The Importance of Land
SNCC 60th Anniversary
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Speakers include:

Shirley Sherrod - Moderator and Executive Director of The Southeast Georgia Project.
Malik Yakini - Co-Founder of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network
Leah Penniman - Co-Founder, Executive Director, and Farm Manager of Soul Fire Farms
Savi Horne - Lawyer and Environmental Justice Advocate

This discussion centers around how to prevent black land loss, black farmers in rural and urban areas, resources for black farmers, and how to fight against food insecurity. Also, how black American families who possess heir property can protect their land/property.

Shirley Sherrod: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm so glad to share the screen and this workshop with three giants in work dealing with land loss, black land loss[1], and food insecurity [2]. Many years ago, we were sounding the alarm about the issues around lack of credit, black land loss, and Heir property [3]. As we were losing land, I can remember back in the eighties when we were saying unless something was done about discrimination at USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] by the year 2000, there would be virtually no black-owned land.

I also remember the issue of rural and urban, and I've been so happy to connect with my urban sister and brother, as they have worked to deal with food and security problems. Savi [Horne] and land loss prevention have worked on this issue for many years. I'm sitting here in a city where nine grocery stores have closed, and this is Albany, Georgia, and there are no grocery stores in south Albany [Georgia]. I'm sitting in an area where one of the largest vegetable producers in the country is just about 35 miles away, but most of that produce has been shipped out to other parts of the country.

So, we have people here who are starving. There was an article in the Albany paper just last week saying that Albany has the highest concentrated poverty rate in Georgia and is among one of the highest in the country. It's shameful. So, I hope you will gain a lot, learn a lot from those working in this area, and join the movement to make a difference in saving land and ensuring our people eat healthy food. So, I have Malik [Yakini] from Detroit [Michigan] with me. I would like to kick it over to you. Malik is a co-founder of the [4]Detroit black community food security

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[1]Black land loss refers to the loss of land ownership and rights by black families and farmers residing or farming in the United States

[2] Food Insecurity lack of regular access to safe and nutritious food

[3]Heir Property- family-owned land that is jointly owned by descendants of a deceased person whose estate did not clear probate.

[4] Detroit black community food security network a non-profit organization based in Detroit, Michigan, that aims to address the issue of food insecurity in black and marginalized communities in Detroit.

network, doing some amazing work in Detroit. I'm so happy to be able to have him share the work that they're doing. Malik.

Malik Yakini: Thank you so much, Miss Shirley [Sherrod], and it's always a pleasure to see you and these dynamic co-panelists. I feel honored to be on the same panel with such dynamic sisters. My name is Malik Yakini, and I'm executive director and co-founder of the Detroit black community food security network. Since 2006, we've done several things in the city of Detroit, including leading the writing of the city of Detroit's food security policy [5].

That policy called for the creation of the Detroit Food Policy Council**,** which we also stewarded into existence. We operate D-town farm, the largest of 1600 or so small gardens and farms in the city of Detroit. In fact, Detroit is probably the place where more urban agriculture is happening than any other place in the country, partially because of the city's tremendous amount of vacant land. A friend of mine always reminds me that it's not vacant because it's being reinhabited by rabbits, pheasants, and other animals.

Still, we have a tremendous amount of land that may be, more accurately, not being utilized by humans. So, it has allowed urban agriculture to blossom in Detroit in a way that is impossible in most cities in the United States. In addition to the policy work that we've done in the operation of D- town farm, we operate a youth program called the Food Warriors Youth Development Program. That program is rooted in the understanding that our growing techniques have to be sustainable, and our movement has to be sustainable. For the movement to be sustainable, we have to intentionally bring young people into it, and they have to see value in food production.

The last thing that we're working on, and perhaps the biggest thing, is we're developing the Detroit Food Commons, a new 34,000 square foot building that we're building right on the main avenue of Detroit, the cornerstone of which is the main tenant of which will be the Detroit people's Food Co-op, a cooperatively owned grocery store food co-op. We currently have more than 1300 members of the Detroit People's Food Co-op, and we expect to break ground on this project before the year ends. So that's just a brief overview of the work we're up to in Detroit.

Shirley Sherrod: Leah [Penniman], what about the work you're doing in New York? I've been so impressed with what these city people are doing, raising food in the city. When I thought for years that could only happen out on these farms we are involved with.

Leah Penniman: Well, thank you very much, Ms. Sherrod. It is an honor to be on this panel with my colleagues and mentors, who have paved the way for us in the rising generation of black and brown farmers. My name is Leah Penniman; I'm the farm manager and founding co-executive director of Soul Fire Farm in Grafton, New York, about 35 minutes outside Albany [New York]. And I don't think it's a coincidence that we are in Albany carrying on that tradition. So, we are a group of 10 folks who are taking care of 80 acres of rural land in unseated Stockbridge, Muncy Mohican territory, and the way that we do our work towards uprooting racism and seeding sovereignty in our food system is, first of all, to reclaim and build upon our ancestral

[5]Detroit Food Policy Council is an organization led by natives of Detroit, Michigan, who are committed to creating a sustainable, local food system that promotes food security and food justice in the city of Detroit.

Afro-Indigenous[6] farming practices to take care of these 80 acres.

So, we're growing vegetables, fruits, medicinal herbs, mushrooms, and honey. We raise goats and chickens for eggs, meat, and all of this food. We package up through a weekly doorstep delivery program that provides no-cost food to survivors of Food apartheid[7] in the nearby urban areas of Albany [New York], Troy [New York], and the surrounding towns. In addition to running the farm, which is, of course, plenty of work. And if you saw me just a couple of hours ago, I was covered in goat poop and remnants of the bean harvest. But in addition to that, we're an education and training farm.

So, we have thousands of folks who come through the farm in physical presence. We have a very popular 50-hour, week-long residential course called our Soul Fire Farming Immersion every year, and we also teach online classes. We teach city folks how to grow their food in their backyards and provide all the materials and supplies for that. We help to run a fellowship in partnership with the [8]Federation of Southern Cooperatives that supports 10 new farmers with a salary and a mentor.

We do online classes, youth programs, and so on. The third area of our work is collaborating with folks like my wonderful co-panelists on regional and national organizing because we need better laws. We need better institutions, not just training, but to make sure that we have access to land, credit, capital, and institutional support to make it possible to succeed as farmers. So, I'm here as a member of the rising generation of farmers, folks who are excited to reclaim our proud [9]Agrarian tradition and carry on that sacred relationship with the land. Thanks for having me.

Shirley Sherrod: Thank you, Leah. Savi and I have been working on land loss issues. It dates back to the early nineties or late eighties when we had more land than we have now and many more farmers. Savi, can you talk a little about that land loss work and how we are connecting the Malik**,** Savi with the rural-urban connections on work as we work on these issues?

Savi Horne: Thanks. It's been a challenging tech day for me, and I just want to give greetings to Malik and Leah, and, of course, Shirley. All that I know I learned from you, and it's not puffery. When I entered this space of the black agrarian movement, you were there from the very beginning in the midst of our fight for recognition, and our role in the USA [United States of America] food system and demand for civil rights very much as SNCC [Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee] had done in the past and its members continue to do. For us, Shirley from the south, we see a through line between the work of Leah and Malik. I think Leah's right; there's no mystery behind why Albany, New York, and the fact that Albany, New York was part

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[6]Afro-Indigenous A term refers to peoples who have both African and Indigenous lineage.
[7] Food apartheid is a system of segregation that divides those with access to an abundance of nutritious food and those who have been denied that access due to systemic injustice.
[8] The Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund is a 57-year-old regional cooperative and rural economic development organization serving a membership of Black farmers, landowners, cooperatives, and other low-income rural people in the South with coop development, land retention, and advocacy
[9]Agrarian-Referring to the land or the use of land for farming purposes

of the Underground Railroad[10]. The surrounding towns of Troy [New York] and connected heavily African Americans had been our descendants of those brave warriors who sought better conditions and freedom in the north.

Of course, that came along with the agrarian culture of the south. The foodways that we see in and around Albany insurance connectivity, many of which are grown sustainably, clean, and healthy by Soul Fire Farm, are a continuum of that tradition. We find evidence as part of the through line through Detroit on our freedom railway and the sustainability of the African American communities throughout Detroit and the continuing legacy of our foodways as expressed there and the movement that can directly link back in time to Mississippi and Fannie Lou Hamer.

And the civil rights movement resonates with Detroit and the movement. Detroit was one of the places where black farmers from the South met, and we met, agitated, and figured out stuff. We saw our people growing food, and many of us were like, y'all own tractors in Detroit [Michigan]. It added that level of cohesion for the movement when we saw black people, not just in the South, but in the Midwest and the Northeast on the GERD, in their struggles, through liberating and decolonizing our food system, it is true that we've seen, tremendous, tremendous losses.

You know, Charlie[Cobb], I was looking at the stats for Southwest Georgia, and Georgia in particular, and right at the beginning of what is the classical civil rights period of, say, 1954 after Brown vs Board of Education[11] to about 69[1969], you had like 12,000, farmers in Southwest Georgia, and that's in 54[1954]. By 69[1969], it had declined 63.1%, and when you look at land ownership, which was about 1.3 million acres of land down to 558,000.

So, we see why, and it's no accident of history. Why the movement, the Albany Movement was crucial to our momentum forward on the liberatory front, on the black line question of which SNCC played a tremendous role in the uplift and the freedom struggle of the civil rights era, but particularly in Southwest Georgia? So, I want to ground what I have to say. I'm thankful to be on this panel with y'all, and I just look forward to our conversation. So, thank you for having me, and back to you, Shirley. Thank you.

Shirley Sherrod: Okay. Thank you, Savi. We have worked not only to help farmers access credit, but also, you've done lots of work on policy. You've been instrumental in some of the few gains that we've had in terms of policy. I just wanna point out, that when Savi and I went to Detroit and I saw bees being grown and, as Savi said earlier, people with tractors, I started seeing how we could do more to make that rural, urban connection. Malik, tell us a little bit more about the work that you're doing and the training going on in Detroit.

Malik Yakini: So, I'll put it first within a little context and say that human demographics have changed significantly over the last hundred years; on the planet, a hundred years ago, most people lived in rural areas. Now, most people live in or around metropolitan areas. Similarly, in

[10] Underground Railroad a system that existed in the United States that allowed enslaved African Americans to escape Slavery in the Southern United States to the Northern United States and Canada
[11] Brown vs Board of Education-An important United States Supreme Court case that made it illegal to racially segregate public schools in the United States in 1954

the United States, a hundred years ago, most black folks lived in the South in predominantly rural areas. Now, most black folks live in metropolitan areas.

As human demographics have changed, it also makes sense to alter how we grow and provide food. And so, it makes sense for us to produce as much food as we can close to the places where we have centers of population density. So that means it's important that we are growing food in Detroit, in New York [New York], Philadelphia [Pennsylvania]**,** and Atlanta [Georgia]. Still, I also want to be clear that urban agriculture will never replace rural agriculture.

It is a good compliment. So, for example, in Detroit, we can grow a tremendous amount of the fruits and vegetables we consume, given the amount of land we have. We're not, we're not at that point. We're only producing 3 or 4 percent of what's consumed right now, but we could probably get up to 20% of the produce that's consumed in Detroit being produced in Detroit with more intensive cooperation.

But we're not going to see acres and acres of wheat growing, for example, in the city of Detroit, where most human beings get most of their calories from grains. So, while we can grow grains on a small level in an urban area, that's still pretty much the province of rural farmers. Similarly, although I am a vegan, most black folks are not vegan, and most black folks eat chicken, beef, and pork.

While chickens are being raised in the city of Detroit, it's unlikely that we will see herd herds of cattle in the city of Detroit. Urban agriculture[12] is not a threat to, or should not be seen as a replacement for, rural agriculture, but it's a complement. We always want to build a complementary relationship between urban farmers and rural farmers and be mutually supportive. So, in Detroit, I mentioned a bit about the tremendous amount of vacant land.

I'll give more history and say that Detroit has a very long history of urban agriculture. Urban agriculture in the United States often the Genesis of it is pointed to the city of Detroit in the 1890s when Detroit had a mayor named Hazen Pingree; he was nicknamed Hazen Potato Patch Pingree. In the 1890s, during an economic recession, Hazen Pingree got wealthy landowners in the city of Detroit to allow landless people to use that land to grow gardens. Many people point to that as the beginning of urban agriculture in the United States.

So, we had that, then we also had the migration of tens of thousands of black folks from the South, as well as poor whites who came from the South to work in industrial centers, such as Detroit, Gary, Indiana, Chicago [Illinois], Cleveland [Ohio], so on, so forth. So, with them, they brought their rich knowledge. So, during the 1920s, migration, you know, started in the teens and continued up through the 1960s or so.

But, again, we had tens of thousands of folks who came, and even if they weren't farmers in the South, agriculture was a part of Southern life; even if they just had backyards or kitchen gardens,

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[12] Urban Agriculture-Urban agriculture includes the cultivation, processing, and distribution of agricultural products in urban and suburban areas. Community gardens, rooftop farms, hydroponic, aeroponic and aquaponic facilities, and vertical production, are all examples of urban agriculture. Tribal communities and small towns may also be included.

they had that experience. So, for example, my exposure to gardening was first in my grandfather's backyard, who came to Detroit in the 1920s to work in the Ford factory.

Malik Yakini: He always had a garden in his backyard because that was part of the culture that he grew up with. So, Detroit had this influx of Southern migrants that brought within this tremendous agricultural culture. And so that was part of what was happening in Detroit [Michigan] as more and more black folks moved here. And then, in the 1970s, Detroit elected its first black mayor, Coleman Alexander Young. He had a program called the Farm Lot Program that the city ran and funded, where they provided access to tractors and tillers, topsoil and compost, and seeds and transplants and encouraged Detroit and encouraged Detroiters to plant on vacant lots throughout the city.

And because of the simultaneous White flight [13] that was occurring. The white flight from Detroit started in the late 1950s, perhaps even before the late 1950s; then, of course, the federal highway system helped to spur the development of these suburban subdivisions, which, in turn, helped to facilitate or catalyze this white flight.

Malik Yakini: So, it started in the fifties, but we saw a tremendous surge after the 1967 rebellion in the city of Detroit, leaving Detroit with many vacant properties. So, the farm lot program was designed to put those vacant properties to productive use by growing food. So, Detroit is currently building on that long, rich history of urban agriculture.

As I mentioned earlier, there are more than 1600 gardens. And that includes backyard gardens, side lot gardens, school gardens, and several small farms. So, more urban agriculture is happening in Detroit than in any other major city throughout the United States. And again, partially because of the tremendous amount of vacant land. And then also because of the other historical factors that I named.

Shirley Sherrod: Gosh, I'm impressed, Malik; I've often said you have people who have been trained to farm more than we have. We need some of you all down here in these rural areas so that you can work with us on that. Leah, I heard you say something about goats.

Leah Penniman: I did say something about goats, and I love what you said, Bob and Malik, about the complementary nature of rural and urban farming. And in some ways, even though Soul Fire Farm is in a rural area, we operate as a bridge. The reason that I say that is because the vast majority of the people who come to our beginning farmer training programs are from urban areas.

They have likely been doing community gardening, school gardens, backyard gardens, and church gardens, and are desiring to scale up or to incorporate crops or livestock that are not feasible, in an urban area. So, they come out to Soul Fire Farm with that excitement and a little bit of experience and then say, okay, so how do you put up these high tunnels? How do you put a seven-acre, you know, high-tensile electric fence around to keep the deer out?

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[13] White flight- a term used to describe the exodus of white people from neighborhoods that become more racially integrated

How are we gonna make sure that we can manage fertility and weeds on a large scale when you can't just be hand weeding? And that's been wonderful. I think one of the things that makes me most satisfied is when I see folks who have come through Soul Fire Farm going ahead and starting or joining rural land projects, projects like Shelterwood Collective www.shelterwoodcollective.org, or Kaumba farm co-op Kabi, high hog farm, and many, many others.

For us, we think about our work as biomimicry where the forest when the forest will share its nutrients, its minerals, and its messages through a network of fungal mycelium. Similarly, I think of the black farming movement as being like the forest, with each of our farmers being a tree. We're sharing our resources and encouraging these other trees to grow so that we can reforest a landscape that has been depopulated by our trees.

As far as goats, you know, we have Nubians and their brothers, Bucky, Nebula, and Nova. We've gone through different livestock, and last year, we had Katahdin Goats. I like goats because they eat brush, not just pasture. We've been clearing out our forest edges to expand our pastures, and they get very excited to Munch away at anything from poison Ivy to raspberries to Birch trees. And their job is to fertilize our silver pasture. So, we have a four-acre orchard- apple trees, cherry trees, and peach trees. That's almost entirely fertilized by our goats and chickens.

We have it set up that these animals are rotating through alleys of pasture, and the manure that they deposit then fertilizes the roots of those trees, and the trees return the favor by providing shade to the animals and their dropped fruits and leaves for the animals to munch on. So, it's a really beautiful system. We are very excited about participating in climate healing, and Silver Pasture is one of those technologies that help draw carbon from the atmosphere and put it back in the soil where it belongs. And they're cute. Goats are very, very cute as well.

Shirley Sherrod: What other animals do you have chickens?

Leah Penniman: Yeah, right now, we have goats, chickens, cats, and a dog. We're on a mountain with pretty fragile soil. So, we can't do larger livestock. If we had horses or cows, they would do quite a bit of damage to our fragile clay soil. So, we tend to go for the small ruminants, like goats and sheep. There were some rabbits here last year. There were some pigs last year, but they moved down the road. I'm partial to chickens and turkeys myself.

Shirley Sherrod: Okays, there's been, you know, there was an effort, and we were gearing up for it for debt relief for black farmers, debt payoff for black farmers, given them a new start. So, to speak, those who have been able to hold on because we've lost so many due to discrimination. That's what's at USDA**,** but throughout the system, the systemic racism they've had to endure. Can you talk a little about what has happened with that?

Savi Horne: Oh, sure. I just wanna just kind of step back for a minute and identify my organization, which is a North Carolina Association of black lawyers and Land Loss Prevention project. There is a connection between the land loss prevention project and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives land assistance fund. And these two groups and others like the farmer's legal action group.

The Royal Coalition and the National Family Farm Coalition have come together over many, many years and have done some of the foundational work that led to the Pigford class action[14]. Being able to proceed in court took a lot of work. There was no magic about it. There was a lot of movement building on the ground with the farmers hitting the street the tractor cade, but these groups, the Federation land loss, and others were doing the work of the legal-related work and the policy-related work.

Savi Horne: Part of that thrust was also to undergird the rise of urban ag space by advocating for there to be an office. This dedicated office would provide the type of assistance that urban agriculture needs and the funding and integrate it within the mission across mission areas of the USDA. So, you would have an Urban ag[15] mission reflected in the Natural resource conservation services[16], which is why you would see high tunnels in Detroit and other places.

That all was just foundational policy work. But now we're at this place where, after, even before the Biden election, the beginning of his administration, there were key senators like Senator Booker and Elizabeth Warren having clusters of meetings with black farm leaders and farmers as to the nature of ongoing discrimination at the agency. So, there was deliberateness, I would say, by the Congressional black caucus [17] and Senator Booker's office.

Savi Horne: It resulted in the beginnings of what would be the Black Farmer's Justice Act[18], and given where we were with the pandemic, it was very, very critical that resources be provided to socially disadvantaged farmers. That was part of the movement for the recognition that there was racism that continued and that black farmers bore the brunt of that. Programs created section, Shirley[Sherrod] you'll help fill me in the gap on that, 2501 and the definition of social disadvantage had all of that footprint in the work of Shirley Sherrod in terms of the language in, of that act and the, and the ongoing investigation of what was going on the ground with black farmers in Southwest Georgia and across the south where the Federation would work, not only in, Southwest Georgia, but in Florida, Northwest Florida and, Mississippi and Alabama tracking the historic black belt.

Savi Horne: So, with that, we're able to get things moving, but now it is stalled and chiefly because legal foundations, conservative legal foundations, and ex-white House program people, Trump administration people have sought to derail the Emergency Relief Act for, BIPOC [Black Indigenous, and people of color] farmers. That was part of the American rescue plan. And that's being tied up in about 13 to 17 federal courts. The first was an action that was filed in Wisconsin.

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[14] Pigford class action- Pigford v. Glickman was a class action lawsuit filed in 1999 against the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for racial discrimination in its farm and credit service

[15] Urban Ag-Urban Agriculture-agriculture grown in urban areas

[16] Natural Resource Conservation Services is a service department within the USDA that directly meets the needs of the United States Farmers, Ranchers, and forest landowners

[17]Congressional black caucus a caucus in the United States Congress consisting of a dozen African American members of the House of Representatives and Senate

[18] Black Farmer's Justice Act a congressional bill that was introduced to assist in addressing the discrimination and disparities within agriculture

So, there's one filed in Florida and one in Texas.

So what, where we're at this critical juncture, given the fact that there's an aluminum foreclosure crisis in the black farm belt and people of color farmers that we need to figure out what fixes there could be, by way of legislation that would make the resources, spread across the field for those who are being impacted, and are looking at foreclosure and are limited in resource. So, there is a very strong movement to language and rededicate resources in a way that black farmers can get, and BIPOC farmers write large, providing the assistance that they need and other limited-resource farmers as a way to proceed with this.

Shirley Sherrod: Yes. Malik and Leah, as we move to try to save more of the farmland that we've been able to hold onto so far, there are so many things impacting whether we can at least hold what we have. Savi estimates about 2 million acres down from about 15 million.

Savi Horne: In terms of there, that's part of the problem; part of the problem is that we don't know how much we have. Yeah. We know that by the end of the civil rights period, we had about 6 million acres. So, we are looking at acreage depending on where you look for the stats in families. Some people are saying that they're, let me, I do not know, these are new phones.

So, I do not know how to turn them off and train them on. So, according to some stats chiefly coming out of national Ag [Agriculture], statistical services that perhaps 7 million acres at large inclusive of those that are owned by families that are not in farm production. So, I would say of acting as farmers, active farmers. I can't see it being more than 2.5 million, down from 15 million.

Shirley Sherrod: Yes, can you just say a little about Heir property, which is a major problem for us? I can see some movement toward trying to do more to solve the issue of Heir property, but I'm sure many live in those urban areas who have a claim to some of that land and need to be involved in trying to help hold onto it.

Savi Horne: That's right. I see that as the through line that connects urban and rural black communities as Heir property and what we are now calling the black comments and Heir property is a threat to the re-emergency, but there are instruments that we have used in the past pioneered by new communities, in Southwest Georgia. So, the problem with Heir property is that, and I wouldn't say it's a problem, it is kingship land.

It arose out of objective circumstances, given how, given the level of racial oppression and given the distrust of the legal system because of white supremacy, and the result that we all know will happen when black people encounter the legal system in the carer state, that black folk over time would not do wills because of fear that if they were to do wills and to register wills in, in clerk's office, then that land could be, get at right.

You would know who owns it, and you would set up families to basically orchestrate oppression within their larger community. And so, given that fact, our families historically have not done wills. So, we are at this place where you now have a high amount of land caught up in Heir

property that could become productive farmland. Now, for the very first time. I would say in the hundred 50-year history of the role of the Department of Agriculture, you now have within the 2018 farm bill legislative authority for the Department of Agriculture to fund a mandated program, to create an Heirs property re-lending program, and in places such as Georgia and upstate New York.

So, if Leah knows of any black farmers or people of color farmers for Heir property condition, you now have within the farm bill authority that if you live in a state that has enacted the uniform partition of Heir property act, you can gain entry-level to USDA programs.

You get a farm and ranch number. You can get a conservation plan to be developed by conservation resource services. Not only that, you could position the farmer to qualify for resources from a farm services agency; it's now in the form of a loan, but we do believe in the movement that if you get a loan to clear Hier's property and there's a default situation, then are you default in black land, the black commons back to the government?

So, the collective feeling about this, that it ought to be part of how to mitigate climate change, is that if you adopt conservation-based programs and you have a loan that puts in place those programs, that ought to be a forgivable loan. So, a forgivable loan program for Heir property producer would be a much better system than for Heir property producer to be part of a re-lending program where there could be a default situation and very, very negative family dynamics, as a result.

Shirley Sherrod: Leah and Malik. What are your thoughts on debt, payoff, or the Heir property situation as you do the work you are doing on food security in your area?

Malik Yakini: Leah, would you like to begin?

Leah Penniman: I can start. Well, I will say that Soul Fire Farm is a member of the National Black Food and Justice Alliance. We're very honored to get to work together with our comrades on some of the language for the Justice for black farmers act sponsored by Warren and Booker, including the debt relief provision.

It was one of the most stirring and moving moments of my work as a black farmer to see that that was part of a national conversation after so many generations of being ignored completely. I remember asking, I won't name their name, but I remember asking an elected representative who came to visit our farm. And have you ever heard of the issue of black land loss? They said no, I never even heard that issue.

Then to see this in the national media as part of the national debate. And I know we have not won the fight. I am very aware of that. I know that there's a backlash, but we have worked together over generations to bring it to the level of consciousness now, I want to stop and toast and celebrate that, right? Absolutely. What we're seeing with the rising generation is a few things.

One is people don't have land. So, folks rising generation farmers oftentimes are, our generation

is more disconnected from any type of family land. So, they're working as farm workers as laborers, or they're working in these short-term leases that do not have any long-term security where you can't, you can't put up a high, 10 or invest in soil because you might lose your land the next year or two or three years from then.

This issue of how to keep black land in the family. So, to the extent of family, to speak, it is huge. I would like to see what I hope we can continue to collaborate on. And Ms. Sherrod alluded to this that we're training farmers, and these farmers have no land, right? So how do we make those linkages between these farmers? Many of them are interested in the back-south movement. There's been some writing on that. Some are theorizing about how important it is to build our political power.

How do we make those connections between this land that needs to be kept in the extended family and these landless farmers, many of whom have started in urban areas and are thinking that they want to be connected to more acreage? And so, I think there's a lot of potential there. We need to solve all these problems simultaneously about, about the debt, the, the training, the forgiveness, the, you know, Heir property, all of that, to make sure that we, you know, our children's children can still have a conversation about black farmers that isn't a, a requiem as we need to work together.

Malik Yakini: You know, I don't have much to add to what my two brilliant sisters have said, except that it's important that we link the issue of black land to the issue of reparations [19], and I'm of the mindset. I agree with Leah that we need to celebrate the justice for black farmers act and all our incremental victories. We also need to push for massive redistribution of land in the United States.

We need to tie that massive redistribution of land to our demands for reparations. A lot of times, we think about reparations. We only think about payments, such as cash payments. And the other thing is that we often think about reparations coming from the government, but Leah knows and as many of us have experienced, reparations can be given by individuals also.

So, there are individual landowners who are seeding land to black farmers. I think that's an important form of reparations. We're finding individual wealthy people who are giving large sums of money to black farmers. That's another form of reparations. So, I would support all of that and also suggest that as we move into this next era of black landownership and black, the agrarian aspect of our forward motion, we look more at collective ownership of land.

Of course, Ms. Sherrod and you've been instrumental in advancing the concept of community land trust. We need to look at those in another way so that we can devise a collectively so-called owning land. I don't believe in land ownership. It is a paradox because, on one level, I don't believe in it. And on the other level, it's a necessary evil to create security for black farmers. But I think we must move beyond the mindset that we now have of individual ownership of land and look at how we can collectively hold land for future generations.

Shirley Sherrod: Yeah. So, Malik, since you mentioned the community land trust, I'd like to just

[19] Reparations- the act of making amends, offering expiation, or giving satisfaction for a wrong or injury

step back to 1968; you know, we were working in the civil rights movement here in the area, and many of our people were being kicked off land owned by white landowners because they participated in the movement. It prompted us in 1968, the summer of 1968, to send a delegation to Israel to look at how they were resettling families into a new economically viable community.

They came back, and my husband was one of the seven official members who went to Israel to look at what they were doing. We started meeting and looking at what they learned, what we knew, and what we felt. I want to read to you what we decided to do. We decided to work towards setting up an independent structure to buy, hold, and lease land and perpetuity to individuals and cooperatives for agricultural, industrial, and other economic and social purposes to make it possible for them to earn a living producing for their needs.

For the larger society, finding creative expression for their skills and talents, educating their children, and enjoying all the rights, benefits, and responsibilities of free citizens. That's when we started new communities and got our hands on 6,000 acres of land, creating the [20]First community land trust. Was it easy? Was it smooth sailing from there? No way.

As we were putting these plans together, as word got out that we had 6,000 acres of land in the county, the shooting at buildings started, started the organizing politically and in every other way against us to try to make sure we were not successful on this property started., I wish I could share the plans we made. We planned the whole community. There would be three villages; not only did we plan what kind of industry, health system, and educational system, but one of the main things we did was to plan how we would work with and treat each other.

Shirley Sherrod: So, it wasn't just about the land and growing. We were trying to create a whole new kind of people. We trying to take us back to our roots. So, if you go fast forward to this, this was about seven years ago. We were working with a group of young people in the city at the boys' club, training them to plant a garden. And we were putting in cabbage, and one young boy stood back, and he was looking at everybody, and we said, don't you want to come on and help?

He said, “Well, I don't eat food from the earth. And he said, “You don't; where do you get your food? He said he got his food from the grocery store. And he said he didn't eat it because it had nature on it. You know, he's talking about dirt.

So, it opened my eyes to how so, how displaced he is. I mean, food is being grown all around him. We are in the most agricultural area of the state, and he had no idea other than the grocery store where his food was coming from. So, we've gone through. And I think people knew what it would mean to have that kind of land.

They knew what it would mean for us to have that kind of new way of dealing with, with each other, you know, a new way of treating each other, a new way of growing and working together. And I think as I see you all in the cities promoting that and pulling people together again, it's encouraging to see it happen. Yes, new communities now. Have we lost 6,000 acres?

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[20]First Community Land Trust also known as the New Community, initiative was created by civil rights activists to help African American sharecroppers gain access to farmland.

I can't begin to tell you what it felt like to lose 6,000 acres of land. You know, we worked hard, we tried hard. It took my husband almost 10 years to bounce back from it. But those of us, we say, when you look at the civil rights movement, you see the guys at the top SNCC. But then you look at all those women who are doing that work.

So, we have to pivot and do what we need to do to keep things going. And that's exactly what happened with the new community. So today, we do not have 6,000 acres. We are not on that property, but we do have 1,638 acres of land. We've learned that it was once owned by the largest slave owner and the wealthiest man in the state of Georgia; back in the 1800s, he held the largest number of slaves on that property.

I had a problem when we were initially looking at it; it's like Antebellum[21]**.** Are they talking about the Antebellum house? Why would we be concerned about an antebellum house? It just had, you know, brought bad memories to me. But anyway, once now that we are there, now that we are trying to do all the things we are trying to do from there, I say to people, they took 6,000 acres from us, and God gave us a plantation intact. It was owned by the person who created the system for paying for fuel at the pump, the previous owner.

So, he spent lots of money, lots of money. He spent $3 million restoring that antebellum house, you know, and, anyway, I won't go into all of that, but we have it. And we have a sign that we put up from time to time saying this: this land was once owned by the largest slave owner in Georgia and is now in the hands of the descendants of slaves. And that says a lot. Does anyone else want to comment at this point?

Savi Horne: Yeah. I always like to do an uplift for our first role sociologist, and people don't see in that light, W E B DuBois and the book of the black belt, the chapter, and the *Souls of Black Folks*. And the fact that it's, what is it, 112 years ago, he wrote that and it still Albany [Georgia] Doughtry County still, it feels the same, when he spoke to modern evidence of modern land grabbing, his words, not mine. Right. We hear about land grabbing, but we're not putting it in the context that black folk have recognized land grabbing was really what was going on.

So, we didn't like losing land. They were grabbing the land from us using legal, any kind of legal machinations to get at the land. I just also want to say, you know, coming out of Detroit, the Nation of Islam[22] played a key role in the land rights movement of Southwest Georgia. I think there was a time when shot; they had what, 10,000 acres.

Savi Horne: On the management down to now, of all their transition, all stuff and not getting into that. It's beyond the scope of our conversation. They're now under a thousand acres.

Shirley Sherrod: Yes. It's somewhere. I think it's a little more than a thousand doing some

[21] The antebellum period is defined as the time between the formation of the U.S. government and the outbreak of the American Civil War,1832-1860

[22] Nation of Islam, African American movement and organization, founded in 1930 and known for its teachings combining elements of traditional Islam with Black nationalist ideas.

amazing things.

Savi Horne: But doing some amazing things. So given where that they are given what the potential is to, for the use of the 1600 acres by new communities and the growing, urban ag[Urban Agriculture] movement, gardening movement in Albany and in those small towns, you know, the tides will turn and will create the conditions where young, young kids again, can dream and understand where their food comes from. So, it won't be yucky stuff.

They will see it as a place where they can learn, grow, and thrive on the land or a farm. We're all collectively working for that, whether in our urban spaces or our rural spaces. So never again will we have a child that looks at cabbage and says, "I ain't gonna eat that" because that's yucky. Because it has dirt on it. That makes the work even more important than we have to continue to do.

Malik Yakini: I'll just end by saying that I think it's extremely important that black folks or however we define ourselves, you know, one of our challenges is we define ourselves in so many ways. But you know, I still like the term black people. So, one of the things that we have to do is develop a sense of consciousness that encourages us to work on our collective behalf. That's right. And because without that, we can't accomplish anything.

So, we must see our destinies as being tied together. And we have to see collective work as the way we move forward, and cooperative economics is the economic basis of our forward movement. And we have to have institutions that are democratic, where we're collectively making decisions about our own best interests. But the starting point is that we have to see that we are a people, that we have a collected destiny, and that it's up to us to exhibit agency over our own lives.

Absolutely. In every area of life, farming and food production are among the most basic areas. One of my teachers, "says**"** that men and women feed themselves children and pets are fed. So, as we're looking to be more self-reliant, self-sufficient, self-respecting people, the ability to produce our food is a fundamental aspect of that. So, I just absolutely include my comrades on this call salute, Mrs. Sherrod for the tremendous work that you've done. We stand on your shoulders, and we hope to be worthy representatives of the work that you've done and of the work that our ancestors have done.

Leah Penniman: I will conclude by just building on what you all have said, you know, one of my favorite teachings from an ancestor, Fannie Lou Hamer, said," If you have 400 quarts of greens and gumbo soup can for the winter, no one can push you around or tell you what to say or do". And Mrs. Sherrod, as you're discussing the incredible founding and restoration of new communities, it makes me think about that importance. Baba Malik also feeds us and our communities and builds our institutions. So yes, demanding fair treatment from the USDA and simultaneously talking about what our finance vehicles look like? What does our land trust look like? What do our co-ops like they have in Detroit look like, and in the Northeast, we've started a little simmer of that.

We have a land trust called the Northeast Farmer of Color land trust that collaborates with farmer training organizations; the rural one is Soul Fire Farm. The urban one is a farm school in NYC. We have a policy advocacy group, black farmers United New York State. We also have the food aggregator, the Corbin Hill food project. These are all black and indigenous-led institutions that are collaborating to try to do wraparound so that if someone is getting into farming, we can say, there's where you get land. That's where you get capital.

Here's where you get trained. Here's where you can sell your food. And if you have a problem with the laws, this is our advocacy arm. So, I want us to be thinking both and, in that way, because I do think that self-organization mutual aid institutions that are community-led are, are very important and will ensure, you know, our long-term survival and, and wanna echo that. It's a deep honor to be on this panel with my mentors and the folks who have been doing this work for much longer than I have. And I just hope to be worthy of all that you've invested in me and us. So, thank you.

Shirley Sherrod: Thank you, Leah. You know, it's been Savi. Would you like to make some closing remarks?

Savi Horne: Yeah, I got myself fixed, DuBois, so I got it taken home with Fredrick Douglas on his redemptive Reframe of what the song means. I just want, if I'm looking down, to read it because I don't want to mess it up. He said, quote, if there is no struggle, there's no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and depreciate agitation, especially men or women who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without the Warren and the thunder.

They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. And so, for me, there's a through line in that redemptive refrain of his. We have seen the uprisings, and black folk are saying it's our collective will to self-determination. And that we must own things collectively. We must organize politically and push through collective policies that will benefit the whole BIPOC community and move freedom along.

We must create the liberatory space and farms; our farm, rural culture, and the urban rising culture are part of our liberatory space. So, I just wanna, and we rest upon the work of what you have done, Shirley, and the shining example of New Communities land trust, and what is materializing in Detroit and with the Northeast people of color land trust, these are just wonderful. Wonderful. And I can't wait to be at Rasara again and be at the opening for the Detroit food security co-op store, walk Leah's land, and have a meal with her again. Yes. That is how I wanna come out of COVID, walking Leah's land.

Shirley Sherrod: This union works together on issues together, even more. We need you here, and I want to come and visit your operations. Oh, it's wonderful. So, thank you all so much.