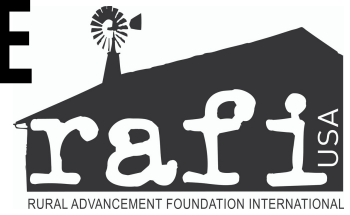


THE RURAL ADVOCATE

*Farmer-focused News and Resources from
Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA*



RAFI-USA Executive Director Edna Rodriguez (3rd from left) and staff planting corn with Ben Miller of Reedy Fork Organic Farm

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Why 'The Rural Advocate'

Our work in rural communities focuses on family farms because farming drives rural economies. Rural folks make up only 19% of the U.S. population but care for 95% of the country's landmass and the nation's primary sources of food, water and fuel. Agriculture, historically a centerpiece of rural economies, contributed nearly \$100 billion to the U.S. economy last year even though less than 2% of American workers work in agriculture.

We're calling this newsletter "[The Rural Advocate](#)" because our work on matters of market, policy and community development is focused on advocating for rural people and places.

Earlier this year, we surveyed our email database to better understand what our followers feel are key issues facing rural communities today as well as top priorities for our work to promote thriving, socially just and environmentally sound family farms. We heard concerns about the aging population, corporate consolidation, healthcare, climate change, lack of jobs, air/water/soil pollution and poverty in rural communities. In our newsletters, we'll be exploring many of these issues as well as celebrating stories of success in rural communities.

2019 Grants Awarded for Innovative Agricultural Projects

RAFI-USA has provided cost-share grants to innovative farmer-led projects in North Carolina for 22 years. This year, our Agricultural Reinvestment Fund (ARF) awarded grants to 23 individual farmers and 3 collaborative projects. We'll track and report to you as they expand, improve and diversify operations.



2019 grantees received the awards on March 26th, 2019 at RAFI-USA's office in Pittsboro.

These grants are made possible by generous support from the North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission. This year's projects include dairy, education, fiber, equipment, fruits, grains, hemp, horticulture, hydroponics, livestock, marketing, medicinal herbs, poultry, water management and value-added products. Grantees represent 11 NC counties; 7 recipients are former tobacco quota holders; 12 are current or former tobacco farmers; ~ 49% are beginning farmers (under 10 years in operation); ~ 6% are veteran farmers; ~ 51% are women farmers; ~ 49% are minority farmers and ~ 29% are young farmers (under 35 years of age). Learn more about the ARF program, the farmers in the program this year, and the projects they'll be working on here: rafiusa.org/grants



What's the latest with Mr. Slade?

In December 2018, we wrote to you about Melvin Slade (rafiusa.org/blog/melvinslade), a second generation farmer who has been working with Tyler, a RAFI-USA Case Manager, to recover from Hurricane Florence and develop a plan to transition his farm to his grandson, Memphis. Tyler visited Mr. Slade in January and his fields were still underwater after the hurricanes (photos to the left).



With RAFI-USA's support during Spring 2019, Mr. Slade secured his operating loans as well as a disaster recovery loan for 2019. His plan is to plant early soybeans with the goal of generating enough revenue this year from soybeans to repay his debts for 2018 and 2019. Mr. Slade and RAFI-USA plan to work together over the next 5 years to diversify Mr. Slade's farm income and make his farm more resilient to future disasters so he can pass it on to Memphis, the next generation.

Have you had your farm financial health check-up this year?



Do you have a 5-year farm financial plan? Are you carrying debt from recent hurricanes, floods or other disasters? Just like your personal health, it's critical to take a detailed look at the financial health of your farm every year - the earlier the better!

And if you focus on prevention, you're more likely to avoid more complicated and often costlier issues later on.

Our farm advocates are ready to help you along the way. Contact our farmer hotline at 919-542-1396 or toll-free at 866-586-6746 (press #1) or attend one of our workshops. Visit rafiusa.org/subscribe to sign up for our farmer email list to be notified about upcoming workshops.

3 Steps for Disaster Preparedness on Your Farm

As hurricane season approaches, there are concrete steps you can take to prepare your farm. What you do before and immediately after a disaster can make a big difference in your farm's recovery. Below are three steps you can take to prepare before a disaster.

1. PUT YOUR RECORDS IN A SAFE PLACE:

Take a few minutes today to get your records to a safe place or backed up electronically. This might include financial, insurance, loan or ownership documents. Scan/email them or text a photo of each document to yourself and someone else so that you can access them from anywhere. Specific examples of important documents include:

- Supplies you purchased for your crops (receipts for fertilizer, seed, etc.)
- Harvest and sales records
- Contract growers – flock placement or pig placement/turn records

2. TAKE PICTURES:

Take pictures of your home and farm, especially equipment, barns and crops in the field, for use in documenting losses later. Make sure the photos are time stamped/dated.

3. UNDERSTAND WHAT DIFFERENT AGENCIES DO:

Assistance from the three main agencies – the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), USDA Farm Services Agency (FSA) and Small Business Administration (SBA) – does not overlap, but people can get help from any of the three. FEMA helps with damage to households (including farm households), USDA helps with farms and SBA helps with businesses and some home loans. Sometimes people mistakenly think FEMA does not serve farmers. They DO serve farm households, just not specifically with farm damage.

Learn more about the important distinctions between these agencies & find disaster preparedness and recovery resources on our website:
rafiusa.org/programs/farmsustainability/disaster-programs

Farm crisis take its toll on farmers and families

There is a farm crisis happening now in Rural America. This shouldn't surprise anyone - what we are seeing now is not new. Farmers rely on open markets, and now that fewer and fewer companies control more and more of the agricultural economy, sovereignty and market opportunity are shrinking and farms are suffering.

We respect and honor farmers and rural people for their independence, hard work, sense of community, stewardship and care for the land and connection to place. Despite their hard work, we are seeing more and more farmers struggle to make ends meet. For example, many farmers are now having to work another job in town to keep the farm going.

The impacts of prolonged stress - financial and otherwise - on farmers, rural communities, workers and many others across the economy, are associated with very significant health impacts.

Is stress on your farm impacting you and your family? Could you use some support? Both RAFI-USA and Farm Aid operate Farmer Hotlines Monday thru Friday. Call if you're in crisis. Call if you need technical assistance. Call if you need to talk. If you or someone you know is experiencing suicidal thoughts, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8225).

RAFI-USA FARMER HOTLINE

919-542-1396 or toll-free at 866-586-6746
(press #1)

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE

1-800-273-TALK (8225)

Interested in joining the Farmers of Color Network?

Need technical assistance on your farm or want to share your skills and experiences with other farmers of color? Want to participate in peer-to-peer cultural gatherings or collaborate with other farmers on innovative projects? Join the Farmers of Color Network!

Launched in 2017, the RAFI-USA Farmers of Color Network aims to develop a network of support and address threats to both economic and cultural survival for farmers of color.

Contact Tahz Walker at tahz@rafiusa.org if you're interested in joining! Learn more: rafiusa.org/farmersofcolornetwork

Upcoming Farmer Fly-In to DC

In July we'll be traveling again to Washington, DC with a group of farmers from across the country to meet with their representatives about issues and opportunities impacting their farms.

If you're interesting in learning more, please contact Tyler Whitley at tyler@rafiusa.org.

Your support is always appreciated in ensuring farmers are able to participate in these trips. If you'd like to support farmers going on the Fly-In, please visit:

rafiusa.org/donate

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