

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE DATE	Wednesday, 2 June 2021 15:00 GMT -04:00
DIALOGUE TITLE	Black American Farmers' Path Towards Equitable Livelihoods
CONVENED BY	Bread for the World; National Black Farmers Association; The Federation of Southern Cooperatives
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/19523/
DIALOGUE TYPE	Independent
GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS	United States of America

The outcomes from a Food Systems Summit Dialogue will be of use in developing the pathway to sustainable food systems within the locality in which they take place. They will be a valuable contribution to the national pathways and also of interest to the different workstreams preparing for the Summit: the Action Tracks, Scientific Groups and Champions as well as for other Dialogues.

1. PARTICIPATION

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

35

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0 0-18

0 19-30

12 31-50

12 51-65

9 66-80

0 80+

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

20 Male

15 Female

Prefer not to say or Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH SECTOR

21 Agriculture/crops

5 Fish and aquaculture

6 Livestock

3 Agro-forestry

Environment and ecology

Trade and commerce

Education

Communication

Food processing

Food retail, markets

Food industry

Financial Services

Health care

Nutrition

National or local government

Utilities

Industrial

Other

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

Small/medium enterprise/artisan

Large national business

Multi-national corporation

20 Small-scale farmer

15 Medium-scale farmer

Large-scale farmer

Local Non-Governmental Organization

International Non-Governmental Organization

Indigenous People

Science and academia

Workers and trade union

Member of Parliament

Local authority

Government and national institution

Regional economic community

United Nations

International financial institution

Private Foundation / Partnership / Alliance

Consumer group

Other

2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

HOW DID YOU ORGANIZE THE DIALOGUE SO THAT THE PRINCIPLES WERE INCORPORATED, REINFORCED AND ENHANCED?

This dialogue was organized as a balance between inclusivity of multiple stakeholders, and the commitment to generating forward-looking solutions for the specific issues facing an otherwise complex food system. To that end, we focused primarily on the issues facing Black farmers. Our dialogue included farmers spanning generational groups; urban and rural; male and female; and small-to-medium sized farmers. This focus in the dialogue allowed us to pay respect to the diversity of issues these groups face and allowed our dialogue to adequately provide space for their voices to be heard. Moreover, our goal was to foster trust within the dialogue participants that this space was safe for voicing concerns: for example, while including government officials or political representatives may have increased the multiplicity of stakeholders, this would have likely come at the cost of building trust among all participants to create a single safe space for dialogue. Thus, we believe that our approach of focusing on a particular--but still diverse in itself--subset of individuals was the ideal way to incorporate, reinforce, and enhance the principles for this dialogue.

HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

The content of our dialogue reflected specific aspects of respect, trust, and inclusivity. In particular, a large amount of discussion went into "enhancing resilient livelihoods and communities", particularly with respect to pay and equitable market access for small- and medium-sized farmers (Ref Manual, p.7). Additional discussion surrounded accountability for political commitments to agriculture in the United States (for example, evaluation of USDA training programs) and addressing systemic inequalities that impede successful policy solutions. From leadership and facilitators, our dialogue prioritized building trust--that is, creating a safe space to "promote trust and encourage mutual respect"--and building a culture of respect, focusing only on a few key questions and allowing participants to dialogue with one another organically. This allowed for a space "open to the coexistence of divergent points of view", and provided participants the space to fully articulate their views.

DO YOU HAVE ADVICE FOR OTHER DIALOGUE CONVENORS ABOUT APPRECIATING THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT?

Make sure to encourage diverse viewpoints. Build trust so that every participant feels comfortable expressing views in his or her own voice, reinforcing the principle that the dialogue is inclusive and not designed to achieve a prescribed consensus.

3. METHOD

The outcomes of a Dialogue are influenced by the method that is used.

DID YOU USE THE SAME METHOD AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CONVENORS REFERENCE MANUAL?

Yes

No

4. DIALOGUE FOCUS & OUTCOMES

MAJOR FOCUS

Our dialogue focused on three primary areas:

- (1) Addressing racial discrimination against black farmers
- (2) Best practices that farmers currently use to address food access, food justice, or food sovereignty.
- (3) Resources needed to be in place to advance equitable livelihood.

Our purpose with these questions were primarily information gathering and synthesis. Organizers of the dialogue put together these questions in an effort to allow participants to prioritize their answers organically. In the three breakout rooms, facilitators asked this question to the participants, allowing them to provide answers and to dialogue back and forth (where applicable) on each topic.

ACTION TRACKS

- Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
- Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
- Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
- Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
- Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

KEYWORDS

- Finance
- Innovation
- Human rights
- Women & Youth Empowerment
- Policy
- Data & Evidence
- Governance
- Trade-offs
- Environment and Climate

MAIN FINDINGS

With reference to BLACK farmers in the Southeastern United States, there are two evident conclusions that can be drawn with respect to sustainable food systems over the next decade and beyond.

First, the very foundations of the food system--namely, the Black farmers who grow food--are at high-risk of failure. This is due, in great part, to historic structural inequities since the 250+ years of enslavement of People of Africa and the legacy of Jim Crow and racism upon their descendants including today. At the peak, Black farmers used to own 16-19 million acres (roughly 6.5 million hectares), now Black farmers own 3.6 million acres (roughly 1.5 million hectares)--less than 1% of the farmland in the US. Especially among Black farmers, the majority of this population, on average, is aging. . Although there is evidence of younger generations expressing new interest, this needs nurturing and investment. At the same time,

The intergenerational incentives for younger farmers to maintain the system seemed to be of great concern to all of our participants--particularly those who ran smaller farms. Though a variety of reasons were provided for this concern, one theme rose up above the rest: the up-front costs of breaking into farming are high for beginners, and the current crop of farmers are not being compensated enough to motivate the youth to pursue farming in the first place. Participants emphasized the low compensation as driving the youth away from farming, and they pointed to lack of start-up resources as driving away even youth who may already be somewhat interested. This is a key failure point in the food system and cannot be dismissed or overlooked as a mere gripe over wages. Without incentivizing younger people to choose farming over other, perhaps more lucrative industrial or white-collar career paths, the entire human foundation of the food system would be at risk of collapsing. This cannot be understated, and as a matter of policy, investing in the individual benefits accrued from farming--such as the awarding of government grants or funds--should be an immediate priority to preserve the future of sustainable food systems.

A second theme arose around the question of equitable access. More specifically, this included access to economic markets as well as the need for streamlining the connection between the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and individual farmers. Farmers spoke extensively about the barriers to qualification that exist in order to compete for lucrative contracts. For example, the certifications and qualification standards often change rapidly, and without a robust infrastructure to connect regulatory bodies with individual farmers, these individual farmers cannot keep up with rapidly changing requirements. Additionally, the language and jargon involved with the complex legal bureaucracy is often inaccessible to smaller farmers: simply put, the increased bureaucratization of agriculture in the United States has weakened the links in the food system between political systems and the individual farmers. This, again, creates a highly concerning failure point within the food system: namely, the risk of alienating (and the potential to entirely lose) small farmers from the overall food system. Without building the requisite infrastructure to connect bureaucracy to individual farmers--including the simplification of language and streamlining the communication of updated regulations--small and mid-sized farmers are at risk of being left behind in the current food environment.

ACTION TRACKS

	Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
	Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
	Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
✓	Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
	Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

KEYWORDS

✓	Finance	✓	Policy
	Innovation		Data & Evidence
✓	Human rights	✓	Governance
✓	Women & Youth Empowerment		Trade-offs
			Environment and Climate

OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC

First, we examined the question of addressing racial discrimination. Participants identified multiple points of concern with respect to alleviating this discrimination. This included access to capital: for example, venture capital to expand farms, or government capital and investment to establish markets. It is noteworthy here to pause and briefly emphasize that this was, again, not merely a complaint about desiring more wealth. Farming is uniquely multi-generational in terms of both ownership and geographic location: as such, past inequities and injustices in a given location and upon a given farm are inextricably linked to modern-day outcomes as previously stated. Inequitable access to capital in the past has left many Black farmers behind in terms of their success, to the point where their capacity to farm has not kept pace with overall societal trends. For example, participants commented on the increasing price of land, and the increasing acreage necessary to sustain a family farm: given that these communities have been systemically disadvantaged, the pace of their own economic development has not kept up with the pace of inflation in terms of prices or competitiveness. This results in a food system which, over time, will systematically exclude Black farmers from starting, maintaining, and/or expanding their farms. In this vein, a concerted and substantial transfer of capital--for instance, (recommendation 1) establishing a separate fund for Black farmers, run by Black farmers--seems to be a key solution for redressing their exclusion from the food systems.

They also pointed to access to government resources. For example, Black farmers are often either rejected or dismissed at USDA offices, with some participants describing a "good ole boy" culture within these offices, where officers do not devote sufficient time and energy to communicate key information to these farmers.

(Recommendation 2) Here, an affirmative attempt to institutionally include Black farmers (or allies) in government offices, especially in tandem with expanding government infrastructure into marginalized areas, may help begin to redress these cultural issues.

This moves into the second discussion topic of resources. Here, we saw two primary themes. First, building off the previous section, participants emphasized the lack of infrastructure for accessing government resources. For example, the issue of storage units was raised multiple times: without equitable access to approved storage units and transportation mechanisms, these same farmers will not have enough access to meet stringent regulatory requirements, and thus will be systematically excluded from selling to certain markets. In other words, without the requisite infrastructure (both in terms of access and competitive pricing for using it), there is a direct line to systemic exclusion to markets--causing an unsustainable cycle for these farmers with the eventual risk of excluding them from markets entirely. Small family farms must have continued, strong access to infrastructure so as to keep the barriers to entry attainable for new generations of farmers to access, build, and enrich new links to the existing food system.

(Recommendation 3) Black owned and operated related resource arm that provides loans, capital, etc., advocacy etc. that is a user-friendly gateway to correct previous mistreatment, access, etc.?

Relatedly, participants discussed difficulties in accessing markets. Again, this had to do with both capital resources (for example, advanced transportation methods) and also systemic discrimination from markets. Some of these discriminatory practices are more subtle than others: for example, in the United States especially, the aesthetic demands of crops can favor larger-scale farmers who use industrial-scale methods to selectively breed marketable crops. This causes smaller family farms to be excluded from the market, and again can lead to destructive cycles of eroding the connection between food systems and small- to mid-sized farmers.

ACTION TRACKS

	Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
	Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
	Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
✓	Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
	Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

KEYWORDS

✓	Finance	✓	Policy
	Innovation		Data & Evidence
✓	Human rights	✓	Governance
✓	Women & Youth Empowerment		Trade-offs
			Environment and Climate

AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

There were two areas of divergence among the participants of this dialogue. In both cases, the disagreement related to methods of expansion and sustainable farming. In the first case, there was a surprisingly lengthy discussion about whether or not access to export markets would be a viable strategy for sustainably growing a small farm. This has implications for developing future resources and infrastructure in the name of streamlining the experience for small farmers. For example, one participant raised the experience of facing difficulties navigating the regulations of importing and exporting his products; much like domestic regulations on crops, this points to the need for building deeper community roots for government regulatory agencies, where farmers can turn to for advisement. Another participant pointed out that given how competitive the developed-country market can be (such as the United States), small farmers may find their best opportunities by exporting to other countries.

However, this assertion was countered by the equally valid concern that this strategy underestimates the massive capital requirements for exporting. Not only does it require accessing massive infrastructures that small farmers would not already have access to (placing an undue burden on them with respect to expansion), but it also downplays both the capital and the volume required to mitigate the risks associated with exporting to developing markets. For example, exporting to developing markets can bring with it failures to pay; this could be catastrophic for smaller farmers whose margins are already thin, and who already do not have sufficient access to resources to weather that loss of crop. Moreover, the amount of crop necessary to actually make exporting profitable—given the intricacies of transporting goods at scale—may be difficult or entirely unachievable to render exporting an insufficient strategy for smaller farmers. Overall, this discussion provided useful and important context to the discussion of where to prioritize educational and infrastructural resources for small to medium sized Black farmers.

Relatedly, a second area of divergence came from whether or not achieving "large farm" status is, itself, a sustainable strategy for national or global food systems. This speaks to global issues of climate and resource sustainability: if the only path to success in agriculture is achieving large-farm status, then by definition all small to medium sized farms will scale themselves towards these industrial-scale strategies. These strategies may not be sustainable for the future, given the climate and resource implications of industrial-scale agriculture. Thus, there is a systemic question of whether the aspirations of farmer success should be restricted to the modern large-scale agriculture practices. This has major implications for how countries allocate resources to small, medium, and large farms: if this aspiration is in fact unsustainable (which many of our participants argued it was), it becomes the responsibility of governments to transfer substantial monetary and capital resources to small- and mid-sized farms, such that these farms can achieve large-farm levels of monetary success without the unsustainable practices that come with it. This area of discussion seems to have the most global implication, though it remains a difficult one to define more concretely.

This discussion was furthered with the concern that local and state markets discriminate against Black Farmers and contractual relationships with schools etc. are not favored with Black Farmers. There was concern that small-scale farm should also include community farms (gardens) and therefore redefining and clarifying eligibility requirements for governmental and private support.

ACTION TRACKS

<input type="checkbox"/>	Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
<input type="checkbox"/>	Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
<input type="checkbox"/>	Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
<input type="checkbox"/>	Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

KEYWORDS

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Finance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Policy
<input type="checkbox"/>	Innovation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Data & Evidence
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Human rights	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Governance
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Women & Youth Empowerment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Trade-offs
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Environment and Climate