Farms to Grow, Inc presents, in collaboration with the R&DE Stanford Food Institute, Residential & Dining Enterprises

Black Farmers Purchasing Toolkit

A Farm-to-Institution Procurement Guide for Black Farmers
Farms To Grow, Inc is an Oakland, CA-based nonprofit that advocates for sustainable Black farmers throughout the United States, with the overarching goal of reducing land loss and inspiring future generations to see farming as a viable career option.

Since 2020, Farms To Grow, Inc has collaborated with Residential & Dining Enterprises (R&DE) and the R&DE Stanford Food Institute on Stanford's Black Farmers Initiative, as part of their Equitable Harvest program by assisting with outreach to Black farmers and co-developing two toolkits. This toolkit aims to assist Black farmers in gaining access to institutional foodservice distribution channels while the other guides institutional buyers and foodservice distributors on purchasing from Black farmers with equity and cultural awareness in mind.

**Farms to Grow, Inc’s** goals align closely with the R&DE Stanford Food Institute’s racial equity commitments around supplier diversity and inclusion. Both historically and still today, Black farmers like yourself face innumerable challenges of systemic racism in lending practices, lack of access to land and capital, cost-prohibitive insurance requirements, gaining technical assistance and knowledge, and countless other barriers that prevent them from entering and competing in wholesale markets.

Stanford serves upwards of 25,000 meals a day and procures 11.4 million pounds of food each year. This toolkit is for every Black farmer with the desire to learn the procurement process, requirements, and regulations, develop strong business acumen and a Food Safety Plan, and maintain Standard Operating Procedures. We will supply webinars and resources to continue guiding you in the farm-to-institution onboarding process.

Ultimately, this toolkit is designed for you to upscale your market share and enter into wholesale markets. I truly believe that through Farms to Grow, Inc partnering with the R&DE Stanford Food Institute, we will set a precedent for institutional foodservice decision-makers to advance an equitable food system. Food is a multi-billion dollar industry, yet Black farmers earn an average of $30,000 annually. Incremental change is not enough. We need transformative change in the food system.

The R&DE Stanford Food Institute and Farms to Grow, Inc have laid the groundwork for this Black Farmers Initiative; now, it’s up to you to see the value and benefit from the opportunity. It will be as successful as you make it!

Elaine Smith - Executive Director
Farms to Grow, Inc
www.farmstogrow.com
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The Equitable Harvest and Black Farmers Initiative is aligned with Stanford University’s vision to “strengthen communities on campus and beyond.”

The Black Farmers’ Purchasing Toolkit is a practical guide to scaling up and certifying your farming operation for wholesale. We believe that understanding and implementing the resources from the toolkit will break down barriers, change industry standards, leave a pathway of success for the next generation, and present the opportunity for Black farmers to build the intergenerational wealth they were denied for so long.
The toolkit delivers specific instructions on how to:

• Secure a food safety certification.
• Conduct soil and water tests and third-party audits.
• Create standard operating procedures.
• Create a harvest schedule and farm map.
• Obtain equipment such as fences, cold storage, packaging, and labeling.

It also shares the stories of Black farmers nationwide, gathered through 10 interviews demonstrating their challenges and triumphs on the road to farming success. Their testimonies reveal that no Black farmer is alone in their struggles and that the rewards reaped from overcoming them are worth it.

You'll also find resources on seeking out available funding, a Frequently Asked Questions section, and a glossary of terms used in the foodservice industry.
Introduction

In 1920, there were nearly one million Black farmers in the United States. Today, according to recent data [1], there are just over 45,000. This staggering 95% decrease tells a story of systemic racism that spans both the past and the present.

The Black Farmers Purchasing Toolkit is a step toward reversing this history of land loss in the Black farming community and building a more equitable agriculture future by opening doors to previously hard-to-access markets, reshaping the perspective of Black farming as a viable career, and showing the potential for innovation and success in farming.

Whether you lease or own 2, 10, 40, 100 acres, or more, this toolkit will guide you through building wholesale relationships and selling to institutions like schools, universities, and hospitals. It’s a chance to diversify your distribution and expand your market share.

Distributors play a pivotal role in the wholesale process, requiring specific product standards, safety measures, certifications, and insurance. The toolkit will help you navigate these demands, from getting a Certificate of Insurance (“COI”) to establishing a Food Safety Plan. You'll also find resources for administrative support and scaling up your operation.

The Black Farmers Purchasing Toolkit is more than a resource; it’s a roadmap to cultivate a thriving future for Black farmers, one step at a time. Your journey starts now.

We hope this initiative might help support the existing momentum of other local initiatives underway nationwide, as well as accelerate federal policy progress: In early 2023, seven U.S. Senators, led by Cory Booker, reintroduced [2] the Justice for Black Farmers Act. Representative Alma Adams introduced the same bill in the House, with seventeen co-sponsors. Over one hundred organizations [3] have endorsed these acts.
LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT:

Stanford sits on the ancestral land of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe. This land was and continues to be of great importance to the Ohlone people. Recognizing the centrality of land, history, and equity to sustainable food systems work, and consistent with our values of community and inclusion, we have a responsibility to acknowledge, honor, and make visible the University’s relationship to Native peoples.
Steps to Becoming a Wholesale Supplier

1: Farmer

2: Produce

3: Distributor
From this point forward, you will gain valuable insights and practical guidance on selling to institutions such as schools, universities, and hospitals. These are great ways to diversify your distribution and gain market share. However, the standards are very different from selling at a farmers’ market or other direct-to-consumer channel. Wholesale distributors play a huge role in the supply chain between the farmer and the institutional buyer in purchasing, processing, and transporting produce. The distributor and the institution require product and packing specifications, food safety audit and plan, certifications, and liability insurance. Distributors require a Certificate of Insurance (“COI”) that must be renewed annually. It’s essential to have a Food Safety Plan to monitor and mitigate contamination points on the farm, in addition to building an eco-support system to assist with back-end administrative aspects and the process of upscaling your operation.
Prepping for Certification

Supplying food to big communities is a tremendous responsibility that hinges on preparedness. In this segment, you will learn how to identify and mitigate contamination on the farm, in the packinghouse and storage area, and while transporting food as a point of preparedness by starting with acquiring your “Certificate of Training”[4] by completing the Produce Safety course.

The training is available online or in person and provides a good foundation for Good Agricultural Practices (“GAP”) to satisfy the local G.A.P. audit requirement as a part of your Food Safety Plan (explained within this section).

**FARM DESCRIPTION:**

Before taking the food safety course, prepare by writing a short description of your farm for your Food Safety Plan. Include your farm’s name, operators, acreage, location, crops grown, production seasons, and mission. Your farm description will also be useful for your business plan, loans, certifications, and marketing. Below is an example of a hypothetical business description for Sankofa Freedom Farms:

“Sankofa Freedom Farm is a 30-acre farm in Farm-town, Georgia. The farm is managed by Vernon Bruton IV and Vernetta Bruton. The Brutons are currently in production on 5 acres of their land with the desire and ability to upscale. Sankofa Freedom Farm is in production for two seasons, growing specialty crops such as: cowpeas, bean variety, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, okra, carrots, melons, cucumbers, peaches, and peanuts. Our mission is to sell sustainably grown ‘niche’ specialty crops to direct-to-consumer and wholesale markets.”

**ACTION STEP:**

1. **Complete Risk Assessment** [5]

2. Schedule and finish the produce safety course to acquire a Certificate of Training

   Cost: $30 - $100.00

   Website: Food Safety Training [6]

**FARM MANAGEMENT TEAM:**

As a part of preparedness, designate someone to be responsible for carrying out the farm’s day-to-day operation. This person will train workers, maintain records and daily routines, and ensure the traceback records and protocol are carried out. This person will also be one of the primary contacts for the third-party food safety inspector or recall issues.

Be certain the person you select is mature, trustworthy, and understands the responsibility of carrying out the process and procedures required for your Standard Operating Procedure, especially your recall program.

**RECALL PROGRAM:**

A recall program is an essential part of the Food Safety Plan. It should include procedures describing a step-by-step process of tracking, responding, returning, disposing of product, and closing out with a corrective action to resolve a food safety issue. The recall program should also state the person responsible for performing and recording the process.

**FENCE THE FIELD:**

A fence is typically required to sell your product to an institution. Check with the buyer and distributor to see if they require a fence for your growing area.
If you are not required to have a fence, it is essential to be mindful of daily domestic and/or wild animal intrusion.

For a deep dive into choosing and setting up fencing, here is a **detailed guide** [7] from the agricultural extension team at the University of Georgia. The farmer support company FarmRaise also **lists several grant opportunities** [8] that can help cover fencing costs.

### SOIL TEST:

Before deciding on which crops to produce, it’s important to have the soil analyzed for chemical properties and bacteria levels. Knowing the quality and condition of the soil’s health will help to determine the amendment and fertilizer program, the estimated crop yield, and the farm’s ecosystem health.

The soil should be tested by a commercial lab (a geotechnical engineer) to give an accurate baseline on the pH and E. coli. Here is a **fact sheet** [9] on how to order a soil test.

To find a list of labs for a soil test, contact your Natural Resources Conservation Service office or agricultural extension office. (You can find their information by entering your state and county into **this website** [10].)

For example, in California, the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources website lists commercial labs that provide soil tests in different counties. Search “UC ANR (insert your county name) soil test” to see their lists of labs.

Soil labs have a specific protocol for gathering soil to analyze. Be sure to ask before sending your soil samples. The soil test is required once a year.

### ACTION STEP:

Soil Test

**Cost:** $70 - $150.00

[Soil Test Example] [11]

[How To Interpret a Soil Test] [12]

### WATER TEST:

Water is used throughout fresh produce production and packing facilities and is one of the main carriers of the microorganisms and pathogens that cause foodborne illness. If the water is contaminated, it has the potential to spread throughout the entire operation, including crops, workers, and anyone that consumes the food produced on the land.

Requesting a water test to assess the chemical levels and generic E. coli bacteria (which comes from fecal matter exposure) before planting season is crucial.

### ACTION STEP:

Water Test

**Cost:** $70 - $150.00

Website: [US Water Testing Labs] [15]
WATER CONTAMINATION PLAN:
As a part of the farm's SOP, you should have a procedure in place to minimize the risk of water contamination. The plan should include your type of water sources, intended water use on the farm, water testing schedule, monitoring procedures, corrective actions, preventive actions, and the person(s) trained to oversee the process.

ANIMALS:
No raw or uncomposted manure should be applied to the field or near the production area.
Domestic animals play a role on the farm. However, farmers must complete a risk assessment to ensure no cross-contamination in the soil or water.
Buyers depend on farmers to regulate this, and you should explain your animal practices through your SOP.

FARM MAP:
Create a map of your field(s), indicating their location. Identify each crop placed in the field by row, and show where the water source, washing station, storage facility, cooler, break area, animals, ponds, and restrooms are located for traceability purposes.
Keep your map updated at all times.

TRACEABILITY PLAN:
Typically, small-scale farmers avoid paperwork, but in order to sell at the farm-to-institution level, farm records are essential to a traceability plan, allowing the farm management team to identify any potentially contaminated items in the event a recall is needed to trace the product sold back to its growing origin.
The traceability plan includes an up-to-date map of where the crops are located in the field, a description of the procedures, practices, and standards you use to maintain the records, and the person identified to contact for questions concerning your traceability plan.

MOCK RECALL:
Keeping your consistent records will assist the management team in performing a successful traceback.
Reasons for a recall: a buyer reports a concern with the product, or there's an internal food safety issue or regulatory notification. For example, say there's a customer complaint.
The distributor is the one who will contact your farm management team to alert them of the problem. The distributor will use the invoice's purchase order number and packing labels for traceback. Your team is expected to trace “one step back”
to the field, row, day of harvest, and the harvesting person in less than two hours using the purchase order number and labeling.

You should complete a mock recall after your third product pickup or delivery. A mock recall is done by calling a customer to inform them that you are doing a mock recall and will be documenting their response. Ask them how much has been sold. Follow your traceability plan to see how long it will take you to trace back to locate the product’s origin on the farm.

Can you trace the lot one step forward and one step back? Add corrective actions if needed.

**PREPARING FOR A THIRD-PARTY AUDIT:**

A large government agency’s Good Agricultural Practices (“GAP”) and Good Food Handling Practices (“GHP”) audit programs are voluntary. However, it is essential to understand contamination points on your farm and know the distributor’s requirements you seek to partner with. Check out these helpful resources to learn more about the GAP process from the “Bridging the GAPS” project [17]. This is the complete GAP checklist [18].

Once you pass the audit, you will receive a Local G.A.P Certificate Letter of Conformance [19] verifying that you have a Food Safety Plan and a Standard Operating Procedure in place to minimize the risk of microbial contamination. The following sections are components of a Food Safety Plan.

**ACTION STEP:**

1. Now that you have received your Certificate of Training from Produce Safety Alliance, develop your Food Safety Plan and SOPs, perform a risk assessment of the farm, receive your water and soil analysis, create a farm map, and identify an enclosed field to grow your crop.

2. Next, schedule a third-party audit once. Note: Contact the auditor during the start of the harvest season, as they need to see your harvesting process.

   **Cost:** starting at $1,200

   **Website:** Auditors [20]

   **Risk Assessment Checklist** [21]

**PRODUCT AVAILABILITY:**

Once you identify the crop varieties and quantities you would like to make available to the buyer, create a crop planting schedule to track what you plant and when it is expected to reach maturity. After you are confident of the crop quantity availability, add the items to the joint working “harvest availability schedule.”

The availability schedule is often a living document on Google that will inform the buyer and distributor of your available product.

Note: Alert the distributor and buyer at least two weeks in advance of what to expect for the upcoming season.

**ACTION STEP:**

Create a chart in a spreadsheet, with each of the following written in its own column: the crop variety, the availability date, quantities available, how long the crop will be available, pack sizes available, and price.

*Harvest Availability Schedule* [22]
Components of a Food Safety Plan

ACTION STEP:
Developing a Food Safety Plan and Standard Operating Procedure (“SOP”)
Example of a Food Safety Plan [23]

FENCED-IN FIELD AREA:
When planning where to plant your crops, select an area that is fenced-in to maintain adequate protection from livestock contamination. A field where crops are in production will never be 100% free of animal disturbances such as birds, deer, and coyotes. However, animal waste presents a food safety risk. A fenced-in field area will help reduce crop contamination. The SOP should include how to watch for signs of animal intrusion and fecal matter. As a part of your SOP workers should be trained on how to look for feces, crop damage, and immediate corrective action.

A RESTROOM/PORTA POTTY AND HANDWASHING STATION (PER 20 PEOPLE) WITH VISIBLY DISPLAYED HYGIENE INSTRUCTIONS:
1. Visible signs instructing workers to wash hands, clearly displayed every day.
2. Harvest workers have access to appropriate hand-washing equipment (with soap and towels) and toilet facilities.
3. Restroom/Porta Potty should be located within 1/4 mile of the field.
4. Restrooms/Porta Potty should be routinely cleaned and stocked with written logs to support the schedule.

TRACEABILITY AND RECALL PROCESS | ONE STEP FORWARD — ONE STEP BACK:
1. Farmers should utilize waterproof labeling tags with information that will allow the identification of the product, the field row, variety, and the date of harvest.
2. This information is also cross-referenced by the purchase order # on the invoice.

WORKER TRAINING:
1. Your SOP should state: all workers will receive training on the Food Safety Plan, food safety procedures, sanitation, first aid, farm and harvest operations, and personal hygiene. The training is conducted at the beginning of each operational year by a supervisor. The training should be logged and signed by attendees and the supervisor.
2. The evidence that workers received specific training in hygiene before handling produce should be logged.
3. First aid kits are to be kept stocked and logged at all times and accessible to the workers.
4. Workers are trained on the procedure, process, and corrective actions for handling cuts, vomiting, and diarrhea.
5. Smoking, eating, chewing, and drinking will be confined to designated areas away from the field.
FIELD TRAINING:
1. Suitable protective clothing should be worn while in the field or packing facility.
2. Equipment and tools are clean and maintained regularly.
3. Visual evidence of effective pest control should be monitored daily, logged, and corrective actions taken.
4. All harvesting tools are kept clean and used for harvesting only.
5. All harvesting equipment is kept clean and free from contamination.

FIELD HARVEST & PACKING CONTAINERS:
1. Field harvest packing containers are made of non-porous material that can be easily cleaned, sanitized, and maintained.
2. All field harvest containers are stored in a clean area safe from contamination and animals.

TRANSPORT:
1. All vehicles used to transport crops will be inspected for cleanliness.
2. Produce must be covered and protected from insects, birds, and flies at all times.

RECORDS/LOGS:
1. Documented identification and traceability system and Recall Log
2. Up-to-date maintenance sheets for all repairs and maintenance of equipment
3. Use of compost, and fertilizers (if applicable)
4. Cooler Temperature
5. Delivery Vehicle Inspection, Cleaning, Corrective Action
6. Worker Training & Hygiene, Corrective Action
7. Field Inspection and Corrective Action
8. Field Sanitation Cleaning and Restocking
9. First Aid Kit, Restock, and Incident Report
10. Pre-harvest Assessment, Corrective Action
11. Harvest Production Procedure, Traceability, Corrective Action
12. Tool Cleaning
13. Pest Control and Corrective Action
14. Storage Cleaning
15. Transportation Cleaning
16. Self Assessment
17. Visitor Log
between selling at a farmers’ market and selling wholesale in bulk.

It’s important to diversify your distribution by selling direct-to-consumer and in wholesale markets. As a pricing note: you should plan to sell your crops for 20-35% less than at the farmers market.

PURCHASE ORDER PROCESS:
This is the process of a buyer placing an order with a farmer.

The institution will send the order to the distributor, and the distributor will contact you (the farmer or “Vendor”) with a Purchase Order (“PO”) request and a Purchase Order number to track and manage the purchasing process.

The farmer is the Supplier. As a Supplier, you will package the goods (adhering to your food safety & SOP protocols) for pickup or delivery. After you have fulfilled your PO request, submit the invoice to the distributor. Once the distributor receives the invoice, you should receive payment according to the payment agreement, Net 10 days, 14 days, etc.

Plan and communicate proactively during the growing season, and communicate upcoming availability with your regular buyers two to three weeks before harvest rather than notifying the buyer the week of harvest.

CHEMICALS:
Your SOP is required to:
• indicate all chemicals, including but not limited to pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers.
• have the original label (for audits).
• be stored away from the field.

COLD STORAGE:
Having access to cold storage will quickly remove field heat, and maintaining the cold chain directly contributes to the shelf life and product quality.

Cold storage units, or walk-in coolers, provide ideal conditions for prolonging the shelf-life of your product. Increasing the shelf-life of harvested crops gives the farmer more time to market their crops and reduces waste, both of which should result in higher revenues.

All cold storage spaces should be monitored and logged according to the SOP to ensure the temperature is accurate for the crop and is working well. The farm’s SOP should indicate the accurate temperature for the crops grown.

Cost: A new or used free-standing 20 ft cold storage, 3 phase, 440 amp container. Price will range from $15,000 to $35,000.

ACTION STEP:
Inquire about the distributor onboarding requirements. Have a copy of your W9, and expect to secure a 1 or 2-million-dollar liability insurance policy depending on individual distributor requirements, Food Safety Plan, third-party audit, water test, and soil test.

Cost: Depends on geographic location
• 1 million dollar policy ($400-$900 annually or $35 - $75 monthly)
• 2 million dollar policy ($800-$1500 annually or $66.50 - $125 monthly)

FAIR MARKET PRICING:
We are requesting that all institutional buyers and distributors offer Black farmers a fair market price.

When establishing the prices for your product, be mindful of the difference
ACTION STEP:
Determine who will handle the backend administrative support of your operation.

*Purchase Order Example* [24]

INVOICES:
The invoice is produced by the farmer vendor (you) to give to the buyer by email or once the distributor has picked up the order.

If you neglect to keep track of the invoice or fail to send an invoice, it will delay receiving payment. The invoice should include the following information: the purchase order number, name of the farm and farm location or address, the origin of the product (if not produced by the packing farm), name of the product, pack date, unit (s), price and field/lot number. It’s important to discuss the net payment terms upfront. Agree on when you will get paid, 45 days, 30 days, or 14 days.

Due to limited access to resources, your preferred payment terms are 14 days (N14). If the payment terms are longer, negotiate partial payment arrangements and plan accordingly.

ACTION STEP:
Discuss the net payment terms, (agreement on how long it will take for payment) your preferred net terms is 14 days (N14).

*Invoice Example* [25]

PROTECTING YOUR RIGHTS AS A GROWER:
The *Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act* [26] ("PACA") can reimburse you if a buyer doesn’t honor their payment agreement. Farmers that grow and sell their own produce are not required to have a PACA license. Even without a PACA license, farmers can file complaints with the USDA against buyers who fail to pay, or fail to pay in full per your agreement.

Even though farmers are not required to obtain PACA licenses, it is strongly recommended because it makes it easier to protect yourself under the “trust provisions” of PACA. Under these “trust provisions,” the claims of farmers trump the rights of lenders, and the produce buyer that fails to pay for produce is held responsible. The trust provisions of PACA provide farmers with the most comprehensive and robust collection rights of any other creditor in the US.

Once you have your PACA license, you can obtain the benefits of the trust provisions of PACA by including this statement on the face of your invoices to your buyer:

The perishable agricultural commodities listed on this invoice are sold subject to the statutory trust authorized by section 5(c) of the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act, 1930 (7 U.S.C. § 499e(c)). The seller of these commodities retains a trust claim over these commodities, all inventories of food or other products derived from these commodities, and any receivables or proceeds from the sale of these commodities until full payment is received.

You should include this statement on the invoice as well, to preserve your right to collect interest and attorney’s fees in the event a collection action is necessary.

Interest on unpaid balance shall accrue at 18% per year or maximum statutory rate. Buyer agrees to pay interest and any attorneys’ fees and costs necessary to collect any balance due hereunder. All interest, attorneys’ fees, and costs due seller shall be considered sums owing in connection with this transaction under the PACA trust.

If you (the farmer) do not have a PACA license, you can still preserve your interest under the trust provisions of the PACA by sending a *Notice of Intent* [27]
to your buyer within 30 days from the date payment was due for the product. Here is a sample Notice of Intent. Payment terms under PACA are automatically set at 10 days from delivery of the product unless the parties agree to change the “10” term in writing before the transaction. (The maximum time for payment is 30 days from delivery of the product. If a farmer extends the time beyond 30 days it will waive its rights under the trust provisions of PACA.)

However, this “Notice of Intent” method can be slow, so farmers should obtain a PACA license.

Cost: $995.00 per year.
You can apply for a PACA license [here](#).

**PACKAGING:**

Pack size preferences require products to be packed in a certain way (e.g., standard box, loose pack, bulk, etc.). How is your product packaged for transport? Do you have the capacity to pack and shrink wrap products on pallets? All produce must be packed and prepared under sanitary conditions.

**ACTION STEP:**

Determine and order the box size needed to pack the produce. Identify a team to train on your SOPs to support the packing production.

**LABELING:**

Most distributors require some sort of label sticker for your product for traceability. All labels must include the following information:

- name of the farm
- farm location or address
- origin of the product (if not produced by the packing farm)
- name of the product variety
- pack date
- and field/lot number

This information can be on a sticker on

the box or custom-printed boxes unique to your farm, whether it’s a case or a pallet. This label will satisfy the traceability requirements of most distributors and institutions.

[Label Example](#) [29]

**FUNDING SUPPORT:**

Funding support is crucial to scaling up your farming operation. It's important to build a support team to assist you with applying for funding. Below you will find funding options.

To get started, contact your local Farm Service Agency to acquire a Farm Track number. Once you receive your farm track number, you are eligible to apply for Guaranteed loan [30] funds, Direct Operating and Direct Farm Ownership loan funds, and farm support programs through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (“NRCS”). You may also be eligible for funds through the Minority and Women Farmers and Ranchers programs [31].
GRANTS:

Keep in mind grants are not just awarded by the large governmental agencies. As a small business owner you can also apply for grants through private companies, corporations, and federal and state agencies.

NAACP [32]
Grants.gov [33]
Hello Alice [34]

MICROLOANS:

Microloans range from $5,000 - $50,000 and can be acquired through a nonprofit, banks, and credit unions.

FAMILY INVESTMENT:

Consider presenting your business plan to a family member to support your upscaling.

CROWDFUND:

The power of crowdfunding is an excellent way to introduce your farm business plan, projects and raise funding. Make it a compelling ASK!

ACTION STEP:

Farm Service Agency
Location Finder [35]

List of Practical Resources For Black Farmers

Produce Safety “Certificate of Training” example
Farm Food Safety Risk Assessment template
Online list of food safety trainings and their locations, prices, and languages
Detailed guide to choosing and setting up fencing
Guide to funding resources for fencing
USDA guide to soil testing for small farmers
Locate a USDA Service Center
Example of soil test results
Guide to understanding soil test results
USDA questions and answers page about water testing
Example of water test results
Water testing lab locations
Example of farm map
Harvest availability schedule template
USDA Guaranteed Farm Loans question and answer page

USDA Minority and Women Farmers and Ranchers questions and answer page
NAACP grants
Government grant list
Hello Alice Black-Owned Business Resource Center
Locate a USDA Farm Service Agency office
Local Good Agricultural Practices Certificate “Letter of Conformance” example
Additional resources on Good Agricultural Practices from Bridging the GAPs
USDA GAP Checklist
Local Specialty Crops Inspection Division Audit Offices
Farm Hazard Inspection Checklist
Food Safety Plan example
Information on USDA Good Agricultural Practices audits

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The Voices & Stories of Black Farmers

The following stories reveal the plight, challenges, and triumphs Black farmers have faced on the road to farming success. We interviewed 10 Black farmers: five based in California, and five other states (Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, and New Jersey). Nine of these farmers are male; one is female. Crucial to this purchasing program and research initiative was that we heard from the farmers directly, as a key goal of the toolkits is to center their perspectives and elevate their stories.

The interviews, based on community-based participatory research [36] principles and following an organic, conversational format, were led by Jared Klegar (Stanford B.A. ’24), accompanied by Elaine Smith (Farms to Grow, Inc Executive Director) and occasionally Diane Mavica (Stanford R&DE Associate Director of Vendor Management and Contracts). Each interview lasted about 1 to 2 hours.

During the interview the farmers shared insight on their:

1. Motivations for farming
2. Agricultural philosophies and farming practices
3. Barriers to wholesale markets
4. Experiences with racism and discrimination
5. Business goals and top priorities going forward
Motivations for Farming

When the farmers were asked to describe their motivations for farming, three themes emerged: family, community, and health and nutrition.
THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY:

All the farmers we interviewed cited family as a major motivating factor for both starting and continuing farming. Many learned how to farm from watching their parents or grandparents. Today, some work alongside their siblings, while others show their children the ropes, hoping the next generation will ultimately take over their operations.

With this sense of heritage—one farmer’s family has been involved with agriculture for eight generations—comes a unique connection to the land. But given the history of discrimination against Black farmers, it also sometimes means wrestling with complex familial pasts. Several farmers spoke about relatives who had been sharecroppers, working under unjust conditions. These farmers expressed how they try to honor their family’s agricultural traditions while acknowledging the inequitable social structures under which many of these traditions were born. In this way, farming can be “a process of healing ancestral trauma,” as one farmer, Ms. Tomia MacQueen, described it.

A COMMUNITY-CENTERED EFFORT:

Many interviewees said that they first established their farms because they wanted to give back to their communities. After the local grocery store in one farmer’s town closed down, he began growing food as a way to fight food insecurity within his community. And even among farmers who are interested in selling their products in wholesale markets, many stressed the importance of keeping some of their crops within their communities.

Another farmer noted that his community has been crucial in sustaining his business. After a fire destroyed sizable portions of his property—damages totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars—he received just $2,000 from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. In the absence of substantial outside help, he relied on the support of family members, neighbors, and fellow farmers in order for his farm to survive.

HEALTH & NUTRITION:

In particular, farmers emphasized their desire to provide their families and communities with healthier food options. “I did not like the simple fact that pesticides were in our food,” one farmer said. “I just felt that it was making us unsafe, and I always thought that it was making us have some of these health conditions within our Black community.”

For reasons along these lines, it has been important to many farmers that they provide their community members with access to fresh, locally grown food—and that they do so using sustainable practices.
Agricultural Philosophies & Farming Practices

Across the board, the farmers we interviewed use sustainable methods, and credit many of these techniques to their Black and Indigenous predecessors.

In 1865, after the emancipation of enslaved African Americans, Black farmers rightfully expected equality and the forty acres and a mule promised by Union General Sherman, and through this, a chance to accumulate wealth and independence as freedmen. Unfortunately, President Andrew Jackson revoked the order in the same year.

The following letters written by Booker T. Washington and Dr. George Washington Carver illustrate the state of poverty of Black farmers as sharecroppers and landowners 31 years after the emancipation proclamation and their hope to empower Black farmers through education.

In 1896 Booker T. Washington, President of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, sent a letter to Dr. Carver:

“Tuskegee Institute seeks to provide education - a means for survival to those who attend. Our students are poor, often starving. They traveled miles of torn roads, across years of poverty. We teach them to read and write, but words cannot fill stomachs. They need to know how to plant and harvest crops. I cannot offer you money, position or fame. The first two you have and the last, from the place you occupy, you will no doubt achieve. Things I now ask you to give up. I offer you in their place - work - hard, hard work - the challenge of bringing people from degradation, poverty and waste to full manhood.”

Booker T. Washington

On May 16, 1896, Dr. Carver responded to Booker T. Washington:

“My dear Sir,

I am just in receipt of yours of the 13th inst and hasten to reply. I am looking forward to a very busy, pleasant and profitable time at your college and shall be glad to cooperate with you in doing all that I can through Christ who strengtheneth me to better the condition of our people. Some months ago I read your stirring address delivered at Chicago and I said amen to all you said, furthermore you have the correct solution to the: “race problem”.

Providence permitting, I will be there in Nov. God bless you and your work.”

Geo. W. Carver.

Dr. Carver’s methods paid close attention to soil fertility, diversification, crop rotation, and cover crops. He taught the Black farmers about the danger of mono-cropping and wanted, according to the Tuskegee Institute’s website [37], to direct Black farmers away from cotton, which often brought about soil exhaustion and erosion. Carver shared his research findings by circulating free, accessible bulletins, which “contained invaluable advice about improving soils using fixed nitrogen crops and growing low input crops.”

Carver’s bulletins [38]—and his ingenuity at large—are all too commonly overlooked by (White) historians. But his impact on sustainable and regenerative agriculture, not to mention science as a whole, has been indelible, and some of the farmers we interviewed credited his innovative practices.
A TRADITION OF SUSTAINABILITY:

One farmer’s mission, he said, is “to keep old traditions alive, old crops, African crops—keep that stuff going, like mustard greens, turnips, swiss chard, kale, seeded melons.” Many farmers spoke about the cultural significance of the crops they grow.

And to grow these crops, the farmers we interviewed use methods that attend to sustainability and conservation. Several also have farm animals, and discussed their advocacy for and methods of humane animal treatment. Many grow organic, which “may cost a little bit more,” a farmer explained, but is “worth it, because what we’re putting in our bodies is good, and it’s healthy for us, and it’s helping us to live longer and have more productive lives.”

Moreover, they use the following techniques, which prioritize healthy soil, carbon sequestration, and the preservation of biodiversity, among other sustainable practices:

- No or low-till
- Crop rotation
- Diversified farming
- Managed and rotational grazing
- Cover crops
- Compost
- No synthetic pesticides, herbicides, or insecticides
- Pollinator protection
- Precision irrigation and drought-tolerant crops
- Water-conserving and water-draining soil mixes
- Hydroponics
- Reusable containers
- Mulching
- French drain systems
- Tractor repairs in designated areas to prevent oil leaking
- No waste

As one farmer put it, “I think it’s the only way that we continue to survive: that we’re employing these techniques.”

ROOTS IN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE:

These practices could be called “regenerative” or “climate-smart.” But as multiple farmers noted, they and their ancestors, as well as their Indigenous colleagues, had been utilizing so-called “regenerative” practices long before these buzzwords [39] caught on.

“What happens in academic institutions,” one farmer said, “is that they work very hard to codify the practices of the people on the ground. So when we talk about ‘climate-smart’ agriculture, what that word is really replacing is Indigenous practices.” The term, despite appearing to encapsulate a new form of farming, in actuality describes “the way that we worked before colonization.”

Another farmer pointed to regenerative agriculture’s origins in the Global North and the movement’s frequent failures to credit the Indigenous knowledge on which it is built. He contrasted this with agroecology, another movement that recognizes agriculture as interconnected with politics, economics, and society. (You can read more on this distinction here. [40])

CERTIFICATIONS:

Of the growers we interviewed, most do not have sustainability certifications for their farms. Farmers expressed interest in these certifications, but some did not know the requirements to getting certified; some did know the requirements but were dissuaded by barriers with regard to paperwork and cost (fees for application, inspection, renewal, etc.); and others were unsure, given size requirements and the demands of the market, if their operation could reasonably run wholly organic, for instance.

One grower’s farm was certified organic, but he said he didn’t know if the certification was helping to improve his pricing.
Barriers to Wholesale Markets

The barriers farmers encountered can be classified into the following categories: lack of available information, unfair pricing, issues with transparency, and concerns relating to transportation, food safety, and scale requirements.
LACK OF AVAILABLE INFORMATION:

When it comes to wholesale markets specifically, farmers spoke about a general lack of information. Many were unaware of the option to sell, for example, to colleges and universities. Those who were aware did not know where to start or whom to contact. Without any inroads to institutions or distributors, it made more sense for these farmers to continue with community farming and to sell only in local markets.

UNFAIR PRICING:

Despite this widespread inaccessibility, some of the farmers we interviewed still were able to enter wholesale markets. There, however, they faced unfair treatment, particularly with regard to pricing.

One farmer struck a deal with a food broker to sell his red onions for $12 per box. But when the broker finally sent him the check, the price had suddenly changed—without any discussion or negotiation—to $5.80 per box. Because there were no measures of accountability in place to restrict this food broker’s power, the farmer had no recourse to challenge the new price. The experience dissuaded him from wanting to stay in wholesale.

ISSUES WITH TRANSPARENCY:

The farmer who was not given fair prices for his red onions observed: “African American farmers no longer trust the government after the treatment they have received.” And, after the treatment Black farmers have received from institutions and distributors, that distrust extends to them as well.

Farmers emphasized that it is critical to keep them informed in all business interactions. One farmer, who is currently working with a university in the South, noticed that there were “backroom conversations that [he] is not a part of.” Farmers expressed a willingness and need to be included in these discussions, in order to build trust and stay current on buyers’ demands.

TRANSPORTATION & FOOD SAFETY REQUIREMENTS:

About 18 years ago, one farmer said he tried selling to schools in his county. The main difficulty he encountered was transportation: Without the infrastructure to transport his crops from his rural farm to the urban areas where schools were located—at a minimum, a 1.5-hour journey—he was not able to secure the purchasing relationship.

In addition, many farmers were unaware of the extensive food safety practices required by institutions and distributors. If they did know about these requirements, oftentimes they were unsure about the costs involved.

THE PROBLEM OF SCALE:

Many farmers said selling to institutions like colleges and universities appeared inaccessible to them because these institutions tend to purchase crops at a high volume. Farmers did not know if it was financially viable for them to try to scale their operations to meet this demand, nor did they want to compromise the quality of their products or the sustainability of their practices to meet the minimum amount of what institutions want.
Experiences with Racism & Discrimination

The barriers to wholesale markets described above are intricately linked to farmers’ experiences with racism and discrimination. Racism creates obstacles that farmers must consistently face and overcome in order to continue farming.

When asked if he had ever experienced racism in his line of work, one farmer, Mr. Jim Embry, said, “Every day. I mean, that kind of question is like, ‘Is the sun ever going to shine?’ The sun’s always shining. Even when the Earth turns, and we’re in night, the sun is shining.”
OVERT RACISM:

Another farmer told the following story:

I was in my junior year of college, and I came home one summer and I learned from one of my White farm buddies that he had just got a beginning farmer loan because he was from a farm family and he wanted to farm.

So one particular day, my dad and I were at a governmental office, and I walked in the back to talk to the county executive director about a beginning farmer loan. This gentleman proceeded to tell me that I was a smart young man, and I was in college, and I should go pursue a job and use the good head on my shoulders and not get involved in farming.

I felt a little slighted because my high school buddy had just told me he got a beginning farmer loan. I’m like, Why would you give so-and-so a farm loan and discourage me from trying to get a farm loan? That’s just not what I wanted.

I said, ‘I want a farm—it’s my family’s legacy, and I want a farm.’ So he proceeded to tell me, ‘Well, you know the farm is expensive, and your dad right now—he’s in debt and owes the government money.’ And I said, ‘Well, sir, that’s not what I came in here for. I didn’t come in here to ask you for a lecture on who, what, and why. I came in here to ask you for a beginning farmer loan for me. And it doesn’t seem like you are answering my question.’

So he proceeded to get a little frustrated with me. And he set back in his chair, and he pulled his center desk drawer out. And in that desk drawer he had a pistol. He looked down at that pistol, and he looked back up at me. He said, ‘I think we’re done with this conversation, son.’

That is a scar that I still bear, and I hope and pray that no other young Black, Native American, or historically underserved kid would ever have to experience anything like that in life, because I, too, could have been a George Floyd, an Ahmaud Arbery, a Breonna Taylor, just in that local government office.

Many institutions, agencies, and individuals have inflicted this type of trauma upon Black farmers. This experience from a couple decades ago still speaks to the violence some Black farmers encounter today [41].

COVERT RACISM:

Farmers also shared experiences in which the racial discrimination they faced was more subtle, disguised enough that its perpetrators could rationalize it away. “Racism is a very tricky thing to codify from the outside,” one interviewee said. “As someone who experiences it, you can kind of see it. But then people can say, ‘Oh, that wasn’t racism, that was just such-and-such.’ There’s a lot of ways that people try to justify actions.”

Taken together, these stories undeniably lay bare the pervasive culture of racism that farmers have had to navigate.

Black farmers have been denied loans even with excellent credit scores, impressive work histories, and the highest credentials. They have been shut out of farmers’ markets. They have not been able to sell their products even when they have seen White farmers, with products of a similar quality, successfully sell theirs to the same buyers. They have been expected to pay for their land upfront, in cash. Government organizations have neglected to tell them about opportunities for grants and bridge loans.
Business Goals & Top Priorities Going Forward

The farmers we interviewed all have ambitious goals they wish to achieve over the next 5 to 10 years. They hope to farm more of their land, sell their products to institutions, and gain access to more resources.
FARMING MORE LAND:
A large portion of the farmers currently farm less than one-third of the land they own. Without sufficient capital and demand, though, they said they cannot expand their operations. In the past, some had experienced difficulties getting rid of their products: they couldn’t find markets in which to sell them, and so distributed them to shelters and churches at no cost or found other ways to donate them. They didn’t see competitive prices as a viable option and simply didn’t want to let their crops go bad or to waste.

Going forward, many farmers said their goal is to sell all (or most, since some farmers noted they still wanted to donate food to their communities) of their products, and to do so at prices proportional to the quality of their food and the amount of labor they invest.

Then, their farms will be able to grow. One farmer, who recently became an approved supplier of R&DE Stanford Dining, Hospitality & Auxiliaries, was only farming about 20 percent of his acreage in 2022. Now, with Stanford lined up as a wholesale buyer in 2023, he is farming 70 percent of his land.

ONBOARDING:
The farmers in the process of onboarding at Stanford said their near-future plans are to finish complying with the university’s food safety requirements and to work out the logistics of delivery and pick-up schedules.

GETTING MORE RESOURCES:
To reach these goals, nearly every farmer stressed the importance of access to resources. Some need new equipment, others are looking to acquire crop insurance, and still, others would like to be able to hire full-time employees.

“Farmers need advocates,” as one interviewee put it. Another said, “The limit on what I can do is my resources currently.” They know how to farm; they just need the capital.

“Black farmers have shown perseverance in the face of innumerable obstacles. Still, it is hard at times not to be discouraged. “Sometimes, when doors are not open,” one farmer, Mr. Will Scott, said, “you refrain from opening the door anymore.”

Another said that, in light of the legacy of discrimination against Black farmers, a certain mindset can develop: “You stay in your area in which you are able to succeed and you try to move on from there. But you wouldn’t dare venture out into something if you thought it wasn’t available to you.”

When asked if he had any questions about supplying a university like Stanford, one farmer responded with three. “Is it real?” he asked. “The opportunities—are these things real?” And finally: “Is Stanford the only school that is looking at this as an opportunity to share with people?”

Our hope is that, by widely sharing this toolkit, we will soon be able to answer this question with a resounding no, and that there will be diverse opportunities for Black farmers to enter wholesale markets across the nation.
A Closing Thought
The farmer continued: “Black farmers are an endangered species. And there are more bald eagles in the lower 48 states than there are Black row crop farmers.

“So if we don’t do something, if this industry doesn’t wake up and people don’t get on the same page to make something happen—we will be extinct.”

It is possible to reverse the disappearance of Black farms in the U.S. But we all have to play our part to make sure it happens.

In the 1960s, one farmer said, there were only about 400 nesting pairs of bald eagles in the lower 48 states. So the government made a multi-million dollar investment and enacted legislation to help protect these endangered birds.

Today, the bald eagle population has “climbed to an estimated 316,700 individual bald eagles in the lower 48 states,” [42] and bald eagles have been delisted from the Endangered Species Act.

Steve Gaskin
LeMule Ranch, Guinda, CA
Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: Do you need Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification to sell to institutional foodservice programs such as Stanford? What types of certifications are important to have?

A: Yes, a GAP certification is required in most cases. For small-scale farmers, you would need a “Local G.A.P” certification.

You can find more information about GAP audits [here](#). [43].

Q: Who do my products go to when I sell to a college or university? Is it the students?

A: Yes. At Stanford, the products are used in dining halls, which feed the university’s students, faculty, and staff.

Q: How can I get in contact with other farmers already selling wholesale?

A: We are currently developing a database of farmers, community organizations, and stakeholders. Every farmer in the program will have access to cultivate opportunities for collaboration and mentorship among a regional or national farmer cohort.

Q: How can I get in contact with universities and other institutions?

A: Contact the purchasing department.

Q: What’s the process to receive payment?

A: After you have established a Vendor ID, you are in the database of the university. Send your invoice to the accounts payable department. You will receive payment based on the net terms agreement.
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And to the farmers who contributed their time, wisdom, and deep insight: Thank you for sharing your stories with us. We hope we’ve done them justice.

FARMERS INTERVIEWED:

Jim Embry: Atrus Ballew Farm, Kentucky
Chris Fields: Fields Produce Farm, California
Paul Gaskin: Blue Ridge Ranch, California
Larry Jamison: Field Master Produce, Mississippi
Tomia MacQueen: Wildflower Farm, New Jersey
Will Scott Jr.: Scott Agriculture LLC., California
Donald Sherman: Sherman Produce. California
Tim Thomas: Thomas Family Farm. California
Carlton Turner: Sipp Culture, Mississippi

FOODSERVICE PROFESSIONALS INTERVIEWED:

Melissa Melshenker Ackerman, Planet Harvest
Doug Bohr, International Fresh Produce Association
H Nieto-Friga, Kitchen Table Advisors & SupplyChange
Haile Johnston, The Common Market
Ron Rainey, University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture
Lauren M. Scott, International Fresh Produce Association

ACCESS A DIGITAL VERSION OF THE TOOLKIT AT:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER READING ABOUT U.S. BLACK FARMERS:


Bustillo, X. (2023, February 19). In 2022, Black farmers were persistently left behind from the USDA’s loan system. NPR.

Bustillo, X. (2023, February 26). Black farmers worry new approach on “race neutral” lending leaves them in the shadows. NPR.


Sewell, S. (2019, April 29). There were nearly a million black farmers in 1920. Why have they disappeared? The Guardian.


See the complete list of references cited in this toolkit here.
Individuals highlighted on the cover image:

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