

# MMIH BIPOC Farmer Organizations Case Study

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[00:00:03] Overview of Farmer Outreach

[00:00:10] Jane Jewett: Yeah, so maybe we should start out with Andrew, just having you name off the people and groups that you talked to.

[00:00:24] Andrew Bernhardt: Let's see. Well, from memory there's some of the tribal nations I've reached out to. I haven't talked to everyone. But there's a few tribes that I've reached out to.

[00:00:46] Specific Farmer Groups and Organizations

Andrew: There are some really small scale local kind of groups that are supporting a handful of Hmong farmers in different kind of urban areas around Wisconsin.

Andrew: And then there's a couple of organizations that kind of are not necessarily focused on supporting BIPOC farmers exclusively. But just kind of support like more like local agriculture farmers in general. And, I think some of the, some of that has included, outreach to BIPOC farmers.

Andrew: Like Fair Share, for example. And then the only like organization that I've reached out to that really kind of interfaces with Latino or Latinx growers in particular. There's the Hungry Turtle Farm, which is an organization that's in Northwest Wisconsin. They've kind of evolved. Over the years. They used to be around and then they kind of disappeared for a while and there's been some like leadership changes or something like that.

Andrew: I don't know the full history, but so they're, even though they've been around a long time, they're really kind of new again. And I talked with them recently. So yeah, there's, there's oh, and then there's so that was Native American, First Nation farmers, tribal farmers, Hmong farmers Spanish speaking farmers.

Andrew: And then there's one group that's in Wisconsin, Urban Triage, that supports black farmers. And there's potentially some other organizations that are kind of on the border of Wisconsin that like you've reached out to Kate, technically she's kind of just over the border in Illinois. So those are the people that I've reached out to and touched base with.

## [00:03:34] Challenges and Insights from Farmer Interactions

Amy Fenn: Is that including, like, when you went to emerging farmers and different conferences, just bumping into people? Or casual conversations?

Andrew: That was me. That's the dedicated or specific email or phone call with people for this grant in particular. Sometimes I talk with farmers at events, whether it's a field day or a conference.

Andrew: I just had a workshop this Saturday with some Hmong growers and was talking to one of the women named KaZoua. She is actually an interpreter, but has like family that farms and is kind of connected. She was talking about how she has like a farmer that's, I think, in her family that raises like cows and pigs and stuff and does livestock. And I was like, Oh, I had no idea.

Andrew: And it's like all these things sometimes they're there, but hidden. And so I, it's on my to do list to reach out to her and just one, I need to get the invoice from her to pay for the interpretation, but just to kind of like learn more about what farm that is, I have to do a little, about to just talk to her and I've worked with her at a dozen times.

Andrew: It's just something that has never come up specifically. So, and I have talked to various people at conferences and workshops and things about this. But for the survey interview thing that's the people that I was trying to think that was like 10 or 12 people that I've reached out to.

## [00:05:51] Hmong Farmers and Their Practices

Jane: Okay, cool. Yeah. So let's just start on the list of prompts then. How do these farmers view farming? What are their reasons? Are they doing it for subsistence or to help their family? Or are they selling it? Or, why are they, why are they involved?

[00:06:19] Andrew: Yeah, I think that there are some of the older Hmong farmers. I don't think that their primary goal is to make a lot of money and be that innovative and they're not looking to switch up what they do and sometimes I think they farm because it's just a part of who they are. It's their like identity and it's a way for them to get outdoors and in I think a lot of ways it's about finding peace and for their mental well being is farming. But a lot of the Hmong farmers like, other white farmers and all that kind of stuff, they have primary off-farm jobs.

[00:07:31] Andrew: And I'm, I pretty much only end up interacting with the farmers that have some kind of farmer's market activity. I just don't end up finding, I'm not sure how many farmers there are that just grow for themselves, but there, I think that there are some of these growers that there's a lot of large scale community gardens, a lot of these community garden, like community gardens, you have a tiny little, postage stamp size lot of land and you all come there and you grow for yourself. I've seen some other pieces of land where you might have, half an acre or something, maybe a little smaller, maybe a little bigger. And they're really kind of growing for themselves, so I think that, but I just don't end up talking to those farmers that much. But some of the farmers that are among, it's like in the one to three, maybe a little bit bigger acre size operations.

## [00:08:49] Spanish Speaking Farmers and Dairy Workers

[00:08:49] I really don't get to talk to a lot of Spanish speaking farmers. My guess is that there's more out there, but I have kind of like limited...I've just not been able to find the person that gets me connected and I do think that maybe there are actually fewer Spanish speaking farmers.

Andrew: I think there's a large, that I know about, there's a large Spanish speaking dairy farm worker kind of population. There's a lot of farm workers out there, but there's, I think, fewer farm owner operator situations. The group of Spanish speaking farmers that I know are all kind of in that northwest Wisconsin area, and I don't know if that is truly a hotspot or if that's just kind of who I've gotten connected with, but that's one thing that I'm excited to kind of do more is find and meet some more growers. I know that there are some in South Central Wisconsin, for example, and I've met a few, but I've not really found any organizations that kind of support or target those growers.

[00:10:16] Andrew: I'm not sure if there are any.

Jane: Andrew, did you have any connections with the Latino Economic Development Center when you were in Minnesota?

Andrew: Yeah. Mm hmm. Yeah. So I know Aaron pretty well. Aaron Blyth. Yeah. And, Rodrigo and some of those growers, they work very closely with or at the LEDC and, that's kind of how I got connected to those folks a little bit, but I actually met Rodrigo first because when I was a SARE state coordinator in Wisconsin he had gotten some SARE grants.

[00:10:59] Andrew: And so I learned about him via SARE grants that he had gotten. And has always been like a leader, I think, and outspoken and well spoken farmer. Really like a farmer that is willing to speak up on behalf of a lot of issues. And also willing to talk to farmers about what works for him and what doesn't work for him and to give some really sage advice to growers.

[00:011:35] Andrew: He's just a really smart farmer. And his farm has I've seen it evolve quite a bit. When I first met him, he was not doing any livestock at all. But now I know that he does have sheep. And I assume that they're grazed. I have not asked him. I'm guessing that he puts them out on pasture.

Andrew: My guess, actually, is that a lot of the farmers I, my guess is that if you, I think the real question is not about transitioning from livestock to like having livestock to manage grazing or pasture-based grazing. But it's going to be about, adding or, transitioning from diversified vegetable operations to incorporating livestock in some kind of way.

Andrew: I think that there's, there's a lot of poultry is an easier kind of entry point for a lot of this and I don't really feel like that's the focus of the grant project.

## [00:13:01] Land Access and Livestock Integration

Jane: Well, it isn't for the larger scale established farmers, but when we're talking about the BIPOC farmers it is, I mean we're interested more in attitudes towards livestock in general, not just grazing and the project as a whole, really as well has been more about integration of livestock period in different ways people do that, not solely about grazing. So, yeah, any insights that you have about the classes of livestock, the types of livestock, but that transition, and how that looks for BIPOC farmers? Yeah, we're interested in that.

Andrew: Yeah. I think there's a lot of... I really think it comes up the one of the biggest challenges that I see when I'm talking to farmers is access to land. Among farmers, I think that are able to purchase land are more inclined to, to consider livestock and, I think maybe potentially having chickens or some kind of guinea fowl or something like that on their land. Incorporating chickens is a lower risk as far as what you invest in something.

Andrew: I think people see it as that. It's a risk. And yeah, I've talked to some farmers about having livestock and the thing, or I'm not sorry, I've talked to a lot of these organizations about having farmers having livestock. Yeah, access to land has always come up but when you talk to a tribal nation, access to land is a little bit different situation for them.

[00:15:20] Andrew: But yeah, I think that when you're growing from produce from year to year no matter what happens, you've not sunk a lot of investment into something and you can be a little bit more nimble about having to move. So starting perennial crops, it's a risk. Investing in infrastructure, a building or something.

Andrew: Sometimes it's hard for farmers to figure that out because of the relationship they have with landlords, or they just, the uncertainty that they have with the access to the land. And yeah, and then I think getting a flock of poultry is just going to be a lot easier to start and if there is some loss of any of the animals it's easier to replace that and easy, it's just a little bit more straightforward.

[00:16:43] Andrew: If you are going to start buying larger animals and if you lose animals or things like that, there's some concerns about the uncertainty or the risk of, having those animals and trying to take care of them through the winter and trying to figure out how to sell them and trying to figure out how to take care of them is something that has been voiced not by everyone that I've talked to, but it has come up.

## [00:17:20] Support Organizations and Their Roles

Jane: So. Yeah. Okay. So, one of our prompt questions was how do these organizations support the farmers they work with? And we're really thinking about not just in the context of livestock, but like what kind of general supports do they offer? Do they do trainings? Do they help facilitate land access? Do they help farmers find financing? Do they work on totally different things like health care? What do they?

Andrew: Yeah.

Jane: What do they do?

[00:17:58] Andrew: Yeah, I think it's a combination of two things. Sometimes it's like the organization is specifically focused. **They have their niche or they have their specialty. So they end up kind of just focusing on those things. And then there's other organizations that kind of follow the lead of the farmers and what the farmers are interested in.** So, like Urban Triage or Hungry Turtle Farm, some of those things they kind of, I think, wait for the farmer to kind of ask a question or come to them with a need, and then they support them in getting that question answered or addressing that issue or that concern.

Andrew: Even like Bo Zhang who works with growers in the La Crosse area. I think those farmers are trying to sell their produce at the local farmers markets. So because they are the driver on what the farmers are driving. The kind of how, what Bo does, she was like, okay, so how can we help them sell more at the farmer's market and get better prices?

Andrew: Or, what are their kind of issues? And so the farmer is the one that's kind of like setting the agenda. And I don't think that Bo is really trying to say, Hey, have you thought about this? How about you change the way you farm? How about you also add in this? And so. You have to kind of have that kind of operation from one, and then you have someone who's like Groundswell Conservancy, an organization that is not focused on BIPOC growers, but it's a land access, it's a land trust like Farmland Land Trust is a big one.

[00:20:02] Andrew: Groundswell Conservancy is a land trust that's in the southwest Wisconsin area. I don't know their full region that they cover. So they focus on land access and it just so happens that one of their employees is Hmong. And because of that, she is like a champion and has those connections with Hmong growers.

Andrew: If Yamua did not work there, I do not think Groundswell Conservancy would be engaging with Hmong growers. That's just my take on it. Another organization like the Central Rivers Farmshed, which is in the Stevens Point area of Wisconsin, central Wisconsin. I've known about this organization for a long time, and I've known about it when in its early days...it is an organization that was really trying to create new markets and support the local agricultural scene and helping get local food to consumers.

[00:21:10] Andrew: And so it was like helping out growers in general. I don't think they were being exclusive to, to any ethnicity. But now Ann Vang, she works at FarmShed. And because of that, I think she brings her own interests to the organization. And she's like a firecracker of a person and she helps with farmers making value-added food products to farm-to-school efforts to culturally appropriate foods and wholesale settings and just does a whole bunch of stuff across that kind of like supply chain spectrum.

Andrew: And it's targeted towards culturally relevant foods for Hmong community or for Hmong growers. And it's because she is that champion there. And so either the organization itself is kind of like led by a Hmong person for Hmong farmers, or it's an organization that has employed a Hmong person that then kind of makes that connection. Like Rooted is an organization and now has KO and he, I think engages a lot with, and before KO it was new, but it was like that person that really helps that.

[00:22:51] Andrew: Hungry Turtle Alondra, she speaks Spanish. I don't really know what her ethnic background is and her backstory or anything like that, but. I think because of

that, now she's really engaging Latino farmers. So how do these organizations support the farmers they work with?

Andrew: It's that combination of trying to address needs as they come up. And I think, Each organization kind of does it a little differently. So, and some of it is really dependent on what grant funding they have. Things like that. So, there you know Groundswell Conservancy has a USDA grant right now that's really targeted towards supporting by BIPOC growers and so I think they're like branching out and providing workshops and education and technical assistance, whereas normally they wouldn't do that kind of stuff. And so I think some of that is really dependent on kind of what funding they have or not. When I talked to the new Hmong professionals group that's in Appleton, they said we are limited by funding. we would they kind of almost. And, and Bo is the same way, a lot of these people are kind of doing it because they feel like there's a need for it and they don't really necessarily get, there's not a lot of financial gain or support, financial support for them or their organization.

[00:24:45] Andrew: So sometimes they're limited on what they can and can't do and how they support farmers.

Amy: I wonder how they compare. Am I muted? No. As far as promoting something like promoting sustainable farming versus the farmers where they're at, like in that balance compared to the more mainstream farming organizations? It seems NRCS is always kind of like, here's the next step, here's the direction we're all going to go and kind of one thing over another versus, I don't know, when I think about indigenous farming techniques or something, it seems more like, Oh, what are you doing? We would like to learn from you. And I wonder where the organizations maybe fall in that spectrum.

Andrew: Yeah, I kind of, I think probably most of the organizations that you've talked to or that I've talked to, I think if like you offered up something for their growers, like about production or marketing or whatever, if it seems relevant and useful to the farmer, then they would be totally open to having anyone, whether it's you all talk about the benefits of, pasture-based grazing systems or livestock and the connection with soil health. I think that that's really valuable. But, I think you stepped away for a little bit and I'm not sure exactly what you heard, so stop me if I, am I saying something again, but I was saying that there's a lot of these organizations, I feel like, don't push farmers to kind of like, think new or try to help them farm in a different way.



[00:27:03] Andrew: A lot, I think a lot of them kind of just support the farmers to help them do what they're doing. And the farmers kind of set the agenda for some of these organizations. And I think if I were to go to one of those organizations and say, Hey, there's a different way of farming. You can have livestock. And there's some really great connections with soil health. And there's some benefits or something like that. And that's kind of encouraging a farmer to try to change their system. I think they'd be open.

Amy: Okay, I don't want to make you repeat yourself, so...

Andrew: Oh, oh, yeah.

Amy: That's okay.

Andrew: Yeah, but I think that they're open to that kind of idea. But yeah, maybe I didn't understand your question or whatever, fully,

Amy: I did have to step away. I wasn't listening for a minute. Okay.

Jane: I don't think this is repetitive, though. So let's keep going with it for a minute. So, So Amy was asking about, is there kind of a continuum where organizations fall between being just farmer driven waiting for the farmers to ask for things and then trying to get it for them and promoting new things. And Andrew, what I hear you saying is that, yeah, and the promotion of new things kind of needs to come with money attached to be able to do that work?

[00:28:39] Andrew: I think in some cases, and I think a lot of these support organizations end up providing different kinds of support or workshops or stuff like that because they've gotten funding for it. A lot of these organizations I think are like small scale, but that's not always true. I think that a lot of the organizations in general are going to provide like general...They're kind of designed to help the farmer. And it's a little bit like maintaining the status quo. And, it's like the farmer needs to grow vegetables because that's what the farmer wants to do.

Andrew: And they're going to help them do that. Like a lot of these organizations are out there to say, you need to change how you farm. I think if it's presented in the right

kind of way, and if I wanted to try to have a presentation or a discussion or a roundtable or whatever. If I wanted to come to the farmers and say I've got this thing I'd like to share with farmers, I think most of these organizations are open to that idea.

[00:30:06] And even if there was money attached to it, like you just said, Jane, I don't necessarily think these organizations are going to embark upon that. I think it's going to take maybe this, I mean, this organization or whatever, this project, if they want to, if you want to try to promote and show the value or the benefit science behind it or biology or something, whatever you're trying to show, like the, the return on investment of it or the environmental ecological benefits.

Andrew: And I think if, I think all these organizations are open to that, because they're always trying to support farmers, but I think in general, the way that they support farmers is either going to be helping them do what the farmers have expressed interest in what they're doing. It's not push them towards innovation. I think in some cases the organization might be really specific. There's like a land trust or something that is going to be like, just focusing on land access. And unless they do have some kind of grant funding, they're never going to talk about soil health. Why would they? That's not what they do.

Andrew: It's just, they're a land trust and they're going to help them help farmers buy land. So I think. It's great to talk to them and say, how many farmers do you work with? What kind of support do you give? Do any of these farmers grow livestock, and go through that survey. But a lot of it was like, well, that's not really relevant to us because we, that's not what we do. And maybe they, maybe if there's a specific grant that comes up or some funding, it doesn't have to be a grant and maybe they vary, they branch out a little bit and maybe there's a partnership or something.

## [00:32:07] Educational Farms and Livestock Challenges

[00:32:07] Andrew: The other kind of situation that I haven't talked about is, there's situations like HAFA, which I'm, I'm sure you're familiar with, but there's like Hafa, Big River Farms, which is part of the food group, and there's like the Fondi Farm, or the Fondi Center, there's the Farley Center, and there's some other, not really with names, but there's other plots of land that have been divided up for BIPOC farmers to use.

Andrew: And they get their one acre, or their maybe five acres, or maybe two acres, or something like that, right? That's how HAFA works. HAFA is not gonna ever let someone go buy some cows, and probably not gonna even let them go buy some chickens. It's either, there's rules or restrictions about how they can use the land, or there's just there's like that set outside of that organization or the organization itself is not focused on that. And so yes, all those organizations really support BIPOC growers and like that's their job and focus, but a lot of them are just based on vegetable production due to that's just easier for them to teach about, or that's like the teachers, they're the educators, that's the experience and knowledge that they have.

[00:33:48] Andrew: Or maybe the land is a nature preserve that someone, like they're able to farm on, but they're not going to have animals on. And, I think when you talk to Angelic Organics, which is now Farmer Rising, that's a really kind of unique situation because it is that kind of like education, farming setting that is focused on livestock. And I was like, wow, that's, there are other examples of that around, but to have it be focused on livestock is pretty unique.

Andrew: I think some of that is because of they have access to their own land, they own it in a different kind of way. But yeah, I think that it might be interesting to talk to some of these organizations about it. So when I talked to Stephen at Bondi, which is like north of Milwaukee. It's really not an urban setting. It happens to be north of Milwaukee, but it doesn't feel like Milwaukee. So, they have a nature preserve. I forget if the county owns it or how that works, but they don't really own the land.

[00:35:20] Andrew: Right? But they get to use it pretty indefinitely, as far as I understand. I don't think there's any like concern about them not ever being able to farm it. It is an old farm, and I don't remember the backstory, but, it's an old farm, so you have an old silo, and an old barn, and, all that kind of, an old farmhouse, which I'm not sure if anyone lives there or not, I don't know how that works, but but yeah it's about 40 ish acres or something, and it's divided up in multiple acre plots that are like long term.

Andrew: And 75 percent or so are Hmong. There's some, a few like black farmers that I know of, I guess, I'm not sure if there's any white farmers there actually or not, but I talked to Steven about it and, and he was actually pretty like open and interested about learning about and providing like education or around having livestock on your farm.

[00:36:31] Andrew: Because. Some of just working in that community, right? Some of these growers have left the Fondy farm to get their own farm, and so like they're starting to have like connections beyond that piece of land. And I'm sure the same, I haven't talked to KaZoua Berry or anyone at Big River Farms, which I don't know if they still call it that specifically or not, but that's an educational farm and you go through and you graduate and you move on, and I'm not sure what kinds of like rules or restrictions there are around incorporating livestock, but if farmers wanted to ever have livestock after they graduate and move on, however it is that they move on, it seems like, there's some potential there to have some minimal livestock for almost for an educational reason at some of these to kind of like learn about it. And I think it's great to learn about the connection between soil health and livestock, but maybe there needs to be some more practical like, how do you take care of animals? And if a plant dies, you've got a whole row of them, you've got like a whole field of them, and you just hope that not all of your plants die and, it's easy come, easy go, but, I think like when you're starting to, the bigger the animal...I feel like you're putting more of your eggs in one basket when comes to that. So, it might be that.

Amy: That's a good point.

[00:38:28] Andrew: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And similarly, it's like, from selling it as well. I think if farmers, can figure out ways to have it butchered or processed and then frozen and maybe...I'm not sure where they're at and what they're thinking about, but maybe there's ways that they don't have to feel like they have this big thing that they have to figure out what they're going to do with, they can save it and find markets as, not that they're going to lose their shirt in the process. But...

[00:39:15] Jane: So, okay...I'm kind of looking at number five, support or programming provided to these farmers for raising livestock. And Andrew, what I hear you say is not really because the organizations working with farmers already, that's not their focus, but there would be openness to others coming in and providing that kind of information and training, but it would kind of have to be a longer term relationship, I think, is what you said. I mean, yeah, there would need to be money, but the money. Like the, the organization that's already working with the farmers may not be able to expand to that kind of training, like they would want a relationship with someone else who had the expertise to provide it and kind of a more ongoing way instead of just pop in for a workshop and then disappear.

[00:40:22] Andrew: I sometimes, well, no, I think that there could be kind of one-off things that are based upon awareness and exposure. Similarly, there was that group that I was from Appleton, I was really surprised that they organized a road trip to go and visit some farms that happened to be owned and managed by Hmong growers that did livestock.

Andrew: And it was like, I'm pretty sure it was beef cattle, if I remember correctly. That's like a one off thing, and there's already a strong presence of like pasture walks and things like that. I think there could be a workshop or a pasture walk or educational opportunities, it can vary quite a bit on what this is.

Andrew: But I think that those can be like one off things where similarly we might...I might have a workshop with farmers and say, you need to think about like record keeping, or you need to think about GAP certification, or you need to think about signing up for NRCS EQIP program or something like that.

[00:42:00] Andrew: They're not going to sign up for it necessarily there. They're not going to do that at that time and I'm, but you know the goal is to kind of like help them learn about these things and know that that's an option that they have to explore. And it would be, it's always great if I can kind of follow up with any of them and have this kind of long-term support that I, whether it's me or someone else, but you know, have long term support that is offered to farmers.

Andrew: But I do think that if there is an opportunity for some group or some educator to talk about raising livestock, I think it could be beneficial. When I asked the question, "Are you interested in like materials around soil health?" Almost everybody said "yes", but when I asked "Are you interested in materials for raising livestock?" I got a lot of, "Well, maybe, that's not really, I'm not really sure". A lot of growers aren't interested in that or I'm not sure if they're interested in that because we never really talked about it. But I got some maybes or I think one person even said, no, that's not really what we need.

[00:43:17] So yeah, I guess, if you had an organization and the farmers weren't interested in something or, or the people that are running the organization, they've never raised livestock themselves, and they don't have that kind of background or history or experience, then it's gonna be really hard for them to kind of like feel confident or comfortable enough to start like getting their farmers that they support

start raising livestock as well. That's my guess. Maybe there's some organizations that have staff that are willing to learn and share as they go.

Andrew: But I think that maybe there's an opportunity for like maybe Eugene or Laura or someone, if there was someone out there, grassworks or something, if they wanted to like target Hmong growers in some kind of way, or Latino growers or whatever, black, black farmer growers, they could do some targeted outreach and try to have some events.

Andrew: And, maybe the farmers are like, I don't want to attend. It's not really interesting to me, but I think that there might be some openness to it. And like I, I was saying that I just discovered a farmer named Ger and he's in the Eau Claire area and he raises beef cattle and I was helping him apply for funding to get a butcher shop.

## [00:45:11] Hmong Farmers and EQIP Program Challenges

[00:45:11] Andrew: If you have other Hmong farmers come and see one Hmong farmer doing it, then they're like, aha, so it can apply to me, that it is possible. But if I take some Hmong farmers and take them to a white owned farm and say, hey, look at this white farmer and what they've got going here, there's pasture bays or there's whatever, you name it.

Andrew: They might be like, well, it's not really relevant to me. That's not something that I can do. And it happens all the time. I work with Kaiying Vang who is an NRCS person and he's amazing, and he talks to Hmong farmers all the time about signing up for EQIP or CSP or all these different programs.

Andrew: And there's he's they're set aside money, dedicated, dedicated for farmers like you. And they won't do it because they don't think it's real or they don't think that they can get it or they, there's all these things. And I was talking to one farmer named Franta and he was like, it took me, I can't remember, I'm just going to summarize, but it took me like five or six or seven years or something to actually apply for it.

Andrew: Because I just thought I wouldn't like, I thought it was like, not going to get it. Or I don't know. You know, I heard about it, I knew about it, but I never did it, and I

don't know why I didn't do it. I just thought that maybe it was going to be hard, or it was going to be something, or whatever.

[00:46:49] Andrew: All these little things that we tell ourselves. And he was like, I finally did it, and it was like not that big of a deal. And in his case it was like getting a high tunnel through EQIP. But the same thing I think could be similarly applied to a new farming technique. Have you tried cover crops? Like, why haven't you? And then, or have you tried livestock? Really, why haven't you? And so I think there's sometimes these things that people tell themselves, but if they see someone that looks like them doing it, then they're like, okay, now I really believe you. I believe what the Janes and the Amy's and the Laura's are telling me, because I see another farmer that looks like me doing it.

Andrew: So I think finding those farms, and those people, and then creating events around that, I think that could be a really powerful resource. **There's the difference between knowing something and then believing that you can do it.** But yeah.

Jane: Exactly. Yeah.

Andrew: But that was kind of all connected to number five.

Jane: Right.

## [00:48:15] Grant Proposal Struggles for BIPOC Farmers

[00:48:15] Jane: And that was really helpful Andrew. And one of the things I'm struggling with kind of lately as I write grant proposals is, I'm getting some feedback from one colleague in particular that if you're writing a proposal that's going to involve BIPOC farmers that it needs to it needs to be like more than 50 percent of the money going to BIPOC-led organizations. Like having white-led organizations have the money to do trainings is not helpful and not where we should be. And yet, the expertise on these things currently doesn't reside in the BIPOC community often, and how do we transmit expertise? Train up trainers? How do we get to

that point if the money is going to a BIPOC-led organization that may not currently have an interest in these topics, which it sounds like that's the case, like that's not the thing they do. So that's kind of a conundrum for me at this point. So what do you think about that?

[00:49:44] Andrew: Yep. I see the situation, the conundrum that you're in. I agree. I mean, I think that I've written grants where in hindsight, I'm like, wow, I really was just stepping in and as an outsider trying to provide support. Very good intentioned with farming communities whatever kind of community it was and there needed to be some kind of more involvement or investment in both directions from that farming community. I get that. But I think that I guess I just want to be careful like dichotomizing something. Because I agree with you too. I think that just sending money to a BIPOC-led organization that supports BIPOC farmers if they don't have that experience, expertise, interest, knowledge, they're not interested in this topic, then how would you ever see change happen if that's kind of the goal?

## [00:51:17] Balancing Funding and Expertise in Grants

[00:51:17] Andrew: That's not always what it should happen. But then how is that going to work? But I would guess that I don't know your colleagues at 50 percent or something like that, but I would guess like really if you design a project where there was 50 percent involvement and funded involvement from the...non-BIPOC led applicant, maybe, and the BIPOC-led partner organization, what I'm guessing the scenario, is that...some percentage that's close. I think that...you could be involved enough that you're not just handing over money and then you have no say in the situation. That's my guess. It's not 'Oh, if we write in the, this BIPOC led organization for too much', then how are we supposed to ever make change? Because they're not interested in it. Well, I mean, that feels kind



of extreme a little bit, but I would say that if either way, if you end up being too outside organization that's trying to create change and there's no buy in or, and it doesn't necessarily have to be through money, but you know, through funding, but if there's no buy-in and investment and the community that you're engaging via some BIPOC led organization or just the farmers directly themselves, then you're probably not going to have much success.

Andrew: And likewise, if all you do is get funding to just like funnel towards these partner organizations or farmers themselves, but then provide no education or no resources or support because you've sent all the money or the majority of the money to these farmers or the support organization, you're probably not going to create much success and change that way either. So I think there's some...I mean, I see where you're coming from and I see where they're coming from, but I imagine that if you end up somewhere in the middle, that's gonna be how you're gonna be more successful. I can't say you're gonna be 100% successful.

## [00:53:50] Importance of Farmer Buy-In and Local Support

[00:53:50] Andrew: I mean, I think even if it's like a bunch of white farmers, if I, this is historically kind of how it's been, like when I worked at Extension, if I was an Extension educator and I went and talked to a bunch of farmers, it meant diddly squat sometimes. They showed up for whatever reason, right? But it didn't mean that much based on what I'm saying because I'm not a farmer. But if their neighbor or another farmer said something, they're like, yeah, okay, I believe you because you've got street cred.

Andrew: You're a real farmer too. So it doesn't matter that it's Hmong or White or whatever. I think sometimes it's just, you're a university person. Your head is in the cloud. You work in these really controlled environment situations when you do your research, but that's not the way it is in real life on a real farm. So I think you run into all these kinds of issues no matter what it is. So I think having farmer buy-in and support is sometimes more valuable from a creating change perspective than like having BIPOC-led organization support. And I think, what I was saying is finding...if you can find one farmer to do what you're trying to, embody what you're trying to change, usually that's what grants are about, change.

[00:55:32] Andrew: If you find one farmer. Wow, then you can, then all of a sudden it becomes so much easier to get a second farmer. And then with those two farmers, they can each, and it can, it can escalate. And so I think it's like finding the right mix of farmers, local support, all that kind of stuff. It really is how it's going to have to work. And for me, I spend most of my days like, I don't know if it's 90 percent or higher, unfortunately, like in a desk in Madison on a computer, and I have these like one-off situations where I go to an event or something like that or go to a conference and engage with people. Sometimes educators or technical assistance providers, more so than farmers.

Andrew: So, I feel really disconnected from a lot of farmers and I really can't just like constantly be driving around the state like, showing up at farms and knowing where to go and all that kind of stuff. I mean, that's just it's kind of easier said than done. And so I really rely on, from an efficiency point of view, it's 'Oh wow. I just found out about Bo in La Crosse. Oh wow. She is my conduit to 15 farmers. And Oh, I found out about Long Lu in Appleton. He is my conduit to like the 20 farmers that he works with, and it's you gotta find all those people. And that is what I think is how I would build a grant proposal.

## [00:57:24] Connecting Farmers with Resources and Organizations

[00:57:24] Andrew: It's finding the right farmers in Grassworks. I feel like there's always like the, it's kind of like...there are some really outspoken farmers now that are really like champions and cheerleaders and change makers. They are really like, I think probably the reason for a lot of that success of Grassworks more than just like the, the organizational leaders there...it's farmer-driven. Okay.

Amy: I have to go. Right. Okay, bye.

Andrew: Anyway, that felt kind of long winded but yeah, I, it's just I feel like it's touchy to say what's my take on putting together a strong grant proposal and that balance between sending funding to a support organization or a partner on a grant.

[00:58:35] Andrew: I think that it needs to happen. I don't know if there's.

Jane: Yeah, I mean there's also. Yeah, and then questions of capacity to like the...over the past few years there's been. A great deal more attention paid to engaging BIPOC communities, which is great. The existing organizations are...they're running out of staff capacity and offering up short-term grant money to say, can you do this project that only lasts one or two years,

Andrew: Right?

Jane: Yeah. That's a little difficult too. Yeah. I mean, your point I think is, you just got to build those relationships and it takes time.

Andrew: Yeah. And I think some of these relationships, it always happens in like jumps. Jump forward, jump and unfortunately drop down

sometimes, but it's like you meet one person and they open a door to like their network or their community or their group...And so, when you're building those relationships, sometimes it's nothing happens for the longest time, and then all of a sudden, you're at the right place at the right time, because you're out there, you're looking, you're ears and eyes, you're kind of like, talking, and you're looking, right?

[01:00:29] Andrew: And then you find someone, and then bam, all of a sudden it's totally different, and it's very sudden. It's not like this gradual...you add a farmer, one farmer a week kind of thing. And that doesn't work that way. Usually it's no farmers for seven weeks. And then on the eighth week you meet 10 farmers and stuff like that., but yeah. I mean, I think that the challenge with this. And I've talked to Amy about this and the challenge of this project and the reason I've struggled so much to kind of put things down and to talk to people. One is people aren't interested in talking to me because they don't feel like they have anything relevant to say because it's not really...the questions are not relevant to them.

Andrew: And two, it's kind of hard for me to put all this down on paper because I don't know if there's anything...I don't know how to kind of like, draw any kinds of conclusions because it's like, well, some of these questions don't apply in this situation or to this group. So...that's been...

Jane: Yeah, I think this conversation has been really useful, though. And I think that we've actually hit on most of the points in here one way or another.

Andrew: Yeah.

Jane: So if you have a couple more minutes, I'd just like to, okay. Number eight. Are these organizations making connections or helping their farmers make connections, not necessarily around livestock, but around any agriculture with universities or Extension or NRCS or Farm Service Agency

or other things like that? Are they, is that something these organizations are doing? And if they are, how's it going?

[01:02:43] Andrew: I think that there's a lot of organizations that are connected to some of these. Not everybody. But yeah, and I think that every organization that I've talked to, I feel like fall somewhere slightly different on that spectrum of how well connected or how well they connect the farmers to these resources. Yeah, I think when it gets connected to Extension, historically, and I think it's still mostly prevalent, or, accurate to say that there's a lot of local presence in Extension. It used to be like every county in Minnesota, it was never that broadly...Extension wasn't as spread out throughout the state as it was in Wisconsin.

Andrew: And I'm not sure about other states. So I think getting connected with Extension educators is pretty easy even still today. I think a lot of times the University, if you're really small scale and...if what you're doing doesn't feel like, well...I'll say is, I feel like the university, a lot of what they're doing doesn't apply right away to these growers, like the research plots or the research that they're doing, all that kind of stuff. I feel like it's always like a step removed...like maybe the University research is going to influence something that ends up happening to a product or a practice or something that then the farmers can take advantage of, but that's always a little bit like removed.

Andrew: And then sometimes, some organizations are pretty good about getting connected with USDA. If you're going to have NRCS come and do their like rain simulator. Sure, that's easy for them to do. Right. Like I've seen the rain simulator thing multiple times and I've heard NRCS and FSA talk about the programs that they have, but I'm not necessarily sure always how like easy it is for BIPOC growers to actually sign up for and actually take advantage of some of these programs.

## [01:05:48] Challenges in USDA Program Accessibility

[01:05:48] Sometimes I think that it's unnecessarily complex. And to the point of being exclusive, some of the USDA programs.

Jane: Yeah. Are you familiar...

Andrew: Mmhmm.

Jane: At all with Renewing The Countryside's work on that to train trainers who will go into offices with people?

[01:06:22] Andrew: Yeah. Yep. I am. And I've been trying to facilitate similar group visits or open house events at USDA service centers. I mean, I just had a meeting with some folks last week at USDA Service Center about a similar group visit with some Hmong farmers, and...I've organized a presentation with two of the people that I talked to. They've come to an event and talked to Hmong farmers and one of the...The FSA loan person, she used to work at DATCP and be a huge proponent of a lot of local agriculture and local food, the local food movement.

Andrew: So I know she gets it, but still, it just isn't designed for that in some kind of way. And it was like funny, like how they're like 'You mean you just want to bring people here? And, okay, we don't have a room big enough for them to sit down for us to do our presentation.' I'm like, 'No, I just, I've already told you this, this is not about you presenting about your programs. That's not the goal.' And then I was like, I know that I've talked to Sara George and I know that, one of the things that they've done at other USDA service centers is get people signed up with FSA to start the paperwork for their farm number.

[01:08:03] Andrew: Okay. And I'm like, I know we can get all that information ahead of time and kind of like help, that could be an outcome of this event and man that was just like, nope, not gonna work. It's just, we do one-on-one, they can set up a time to go one-on-one meeting, and I was like, 'Yeah, that's probably not going to work'...And then I've talked to many USDA folks recently. We didn't have to talk about this group but it's oh, we have interpretation services. I'm like, okay, so a Hmong farmer is going to, how are they going to get that figured out? What are they going to do? How do they get that set up? And if they show up, are you going to be like, oh, you can't speak English very well, or having some difficulty explaining something?

Andrew: Trying to figure out what you need? What's that process like? That's like embarrassing or intimidating or nerve wracking or stressful. And I just think they don't, they're like, yep, USDA isn't for me. And that's just not what I'm going to do. And it's like really hard to get some of these growers to take advantage of some of these programs and stuff despite the kind of support you give them. It's just not always going to happen. That's not always the case. But, from like a partner organization and having like these, these partner organizations. I think that there's a real easy opportunity for to have those partner organizations connected to the University Extension, SARE, USDA, all these different Grassworks or, I think there's a way or even like Renewing The Countryside and the GoFarm Connect stuff...I think there's a way for them to get connected to them because usually there's the leadership at those organizations I think that's kind of like what they're doing is trying to find resources already.

[01:10:45] Andrew: They're trying to get their farms connected. So I think a lot of times they're really happy to have additional resources. Because like when I said, do you want information about soil health, like everybody was really excited about that, and I said, would you like information about livestock? And I think they, it's not like they're opposed to getting connected to resources, it's just like they're not sure if that's what their

farmers want or need. So, but they're like, yeah, and I think that there are some organizations that just haven't bridged that gap, to making that connection with the person or they haven't figured out where they need to go to find out, so sometimes it's a website or manual or book or whatever it is, right?

Andrew: And so sometimes those things are, those limit what they tell their farmers that they support. So, yeah, I mean I think that's where like I step in...is trying to make sure that farmers or the organizations that support those farmers know about all their options and all of their resources.

## [01:12:10] Wholesale Market Access and Training

[01:12:10] Andrew: And the farm event that we had this past Saturday was talking about the whole project in general is about expanding market access. So kind of like expanding off from farmers markets to other types of markets, particularly like wholesale markets and like how that's a little different and all that kind of stuff. One of the events that was on Saturday was about...you need to maintain cold chain, and you need to store your produce differently. You need to think about harvesting it differently and then how you handle that and move it around and deliver it. And so it was about those kinds of needs and installing a cool bot and having a cooler on your farm, like a DIY kind of thing.

Andrew: And then there was talk about solar panels because a lot of these farms don't have access to running water and electricity. So how do you power your farm to have a cooler? And then we're talking about the USDA



REAP grant and yeah, that's a grant. Hmong farmers can totally apply for that.

[01:13:35] Andrew: I bet you, I don't know if there's ever been a single Hmong farmer in the entire United States that's ever applied for it. I have no idea. But they should. In March in Wisconsin alone, like over 2 million dollars were awarded and they do quarterly awards, and like 23 projects were awarded in March they do every quarter. I think it was 20 projects were for were for solar arrays. And the majority of them are individual farms. There were other businesses.

Jane: Solar arrays are a great place to graze sheep.

Andrew: There you go. Well, I mean...

Jane: So the wholesale thing, new market channels, I just put something in the chat for you to look at too. MISA had a grant. We're almost done with it, but we developed a wholesale training manual and it doesn't it doesn't go into cool bots so much, but it covers six topic areas kind of surrounding jumping up from a direct marketing farmers market stand type of operations to getting into more wholesale. So, Yeah, we had a Minnesota Specialty Crop Block Grant and we developed that curriculum and we have mini-grants available for Minnesota based farmers that we're trying to get out the door now for people that complete all of the curriculum. But, the whole package is there and available if anybody else wants to use it.

[01:15:30] Andrew: That's great.

Jane: Yeah, there are just really simple worksheets for each section and the idea with those was, they're one or two pagers. If people can complete those, that's the start of a pretty decent business plan. Like you look at your financials, you look at your on-farm food safety plan, you do a little planning around like the amount of seeds you have to buy and the amount of rows you have to plant to fulfill X amount of contract for pounds of

squash or something and you'll take a look at your licensing and regulations and your buyer connections and packing and packaging so we actually presented all of that. We did it last year in six separate recorded sessions and those recordings are available but then in March of this year we did the whole shebang in one day at a training event that Kathy Zeman organized. And that was followed by two days of more intensive financial record keeping training, but we did the whole Wholesale Readiness in one day and we had 40 farmers, most of whom were BIPOC farmers, many of whom didn't have superb English skills.

[01:17:04] They filled out those worksheets and turned them in. They were able to turn them in using their phone and an online form. And so we got a lot of that training done and now we're working towards getting those people their mini grants because I'd say half of them have turned in all of their worksheets for each topic. So that was pretty successful.

Andrew: That sounds amazing. I would love to. Oh, Ryan Pesch. Yep. I would love to share this with...there's some projects right now that are kind of focused on like helping BIPOC or Hmong specifically branch out into wholesale markets. I think this would be really valuable to share with them and maybe...

Jane: You're totally welcome to.

Andrew: I will see what the group thinks about this. I don't know if there's any way to kind of like have a training, some version, some type of training that focuses on this. I don't know if it's the whole thing or part of it, but yeah, I think that'd be really great. And then I see that there's a YouTube video on Wholesale Readiness Introductory video.

Jane: Yeah, I'll probably be taking that down. That was like an introduction to the course back in fall of 2022 when we were trying to recruit people for it. But down below that, the course materials, there's a video for each session. And the sessions were two and a half hours long and included

some small group breakouts. So the videos are longer than what people want to watch, but I've got the timestamps in there for when the presenters are going through their piece. So Ryan Pesch is talking about business planning in session one and then Natalie Hoidal with Extension is session two and Brett Olson, Renewing the Countryside did session three. Analissa Hultberg from Extension did session four, and then I did the licensing and regulations in session five and then Ryan again did packing and packaging.

Andrew: Nice.

[01:19:46] Jane: There's that course materials that has all of the worksheets and other supplemental materials that are also included in that curriculum binder. Yeah.

Andrew: Are the video kind of like..is designed in such a way that it's like PowerPoint slides and someone's talking in the background or is it like a video of someone presenting like an individual, an individual talking? How is that?

Jane: Yeah, it's a webinar style where there are PowerPoint slides and then the presenter is presenting those.

Andrew: Okay. If it's like PowerPoint slides and there's someone talking, sometimes those are a little bit easier to actually get dubbed into other languages, and you don't have to worry about lip syncing although it's never like a...it's not like a deal breaker. But yeah, yeah.

Jane: The other thing that we did is create transcripts, and those are in the course materials and logistics link. If you go to that there are folders for each session in Drive and I had a contract with Emily Reno. I don't know if you know who she is. But anyway, she took the transcripts from each of the videos because we recorded them just like this one, downloaded the transcripts, and then she edited those.

[01:21:32] Andrew: Yeah, I'm looking at that.

Jane: Yeah, someone who's got more limited English could listen to the session, but also be following along with the printed transcript, which that's great could potentially help a lot. And we figured those transcripts would be something pretty easily translatable into other languages, especially as some of the AI is getting pretty good at that.

Andrew: AI to translate into different languages?

Jane: Yeah, actually University of Minnesota Extension has translated their entire website into Spanish using an AI tool.

Andrew: That's cool. Yeah.

Jane: Yeah. I should get those transcript links out in front on that landing page too.

Andrew: So talking going back to the, this grant what do you, what do you...do you have any advice or ideas for how to structure a write up? What gets written and kind of how it's organized? So, I, you know what, well, Amy and I talked about was kind of like an overview or an executive summary. And then maybe highlighting some...