



# Farm Notes

CSA Newsletter

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Potomac Vegetable Farms  
www.potomacvegetablefarms.com

## Why Racial Justice Matters on This Farm

By Stephen Bradford

The story of Potomac Vegetable Farms cannot be separated from the history of racialized capitalism. It is only by understanding ourselves from within this violent legacy – stretching from slavery to the present-day inequities of the food system – that we may continue to grow meaningfully to meet the challenges of this moment.

One origin story of this farm might center on my white grandfather's dreams of building an agrarian utopia with my Chinese-American grandmother, Hiu Newcomb. Together they were able to build a thriving farm business and a vibrant community. As the story continues, 1973 may be seen as a watershed year for this farm, when my grandparents joined with 3 other families to buy 400 acres of land in western Loudoun County, in what continues to grow as a hub for an interconnected web of farmers committed to cultivating a new way of being.

Seen from another angle, this narrative of freedom, interdependence and transformation is complicated by the plainly visible roots of racial inequity holding strong on this land. We know that at the time of the Civil War, enslaved Africans were held captive and forced to work this land that we now claim ownership over. As we continue to use this land to support our own middle-class agrarian oasis we must confront the reality that our lifestyles are secured by selling produce mostly to other affluent whites in the consumer-driven local food movement that has failed to address the needs of the communities that remain most negatively impacted by the racism which defines the same food system that privileges us. There is absolutely no shortage of good intentions from within the white, landowning families that have come together on these 400 acres, as well as the scores of similarly white workers that

committed years here learning about growing food and living in community. But what we are perhaps now coming to understand more fully is that as a group with such a relatively narrow band of experience and lopsided relationship to privilege, we are neither prepared nor qualified to responsibly steward land that holds so much need and possibility for healing the wounds of racial violence in our food system.

The good news is that white farmers are not and never have been alone in navigating the challenge of growing a just food movement. Even though white farmers are much more visible in agrarian movements in this country, these movements owe much to the wisdom preserved through Black and Indigenous agricultural traditions. These traditions have thrived in the margins, testifying to the resilience of these practices, and now increasingly farmers of color are emerging as the moral and creative leaders in an agrarian movement which has the true potential for systemic social transformation. The work of Leah Penniman with Soul Fire Farm in New York, Regi Haslett-Marroquin with Main Street project in Minnesota and Chris Newman at Sylvaniaqua in Virginia are particularly inspiring to me in this regard.

Our role as white farmers in this moment is to humble ourselves, to look to the leadership of Black and Indigenous farmers, uplift their voices and commit ourselves to learning what it means to show up in solidarity. We need to look inward, to examine the impact of our privilege, and to understand what growth we will be called to personally as we build connections in a network of inclusive communities capable of responding to the full complexity of the challenges and opportunities before us.

CSA members will receive an email with donation links to some black and indigenous led agrarian projects worth supporting. Please look for it!

## Farmers for Racial Justice: An Overdue Alliance

By Olivia Murphy

While caring about racial equality and organic farming/environmentalism may be positioned as completely separate conversations for many, the truth is that these issues have been entwined for the entire history of this land. Many non-black people may feel like they can understand and acknowledge the violence of slavery, yet fail to make a connection to the daily tokenization and coexisting exploitation of black people today. Here is what Leah Penniman, sustainable farmer and lifetime racial justice activist says in her 2018 book, Farming While Black,

“Racism is built into the DNA of the US food system. Beginning with the genocidal land left from Indigenous people, continuing with the kidnapping of our ancestors from the shores of West Africa for forced agricultural labor, morphing into convict leasing, expanding to the migrant guestworker program, and maturing into its current state where farm management is among the whitest professions, farm labor is predominantly Brown and exploited, and people of color disproportionately live in food apartheid neighborhoods and suffer from diet-related illness, this system is built on stolen land and stolen labor and needs a redesign.”

This legacy is dark and ugly, and that’s exactly why white farmers today have a responsibility to make racial justice a core, actionable value of their businesses and to form interracial alliances. As farmers, let’s start with listening to the expertise of black farmers and community leaders, and finding creative solutions to unequal food access in our region.

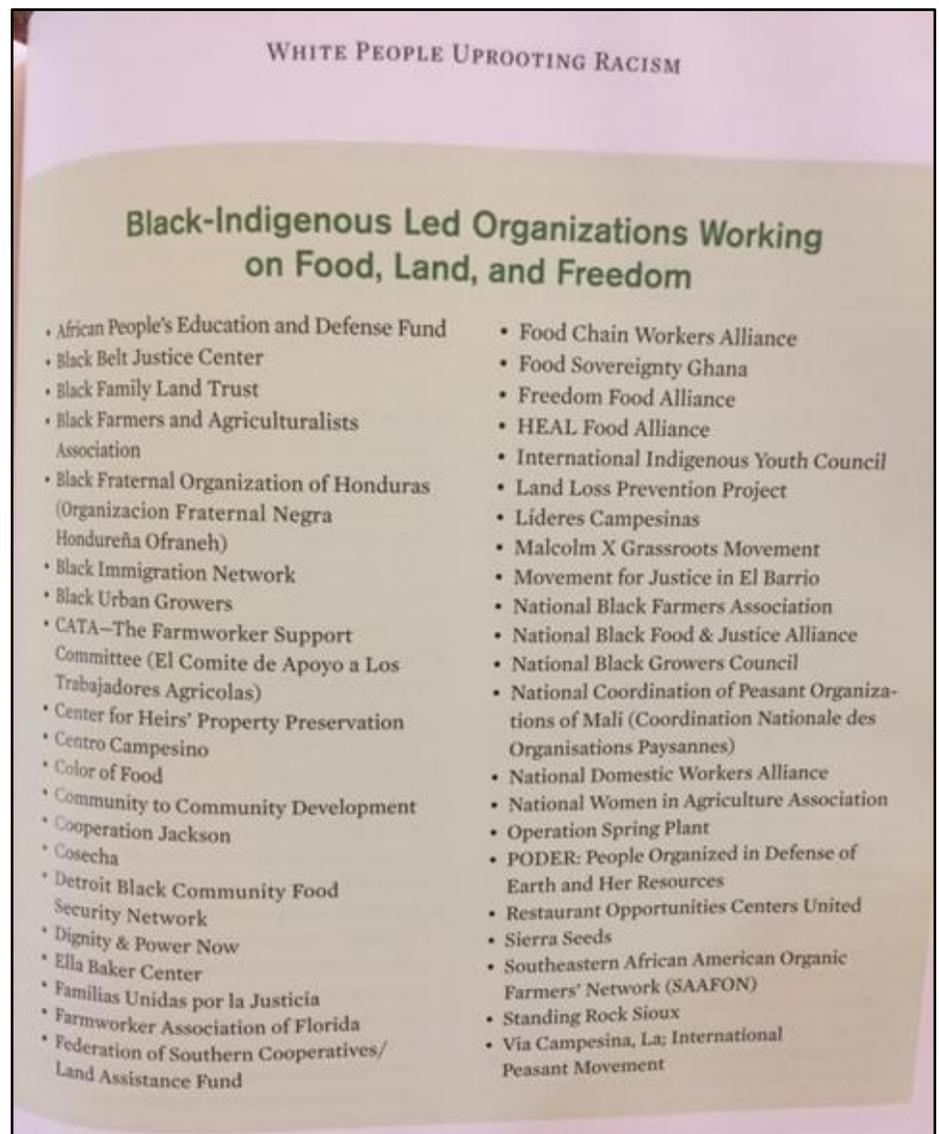
Penniman goes on to say,

“There is a reason why the typical white household has 16 times the wealth of a typical black household: 80 percent of wealth is inherited, often traceable back to slavery times. Existing policies reinforce and augment the wealth gap. *The most important action that white people can take to uproot racism is to enact reparations, to quite literally give back what was stolen.*”

This is only one excerpt from this book concerning what white people can do to uproot racism. There are a number of educational resources and asks compiled by black leaders online.

As consumers, let’s learn about our deeply inequitable American food system, commit to supporting and amplifying black-led initiatives, and start redistributing our money in a major way. Let’s do the work of questioning racist assumptions we’ve been socialized into accepting, and then let’s act with love to transform our relationships, workplaces, and organizations. It’s a lifetime’s work, and it’s worth it.

Below is an image of resource lists from Farming While Black:



## Continue Learning, Wherever You Are

By Rae

What a special moment we're in! No matter our experiences or backgrounds, it's a great time for non-Black folks to deepen our commitment to listening, learning, supporting Black people, and creating systems that uproot racism and balance our society.

If diving into this feels a little new or intimidating, that's completely normal. Take it one step at a time. Here are a few ideas to support you in your journey (geared toward White people, like myself):

- ❖ Start with bringing your attention to yourself. Am I comfortable with the fact that I have privileges? White people sometimes feel that because they have struggled, worked hard, and faced obstacles, that they don't have privileges. Getting comfortable with the visible and invisible privileges we have is a great start. Remember, having privileges doesn't make us shameful. But it DOES make us responsible for creating a world where there are no more injustices in our political and economic systems. Am I comfortable with acknowledging and talking about race? This can be very uncomfortable if it's new. But remember, it's much more comfortable to talk about race than to experience racism! Our courage is needed, especially in this moment. Organizations like [Showing Up for Racial Justice](#) can be helpful so that you don't feel like you're doing this work alone.
- ❖ Continue learning, wherever you are. Please watch the documentary [13th](#) if you haven't already. Seek out Black authors and voices. Here's another [great list of resources](#). Maintain that courage and be willing to release some ideas you've held for your entire life. Remember that most White people in our country once thought abolishing slavery was impossible. Truly impossible. And read about why and how the [Minneapolis City Council has pledged to disband the police force](#). Keep reading more about alternatives to policing if you're still curious. Examine how your city or town budgets are spent.

- ❖ Listen to the Black people in your life, if you have relationships with Black people. It's easy for White folks to feel like we have the best ideas. Most of us were trained this way! And it's a crucial thing to unlearn. If you are able to create relationships with Black people that are grounded in listening, mutual trust, and a true sense of interconnectedness (my destiny is bound up with yours), it will open up the most beautiful and transformative possibilities for you.
- ❖ Symbolic actions are important and can sometimes help support policy changes. But they usually can't do it alone. Remember, this movement requires us to change policies, and to redistribute our personal resources and our collective (tax) resources. The average net worth of a White family is \$171k, while that of a Black family is \$17k. If any part of you thinks that is because White people work harder than Black people, it's time to keep studying and listening. Really examine -- do I have more than I need? Can I make a monthly contribution to a Black led organization or Black people directly? To Black farmers? To projects that put more land in the possession of Black people?
- ❖ Racism against Black people and White supremacy go hand in hand. What is Whiteness and where did it come from? For my family that immigrated to the United States from Italy in the 1920s, our language, customs and rituals were shamed. The more we could assimilate, the more secure we'd be socially and financially. Much depth and wisdom was lost in that process. I've spent the last several years learning more about my family's history, Italian culture, including the history going back hundreds and thousands of years. Getting in touch with our family stories helps to heal the cultural damage done through assimilation into Whiteness, makes us more integrated and whole, and enables us to more meaningfully connect across differences.

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## We Are Not Born With Bias

by Dick Clement

Bias: a noun. Prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.

We are not born with bias. Biases are acquired in many different ways as we progress through life. Some are imbedded in a culture, where we live and grow up. Social media, radio, TV, newspapers, friendships, and families can not only develop but also reinforce bias. Now is the time to examine bias. This will take

work -- reading, listening, discussing, opening minds to other biases than our own. We have choices of sources of information. We can choose to retain acquired bias or to consciously develop new ones -- our own.

On June 6, 1944, men and women of all colors and diversity united to begin the defeat of repression and dominance.

On June 6, 2020, men and women of all colors and diversity united to begin the defeat of injustice, repression and dominance. Now is the time.

## The Power of Radical Imagination By Julia Metzger-Traber

This is a moment I never thought I'd witness in my lifetime. I am seeing the radical imaginations of decades of fierce, compassionate, brilliant women of color\* organizers and visionaries becoming the map of our future as a society. On Sunday June 7, 2020 a majority of Minneapolis City Council members publicly declared their commitment to de-fund the police, to dismantle the policing structure as we know. Unthinkable. Impossible. Decades of politics—through the 70s, 80s, 90s and into the early 2000s--centered themselves around public safety through policing—the War on Drugs, the War on Terror... Now most people see these were all wars on black bodies and black communities. It did not make us safer. It traumatized generations and tore at the fabric of communities. Women of color saw it, knew it, named it, kept naming it, and out of necessity and resilience and genius, through grief and pain, imagined and practiced how to care for one another and keep each other safer in the midst of and despite the violence the state-run "public safety" entity inflicted on their bodies, families and communities. At the intersections of their experiences, weaving hearts, bodies, spirits and intellects, they imagined other ways of being and then practiced them... and practiced them... and practiced them.

And now here we are, mainstream white Americans waking up to what they've been trying to tell us. We have to imagine beyond the conditions we are in. For 20 years *INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence*, a national network of radical feminist, abolitionist orgs, has been documenting and naming the violence ravaging black lives and simultaneously living into their dreams of community care and transformative justice, without state or financial support. Almost 20 years ago, Angela Davis told us that Prisons were Obsolete.

And now abolition is on the tip of everyone's tongue. On CNN! It just might be happening. A pandemic has taught us that radical, profound social change doesn't need to take centuries. It can happen now if we admit our interconnectedness and align around structures that truly support health and safety. The Corona virus is a pandemic, a disease, that has killed 110,000 in this country. Racism is a disease that has destroyed the lives of millions. Our response should be as rapid, holistic, structural and personal. We have to believe it is possible.

So I want to say thank you to those who have worked on the fringes with vision. Who could imagine a world without prisons? A world in which healing and not criminalization is the response to violence? A world in which black bodies are treated as sacred? You did. You saw it that world, and you quietly and loudly, and ceaselessly built toward that vision. We owe this moment to you. May we more readily heed the wisdom of your imaginations moving forward. May we remember that another world is possible.

\*We acknowledge and uplift the radical Black feminist tradition that has always been Queer, intersectional and in resistance to domination of all forms.

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## I Have Lots of Learning and Unlearning To Do By Ciara Prencipe

I didn't learn about white privilege until I was in my second year of college, in 2014. Given this country's past and present, it's wild to me that as a young person who was both interested in social justice and well educated, I didn't hear that phrase until I was 21. One resource our professor gave us that I still find myself recommending is "[Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#)" by Peggy McIntosh (1988), which was written over 30 years ago and still, unfortunately, speaks to the privilege white people have in U.S. society. When I'm feeling overwhelmed by the scope of racism in our society, one thing I like to do is reach for a book - as a white person, even after years of trying to educate myself, I have lots of learning and unlearning still to do regarding race and privilege. Here are a few books that really helped me:

1. How to be an Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi (2019) - I read this book last year and it was a hard read. It challenged me in ways I didn't know I needed to be challenged. Kendi continuously asks the question - How can we be not just \*not\* racists, but actively \*anti\*-racist?

2. Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) - This book absolutely tore me apart. Coates writes with love and ferocity to his son about racism in America, trying to answer hard questions and prepare him for a cruel world. Where "How to be an Antiracist" made me *think* about my role in dismantling racism, this book made me *feel*, deep in my gut, in my chest. I listened to the audiobook, which Coates narrates, and I highly recommend it.

3. Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo" by Zora Neale Hurston - In 1931, Hurston interviews and transcribes the life story of that last person alive who was captured in Africa, then transported and enslaved in the U.S. - His name was Cudjo..

A reminder that you can buy books online and still support local bookstores through sites like [indiebound.org](http://indiebound.org) and [bookshop.org](http://bookshop.org), or directly from the bookstore's website. [Here's](#) a list of Black-owned independent bookstores. You can also buy audiobooks through [Libro.fm](http://Libro.fm), which supports local independent bookstores