

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Importance of Land; Food Insecurity

Speaker 1 (00:00:07):

The name of this tune is Mississippi. And I mean, every word of it Alabama's gotten me so upset Tennessee made me Alabama's me. So upset Tennessee made me, everybody knows Mississippi

Speaker 2 (00:00:44):

God

Speaker 1 (00:00:48):

To see it. Can't you feel it? It's all in the air. Can't stand in the pressure and stand somebody come prayer. Alabama's gotten me so upset. Tennessee made me every show, but the show hasn't been written for it yet. Our dogs on my trail, school, children sitting in jail, black cat cross my path. I think every day is going to be my last Lord. Have mercy on this land of mine. We all going to get it in due time I don't belong here. I don't belong. There I've even stopped believing in prayer. Don't tell me, I'll tell

Speaker 2 (00:02:06):

You,

Speaker 1 (00:02:07):

Me and my people just about I've been there. So I know keep on saying, go

Speaker 2 (00:02:16):

Slow.

Speaker 1 (00:02:23):

That's just a turtle. Washing the windows, the you just playing RO

Speaker 2 (00:02:39):

Game.

Speaker 1 (00:02:49):

I do you very best. Stand up. Be counted with all the rest. I bet you thought I was kidding

Speaker 2 (00:03:05):

Me.

Speaker 1 (00:03:10):

Picket line school, boy cops. They try to say it's a communist plot. All I want is equality for my sister, my brother, my people, and me. Yes. You lied to me all these years. You told me to wash and clean my ears and talk real, just like a lady. And you'd stop calling me sister, Sadie. This whole country is full of lies. You keep saying go

Speaker 2 (00:04:13):

That's

Speaker 1 (00:04:31):

You don't what's it.

Speaker 3 (00:05:04):

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Importance of Land; Food Insecurity

Good afternoon, everyone. I'm so glad to be able to share the screen. This workshop with three giants in the work, dealing with land loss, black land loss and food insecurity. Um, you know, we were sounding the alarm many, many years ago about the issues around lack of credit and black land laws and air property. And as we were losing land, I can remember back in the, in the eighties when they were, we were saying, unless something was done about discrimination at U S D a by the year 2000, there'd be virtually no black on land. I also remember the issue of rural and urban, and I've been so happy to with my urban sister and brother, as they have worked to deal with the issues of food and security. And of course, um, savvy and land loss prevention has been working on this issue for many, many years.

Speaker 3 (00:06:11):

Um, I'm sitting here in a city where a grocery stores have closed, and this is Albany Georgia, and there are no grocery stores in south Albany. 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 the, 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 who are working in this area and join the movement to make a difference in saving land and in making sure our people can eat healthy food. So I have with here with me here, Malik from Detroit, my Malik, I would like to kick it over to you. Malik, um, is a co-founder of the Detroit black community food security network, doing some amazing work in Detroit. And I'm so, so happy to be able to have him share the work that they're doing. Malik,

Speaker 4 (00:07:47):

Thank you so much, miss Shira. And it's always a pleasure to see you as well as, uh, these dynamic, uh, co-panelists. I feel honored to be on the same panel with such dynamic sisters. Uh, my name is Malik Yakini I'm executive director and co-founder of the Detroit black community food security network. And 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 and that policy call for the creation of the Detroit food policy council, which we also stewarded into existence. We operate town farm, which is the largest of the 1600 or so small gardens and farms in the city of Detroit. In fact, I think Detroit is probably the place where there's more urban agriculture happening than any place in the country, partially because of the tremendous amount of, uh, vacant land in the city.

Speaker 4 (00:08:45):

And a friend of mine always reminds me that it's not really vacant because it's being reinhabited by rabbits and pheasants and other animals, but we have a tremendous amount of land that may be more accurately is not being utilized by human beings. So it has allowed urban agriculture to blossom in Detroit, uh, 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 town farm, we operate a youth program called the food warriors youth development program. And that program is rooted in the understanding that not only do our growing techniques have to be sustainable, but our movement has to be sustainable. And in order for the movement to be sustainable, we have to intentionally bring young people in it and they have to, they have to see value in the production of food.

Speaker 4 (00:09:35):

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Importance of Land; Food Insecurity

Uh, 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, or the main Tene of which will be the Detroit people's food. Co-op a cooperatively owned grocery store. We currently have more than 1300 member owners of the Detroit people's food co-op and we are expecting to break ground on this project before the year is over. Uh, so that's just a brief overview overview of the work we're up to in Detroit.

Speaker 3 (00:10:24):

Leah, what about the work you're doing in New York? You know, I've been so that I just have to say I'm 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 <laugh>.

Speaker 5 (00:10:46):

Well, thank you very much, Ms. Sharad and it is an honor to be on this panel with my colleagues and mentors who have paved the way, you know, 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 of Albany. And I don't think it's a coincidence that we are in Albany as well. Um, carrying on that, uh, 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, in our food system is first of all, to reclaim and build upon our ancestral Afro indigenous farming practices to take care of these 80 acres.

Speaker 5 (00:11:41):

So we're growing vegetables, fruits, um, medicinal, herbs, mushrooms, honey, we raise goats and chickens, uh, for eggs and 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 in the nearby urban areas of Albany, Troy, and the surrounding towns. Um, in addition to running the farm, which is of course, plenty of work. And if you saw me just a couple hours ago, I was covered in, uh, you know, goat, poop and, 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, uh, physical presence. You know, every year we have a very popular 50 hour, week long residential course called our soul fire farming immersion. Uh, but then we also teach online classes.

Speaker 5 (00:12:30):

We teach city folks how to grow their own food in their backyards, um, and provide all the materials and supplies for that. We, we help to run a fellowship in partnership with the Federation of Southern cooperatives that supports 10 new farmers with a salary and a mentor. Uh, we do online classes, youth programs, and so on. And then the final sort of third area of our work is of course, collaborating with folks like, uh, my wonderful co-panelists, uh, on regional and national organizing because we need better laws. We need better institutions, uh, not just the training to make sure that we have access to land and, and credit and capital and institutional supports to make it possible to succeed as farmers. So I'm here, uh, as a member of the rising generation of farmers, folks who are really excited to reclaim, uh, our proud agrarian tradition, um, and to carry on that sacred relationship with land. Thanks for having me.

Speaker 3 (00:13:25):

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Importance of Land; Food Insecurity

Thank you, Leah savvy, you knows. And I have been working on land loss issues. Oh my goodness. It dates back to the early nineties or late eighties when we had lots more land than we have now. And when many more farmers, um, so savvy, can you talk a little about that land loss work and, and then, um, our, how we are connecting the, uh, uh, Malik savvy with the rural urban connections on work as we work on these issues.

Speaker 6 (00:14:04):

Thanks. It's been a challenging tech day for me, and I just want to just give greetings to Malik and Leah and of of course, Shirley. Um, I believe all that I know I learned from you and, and it's not puffy. Um, when I entered this space of, of black AGR, um, movement, um, you were there from the very beginning in the midst of our fight, um, for, um, recognition and our, of our role in the us food system and demand for civil rights very much as SNCC had done in the past and its members continue to do. Um, so for us Shirley from the south, we definitely see, uh, a through line between the work of Leah and Malik. And I think Leah's right, it's not, there's no mystery behind why Albany New York and the fact that Albany New York was part of the, on the ground, uh, railroad and, and the surrounding towns of Troy and connect heavily African American had been our descendants of, of those, um, brave, um, warriors who sought for better conditions and freedom in the north.

Speaker 6 (00:15:36):

And of course, that came along with the AGR culture of the south. Clearly the food ways that we see in and around Albany insurance connectivity, many of which grown sustainably clean and healthy by soul fire farm is a continuum of that tradition we find, and, you know, evidence as part of the through line through Detroit, on, on our freedom railway and, and, um, the sustainability of the African American communities throughout Detroit and the continuing legacy of our food ways as expressed there and the movement that can directly link back in time to Mississippi and Fannie Lou Hamer. And I must, and that's why I believe, you know, um, you know, the civil rights movement has such resonancy in, in Detroit and, and the movement. Detroit was one of the places that black farmers from the south met and we met and agitated and figured out stuff.

Speaker 6 (00:16:58):

And we saw our people growing food, and many of us were like y'all own tractors in Detroit. And, and, uh, you know, so it added, um, 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 decolonizing, our food system, it is true that we've seen, um, tremendous, tremendous losses. Um, you know, um, Charlie, I was looking at the stats for, uh, Southwest Georgia, Georgia in particular, and right at the beginning of what is the classical civil rights period of say the 1954 after brown V board board of ed to about 69, you had like 12,000, um, farmers in Southwest Georgia, and that's in 54. And by 69 it had declined 63.1% as well as when you look at land ownership, which was about 1.3 million acres of land down to 558,000.

Speaker 6 (00:18:21):

So we see why, and it's no accident of history. Why three, 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 role, a tremendous role in the uplift and the freedom struggle of that, of the era, the civil rights era, but particularly in Southwest Georgia. So I just wanna just kind of ground what I have to say. And again, I just, um, just really thank, I'm thankful to be on

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Importance of Land; Food Insecurity

this panel with y'all and I just look forward to our conversation. So thank you for having me and back to you, Cheryl.

Speaker 3 (00:19:13):

Thank you.

Speaker 3 (00:19:16):

Okay. Thank you. Um, you know we have worked not only from the, the working the health farmers access credit, but also you've done lots of work on policy. Um, you've been instrumental in some of the few gains that we've had in terms of policy. And I just wanna point that out, but when S you know, I went to Detroit and I, I saw bees being grown and, and as said earlier, people with tractors, you know, I really started seeing how we could do more to make that rural, urban connection. Um, so, um, Malik, tell us a little bit more about the work that you're actually doing, the training going there in Detroit.

Speaker 4 (00:20:12):

So I'll put it first within a little context and say that human demographics has have changed significantly over the last hundred years, uh, on the planet a hundred years ago, most people lived in rural areas. Now, most people live in or around metropolitan areas. Similarly in the United States, a hundred years ago, most black folks lived in the south in predominantly rural areas. Now, most black folks live in, uh, metropolitan areas. And so as human demographics have changed, it also makes sense that we alter how we're growing and providing food. And so it makes sense for us to produce as much food as we can close to the places that we have centers of population density. Um, so that means it's important that we are growing food in Detroit, in New York and Philadelphia and Atlanta, but I also want to be clear that rural agriculture will ne I mean, urban agriculture will never replace rural agriculture.

Speaker 4 (00:21:10):

I see it as a good compliment. So for example, in Detroit, we can grow a tremendous amount of the fruits and vegetables that we consume given the amount of land that we have. We're not, we're not at that point. We're probably only producing three or 4% 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. Uh, but what we're not going to see is acres and acres of wheat growing, for example, in the city of Detroit and most human beings get most of their calories from grains. And 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 personally am a vegan, most black folks are not vegan and most black folks eat chicken and eat, uh, eat beef and pork.

Speaker 4 (00:22:08):

And so while there are chickens being raised in the city of Detroit, it's unlikely that we're going to see herd herds of cattle in the city of Detroit. So again, urban agriculture is not a threat to, or should not be seen as a replacement for rural agriculture, but it's a compliment. And so we always want to build the, the complimentary relationship between urban farmers and rural farmers and to be mutually supportive. Uh, so in Detroit, you know, I mentioned a bit about the tremendous amount of vacant land in the city of Detroit. I'll give a bit more history and say that Detroit has a very long history of urban agriculture. In fact, urban agriculture in the United States often is, uh, the Genesis of it is often pointed to in the city of Detroit in the 1890s, when Detroit had a Marinna named Hazen Penry, he was nickname Hazen potato patch Penry because during

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Importance of Land; Food Insecurity

the 1890s, during a period of economic, uh, re recession Hazen, Penry got wealthy landowner in the city of Detroit to allow landless people to use that land, to grow gardens, and many people point to that as the beginning of urban agriculture in the United States.

Speaker 4 (00:23:25):

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, Cleveland, so on, so forth. And so with them, they brought their rich knowledge. So at, you know, during the 1920s and really the migration, you know, started in the, in the teens and continued really up through the 1960s or so. But, um, um, 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, uh, backyard gardens or kitchen gardens, they had that experience. So for example, for me, my exposure to gardening was first in my grandfather's backyard, who came to Detroit in the 1920s to work in the Ford factory.

Speaker 4 (00:24:22):

And 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, uh, migrants that brought within this tremendous agricultural culture. And so that was part of what was happening in Detroit as more and more black folks moved here. And then in the 1970s, Detroit elected his first black mayor, Coleman Alexander Young, and he had a program called the farm lot program that the city actually ran and funded where they provided access to tractors and tillers and top soil and compost and seeds and transplants and encouraged Detroit and encourage Detroiters to plant on vacant lots throughout the city. And because of the simultaneous white flight that was occurring. In fact, the white flight from Detroit really starting the late 1950s, um, perhaps even before the late 1950s, the, of course the federal highway system helped to spur the development of these suburban subdivisions, which in turn, uh, helped to facilitate or catalyze this white flight.

Speaker 4 (00:25:25):

So it started in the fifties, but we saw a tremendous surge after the 1967 rebellion in the city of Detroit, and that left Detroit with a lot of vacant properties. And so the farm lot program was designed to put those vacant properties into productive use, uh, by growing food. And so Detroit is currently building on that long rich history of urban agriculture. And as I mentioned earlier, there are more than 1600 either gardens. And that includes backyard gardens, side lot gardens, uh, school gardens, as well as a number of small farms. So probably more urban agriculture is happening in the city of Detroit than 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,

Speaker 3 (00:26:14):

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

Speaker 5 (00:26:34):

I did say something about goats and I, I love what you said, Bob and Malik about, um, the, the complimentary 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. And the reason that I say that is because the vast

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Importance of Land; Food Insecurity

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, church gardens, and are desiring to scale up or to incorporate crops or livestock that are not feasible, um, in an urban area. And so they come out to soul fire farm with that excitement, uh, with a little bit of experience and then say, okay, so how do you put up these high tunnels? How do you, um, put a seven acre, you know, high Tenile electric fence around, uh, to keep the deer out?

Speaker 5 (00:27:26):

How are we gonna make sure that, that we can manage fertility and weeds on a large scale when you can't just be hand weeding? And so, um, that that's been really wonderful. And 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, uh, projects like shelter, wood collective, or Kaumba farm co-op Kabi, high hog farm, um, many, many others, because for us, uh, we think about our work as this biomimicry where, you know, the forest, when it, uh, the forest will share its nutrients, its minerals, its messages through a network of fungal MEIC. And in a similar way, I think of the black farming movement as being like the forest with each of our farmers being a tree, and we're sharing our resources and encouraging these other trees to grow, um, so that we can refor, you know, a landscape that has been, um, depopulated of our, our trees.

Speaker 5 (00:28:23):

And as far as goats, you know, the goats that we have, they are Newan, uh, they're brothers, Bucky, Nebula, Nova. Um, we've gone through different, uh, livestock and last year we had kata and sheet, but I really like the goats because they'll eat, uh, brush, not just pasture. And we've been clearing out our forest edges to expand our pastures and they get very, very excited to mu away at anything from poison Ivy to raspberries, to, uh, Birch trees. And, uh, their job is to fertilize our silver pasture. So we have a four acre orchard that's, um, apple trees, uh, cherry trees and peach trees. That's almost entirely fertilized by our goats and chickens. And so 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, uh, return the favor by providing shade, uh, to the animals and their dropped fruits and, and leaves for the animals to munch on. So it's a really beautiful system. And, uh, we, we are very excited about participating in climate healing and silver pasture is one of those technologies that does help draw carbon from the atmosphere and put it back in the soil where it belongs. So, um, and they're cute. Goats are very, very cute as well.

Speaker 7 (00:29:38):

<laugh>

Speaker 3 (00:29:39):

Uh, what other animals do you have chickens?

Speaker 5 (00:29:43):

Yeah, right now we have the goats, the chickens, the cats, and the dog. Um, we're on a mountain with pretty fragile soils. And so we can't do larger livestock. Um, 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 was some pig last year, but they moved down the road. Um, I'm pretty partial to the, the chickens and the turkeys myself.

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Importance of Land; Food Insecurity

Speaker 3 (00:30:07):

<laugh> Sam. Um,

Speaker 4 (00:30:23):

You're muted, miss

Speaker 6 (00:30:25):

You're muted.

Speaker 3 (00:30:26):

Okay. I'm sorry. Savvy. I was, am I still moving?

Speaker 6 (00:30:31):

I can believe <laugh> no, we can hear you

Speaker 3 (00:30:35):

Okays. Um, 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, cuz we've lost so many due to discrimination. Um, that's, what's at U S D a but throughout the system, the systemic racism they've had to endure. Can you talk a little about what has happened with that?

Speaker 6 (00:31:09):

Oh, sure. And I just wanna just kinda, um, just step back for a minute and just identify my organization, which is a North Carolina association of black lawyers, um, and land loss prevention project. And there is a connection between the land loss prevention project and the, um, Federation of Southern cooperatives land assistance fund. And, uh, these two groups and others like farmer's legal action group. And, um, the Royal coalition, the national family farm coalition have come together over many, many years and were, did some of the foundational work that led to the Pigford, uh, class action. Being able to proceed in court, took a lot of work. There was no magic about it. It was a lot of movement building on the ground with the farmers hitting the street, the ADE, but, uh, these groups, the Federation land loss and others were doing the work of the, the legal related work and the policy related work.

Speaker 6 (00:32:26):

And part of that thrust was also to undergird the rise, um, urban ag space by advocating for there to be an office, a dedicated office that would, um, provide the type of assistance that urban agricultural need and the funding, and basically integrate it within the mission across mission areas of the U S D a. So you would have urban ag mission being reflected in the Nat in the natural resource conservation services, which is why you would see high tunnels in Detroit and other places. And that, that all was just foundational policy work. But now we're at this place where, um, after, even before the, um, Biden election, beginning of his administration, there were key senators like Senator Booker and Elizabeth Warren having, um, clusters of meetings with black farm leaders and farmers as to the nature of, um, ongoing discrimination at the agency. And so there was, uh, deliberateness, um, I would say by the, um, congressional black caucus and Senator Booker's office.

Speaker 6 (00:33:56):

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Importance of Land; Food Insecurity

And it resulted in the beginnings of what would be, uh, the black farmer's justice act and given where we were with the pandemic, it was very, very critical that resources be provided to, uh, socially disadvantaged farmers. And that was part of the movement for the recognition that there were racism that continues and that black farmers bore the brunt of that and, and programs created section, um, um, Shirley you'll you'll fill me in on that gotta gap on that, but, uh, 25 0 1 and the definition of social disadvantage had all of that footprint in the work of, uh, Shirley Sheard in terms of the, the, you know, the language in, of, of that act and the, and the ongoing investigation of what was going on on the ground with black farmers in Southwest Georgia and across the south where the Federation would work, not only in, uh, Southwest Georgia, but in Florida, Northwest Florida and, um, Mississippi and Alabama tracking the historic black belt.

Speaker 6 (00:35:19):

And so with that, you know, we're able to get things moving, but now it is stalled and chiefly because, um, legal foundations, conservative legal foundations and ex, um, white house, um, program people, Trump administration, people have sought to derail the, um, emergency relief act for, um, bipo farmers. That was part of the American rescue plan. And that's being tied up in about 13 to 17 federal courts. And the first was the, uh, action that was filed in, in Wisconsin. And so, and there's one filed in Florida, one in Texas. And so what, where we're at at this critical juncture, given the fact that there's aluminum foreclosure crisis in the black farm belt and people of color farmers that we need to figure out what fixes there could be, uh, by way of legislation that would made the resources, uh, spread across the field for those who are being impacted, um, and are looking at foreclosure and are limited in resource. So there is really a very strong movement to, uh, language and rededicate resources in a way that black farmers could get and buy farmers writ large, the assistance that they need. And other limited resource farmers as, as a way to proceed on this.

Speaker 3 (00:37:16):

Yes. Um, Malik and, and Leah, you know, as we, as we move to try to save more of the farmland that we've been able to hold onto so far, there's so many things impacting, uh, whether we can at least hold, what, what do we have savvy estimate about 2 million acres down from about 15 million?

Speaker 6 (00:37:40):

Yeah. In terms of there that's part of the problem, part of the problem is that we don't really know how much we have. Yeah. What we do know is that by the end of the civil rights period, we had about 6 million acres. And so we are looking at acreage depending on where you look for the stats in families. Some people are saying that they're, um, let me, I dunno, these are new phones. So y'all, I turn and trained on. So some folk, according to some stats chiefly, um, coming out of, uh, national ag re um, statistical services that perhaps 7 million acres at large inclusive of those that are in owned by families that are not in farm production. So I would say of acting farmers, active farmers. I can't see it being a more than 2.5 million down from, uh, 15 million.

Speaker 3 (00:38:52):

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

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Importance of Land; Food Insecurity

Speaker 6 (00:39:17):

That's absolutely right. I see that as the, as the through line that connects, um, urban and rural black community as air's property and, and what we, we are now calling the, the black comments and, and A's property is a, a threat to the re emergency, but there are instruments that we have used in the past pioneered by, um, by new communities, uh, in Southwest Georgia. So the problem with air's property is that, and I wouldn't say it's a problem really is kingship land. And it arose out of objective circumstances, given how, uh, given the level of, uh, racial oppression and given the distrust of legal system because of white supremacy and, and, and the result that we all know will happen when black people encounter legal system in the carer state, um, 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.

Speaker 6 (00:40:45):

You would know who own it, and, and that you would set up families to, uh, basically to some, some, um, orchestration oppression within their, within the larger community. And so given that fact, um, our families historically have not done well. So we now are at this place where you now have the a, a, a fairly high numbers of land caught up in HES property that is actual, could actually become productive farmland. Now for the very first time. And I would say in the hundred and 50 year history of the role of, of the, um, department of agriculture, you now have within the, the 2018 farm bill legislative authority for the department of agriculture to and funded is a mandated program, um, to create an HES property re program and in places such as Georgia and upstate and New York. So if Leah knows of any black farmers or people of color farmers for air's property condition, you now have within the farm bill authority, that if you live in a state that has enacted the uniform partition of A's property act, you can gain entry level to U S D a programs.

Speaker 6 (00:42:20):

You get a farm and ranch number. You can get a conservation plan to be developed, um, by, um, conservation resource services. And not only that, you could position the farmer to qualify for resources from farm services agency, it's now in the farm of a loan, but we do believe in the movement that if you get a loan to clear air's property, and there's a default situation, then are you default in black land, the black commons back to the government? So, um, the collective feeling about this, that it ought to be part of the, um, ways in which 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 for forgivable loan program for HES property producer would be a much better system than for HES property producer to be part of a re program where there could be a default situation and very, very negative it family dynamics, as a result,

Speaker 3 (00:43:44):

Leah and Malik. What are your thoughts on debt, um, payoff or the air property situation as it, as, as you do the work you are doing on food security in your area,

Speaker 4 (00:44:01):

Leah, would you like to begin?

Speaker 5 (00:44:04):

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Importance of Land; Food Insecurity

I can start. Well, I, I will say, you know, um, soul fire farm is a member farm of the national black food and justice Alliance. And 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, um, including the debt relief provision. And, you know, it was one of the most stirring and moving moments of, of my work as a black farmer to, to see that that was part of a national conversation after so many generations of, uh, being ignored completely. Um, you know, I remember asking, I, I won't name their name, but I remember asking, um, an elected representative who came to visit our farm. Uh, have you ever heard of, of the issue of black land loss? Um, and they said, no, ne never even heard that issue.

Speaker 5 (00:44:59):

And then to see this in the national media to see this as part of the national debate. And I, I know we have not won the fight. I am very aware of that. And, you know, I know that there's a backlash, but that we have worked together over generations to bring it to the level of consciousness now, um, I wanna stop and toast and celebrate that, right? Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, 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 are more disconnected from any type of family land. So they're working as, uh, farm workers as laborers, or they're working in these short term, uh, 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 years or three years from then.

Speaker 5 (00:45:48):

Um, and so this issue of how to keep black land in the family. So to the extent of family, so to speak is, is huge. And what I would like to see and what I hope we can col continue to collaborate on. And, and, um, Ms. Sherad alluded to this is that we're training farmers and these farmers have no land, right? So how do we make those linkages between these farmers, who many of them are interested in the back south movement? There's been some writing on that. And so some theorizing on how important that 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 farmers who are landless, um, many of whom have started out in urban areas and are thinking that they want to, uh, to be connected to more acreage. And so I think there's a lot of potential there, and we need to solve all these problems simultaneously about, about the debt, the, the training, the, um, forgiveness, the, you know, air's property, all of that, to make sure that we, you know, our children's children's children can still have a conversation about black farmers that isn't a, a Requiem as we need to work together. Mm-hmm,

Speaker 4 (00:46:52):

<affirmative>, you know, I don't have much to add to what my two brilliant sisters have said, except just to say that it's important that we link the issue of black land, to the issue of reparations and I'm of the mindset. While I agree with Leah, that we need to celebrate the justice for black farmers act, and we need to celebrate all the incremental victories that we have. We also need to push for massive redistribution of land in the United States. And, um, we need to tie that, uh, massive redistribution of land to our demands for reparations. A lot of times we think about reparations. We only think about, uh, payments cash payments. And the other thing is that we often think about reparations coming from the government, but as, uh, Leah knows, and, and many of us have experienced, uh, reparations can be, uh, given by individuals also.

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Importance of Land; Food Insecurity

Speaker 4 (00:47:43):

So there are individual land owners who are seeding land to black farmers. I think that's an important form of reparations. We're finding, uh, individual wealthy people who are giving large sums of money to black farmers. That's another form of reparations. So I would support, uh, all of that, and also suggest that as we move into this next era of black land ownership and black, uh, the, the agrarian aspect of our, of our forward motion, that, uh, we look more at collective ownership of land. And of course, uh, Ms. Shard and the, uh, you you've been instrumental in advancing the concept of community land trust. Uh, we need to look at those in any other means that we can devise of collectively so-called owning land, by the way, I don't believe in land ownership. Um, it, well, it's a paradox because on one level, I don't believe in it. And on the other level, it's a necessary evil in order to create security for black farmers. But I think we have to move beyond the mindset that we have now of individual ownership of land and look at how we can collectively hold land, uh, for the future for future generations.

Speaker 3 (00:48:53):

Yeah. So Malik, since you mentioned, um, the community land trust, I'd like to just 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 land owners because of their participation in the movement. And it prompted us in 1968, the summer of 1968 to send a delegation to Israel, to look at how they were resettling, uh, families into new economically viable commun. They, they came back. My husband was one, one of the seven official members who went, uh, to Israel to look at what they were doing. And we started meeting and, and looking at what they learned and what we knew and what we felt. And I just wanna 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 possible their earning a living producing for their own needs.

Speaker 3 (00:50:16):

And 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 actually got our hands on 6,000 acres of land creating the first community land trust. Was it easy, was a smooth sailing from there, no way <laugh> 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. Um, we, we, 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, of industry and 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.

Speaker 3 (00:51:35):

So it wasn't just about the land and growing. We were trying to create a whole new kind of people <laugh> us, you know, trying to take us back to our roots. So if you fast forward to, this was about seven years ago, we were working with a group of young people here in the city at the, at the boys club, training them how to plant a garden. And we were putting in, um, cabbage and one young boy stood back and, uh, he's looking at everybody and we said, don't you wanna come on and help? He said, well, I don't eat, um, food from the earth. And he said, you don't,

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Importance of Land; Food Insecurity

where do you get your food? He said, he, 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.

Speaker 3 (00:52:29):

So it really, you know, just really opened my eyes to how so, how he is so displaced. I mean, food is being growing all around him. We are in the most agricultural area of the state. And, um, he had no idea other than the, the grocery store as to where his food was coming from. So we we've gone through. And I think people knew what it would mean to have that kinda land. I think they knew what it would mean for us to have that kind of new way of dealing with, with each other, you know, new way of treating each other new way of growing and working together. And I think as I see you all in the cities, um, actually promoting that and pulling people together again, it's, it's really encouraging to, uh, to see it happen. Um, yes, new communities now has we lost 6,000 acres?

Speaker 3 (00:53:28):

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. Um, and, and it took, it took my husband almost 10 years to bounce back from it. But you know, those of us, we say, when you look at the civil rights movement, you see the guys at the top SN yes. But then you look at all those women who are doing that work. So we have to pivot and, and do what we need to do to keep things going. And that's exactly what happened with the new community. So that today we do not have 6,000 acres. We are not on that property, but we do have 1,638 acres of land. And 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 18 hundreds, he held the largest number of slaves on that property.

Speaker 3 (00:54:29):

Now I had a problem when we were initially initially looking at it, it's like, Antibe they talking about the antebellum house? Why would we we'd 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, 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. So anyone else wanna comment at this point?

Speaker 6 (00:55:41):

Yeah. I just always, um, like to, uh, do an uplift for our first role sociologist and people don't seem in that light, um, w E B the boys and the book of the black belt, the chapter and the souls of black folk. And, and the fact that it's, what is it, 112 years ago, he wrote that and it really still Albany Doty county still, it, it still feels the same, you know, when he spoke to modern evidence of modern land, Grabb, mm-hmm, <affirmative> his works not mine. Right. And, and, and so, you know, we, we hear about land grabbing, but we're not put it in, in with the context that black folk, um, have recognized land grab was really what was going on. So we weren't like losing land. They were grabbing the land. Yeah. Uh, from us using, uh, legal, any kind of legal machinations, uh, um, to, to, to get at the land. And I, I just also wanna say, you know, coming

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Importance of Land; Food Insecurity

outta Detroit, the nation of Islam 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

Speaker 3 (00:57:10):

Yeah.

Speaker 6 (00:57:11):

On the management down to now, cuz of all their transition, all stuff and not getting into that. It's beyond the scope of our conversation. I believe they're now at under a thousand acres.

Speaker 3 (00:57:23):

Yes. It's somewhere. I think it's a little more than a thousand doing some amazing things,

Speaker 6 (00:57:27):

But doing some amazing things. So given where that they are given what the potential is to, for the use of the, um, 1600 acres by new communities and the growing, um, urban ag movement, gardening movement in Albany and in those small towns, uh, you know, the tides will turn and will create the conditions where, um, young, young kids again, can dream and understand where their food come from. So it won't be yucky stuff. They will see it as a place where they can learn and grow and thrive being on the land, being on a farm. And so I think we're all collectively working for that, whether in our urban spaces, our rural spaces. So never again, will we have a child that look at cabbage and say, I ain't gonna eat that. Cuz that's yucky. Cause it has dirt on it. Um, so yeah, so that makes the work even more important that we have to continue to do.

Speaker 3 (00:58:38):

Yes. Leah Malik, <laugh>

Speaker 4 (00:58:48):

Leah. Um, I'll just end by saying that, um, I think it's extremely important that black folks or however we define ourself, you know, one of our challenges is we define ourself in so many different ways. Uh, but you know, I still like the term black people. So one of the things that we have to do is we have to develop a sense of consciousness that encourages us to work on our own collective behalf. That's right. And because without that, we can't accomplish anything. And so we have to see our destinies as being tied together. Mm-hmm <affirmative> and we have to see collective work as being the way that we move forward and cooperative economics is being the, 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 and that we have a collected destiny and that it's up to us to exhibit agency over our own lives.

Speaker 4 (00:59:50):

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

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Importance of Land; Food Insecurity

Speaker 3 (01:00:32):

Thank you. Well there, yeah. <laugh>

Speaker 5 (01:00:36):

Yeah. I'll I will conclude by just building on, um, what y'all have said, you know, one of my favorite, uh, teachings from ancestor, Fannie Lou Hamer, she 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. Shera, as you're discussing, uh, the incredible founding and re uh, restoration of new communities, it makes me think about that importance, uh, Baba Malik also with feeding ourselves and our communities and also building our own institutions. So yes, demanding fair treatment from the U S D a and simultaneously talking about, well, what do our own finance vehicles look like? What do our own land trust look like? What are our own co-ops like they have in Detroit look like, and you know, in the Northeast we've started, uh, a little simmer of that.

Speaker 5 (01:01:24):

You know, we have a land trust called the Northeast farmer of color land trust that collaborates with the farmer training organizations, the rural one is soul fire farm. The urban one is farm school NYC. We have a policy advocacy group, black farmers, United New York state, right. We also have, um, the food aggregator, the Corbin hill food project. These are all black and indigenous led, uh, 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. There's where you get capital. Here's where you get trained. There'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 really do think that self-organization mutual aid, um, institutions that are community led are, are very important and will ensure, you know, our long term survival and, and wanna echo that. Um, it's a deep honor to be on this panel with, with my mentors, um, with the folks who have been doing this work for much longer than I have. And, and I just hope to be worthy of, you know, of all that you've invested in me and in, in us. So thank you.

Speaker 6 (01:02:26):

Thank

Speaker 3 (01:02:27):

You, Leah. Thank you. You know, it's been savvy. Would you like to have some closing and remarks?

Speaker 6 (01:02:33):

Yeah, I kinda got myself fixed, um, the boys, so I got it taken home with, uh, Douglas on what this all means. And I just wanna just, if I'm looking down, I'm actually reading it cause I don't wanna mess it up. He said, uh, quote, if there is no struggle, there's no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom. And yet they appreciate agitation are 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, in that redemptive, uh, refrain of his, we have seen the uprisings and we have seen that black folk are saying it's our collective will, uh, to self-determination. And, uh, and that we must own things

SNCC 60TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE, 2021

The Importance of Land; Food Insecurity

collectively. We must organize politically and we must push through collective policies that will benefit the whole of BI community and move freedom along.

Speaker 6 (01:03:55):

We must create the liberatory space and farms, our farm, rural culture, and the urban rising culture is part of our liberatory space. So I just wanna, and we rest upon the work of what you have done, uh, Shirley and, 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 ROR again and be at the opening for Detroit, um, food security co-op store and walk Leah's land and have a meal with her again. Yes. That's. I wanna come out walking Leah's land. Yes.

Speaker 3 (01:04:46):

Well said you, you know, um, I always Malik have you, I don't think you've been down. Have you been down Leah? No, I haven't been there

Speaker 6 (01:04:56):

Yet. You have to,

Speaker 5 (01:04:58):

I've been down. I went to the 50th anniversary right before COVID thank

Speaker 3 (01:05:02):

God's right.

Speaker 5 (01:05:04):

Sat on that big old porch.

Speaker 6 (01:05:05):

Yeah.

Speaker 3 (01:05:06):

To get you back here again. So we can really push

Speaker 6 (01:05:09):

Absolutely

Speaker 3 (01:05:11):

This, uh, union working together, you know, working on issues together, even more. We need you here and I definitely want to come and visit your operations. Oh, it's wonderful. So.