A publication of the Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance

# SEED CULTURE

We are living the dream...collectively!

Quarterly

Volume 3, Issue 1 Summer 2026

## Part of the Journey

## Getting Back to the Land

## Seeds of Hope

## From Soil to Health

## Victory Garden

***Special Insert:***
***UCFA's 2026 Conference***
***SEEDS & CULTURE:***
***Rural and Urban Agriculture United***

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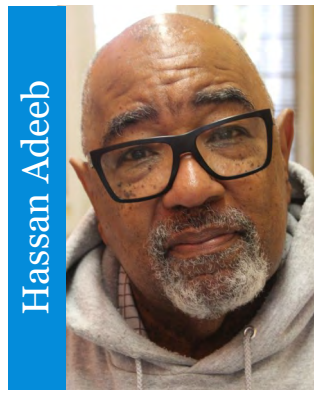
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# SEED CULTURE

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UJAMAA COOPERATIVE FARMING ALLIANCE

***SEED CULTURE*** is a quarterly journal dedicated to communicating the mission and goals of the Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance (UCFA). The content produced by contributors to this publication are not necessarily the views of UCFA. We welcome letters and news items from readers. All requests for permission to reprint articles must be directed to ujamaafarmingcoop@gmail.com.

# We Can Solve Our Own Issues

By Bonnetta Adeeb

## "We are doing the right work at the right time in history."

Dear Ujamaa Family, Friends and Growers,

I had the fantastic opportunity to travel to California to visit growers, mentors, and partners and scout some potential possibilities for our Western Seedhub. As I was flying into Oakland's airport, I saw things from the sky that I had no recollection of ever seeing. I grew up in the Bay Area and later moved to Southern California. I was returning to my childhood home for the first time in many years. It dawned upon me that the large lake was a place I traveled to and site of many ski club adventures in college. That was Lake Tahoe. The extensive water-ways were the huge San Francisco Bay inlets with its many areas of North Bay, East Bay, and South Bay where I lived for so many years. After burying my grandparents and Uncle Rovelton, I had not returned to northern California. It was an emotional homecoming. But, there's no place like home.

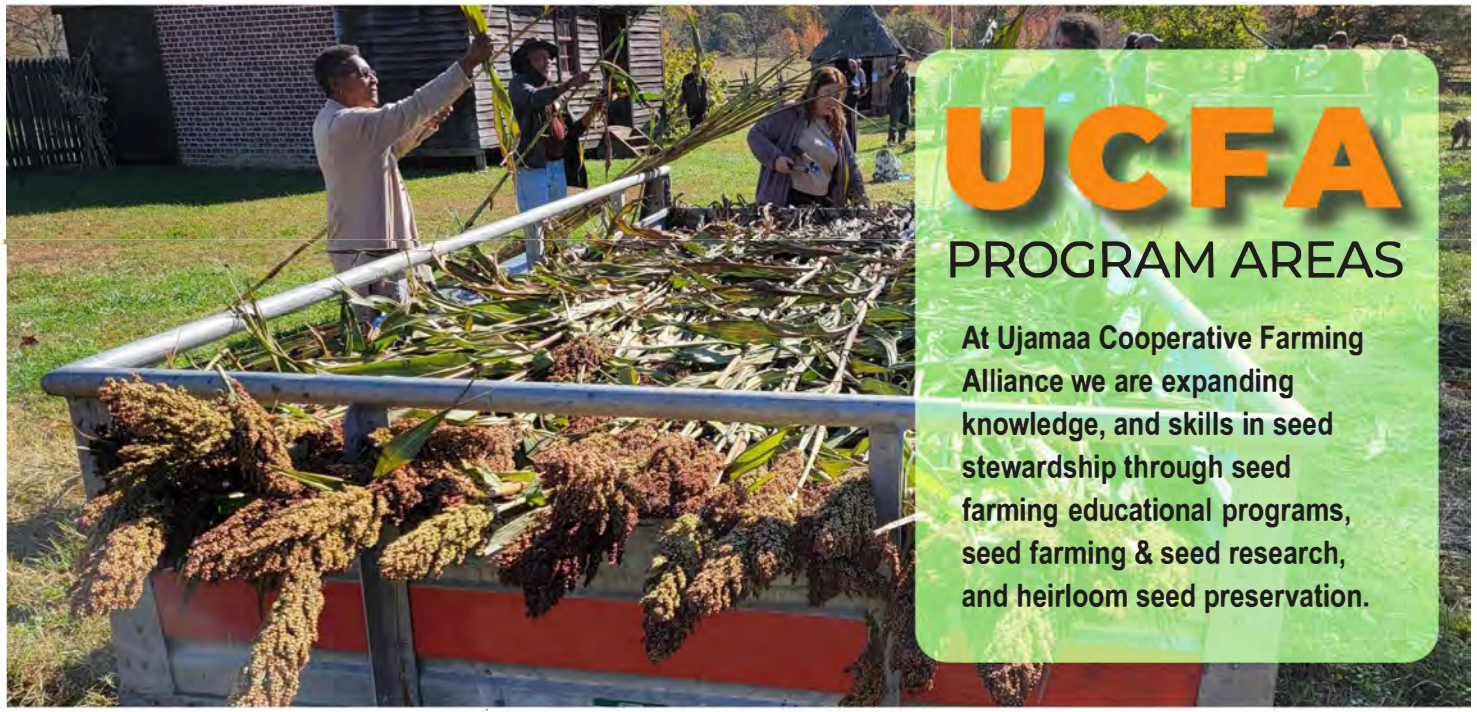
When I reached my destination, I hooked up with UCFA members Tomia MacQueen of Wildflower Farm in Pennington, New Jersey, and from Colorado, Cara Loriz, the Western Seed Hub Coordinator. We are supporting growers at seed hubs in the Far West in Washington, Oregon, Northern and Southern California, Arizona, and Colorado. We are thrilled to find more like-minded seed folks in new and exciting places.

I visited with our dear friend and partner Michelle Mascaihna of the Kataly Foundation. Later I had a very special visit to the Eatable Schoolyard team in Berkeley and met with chef and food children's activist, and my mentor Alice Waters. She is one of the bravest fighters for food justice on the planet and her can-do spirit is always contagious. Later I met with wonderful friends doing work with elementary school gardens and farmers attempting to start collectives to meet the challenges they are facing. Planting Justice is also doing incredible work with returning citizens teaching them agro-forestry and tree farming. Some of our members in the region are growing culturally meaningful crops from and for the Iranian, Pakistani, Chinese, and Filipino communities. Later Cara, Tomia and I headed north into Mendocino County to learn from our amazing partners at Open Circle Seeds.

This trip to California has been a profound source of encouragement, reaffirming our conviction that we are doing the right work at one of the most important moments in history. Access to healthy, locally grown, culturally meaningful food as well as farmers dedicated to preservation, conservation and developing climate resilience in our food system is the way to go. This reiterates the message that, "Only we can solve our own issues." We are the ***sheros*** and heroes we have been waiting for. Please remember that we are in the "spring" of our existence and nature is organizing our success. Let's continue to demonstrate our faith by planting hope for the future. Our superpowers lie in the seeds we honor and share with others. Let's continue to be Encouraged!

This trip to California reaffirmed that we are doing the right work at the right time in history. To learn more about the Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance (UCFA), our programs, and our mission to preserve culturally meaningful heirloom seeds and grow the next generation of seed stewards, visit **UjamaaFarms.org.** If our work inspires you, consider making a tax-deductible contribution at **Ujamaafarms.org/Donate** to us help expand our seed farming educational initiatives, seed farming research efforts, heirloom seed preservation, and UCFA community outreach and education iprograms.

Bonnetta Adeeb,
Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance
Founding UCFA Granny and Founding Member



# UCFA
## PROGRAM AREAS

**At Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance we are expanding knowledge, and skills in seed stewardship through seed farming educational programs, seed farming & seed research, and heirloom seed preservation.**

## Seed Farming Education

Through the Ujamaa Academy, the Ira Wallace Seed School, workshops, lectures, webinars, and hands-on field trainings, UCFA provides growers—particularly those from historically marginalized and under-served communities—with training in seed farming and seed saving, In addition, UCFA develops educational curricula, publications, and children's books that promote agricultural literacy, biodiversity, cultural heritage, and environmental stewardship.

## Seed Farming & Research

At the UCFA seed farming training sites in Upper Marlboro and Camp Springs, Maryland participants gain hands-on experience in the production, harvesting, processing, and storage of culturally meaningful heirloom seeds. In collaboration with Tuskegee University, the Seed Farm at Princeton, the Utopian Seed Project, the Experimental Farm Network, and other agricultural research partners, UCFA conducts research projects on the preservation, adaptation, and improvement of heirloom crop varieties.

## Heirloom Seed Preservation

UCFA supports the preservation of African, Asian, European, Indigenous American, Caribbean, and diasporic food crops that represent generations of agricultural knowledge and cultural heritage. Preservation is achieved through the active cultivation, regeneration, documentation, and distribution of heirloom seeds. UCFA distributes heirloom seeds online through UJAMAA SEEDS.COM, and at conferences and community events. We also provide free and low-cost seeds to community groups.

*UCFA Seed Teachers is a working group of youth advisors and educators who teach today's youth the importance of agriculture, natural resources, and the environment. Experiential learning is key as well as connecting to ancestral heritages. This Spring the Seed Teachers collaborated in developing activities for youth to celebrate Earth Day, from preschoolers to high schoolers. Here are how some Seed Teachers recently incorporated the activities in their communities.*

# SEEDS OF HOPE

## GROWING A GREENER FUTURE

**This past Spring several UCFA Seed Teachers collaborated in developing activities for youth from preschoolers to high schoolers to celebrate Earth Day.**

Here are some Earth Day activities in their communities. UCFA Seed Teachers Anna Muhammad and Ulum Pixan of the Pocasset Pokanoket Landtrust (PPLT) joined youth and adults from other organizations in Springfield, Massachusetts to celebrate caring for Mother Earth and growing food.

At Open Pantry Social Service Agency, youth from the "Youth Agricultural Scientist Program" of Tapley Garden in Springfield joined Open Pantry staff in a community garden cleanup. PPLT and Open Pantry Social Services have worked together on the community garden, and all of the food grown is distributed to families on neighboring streets, Open Pantry clients, and the Open Pantry kitchen, which feeds over 300 people daily.

Participants from PATCH, another Springfield, Massachusetts organization, planting sugar snap peas, planting trees, and fixing the watershed pond topped off a full week of Earth Day activities. Jorge Perez, founder of PATCH, said that the full week of Earth Day activities "brings together youth, elders, and community members to care for the earth, plant food, and share in the company of each other." PPLT also conducted soil health activities with youth from a day camp and closed out the week with a community-led day that featured vendors, the Springfield Fire Department and music.

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## Baltimore

Baltimore based UCFA Seed Teacher, Ramona Wilson-Xu welcomed over 120 attendees to Woodmoor Elementary Magnet Community School's Second Annual Earth Day celebration. This Earth Day event entitled, "Clean Green Connections: Growing Sustainability at Woodmoor" brought together students, families, staff, and community partners for a day of meaningful learning and environmental action.

Seed Teacher Kim Poole participated in the activities as well. This Baltimore event was sponsored by grants from WholeKids, Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation, Newman's Own Foundation, and Baltimore County Clean Green 15. This year's event at Woodmoor was especially significant as the school announced its recognition as a first-time Maryland Green School, marking a major milestone in its sustainability journey. The celebration featured engaging presentations, vendor tables, and interactive experiences led by community partners in conservation, energy, and environmental science.

## Waldorf

In Waldorf Maryland, UCFA Seed Teacher Diane Fisher had an activity station where youth at John Hanson Middle School repurposed newspapers as seed starter pots. After making the newspaper pots and filling them with soil, students selected from various heirloom seeds plants that were meaningful to them. They planted 2-3 seeds in one newspaper pot and were able to take the pot and the remaining seeds in the seed packet home with instructions on seedling care. Students enjoyed the opportunity to grow something that would be shared.

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## LaPlata

In La Plata Maryland, as part of Earth Week, the La Plata High School's Environmental Club's "Green Fair" was hosted by La Plata Farmer's Market. UCFA Seed Teacher Diane Fisher again taught market attendees how to make seed starter pots from newspapers. Several varieties of heirloom seeds were offered to plant in the starter pots and take home.

Many were surprised at the effectiveness of the starter pots as well as learning that the pots are decomposable. Also, at the La Plata Green Fair several local and state organizations shared with the community how to recognize native versus non-native plants as well as ways to take care of the Earth.

## St. Louis

UCFA Seed Teacher and parent Antonio Brazelton facilitated the kickoff of the new PACT (Parents Are Cool Too) speaker series at New City School in St. Louis, Missouri. This Family Association initiative celebrates the community's diverse expertise, and for the "nature" themed inaugural session, participants dove into the practical science of plant starters.

Antonio guided students ranging from four years old through 1st grade through the process of creating sustainable pots by cutting newspaper into strips and rolling them with tomato paste cans. It was a joy to watch them then select and plant their seeds, including callaloo, purple hull peas, tomatoes, and blue heirloom corn, to get the spring gardens started.

The hands-on learning continued outside, where Antonio joined fellow families in a group effort to prepare the New City Garden for the season. Together, the group turned the soil and amended the raised beds, an experience that served as a perfect prelude to Earth Day. It was incredibly rewarding to see the community come together to embrace the school's culture of joyful, lifelong learning. By planting this range of crops and connecting children to the earth through these shared activities, the group is not just growing food; they are cultivating a stronger, more resilient community, one seed at a time.

# Part of the Journey

Written by Antionio Brazelton

I can still hear my grandmother's voice when I told her I wanted to study agriculture.

"You mean like farming!?" she cringed with a laugh. "We tried that before, Baby, are you sure you don't want to be a doctor or an engineer?"

She grew up sharecropping with her grandfather in the late 1940s, and I'm sure she assumed our family's days out in the field were over.

Ironically, sixteen years after that conversation, I was standing with my son in front of a vacant lot in East St. Louis, preparing to plant my first collard green field trial. As a plant scientist, I was gathering data for my dissertation. As a first-year seed steward, I was learning the art and culture of seed saving. As a father, I was realizing that my five-year-old was not just going to play quietly on his iPad while I worked. He was determined to become part of the journey.

While I meticulously analyzed the rows for spacing, uniformity, and traits to improve plant performance... this child was full-on frolicking. He found dandelions to disperse into my nice, neat rows. He stepped on leaves chasing cabbage moths. He dug holes for the frogs hopping along the edge of the field. At some point, the gentle serenade of grasshoppers in the summer heat fell silent beneath the deafening chorus of "Daddy, look!" "Daddy, come here!" "Daddy, what's this?" and "Oooh Daddy, did you see this?"

As far as I was concerned, I was just there to measure plants and get this data. Dassit! Or so I thought. If I'm being honest watching my son move through the field like that inevitably changed the way I understood "the work". In real time, I was learning how messy fathering through a PhD could be, how much patience it required, how much flexibility it demanded, and how much grace it needed for the things I could not control. That day, somewhere between the unruly field and my son, I began learning two important lessons about fatherhood that I try to lean into more and more each day.

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**I am learning to be thankful for the flowers, even the ones I didn't plant.**

Nestled behind a small, unsuspecting blue brick building, I was trying to transform a vacant lot into a living site of scientific exploration. My plots were designed as textbook studies in precision: geometrically symmetrical rows where every plant was spaced exactly 18 inches from center, drip-irrigated at a steady flow rate twice daily, and kept clean and free, by hook or by crook, of anything that even looked like it could be a weed.

Then, a few weeks later, the field started talking back. Suddenly, my carefully manicured collards were lost in a wildfire of asters, wild bergamot, sedges, and other plants I had never intended to grow. My first instinct was that they had to go. But the bees and butterflies told a different story. Those flowers may have looked out of place, but they were helping create a community that supported the collards in ways my careful planning could not. They brought in bees and butterflies, deterred pests away from my greens, and created a more balanced ecosystem than my clean rows ever could.

Fatherhood has been teaching me that same lesson. As my son grows, I am learning that he will be shaped by more than the conditions I create for him. He is navigating two homes, different rhythms, new friendships, questions, disappointments, joys, and experiences I cannot control, and all of it is becoming part of the ecosystem around him. Some of it makes me proud, some of it makes me nervous, and all of it reminds me that love is an act of surrender, not control. Truth is, our life does not look exactly like what I originally hoped it would, but I am learning that a field is not failed just because something unexpected blooms. The weeds will come. Some will flower. And they, too, will be beautiful. My work is not to pull up everything I did not plant, but to pay attention to what is helping us become more rooted, resilient, and whole.

**I am learning that this work was never meant to be mine alone.**

From the time I began interviewing for graduate school, my son was there. I started my PhD program five months after he was born, and to this day I still ask, "Why would my friends let me start a PhD program as a new dad?" But by then, it was too late. I was already up reading research papers during midnight feedings, holding a bottle in one hand and plant science articles in the other. To get him up to speed, I even bought him an ABC book of biology. No surprise there: P was for photosynthesis. The PhD had already become something we were moving through together. He was no stranger to the messiness of field seasons, greenhouse visits, conference deadlines, root washes, and the quiet routines we built around the work.

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His presence forced me to slow down and be more intentional about the ways I included him. Some moments, I had to choose between writing one more chapter and getting down on the floor to play. Other times, I had to choose between analyzing one more dataset or finishing a bedtime story, knowing I still had dishes waiting in the sink. Some nights I chose the work, some nights I chose him, and most nights I wondered whether I had given enough to either. One hot Saturday morning, the pool was closed. So, we threw on his swim trunks and let him join our lab as we used a hose to rinse soil from collard roots. He had no clue it was research. To him, it was just a muddy field for his monster trucks to slosh around in. And honestly, he probably had the most fun of all of us that day.

That lesson followed me into seed stewardship. Including Ben never felt like an interruption of the work; it just became part of the work. Saving seed was teaching me to slow down, make room for others, and trust that the work deepens when more hands, more stories, and more hearts are allowed to touch it. In East St. Louis, this meant making room for high school students, farmers, teachers, grandmothers, fathers, neighbors, and even the occasional hungry raccoon.

On May 20, 2026, we got to commemorate the last five years by walking across the stage together during the hooding ceremony at Washington University in St. Louis. It was not just me crossing a stage. It was us carrying the work together, in public, after years of doing it quietly.

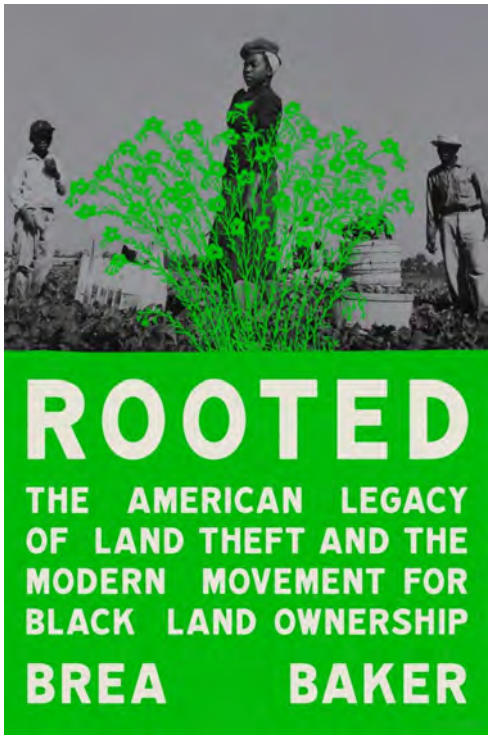
I thought about my grandmother in that moment. Her question all those years ago was never meant to be mockery; it was memory. It carried the weight of what agriculture had demanded from her, from our family, and from so many people who looked like us. But standing there with my son, I also understood that I was not simply returning to agriculture. I was learning how to return with choice, with care, and with the next generation.

What she knew as survival, I was learning to study, steward, and share. But more than anything, I was learning that the work of seed stewardship, much like fatherhood, is the work of tending what you love without needing to own every part of what it is becoming. Not by controlling every row, every flower, or every outcome, but by making room for life to grow in ways that you may never fully predict.

# Getting Back To The Land

Written by E. Fatimah Hasan

Brea Baker, in her book, *ROOTED: The American Legacy of Land Theft and the Modern Movement for Black Land Ownership*, brilliantly makes the case to re-establish, along with the Native Americans, our connection to the land as stewards and to sustain our communities into the future. She recounts the history of systematic separation of Native Americans and Blacks from the land by the colonizing forces, who sought commodification and financial gain via stolen land and labor. The Africans, before being snatched away, had a deep bond to their rich and fertile ancestral homeland. They braided seeds into their hair and grew to know and love the land in the Americas in the same way. Ms. Baker recounts the challenges that her ancestors encountered after slavery, going from merely working the land to purchasing, owning, and retaining it. While many free Blacks owned land during the time most Blacks were enslaved, after emancipation Blacks came to own and control millions of acres in the United States. How-ever, well into the 21st Century, we find that due to land theft and oppression, not even 1 percent of rural land remains in the hands of Black Americans today, and in urban areas, redlining, historic discrimination, and community destabilization has wreaked havoc on our communities.




### HER STORY

For Ms. Baker's story of our relationship to the land, her reference point is her ancestors with roots in the area of North Carolina, home of the Lumbee Tribe, the largest in the state. Like many Blacks before and during the Great Migration, her grandfather in his youth fled North Carolina to the northern destination of New Jersey, seeking a better life, but he ultimately returned because the land and the sense of family called him back. He was able to purchase 86 acres, work the land, and live in peace on what they lovingly referred to as "Bakers' Acres." The family landholdings grew to hundreds of acres over the years. Today, Ms. Baker and her wife, Mariah, prefer to keep chickens and grow a variety of fruits and vegetables, including peaches, tomatoes, arugula, tomatoes, asparagus, rhubarb, peppers, spinach, broccoli, and cauliflower.

Ms. Baker reminds us of the importance of maintaining control over our land, and she quotes Mary Lyons of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, who said:

> "When we talk about land, land is part of who we are. It's a mixture of our blood, our past, our current, and our future. We carry our ancestors in us, and they're around us. As you all do."

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Some of us in the Ujamaa CFA family were able to understand and witness first hand the amazing resilience and steadfastness of the Bad River band of Ojibwe People in their centuries old struggle to declare and maintain control over their land in the documentary, "Bad River," shown at the Rural Coalition Winter Forum this year. The messages they expressed about preserving the land for their yet unborn descendants was powerful beyond words. Therefore, in her book, Ms. Baker emphasizes that **landownership is the key to our survival**. Land has intrinsic value, as something that is part of our identity. It gives us a frame of reference around which to provide sustenance, raise our families, and build our lives, while, at the same time, it allows us to serve as stewards of the land with its flora and fauna. We engage in collective environmental stewardship, which is our duty to perform. After all, the Earth is our Mother, providing shelter and nourishment for every living thing.

## THE EFFECTS OF CAPITALISM

Ms. Baker urges us to distinguish ourselves from the prevailing capitalistic psychology when she writes:

"Capitalism leads us to believe that everything is scarce, but the first Americans operated off of an abundance mindset, understanding that the Land and Her renewable resources could more than sustain us if we didn't let our greed dictate Her pace."

Ms. Baker quotes Matthew Desmond, who explained capitalism in *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* in this way:

"[Private property] is what enables the private landowner to fence off natural resources and forests and rivers, assets that originally belonged to no one and were stewarded by the surrounding community, transforming common goods into commodities controlled by a single person or business entity."

Rather than pursue this fundamental aspect of an economic model that leads to extreme inequity, it is imperative that we avoid being physically as well as spiritually uprooted further by settler colonialism. Ms. Baker recalls the experience of the Maroon communities as intentional and "...a beacon for those committing to justice in the twenty-first century and beyond." When faced with upheaval, they resorted to movement as a tool to claim their freedom by creating distance between them and Western civilization completely, and establishing their own communities foraging, growing culturally meaningful food, and preserving their way of life on their own terms. Do we not have the same challenges today?

## PROGRESS POST-EMANCIPATION AND BEYOND TOWARD POLITICAL POWER

In Part Two of her book, Ms. Baker writes about the hope that fueled the amazing efforts of Black Americans to purchase land and find places of safety and community life post-slavery, against all odds. They fully understood the need to feed their families by gardening, bartering, working the land that they knew better than anyone else, and by planting the seeds and cultivating crops they well knew how to grow: collards, kale, corn, okra, watermelon, sugarcane, tomatoes, beans, and more. How well we know that growing our own food can provide income, and is far better for our health, and what better way to appreciate the land and foster reconnection to it.

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> "Land ownership and the production of food are foundational to any conversation around political autonomy."
> - William Barber III

Blacks who owned land went from 775 in 1860 to more than 6,500 ten years later, with Mississippi and Georgia leading the way, and rural land in the hands of Blacks in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri increasing by a whopping 744 percent. With significant support from the Black Church as a major institution in rural and urban communities, by 1910, approximately 150,000 Blacks owned land worth $165 million, or $4.7 billion in today's dollars. And yet, such efforts to establish autonomy and increase land-holdings and political power were vehemently undermined and rebuffed with violence, necessitating organizing into what would be the precursor to Black Lives Matter Movement and organizations such as Rural Beacon Initiative, led by founder and CEO William Barber III. Ms. Baker recounts that he said to her, "Land ownership and the production of food are foundational to any conversation around political autonomy." Ms. Baker also points out the utility of Blacks buying land and collectively owning and working the land using regenerative agricultural practices, something that UCFA enthusiastically espouses as a survival mechanism.

## EDUCATION AND FOOD EQUITY

Ms. Bakers' family thrived as well as a multitude of industrious Black farmers and landowners, creating food equity and establishing educational institutions that taught how to care for and make a living from the land and through various trades as advocated by Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald, known for his Rosenwald Schools. The educational piece is a major focus for Ujamaa CFA as well, and we are proud to carry on that legacy. During this time, George Washington Carver, outstanding scientist, researcher, and environmentalist, was dedicated to making Black farmers aware of their need to stay connected to the land for their economic prosperity. His research and innovations pioneered over 300 value-added products from peanuts, such as peanut butter and other foods, beverages, industrial items such as rubber, and household items like soaps, paper, and even cosmetics. As part of the work Ujamaa CFA does, remembering his legacy can perhaps inspire young entrepreneurs to continue innovating.

Durham's Chapel School
Image by rossograph

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## THE FUTURE: COMMUNITY BUILDING AND COOPERATIVE ECONOMICS

We continue to engage in intergenerational community building and cooperative economics, naturally. But historically, many Blacks fled the South with their lives during the Great Migration and beyond, in the wake of what Renard "Azibo" Turner refers to as *anti-agricultural backlash*, in that Blacks see doing farm work as turning the hands of time back to slavery days. Ms. Baker points this out in her book, and further quotes Leah Penniman, author of *Farming While Black,* as saying:

**"...there is so much land-based trauma, For us, land was the scene of the crime, as six million people would flee the rural agrarian South...people were raised thinking that the way to succeed was to get as far away from the land as possible."**

In addition, there is the struggle some of us wage to reclaim "heirs'" property. Ms. Baker points out that the USDA refers to heirs' property laws as "the leading cause of Black involuntary land loss." Unfortunately, over the years, Black communities have lost control of over 14 million acres of land they once controlled communally to white-led corporations.

This is what we are up against in 2026. A great read, Ms. Baker's book calls for reparations in the form of facilitating land gains for Black and Native Americans. She notes the ongoing land theft, including in the Global South: Puerto Rico, Hawai'i, Palestine, Guam, Samoa and other island nations. Can the reader come away inspired to act upon the urge to get back to the land? For me, it is a resounding, "YES." If your family owns land in the South or anywhere your ancestors called home, and you allow yourself to think deeply about their legacy and what they understood about the value of land ownership, you will yearn to reclaim the land.

Do we need to overcome the trauma we have lived through in order to embrace our roots and heritage in the land our ancestors worked on from dawn to dusk? Do we need psychoanalysis to unpack the hurt, so that we can once again get our hands in the dirt? For some of us, the answer may be yes. We also know that reviving community farming by growing culturally meaningful foods and saving seeds as a pursuit helps us improve our nutrition, food security, physical fitness, and mental health. I believe we are headed in the right direction, and Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance is among those leading the way. A Luta Continua, Vitória é Certa! The Struggle Continues, Victory is Certain!

# Victory Gardens

## The Glover Park Community Garden, Washington , D.C.

Written by Kilyan Spencer, American University student

The District of Columbia is home to a beautiful variety of neighborhoods. As much as private investors and large corporations attempt to take more land in the city, certain practices help fight these processes and build great community involvement and local spirit. The Glover Park Community Garden is one of these spaces through which the varied tableau of DC's people can shine through, growing nutritious organic produce and reconnecting with the land in an urban environment.

Built on federally owned Rock Creek Park, the assortment of 152 plots managed by the Glover Park Community Garden Association (GPCGA) was originally built as victory gardens during the Second World War to reduce the burden on the food supply. Since then, it has remained in the hands of the parks service, which has specific limitations on how produce may be grown. The rules around organic growing are reminded to the members by the vice president, John, in his "sardonic" email chains. During a tour of the plots, John talks about the variety of ways people have shaped their spaces. With pride, he points towards a trestle where some 200 pounds of tomatoes were harvested last season.

Sitting down with some of the gardeners in the middle of their tasks, their jobs are never what they talk about. Squatting on a split wood plank while she removes the weeds that have sprouted in the early spring, Pudji says, "When you come here, you love it, it feels so nice." In her plot, she is replanting the legumes and plants she grew up with in Indonesia: turmeric, Thai ginger, pecel, and much more. She's had this plot for 10 years now, the waiting list has around 100 names on it, and it can take a few years for a new plot to open up. For Pudji, gardening is not only therapeutic but also a memorial, as her father and grandfather both farmed and gardened. She first shared the plot, a co-gardening initiative where two people can share a 25-by-25-foot garden and maintain it together. The GPCGA pushes for this shared use as it gives more people access to these plots and gives them a break on the waiting list.

Another alumn of the co-gardening system, Juliette's plot is bursting with colour. The mustard she planted has bloomed, the flowers shining bright yellow. She dislikes the idea of pushing gardening as a specific therapeutic activity; she "plants what she eats." This mentality is shared among many members, primarily using the gardening space as a food source to mitigate the amount spent at supermarkets.

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The harvest is good enough among the group that it is common to see a sharing mentality, offering each other extra seeds. Surplus also gets given out as the amount is too much for one or two persons to consume in time. Talking with Rossana, she wants to advance initiatives donating surplus to local food banks to increase the positive impact on the broader DC area. She's had her plot for around 8 years, and the diversity of the people, in both age and nationality, "We have 20 different nationalities here, that impact what and how things are grown." She's Italian, born in Argentina. After her time in the garden, she reflects on the "Love and respect for nature" the community garden instills.

Through the garden, people have found not only solace from their day-to-day stressors, a place where they can reflect with themselves, but a communal reflection with all members of their community. These mental positives are, of course, valuable, but the tangible benefits are perhaps more noteworthy. This garden has given folks the ability to step away from the hyper-extractive food systems around them and grow the food they want to eat in such abundance that surplus may be given away so that others may also enjoy organically grown local produce. Glover Park is shaped by this space; dog walkers meander through the open park space below the plots while gardeners diligently tend to their areas. What was once a garden of necessity has over time become a place of care, between gardeners, between community members, between residents, and where they call home.

# SAVE THE SEED!

Written by Karen Bowlding

**"Seeds are living links in an unbroken chain reaching back into agriculture's antiquity." - UCFA**

## The Upsurge

Small farmers and home gardeners are saving seeds more than ever! We are now seeing a rebirth of heirloom seed saving. We want *real* food, and with the rise of altered vegetables and fruits, it's hard to find seeded produce, especially watermelon, oranges, and cucumbers in the grocery stores. Besides the loss of nutritional and medical value, we don't know the process of removing seeds and how modifications affect our health. Some of us have even become roadside shoppers from the farmers that travel from the south just to get seeded food.

## Our Why

- Food companies have removed the seed from food to keep us from growing our own.
- Corporations are using predatory capitalization methods to force farmers to buy seeds from them every season, upping expenses.
- Grocery stores sell seedless produce, even those labeled organic.
- Agrochemical companies are acquiring smaller seed companies and patenting the genetics.

We mustn't lose control of our food. Save seeds from previous harvests, regrow, and share. We are the seed keepers!

# CRUCIAN KALLALOO

Popololo, Whitey Mary, Broom Broom (crucial Khalaloo), Pusly (Purslain)

Amaranth

**A conversation with Bonnetta Adeeb and Dale Brown, co-owner of Sejah Farm of the VI, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands**

**Bonnetta:** Tell us your story.

**Dale:** My name is Dale Brown. I am the co-owner of Seija Farm of the Virgin Islands LLC. We have been farming at this location for the last 28 years. The crucian callaloo is somewhat different from all the other callaloos that you know. There's two types of amaranth that is used in the crucian catalog, not one. And sometimes it's more than two varieties of it...one of the amaranth is called Whitey Mary and the other is the wild green amaranth that grows at forage in the wild. there is also a red one, without spine and one with spine.

**Bonnetta:** How do they taste?

**Dale:** Like spinach.

**Bonnetta:** Well tell us about what this crop means to you?

**Dale:** One of those foods that was met here by the slaves that were brought over from Africa. So, when they looked at the land, they saw something that resembled home, and they immediately took to it. And that is the amaranth itself and other foraged shrubs [and herbs] such as the Whitey Mary, Popololo, or purslane. We also call it crane crane or vroom vroom. That is a dried, which we call Callaloo. So, it's used both green and dried to make the original Crucian Callaloo. And of course, what's added to it was okra, maybe a little bit of spinach, meats. And stuff of that nature.

**Bonneta:** What is most significant about this?

**Dale:** It's something that we came with and something we saw, and it benefit us, and we use that as one of our sustenance to maintain ourselves. Now, the Callaloo...as you know, Amaranth is high in protein. And it's one of those crops that you can call a superfood. Our forage was added to it. So, it is supposed to be part of our culinary culture. And it should be noted as that the tradition and culture which was brought actually holds us in that memory or that ancestral memory.

*Continued on next page*

**Bonnetta:** So you would call that one of your ancestral crops.

**Dale:** That would be ancestral crop.

**Bonnetta:** Could you name some more ancestral crops?

**Dale:** Well, here in the Virgin Islands there is the Barbotry. Oh, the moringa! The moringa was brought here, too.

**Bonnetta:** Crane cane? Vroom vroom? What is Popololo?

**Dale:** Popololo is actually a low-growing vine shrub and it's very high in protein that is placed in the pot for the Callaloo. And it gives it that green texture. Vroom vroom is what we call Callaloo Bush, it's a shrub. When it's green, the leaves are very fine, depends on how much irrigation it gets naturally. Sometimes it take 10 shrubs to make that one pot. And then you have another set of broom broom that is left to dry with the leaves on it. And when the leaves are dry, they are beaten off. They're crinkled together and placed in the pot at the time of its preparation. One is fresh and the other one is dry.

**Bonnetta:** What is Whitey Mary?

Dale: Whitey Mary is an amaranth also. And it's a low-growing amaranth that spreads like a vine. And then there's parsley, but the correct term for it is purslane.

**Bonnetta:** Could you describe what it looks like when it\'s growing?

**Dale:** It doesn't grow like the regular amaranth like a stalk. It's leaves are very low.

**Bonnetta Adeeb**: Like a ground cover?

**Dale:** It can, if it left alone.

**Dale:** Amaranth growing in the wild is called Pig-weed.

**Bonetta:** Do people dislike it? 'Cause here they don't like pigweed much.

**Dale:** But pigweed is an emirate. It's not invasive, it's part of the Americas.

**Bonnetta:** I agree. They call it invasive here. And it grows everywhere on every continent.

**Dale:** The indigenous people,70,000 years ago that probably brought it over to America. And they were thriving on it.

**Bonnetta:** Do you use only the leaf or do you use it as a grain?

**Dale:** I don't. You can use it as a grain. It can be used as a green, yes.

**Bonnetta:** So who does that?

**Dale:** Nobody does, but if you know now the benefits of the stalk then yes, you'll add it to your soup.

Learn more about Dale Brown at sejahfarm.com

# RECIPE
# Callaloo

KAL-uh-loo

A thick, spicy mélange of fish, meats, and leafy greens.
This recipe uses Whitey Mary Amaranth

**Ingredients**

- 1 ½ pounds of salt beef, ham bone, and pig's tail
- 1 ½ pounds of fresh fish, cleaned
- 3 pounds of spinach or mixed greens
- 2 crabs , backs removed and cleaned
- 1 corned conch (cured with salt)
- 1 piece of hot pepper
- 12 okras

Soak meat overnight in cold water. In three quarts of water boil meat and conch until tender. Add cleaned fish and cook for a few minutes. Lift out fish with slotted spoon. Remove bones and flake. Return fish to meat mixture, add crabs, and continue to cook.

Wash amaranth greens and put through grinder with okras. Add greens and hot pepper to cooking mixture and boil rapidly for about 30 minutes. The addition of vinegar prevents the appearance of slime, but this is optional. Do not skim with boiling.

Serve with fungi a traditional, savory cornmeal dish similar to polenta, which is a staple in the Virgin Islands. Makes 16 servings, I cup each.

*Note: Callaloo needs the high sodium meats to maintain the distinct flavor of this native favorite. Soaking the meat removes a little of the sodium, however, the amount removed is minute, because the curing process "locks" the sodium to the meat. Conch, another native delicacy, is also high in sodium. Enjoy this dish in moderation is you are watching your sodium content.*

*Source: Native Recipes,* University of the Virgin Islands Cooperative Extension Service

# FROM SOIL TO HEALTH

## A Farmer-Dietitian's Journey Through Pesticides, Seeds, and Sustainability

Written by Chimene Castor

Across the lively fields of Tanzania and Kenya, growing pulses is central to life, shaping identity, culture, and survival itself. As I enter this world as a new farmer and a Registered Dietitian, I have found a deep truth: the story of the soil is reflected in our bodies. My travels through East African farms, combined with my own practical experience, have shown me a complex and urgent story about pesticides, seeds, soil health, and the need to rethink how we grow food, both nearby and far away.

On farms across Tanzania, I watched men move through vibrant green fields, spraying crops beneath the heat of the sun while wearing simple face masks. At first glance, the masks appeared to symbolize protection and responsibility. Yet a closer look revealed a more troubling reality. Many farmers worked without gloves, protective clothing, or eye shields, surrounded by a harsh chemical odor that lingered heavily in the air. These gaps in protection tell a deeper story—one shaped by limited access to safety equipment, inconsistent training, economic hardship, and the normalization of daily chemical exposure in agricultural life. With every spray, pesticides drift beyond the crops, entering the air farmers breathe, settling onto their skin, and seeping into nearby soil and water sources.

What may seem like a routine part of farming quietly becomes a growing public health concern, but we know that over time, repeated exposure accumulates silently, increasing the risk of respiratory illness, skin disorders, neurological complications, reproductive concerns, and chronic disease. The impact extends far beyond the fields themselves, affecting families, neighboring communities, and future generations who depend on these agricultural systems for both food and livelihood.

*Continued on next page*

When I became a Master Gardener, I was filled with excitement and hope. I imagined rows of vibrant vegetables and fresh fruits growing under the Tanzanian sun—food that would nourish my child and me and perhaps even bless neighboring families within our compound. With the opportunity as visiting professor in the College of Agricultural and Food Technology, with an anticipated of a six months stay in Tanzania and knowing that some crops could grow within 75 days, I eagerly purchased seeds and natural fertilizer, convinced that planting a garden would naturally lead to healthier living. But the land quickly humbled me. I learned that gardening is far more than placing seeds into the soil and waiting for growth. Some seeds struggled to sprout, while others withered despite my careful attention. The soil composition, climate conditions, and seed varieties were not compatible, and the results revealed how delicate and interconnected farming truly is. What began as a simple gardening project became a lesson in patience, science, and stewardship. I came to understand that successful farming requires knowledge of soil health, seasonal patterns, water management, biodiversity, and sustainable agricultural practices.

As my understanding of farming deepened, so did my awareness of the hidden public health challenges tied to food production. Beyond the beauty of green fields and harvest baskets lies another reality—one often marked by chemical exposure and environmental risk. I watched farmers spraying crops surrounded by a sharp chemical odor that lingered heavily in the air. Many worked with little more than a face mask, often without gloves, eye protection, or protective clothing. From a public health perspective, pesticide exposure reaches far beyond the crops themselves. Short-term exposure can lead to breathing difficulties, skin irritation, headaches, dizziness, and eye problems. Yet the long-term consequences are even more alarming, with studies linking repeated exposure to increased risks of cancer, hormonal disruption, reproductive complications, and neurological damage. These dangers are especially pronounced in farming communities where protective equipment, safety education, and healthcare access may be limited.

As a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist and educator, this experience transformed the way I think about food systems and health. It reinforced that healthy food is not only about what reaches the plate, but also about how that food is grown, harvested, and sustained. Food systems should nourish communities without compromising the health of farmers, families, or the environment. This journey strengthened my commitment to educating communities about the critical connections between soil quality, environmental health, safe farming practices, and chronic disease prevention. It reminded me that agriculture and health are deeply intertwined. The health of the soil influences the health of crops, the health of communities, and ultimately the health of future generations. As noted with the banana's crop.

*Continued on next page*

This experience revealed that agriculture is not simply about combining inputs, but about understanding interactions. Soil is not an inert medium; it is a living ecosystem composed of microorganisms that play essential roles in nutrient cycling, plant immunity, and root development. The introduction of pesticide-treated seeds may disrupt these microbial communities, limit nutrient availability and weakening plant growth. Even when nutrients are present, plants may struggle to access them if the biological systems that support uptake are compromised. Environmental stressors such as heat, inconsistent rainfall, and pest pressure may further intensify these effects. What became clear is that chemical protection alone does not guarantee plant resilience, and that successful farming requires a systems-based approach.

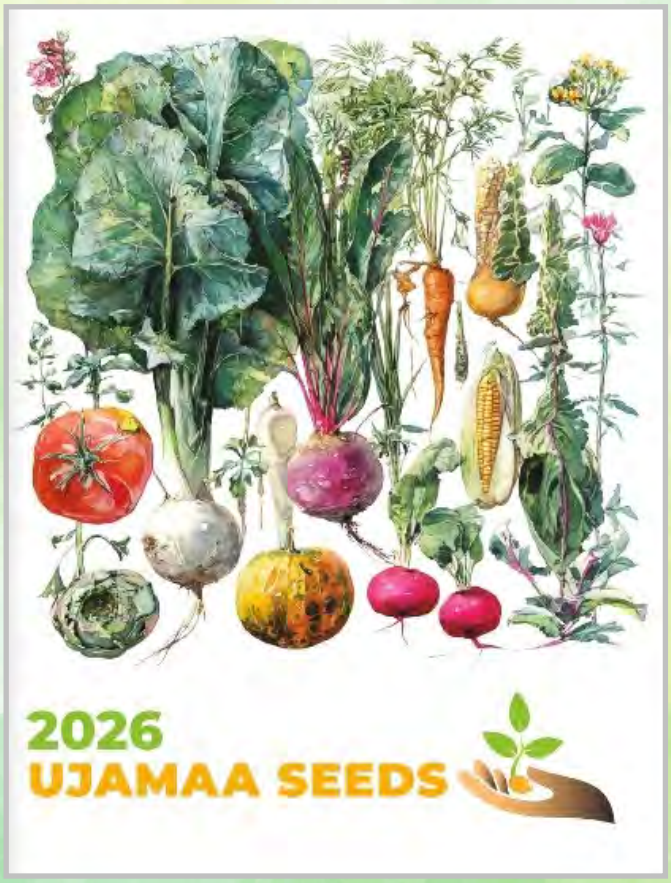
## Health of the Soil

The health of the soil is the foundation upon which agriculture—and ultimately human health—depends. Soil degradation, driven in part by repeated chemical exposure, can reduce microbial diversity, disrupt ecological balance, and increase reliance on synthetic fertilizers. Over time, this creates a cycle of dependency that is both economically and environmentally unsustainable. In regions already facing climate variability, protecting soil health is essential not only for crop productivity, but for long-term food security and resilience.

From a nutrition perspective, the implications are profound. The concept of food as medicine begins in the soil. Nutrient-rich soils produce nutrient-dense foods, while degraded soils yield crops with diminished nutritional value. This contributes to micronutrient deficiencies, often referred to as hidden hunger, which remains a significant global health challenge. Additionally, pesticide residues in food raise concerns about cumulative exposure and long-term health risks. As dietitians, we must expand our lens beyond individual dietary choices to include the systems that shape food quality at its source. Amid these challenges, there is a growing need to reclaim and strengthen sustainable farming practices rooted in indigenous knowledge. Across Tanzania and Kenya, traditional agricultural methods such as crop rotation, intercropping, organic composting, and botanical pest control have supported communities for generations. These practices emphasize biodiversity, ecological balance, and soil regeneration. Integrating these approaches with modern scientific knowledge offers a pathway toward more resilient and sustainable food systems—systems that not only produce food but also protect health and the environment.

Moving forward, addressing these challenges requires an integrated and collaborative approach. Farmers must have access to education on safe pesticide use as well as sustainable alternatives that prioritize soil health. Protective equipment must be made accessible and culturally appropriate to reduce occupational exposure risks. Policies must support environmentally responsible farming practices while safeguarding both farmers and consumers. Most importantly, agriculture, nutrition, and public health must work together to create systems that prioritize long-term well-being over short-term gains.

There is an African proverb that reminds us, “Unless the lion tells the story, the hunter will always be the hero.” The image of farmers spraying crops while wearing masks is more than a moment—it is a story that must be told. It is a story of resilience and adaptation, but also one that reveals critical gaps in knowledge, resources, and systemic support. My own experience, in which only two of twelve plants survived, serves as a powerful reminder that soil health, farming practices, and human health are deeply interconnected. If we are to build a future where food truly nourishes communities, we must begin with the foundation. Healthy soil leads to healthy crops. Healthy crops lead to healthy people. And ultimately, sustainable agriculture is not just about feeding the world—it is about sustaining life.

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SPECIAL INSERT

# SEEDS & CULTURE

## Rural and Urban Agriculture United

2026 UJAMAA COOPERATIVE FARMING ALLIANCE CONFERENCE

University of the District of Columbia
March 6-7, 2026 Washington D.C

# TWO BRANCHES - ONE ROOT

## Symbiotic Relationships Between Rural & Urban Agriculture

Rural and urban agriculture form two vital halves of a sustainable food system. Together, they bridge the divide between producers and consumers, create mutual learning networks, and cultivate food sovereignty across both countryside and city landscapes.

1. **Economic Interdependence ■**
   Urban markets fuel rural farms through farmers' markets and co-ops, while rural inputs sustain urban growers. Together they create shared prosperity and local jobs.

2. **Knowledge & Innovation Exchange ■**
   Urban centers foster agricultural technology innovation adaptable to rural areas, while rural wisdom in soil health and biodiversity strengthens city growing practices.

3. **Environmental & Ecological Synergy ■**
   Urban composting supports rural soil fertility, while pollinator corridors and green spaces link ecosystems for shared environmental benefits.

4. **Cultural & Social Connections ■**
   Urban farms celebrate rural foodways and heirloom crops, while rural traditions are uplifted through urban advocacy for food justice and cultural preservation.

5. **Building Resilient Food Systems ■**
   Urban agriculture ensures local fresh food supply in crises, and rural farms maintain staple crops and seeds—together fostering resilience and sustainability.

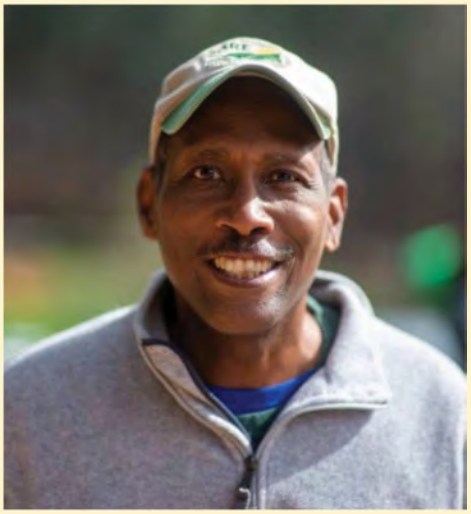
**Conclusion: Unity in Growth ■**

Rural and urban agriculture are partners in a shared ecosystem. Their collaboration ensures equity, sustainability, and resilience for communities from city rooftops to countryside fields.

# SEEDS & CULTURE

## Rural and Urban Agriculture United

# 2026 Keynote & Session Speakers



**Brennan Washington**
Phoenix Farms
Southern SARE

Brennan Washington, co-owner and founder of Phoenix Gardens ( *https://phoenixgardens.net*).Brennan and his wife, Gwendolyn, built Phoenix Gardens as a diversified, Certified Naturally Grown farm and education hub—grounded in sustainable production, community learning, and farmer-to-farmer support through workshops, field days, and training.

Brennan's leadership is a powerful match for our theme, "Rural and Urban Agriculture United," because his work bridges the full ecosystem that makes "unity" real: farms, markets, universities, and farmer-serving organizations.
As the 1890 Land-Grant Liaison and Southeastern Outreach Coordinator for Southern SARE, he has helped connect limited-resource and minority farmers to research-backed tools, funding opportunities, and regional networks—exactly the kind of cross-regional collaboration that strengthens both rural producers and urban growers.
Brennan has served as a mentor and program manager for the Georgia Organics Farmer Mentoring Program and continues to provide guidance to new and beginning farmers. He was the principal architect and visionary behind Southeastern Regional Food Business Center. Mr. Washington had a long career in information technology management prior to starting his agricultural career.

His partnerships and service across organizations such as Georgia Organics, the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (SSAWG), and farmer-market leadership efforts reflect a career devoted to growing practical pathways—from production to markets to mentorship—so communities can thrive on locally grown food

**Vivien Sansour**
Palestine Heirloom Seed Library

Vivien Sansour is the founder of the Palestine Heirloom Seed Library. Vivien's work is internationally recognized for recovering threatened heirloom seeds and safeguarding the cultural stories they carry—returning seeds, memory, and foodways to the people who have long stewarded them.

Vivien Sansour's seed-saving work is a powerful fit for this conference because it demonstrates—at a global scale—how agriculture is inseparable from culture, and how seed stewardship strengthens community resilience in the face of disruption. The Palestine Heirloom Seed Library (https://viviensansour.com/Palestine-Heirloom)is dedicated to "recovering" heritage seeds and their stories and putting them back into people's hands, affirming seed sovereignty as both a practical agricultural strategy and a living cultural practice.

Vivien's message resonates especially deeply: seed protection depends on relationships across landscapes—farmers, gardeners, seedkeepers, and educators sharing knowledge and seed across rural fields and urban growing spaces.

Vivien's example reminds us that resilient food systems are built when rural and urban communities collaborate to steward seed, preserve heritage, and keep local adaptation alive—one variety, one story, and one growing season at a time.

**Bonnetta Adeeb**
STEAM ONWARD/Ujamaa
Cooperative Farming Alliance

**Kathy Anderson**
STEAM ONWARD/Ujamaa
Cooperative Farming Alliance

**Florence Anoruo**
South Carolina State University
Orangeburg, SC

**Chanda Robinson Banks**
Strategic Seed Stewardship

**Alician Batts**
Rooted East Collective
East Knoxville, TN

**Reji Blackwood**
DMV Seed Commons
Ira Wallace Seed School

**Antonio Brazelton**
Jackie Joyner-Kersee Food
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**Collie Graddick**
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SEEDS & CULTURE:
Rural and Urban Agriculture United

*Thank You*

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# 2026 UCFA Conference Sessions

Hibiscus & Gullah Geechee Culture - Alissia Matthews

Policy Pathways for Climate Solutions, Beginning with Seed - Julie Dawson

Seed Sanctuary Toolkit: *Hands-On Native Grass-land Seed Collection, Cleaning, and Propagation*-Lotus Chaney

Soup the Stock of the People: *Sharing, & Reimagining Black Foodways* - D'Real Graham

Growing Seed for Seed Companies - Edmund Frost, Ira Wallace, Nate Kleinman, Bonnetta Adeeb

Cultivating Equity in Agriculture: *Advancing Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers through Comprehensive Research and Youth Empowerment* - Kenisha Thomas

Non-Binary Botany - Reggie Blackwood, Chris Keeve

Reclaiming Ancestral Knowledge: *Reconnecting with Wild Foods*- Candise Jordan

Issues in Pest Management - Nate Kleinman, Antonio Brazelton, Julie Dawson, Tomia MacQueen, Elenor Lopez

Farming in Ubuntu: *Collective Land Stewardship, Food Sovereignty, and Community Care* - Henrietta Isaboke, Brennan Standel

Floriculture Is Food System Work *(Even When It Isn't Edible)* - Dee Hall Goodwin

From Fire to Fertility: *Biochar, Soil Healing, and the Wisdom of Our Ancestors* - Dr. Florence Anoruo

Higher Education Opportunities in Agriculture -Alexis Yamashita, Eric Bishop von Wettberg, Antonio Brazelton

The Imperial Presumptions of Patents: *Intellectual Property Regimes, Crop Diversity & Habitual Colonizers* - Chanda Robinson Banks, Garrett Gaddy-Lovelace, Alexis Yamashita

Farm to Postpartum: *Reclaiming the Seeded Lineage Between Land, Birth, and Nourishment* - Femeika Elliott

Herbs 101: *Rooted in Resilience, Flavor, and Tradition* -Nyema Clark

Practicing Collective Economics in the Food System: *The Ujamaa Bartering Market* - Alician Batts, Thomas Ruggles, Kalil White

The Return to African Indigo: *The Story of a Sacred Blue* - Bernard Singleton

Government Seedbanks: *Their Importance, Accessibility, Problematic Nature, & How to Make Them Better* - Nathan Kleinman, Vivien Sansour

Kool Kids Grow: *A Youth Perspective To Farming Small And Dreaming BIG* - Kendall Rae Johnson

Microgreens as Medicine: *A Practical Urban Growing Workshop for Community Health & Resilience* - Quandra Gray

The West End Free Market: *Creating Access and Abundance in Durham* - Abijah Gattis

Strengthening Rural and Urban Agriculture Connections- Bonnetta Adeeb, Karen Washington, Nyema Clark, Collie Graddick, Tomia MacQueen, Moderator

Land Access - D'Real Graham, Leah Penniman, Femeika Elliott, Alma Rocio Segoviano Basurto, Moderator

Building a Black Natural Materials Economy: *A Visioning Lab* - Tóbi Clement , Yoshi Jackson

Putting Up the Harvest - Yvonne Brown

Seed Farming - Tomia MacQueen

STEM in the Garden - Antonio Brazelton, Anna Gilbert Muhammad, Diane Fisher

Plant Fibers, Dyes & Pigments - Zaneta Trent, Bernard Singleton, Yoshi Jackson, Tóbi Clement, , Kathy Anderson, Moderator

Youth Farming Education - Kenya Nicholas, Tomia MacQueen, Dara Cooper, Neshima Vitale-Penniman

Black Seed Keeping as Cultural Preservation, Resistance, & Innovation - Bonnetta Adeeb, Carla Thomas McGinnis

Diversifying Your Farm Income and Offerings - Taykiera Hyman, Afraka Yates

# 2026 UCFA Conference Sessions

**LAND ACCESS**
D'Real Graham, Leah Penniman, Femeika Elliott, Alma Rocio Segoviano Basurto, Moderator

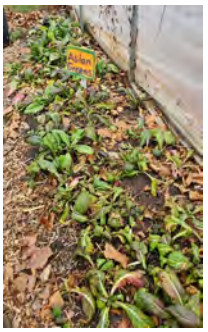
**PLANT FIBERS, DYES & PIGMENTS**
Zaneta Trent, Bernard Singleton, Yoshi Jackson,
Tóbi Clement, , Kathy Anderson, Moderator

**THE IMPERIAL PRESUMPTIONS OF PATENTS: INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY REGIMES, CROP DIVERSITY & HABITUAL**
COLONIZERS - Chanda Robinson Banks,
Garrett Gaddy-Lovelace, Alexis Yamashita

**FARMING IN UBUNTU**
Collective Land Stewardship, Food Sovereignty,
and Community Care—Henrietta Isaboke, Brennan Standel

**PALESTINE HEIRLOOM SEED LIBRARY**
Vivien Sansour

# The 2026 Conference Farm Tour



## 2026 UCFA Seeds & Culture Conference

# A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Written by Emile Coumans

I had the wonderful opportunity to attend the 2026 Ujamaa Seed and Culture conference which was held from the 6th and 7th of march at the University District of Columbia Lamond-Riggs campus. Throughout my time as a student and volunteer, I had an incredible time learning from a variety of speakers and topics. Ujamaa Cooperative Farming Alliance has taught me a lot, and I fully support their mission. At the start during the opener, one of the founders of UCFA, Bonita spoke about how during covid 19, they started to help communities which I found meaningful because especially in times of hardship, helping out others in your community can make a large impact even if it is the slightest action.

Following, there was a keynote speaker: Brennan Washington, who spoke about his personal life and significant agricultural and farming topics. His mission is to work with farmers all over the Southeast US and provide aid such as funding grant programs to producers. I would also like to discuss during my time at the conference how I learned about the role of community. In one of the speaker sessions, Afro-ecology & 16 Street Green Program, led by Xavier Brown, he talked about his role in helping youth communities through the way of agriculture which I found impactful and meaningful. Community can be usually thought of helping those on a local level and those around your area but on a deeper and larger scale, agricultural aid within communities can be presented on a global level from different ethnic communities.

Though on the deepest level, community can bring people from no matter what background together and have an impact on those contributing to it because not only are communities a way to bond with other individuals, but it is a way to share common interest with a passion. Overall, my role as a volunteer was meaningful and fulfilling. I was able to meet so many amazing individuals and partake in various roles that helped those attending this conference. I did enjoy this conference because even as a student who is not fully focused on the environment, it has taught me the importance of being together and the level to which seeds can mean to people.

It was a gateway for me to explore a new domain that I previously may not have necessarily thought about. Over the span of only two days, I learned so much and can now apply what I learned to the real world, whether that is helping out communities, planting seeds and growing a garden, all of what I learned has taught me valuable life skills I can now keep for the rest of my education and life. What was wholesome and what makes Ujamaa such a wonderful organization is that I was gifted a bag with various UCFA merchandise as well which meant a lot. Ujamaa was wonderful in organizing this conference with so many inspirational individuals.

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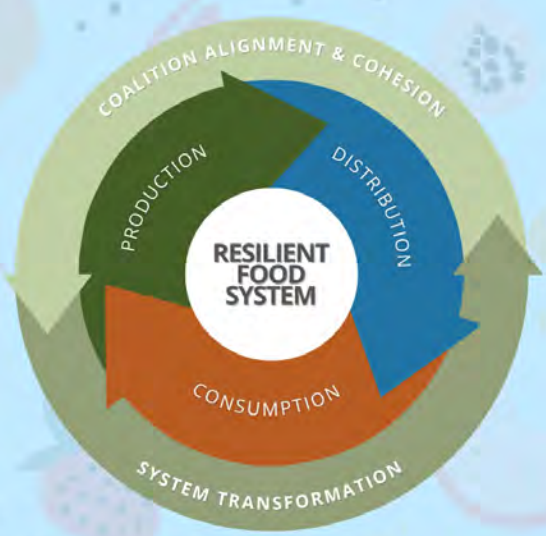


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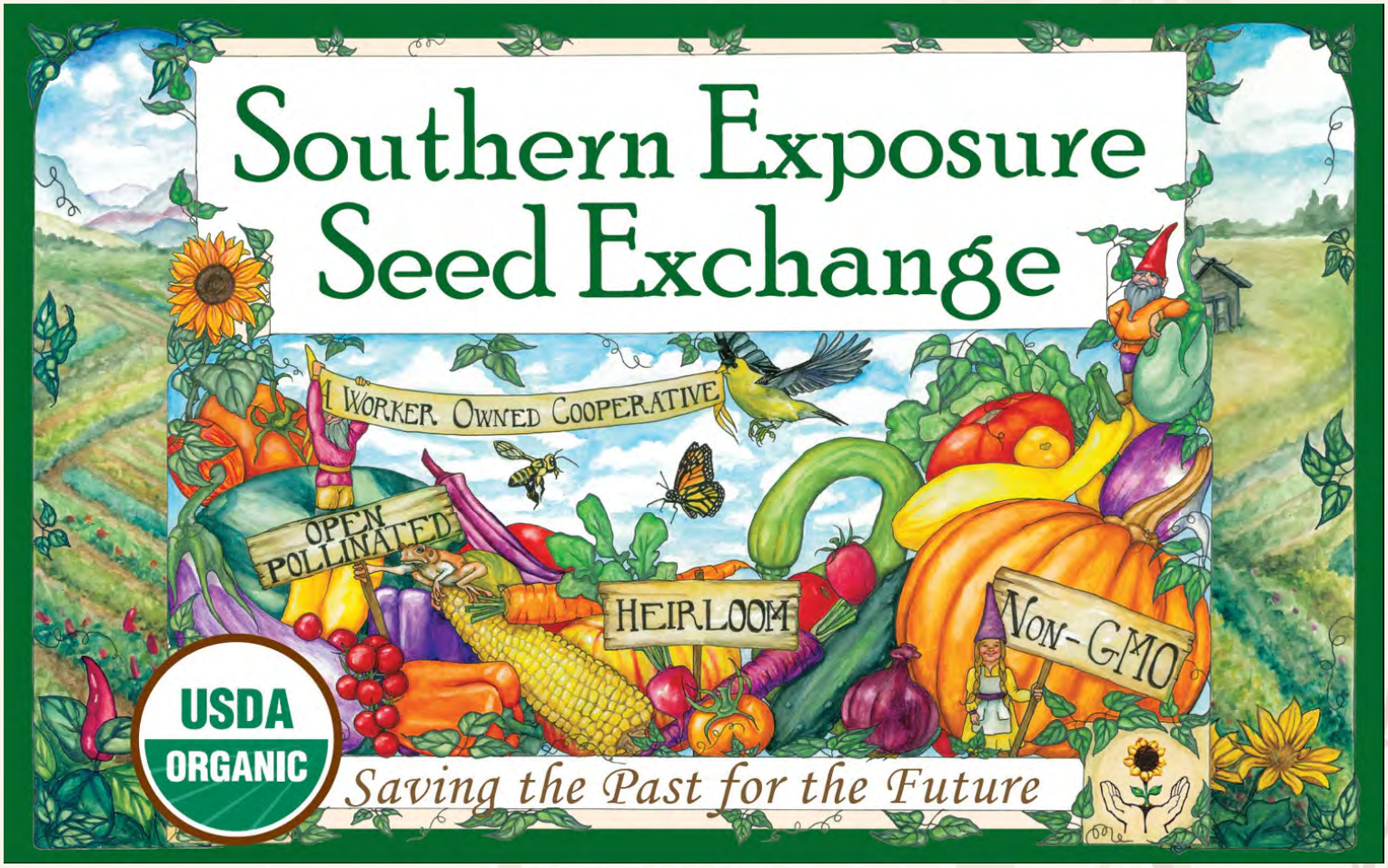
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