



Our CORE Incorporated

PO Box 1371

Newburgh, NY 12551

845-202-3446

Our vision is a community without economic, political, nutritional, and environmental oppression.

20 April 2021

Written Testimony- Joint Public Hearing: Diversifying Agriculture and Addressing Food Justice

Christine Hutchinson - Biographical details

Teacher-Newburgh school district

Director- Our Core Inc. an organization that empowers statistically and actually marginalized youth.

Board Member- Northeast Farmers of Color

Steering Committee member- Black Farmers United

Avid Supporter- Black Farmer Fund

Former poultry farmer

Our Core's AgriCultural Education program seeks to diversify agriculture and address food justice to lessen inequities in our food systems. We do not seek to coexist with them. Our program teaches young people to grow food and steward land- that isn't theirs.

Our students' disconnection from their food is endemic of the historical disconnection of Black people from their land. In their conjuring an image of a farmer, he is definitively a white man.

The very real lack of diversity in farming, the horridly accurate image that embodies the statistic: 139 of over 50,000 farmers instantly diminishes this pool of potential farmers. Their attempts to connect Black people to farming generally lead only to images of enslavement. They need to see themselves in the countenance of their imagined farmer.

Among the things we teach in our program are that Black people **have historically farmed**, before, during and after enslavement, so to embrace agriculture is to embrace our history.

To do this teaching, we must meet them where they are- in urban areas. Urban agriculture is how we create farmers as current farmers age out. If Urban agriculture is not supported, that



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is a clear statement that- even as we desperately attempt to fill the seats we anticipate will be left empty by returning farmers, we do not want Black farmers.

Our Core has developed a program that generates interest in farming, and has the potential to produce farmers and citizens who prioritize NY agriculture. These teens are with us for 3 or more years. Once they finish their work with us, when they aim to move into the agricultural professions with skills and credentials- they will hit the brick wall.

This would be the same brick wall I faced when I was a small poultry farmer. I grew poultry on another person's land. Though the land owner was kind and gracious- other people in the space were making quiet and clear threats- making it apparent that it was a matter of time before I would face scrutiny that could become an explosive situation. With no agricultural community to support me, my only option was to leave that space. There was no other land for me- the resources needed were simply not there. Even with savings and a Masters-level career - I could not afford the land needed to continue to grow poultry in Orange County. In Our Core's work, we also can not access the land to run our programs- instead piecemealing our work on land others allow us to use - until they don't. This demonstrates to these young people that there really is no option to continue the work that we claim is most important.

As we've approached parcels of land in Newburgh over the last two years, we have been told time and again agriculture is simply not valuable enough to deserve a single dedicated acre. Even on land that has sat vacant for decades, the **idea** of 'Development,' just the possibility of future development wins out every single time.

Unless we turn to BFU's 9 solutions.

Solution # 3 transfers 400 acres of land to the NEFOC land trust. and #5 supports black-led urban farms' access to empty lots and permanently protects urban farms with conservation easements.

New York State must make agricultural space a fiscally appealing option for struggling municipalities and individuals. Easement funding should be made available to organizations



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that have the capacity to turn gravelly lots into food and skill producing spaces particularly for our young people who have no other real connections to their foods.

Committing land to the NEFOC land trust ensures urban and rural lands are available to nurture crops, learners, farmers and our state



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Black Farmers United NYS 9 Solutions for Racial Inequity in New York Agriculture

In 2019, Black Farmers United NYS, a group of over 40 Black farmers and food systems actors, developed these 9 solutions for racial inequity in New York agriculture. These initial solutions build on the collective successes and challenges of Black-centered initiatives. Moreover, they are informed by our collective knowledge of the missteps of white-led organizations “serving” Black farmers. We must shift the decision-making power and resources needed to design and implement these solutions to Black people and organizations, and ensure they are not co-opted by white-led institutions. The initial solutions include:

SOLUTION #1: Pathways for Black guestworkers, migrant workers, and undocumented farmworkers to become business-owning “producers.”

SOLUTION #2: \$10 million for Black farmers through the Black Farmer Fund, a nonprofit investment vehicle collectively led by Black farmers for Black farms and food businesses in New York State including food, forage, hemp, fiber, livestock and related enterprises.

SOLUTION #3: 400 acres to the Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust, which provides affordable land access to Indigenous and Black farmers and earthkeepers.

SOLUTION #4: Create a certificate program at Cornell with experienced Black farmers teaching new Black farmers on their farms with salaries and scholarships provided by the University.

SOLUTION #5: Funds for Black-led urban farms. Create easier pathways and priorities for urban farmers to access empty lots. Permanently protect urban farms with conservation easements. Support Black farmers in building an urban-to-rural pipeline for growers.

SOLUTION #6: Ensure Black people are included as “Farmland for a New Generation



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New York” navigators.

SOLUTION #7: Provide full scholarships to all Black students pursuing SUNY agricultural degrees.

SOLUTION #8: Improve data collection to identify who and where our state’s Black farmers are.

SOLUTION #9: Combine and refine these solutions to create a comprehensive plan to increase the number of Black farmers in New York State who are thriving.

Learn more at: <https://www.blackfarmersunited.org>