & its natural resources, while ensuring the health and welfare of humankind."

-Dr. Nancy J. Dawson
Founder, Russellville Community Garden Project, Inc.
Agriculture and anti-hunger policies are intimately linked not only in Kentucky but across the United States. Small-scale, local farmers are committed to feeding their communities and policies that create a level playing field for small farmers to compete against large-scale operations enables those farmers to do what they do best. If we, as organizations committed to equity and justice, wish to end hunger and poverty in the United States, we should not undermine the power and importance of local food systems development that prioritizes both producers and consumers. Support of small, family-owned farms supports local economies which helps lift small producers out of poverty, thereby decreasing food insecurity. Furthermore, anti-hunger solutions that look to get healthy, locally grown food onto the plates of people who are food insecure keep more dollars circulating in the local economy and can empower communities and public funding of such efforts can make these programs more sustainable.

In the United States, land ownership is a staple source of economic power and systematic Black land loss and theft of Black-owned land is one critical factor that has kept Black communities from equitable economic outcomes since the establishment of this country. Policies that promote equitable land access and offer protections for heirs property owners are not only to increase the wealth of the Black community, but would also save many Black farms. Black farmers in Kentucky are critical leaders in anti-hunger efforts in their communities.

Ally organizations, even those focused more on hunger than farming, should advocate for policies that right these wrongs. They should support targeted funding efforts to Black communities and should prioritize establishing decision-making boards with racially-equitable representation. Too often, decision-making positions at all levels, but especially in funding decisions, are held mostly by White folks. If we are serious about ending the cycle of exclusion of resources to farmers and communities of color, we have to prioritize redistributing decision making power in all aspects of our work to those who are most impacted.
Community Farm Alliance is a member-based non-profit organization in Kentucky that seeks to uplift and advocate for strong family-scale agriculture in local economies and communities. They do this by organizing and encouraging cooperation between urban and rural communities through leadership development and grassroots, democratic policy action. Community Farm Alliance is a predominantly White institution and in 2019 adopted a commitment to equity where they commit to taking steps that

1. “allow us to regularly evaluate and address equity concerns within our organizational culture and structures
2. help educate us as individuals to better recognize the systems of power and oppression that are at play in our work, both historically and in the present
3. ensure that the voices of historically marginalized and socially disadvantaged populations and affected communities are always elicited, heard, and brought to the forefront of our conversations
4. embrace equity and justice on a broader level by acknowledging the specific barriers that accompany classism, racism, sexism, geography, xenophobia, ableism, etc. in Kentucky
5. prioritize strategic collaborative partnerships with organizations that are addressing issues of equity both within and outside of our sector
6. will help us to determine measures of success for this work, including setting up a system of accountability and periodic re-evaluation of our progress and goals”
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