



SEPTEMBER 2022

"DEI Resources for Organic Professionals"

- Project Report & Lessons Learned



ORGANIC FARMERS
ASSOCIATION



NATIONAL
ORGANIC
COALITION



Table of Contents

03

Context

08

About the
Project

11

Findings and
Recommendations

16

Project
Limitations

17

Tools

20

Next Steps

22

Resources &
Appendices

Context

A) ORGANIC FARMER DEMOGRAPHICS

"Diversity" has always been an important value of organic, which farmers embed into the fabric of their farms. Organic farmers understand that a rich mix of plants, animals, and microorganisms is necessary to create healthy soil, resiliency, and a system that does not rely on toxic chemicals. Yet, the U.S. organic farming movement lacks racial diversity. In the same way that on-farm diversity is essential to create a healthy farm, racial and cultural diversity is essential to ensure the knowledge, wisdom, and energy to transform our food system.

The [2017 Ag Census data](#) shows that Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) are underrepresented as farm owners/operators, including [organic](#). **While over 13% of the US population identifies as Black or African American, fewer than 1.4% of all farms in the U.S. are owned by Black or African American farm owners (down from 14% in 1920). 98% of agricultural land is owned by white landowners.** According to [2017 Ag Census data](#), 92% of organic farmers identify as white, fewer than 1% of organic farmers identified as Black or African American, and 0.5% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native. Racist systems and policies have led to today's inequities: we must consider how to support an equitable playing field.

As written by Alice K. Formiga, Oregon State University for eOrganic, "Information on the demographics of producers on farms and on organic farms in the United States can be

difficult to find and understand. [There is a] need for improved data collection and presentation to support efforts to diversify agricultural production and land tenure, and to evaluate the success of government programs in reaching diverse groups. While these statistics document the stark ethnic and racial disparities in U.S. agriculture, they provide only an incomplete picture of the present, as they lack the stories of the many producers of all races and ethnicities who have farmed and continue to farm in the U.S"

Additionally, there is a critical lack of racial diversity in the population of organic certifiers, organic inspectors, and in the staff of organic farm organizations providing much of the nation's organic technical assistance and educational programming. Gathering demographic data on certifiers, inspectors, and other organic professional staff would help track changes in racial, ethnic, and gender demographics over time.

For farmers who are seeking organic certification, their first points of contact are often with a certifying agent and an organic inspector, who is responsible for conducting the mandatory annual on-site inspection of the farm or handling operation. Most organic certifiers and inspectors are white, so BIPOC farmers often meet with a white certifier who may not have a shared lived experience and may not understand specific challenges and situations a BIPOC farmer may have faced. They may not understand the impact systemic racism has played before BIPOC farmers were even able to connect to an organic certification agency.

U.S. agriculture is embedded in systemic racism, and current policies and programs still uphold systemic racism. [Local USDA offices continue to perpetuate discrimination](#) by restricting access for BIPOC farmers to loans, grants, and other services.

We recognize that access to the organic and “good food” movements, and to organic certification has not been equal across all communities and groups. Systematic racism has kept our movement from reaching its full potential. An organic movement and an organic program that centers diversity, equity, and inclusion is better positioned to tackle key social challenges we face in growing an organic food system.

Organic professionals (certification agency staff, inspectors, and leaders in advocacy and farming organizations), need training focused on understanding the legacy and history of race and racism in U.S. agriculture to be able to support BIPOC farmers. We also need to

understand and acknowledge how institutions and systems produce unjust and inequitable outcomes – and training for how to remove barriers within our organic organizations.

Finally, we acknowledge that though the U.S. organic movement has historically mostly elevated the voices of white (male) farmers, scientists, and researchers as pioneers/fathers of the organic movement. BIPOC farmers, scientists, and researchers have been, and continue to be, foundational to every aspect of the organic movement.

Further, as stated by Jennifer Taylor for IFOAM’s quarterly publication, “[Cultivated](#)” , “Indigenous farmers, Black farmers, and farmers of color make up to 80% of the world’s farmers [...] Often they have not had equal access and participation in programs and training designed to assist large producers and agribusinesses. This lack of inclusion and racial equity has impacted the growth, development and improvement of underserved farming populations and their communities.”

Information on the demographics of producers on farms and on organic farms in the United States can be difficult to find and understand. [There is a] need for improved data collection and presentation to support efforts to diversify agricultural production and land tenure, and to evaluate the success of government programs in reaching diverse groups. While these statistics document the stark ethnic and racial disparities in U.S. agriculture, they provide only an incomplete picture of the present, as they lack the stories of the many producers of all races and ethnicities who have farmed and continue to farm in the U.S.”

– Alice K. Formiga, Oregon State University for eOrganic, August 2022

B) GATHERING STAKEHOLDER INTEREST IN PRIORITIZING RACIAL EQUITY IN THE ORGANIC MOVEMENT

In 2018, the **National Organic Coalition (NOC)**, identified racial equity in organic agriculture as a priority, focusing on two actionable items:

1. Learning more about barriers to participation in organic certification for BIPOC and underserved farmers and ranchers.
2. Providing training for NOC staff, coalition members, and the broader organic community.

NOC convened a conversation about racial equity in organic agriculture as part of the [pre-NOSB meeting in Pittsburgh in fall of 2019](#). In that initial conversation, it became clear that individuals' understanding of systemic racism varied greatly, with some participants lacking a basic understanding and language to discuss issues of race and racism or outright denial of barriers. At [the fall 2020 Pre-NOSB meeting](#), NOC hosted a conversation about barriers to participation in organic certification for BIPOC farmers with facilitators from Cambium Collective. That session was the most popular breakout session at the meeting and received great feedback. At the (virtual) [spring 2021 Pre-NOSB meetin](#), NOC hosted a presentation about organic certification on Tribal operations and the specific barriers they face. The interest and feedback from these sessions have made it clear that there is a need for and interest from the organic community to have access to training and resources on diversity, equity and inclusion.

On July 15th, 2021, [NOC submitted comments to USDA about how to address issues of racial equity in USDA programs](#), with a focus on the organic program. One of the main gaps identified is training for organic professionals and USDA Staff on the issues of racial inequality within the organic community.

During the October 2020 NOP-NOSB public comments, **IFOAM North America (IFOAM-NA)** identified the need for the USDA-NOP and the organic community to focus on the needs of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers/BIPOC farmers and to work together towards building an inclusive organic agriculture, where the benefits of organics can be accessed and enjoyed by all farms and all communities.

In January 2021, **Accredited Certifiers Association (ACA) and International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA)** co-hosted a training for organic inspectors and certification agency staff, which included a workshop on racial equity called, "This Land is Your Land: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice." The workshop explored the current environment of agriculture, aging farmers, and lack of diversity in the field and addressed issues with land access, ways to diversify the field of agriculture, and strategies for achieving workplace diversity. The workshop was well received from participants with an expressed desire for more training on this topic.

In February 2021 **Organic Farmers Association (OFA)** Grassroots Annual Policy Survey sent to all U.S. certified organic farmers, organic farmers identified "increasing organic farmer diversity," as a top priority for 2021. In the spring of 2021, OFA certified organic farmer members passed the following policy position, "OFA supports addressing issues of race, gender, and social equity in agricultural and food policies, including promotion of participation, leadership, and successful empowerment of the affected communities, with an understanding that structural racism, sexism, and inequality limit leadership, organizational, and movement success."

This farmer-driven policy demonstrates that organic farmers support an expansion of racial diversity, equity, and inclusion within the organic movement and find it essential for the future success of the organic movement.

These organizations also thought that introducing more BIPOC students to the various sectors of the organic stakeholder community would help foster career pathways in organic agriculture.

In the spring of 2021, Organic Farmers Association (OFA), the National Organic Coalition (NOC), the Accredited Certifiers Association (ACA), the International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA), and IFOAM – North America (IFOAM-NA) started meeting to discuss a shared desire to facilitate training opportunities focused on systemic racism and their role as a mostly white community in building a more diverse, inclusive movement. We recognize that the organic community needs some basic training for certifiers, inspectors, technical assistance providers, farmers, and staff at organic educational organizations. We also need to support each other in making progress in our efforts to tackle systemic racism in our organizations and in the broader organic community.

In response to this need, Organic Farmers Association (OFA), the National Organic Coalition (NOC), International Organic Inspectors Association (IOIA), Accredited Certifiers Association (ACA), and IFOAM-North America began a collaboration in 2021 to support organic professionals in their work to create a more diverse and inclusive organic community.

IN SUMMARY

- Access to agriculture & organic certification has not been equal across all communities.
- For farmers seeking organic certification, their first point of contact is often with a (most likely white) certifying agent and an organic inspector.
- Project partners have garnered support from their stakeholders in prioritizing racial equity in the organic movement.
- Certification agency staff, inspectors, and leaders in advocacy and farming organizations need more training focused on:
 - The legacy and history of race in food & ag systems.
 - How institutions and systems produce unjust and inequitable outcomes.
 - How to remove barriers within their organic organizations.

Why Racial Equity Should be Centered in the Organic Movement



Diversity is a Central Tenet of Organic

In the same way that biological diversity is foundational to the healthy agricultural systems we support, we recognize that diversity of people makes the organic movement healthier and more sustainable.



Systemic Racism has Disenfranchised Black & Brown Farmers

Access to the organic movements and to organic certification has not been equal across racial groups: systematic racism has kept our movement from reaching its full potential. Only 3% of organic farmers identify as "Black, Indigenous, LatinX, Asian American or Pacific Islanders"



Acknowledging Indigenous Knowledge

Black & brown farmers have been, and continue to be, foundational to every aspect of the organic movement. Our movement has historically mostly elevated the voices of white (male) farmers as pioneers/fathers of the organic movement.



Collective Liberation

Farmer Focus Group & NORA report has showed that a lot of the challenges faced by BIPOC farmers were faced by many small-scale white farmers. Addressing these challenges would help all farmers.



**DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION
TOOLS FOR ORGANIC PROFESSIONALS**



ORGANIC FARMERS
ASSOCIATION



NATIONAL
ORGANIC
COALITION



About the Project

A) PROJECT PARTNERS

Cambium Collective. [Cambium Collective](#) specializes in conducting community engagement that centers people whose voices have not been present in planning efforts. They develop recommendations that address root causes of inequity, seek to build real and lasting change, and stimulate action, collaboration, and implementation. Their focus areas include food systems, climate change, community revitalization, and neighborhood & economic development. The Cambium Collective team includes experienced facilitators & trainers who utilize a variety of approaches based on popular education, participatory learning & collective wisdom. Cambium Collective, LLC served as the primary facilitators and context experts.

Accredited Certifiers Association. The [Accredited Certifiers Association \(ACA\)](#) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization created to benefit the organic certifier community and the organic industry. The primary mission of the ACA is to ensure consistent implementation of the USDA Organic Regulations through collaboration and education of accredited certification agencies. The ACA represents 64 certifier members which includes most US based National Organic Program (NOP) accredited certifiers. The ACA recognizes the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the organic certification process. We work in a food system that has exploited and unjustly treated people of color for centuries, and the ACA recognizes this as well as the harm that this system has caused. ACA is committed to increasing awareness about these issues and finding ways to collaborate across certifiers and partnering organizations to make the organic certification process more inclusive.

IFOAM – North America. [IFOAM North America](#) is a regional body of the IFOAM– Organics International. Our work builds capacity to facilitate the transition of farmers to organic agriculture, raises awareness of the need for sustainable production and consumption, and advocates for a policy environment conducive to agroecological farming practices/organic farming systems practices and sustainable development. IFOAM North America supports building capacity and enabling access to the benefits of organic agriculture and thriving organic livelihoods with all communities, inclusive of BIPOC farmers and their communities, socially disadvantaged farmers, and underserved small farm populations and their communities. IFOAM has members in over 100 countries and territories.

International Organic Inspectors Association. The [International Organic Inspectors Association \(IOIA\)](#) is the professional organization of organic inspectors and offers training and networking world-wide for crop, livestock, and processing inspectors. Incorporated as a 501(c)(3), IOIA operates globally with inspector members in more than a dozen countries. IOIA has been training inspectors since 1993. The IOIA Training Institute trains hundreds of working and new inspectors annually through on-site or web-based internationally recognized training events. In 2020, IOIA delivered 60 training events in four languages through collaboration with 13 cosponsors, including universities, nonprofits, certification agencies, governments, and others. IOIA recognizes the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in growing the ranks of organic inspectors, certification agencies, and producers. Addressing the current lack of diversity is critical in creating a just and sustainable marketplace for organic products.

National Organic Coalition. The [National Organic Coalition \(NOC\)](#) is a national alliance of organizations and companies working on behalf of farmers, ranchers, environmentalists, consumers, and industry members involved in organic agriculture. NOC seeks to advance organic food and agriculture and ensure a united voice for organic integrity, which means strong, enforceable, and continuously improved standards to maximize the multiple health, environmental, and economic benefits that organic agriculture provides. The coalition works to assure that policies are fair, equitable, and encourage diversity of participation and access. NOC is [prioritizing racial equity](#) in our organization and strategies, and is committed to listen, understand, learn, amplify, work, and act to address and dismantle systemic racism.

Organic Farmers Association. The [Organic Farmers Association \(OFA\)](#) is a membership nonprofit agricultural organization that educates and represents the interests of domestic certified organic producers. OFA strives to build and support a farmer-led national organic farmer movement and national policy platform by developing and advocating policies that benefit organic farmers; strengthening and supporting the capacity of organic farmers and farm organizations; and supporting collaboration and leadership among state, regional and national organic farmer organizations. Organic Farmers Association was created with values and guiding principles that call for a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organic community.



B) PROJECT GOALS

Our collaborative's initial goal was to conduct a project for organic professionals to have an increased understanding of institutionalized racism, and the impacts on access to opportunities for underserved farmers at USDA and in our organizations. We received funding from the National Organic Program (NOP) – Human Capital Capacity Building Initiative to support this project.

Ultimately, the objective of this project was to get a commitment from organic organizations to take on specific actions to identify and break down barriers to increase participation in organic certification by BIPOC farmers as well as increase the diversity of staffing throughout the organic community so that more BIPOC inspectors, certifiers, and educational staff support organic farmers.

C) PROJECT ACTIVITIES

To achieve the goals mentioned above, the steering committee and consultants led the following activities:

- [Virtual presentation](#) on the history of systemic racism in organic agriculture (viewed over 800 times);
- Focus group for Black, Indigenous, Latinx and Asian organic or transitioning farmers on the barriers and challenges to organic certification;
- Conversations with national organic organization leaders on the key challenges that came up when organic professionals started reflecting on bias and power dynamics within a regulatory system;
- Two virtual training opportunities (February 2022 and April 2022) for organic professionals (64 participants) to deepen participants' understanding of identities and stories, building awareness of how workplace culture may perpetuate discriminatory practices, and begin to identify actions to create sustainable change on an individual and organizational level;
- Internship opportunities for 1890 & 1990 Land Grant university students at 5 organic organizations (NOC, IFOAM – North America, ACA, IOIA, and Organic Seed Alliance); and
- Developing tools & resources for Organic Professionals (included in the Appendix of this report)

IN SUMMARY

- A group of national organizations representing a wide array of organic professionals recognized the importance of prioritizing racial equity, and the need to offer training for their stakeholders
- The USDA–National Organic Program (NOP) recognized the need to invest in diversity, equity, and inclusion training and resources for organic professionals
- Project consultants and steering committee conducted several activities for participants and stakeholders to have an increased understanding of institutionalized racism, and the impacts on access to opportunities for underserved farmers at USDA and in organic organizations
- Project consultants and stakeholders gathered lessons learned and recommendations for the organic professionals, organic organizations, and the organic program to be a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive movement.

Findings & Recommendations

This section of the report is an attempt at aggregating and summarizing the information gathered throughout this project into recommendations and lessons learned for organic professionals, organic organizations, and the organic movement. External data and resources supporting these recommendations are linked throughout.

In the summer 2021, the USDA published and marketed a [Federal Register notice](#) that officially called for written comments to a Request for Information (RFI), and held public listening sessions. USDA received a total of 512 comments spanning topics from land ownership to farmworker rights. The [RFI Summary Findings](#) highlight aggregated the comments received into the following findings:

- USDA's history of discrimination
- Lack of internal Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility at the USDA
- Barriers to Funding Opportunity and Program Access
- Barriers to Land Access, Ownership, and Retention
- Need to honor Trust & Treaty responsibilities with Indian Tribes
- Need for targeted education, outreach, and technical assistance
- Expanded access to nutrition programs
- Strengthening USDA's civil rights program
- Customer experience at USDA

We note that many, if not most, of the recommendations outlined in this section align closely with the public comments made through this Federal Register notice. We also underscore that the recommendations outlined below were gathered through a single year's project that had a limited scope, funding constraints, and was led by a steering committee consisting of mostly white women. Project limitations are outlined further in this report.

1

Administrative Considerations

Organic certification agencies should consider ways to reduce redundancies and heavy paperwork burden; and be flexible with recordkeeping styles, and supportive of self-determination, a primary motivation for BIPOC farmers. Currently, to add any new crop to their land, a farmer must call their certifier to let them know. This goes against people's desire for sovereignty. Black and Indigenous farmers calling to request permission to incorporate new crops or use an input on their own farm from a primarily white certification staff is an inequitable power dynamic that directly affects fBIPOC farmers.

2

Certification Fee Structure

More certification agencies could adopt accessible sliding scale fee structures for organic certification based on a series of factors including farm size, type of farm, race/ethnicity, etc. The cost share program allows farmers to seek refund, but the upfront cost can still be significant for small operations. A change to the cost-share program that would eliminate the reimbursement but subtract that amount from the initial payment would make organic certification more accessible. This could also include the near-term goal of increasing access to organic certification.

3

Organic Professionals Need Training & Professional Development

There is a need across the organic community for long-term, ongoing, and in-depth training in anti-racism and systems of oppression for organizational leaders, certifiers, and inspectors to understand how to shift power, resources, leadership, and behavior in support of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian farming communities. Training focus areas could include:

- Behaviors and approaches to working with Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian farmers
- Addressing racism and white supremacy during farm visits
- History of USDA racism and its impacts
- Racial equity skills and practices to build organizational and institutional power, decision-making, and organizational and systemic change.

One-off training opportunities are valuable, but regular and ongoing racial equity training can make a significant impact on individuals' education and practice. Many project participants expressed interest in "cohort" type learning opportunities, both as an opportunity to co-learn and as an accountability mechanism.

5

Centering Racial Justice in the Inspection Process

Developing inspection protocol needs to center racial justice, restorative justice, and abolitionist practices that do not involve punitive measures such as calling the police, law enforcement, or immigration and customs enforcement (ICE), as much as possible.

4

Affinity Spaces for Organic Professionals

There is a need (and interest!) in establishing regular organic inspector and certifier affinity spaces for continued learning, support, accountability, and community. These spaces would also offer organic professionals an opportunity to connect, share experiences, troubleshoot, and find resources.

- A short survey to inspectors and certifiers could help gauge interest, needs, questions, and frequency.
- The affinity spaces should maintain a racial equity and social justice lens to support growth and learning of how to be in the practice of being an anti-racist inspector or certifier.
- People of color in the organic industry generally are isolated from each other and are often in the racial minority and/or without decision-making power where they work. Priority should be given to funding opportunities in the field for people or communities who are Black, Indigenous, immigrants, speakers of English as a second language, as well as other marginalized peoples to build relationships, share resources, and find support.

Some of the goals of these affinity spaces could include identifying racially equitable best practices and approaches for certifiers and inspectors to keep farmers, operators, and themselves safe at work and during site visits/inspections.



6

Diversifying Recruitment Practices

Several key stakeholders of the organic industry have suggested thinking outside the box when recruiting staff, beyond the obvious areas of expertise. For instance, some important skills for organic certifiers may be found in individuals with a background in compliance in other sectors (environment, public health, healthcare, or even housing).

One recommendation would be for organic organizations to consider what skills they are looking for in new staff, and where those skills might be found.

Furthermore, organic organizations often look for “on-farm experience” when recruiting and reviewing candidate applications. As the organic industry looks for a more diversified workforce, we must acknowledge the severe land-loss that people of color have suffered in this country. Additionally, on-farm experiences such as internships are often poorly (if at all), a challenge for low-resourced students. These and other factors may make on-farm experience requirements a barrier to recruiting successful candidates. An understanding of these barriers should put in perspective the lack of farming background or on-farm work experience. Examining recruitment practices is important and must be done in conjunction with examining the organizations’ hiring policies.

More information in Appendix D: Considerations for Diversifying Recruitment Strategies at Organic Organizations

8

Supporting BIPOC Staff

What individuals and organizations need to become racially equitable in all aspects of the work depends on the unique makeup, structure, and function of the organization. This work takes time, training, diligence, and a genuine commitment to going through a multi-year process. Racial equity isn’t just about meeting quotas for diverse staff or having a one-time racial equity training. It is a personal and organizational journey and commitment that could become a foundational value and part of decision-making and how work is conducted.

More information in Appendix E Considerations for Building a Racially Equitable Organic Organization to Improve Working Conditions for BIPOC Staff

7

Organic Organizations Should Partner with HBCUs, Tribal Colleges, HSIs, and AANAPSI

During the project’s in-depth trainings, several organic organizations (including certification agencies, service providers, and education agencies) mentioned the desire to recruit “racially diverse staff” yet identified that action as a challenge for their organization. When recruiting for interns for this project, the most relevant candidates for each opportunity came through existing relationships between steering committee members and university professors and student groups at 1890 and 1990 Land Grant Universities (LGUs). We noted that students at 1890 LGUs may come from states beyond where the institution is located and may have ties to where an organic organization may be located. Facilitating relationship-building between Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Asian American and Native American Pacific- Serving Institutions (AANAPSI) and organic organizations would lead to opportunities for hiring interns and staff and could result in partnerships around research, education, and training.

The project’s steering committee started building [a national directory of HBCUs, Tribal Colleges, and HSIs with Organic or Sustainable Agriculture Programs and their faculty](#) for organic organizations to use.

9

Working with Racial Equity Consultants

While organizations can implement much of what is highlighted in this resource, hiring a racial equity consultant team for all or part of this work is recommended. Their expertise can support teams through the process and serve as an outside perspective with trained eyes to notice key areas for change, to support staff through conflict and complicated conversations, and support your BIPOC staff to ensure their voices are heard, that any harm (past or present) is treated with care, and that all staff are included along the journey.

11

Support for Organic Organizations

Organic organizations often operate with thin margins or limited resources, creating increased pressure on staff to meet deliverables. Organic organizations need resources to transform the way they operate to support liberatory power rather than to perpetuate harmful systems of power, domination, and exploitation.

13

Programs & Policies Addressing Barriers for BIPOC Farmers Support all farmers

The [Organic Farming Research Foundation's \(OFRF\) 2022 National Organic Research Agenda \(NORA\)](#) report highlighted that BIPOC organic farmers and white organic farmers faced similar challenges regarding technical assistance needs and organic topics of concerns, but BIPOC farmers experienced those challenges at much higher rates than white farmers. Similar findings were highlighted in the [National Young Farmers "Building a Future with Farmers 2022 Report"](#). This highlights that any program or policy addressing these needs and concerns would benefit all farmers.

10

Certification Cost Share Program

Organic certification costs are a barrier, especially for BIPOC farmers. We need to expand the National Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP), and consider:

- Adopting a higher cost share percentage for BIPOC and other underserved producers
- How this program is structured, and consider ways for farmers to not have to pay the cost upfront and be reimbursed later
- Doing better outreach and bringing awareness about the cost share program (many farmers don't know about this program)

12

Opportunities for Dialogue

The organic movement should consider ways to create opportunities for dialogue on how to create lasting racial equity systemic change and repair harms experienced by Black and Indigenous people and communities. Moving towards racial equity and anti-racism is both a personal, organizational, and system change. These conversations would likely need to be done in racial affinity spaces and include discussion on what repair looks like and how to implement repair individually, organizationally, throughout the organic movement, and through USDA.

14

Landscape Assessment

Project consultants and steering committee members identified a need to conduct a landscape assessment of the entire organic certification and inspection process to identify how it can be adapted to be in support of the organic community's commitment to racial equity. The assessment should include:

- Interviews and a survey of organic farmers.
- Additional interviews and focus groups with Black and Indigenous farmers to identify where changes can be made.
- Review or audit of the certification and inspection process by a racial equity consultant.
- Recommendations for how the process can be redeveloped with racial equity values and practices.

16

Relevant & Appropriate Outreach

One of the findings of this project is that the outreach for many of the existing programs that support organic farmers could be improved to actually meet those who most need these programs. Some specific examples include:

- **Organic Certification Exemption:** the organic exemption option (where organic operations under \$5,000 in gross sales can use the word organic without needing to certify) should be more explicit.
- **NRCS Conservation and other USDA Agency Programs Supporting Organic Practices:** we noted an extreme variability in awareness of different programs supporting organic practices. The awareness seems to be very tied to particular NRCS agents and their knowledge of and engagement in organic agriculture. The recently published [National Young Farmers Coalition 2022 Survey](#) showed that only 49% of young and BIPOC farmers have not utilized any USDA programs, and of those 49%, 71% were unfamiliar with the programs that could help them.
- **Organic Transition Initiative:** Organic farmers, especially BIPOC organic farmers, need increased support for organic agriculture to help build a more ecologically sound, resilient, and climate-friendly food and farm system. In a historic move, in June 2022, [USDA announced a \\$300 million investment to support organic and transitioning farmers](#) through farmer-to-farmer mentorship programs, new technical assistance resources, and changes in crop insurance programs, to help expand domestic organic production in a sensible manner. This is an incredible opportunity for USDA and partner organizations to distribute funding and address some of the inequities.

15

Infrastructure Support for Farmers

There is a desperate need for the development of more infrastructure to support organic farmers, the impact of this is being felt most by BIPOC farmers, small farmers, and elder farmers. Infrastructure improvements could include:

- Opportunities for Cooperative Extension agents and directors to be educated in organic agriculture practices to support organic farmers on the ground.
- Opportunities for USDA Agency agents to be educated in organic agriculture practices to support organic farmers on the ground.
- More transparency about USDA translation services in every county office entry.
- Printing of organic applications for farmers.
- Expanded translation services provided by organic certification agencies.
- A well publicized and distributed directory of certifiers/inspectors, which would include information such as languages used, fee structures, staffing structures and cultural relevance/experience.

Project Limitations

LIMITATIONS OF "DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION"

The original intended audience for this project was organic professionals (organic certifiers, inspectors, educators, technical assistance providers, and advocates), who are currently mostly white. We recognize that "DEI training" typically focuses on how to help white professionals learn about their biases and racism. And though this work is needed, we need to:

- put more resources and energy into supporting BIPOC staff at organic organizations, and BIPOC farmers
- work on a more concerted effort to ensure that the diversity education that is being done doesn't center and coddle whiteness
- ensure we are not just "checking the box" but truly leading to meaningful, sustainable, and structural change

FUNDING SOURCE

We are incredibly grateful for the NOP's support of this project. We are optimistic about all the resources USDA is putting towards addressing racial equity in agriculture. However, we believe that for the organic movement to truly work on centering racial equity, USDA should not just be a funder, but a partner in this work. We also recognize that government funding may limit our ability to disrupt the systems in place.

FARMWORKER ISSUES

We acknowledge that the vast majority of farmworkers, including on organic farms, were not born in the US. This points at some glaring racial equity issues that we did not address at all in this project. If fairness truly is a central tenet of organic, then we must look at our movement's labor practices.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION TOOLS FOR ORGANIC PROFESSIONALS



**DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION
TOOLS FOR ORGANIC PROFESSIONALS**



**ORGANIC FARMERS
ASSOCIATION**



**NATIONAL
ORGANIC
COALITION**



Diversifying Recruitment Strategies at Organic Organizations



- 1 **Foster relationships** with HBCUs, Tribal Colleges, Hispanic-Serving and AAPI-Serving Institutions

Offer **paid internships** to underrepresented students, both as a resume-building opportunity and as a pathway to permanent employment

2



- 3 Think deeply about the **skills and capabilities** (rather than experience) you are looking for in your new hires, and where those skills might be found

Along with your recruitment strategies, examine your organization's **hiring policies!**

4



- 5 Consider reaching out to and **sharing challenges and strategies** with ally organizations, and consider hiring equity consultants

**DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION
TOOLS FOR ORGANIC PROFESSIONALS**



ORGANIC FARMERS
ASSOCIATION



NATIONAL
ORGANIC
COALITION



Considerations for Supporting BIPOC Staff at Organic Organizations

1

Listen, Ask, and Compensate

Listen to your BIPOC staff about what their needs, feedback, ideas, and experiences in the workplace. Clarify what you can or cannot take action on and follow through. Compensate for sharing expertise and experience.

2

Evaluation, Reviews, and Feedback

Ensure that your process is clearly outlined and accessible to all staff. Ask staff for feedback about the review or evaluation process to ensure its accessibility.

3

Transparent Decision Making

The impact of a confusing or unclear decision-making process is that it can benefit the people who have more power or privilege at the organization and disadvantages those who have less or who have not been able to make informal or personal relationships.

4

Conflict Transformation

Meaningfully engaging in conflict will support your organization's growth, and retain staff, including BIPOC staff.

5

Document

Clearly outline workplace policies in employee handbooks. This creates accountability, and also increases transparency and trust. Find the balance between documenting workplace norms, and creating a culture of hypervigilance and surveillance.

**BASED ON CONTENT BY CAMBIUM
COLLECTIVE**

**DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION
TOOLS FOR ORGANIC PROFESSIONALS**



ORGANIC FARMERS
ASSOCIATION



NATIONAL
ORGANIC
COALITION



Glossary

Throughout this report, we use the terms below as defined by Racial Equity Tools or the US White House Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity through Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government (01/20/2021).

Racial Equity Racial equity is the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. When we use the term, we are thinking about racial equity as one part of racial justice, and thus we also include work to address root causes of inequities, not just their manifestation. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or that fail to eliminate them.
Source: [Center for Assessment and Policy Development](#).

Indigeneity Indigenous populations are composed of the existing descendants of the peoples who inhabited the present territory of a country wholly or partially at the time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived there from other parts of the world, overcame them and, by conquest, settlement, or other means, reduced them to a non-dominant or colonial condition; who today live more in conformity with their particular social, economic, and cultural customs and traditions than with the institutions of the country of which they now form part, under a State structure which incorporates mainly national, social, and cultural characteristics of other segments of the population which are predominant. (Examples: Maori in territory now defined as New Zealand; Mexicans in territory now defined as Texas, California, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, and parts of Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas, and Oklahoma; Native American tribes in territory now defined as the United States.)
Source: [United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues \(2010, page 9\), originally presented in the preliminary report of the Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights, José Martínez Cobo \(1972, page 10\)](#).

Decolonization Decolonization may be defined as the active resistance against colonial powers, and a shifting of power towards political, economic, educational, cultural, psychic independence and power that originate from a colonized nation's own indigenous culture. This process occurs politically and also applies to personal and societal psychic, cultural, political, agricultural, and educational deconstruction of colonial oppression.
Source: [The Movement for Black Lives \(M4BL\), "Glossary."](#)

Structural Racism

Many of the contours of opportunity for individuals and groups in the United States are defined—or “structured”—by race and racism. The term structural racism refers to a system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with “whiteness” and disadvantages associated with “color” to endure and adapt over time.

Source: [The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change](#)

Equity

([Government Definition](#)): The consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

Underserved Communities and Stakeholders

([Government Definition](#)): Populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as exemplified by the list in the preceding definition of “equity.”

Next Steps

The organizations partnering on this project applied for a second year of funding from the National Organic Program – Human Capital Capacity Building initiative, to keep building on Year 1 findings and move towards concrete, authentic, and sustainable change towards a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive organic community.

Two main themes were identified as critical importance for the second project year.

1. Elevating BIPOC-Led & Serving Organizations through Resource Shifting and Partnership Development

Through this project, the Steering Committee has learned it is of crucial importance to resource Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)-led organizations doing the work to support organic and organic-interested farmers of color so that they can continue to expand their program offerings and assume leadership positions within the organic movement. White-led and/or primarily white organizations are systematically better positioned to receive funding. They have a historical track record of managing federal grants, have an established history of delivering programs to farmers, and exist within a white-dominated culture poised to support their designated priorities. Due to centuries of discrimination, BIPOC-led organizations and farmers have not had access to the same resources, which has perpetuated a lack of access and advancement for farmers of color. Year 1 identified a strong need to support the space for facilitated connections between BIPOC-led organizations (or organizations representing & serving socially disadvantaged farmers), and funding sources. The Project Consultants have pushed the Steering Committee to consider “How power be shifted, ceded, and leveraged to support

BIPOC-led organic and sustainable agriculture organizations who have a list of demands, policy recommendations, etc.? The investment in white people’s re-education should, at a minimum, be matched with funds that go directly to Black and brown communities and organizations.”

Continued learning, research, and understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion components, history, and data is important; however, there is a strong desire for action that centers equity within the organic movement to begin to establish places where real change can occur.

The first component of our Year 2 work will focus on facilitating a diverse group of organic professionals into deep discussion, partnership development, and a framework for action and accountability to work towards true diversity, equity, and inclusion within the organic movement.

2. DEI Education and Tools for Organic Professionals

Stakeholders specifically expressed a desire for more education & concrete tools for organic organizations to create more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workspaces (from recruitment strategies to healthy and supportive work environments). Training participants and steering committee members also identified the need for a review of the organic certification process and application to assess where adaptations should be considered to achieve inclusivity and cultural sensitivity.

The second component of our Year 2 work will focus on providing resources and online training opportunities for organic professionals to continue their learning and professional development, so they gain the tools to take action within their organizations around diversity, equity, and inclusion in organic.

Centering Racial Equity in the Organic Movement

One of the biggest lessons learned through this project is that doing “DEI work/training” barely scratches the surface of what needs to be done: it helps build awareness about the challenges our movement needs to address. **Our movement needs to think and act towards deep, sustained work leading to authentic and meaningful change, shift power, and center racial equity in the organic movement.**

Acknowledgements

Thank you to:

- All the project's Steering Committee members, for pulling this project together, and staying curious and vulnerable.
- Cambium Collective, for their expertise and graciousness.
- USDA – National Organic Program, for supporting this project.
- All the organic stakeholders who participated in the activities delivered through this project and working towards making the organic movement racially just.

Resources

“Racial Equity in Organic – Resource List”

was started by NOC, expanded during project. Please do not hesitate to submit recommendations for additions or edits to this list by email:

info@nationalorganiccoalition.org.



SEPTEMBER 2022

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION
TOOLS FOR ORGANIC PROFESSIONALS



ORGANIC FARMERS
ASSOCIATION



Appendice



**DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION
TOOLS FOR ORGANIC PROFESSIONALS**



**ORGANIC FARMERS
ASSOCIATION**



**NATIONAL
ORGANIC
COALITION**



Appendix A)

Virtual Presentation: A History of Racism in U.S. Agriculture & Organic

Content by Cambium Collective

[View the recording here.](#)

Relevant resources [are linked here.](#)

Appendix B)

Lessons Learned from Pilot Training on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion with Organic Inspectors and Certifiers

Content by Cambium Collective

[Available here.](#)

Appendix C)

Lessons Learned from Hosting Internships at Organic Organizations

[Available here.](#)

Appendix D)

Considerations for Diversifying Organic Organizations' Recruitment Strategies

[Available here.](#)

Appendix E)

Considerations for Building a Racially Equitable Organic Organization to Improve Working Conditions for BIPOC Staff

Content by Cambium Collective

[Available here.](#)