

# **AFT FNG CURRICULUM RESEARCH ON SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO LAND ACCESS IN WA**

**Themes drawn from interviews with BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and Immigrant farmers**

Conducted by Ecotrust (December 2021-January 2022)

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#### GENERAL SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

- “You can’t talk about land access without (addressing) settler colonialism, capitalism, genocide and the removal and enforced labor of black and brown folks.”
- “Lumping all races or different POC lived experiences within BIPOC is dangerous. Be careful. People are not getting the full picture to addressing situations when there are different positions within the BIPOC lived experience.”
  - ◆ Solutions:
    - Prioritize those that have been most impacted - Black and Indigenous
    - understand which individual(s) / community(ies) you are working with and address their specific needs
- BIPOC communities have been in “survival mode”; don’t have time to strategize towards land access and much less finding sustainability. “So busy doing the work that don’t have capacity for future”
  - ◆ Solution: Need to acquire land to be able to vision and act
- No farmland, no warehousing/storage, no distribution/aggregation space
- “White folks don’t understand race and equity; this is challenging for BIPOC folks.”
- Generational trauma leads to somatic impacts
  - ◆ A mixed indigenous farmer shared their great grandparents were to boarding schools, their granma experienced race terror in Spokane while growing up and developed an auto immune disorder; now they too have an auto immune disorder like their grandma. “Our bodies carry the effects of white supremacy.”
- Access to generational wealth, resources and land
  - ◆ “Most people don’t get inheritance of land or much financial resources.”
  - ◆ “Not everyone has family wealth to be able to ask a relative for money or a loan, and even if they can, not everyone wants to deal with the complex relationship dynamics that may arise from such a transaction.”
    - People need autonomy
  - ◆ Generational wealth has been in social capital - the only family offering ELL classes, child care or running the local food pantry in town, etc.
  - ◆ Children of immigrants born in the US inherit things like an old car, but that is about it
    - They don’t ask family to support their farming, because they are not comfortable with tapping into their retirement fund.
- Purposeful re-dispossession of land
- Institutionalized white supremacy

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- ◆ “Land Trusts (e.g. Forterra, WA Farmland Trust) want to increase land access, but often the barriers require so much of the farmer. To access (land) you have to be ready, but we have been systematically excluded from the opportunity of being ready.”
- “My social justice oriented work in farming I’m only able to do by choosing to live in poverty. The whole down payment comes from farmers and going into debt. I’m fortunate to have a stable vehicle, for example, but if I’m experiencing difficulties...”
- “Experiencing precarity for having a social mission is a systemic barrier. I shouldn’t need to build the case that this type of work is needed to access capital and support.”
- “The only reason I can farm is because we support our income with additional jobs”
- “People in South King County are taking 3 buses and walking a mile to get to a farm and then work. Showing up to farm a ¼ acre or less that has been intensively produced on and needs a lot of remediation. A farmer in a situation like that is put in an awful position.” (dense technical process) - miss out on an opportunity to support in a case management way
- “Finding technical assistance providers of color that understand your lived experience and why you do farm work is tough. Not just land trust or government staff, but real estate agents, finance people, etc. There is generally little support for farmers.”
- Translating the perspective of farming as a way of life to sustain life.
- Pressure of having to generate income immediately.

### **LAND ACCESS BARRIERS**

#### **Financial readiness**

- “In order to access resources you have to be a ‘viable business’, but this is racialized bias. Technical assistance providers don’t condition you to viability. They are dismissive. They don’t believe you can succeed or in what you do.”
- “Are we talking about purchasing or leasing land? No to purchasing at this time. Yes to leasing; it’s more affordable. I have a small amount of savings, a full time job and a small grant award.”
- “Wish there were community lending systems, pools of moneys that producers put dollars into and those in need can access the money - would help with autonomy at 0% loan interest. Peer to peer support.”

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- “I don’t believe incubator farms are working. They are not moving anyone to financial readiness”
- “Need a narrative shift around ‘readiness’. When all your choices are bad, can you even be ready?” Farmers need a universal basic income - a salary just to farm (\$30K/ yr flat rate) + canceling student debt, secure housing (support folks with zoning), make sure is not financially impossible to put a house in the farm, food prices don’t reflect the cost of production (don’t want food to be a luxury item)... The work that we are doing is very complex - emotionally, spiritually. How can technical assistance providers folks respect and accept the decision to help people in the context of farm viability? Don’t tell me giving free food to people in need is not profitable. I know it’s not profitable. Don’t tell me to quit because I won’t. What are other ways to generate income?”
- “In terms of financial readiness for long term lease, purchase or credit readiness, I feel stuck with nonprofit landlords as my only way to move our work forward. The web of dependency between land access and nonprofits is not meeting my needs or those of farmers that I know.”
- “Need better accountability measures around non discriminations.”
- “Is hard to be a farmer and survive with this [profession as a] sole livelihood. [I’m] navigating it (systemic barriers) by luck and thanking the universe, a high level of curiosity and resilience.”

### Search for Land

- Fear of who the landlords are; typically white
  - ◆ Solution: Include in land listing whether the owner(s) are BIPOC, LGBTQ+ friendly, etc. or not. This would be helpful so folks don’t waste their time dealing with racists.
    - Responding with “I don’t think I’d have a problem” is a red flag. BIPOC folks want to engage with secure people
- Rural areas in WA are white, conservative and hostile. Population shift to black and brown is very slow because it is too expensive and unsafe.
- Inability to feel safe, particularly in a rural environment
- Lack of education on the process to acquire land
- Navigating the system to acquire land is a systemic barrier itself; there is a lot of technical jargon.

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- Location where land is; it's usually in rural and conservative areas
- Lack of autonomy to make decisions concerning land use
- Lack of housing at the farm
- Water pressure / irrigation limits in collective water usage areas that already farm and have space for more farmers leasing, but no additional water utilities
- "Municipal water is too expensive."
- Non-farmable or high demanding in investments (resources + time) land
- Can't take infrastructure investments with you in leased land (e.g. water pump, fencing, buildings, etc.)
- "A white man can come to farm and no one will tell them what to do. A black woman comes to farm and everyone want to tell her what she can and can't do"

### Affordability

- High costs / "There is no affordable land"
- Available farmland inventory is low nationwide. This drives prices up. BIPOC can't compete with developers
  - ◆ Solution: Provide resources to BIPOC and other marginalized communities so they can at least compete
- "Affordability is a relative term when prices keep going up"
- "I don't believe in farming alone because 'we are great'. I'm focused on building relationships. I have been leaning on cooperative models and started a collective land ownership discussion with other farmers. The 6 to 8 farmers don't qualify alone for a farm loan; it takes all of them to put a proposal together, which is a burden in figuring out that intimacy level, exit plans, etc. It is a beautiful thing, but with a lot of extra work."
- "Affordability will never be accessible to me in Washington."
- "There isn't affordable land."
- "If I had to put a price on a lease: \$300-500 / year per acre max, including water."

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- “Affordable means free or extreme low cost”
- Let’s instead talk about reparations and rematriations as land access to BIPOC folks
- Access to land and resources has come from interpersonal relationships - people that have access to things and whom folks have built trust with to access those resources.
- “I imagine affordable land access as systems of public investment that don’t presently exist.”

### Security

- Lack of long term leases
- If leasing, security means that everything is laid out on the lease after having sat down with a lawyer or someone knowledgeable that helps advocate for you and sits down to really understand the terms of the lease; they would consider what terms are non-negotiable to you, what happens if the landowner dies, etc.
- Have seen long term leases as options, but marginalized folks get marginalized land - that gives no security. Rehabilitation of the land takes 2-3 years and by that time, usually lease is over. On top of this, we have climate change and are already seeing heat domes, droughts, and flooding. What does secure mean in that context? Need to think about climate change, water rights, and political shifts.
- Pressure from Real Estate Development cannot be ignored.
  - ◆ Need more money to compete with real estate.
- Need farmland in perpetuity
- Community Land Trust for BIPOC
- Need to be cross-organizing towards security
- “5 acres (of farmland) with a house would be the ideal security, but that is unaffordable. That currently costs half a million dollars at least, if not over a million dollars”
- “Security has to do more with social conditions than financial (aspects). Farming in peace without the police being called, weapons brought or other intimidation tactics. I don’t see myself leaving the peri urban area. I see farming as a community place - a personal circle of safety for us and visitors with farmland tenure.”

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#### Other: Accessing State and Federal Programs

- Eligibility requirements. Example:
  - ◆ “ ‘Prior distribution experience’ was required and even though we were doing last mile distribution, we still didn’t qualify.”
  
- “Resources available through USDA, like EQIP, are for land owners. We need more programs for people who are renting land.”
  
- It takes a lot of time and resources to submit those applications. Two farmers expressed having master’s degrees, yet experiencing difficulty to fill out applications (“painful experience”, too complex, “impenetrable paperwork”, too much time, not straightforward). “Paperwork is complex to intentionally keep some folks out.”
  - ◆ Solution: Farmer knowledgeable of program or technical assistance providers that understands farming experience providing 1:1 assistance - become care worker / case worker that understands you, values you and knows your business and operations. Support the application (walk-through together), answer questions/provide clarifications, and connect you to the services you require. Tailored to producers; accommodate special requirements. Be patient with producers and move at the speed of trust.
  
- “Service providers are so removed from the land and what farmers go through that it is difficult to understand that a million forms and timelines are difficult to follow. But this shouldn’t be a barrier to meaningfully engage.”

#### LAND ACCESS MODELS

##### ★ Preferred land access model

- Community Land Trust or 99 year lease. “We are talking about people’s livelihoods, so we need to re-think what truly is ‘long-term’ for farmers and the generations after them.”
  
- “I would prefer ownership. Realistically, I’m not in a financial place to own. But leasing would be the gateway. [Interviewer asked about lease to own.] I don’t want it to turn into tenant sharecropping... From experience, people tend to hold things over you”.
  
- Farmer-created small land trust as an alternative to the inheritance model.

##### ★ Creative Land Access

- From a farmer interview: “Is not about becoming creative [about land access], is about having the resources to secure it.”
  
- Hydroponics Vertical Farming in portable shipping containers

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- Tribal nations have been buying big pieces of land; there could be partnerships to support ag livelihoods, land trust facilitated programs.
  - This would be LONG TERM WORK that is relationship-based. Open conversation to alternative land use agreements with tribal folks and land trusts.

## **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS**

### **Historic engagement** - *Prior negative experiences with technical assistance providers*

- Offered land that is not farmable or that requires a lot of work and investment to make it farmable
- Acquiring / wanting credit for BIPOC accomplishments or material(s) developed (e.g. curriculum)
- Surveillance with cameras; lack of trust
- Viva Farms told a farmer needed to go through their practicum before they could lease their land, despite them having completed a different farm practicum in Alaska and having a business plan
- Not hearing back from technical assistance providers provider
- Lending practices have generally been negative for BIPOC folks. There is distrust in lending institutions.
- Unclear how to access their resources (e.g. NRCS hoop house). They say visit website, then find local office, then email them. But they don't tell you there is a lot more boxes you have to check to even receive help.
- "In a farming conference, I went to the County's booth table to ask how to begin the farm and they were just like 'you are going to have a really hard time'."
- "I asked my accountant how to lower the the tax amount due and their response was 'make more money'."
- "Overall, they have responded with 'You want to do this? Here is an impossible task to achieve'."
- Transferring from one incubator to another and being told by the new program farm manager that they didn't know why they were trying to farm in unfarmable farm was a painful experience

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- ◆ Transformed experience in farming from community centered mission to alone and unsupported, which made it a traumatizing experience.
- Requesting financial flexibility in land rent at an incubator farm and being ignored - painful
- Inability of technical assistance providers in understanding that the main goal is a social goal, and not prioritizing financial goals. It's about feeding people.
- Real estate agent didn't feel trustworthy.

#### **Historic engagement** - *Things that are NOT working*

- “Technical assistance providers providers are not looking to make things equitable; they/their organizations are focused on the ‘feel good’ from we helped this many BIPOC farmers.”
- “Unqueer processes”
- “Some technical assistance providers don't see themselves as service providers, they see themselves as gatekeepers. They don't approach it from “I'll meet you where you are at point of view.”
- Making assumptions (racialized bias), being dismissive and sharing negative comments.
- Incubator program evicting families
- “One type of model, one type of land access fits all” mentality.
- “(Institutional) Food Systems and agriculture have explicitly excluded the level of mutual aid support of technical assistance, and rather source complex models and resources like NRCS and USDA.”
- Land Trusts reaching out to support in finding land, participate in panels or farm tours without understanding the farm business or having the financial preparation to truly work with the farmer into what it would take to support their vision.
- “Technical assistantship has not been culturally relevant.”
  - ◆ “You can't train cultural competency into people who are not from those cultures. You can't train cultural empathy to people who can't relate to the lived experiences of folks in marginalized communities. This doesn't mean that we

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shouldn't educate, but they need to bring new people into their organizations that belong to those communities."

◆ "Cultural humility comes from lived experience and shared struggle."

#### **Self-improvement** - *Things technical assistance providers should work on understanding*

- Understand why you are doing this work.
- Who you are / The real you, is going to come out eventually. This is not just about relationship building. If you are not in it to meaningfully help people, then don't even show up; don't waste their time.
- Understand that you are working with people for which these conversations are heart-titting issues.
- Be prepared to be honest and vulnerable. You don't have to know all the answers.
- The only difference between the technical assistance providers and the farmers is power. Technical assistance providers have to be an extension of the farmer.
- Overall awareness of the limited amount of land, competition of BIPOC in quest for land (not sure what the solution is) - very problematic
- "Understand how life changing their decisions can be, especially for BIPOC. Folks are looking for a hand in, not a hand out. Just asking for an open door: Can you help unlock the door?"
- Knowing that the power they hold perpetuates systems of white supremacy and hold people of color back
- Focus on building trust and know your history of discriminatory practices (lenders).
- Only offering support on business plans and finances is dehumanizing.

#### **Taking it to the next level** - *Things marginalized folks wish technical assistance providers would work on*

##### **At the individual level**

- Be open to conversations to dismantle of systems of oppression
- Do more work on facilitating the land inquiry or land purchase / transaction. Don't just share the listing of land.

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- “Need empathic people. Don’t want allies, but people who ‘get it’ and not just feel like they have to do this work. Need people that understand emotional and spiritual stress.”
- Ongoing continued self-education in EDI. “Stay relevant; things are always changing.”
- Share with beginning farmers that there are water and soil tests that they should do prior to leasing or purchasing land, help them do it as well as their food safety plan development; and if you can’t do it, point them to someone who can.
- 1:1 technical assistance providers for applications (e.g. Coronavirus Food Assistance Program)
- “I wish technical assistance providers would see themselves as care workers or case workers.”
- “Someone who is mentoring me and be in the room with me with the NRCS or whomever, while moving at the speed of trust, with patience, working on developing the relationship; they got to want to develop a relationship. But understand too, that some farmers are not going to be interested in developing a relationship: some will just want the resources and connections, support and they would be done.”
- Create conditions for safety; go to their community and don’t expect them to go to you
- Support folks with zoning so that they can live on their farmland
- “Not many people ask you what you are trying to do or understand why - that would help better connect.”
- “White folks assume there is a shared understanding of what land means and what land acquisition means. Ask questions to better understand the farmers goals and the best way to be helpful.”
- “People need to be clear about deadlines.”
- “Technical assistance providers need to care about their jobs. Take time to ask questions and learn about the farmer - humanize the situation”
- Share available land more actively / publicly via social media posts (e.g. Whidbey Island post from Agrarian Trust)

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- Sit down with folks and have conversations about what has and has not been successful
- Provide more communication between the farmer looking to lease or sell; are the BIPOC, LGBTQ+ friendly?
- Assist with leasing agreements and setting up exit plans
- Help with business plans for farmers

#### At the organizational level

- Providers are SO WHITE! How can we get more brown technical assistance providers to support BIPOC farmers? Want technical assistance that is provided by another person of color who values you, understands you, and understands why you do this.
- Allocate resources (time, land, money) and help shift power to marginalized folks.
- Equity training and commitment to the work.
  - ◆ Recommended resources:
    - [Whiteness at Work](#) training
    - Soul Fire Farm's [Uprooting Racism](#) training
    - AORTA's [Uprooting White Supremacy in Organizations](#) training
    - Book: *Farming While Black*
    - The Wallace Center's [Food Systems Leadership Network](#) trainings and resources on racial equity
  - ◆ Consider hiring an outside consultant on your technical assistance providers approach to land access and learn from them/the communities you engage in how you can be more equitable and inclusive. Put this in your next grant application or budget!
- We need folks committed, not white saviors
- It would be nice to have a lender with experience in lending to BIPOC and give smaller loans and short term loans. E.g \$3K loan.
- Technical assistance is provided via peer to peer support; farmers mentoring
- Wish technical assistant providers are not underpaid, under-resourced and overworked. They have to have a reasonable workload.

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- Train technical assistance providers to understand what a 100 year floodplain is and to know whether they are pairing folks with a viable piece of land. Get them to know which county programs, USDA programs, etc. there are of use/help to the farmer.
- Listen to farmers and support what they are asking
- The most innovative people that a BIPOC farmer knows and works with, are people who are working from a social justice approach through care management or case management work.
  - ◆ “Currently, (historically white-led) organizations are not well positioned to do case management; they need to develop their programs differently, from a Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) approach with trained JEDI advocates and lived experience. Ask questions that use a **human dignity level approach**, like: How do you get to the farm? What do you use to transport your vehicle? Is that resource stable/safe, if not let’s find a way so that it is. What is your experience in food access at home? Do you get to eat the produce you grow?”
  - ◆ “(Historically white-led) Organizations are not capable of providing this level of care support, but people in our marginalized communities have been doing it and would love to do paid work.”

#### **At the systems level**

- “I want to see a new wave of technical assistance providers that specialize in working with marginalized communities (BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and others).”
- Need folks to work on policies change
- Keep farmers at the table and decision-making; particularly around policies.
- Work towards farmer sovereignty - farmers making decisions about their farming. “For farmers, by farmers.”
- “Need movement across technical assistance providers to establish 503c4 political organizing and coming out of the shadows. One of the best things that could happen is to bring new people that have different backgrounds and do things in a different way that is relevant to the community. (HWL) organizations need to come up with plans and ideas to transfer the power that they hold (training, positions, data). They need to create opportunities for grassroots leaders to learn the skills and have them train their people (Train the trainer). We also need increased transparency. This FNG curriculum, for example, is happening in close quarters and the information is not easily accessible to organizers in the community.”

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- “Remember that this is an intergenerational, long term journey of dismantling barriers and systems of oppression. Be okay with not being able to change things within your lifetime.”

### **DEFINITION OF FARMING SUCCESS**

- Revaluing farming as the center of life - tiny homes near the farmland with an education center where youth learn trade skills
- “I have a ¼ acre of farmland with reliable access to water - a well or surface water with a pump - and a place to live on the land. I have a long term contract or lease of at least 10 years. I have autonomy to make my own mistakes and figure out what works out best for me. I have a healthy relationship and communication with the owner.”
- Farmers are invested in
- Fellowships, co-learning opportunities, political education and peer-to-peer mentorship (particularly with those 1-2 people that successfully make it)

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#### **CONSIDERATIONS FOR TRAINING ON IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE FARMERS - ELL FARMERS**

##### **What folks wish technical assistance providers understood**

- Don't make assumptions
- Learn about implicit bias
- Connect and build relationships with folks
- Understand that you are working with people that have been displaced from their homes, country and livelihoods.
- Getting a deep understanding of the history of oppression in ag

##### **What folks with technical assistance providers would work on**

- Include interpretation in your budgets and offer interpretation services free of charge
- Cultural humility; which is an ongoing learning
- "Find ways to humbly and respectfully ask questions."
- "Partner with ethnic and community based organizations to get the word out there / outreach + build relationships and trust."
- Tools
  - ◆ Videos (2 min max)
  - ◆ Work on simplified versions of the different processes that you work on - fact sheets with visuals + basic steps
- Share what people don't know what they don't know.
- Strengthen the network of providers for the farmers.
  - ◆ Make introductions to other technical assistance providers; don't assume they will reach out. How can you make it easier for them to get the most help?
  - ◆ Ask each person the best communication method that works for them.
  - ◆ When you introduce the farmer, do so with a blurb of their story - this requires you to truly understand what they need/are searching for. Then follow up with the farmer to see if they found the information/help they needed, and if not, connect them to someone else.

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#### **CONSIDERATIONS FOR TRAINING ON LGBTQ+ FARMERS**

##### **With regards to data collection**

- “The most generous way to collect queer data is to leave open ended questions and let people self identify.”
- “Educate people that are collecting and analyzing data to understand what are the categories you need to define vs build out.”

##### **With regards to educating technical assistance providers**

- Get informed with cultural history. Don't just look at the legal or medical definitions. Use a well rounded approach of actually learning the culture of queer people, their social movement and struggles. Take time to digest the timeline of events within this community and its culture.
- Don't just keep a queer or diverse intern or volunteer as a token; pay them to do this work.

##### **What folks wish technical assistance providers understood**

- The incidence and history of violence towards LGBTQ+ communities.
- That there is a misunderstood assumption of what safety means to LGBTQ+ folks, particularly in rural areas.
  - ◆ Queer people are already culturally isolated people and in agriculture, its probably more.
  - ◆ Generally, the risk of queer suicides/year is high.
- “Queer people are more likely to start collaboratives and coops that experience failure.”
- “Many queer radicalized young people (people under 40) don't have elders because they have died (public health crisis; AIDS, pandemic), and we mostly know them through books.”
- “Our culture stands for building community systems of care because we are in understanding that only we can support ourselves (e.g. CSA pop up at HIV care facility).”
- “Understand that it means to be trans and what they go through.”

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**What folks with technical assistance providers would work on**

→ “Find ways to humbly and respectfully ask questions.”