

FARMERS OF COLOR NETWORK



Gabrielle E.W. Carter, Woodward Homestead, Apex, NC

OUR STORY

About RAFI-USA & the Farmers of Color Network

Rural Advancement Foundation International- USA (RAFI-USA) was founded in 1990 to challenge the deep inequities in our food system, where rural communities - their land, animals and people - are exploited to benefit corporate power structures. We combine on-the-ground services and policy advocacy to ensure small and mid-size farmers have fair access to the tools they need to make the right choices for their farms and families, their communities and the environment.

Since our beginning, RAFI-USA has worked one-on-one with farmers of color who because of unfair treatment at the hands of lenders and government agencies have faced financial crisis. In 2015, we began a project to increase participation of historically marginalized farmers of color on Farm Service Agency or Soil and Water Conservation District committees. We learned that, because of past bad experiences with FSA and being tokenized on such committees, most farmers of color were unwilling to engage further.

That experience led us to launch the Farmers of Color Network (FOCN) in 2017 to more intentionally support Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) farmers in the Southeast so that they are improving their economic viability, keeping their land, and gaining generational investment.

Samantha Winship, Mother's Finest Urban Farm, Winston-Salem, NC

“RAFI-USA’s Farmers of Color Network has been a God-sent resource for me. As a small beginning farmer, the resources shared by RAFI combined with the grant I recently received to provide refrigeration for my produce and cut flower operation has increased my productivity immensely. Additionally, RAFI has expanded networking opportunities for farmers and provides a constant source of easy to interpret information to help busy farmers keep current with USDA and other programs. Thank you RAFI for being there for me!”

Anita Roberson, Botanical Bites LLC, Fredericksburg, VA



OUR IMPACT



Dale Browne, Sejah Farm, U.S. Virgin Islands

**The network is quickly growing.
We have resourced approximately
400 BIPOC farmers across**



Infrastructure grantees from 2020-2022:

ACRES OWNED
4,799



ACRES LEASED
2,448

GRANTS DISTRIBUTED:

2020	2021	2022
\$126,500	\$376,200	\$100,600

**FARMER BUYER CONNECT EVENTS
IN 2019 & 2021 SERVING:**

47 FARMERS



44 BUYERS

CONNECTED IN THE TRIAD NC REGION

This event is designed to give farmers of color, churches, farmers markets, and retail and wholesale buyers an opportunity to build relationships that broaden the visibility and strengthen market access for farmers of color throughout the state.



Isabel Soto, Colusa Farms, Naples, FL

BIPOC farmers in the U.S. have long been held back by systemic racism. They have, and still do, face discrimination in accessing credit, loans, resources and markets. In 2017, less than 5% of farm producers were people of color. They have been shut out from industry and government supported service agencies and cooperatives, such as the USDA's Farm Service Agency, that long made it possible for white farmers to survive. The irony is that this cooperative extension model was pioneered by George Washington Carver, and then co-opted by the white agricultural establishment.

As agriculture was modernizing and undergoing corporate consolidation, farmers of color and their traditional, sustainable methods of farming struggled to compete. While all small and mid-size farms in the US have been disappearing, BIPOC owned farms, already under-resourced, are particularly at threat.

An agriculture system based on stolen land and stolen labor cannot be reformed without acknowledgement and repair of that history. The U.S. is only now beginning to approach that first step. Political and societal will is changing and momentum toward repair is growing. If we do not seize this as the moment to build the foundations for a more equitable, non-extractive agriculture, we will continue to lose generations of farmers of color and their land.

THE PROBLEM



The total number of black owned farms dropped from

6.8 million in 1935



to **3 million** in 1974

And those still farming are aging and many in the younger generation see farming as too risky.

OUR APPROACH

Farmers of Color Network works through a collective model that is BIPOC farmer-centered and led. We ground our work in relationships because individual farm needs are inextricably tied to the health of the broader farm ecosystem. Through deep cultural work, we foster a reweaving of agrarian relationships as a means of rural organizing.

We utilize a mix of infrastructure grants, technical assistance, building collective power, and policy change to support farmers' production goals, gain new markets, and revitalize their farms.

OUR 4 PROGRAM AREAS



**ON-FARM
INFRASTRUCTURE
GRANTING**



**TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE**



**BUILDING
COLLECTIVE
POWER**



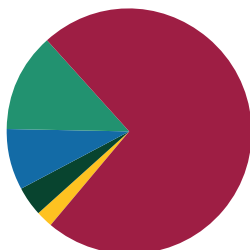
**POLICY
CHANGE**



Tom and Linda Savage, Allied Organics Farm, Hurdle Mills, NC

FOCN's distinctives within the farmer of color food systems sphere:

72% BLACK
12% INDIGENOUS
8% LATINX
3% ASIAN-AMERICAN
5% MULTI-RACIAL



1. Serving a wide scope of communities of color. For instance, the first three years of the FOCN infrastructure grantees were **72% Black, 12% Indigenous, 8% Latinx, 3% Asian American, and 5% multi-racial.**
2. Comprehensiveness of our programming including prioritizing pushing funds out to farmers as that is what our analysis shows is most needed to repair generations of farmers being under-resourced in government programs and by private lenders. **For more than twenty years, RAFI-USA has successfully managed re-granting programs to farmers.**



On-farm infrastructure granting serves two main purposes. It provides non-extractive, on-farm, project-based funding otherwise difficult for BIPOC farmers to access, and as an entry point into relationship building with FOCN and collectively with other farmers.

Our grants support innovative, replicable projects that demonstrate an ability to increase farm sustainability, establish new markets for local products and services, add value to existing farm products, focus on regenerative agricultural systems or agro-ecology, and uplift cultural and traditional agrarian practices. Although small at \$5-10K, grants add value and assets that farmers can potentially leverage for additional lending, and infrastructure improvements help mitigate risk. Grant review board members are 100% people of color.



FOCN provides **technical assistance** which responds to immediate needs such as disaster relief grants, online marketing tools, diversifying income streams, estate planning, or accessing federal or state programs. We also assist farmers in developing stewardship plans based on a fuller picture of their long-term goals. FOCN provides culturally appropriate farm and farmer counseling.



Many BIPOC farmers are disconnected within the wider support structures of the agriculture community and feel isolated from one another. **Building community and collective support** is vital to strengthening an individual farmer's chances of retaining and growing their farm. FOCN provides a cultural space that honors multi-generational, people of color-led and women-led organizing, agroecological and sustainable practices, and ancestral traditions knowledge. We coordinate farmer-to-farmer learning exchanges and work brigades, farmer-buyer connect events, informational webinars and convenings for shared educational opportunities.



We engage BIPOC farmers within our network to inform our **policy work** as well as provide opportunities for advocacy with congressional and administration offices. We work to ensure set-asides for BIPOC farmers in all USDA funding opportunities as well as the outreach necessary to ensure that BIPOC farmers can take advantage of them. We are facilitating a BIPOC farmer advisory cohort to work on the 2023 Farm Bill.



Htoo Saw Ywa, Oakey Grove-Karen Community Farm, Wendell, NC



Thomas Bradley, Bradley Farms, Cherokee, NC



Cecelia Miller, The Coffee Lady 31, Inman, SC

OUR STRATEGIES

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