



Field to Market®

Racial Justice, Equity and Inclusion: Dismantling Legacy Barriers and Biases in U.S. Agriculture

Cross-Sector Dialogue Summary & Key Findings
March 24, 2021 | Virtual

INTRODUCTION

Centuries of discriminatory and exclusionary policies and programs have created massive economic and social inequities that persist throughout agriculture in the United States. Enslaved African people, indigenous communities and immigrant workers have played a foundational role in building our agricultural system. All the while, Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) farmers and communities have been systematically marginalized and excluded from the wealth and opportunities which that system generates.

With this history in mind, Field to Market: The Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture joined this historic movement in 2020 by announcing [our organization's commitment to advancing racial justice](#). As part of this commitment, we announced several concrete steps that Field to Market will take to ensure that racial justice is prioritized within our organization's ongoing sustainability efforts.

Among these actions was a commitment to elevating and amplifying diverse voices, harnessing the power of our organization's convening power to prioritize dialogue centered on racial justice in food and agriculture. This summary document shares the results of Field to Market's first convening on this critical subject as part of our Cross-Sector Dialogue series, which brings together stakeholders from across the agricultural value chain to advance shared learning and drive collective action in addressing systemic barriers to scaling sustainable agriculture.

This Dialogue convened 90 such stakeholders to examine the history and ongoing racial barriers and biases in U.S. agriculture and explore how to support collaborative solutions that advance equity and inclusion for BIPOC farmers and communities.

The following summary shares key learnings from expert speakers and participants at the Dialogue, as well as an [Appendix of Key Resources](#) for organizations interested in exploring opportunities to advance racial justice within their own organization.

We encourage those companies and organizations interested in collaborating with Field to Market on this critical work to [register your interest and share your feedback through a brief survey](#). Over the coming months, we will invite members and interested stakeholders to participate in additional workshops, listening sessions and programs centered on advancing critical topics related to racial justice.

Please note that the following summary provides a synthesis of key remarks and observations from the event and does not necessarily represent the views or perspectives of Field to Market.

SETTING THE GROUNDWORK: DEFINITIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Brandon Hunnicutt, farmer and chair of Field to Market’s Board of Directors, opened the Dialogue with remarks emphasizing the need for the agricultural community to acknowledge the history of racism in the industry. Hunnicutt stressed that by working together to ensure opportunities for all, we strengthen our agricultural system and all of the industries that rely on it. A video of Hunnicutt’s address can be [viewed here](#).

Hunnicutt introduced the Dialogue’s facilitator, Ebony Webber, Chief Operating Officer at MANRRS (Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences), who shared guidelines for how participants can share in productive and candid conversations about race, including:

- Empathize with others’ perspectives.
- Accept disagreement, as it can help us come to a deeper understanding of difficult subjects.
- Avoid assigning shame and blame or attacking others.
- Be aware of your own actions and hold yourself accountable for what you say and do.
- Realize that statements shared with good intentions may still harm someone else.

To ground participants in a set of common terms used in discussions on diversity, equity and inclusion, Webber went on to provide key definitions:

Diversity – The representation of all our varied identities and differences (race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, tribe, caste, socio-economic status, thinking and communication styles, etc.), collectively and as individuals

Equality – Treating everyone the same.

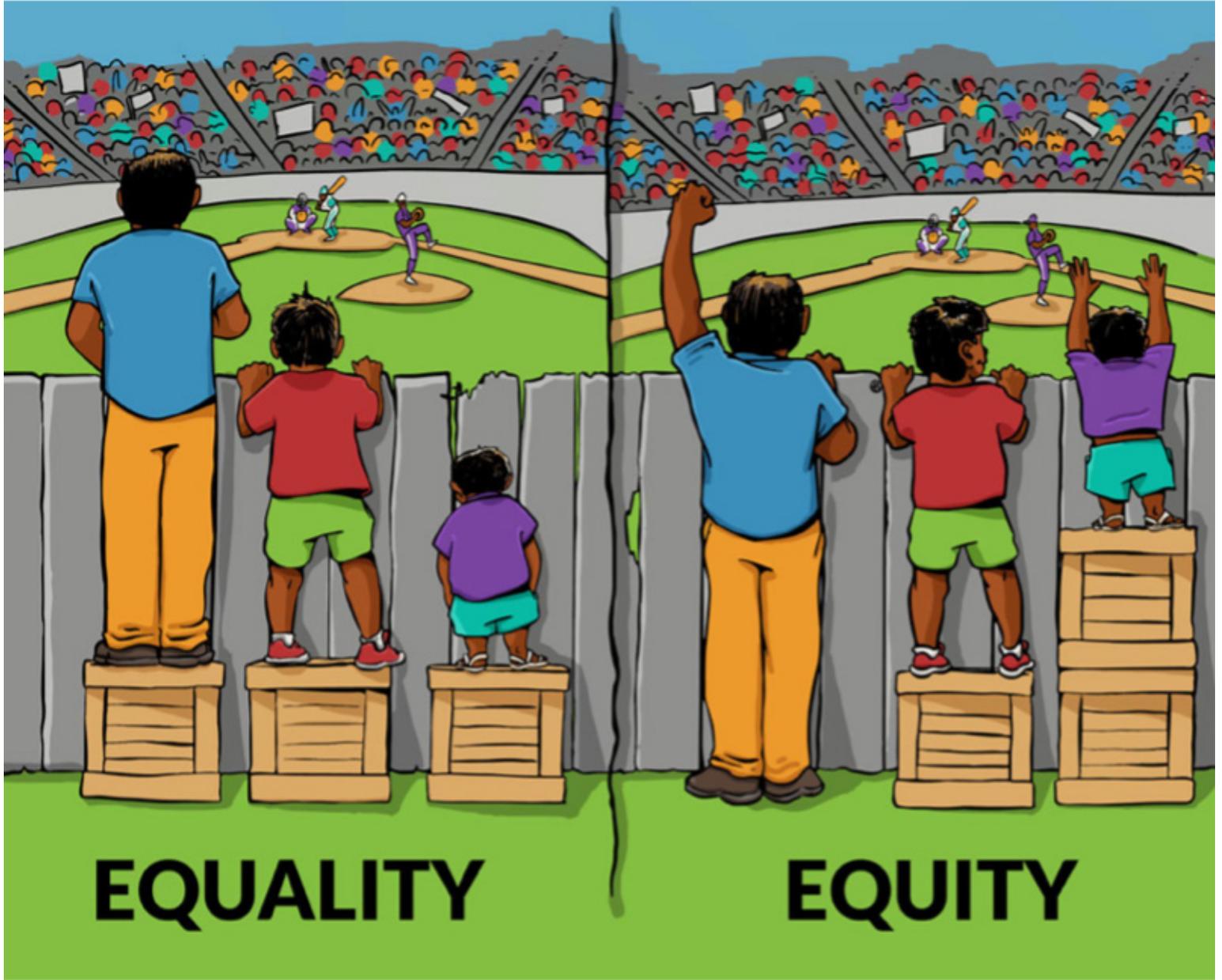
Equity – Recognizing that we do not all start from the same place and acknowledging and making adjustments to imbalances.

Inclusion – Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policy making in a way that shares power.

Racial justice – The presence of deliberate systems and supports to achieve and sustain racial equity through proactive and preventative measures.

“BIPOC representation in our boards and leadership is lacking. Having a board champion to push for it may help center these issues”

– Grower representative



UNDERSTANDING THE PAST TO CREATE A MORE EQUITABLE FUTURE

Farming is an inherently risky industry. But for BIPOC producers, the challenges of the profession have been compounded by generations of exclusionary practices and policies that have restricted access to land and capital. Led by Dr. Marcus Bernard, Associate Professor at Kentucky State University, the opening session of the Dialogue established a common understanding of the historical events that drove millions of BIPOC growers off of the farm and further from the promise of prosperity and explored where our industry can chart an equitable path forward.

Bernard described the prevalent stereotypes of the American farmer, which fail to capture a realistic picture of the diversity of the community. Images of modern-day Black, LatinX, Asian, Asian American and Native American farmers are largely missing from our collective vision of today's agriculture.

Of the more than two million farms in the U.S., [fewer than 2% are Black operated](#), and 88% of Black farmers live primarily in 12 southern states. Farms operated by Black producers are smaller in size with lower net farm incomes than their white counterparts. This discrepancy is the result of long-term exclusion from credit and markets on the basis of race. The loss of land by Black farmers between 1877 and 1915 was accelerated by a combination of factors, primarily [Jim Crow laws](#) and lack of affordable credit compounded by low cotton prices, boll weevils and increasingly poor soil conditions.

Bernard went on to provide more examples of systemic actions that further marginalized Black farmers and ultimately drove them from their land. Although Black farmers won two class action lawsuits against the USDA for discriminatory practices, Pigford (1999) and Pigford II (2010), unnecessary red tape and other barriers to accessing funds limited the impact of the awards. There is great hope that provisions in the American Rescue Act (2021) will help to make progress on these longstanding issues.

A recording of Dr. Bernard's presentation can be [viewed here](#).

“We wrote a letter of support for some racial equity provisions in the American Rescue Plan and got some pushback from [our networks] but were able to explain to them why it was important; that effort helped to shift some mindset. This conversation today reinforces that we're on the right path, but there is more work to do.” – Agribusiness representative



CALL TO ACTION: SHAPING YOUR ORGANIZATION'S ROLE IN AMPLIFYING EXISTING INITIATIVES AND SUPPORTING BIPOC GROWERS

As organizations across the food and ag value chain increase their commitments to engage and support diverse growers, designing initiatives to overcome legacy barriers and create a more equitable industry may seem daunting. Fortunately, organizations need not start from scratch. This panel discussion highlighted existing organizations which support BIPOC growers across the U.S. and explored opportunities for collective action from the value chain to amplify their efforts. Participants learned from experts active in this work and surfaced partnerships, programs and strategies which can enable Field to Market member organizations to shape a more equitable and inclusive industry.

The panel was moderated by Dr. Veronica Womack, Executive Director of the Rural Studies Institute, Georgia College & State University. Dr. Womack interviewed panelists representing four organizations serving primarily BIPOC agricultural professionals and asked them to talk about why their respective organizations were founded, who they serve, what critical need they are filling, and what they need for long-term success and sustainability.

Rodrigo Cala is an agricultural trainer with the [Minnesota Latino Economic Development Center \(LEDC\)](#). Cala spoke of the challenges facing new farmers and the need for candid conversations about immigration and climate change.

Phillip (P.J.) Haynie III is a farmer and Chair of the [National Black Growers Council](#). Haynie talked about the counterproductive disconnect between the broader agricultural community and Black growers.

Kari Jo Lawrence is the Executive Director at the [Intertribal Agriculture Council \(IAC\)](#). Lawrence explained how IAC was born from the foreclosure crisis in the 1980's and the near-total exclusion of Native American producers from emergency loans and relief payments.

Ebony Webber is the Chief Operating Officer at [MANNRS](#). Webber described MANNRS's mission to be the voice and home for all minority students that find themselves underrepresented in the agriculture industry.

A recording of the panel discussion can be [viewed here](#).

“Today was the first time I heard anyone talking about diversity in ag mention farm workers, which I appreciated and is a huge element of racial justice in U.S. agriculture.” – Affiliate representative

IDENTIFYING STRATEGIES AND NEEDS TO ADVANCE RACIAL JUSTICE FOR AGRICULTURE

Each speaker was asked to identify the key areas where their organizations need additional support from the value chain, shaping a list of felt needs from BIPOC organizations which stakeholders across the value chain can consider as they form new partnerships and strategies to advance diversity, equity and inclusion.

FELT NEEDS FROM BIPOC AGRICULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

What can organizations across the supply chain do to better support BIPOC growers?

- **Ask BIPOC growers what they need** and structure incentives appropriately. Be careful when making assumptions about what drives conservation behavior.
- **Elevate and amplify BIPOC voices** in all discussions about agriculture, sustainability and supply chains, not only in conversations about diversity, equity and inclusion. If diverse participants do not want to join your conversation, find out why and do what you can to make them feel welcome and heard so they will join you next time.
- **Support immigration policy** that is good for all farmers. Our agricultural system as a whole, including many commodities, are dependent on immigrant workers.
- **Advocate for, and invest in, long-term funding for grassroots organizations** that are already active on the ground in their communities. The organizations featured on the panel are a small subset of a much larger list of such groups. [Appendix A](#) at the end of this document is a partial, but not exhaustive, resource list.
- **Change your notion of what farmers and trusted advisers look like**, and allow underrepresented communities to tell their own stories. Here's an [example of community-driven storytelling](#) from the Intertribal Agriculture Council.
- **Support small and new growers as they scale up their operations.** Assistance in accessing funding and technical assistance, creative financing, and access to additional land can help smaller farmer grow and access additional markets.
- **Engage BIPOC organizations in addressing climate change.** Historically underserved growers are among the most vulnerable to the extreme risk climate change poses to sustainable crop production. They can also be a great resource for solutions to addressing climate change in their communities and beyond.
- **Include BIPOC farmers and organizations in decision making.** As companies develop strategies, include decision makers who understand what is happening on the ground.

Following the panel discussion, small groups met to discuss the barriers and opportunities they saw emerging from these needs.

Credit: Intertribal Agriculture Council



“We’re thinking about how we can use our role as a conservation NGO to make sure under-represented voices are at the table. We also work with many large food and retail companies, so we’re thinking about how we can use our seat at the table to lift up farmers of color.” - Civil Society representative

BARRIERS IDENTIFIED BY THE FOOD AND AG VALUE CHAIN

What barriers or challenges are still in place within the value chain that need to be overcome? What additional “big questions” remain that need to be answered before organizations can effectively develop and implement a strategy?

- **Set Appropriate Goals** – Meeting environmental sustainability goals is already challenging, but there are tools to help set targets and measure progress. There aren’t clear guidelines for setting goals around diversity, equity and inclusion, and finding growers from underrepresented populations adds a really difficult level of complexity.
- **Diversify Sourcing Strategies** – Even in complex supply chains, there are opportunities for food and beverage companies to diversify sourcing strategies by understanding where BIPOC farmers are located and to help create new markets where possible.
- **Expand Networks** – Agriculture relies heavily on networks. Member companies and field representatives are often not very diverse, and if they continue to rely solely on the same existing networks, then hiring, member recruitment and sourcing will not change.
- **Have Tough Conversations** – How can organizations approach conversations about racial justice without creating divisiveness?
- **Find Data to Support Investments in Diversity** – Companies make financial decisions based on data. Where can organizations find diversity data which supports decisions to invest in initiatives and organizations in this space, and are there other lenses that can be used to support decision making?

SECTOR-SPECIFIC STRATEGIES TO ADVANCE RACIAL JUSTICE

What role can organizations across the value chain play in scaling partnerships and programs which support BIPOC farmers?

University and Government Partners | Provide on the ground assistance for farmers

- Cooperative Extension services can assist farmers in navigating USDA application processes for funding and technical assistance
- Serve as regional coordinators to ensure that national level programs are accessible to local farmers

Agribusiness | Provide proactive farmer and workforce inclusion and engagement

- Proactively engage BIPOC farmers in pilot projects, field trials of new products and software, and other supply chain opportunities
- Advocate for and invest in BIPOC workforce and community development

Brands & Retail | Source from BIPOC farmers, and increase consumers' awareness of them

- Invest in and source from small, new and diverse growers
- Amplify BIPOC-led storytelling and shift existing consumer stereotypes of farmers
- Equip employees to engage with racial justice and connect to consumers in this work

Civil Society | Advocate for and fund BIPOC-led solutions to global concerns

- Ensure that the typical focus on “scalable solutions” does not exclude BIPOC farmers and the local community-based solutions that they develop
- Review funding guidelines for requirements that inadvertently exclude local, small, or community-specific organizations
- Learn and apply conservation techniques developed by southern Black and indigenous farmers; recognize the provenance of regenerative practices

Grower | Expand commodity group benefits to more diverse farmers

- Establish collaborations between programs and organizations which support BIPOC growers and state and national grower groups
- Advocate for better access to credit for farmers of color and female farmers
- Create pathways to farm ownership through programs that connect aging farmers to new and beginning farmers



“We should more closely consider how to support Black farmers in accessing ecosystem service market opportunities.”

– Brands & Retail representative

WORKING TOGETHER TO ADVANCE A MORE EQUITABLE INDUSTRY

Honest dialogue to advance racial justice has been long overdue in the commodity crop space. There is much work to be done to build a more equitable industry, and fortunately, no organization needs to tackle these issues alone. With a clearer understanding of the history of unjust policies and practices that have unfairly targeted BIPOC growers and the existing needs and opportunities to empower these communities, the value chain can unite to dismantle these systems and intentionally build a more diverse, inclusive and equitable industry.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to advancing racial equity. Just as there is no single suite of best practices that works across all crops and regions, we cannot make broad generalizations across, or even among diverse people groups. The speakers and panelists featured during this Cross-Sector Dialogue represent a subset of the tremendous diversity of people in the larger agricultural community, and we recognize that there are many voices that were not included in this conversation.

Field to Market remains committed to continuing this conversation by amplifying and elevating additional diverse voices within and outside of our membership. Together, our expert speakers and committed participants surfaced tangible opportunities and solutions which the value chain can leverage to advance equity in our industry. We invite you to join us in this important work.

Over the coming months, we will convene member organizations and interested stakeholders for small-group workshops focused on topics of interest, surfacing partnerships and strategies for collaboration across specific sectors and needs. Please complete a [brief survey](#) to indicate your interest in collaborating with Field to Market and our member organizations on key next steps.

APPENDIX A – ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING BIPOC AGRICULTURAL PROFESSIONALS

Please note that the following is an incomplete list of organizations engaged in this work and Field to Market is not affiliated with organizations listed here.

[APLU’s Council of 1890s](#)

[Castanea Fellowship](#)

[Federation of Southern Cooperatives](#)

[First Nations Development Institute’s Keepseagle Fast-Track Grant Program](#)

[Indian Nations Conservation Alliance](#)

[Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative](#)

[Intertribal Agriculture Council](#)

[Land Loss Prevention Project](#)

[Latino Economic Development Center](#)

[MANNRS](#)

[Mississippi Minority Farmers Association \(MMFA\)](#)

[National Black Farmers Association](#)

[National Black Food Justice Alliance](#)

[National Black Growers Council](#)

[National Latino Farmers & Ranchers Trade Association](#)

[National Young Farmers Coalition](#)

[Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust](#)

[Soul Fire Farm](#)

[Southeastern African American Farmers’ Organic Network](#)

[Tuskegee University Small Farmer Outreach, Training, and Technical Assistance Project](#)

[Urban Black Growers](#)

APPENDIX B - RESOURCES TO SUPPORT FURTHER LEARNING AND ACTION.

[Advancing Racial Equity and Justice in US Agriculture](#) – Recorded panel discussion from the 2020 Sustainable Agriculture Summit, hosted by Field to Market and MANNRS.

[Black Producers](#) – A snapshot of demographic information about Black producers from the 2017 Census of Agriculture. *Census of Agriculture Highlights – USDA-NASS, 2017.*

[Harvard Implicit Association Tests](#) – Project Implicit is a non-profit organization and international collaboration between researchers who are interested in implicit social cognition - thoughts and feelings outside of conscious awareness and control. The goal of the organization is to educate the public about hidden biases and to provide a “virtual laboratory” for collecting data on the Internet.

[Native Food Connection](#) – Expand public awareness leading to new market opportunities for Tribal producers while reframing the growing Native culinary movement to encompass the entire spectrum of the Indian Ag and food sector.

[Navigating Diversity in Agriculture and STEM with Dr. LaKisha Odom](#) – A three-part series by the Open Rivers Navigator Podcast focused on diversity in agriculture and STEM.

[Privilege Walk](#) – Adapted for Lake Land College by the Diversity Education Task Force, designed to provide college students with an opportunity to understand the intricacies of privilege and to explore the ways that we enjoy privileges based on being members of social identity groups in the United States.

[Progressive Governance Can Turn the Tide for Black Farmers](#) – *Center for American Progress, 2019.*

[Racial Equity Toolkit](#) – A resource to orient and incite members of the National Young Farmers Coalition toward preliminary consciousness-raising and direct action. This toolkit does not detail a universally applicable pathway toward resolving pervasive racialized oppression; it is an initial resource for people who are overwhelmed by the breadth and depth of the problem, and need help determining how to start dismantling racism in their communities.

[The Dispossessed: Why are so many black families losing their land?](#) – *The New Yorker and ProPublica, 2019.*

[There were nearly a million black farmers in 1920. Why have they disappeared?](#) – *The Guardian, 2019.*



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