

MMIH BIPOC Farming Organizations Case Study Summary

The [Green Lands Blue Waters](#) organization leveraged a [North Central SARE grant](#) to learn about challenges and goals of BIPOC farmers around incorporating livestock on pasture in their farm operation as well as help farmers learn more about livestock and the connection between grazing livestock on pasture and improving soil health.

There are many reasons why individuals choose to farm. Often considered the oldest occupation in the world, farm businesses today take many different shapes and forms. However, many people farm for reasons beyond making a living; many farm as a hobby, as a second source of income, to grow their own food, to build community, as a means to engage youth or the elderly, and a way to escape the stresses of life for one's mental health.

What and how to farm is a critical question when someone decides to farm. As the art and science of farming continues to be refined, sustainable farming practices that preserve watersheds and build up soil health are being researched and developed. Some sustainable farming practices originate from old indigenous practices and others are made possible by new tools, technology and farming systems.

As science continues to show evidence of global climate change linked to human activities, farming is providing one way for humans to offset carbon emissions and potentially sequester carbon. As the historic dust bowls raged across the United States in the 1930's, farmers and researchers began to understand the importance of managing soil, that the ground itself was a valuable resource that could be lost if not taken care of. Still today, instead of building soil, many farms rely on regular inputs of synthetic chemical fertilizers to enable the land to continue to grow crops as feed or food.

Grazing livestock on permanent pasture or fields during the off-season has emerged as one agriculture practice that is proving to benefit the ecosystem, reduce the need for synthetic inputs, increase yields and improve soil health. However, many BIPOC farmers face a variety of barriers that deter or prevent them from incorporating livestock into their farming operation.

The following pages summarize interviews with various farmers and representatives from agricultural organizations across Wisconsin. Andrew Bernhardt communicated extensively with groups such as tribal nations, urban farming support organizations, and BIPOC-focused agricultural networks. The conversations primarily addressed challenges and support mechanisms for BIPOC farmers, such as access to land, livestock integration, and sustainable farming practices. Noteworthy themes include the mental well-being associated with farming, the diversity of farming motivations among different ethnic groups, and the critical role of financial and educational support in fostering agricultural development.

Key Barriers for BIPOC Farmers Incorporating Livestock into Farming:

Access to Land

- **Limited Land Ownership:** Among farmers, many do not own significant amounts of land. Livestock farming typically requires larger tracts of land, posing a substantial barrier.
- **Uncertainty in Land Tenure:** Farmers often have temporary or uncertain access to land, making it risky to invest in long-term projects like livestock farming.
- **Land Trust Limitations:** Organizations like HAFA and Groundswell Conservancy provide land specifically for vegetable farming with restrictions on livestock.

Financial Constraints

- **Initial Investment Costs:** Livestock farming requires substantial initial investments which include purchasing animals, building infrastructure, and ensuring adequate feed and care.
- **Risk Management:** There is a higher financial risk with livestock, including the potential loss of animals, which can be a significant financial blow.
- **Limited Funding:** Many BIPOC farmers lack access to sufficient funding and financial resources to make such investments. Grants and funding for livestock projects are not always readily available or accessible to them.

Knowledge and Expertise

- **Lack of Training and Resources:** There is a lack of targeted education and training programs focused on livestock for BIPOC farmers. Organizations supporting BIPOC farmers often lack expertise in livestock farming.
- **Cultural Relevance:** BIPOC farmers may not see livestock farming as relevant to their traditional or cultural farming practices, which usually focus on vegetable production.

Infrastructure and Resources

- **Lack of Necessary Infrastructure:** Livestock farming requires specific infrastructure such as barns, fencing, and water supply, which many BIPOC farmers do not possess.
- **Challenges with Utilities:** Many BIPOC farms do not have reliable access to electricity and water, both essential for maintaining livestock.

Market Access and Sales

- **Market Demand:** There is uncertainty about the market demand for livestock products from BIPOC farmers. Farmers who currently focus on vegetables are unsure if or how they could tap into livestock markets.
- **Processing and Distribution:** Access to slaughterhouses and meat processing facilities is limited, and farmers face challenges in storing and distributing livestock products.

Institutional Support and Networking

- **Limited Outreach and Support:** There is a need for more institutional support from organizations like NRCS, Extension services, and universities tailored specifically to the needs of BIPOC farmers interested in livestock.

- **Connection to Successful Models:** Seeing successful models of BIPOC farmers who have successfully incorporated livestock could encourage others, but these examples are currently too few and far between.

Animal Care and Welfare

Knowledge of Animal Care: There is a broad gap in knowledge about how to care for livestock, especially around veterinary needs, nutrition, and breeding practices.

Seasonal Challenges: Farmers are concerned about taking care of livestock, especially through harsh winter conditions.

Community and Relational Dynamics

Peer Influence and Relatability: The perceived success and how applicable the farming methods are to their own situations greatly affect their willingness to adopt new practices. If they see a peer from a similar background succeeding, they are more likely to follow suit.

Recommendations

Some recommendations for overcoming these barriers include:

- 1. Enhanced Training Programs:** Create training programs and workshops specifically for BIPOC farmers about livestock care, management, and business planning.
- 2. Financial Support:** Develop targeted grant programs and financial assistance specifically for BIPOC farmers to lower the initial investment barriers.
- 3. Infrastructure Development:** Assist in developing farm infrastructure through funding and cooperative models tailored for livestock operations.
- 4. Market Development:** Work on creating market linkages and providing support in processing and distribution channels.
- 5. Institutional Collaboration:** Strengthen partnerships between existing agricultural institutions and BIPOC organizations to provide better support and connectivity.
- 6. Highlight Successful Models:** Promote case studies and peer learning opportunities from successful BIPOC livestock farmers.

By addressing these barriers holistically, there is potential to promote sustainable livestock farming practices among BIPOC farmers, contributing to community resilience and diversified agricultural outputs.