Conservation and Agriculture Reach Everyone

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts and Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project Inc. program
CARE Project Partnership

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts - non-profit organization with the mission of providing leadership, resources, and partnership opportunities to conservation district and those who manage the land to enhance our natural resources for a better Oklahoma

Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project - non-profit organization that provides education, technical assistance to socially disadvantaged farmers and forestry landowners.
Project Vision

To provide information, training, funding opportunities and technical assistance to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

What is a socially disadvantaged farmer/rancher?
A socially disadvantaged farmer/rancher was defined in the 1990 farm bill as members of a socially disadvantaged group, which is defined to mean those whose identity in a group has subjected them to racial or ethnic prejudice without regard to their individual identity.
The History of Landowners in Oklahoma

- Indian Removal Act of 1830 forced tens of thousands of Native Americans from their homes to modern day Oklahoma.

- All of the five civilized tribes owned slaves.

- Following the Civil War, slavery was abolished and the former slaves of the Native Americans began forming towns.
Settlement from 1865-1920

• During this time period, all black communities were established throughout Oklahoma

• In 1910, there were 13,000+ farms operated by African Americans in Oklahoma.

• 1910, 176,000+ farms owned by whites

About All-Black Towns

African Americans who settled in Oklahoma established more than fifty identifiable All-Black towns between the end of the Civil War and 1920. This number is unparalleled in any other region of the United States. Most towns were developed in Indian Territory by freedmen (former slaves of the Five Tribes). Others were established as a result of land openings beginning in 1889.

In these towns African Americans lived relatively free from the prejudices and violence found in many communities. Today, thirteen historical All-Black towns still exist.
Fast Forward 100 Years – Landownership Today

- Today there are 1,900 farms owned by African Americans in Oklahoma
- There are 14,000 farms owned by Native Americans
- There are over 100,000 farms owned by whites in Oklahoma
Why the disparity in land loss rates?

Unequal access to governmental programs, heir property/fractionation issues, and a lower level of agriculture community support for minority farming/ranching operations over the last 100+ years.
USDA and Minority Producers

Reports of Discrimination

• 1965 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights publishes “Equal Opportunity in Farm Programs” detailing discrimination within USDA

• 1983 & 1990 US Commission on Civil Rights reports filed that civil rights abuse was a leading factor in the decline of minority farm ownership

Legal Action

• 1999 Pigford I lawsuit is filed. Settled for $1.03 billion.

• 2008 Pigford II lawsuit, settlement of $1.25 billion

• 2011 Keepseagle lawsuit, settlement of $760 million

• 2011 USDA and DOJ announce $1.3 billion available for Hispanic and women farmers
USDA Efforts to Repair Relationships with Minority Farmers/Ranchers

Establishment of the Office of Advocacy and Outreach to enhance access to USDA programs.

• Specialized funding pools & financial resources
• Advisory committees
• Outreach efforts
• Learning resources
Fractionated Land and Heir Property Issues

Current legislative efforts:

“Assist Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Act of 2018” Senate Bill: 2839, Van Hollen and Smith and House Resolution 5824, Lujan-Grisham

“Assist Farmers and Ranchers Operating on Heirs’ Property to Participate in USDA Programs Act of 2018”

To Sign On:
https://www.ruralco.org/2018/05/08/farm-bill-equity-sign-on-letter/
Community Agriculture Organizations

Why community ag groups should help

• There 246,176 minority farmers in the United States. There are an additional 288,264 female farmers in the U.S.

• Diversity improves the organization

How they can help

• Invite minority farmers/ranchers to attend your organizations events.

• Include leaders of minority farming/ranching organizations in your larger ag community.

• Identify minority landowners who have leadership potential. Nurture those relationships. Encourage those people to seek out leadership roles.
Project Goals

• Build relationships between socially disadvantaged producers, USDA and conservation districts at the local, state, regional and national levels.

• Cultivating leadership of socially disadvantaged producers to increase knowledge of and participation in USDA programs.

• Provide educational information and training opportunities to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in larger geographic areas across Oklahoma.

• Educate non-minority farmers, ranchers and conservation district leaders and employees about the unique barriers that socially disadvantaged farmers/ranchers face.
Why Oklahoma?

• 18,585 Socially Disadvantaged Farmers/Ranchers

• Oklahoma is 2nd in the nation for the number of Native American farmers and 14th in the nation for African-American/Black farmers.

• Strong conservation districts, the majority of which are co-located with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and many that are co-located in the same building as Farm Service Agency allows districts to be a natural bridge between producers and United States Department of Agriculture

• Native-American and African-American farmers/ranchers receive significantly less funding through USDA compared with their white counterparts in Oklahoma.
Participating Conservation Districts & Partners

- Wagoner County Conservation District
- Muskogee County Conservation District
- Muscogee (Creek) Nation Conservation District
- Okfuskee County Conservation District
- South Caddo Conservation District
- West Caddo Conservation District
- North Caddo Conservation District
- Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project
- Core conservation partnership – NRCS, OCC, OACDE
Our Plan

• Identify and cultivate relationships with SDA producers in the community that are willing to serve as champions

• Include SDA producer organizations and individual SDA producers in existing conservation, commodity, and farm advocacy groups

• Conduct survey and interviews to identify existing barriers in access to USDA programs and share that information in a confidential written report to the office of advocacy and outreach

• Host field days and workshops featuring SDA producers
Meet our CARE Champions
“The Farm Service Agency Operating Loan Program allowed me to expand my operation by 100 acres.”
“The Beginning Farmer/Rancher Microloan through the Farm Service Agency allowed me to start my own operation.”
“USDA programs allow people to better their farms.”
Vanessa Vance  
CADDO COUNTY

“I have been working with my tribe to create opportunities for tribal members to learn about different USDA and conservation district programs.”
“Without the state cost share and NRCS programs, I would not have been able to move my operation forward as quickly.”
"Conservation is the way we can preserve our land while still providing food for our families and future generations."
"Talk to your local NRCS district conservationist. From conservation planning to cost share programs. There is something for everyone."
For more information:

okconservation.org/care

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