

# Shining a Light in Dark Places

## Raising Up the Work of Southern Women of Color in the Food System

A Policy Brief



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*Contact us:*

The Center for Social Inclusion  
150 Broadway, Suite 303 New York, NY 10038  
(212) 248-2785  
[info@thecsi.org](mailto:info@thecsi.org)

*Find us online:*

[www.centerforsocialinclusion.org](http://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org)  
[www.facebook.com/centerforsocialinclusion.org](https://www.facebook.com/centerforsocialinclusion.org)  
[www.twitter.com/theCSI](https://www.twitter.com/theCSI)

## AUTHOR:

**Shorlette Ammons**, CSI Food Equity Fellow

North Carolina A&T State University at the Center for Environmental Farming Systems

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This work and any future work are never possible without the people on whose shoulders we stand. I am forever grateful to the countless women of color in North Carolina, the US, and Global South who laid this path. Thank you Hattie Adell Ammons.

A special thanks to all of the women who took the time to share their thoughts, ideas, and passions with me during this interview process: Tavia Benjamin, Eva Clayton, Hermelinda Cortes, Greta Gladney, Shirley Pope, and Daa'iyah Salaam. Much appreciation to you all.

Much gratitude to the Center for Social Inclusion for this opportunity, with special appreciation to Anthony Giancatarino, Simran Noor, and Maya Wiley.

Thank you to North Carolina A&T State University and the Center for Environmental Farming Systems. A very special thank you to Dr. John O'Sullivan for his mentorship and leadership.

Thank you to everyone who reviewed and offered feedback on this paper, including Shirlette Ammons, Dennis Chin, Suzanne Pharr, Christina Spach, Monica White, and others. I know that time is a limited resource. Much appreciation for lending us some of yours.

Thank you Anansi, my light; Caitlin, my heart; the Ammons' and all of my family, both blood and chosen, who has supported me through the duration of this project and this work.

**SHINING A LIGHT IN DARK PLACES: POLICY BRIEF**  
*RAISING UP THE WORK OF SOUTHERN WOMEN OF COLOR IN THE FOOD SYSTEM*

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

*Introduction* .....4

*Changing the narrative*.....6

*Identifying food systems policy that directly affects women and children*.....9

*Developing women of color leadership to lead the policy change*.....11

*Capacity building and organizational development*.....13

*Finding ways to sustain small family farms*.....15

*Recommendations*.....17

*Final Thoughts*.....20

*Appendix*.....21

    I. *Interviewee Biographies*.....21

    II. *Referenced Organizations*.....24

## INTRODUCTION:

As a Black girl growing up as a farmworker in rural North Carolina, the realities of our food system were obvious early on. My first realization that the food system was broken was not in the segregated lines of free “welfare baby” lunchers and full-price lunch students in middle school, nor was it in the grocery store line where we shamefully offered our welfare checks in exchange for Body Buddies cereal and “government cheese.” It was in the tobacco and cucumber fields, just outside of **Mount Olive**, where my 11-year-old twin sister, my younger cousins, my aunts, and myself spent our summers working for Mr. Julius; his grandson, who was much younger than all of us, was our overseer, towering over us on his tractor. We worked for money to buy school clothes, mostly from the Maxway or Roses. We started around 5 AM so we could beat the heat of North Carolina’s scorching summers. We were paid \$2-3 per hour by the Julius family; cashed our paychecks at their store and purchased our Pepsis, peanuts, and nabs there too. We were putting their money right back into their pockets. At some point, when receiving the change in my 6th grade hands, I recall thinking, “*something about this ain’t right.*” I, like so many other rural, Southern, farmworker children, knew “where our food comes from.” We also knew that something wasn’t right.

**Real life Southern stories**, such as my own as well as those described in the interviews referenced throughout this document, illustrate the **legacy** of work of women of color in the food system as a means of transforming the lives of young children. My mother’s remembrances of growing up are often **food-centric**, describing the work of many collective hands on often borrowed land. These practices of resilience still exist in today’s Southern food story. Examples of this legacy appear in the work of the **Southern Rural Black Women’s Initiative (SRBWI)** which connects small farmers of color to distribution channels like school systems and other institutions. It can also be seen in the work of Community Voices, a curriculum started at North Carolina



A&T State University by **Dr. Shirley Pope**, who is now at Alcorn State University, and others. The curriculum walks communities through a collective process of identifying key issues and formulating ground-up solutions. Additionally, there is the work in **Goldsboro**, North Carolina, headed by Cheryl Alston and other elder Black women, to start a “barter CSA” (community supported agriculture) in which a community of families plant row crops and exchange among themselves in order to create a diverse offering of healthy, affordable, and locally grown foods.

These small initiatives, led by women of color, are innovative examples of collective, community-based efforts that are steeped in Southern traditions, but are often invisible because of lack of resources and scale. Dating back to slavery, **cooperative economics among African Americans**, working together and sharing resources, was necessary for basic survival, meeting both practical and spiritual needs and often facilitated by women. Equitable

distribution – making sure everyone received equal sustenance for their work and their needs – represented a value in poor Black communities that was rarely reciprocated in the larger culture. From the post-reconstruction efforts of the late 1800's to **organized labor** to the **civil rights and Jim Crow era of the 1960's**, cooperative economics became a political necessity, as much as a spiritual and practical one. Being poor in the South often meant being further removed from the political and economic fabric of this country, making the decision-making voice provided by cooperatives even more critical to the empowerment of a disenfranchised people. The collective voice that cooperatives provided helped give women and political leaders of color like Fannie Lou Hamer and others a solid economic platform, as well as economic viability and a national stage.

**This document describes the realities of current and past food systems from the perspectives of Southern women of color.** Interviewees include former Congresswoman Eva Clayton, who brings a needed perspective based on her global anti-hunger work and passion for rural communities; Tavia Benjamin and Hermelinda Cortes, who both offer millennial insight on the intersectionality of issues that lead to economic and health disparity; finally, Daa'iyah Salaam and Greta Gladney offer a grassroots perspective that provides a direct link between what is happening on the ground and the policies that are needed to impact change. This paper charts a course based on five different focus areas that have emerged from interviews of these women. Quotes and stories from those interviews are woven throughout the document. It concludes with a series of recommendations, as defined by this set of leaders, and a few final thoughts that emerged from my own work and this process. The overall purpose of the recommendations is to create **equitable food systems change** by:

- 1) **Changing the narrative;**
- 2) **Identifying food systems policy that directly affects women and children;**
- 3) **Developing women of color leadership to lead the policy change;**
- 4) **Capacity building and organizational development; and**
- 5) **Finding ways to sustain small family farms.**

## 1) CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

Dispelling current food systems narratives like, “*youth don’t know where their food comes from*” or “*farmworkers and people of color only relate farm work to slavery and have no desire to own land and become farmers,*” is critical to creating a new narrative that encompasses the struggles and realities of people of color who are working to change the system as well as those who are most directly affected by its inequities.

The current narrative echoes the disproportionate number of people of color in our obesity rates, hunger and food insecurity rates, and most health-related diseases. What the current narrative often omits are the economic gaps that force folks to make hard choices. Should I purchase healthy food or basic medication or diapers? Will my family and I be deported?

Creation of new narratives that provide examples of historic and current working models based on cooperative economics and that are descriptive of the impact of White colonization, slavery, and deportation are essential. These, and other institutionally racist practices, have led to much of the disparity that exists in marginalized communities. Implementation of policies and strategies that build equitable urban and rural communities is a key objective.

The current food systems story spans generations, cultures, and Southern landscapes. But it is threaded by a distinct omission and skewing of the narrative of many Southern women of color whose complicated food legacy shapes and informs our current work and reality. Lack of a **counter narrative** hinders the expansion of stories that demonstrate the linkages between urban and rural, north and south, and the relationship to resistance struggles around the Global South. According to a 2012 report released by Southerners on New Ground,<sup>1</sup> the rural South houses 83% of the poverty that lies outside of urban communities. Most of the **one and a half million Latinos that moved to the rural United States** in 2011 are in the South, along with **millions of African Americans** who migrated north between 1915-1970 and are now returning to their Southern, rural roots.

For Southerners, growing food is not a new concept. The key is to recognize the work of growing food to feed our communities as a revolutionary, resistance-based process, revitalized by Southern, rural people during the pre-civil rights era. Looking at the histories that fuel the current landscape of Black Southern agrarianism, and labor struggles of Latino and other farmworkers in the United States and beyond, can be vital to moving our work forward in both urban and rural areas. The relationship of Black Southerners to land and agriculture is long and complex. We are an agrarian people, with a history of soul food, storytelling, organizing, sharecropping, and farm cooperatives, all not far removed from present day. Lack of land access was not coincidental in the Southern slave economy that created big agriculture in the South. Many Black farmers in the early 1950’s and after were denied access to loans to secure

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<sup>1</sup> Southerners on New Ground - [http://Southernersonnewground.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Smalltown%20Crossroads%20Report%20\[FINALWEB\].pdf](http://Southernersonnewground.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Smalltown%20Crossroads%20Report%20[FINALWEB].pdf)

new land and **maintain family-owned farms**. Many Blacks and poor Whites were forced to sharecrop, a form of rural tenancy where Black and poor White families worked land for White landowners in exchange for a small portion of the crop, sharing a similar economic fate. This was a counter-productive economy for a supposedly emancipated society; it tied sharecropping families to the White landowners indefinitely.

The rural South is rich in stories and histories, which are repositories for intergenerational, intersectional experiences that link the U.S. North and Global South and cut across ethnic, racial, and class boundaries. We often create the networks we need to facilitate access to jobs, housing, healthcare, and financial, political, and spiritual survival. **Policy, at its best, is influenced by and reflects culture change happening at the grassroots level.**

A current narrative among the mainstream food movement is that children don't know where their food comes from. As we work to reshape and create a new food systems narrative that is more inclusive of the experiences of Southern women and other people of color, Hermelinda's story, as well as my own, represent an often-ignored counter narrative. The denial or omission of this counter narrative contributes to the continued invisibility of an entire generation, their identities muted as a labor and knowledge base that helped shape our food economy.

**Hermelinda Cortes** is the 25-year-old daughter of a migrant farmworking father from Mexico and a working-class mother from the mountains of West Virginia. Her current work with youth in a farm-to-table afterschool program in Harrisonburg, Virginia where she instructs school-aged youth on basic nutrition, healthy eating, cooking, and gardening, has been informed by her poor, rural upbringing in a trailer park on a cattle farm in Augusta County, Virginia. She says,



*"My entire life structure was around what came with poultry work. At a young age, we had a good understanding of where food came from. We were not too fond of eating products they were producing AND that was the food we could afford."*

– Hermelinda Cortes

Here is more of Hermelinda's Story:

*"When I moved back to where I grew up, that's when I started more formally doing work in the school systems here. And primarily that came in a farm- to-table middle school class that I've been doing for about two years now. And that class has mostly looked like...an afterschool enrichment program that has national funding. Two tiers, four days per week. First hour is homework tutoring and then the 2nd hour of the program, they get to choose an elective, enrichment course. It's been wildly popular. Kids love it!*

*"On both sides of my family, we always put up food... that's just something that we always did. Even though we lived in a trailer in the middle of nowhere. That's what supplemented your income. There was always a contrast of being broke and my folks working in these huge places that were these mass-food industrialized things and then at the same time there was this sense of abundance of the stuff that we were growing ourselves and the sense of the community that exists because if we weren't growing something, somebody else was growing something. And I've always had a real interest in food because of that. It was how we socialized...got together. So, that's how I've always held food a little close to my heart because of that. I don't think it was until I grew up and moved away from where I was growing up and moved to the city that I was like 'Holy Moly' there's not a lot of access to fresh stuff here."*

– Hermelinda Cortes

## 2) IDENTIFYING FOOD SYSTEMS POLICY THAT DIRECTLY AFFECTS WOMEN AND CHILDREN

To make changes lasting and sustainable, we must **alter structures**, not just individual behaviors, particularly those that directly affect the lives of our young children who are most at risk of disparities created by rigid and biased structures. One such example is the Women, Infants and Children program (WIC). **Daa'iyah Salaam** of the Southwest Georgia Project points out that WIC, which provides supplemental food for pregnant women and women with young children, has traditionally offered dairy products like cheese and whole milk as a primary source nutrition. She says:

*"When we first started our racial healing program, we asked 'what does food and race have to do with each other?'...We used the policy of WIC and what women are able to get on WIC vouchers. Now, they have since added more things, but at one time you could only get the beans, the cereal, the milk and the cheese--nothing fresh at all. If you think about if you have a high concentration of minorities...and science tells us that African Americans are 75% lactose intolerant, but you have to feed your children and you're feeding them milk and cheese and dairy, and they are intolerant to that, what are you gonna do? You're gonna feed that to them...if I'm locked into this to feed my child, this is what I'm going to feed my child."*

– Daa'iyah Salaam

African Americans make up about 12% of the U.S. population, however, nearly 20% of WIC program participants identify as African American.<sup>2</sup> According to the Johns Hopkins Health Library, nearly 75% of African-Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic Americans are lactose intolerant as are nearly 90% of Asian Americans<sup>3</sup>. Clearly, WIC was not structured to accommodate the nutritional and particular dietary needs of people of color, though its intention was to provide greater access to nutritional foods. If you are in need of a program like WIC, your choices are limited to what is available even though it may not be good for you. The unintended consequences are increased pediatric visits, if you can afford them, and higher

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture - <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/WICPC2012.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Johns Hopkins Medicine - [http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthlibrary/conditions/digestive\\_disorders/lactose\\_intolerance\\_85,P00388/](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthlibrary/conditions/digestive_disorders/lactose_intolerance_85,P00388/)

child healthcare costs. As a result, in 2002, the USDA began its first review of the WIC nutrition program's offerings since the 1980s. New recommendations like the ones below were developed to better suit the cultural and dietary needs of people of color:

#### Soy Milk and Tofu

Soy milk and tofu (calcium fortified) have been added as options that can be substituted for dairy products in the food package. The inclusion of soy milk and tofu provides popular high-calcium foods for WIC clients from a diversity of cultures. In addition, these foods are an important alternative for clients with milk allergies and lactose intolerance, a more common problem in the African-American and Asian population.

#### Whole Grains

Corn tortillas, bulgur and other whole grains can be substituted for the new whole grain bread category.  
(from John Hopkins Medical Library)

Food systems struggles have often been synonymous with the labor fights for a **fair and living wage**. Farmworkers, dishwashers, cooks, servers, and other workers all along the food chain often endure the drudgery of food systems work while lingering at the low end of the economic spectrum. Women of color are a vital link in that chain, with women and people of color representing a majority of fast food workers as well as those who are on the lowest end of the pay scale, according to the Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC). Additionally, a report from the Food Chain Workers Alliance states that 0% of agricultural workers receive a living wage, with 52% receiving a subminimum wage and 40% making poverty-level wages.<sup>4</sup>



A further look at policies and regulations that have obvious, often unintentional, biases that directly affect women and children, like those associated with the WIC program, as well as labor policies that impact living wages, are needed in order to transform the **biased structures** of our federal policies.

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<sup>4</sup> Food Chain Workers Alliance - <http://foodchainworkers.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Hands-That-Feed-Us-Report.pdf>

### 3) DEVELOPING WOMEN OF COLOR LEADERSHIP TO LEAD THE POLICY CHANGE AS THEY HAVE CULTURE CHANGE

**Fannie Lou Hamer** is long known for her leadership with SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee). However, one of her greatest passions was her cooperative farming effort, the Freedom Farm Cooperative. Ms. Hamer often said, *“If you give a hungry man food, he will eat it. If you give him land, he will grow his own food.”* The cooperative, under the leadership of Black women like Hamer and many others, brought meaningful income to thousands of folks, over 600 acres of land access to poor Black rural people, and the political fight for economic justice to the fields. She had diverse financial backing, with White college students coordinating a fundraising effort that acquired thousands of dollars in grassroots support for the cooperative, making her leadership intergenerational, interdisciplinary, and multi-racial.



*Fannie Lou Hamer*

Continued leadership development of young women of color by elder people of color has been an integral part of Southern strategies. Interviewee **Tavia Benjamin**'s humility and eagerness to learn and be engaged is a testament to the efficacy of that strategy and its potential for positive impact. As a Black woman coming from a middle-class background, Tavia credits her development as an advocate for social justice to a number of experiences that include working with DC Votes to get full voter representation for the District of Columbia, involvement with HAFA (Healthy Affordable Food For All), which brings together folks from all over the food sector, her field fellowship with the Detroit Black Food Security Network, and volunteer work on local urban farms and a women and people of color-led farm co-op. Tavia also assists with the Black Land Project, which is a national survey program that researches and “amplifies conversations” about the Black community’s historical and current relationship to land.

The interview with Tavia, who began to see the parallels in the health disparity among women in Tanzania, Native American populations on tribal lands, and Black women and youth during her alternative spring break experiences, reminds me of **La Via Campesina's** recent food sovereignty statement, *“Food sovereignty is about an end to all forms of violence against women.”* Writer and activist Raj Patel adds, *“The way that capitalism works today is that it demands a subsidy of women's work, especially women's work in the home. Women's work is often unpaid and contributes to well over half of the output of the world's economy.”* He asserts that we must democratize our homes, our plates, our communities, our organizations, and our policies in order to achieve equity in our food system. Women make most of the decisions about food in the home, but they can also play a key role in agricultural decisions and agricultural policy

because of that home-based decision-making power. The leadership of women, therefore, is key in this work and there must be a strong policy and resource investment in support of it.

*"Food is the basis of life...A way for communities to create wealth and for those communities to have self-determination. And it just fits with Black culture."*

– Tavia Benjamin

## 4) CAPACITY BUILDING AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### THROUGH KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS EXCHANGE AND INTERGENERATIONAL PRACTICE INTRODUCTION

From 1910 to 2002, the amount of **Black-owned farmland has decreased by a staggering 90%**<sup>5</sup>. The number of Black farmers has also seen dramatic decreases over the years, up until the recent census which indicates a slight increase. However, many are still tenant farming on much greater acreage owned by White farmers. The continuation of this trend stems from historical predatory lending practices, divisive heirs' property regulations which govern rights of inheritance or lack thereof, and poor legislative protections leading to mistrust and further discrimination within the federal government. Although these practices were not exclusive to the South, Southern farmers were deeply impacted by these policies. This helped to fuel the shrinkage of land and opportunities for farmers of color. In early 2000, food system leaders in rural Georgia came together to focus on rural women in agriculture in the states of Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia.

The Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative (SRBWI) was born out of the desire to create programming specifically designed to address the plight of Southern rural Black women "*as the challenges faced in rural areas are extremely unique.*" Three organizations in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi are the fiscal sponsors of the initiative. SRBWI began by assisting women of color to develop small businesses out of work they were already doing. They also started a "Women in Ag" program to celebrate and offer support to Southern women in agriculture.

Born out of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the 1960's, the Southwest Georgia Project (the SRBWI organization for Georgia) began its work to organize, empower, and mobilize for citizen's rights as a direct result of loss of land and jobs in underrepresented communities. In the interview with **Daa'iyah Salaam** of the Southwest Georgia Project, she raises up a critical need for transformation our nation's food system: building capacity within organizations. The excerpt from her interview below speaks to that:

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<sup>5</sup> American Farm Land Trust - <http://www.farmland.org/programs/states/nc/NorthCarolinaBFLT.asp>

*"Organizationally- targeted funding and resourcing support is needed to help keep organizations who work with farmers healthy and viable.*

*In the field, many limited resource farmers have been farming the same way for years, which is good for tradition but may not be the best practices for business efficiency. They are more accustomed to peddling and selling through farmers markets more so than to institutions. It is difficult changing behavior.*

*Structurally, our current food system is not set up to support the small farmers, even with the recent push to buy local through the school systems. Our Ag Commissioner stated that while it is good that we are trying to pay attention to local farmers, we did not do the work to provide the infrastructure for that to happen. School systems no longer have the capacity or skill to handle fresh local produce. We do not have a fresh produce processing center that can put the produce in the form needed by the schools. Additionally, the expense of getting the all of the certifications required to sell to large institutions are too costly for the farmers."*

- Daa'iyah Salaam

The "peddling" lifestyle referenced by Daa'iyah, is one of the many lessons of resilience that have sustained small, rural family farms in Southern communities, both in the US and Global South. Movements such as the **peasant farmer movements in Latin America** and the community empowerment models of Brazilian writer, activist, and scholar, Paulo Friere parallel the Southwest Georgia Project's racial healing and restoration initiative. Broadening local perspectives to embrace global ones creates further opportunities for the development of new models as well as continued movement-building potential that intersects across multiple identities and issues.

## 5) FINDING WAYS TO SUSTAIN SMALL FAMILY FARMS

*"We need to find ways how we can lift agriculture as something to aspire to rather than something to run away from."*

– Eva Clayton

The work of former Congresswoman **Eva Clayton** has been centered around rural farm development and anti-hunger work on the local, state, federal, and international levels. She attests that small projects, like community gardens and urban farm startups are good starts, but there is a need to connect these projects and pockets of work in order to achieve the scale needed to gain visibility, acceptability, and traction. *"These small projects are what make it all possible,"* says Ms. Clayton. One strategy is to pair sustainable agriculture and food systems efforts with current, larger, more visible ones. Ms. Clayton suggests that **energy is a key entry point for this work**. If growing healthy food that can also provide an adequate economic base for rural communities can be combined with the alternative energy opportunities created by available land in rural communities, increased momentum for the food movement could be gained by association. Additionally, if we are focusing on equity in terms of sustainable agriculture, food security, women of color or young growers having opportunities to farm, the likelihood of young people having access to land is more prevalent in Southern regions. Therefore, our focus should be on the South.

For this reason, **land access** is a key issue for small growers in the South. Land loss and land access have been constant barriers to opportunity, particularly in communities of color. Over the past 30 years, over **23 million acres of prime family farmland has been lost** to commercial development.<sup>6</sup> Black farmers have been losing family farms at even more catastrophic rates — about 800,000 acres, or 25% of land, compared to the 2.3% of total agricultural land no longer being farmed.<sup>7</sup>

The food system is no longer set up for small growers. Small farmers are very limited in resources, including time. Certification processes in agriculture do not lend themselves to accommodating the barriers that small growers face. Daa'iyah Salaam speaks to the example of local food access in school cafeterias. She states, *"When farm-to-school became popular, the Ag commissioner mandated that a school look at small farmers. That was good, but there was no infrastructure to support that."* These infrastructure gaps were not only among the growers, but were at the school-systems level as well. Many school kitchens are simply not equipped to process fresh food. Although the school market would greatly benefit small growers, the

<sup>6</sup> American Farmland Trust. "Farmland by the Numbers" - <http://farmland.org/programs/protection/American-Farmland-Trust-Farmland-Protection-Farmland-by-the-numbers.asp>

<sup>7</sup> Center for Social Inclusion. "Regaining Ground" - <http://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org/regaining-ground-cultivating-community-assets-preserving-black-land/>

certification processes are timely and expensive, which leaves many small growers out of the equation.

*"As far as policies, we have to make sure programs are equally available to all communities—they don't outwardly discriminate but they [are not] aggressively inclusive so there must be evidence that they are doing outreach to the most vulnerable communities."*

– Eva Clayton

**Farm subsidies** for small growers are a critical piece of this puzzle. **Greta Gladney**, Executive Director of the Renaissance Project, a community development corporation in New Orleans, sees this as absolutely vital to communities of color having some level of control over their local food systems. Here's her statement:

*"I believe that food culture has been driven by government subsidy of agriculture, and use of advertising and mass media by large-scale "food" producers. In order to change food culture, I think federal agriculture policy must begin with investing in fresh food production beyond large subsidies for grains like corn and wheat, which end up on the shelves of corner grocery stores as cheap, nonperishable, high-calorie, low-nutritional value products available in abundance in low income communities of color."*

– Greta Gladney

She also raises up the need for multi-level, cross-sector support, particularly from allies in communities of privilege and access that can directly demand and enforce higher standards of accountability for all food producers, which will ultimately have a positive impact on communities of color.

With millions of Northerners returning home to their Southern roots and Latinos moving into Southern rural communities en masse, policies that can harness the expertise and land availability in Southern communities must be revisited. It would benefit us to dig a little deeper into our historical policy vault to further unpack structurally biased farm policies that disenfranchise rural and small growers, women, and farmers of color. Land access policies are a prime example.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

The South continues to be an incubator of meaningful and transformative work that centers on young people, led by women of color. Since 2009, my work in Goldsboro, North Carolina, has involved coordinating a teen food activist group called **Students Working for an Agricultural Revolutionary Movement** or **SWARM**. SWARM was born out of a need to address inequities in our community food system, to tell our own Southern food story, and to organize young folks around issues of food and economic justice.

Many women of color, like Hermelinda Cortes and myself, have grown up in agricultural families and have seen the struggles of our parents and grandparents to hold on to their land, retain their dignity while working in exploitative conditions, and battling against racist practices that have denied opportunities for many rural Black and Latino farm workers. SWARM's mission continues to be to develop the next generation of food justice leaders; create more access to healthy, affordable, naturally grown food; create living wage job and entrepreneurial opportunities, through urban farming and other entry points in the food system; build social justice leadership among youth; and provide opportunities for SWARM youth to engage and network with other leaders of color, especially women. The work of SWARM embodies and builds upon many of the narratives and traditions outlined in this document. From SWARM's campaign to get a salad bar in a local high school, led by a young female student of color, **Kebreeya Lewis**, to our produce delivery program **Produce Ped'lers** that delivered fresh produce from the local farmers market, to housing projects in Goldsboro, employing young people from low-income neighborhoods with a fair wage has been the key to our success. SWARM has empowered young people from areas most affected by food system inequities to be leaders and experts in their own realities as Southern, resilient young people of color.

It is important to raise up the work, realities and recommendations of women of color as a means to address and **shift food system inequities**. This paper offers the following recommendations informed by these Southern women of color as a means to create food systems change that is needed to sustain our future.



*SWARM member*

### **Local and Community Level:**

1. Funding (i.e. small grants, capital financing and tax credits) for innovative distribution channels that allow farmworkers, immigrants, African-Americans, young and beginning farmers to determine needs and solutions.
2. Enabling mechanisms such as financing and local policies like community benefits agreements to create and support smaller, community-based initiatives and cooperatives.
3. Ensuring fair and equitable representation of women of color on local USDA boards and USDA initiatives such as the Rural Pride Outreach Initiative.
4. Crafting local policies, such as labor and procurement policies; structuring of contracts (particularly in small towns and cities); and providing tax and grant incentives to promote and support localized economic structures like cooperatives.
5. Enacting school food policies and regulations on the state and local levels that are less restrictive and allow entry points for small farmers.

### **State Level:**

1. Creation of a task force within the Department of Agriculture made up of women, indigenous, urban and rural farmers, attorneys of color, as well as farmworkers to examine and create policies that directly address issues related to the loss of Black land, such as heirs' property issues and land partitioning, in order to maintain the farming legacy for youth of color in these families.
2. Development of new beginning farmer and intergenerational farming training programs that target and support the expertise of Southern rural women of color.
3. Allocation of research dollars to resource the documentation and archiving of the historical role of women of color in the food system and values-based, participatory action research that raises up effective Southern leadership models that have been developed throughout the years.
4. Provision of funding for the revamping and expansion of university extension programs like 4-H and EFNEP (Expanded Food Nutrition Education Program) that produces curriculum that heavily involves women of color, directly addresses the structural inequities in the food system, and allows for new, innovative instruction for families who are directly affected by food system disparities.
6. Comprehensive funding (at the state and federal level) through research and development dollars for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), 1890's land grant institutions and 1994's Tribal Colleges, in order to make these institutions viable entry points for low-income, rural and first generation students, researchers,

engineers, agroecologists, and other food systems leaders of color.

7. Creation of state-level land policies, like family land trusts, that protect and acknowledge lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) partnerships and connect heirs' property holders to farmworkers and others looking to access land in rural areas.

### **Federal Level:**

1. Federal expansion of SNAP and WIC programs to increase access and affordability to healthy, nutritious foods, with supplemental state support.
2. Passage of federal laws that protect children from child labor abuses such as the Children's Act for Responsible Employment (CARE) Act<sup>8</sup>, which would end the age exemption on agricultural workers that allows children to work in toxic field conditions.
3. Creation of a new pipeline to opportunity for food and farmworker youth and their families through federal immigration policies that allow for full citizenship, in-state tuition, full college eligibility, and access to healthcare.
4. Funding on the national and state levels for knowledge exchanges between farmers of color in the U.S. South and farmers in the Global South to spark new ideas and build the interconnectivity of international food systems work and movement building.
5. Creation of policies that prioritize heirs' property holders who want to sustain family farms.
6. Providing more subsidies for fruit and vegetable production.
7. Providing a living wage that allows consumers to be able to afford to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from local producers.

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<sup>8</sup> Al Jazeera - <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/04/may-day-us-workers-struggle-then-now-201443010056957952.html>

## FINAL THOUGHTS:

Food systems reform cannot be the only solution for a series of problems that are interconnected. There are also more “radical” community-organizing based solutions that offer alternatives outside of the paradigm of basic policy reform. In the food justice movement, we can provide a counter narrative to our own counter narrative that makes room for this work to happen in tandem. For this reason, in addition to policy reforms, there are more radical solutions that call for a *fundamental* restructuring of systems. Many examples of this kind of work are happening in the South and counter the professionalization of **community organizing** that has plagued reform-based politics over recent years. The result has sometimes been “watered-down” strategies that do not offer a values and historically based theory of change or multi-faceted solutions that help to fully transform people’s lives. Some of the models that are worth investigating range from people’s assemblies to harm-free zones, from solidarity economies to many of the peasant movements, like La Via Campesina, that are happening throughout the Global South.

The basic struggle to make daily ends meet, as seen in places like Goldsboro, North Carolina, often leaves the **affordability, accessibility and priority of good food**, out of reach for millions of Black farmers who have seen their farmland disappear over the past twenty years<sup>9</sup>, as well as millions of families who are consistently food insecure and jobless. Current community-based projects, like the work happening here in Goldsboro and other areas around the south, are critical to changing this landscape, but are often invisible or seen by funders and policy-makers as band-aids on gaping wounds. In order to shift this perception, a strong and definitive case must be made to lift up the significance of these projects in providing the **sustainable culture change** needed to support overarching **policy change**. The recommendations from these interviews can be key policy targets in transforming the food system.

1. **Changing the narrative**
2. **Identifying food systems policy that directly affects women and children**
3. **Develop women of color leadership to lead the policy change**
4. **Capacity building and organizational development**
5. **Find ways to sustain small family farms**

A special thank you to the Center for Social Inclusion for their leadership and mentorship and to all of the interviewees for taking the time to vision together.

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<sup>9</sup> Black Family Land Trust – “While African-Americans amassed 15 million acres of land in the South between 1865 and 1919, by 1999 African-Americans owned a total of 7.7 million acres and only 2.5 million of those acres were farmland. In 1920, Black farmers numbered 925,708 (when 1 of 4 owned their own land) and controlled approximately 14 percent of the nation’s farmland. Today, Black farmers have declined in number to approximately 18,000 and they control less than 1 percent of the nation’s farmland.” (<http://www.bflt.org/history08.shtml>)

## APPENDIX I: INTERVIEWEE BIOGRAPHIES



### Hermelinda Cortes

Hermelinda Cortes is the daughter of a Mexican immigrant father and a white factory-workin' mama. Raised on a small farm amidst the Southern delicacies of potato salad and mole, she is a working class Xicana Queer Feminist from the heart of the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Brought up between two seemingly different worlds, she has a special interest in building bridges between communities including second language learning, and food, land, and health justice issues in LGBTQ, working people, and people of color communities. She has previously organized with Students for a Democratic Society, the People United, 97.3 LPFM WRIR Independent Radio, and the Flying Brick Library and is a founding member of the Shenandoah Valley YES! Alliance. When she's not organizing she has a penchant for writing, reading theory, gardening, and cooking. After a seven year stint in Richmond, VA, she has returned to the rolling hills of Virginia where she continues to pursue her dream of building a multi-racial, multi-generational queer farming familia. *(From Southernersonnewground.org)*



### Dr. Shirley Pope

Dr. Pope is with Mississippi Small Farm Agri-Business Center at Alcorn State University and is Co-Project Director of a federal grant "to establish a Policy Institute for Rural Communities and Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers. Additionally, she has served in different leadership roles at 1890 Land Grant Universities such as Assistant Administrator for Extension; Associate Professor of Human Sciences /Special Project; Project Director Leadership Development Program to facilitated change to improve rural communities.



### Greta Gladney

Ms. Gladney is founder, president and executive director of the Renaissance Project, a community development organization in New Orleans. She began to envision her work in the early 1990's and ultimately incorporated the organization in November 2001, where they implement an integrated approach to poverty alleviation across four programmatic areas: food access, education, economic development and arts and culture.



## Tavia Benjamin

Tavia is a food systems leader for Winston-Salem, NC. She served as the 2011-2012 Emerson Fellow with the Congressional Hunger Center. She now lives in Washington, DC where she works on voting rights issues, and still maintains her food systems work through her community engagement with local coops and urban farms in the DC area. She is also a 2014 Food Justice Fellow with the Stone House and Tierra Negra Farms in North Carolina.



## Eva Clayton

The first African-American woman to represent North Carolina in Congress, Eva Clayton became the state's first black Representative since 1901. From her post on the House Agriculture Committee, Clayton advanced the interests of her rural district in the northeastern part of her state and called attention to the economic inequalities that affected African Americans nationally. Clayton became a staunch defender of the rural and agricultural interests of her district, which comprised 20 counties with numerous peanut and tobacco growers. Along with Missouri Republican Jo Ann Emerson, she revived the Rural Caucus and rallied more than 100 Members to pledge continued federal aid to farmers, new rural jobs, and technology initiatives. In 1993 and 2000, respectively, Clayton voted against the North American Free Trade Agreement and Permanent Normal Trade Relations with China, insisting that both would adversely affect the agricultural industry and eliminate low-wage jobs from her district. "Must eastern North Carolina lose in order for the Research Triangle to win?" she asked, alluding to the state's booming high-tech corridor to the west of her district. Although Clayton advocated smaller defense budgets, she remained supportive of naval contracts for projects at the nearby Newport News shipyards, which provided jobs for her constituents. From her seat on the Agriculture Committee—in contrast with many of her Democratic colleagues—Clayton supported extending tobacco subsidies to farmers at a time when critics attacked the program. "This is not about smoking," Clayton said. "This is about discriminating against the poorest of the poor of that industry". They really are attacking the small farmer." She also fought successfully to preserve Section 515 of the Agriculture Department's affordable housing program, which provided federal loans for multi-unit housing projects in rural areas. *(Courtesy of history.house.gov)*



## Daa'iyah Salaam

Daa'iyah Salaam is a passionate speaker, community activist, educator, poet, cultural planner and entrepreneur. Specializing in non-profit management and cultural programming, she presents speeches at conferences and seminars locally as well as nationally. Presently, serving as the Deputy Director for the Southwest Georgia Project, Inc., a nonprofit, she has been successful at co-leading the organization, facilitating the racial healing program, leading in designing and executing the Smithsonian's NMAAHC Save our Treasures Program and, among other things, leading the organization's first Farm to School Program. She uses her love of history, culture and entrepreneurship to facilitate the rebuilding of communities. Daa'iyah's education and past work experiences have prepared her to do research, collections management, grant writing, creative writing, management policies, business management and community outreach and planning. Daa'iyah has served as an academic consultant to the College of Business at Albany State University and now currently serves on the department's advisory board. Additionally, she is a certified business counselor with S.C.O.R.E. and aids both non-profits and for profit businesses garner the structure they need to be sustainable. She believes that to the only way to sustain a community's vitality is to invest in its people. *(Via LinkedIn)*

## APPENDIX II: REFERENCED ORGANIZATIONS

### **Alcorn State University**

<http://www.alcorn.edu>

### **Black Family Land Trust**

<http://bflt.org>

### **Center for Environmental Farming Systems**

<http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/>

### **Detroit Black Food Security Network**

<http://www.detroitblackfoodsecurity.org>

### **DC Votes**

<http://www.dcvote.org>

### **Food Chain Workers Alliance**

<http://www.foodchainworkers.org>

### **La Via Campesina**

<http://www.viacampesina.org>

### **North Carolina A&T State University**

<http://www.ncat.edu>

### **The Renaissance Project**

<http://www.therenaissanceproject.la>

### **Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC)**

<http://www.rocunited.org>

### **Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative**

<http://www.srbwi.org>

### **Southerners On New Ground (SONG)**

<http://www.southerneronnewground.org>

### **Southwest Georgia Project**

<http://www.swgaproject.com>

### **Stone House**

<http://www.stonecircles.org>

### **Tierra Negra Farms**

<http://www.tierranegrafarms.org>

### **Students Working for an Agricultural Revolutionary Movement (SWARM)**

<http://www.facebook.com/SWARM>



*The Center for Social Inclusion works to unite public policy research and grassroots advocacy to transform structural inequity and exclusion into structural fairness and inclusion. We work with community groups and national organizations to develop policy ideas, foster effective leadership, and develop communications tools for an opportunity-rich world in which we all will thrive.*

*The Center for Social Inclusion  
150 Broadway, Suite 303 New York, NY 10038  
(212) 248-2785*

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