

The Minority AgVocate™

DIGITAL MAGAZINE

Welcoming Our New Team Members!

Three Outstanding Individuals
Join the Freedmen Heirs
Foundation Team

Resources for You

Learn about
Events, Funding
Opportunities,
and More!

APRIL AGRIPRENEUR SPOTLIGHT

KENDALL RAE JOHNSON

She's a Nine Year Old
Young Visionary Shaping
the Future of Agriculture

A Perfect Storm

U.S. Farmers Are
Facing a Black Swan
Moment

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Freedmen Heirs Highlights

Welcoming Our New Team Members at Freedmen Heirs Foundation



We are thrilled to introduce the powerhouse talent joining the Freedmen Heirs Foundation team! These mission-driven professionals bring a wealth of experience, fresh energy, and deep commitment to advancing equity and innovation in agriculture.



Sharlene Brown

Director of Financial Innovation & Impact

Say hello to Sharlene Brown, our dynamic new Director of Financial Innovation & Impact! A certified financial health coach with a global track record, Sharlene joins us with decades of experience in mobilizing capital for change. She formerly led the Racial Equity, Economics, Finance, and Sustainability (REEFS) program at Croatan Institute and has held executive and senior roles with the Partnership for Responsible Financial Inclusion (PRFI), Oikocredit-USA, and Grameen Foundation.

From stewarding investment portfolios exceeding \$35 million to advancing micro-finance projects across sub-Saharan Africa and Middle-East/North Africa, Sharlene is a powerhouse of financial knowledge and equity-focused action. Her immigrant roots fuel her drive to uplift communities through access, education, and opportunity.

Sharlene is armed with an MBA and a BA in Economics & Africana Studies—plus elite certifications from Tufts and Harvard University.

Lori Hylton

Director of Strategic Programming

Joining us as Director of Strategic Programming, Lori Hylton brings a unique blend of strategic insight, community engagement, and financial wellness expertise. A certified financial health coach, Lori has shaped impactful programming everywhere she's been—from Croatan Institute to Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) and the Synod of the Northeast PC (USA).

In 2020, she launched *Financial Health in the Pews*, a bold pilot program bridging faith and financial literacy. Lori's commitment to capacity-building and inclusive economic development aligns beautifully with our mission at FHF.

Lori holds a BA in Political Science and Africana Studies, and has completed MA coursework in Urban Affairs at Hunter College.



Eva Mazura

Project Manager

Rounding out our team is Eva Mazura, our new Project Manager who brings organizational skills and a fresh perspective to our project portfolio.

Eva is also a certified Financial Health Coach and previously served at Croatan Institute, helping to shape equitable pathways forward. Eva has an insightful background in anthropology, community development, and social equity, reflecting her depth as both a scholar and strategist.

Eva holds BA in Anthropology with a minor in Community and International Development.



As we welcome Sharlene, Lori, and Eva, we are filled with excitement about the fresh perspectives and innovative ideas they will contribute to our team. Their combined talents and diverse backgrounds will strengthen our ability to support Black farmers and further advocate for their economic well-being.

Join us in welcoming these remarkable individuals to the Freedmen Heirs Foundation team! We look forward to achieving new heights together while continuing to enhance our mission.

Agricultural Insights

A Perfect Storm

U.S. Farmers Are Facing a Black Swan Moment

Written By: Seanicaa Edwards Herron,
FHF Founder and Executive Director

The U.S. agri-food sector stands at a precarious crossroads in 2025. We are now living through a period marked by federal funding freezes, the rollback of long-fought-for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, volatile trade relations, and the abrupt cancellation of contracts and cooperative agreements. These challenges are not

isolated—they are compounding. For U.S. farmers—especially Black and other historically marginalized producers—this is not just a tough season. This is a slow-motion black swan event.

A black swan, by definition, is a rare and unpredictable event with looming consequences and normally, it is only fully understood in hindsight, once the damage has been done. However, I'm sounding the alarm now! What we are witnessing across the agriculture sector fits the description alarmingly well.

The Fragility of Farm Economics is Being Laid Bare

Let's start with the basics. Farmers are hanging on by a thread. Most small and mid-sized farms in the U.S. are not getting rich. They are trying to survive. Operating margins are thin, liquidity is limited, and many rely heavily on federal and nonprofit support to stay afloat.

Today, that support is evaporating. Key programs authorized under the Inflation Reduction Act and critical USDA equity initiatives are frozen, stalled,



or cancelled altogether. Agencies meant to provide stability and innovation are being quietly dismantled from within, with far-reaching implications. Technical assistance pipelines are drying up and promised funds are increasingly delayed, and in many cases, unlikely to materialize.

Black farmers—already systematically shut out of USDA programs for generations—now face another era of neglect, this time wrapped in bureaucratic silence. The warning signs are clear; without urgent intervention, we risk another devastating wave of Black land loss along with precipitously declining farm numbers. It's déjà vu.

Executive Orders Are Dismantling DEI in Agriculture

What began as an anti-DEI political posture has now grown into a full-scale rollback of equity-centered progress in agriculture. Across multiple state and federal agencies, executive orders have triggered audits, program closures, and a chilling effect on any work explicitly focused on racial equity or systemic repair.

Many nonprofits are reducing staff due to decreasing philanthropic and private sector support. Trusted institutions that once anchored Black and other minority farmers in their ag ecosystems are scaling back—not because the need has lessened, but because the political cost has grown too high.

For Black and other underserved producers, this translates to fewer seats at the table, fewer tools in the toolbox, and a resurgence of the same exclusionary dynamics that defined much of the 20th century. We are moving backwards and quickly at that.

Tariffs, Trade Tensions, and Climate Change are Disrupting More Than Markets

Farmers today are also contending with global forces beyond their control. The reintroduction

and escalation of tariffs with major trade partners like China, Canada, and Mexico are again putting strain on export-heavy commodities. Not to mention, our key trading partners are retaliating with their own tariffs, shrinking the playing field for U.S. farmers on a global scale. Additionally, the rising cost of production inputs and equipment have resulted in a profitability equation that simply no longer works for many producers.

**Black farmers—
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On the other end of the spectrum, nature is delivering its own set of blows. Climate change is no longer a distant threat—it's here. Farmers are contending with increasingly erratic weather, making growing and harvest seasons less predictable.

These shifts will hit Black and small-scale producers particularly hard as trade instability and unpredictable weather patterns will limit progress before it starts or opportunities arise.

Broken Promises and Cancelled Contracts

At the corporate level, the agriculture sector has also seen a wave of quietly shelved DEI commitments and unfulfilled pledges made in the wake of George Floyd's murder. Several major food companies and agribusinesses that once made public declarations to source from Black farmers or invest in underserved communities are walking them back. Targeted legal pressure and political risk have made "diversity" a liability in some boardrooms, which is shameful.

For farmers who adjusted production to meet the demands of those commitments, invested in certifications, and expanded operations, this abrupt shift is more than betrayal—it is a breach of trust. Some farmers will lose money while others will lose their farms and their livelihoods.

Why This Is a Black Swan Event

No single challenge outlined above is unprecedented. But their simultaneity, combined with the rapid dismantling of institutional supports and rising political hostility toward equity, make this moment a unique inflection point. Again, I will boldly proclaim that the black swans are circling! This is not a moment to play it safe. This is the moment to lead.

If we fail to act now—if we allow fear, distractions or fatigue dictate our responses—we will look back and realize we missed the signal in the noise. We must not allow the silence of institutions to become the silencing of our values. The black swans are circling. Will we respond with boldness—or will we rationalize our inaction only after the damage is done?

In Case You Missed It

Recent Podcasts and Webinars



Check out the of the latest episodes of the WUKY Local Global Leaders Podcast featuring Ashley C. Smith, the Executive Director and Co-Founder of Black Soil KY. This episode is a must-listen for anyone interested in leadership, agriculture, sustainability, and social justice.

Host Aberer Sikder and Ashley sat down at Black Soil KY's new fulfillment center at 820 Lane Allen Road, Suite 176 in Lexington, Kentucky to discuss her journey as a leader and advocate of Kentucky's Black farmers, chefs, makers, and agribusiness owners.

LISTEN NOW



Last month, Freedmen Heirs Foundation kicked off our Farming Forward webinar series, designed to encourage collaboration and networking among farmers, landowners, and agribusinesses by offering valuable information and resources from industry experts.

Our first session, titled "Farmer Well-Being Beyond Resiliency," featured guest speakers Michelle Hughes and Laura Del Prete from the National Young Farmers

Coalition. They showcased their Cultivemos program, a collaborative effort aimed at enhancing the well-being of agricultural producers, workers, and their families. Additionally, they shared self-care strategies to help farmers manage the challenges associated with farming. Click below to access the recording.

WATCH NOW



Listen to Innovation Forum's Podcast with our Founder and Executive Director, Seanicaa Edwards Herron. She joins Diana Kim to discuss the challenges minority farmers face with financing and land ownership, and the innovative solutions emerging. This discussion on systemic barriers and equity in food systems is a must-listen. Tune In below!

LISTEN NOW

Agripreneur Spotlight

Kendall Rae Johnson

Young Visionary Shaping the Future of Agriculture

At just nine years old, Kendall Rae Johnson is already making history as the youngest certified farmer in the United States. Born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, Kendall inspires a new generation to embrace farming, entrepreneurship, and sustainability. What began as a small patio garden with her late great-grandmother, Laura “Kate” Williams, has blossomed into a thriving urban farm and a movement that inspires youth through agriculture.

Her journey has influenced the development of her distinctive farming operation, which is dedicated to cultivating fresh produce and fostering educational experiences for all. Each year, Kendall’s farm in Atlanta continues to grow and thrive, alongside her non-profit, Kendall Rae’s Green Heart, which has empowered hundreds of students and mentored dozens of young entrepreneurs.

A Trailblazing Advocate for Youth in Agriculture

Kendall is not just a farmer – she’s a force for change. As the USDA’s first-ever National Urban Agriculture Youth Ambassador, she travels the country to promote urban farming, food sustainability, and youth empowerment.



Located in the heart of Atlanta, Georgia, Kendall’s farm, aGrowKulture, specializes in fresh, local produce such as collard greens, cucumbers, peppers, and tomatoes. Her collard greens, a tribute to her late great-grandmother’s legacy, are consistently a top seller. In addition to fresh produce, she also creates products like honey and marinara sauce.

Officially established when Kendall became Georgia's youngest certified farmer at the age of six, her operation now serves as a platform for education. Through her Kool Kids Grow series, she empowers young people to learn about farming and gain a deeper understanding of where their food comes from.

Kendall has been featured on major platforms like Good Morning America, Ellen DeGeneres, CNN, and Sesame Street, amplifying her message of youthful entrepreneurship and sustainable farming. Her efforts have caught the attention of influential leaders such as former First Lady Michelle Obama and Vice President Kamala Harris. In 2023, Georgia declared March 23rd "Kendall Rae Johnson Day" in recognition of her impact on agriculture and youth empowerment.

Growing a Legacy of Empowerment

Kendall's mission is simple: inspire young people to grow their food, get involved in agriculture, and understand where their food comes from. Her farm is not just about producing food – it's about creating a space where the community can come together to learn, connect, and grow.

"I want to make farming fun and accessible for everyone," says Kendall. "My farm is a place where kids can come and get their hands dirty, learn something new, and realize that they, too, can make a difference."

Kendall's innovative approach to sustainable urban farming features a rainwater catchment system for water conservation and a carefully designed farm layout that enables community elders to help. She also makes farming fun and accessible for families through her Krazy Good Tomato Sauce – Easy Kid Cooking initiative and her children's book, *I'm Growing Places*.

The Future of Agriculture

Despite her young age, Kendall is already shaping the future of agriculture. "Farming is about learning and growing – literally," she says. By focusing on connecting with her community and mentoring youth, Kendall is leading the way for future generations to take ownership of their food systems, communities, and the environment.

Her advice to other aspiring farmers and entrepreneurs? "Start small and don't be afraid to try! Find a mentor, ask questions, and believe in yourself."

"I want to make farming fun and accessible for everyone!"



Follow Kendall's Journey below:

Website: www.agrowkulture.com

Instagram: @aGROWKulture

Agricultural Insights

Driving Regenerative Progress

Farmer Inclusion and Sustainability at the Future of Food and Beverage Forum

Written By: Diana Kim, **Innovation Forum**

Innovation Forum is an independent London-based company with a mission to help make sustainability mainstream in business. We do this through industry-leading business conferences and bespoke stakeholder engagement projects that address the biggest challenges in sustainability.

Our debate-driven, focused events address challenges in food systems and works with organizations such as Freedmen Heirs Foundation to deliver these events collaboratively.

The Future of Food and Beverage Forum

We are looking forward to returning to Minneapolis for our flagship Future of Food and Beverage USA Forum on May 28th-29th. This is a key conference focused on advancing sustainability and innovation in the food industry. Bringing together experts, businesses, and stakeholders, the event will explore critical topics such as regenerative agriculture, supply chain transparency, and sustainable sourcing.

We understand that only farmers can change farming. Across the two days, we will ensure farmers are included in the discussions as panelists and audience members. We saw the importance of farmer inclusion last year, and we intend to do the same in May.

Collaborating with Freedmen Heirs Foundation

As agriculture continues to evolve with emerging technologies and opportunities, it is essential to recognize and include the diverse voices of farmers in the conversation. Achieving true regenerative progress requires collaboration, innovation, and a commitment to sustainability at all levels.



Join the Conversation

If you would like to take part in the discussion, please join us at Innovation Forum's Future of Food and Beverage Conference. You can find full details here. As a member of Freedmen Heirs Foundation's community, use code **FH10** for an exclusive 10% discount on conference passes.



That's why we have partnered with the Freedmen Heirs Foundation, an organization with deep-rooted connections to farming communities that are often underrepresented in mainstream agricultural networks. The organization's boots-on-the-ground relationships with farmers provide a crucial bridge, allowing us to engage with those directly shaping the future of sustainable farming.

Through this partnership, we are fostering discussions on how large-scale agriculture can support farmers in balancing profit, regeneration, and nature. Seanicaa will be moderating these conversations, offering insights into practical strategies that align economic viability with environmental stewardship. Together, we aim to drive meaningful progress in regenerative agriculture, ensuring that all farmers – regardless of scale or background – have access to the tools and knowledge needed for a more sustainable future.

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In Person...



And **Online.**

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Footprint Assessment
Today!



For More Info:
marketing@blacksoilky.com

 **BLACK SOIL[™]**
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

Upcoming Events

Virtual and In-Person Events

17
MAY



25
MAY



28
29
MAY



📍 Lexington, KY

You're invited to Strawberry Daze Festival on **Saturday, May 17, 2025**, from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM. In partnership with Cleav's Family Market, start your Kentucky growing season off right with a bucket of fresh strawberries!

This free and open to the public event welcomes families and households to shop, network and celebrate Kentucky agriculture.

GET TICKETS

📍 Lexington, KY

Youth and their families are invited to a day filled with activities, interactive demos and FUN! Join Farmer Dereck Oldham and Omega Star Hobby Farm on **Saturday, May 24, 2025**, from 10:00 AM-4:00 PM. Lunch, activities and FUN are included at the 2025 Youth Ag Day.

This event is **FREE** and open to the public. Registration is required for admission. Please register each guest in group. Youth must be chaperoned and under the care of a parent, guardian or adult chaperone with organization/agency/group.

GET TICKETS

📍 Minneapolis, MN

We look forward to attending **Innovation Forum's Future of Food and Beverage USA Forum** in Minneapolis from **May 28 to 29, 2025**! This two-day business conference will bring together leading brands and key stakeholders to identify the main areas of opportunity and innovation within the food and beverage industry. We will assess how we can collectively drive resilience in next-generation farming.

Would you like to join us? Registration is now open! Use code FH10 for a 10% discount and benefit from the early bird discount! Click below to register.

REGISTER

Upcoming Events

5
6
JUNE



Vidalia, LA

Join the National Black Growers Council (NBGC) as they kick off their 2025 Model Farm Field Day tours. The first stop will be on **June 5-6, 2025**, at Vidalia Conference & Convention Center in Vidalia, Louisiana.

This event is hosted by Willis Nelson, a third generation farmer of Nelson Farms. The farm specializes in corn, cotton, rice and soybeans. Click below to learn more about this event and to register.

LEARN MORE

7
10
SEPT



Lexington, KY

Mark your calendars for the 2nd Annual State of Soil Conference, hosted by Black Soil KY. The conference is scheduled for **September 7-10, 2025**, in Lexington, Kentucky. Registration is currently open and will remain available until August 25, 2025.

Register now to join this impactful event.

REGISTER

Hosting an Upcoming Event?

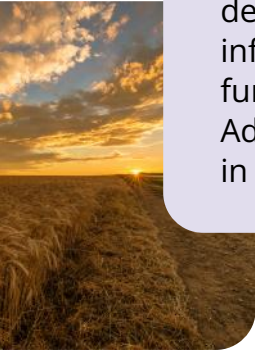
Are you hosting an agricultural event that promises to inspire and engage?

Share your upcoming event with us for an opportunity to be featured in our digital magazine! Whether it's a groundbreaking conference, a field day, a thought-provoking webinar, or an innovative workshop, we want to spotlight your efforts to bring the agricultural community together.

Join us in cultivating knowledge and connections by submitting your event details today.

SUBMIT EVENT

Farmer Resources



Welcome to our Farmer Resources section, designed to provide essential tools and information, including reports, programs, and funding opportunities for farming initiatives. Additionally, explore employment opportunities in various roles within the agriculture sector.

Reports



April Lending Rates

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides loans to agricultural producers to help start or expand their farming operations, purchase equipment and storage structures, or meet cash flow needs. Click below to view this month's interest rates for loans offered through FSA.

EXPLORE

USDA World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) Report

The World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) report is prepared and released by the World Agricultural Outlook Board (WAOB). This report is released monthly and provides annual forecasts for supply and use of U.S. and world wheat, rice,

coarse grains, oilseeds, and cotton. The report also covers U.S. supply and use of sugar, livestock & meat, poultry, eggs, milk, and dairy products; as well as Mexico's supply and use of sugar. Read April's report by clicking the link below.

VIEW REPORT

USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) Crop Production Report

This monthly report contains crop production data for the U.S., including acreage, area harvested, and yield. The report also contains a monthly weather summary, a monthly agricultural summary, and an analysis of precipitation and the degree of departure from the normal precipitation map for the month.

VIEW REPORT

Secretary of Agriculture Briefings on the WASDE and Crop Production Reports

The WASDE and Crop Production briefings can be watched every month beginning at 12:05 pm ET on NASS' YouTube Channel. The briefings are streamed live just moments after the reports are made public.

WATCH NOW

Farmer Resources

Funding Opportunities

SMART Broiler Program Evaluation

Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research (FFAR) is requesting RFPs to evaluate the success of their SMART Broiler Program. RFP's are due **April 30, 2025**. Click below to learn more.

[EXPLORE](#)

BFF Rapid Response Fund

Apply now through **April 30, 2025**, for the Fall cycle of the Black Farmer Fund (BFF) Rapid Response Fund. Click the link below to find out more and submit your application.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Root and Bloom Fellowship

Applications are open now through **May 14, 2025**, for the National Young Farmers Coalition Root and Bloom Fellowship. Learn more about the application process and apply by clicking below.

[EXPLORE](#)

Movement CARE Fund

Communities First Is accepting applications for its Movement Community, Assistance, Regeneration, Endurance (CARE) Fund. The deadline to apply for this opportunity is **May 16, 2025**. Click below to learn more.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Emergency Commodity Assistance Program

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has recently announced the issuance of up to \$10 billion directly to agricultural producers through the Emergency Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP) for the 2024 crop year. This funding will be awarded through the Farm Service Agency (FSA). Applications are due **August 15, 2025**. Read the full press release and learn how to apply by clicking Learn More.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Employment Opportunities

[Black Belt Food Corridor Coordinator](#)

[Development Manager](#)

[Director of Brand Partnerships](#)

[Director of Government and Industry Relations](#)

[Manager of Government Affairs, Regulatory Policy](#)

[Sr. Sustainability Scientist](#)

[US Industry Affairs Lead](#)

We Need Your Support

If you would like to make a financial contribution to Freedmen Heirs Foundation, please click the link below. Your generous donation will be instrumental in advancing our mission while positively impacting the Black agricultural community.

[DONATE](#)

Do You Have Resources or Information You Would Like to Share?

We are constantly seeking collaboration with other organizations in the agriculture sector to share events, opportunities, and valuable resources with our readers. If you would like to contribute an article, event, program, funding, or employment opportunity, please reach out to us by clicking the link below. Thank you!

[CONTACT US](#)

Nominate an Agripreneur

Help us recognize Agripreneurs who are making a an impact!

If you know someone worthy of recognition, please nominate them to be showcased in our digital magazine by filling out the nomination form below or reaching out via email at fhfcomms@freedmenheirs.org. Self nominations are welcome!

[SUBMIT A NOMINATION](#)



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To learn more about Freedmen Heirs Foundation, visit www.freedmenheirs.org.