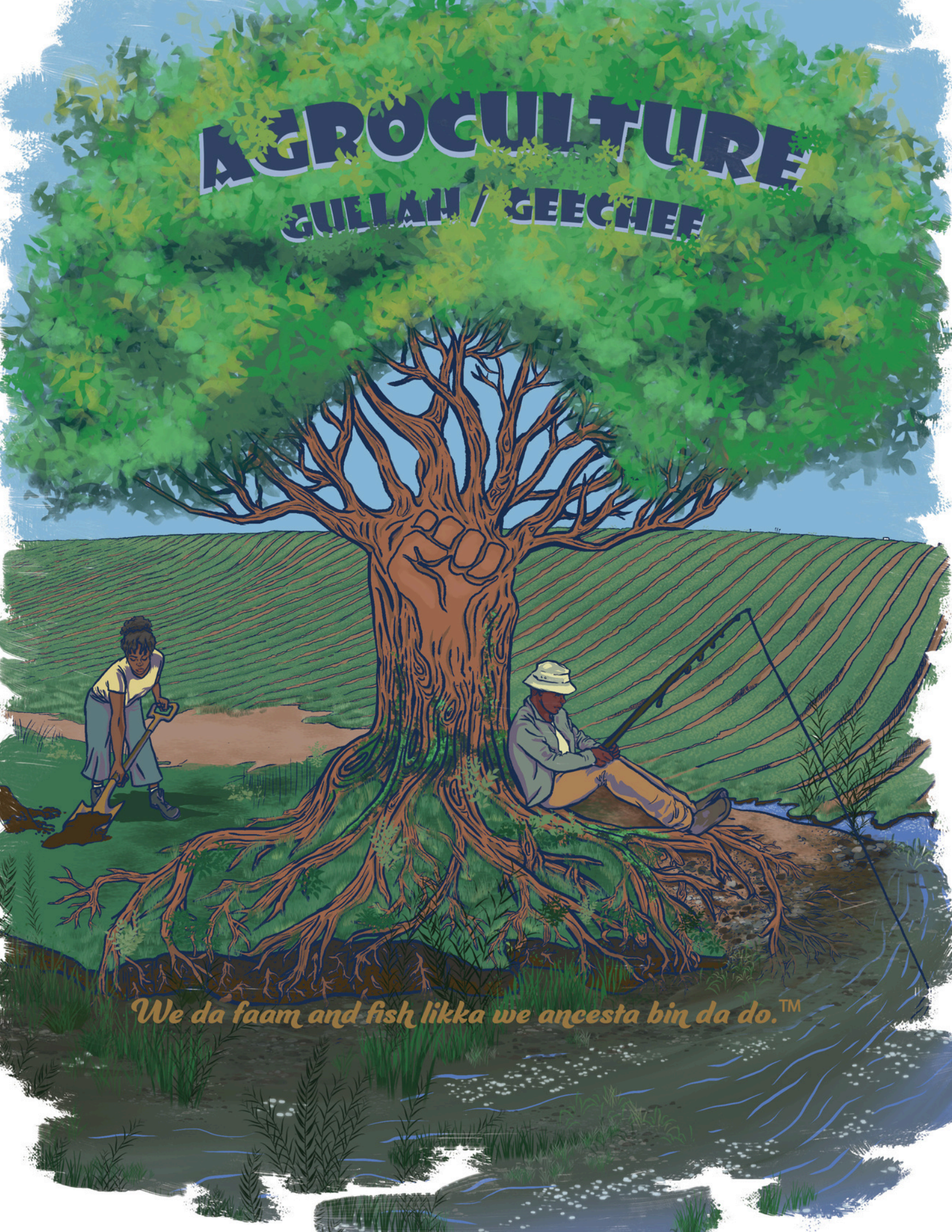


# AGRO CULTURE

GULLAN / GEECHEE



*We da faam and fish likka we ancesta bin da do.™*



An Evaluation  
of the

# Gullah/Geechee AGRO-CULTURE

Study

## Project Summary, Activities, Outcomes & Recommendations

Prepared For:

**Stakeholders &  
Sustainable Agriculture Research &  
Education  
(SARE)**

Prepared By:

**Dr. Najmah Thomas &  
Center for Human Services Evaluation**

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This report serves as the outcome evaluation of the  
Gullah/Geechee Agro-Culture Study 2021-2024

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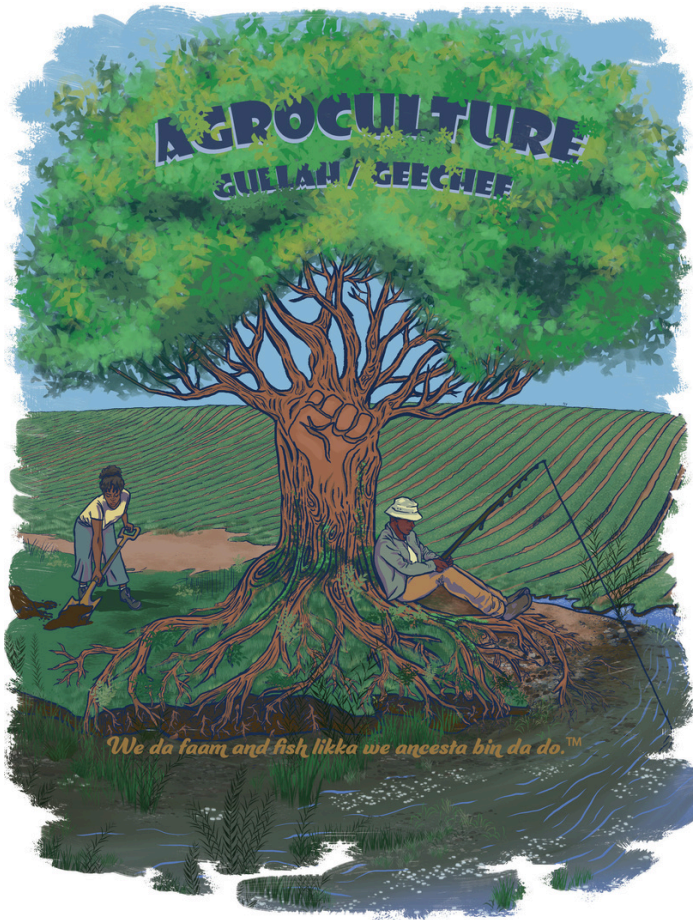
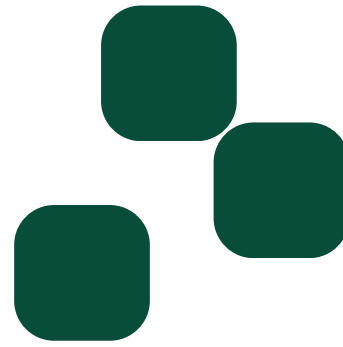
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2024

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to determine potential workable strategies to address capacity issues and sustain family farming across Gullah/Geechee generations. Gullah/Geechee is an African-based culture deeply tied to family farming and fishing.

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## ACTIVITIES

This report outlines the activities conducted as a part of a 3-year research project funded by the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) organization. Those activities included farm mapping and story documentation, capacity analysis, equity analysis, and awareness and outreach tool development.

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## RESULTS

This research effort revealed gaps in knowledge of and access to essential public resources for Gullah/Geechee farming and fishing families, in part because of decades of discrimination in the implementation of those programs. Principle investigators worked in partnership with cooperating farmers to design an easy-to-use Public Resource Framework (resource guide) that outlines important details for key resources that can help build the financial sustainability of smaller family farm businesses. The research also uncovered key outreach and awareness tools and techniques that can be used to encourage younger members of the Gullah/Geechee community to consider farming as a vital career option.

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## NEXT STEPS

The evaluation team's review of this three-year effort resulted in key recommendations to leverage and extend the initial research results, including wide distribution of the resource guide to other Gullah/Geechee communities, and intentional use of social media and interactive mobile apps to engage with younger members of the Gullah/Geechee community.

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# Background

Gullah/Geechee is an African-based culture deeply tied to family farming and fishing; Gullah/Geechee cultural principles include distinct land and water use practices, foodways, spiritual practices, the spoken Gullah language, and traditional craftsmanship.

Gullah/Geechee culture is characterized by self-determination and self-sufficiency; it is defiantly African and distinctively place-based. Created by the human will of people from multiple sections of the West Coast of Africa who were enslaved on plantations along the southeast coast, Gullah/Geechee represents the only group of African Americans who maintained a significant amount of Africanisms including foodways, land use practices, subsistence fishing, and the spoken Gullah language (Goodwine, 1998; Politzer, 1999).

For centuries, Gullah/Geechee communities sustained a way of life predicated on the wealth of close-knit family compounds, and carefully nurtured the resources of the land and water (Dean, 2013). In recent decades, this way of life has been disrupted due to inequitable public policy.

Taxation and Heir's Property regulations resulted in massive land loss in the Gullah/Geechee community; as much as 20,000 acres were taken out of farming production within a five-year period. The Gullah/Geechee family farmers who remain on their land currently have limited capacity to operate their farms, and the transfer of wealth in knowledge and land to the next generation of Gullah/Geechee farmers is uncertain.

Research shows that culture and agriculture ecosystems are inextricably linked – sustain culture, sustain agriculture (Dean, 2013).

The aim of this study was to determine potential workable strategies to address capacity issues and sustain family farming across Gullah/Geechee generations. Beyond the negative impact on the immediate community, this disruption also has negative impacts on the larger farming ecosystem.



# PROJECT SUMMARY

**PROJECT NAME:** Gullah/Geechee Agroculture Study

**TIMELINE:** 2021-2024

## OBJECTIVES

1. Conduct farm mapping and story documentation with the Gullah/Geechee communities on St. Helena Island that have existing family farming/fishing operations, identifying key quantitative and qualitative data related to people, produce, pests, policies and profits (for internal purposes only).
2. Conduct a capacity analysis of local associations, cooperatives and markets (scope, participation, primary activities) on and around St. Helena Island.
3. Conduct an equity analysis of local and state resources and policies related to farming and fishing operations.
4. Develop and test a methodology to attract and educate young (under age 55) Gullah/Geechee farmers and fishers.
5. Develop and disseminate Gullah/Geechee Agro-Culture framework to at least 7 other communities in the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor.

## PARTNERS

This participatory action research project partners included;

1. Cooperating farmers
2. Gullah/Geechee Stakeholders
3. Elder Farmers
4. Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition
5. Papa Brown Farms / Young Farmers & Fishers Association
6. USCB African American Studies Students & USCB Human Services Students
7. Center for Human Services Evaluation

## IMPACT

1. Documented equity gaps in farming program access.
2. Increased family farmers' access to funding and technical assistance programs.
3. Developed marketing and communication tools (logo, website, mobile app) designed in partnership with young Gullah/Geechee farmers.
4. Identified recommendations for future use of marketing and communications tools.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

1. Sustainability for the Gullah/Geechee agro-culture system relies on the transfer of generational knowledge and skills.
2. Provides important and timely information about the availability of local support and technical assistance services for small family operations, as well as the level of resource mobilization for Gullah/Geechee farmers and fishers.
3. Identifies potential policies that can better support economic viability for Gullah/Geechee farming operations.



# Project Activities



This participatory action research engaged farmers and fishers from the Gullah/Geechee culture in determining potentially workable strategies to address capacity issues and sustain family farming across generations.

Activities included:

1. Surveys, interviews and focus groups with farmers, fishers and family members;
2. Mapping and documenting community stories for future generations (not for external audiences);
3. Supporting/hosting Farmers Markets, Community Events & Festivals;
4. Policy advocacy /systems change—communication & education for local and state elected officials about needs of Gullah/Geechee farming/fishing families;
5. On-farm training, technical assistance and mentoring by Elder Farmers;
6. Marketing campaign designed for, and with significant input by, younger members of the community;
7. Gullah/Geechee Field Day events.





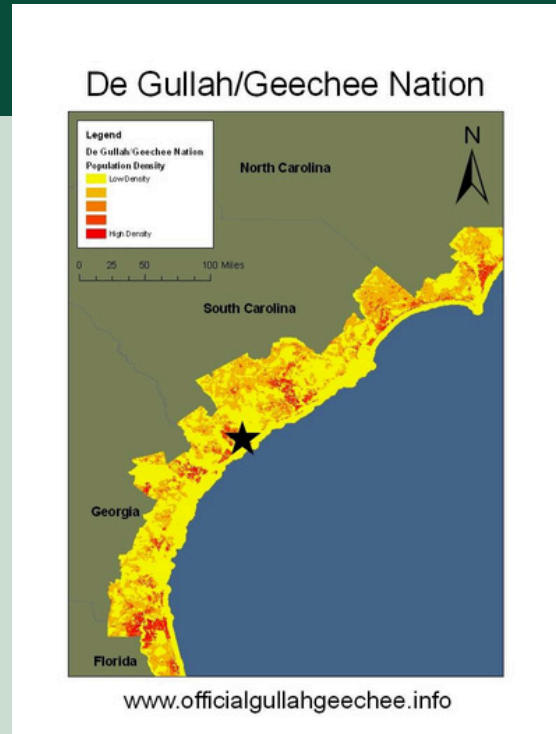
# CAPACITY ANALYSIS

## FINDINGS

There are 4 main organizations on St. Helena Island that have the potential to provide meaningful support and coordination for Gullah/Geechee Family Farmers.

Assets include deep cultural capital, agricultural history, land holdings, farming equipment and facilities.

Significant challenges include staffing capacity/fluctuations, lack of sustained, stable funding sources, age of equipment/extensive repair needs, and limited engagement of young farmers on a consistent basis.



The star on this map denotes the location of St. Helena Island  
photo credit: <https://gullahgeecheenation.com/>

**FIGURE 1. CAPACITY ANALYSIS OF FARMING & FISHING ASSOCIATIONS ON ST. HELENA ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA**

ORGANIZATION NAME	Assets	Challenges
PENN CENTER	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>History of agricultural training.</li> <li>Extensive land holdings.</li> <li>Community farm.</li> <li>Muscadine vineyard.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership &amp; program staff turnover.</li> <li>Facilities &amp; funding.</li> <li>Community relationship management.</li> </ol>
SC COASTAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COROPORATION (501C3)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>History of farming market.</li> <li>Packing shed.</li> <li>Commercial kitchen.</li> <li>Cold storage.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Packing shed in need of repair (75% unusable).</li> <li>Freezer in need of repair.</li> <li>Limited staff &amp; unstable funding.</li> </ol>
GULLAH FARMER'S COOPERATIVE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recently remodeled building (2002).</li> <li>Two high tunnels.</li> <li>Cold transportation.</li> <li>Stable staffing.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mixed history among small family farmers.</li> <li>Access restricted to members only.</li> <li>Average age of members is 70+.</li> </ol>
GULLAH/GEECHEE FISHING ASSOCIATION	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Historical connection.</li> <li>Strong partnerships with conservation organizations.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited staff support &amp; funding.</li> <li>Average age of members is 70+.</li> </ol>

# DECADES OF DOCUMENTED DISCRIMINATION

## EQUITY ANALYSIS

ESTABLISH THE NEXT GENERATION

Year

1920-2020  
Years included in equity analysis

### USDA & BLACK FARMERS

Discrimination through loan delays, denials, custodial accounts, dismissal of discrimination complaints, reductions in crop yields, lower payments, & lack of staffing diversity.

### EXAMPLE OUTCOMES

1920-1930s, shift from labor-intensive to capital-intensive operations + USDA subsidies result in:

- Expensive machinery, increased use of chemicals & other “big ag” practices
- Sharp increases in farmland prices
- Existing Black farmers struggled to compete and maintain operations
- Potential Black farmers struggled to enter the market
- Decades of discrimination, overt and systemic, at every level of the agency, from at least 1933 through present day

### THE LOSS OF BLACK FARMERS

- 1920: 14% of farmers were black in America & 2.6% of farmland was black-owned
- 2020: 1.3% of farmers are black in America & 0.52% of farmland is black-owned
- Represents a 90% decrease in farmers who are black and an 80% decrease in black-owned farmland
- USDA contributed to loss

### EXAMPLE FUNDING GAP

**\$3,398**

AVERAGE CFAP PAYMENTS TO WHITE FARMERS

**\$422**

AVERAGE CFAP PAYMENTS TO BLACK FARMERS

**\$10,674 v. \$1,074**

AVERAGE MFP PAYMENTS TO WHITE FARMERS V. BLACK FARMERS

**30th**

South Carolina's rank in subsidies received by farmers

**753**  
million

Crop Insurance Subsidies Available

**1.44**  
Billion

Commodity Programs Available



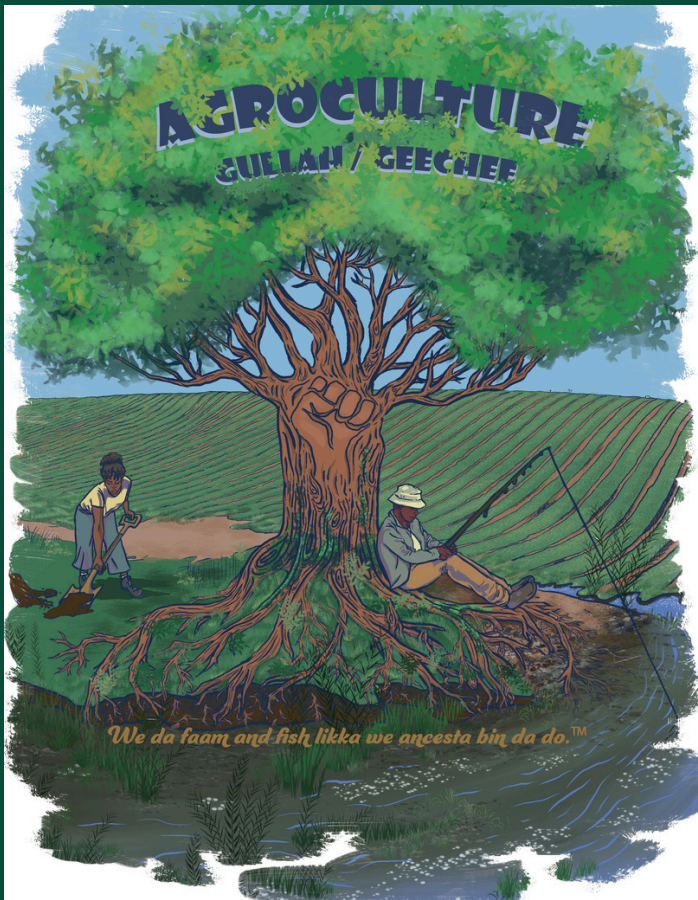
Funding & Resource Guide

Environmental Working Group Website  
Black Farmers & USDA:  
[whttps://www.ewg.org/research/timeline-black-farmers-and-usda-1920-present](https://www.ewg.org/research/timeline-black-farmers-and-usda-1920-present)

# ATTRACTING YOUNGER FARMERS

## LOGOS & RESOURCES

Our team deployed a combination of community-designed marketing campaigns delivered through our cooperating partners, print materials, local radio stations, online platforms, small community-based events and person-to-person conversations.



### Funding & Resource Guide

<https://www.GullahGeecheeAgroculture.com>



### FACEBOOK GROUP

<https://www.facebook.com/GullahGeecheeStudy>

This study developed marketing and communication tools (logo, website, mobile app) designed in partnership with young Gullah/Geechee farmers.





# RECOMMENDATIONS

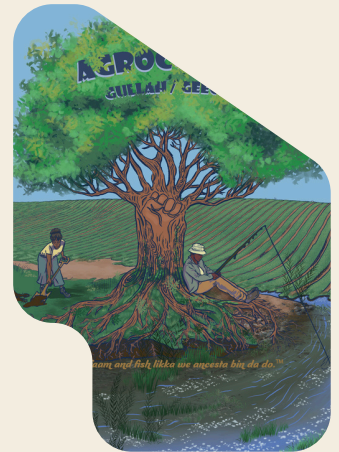
Recommendations for optimizing Gullah/Geechee Agro-Culture results.

www.GullahGeecheeAgroculture.com

## Leveraging & Extending Research Results

This project strengthened Gullah/Geechee family farming and fishing systems and positioned future generations for long-term profitability and stability.

Intentional use of social media and interactive mobile apps to engage with younger members of the Gullah/Geechee community warrants further explorations.



## RECOMMENDATION DETAILS

Widely disseminate print copies of the Gullah/Geechee Agroculture Public Resource Framework for Family Farmers in communities throughout the Gullah/Geechee Nation & Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor (in progress).

Connect with community agencies to partner for advocacy, financial and other resources to build capacity of local agencies that serve family farming communities (in-progress).

Utilize the Gullah/Geechee Agroculture app for more than just reporting findings or sharing the Public Resource Framework. Create a plan to regularly review and update programs on the app, push younger Gullah/Geechee community members to the app via social media platforms; push out regular updates and articles through the notifications feature of the app.

## Power in Partnerships

Expertise and engagement of cooperating farmers, stakeholders, Elders, youth, and organizations in the Gullah/Geechee community made this project a success. It is vital to continue maintenance engagement to leverage and extend the initial results of this participatory action research effort. SARE has a model practice of ensuring farmers are directly compensated for their expertise as a part of research and education grant teams. Addressing impacts of procedural delays and efforts to make it easier to build relationships and credibility with historically marginalized communities is merited.

### Gullah/Geechee Proverbs

A dog that will bring a bone, will carry one.

Every pot has to sit on its own bottom.

Every goodbye ain't gone, every shut eye ain't sleep.





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CENTER FOR  
HUMAN SERVICES  
EVALUATION

# Thank You.



Funding source for this project.

For any questions, feedback, or further inquiries,  
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