

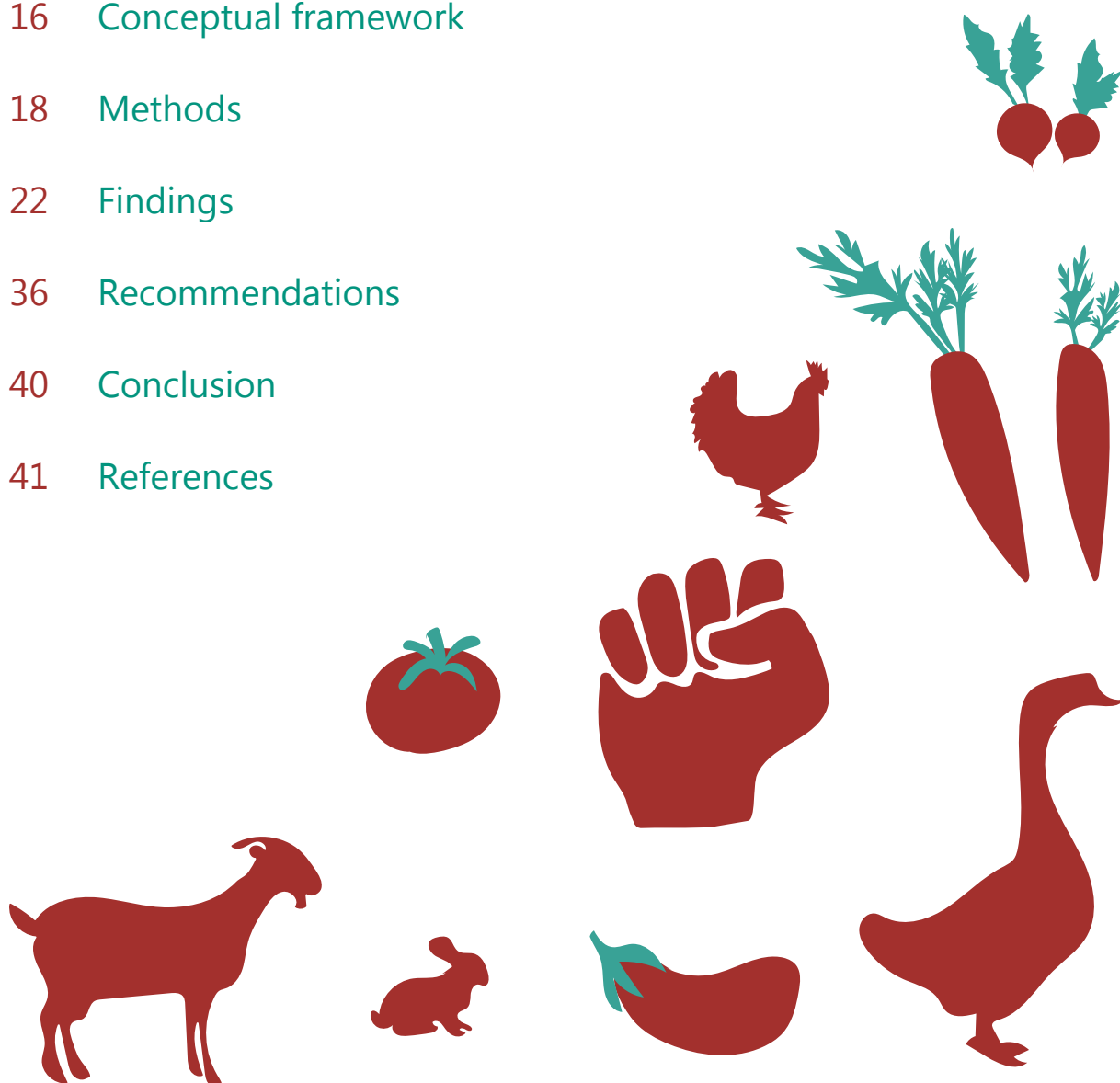
JUMPING FENCES

Land, food and racial justice in British farming



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Cover image. Alexander Thompson-Byer hauls in several tonnes of seaweed, after a day of cutting it along the shore of a loch in North Uist, where he owns a croft.

SUMMARY

This research brings forth evidence-based findings on the structural racialisation of farmers in Britain. It identifies the presence of **Black and people of colour (BPOC)** farming in Britain and presents their experiences. They define themselves not primarily as BPOC, nor as marginalised, but as growers, livestock farmers, apiarists, market gardeners, crofters, willow weavers, permaculturists, mushroom cultivators and community herbalists.

Methods

A literature review was carried out, and an analysis of semi-structured interviews with sixteen people who are currently working in the agricultural sector and land-based work in Britain.

Key findings

Of the British BPOC farmers I spoke with, many of them are relatively new entrants, with some exceptions (of four people) that have been farming in this country for the past two decades.

- **Forms of isolation:** everyone that I have spoken to has experienced isolation in some form or other in the sector, sometimes in quite traumatic ways.
- **Structural racialisation:** there are many experiences that relate to systemic or structural racialisation, for example being perceived as less competent, or being tokenised. Whilst participants experienced and described hostile behaviours ranging from microaggressions to overt racism, many do not routinely draw attention to it.
- **Healing and social justice:** land work is a source of healing for racialised people.
- **Development of a critical consciousness:** individuals are motivated and acting towards bringing diversity and justice into the farming sector.
- There exist complex **relationships to profit and land ownership**, as people navigate the need to derive a sustainable livelihood from their work, without compromising values.
- Issues arise for participants based on **pervasive societal narratives** around who farming is for and what it looks like.
- **Intersectionality:** experiences related to race are compounded by other dimensions of identity and oppression, such as gender, ability and class.

Recommendations

Funding, access to land and training opportunities must also be accompanied by work on shifting pervasive narratives about the conventional image of farmers and farming, and shifting culture within farms and organisations to be more racially inclusive. Who the role models are, who allocates the funding, and who teaches the new generation of farmers – these are the positions that hold power to bring about necessary shift in farming, land and racial justice.

- Shift **narratives** surrounding who farming is for and associated stigma
- Change workplace **culture** on farms and in farming organisations
- Develop strategies of **support**, both for emerging and for established BPOC farmers
- Maintain and create **spaces** for healing and knowledge exchange
- Build current **networks** whilst linking new networks in under-represented regions
- Promote greater and more stable access to **land**

January 2023

Dear Reader,

I was commissioned to conduct this research on behalf of **Ecological Land Cooperative** (ELC), **Land In Our Names** (LION) and **Landworkers' Alliance** (LWA), as part of the Jumping Fences Project. This research is the culmination of the first year of a two year project, funded by **Farming the Future**. These organisations recognise the profound racial inequity that exists in the farming sector and work towards land justice in different ways. The aim of the research is to provide an evidence base from which they themselves, other organisations, governing bodies and individuals, can build strategy and act to address barriers to farming for BPOC in Britain.

The project was born from and is also led by an all-BPOC steering committee of representatives from the partner organisations: **Sonia Sinanan** (ELC), **Josina Calliste** (LION), **Dee Woods** (LION), and **Sam Siva** (LION).

The research would not have been possible without the time and energy committed by the various participants, who each illuminated different perspectives on the journey into an agricultural system that is possibly one of the whitest in the world.

When I set out on this research at the start of 2022, I had recently returned to London and I had a wealth of experience in social and ecological research, examining the complex global dynamics that characterise modern food systems, and the cultural dynamism of food and farming brought about through patterns of migration. But I had not yet applied this to any great extent in understanding the British context, which is the country where I was born, grew up and can most easily call home. A reminder that it can be all too easy to look beyond the problems on our own doorstep.

Whilst the terms and approach used may seem unfamiliar or even provocative for some readers, it has been carefully considered, and you are encouraged to consult the glossary included. The project arises from a wealth of evidence-based research demonstrating the significance of rural racism in Britain. I encourage readers to learn about the experiences of those interviewed and reach their own conclusions based upon their encounter with this evidence.

It goes without saying that experiences and perspectives are diverse, and despite identifying common, salient experiences, it is not the aim of this report to make broad sweeping generalisations. To some extent, I identify with the people that gave their time to participate in this research. Firstly, as a person of colour in Britain. Secondly, as an aspiring landworker in Britain. Other dimensions of my identity – as a mixed-race British, African American, able bodied, neurotypical woman – are likely to have a bearing on the interactions I have had. By positioning myself as a learner as much as a researcher, I have been invited to share these stories in the hope that they might bring about ruptures in our way of thinking about what farming looks like in this country, and who it is for.

Naomi Terry



INTRODUCTION

The starting point for this research is the acknowledgement that farming is the least diverse occupation in England and Wales as revealed by the Labour Force Survey of 2015 [1]. But this is not just about employment opportunities. It is about having access to taking part in nurturing soil, providing nourishing food and tending to cultural connections and heritage.

As long as one does not hold a racist (and ill-informed) standpoint that BPOC are inherently less able to do farming – then it is clear that barriers exist that are preventing a greater uptake of non-white people to this career path. This is the first assumption underlying this research.

What are these barriers? This research finds evidence to illuminate part of this picture, through an understanding gained from BPOC that are currently working in farming in Britain.

It follows then that farming organisations, government and farmers can begin to contemplate these barriers and understand the subtle variations in experience. That, in part, is the work of this report, laying a brick in the foundations for building stronger support and strategy for the advancement of BPOC people in British agriculture, and on the land more generally. By understanding the support needed, dreams, motives, and resilience of BPOC in Britain, more targeted programs, funding structures and approaches can be designed.

Whilst social science research has controversial history of objectifying its subjects, this report takes a **decolonial** approach and thus aims to give a greater voice to the stories of people who are represented within it, with the hope of creating greater agency for them to shape the discourse, destiny and direction of British farming.

Who wants to farm anyway?

Another assumption that this research makes, is that there are BPOC people in Britain who are not working in farming, but would like to, and in fact many people are arriving from countries where agricultural work is more commonplace [2], [3].

India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nigeria are a few countries that have increasingly high representation in Britain and in each of these countries, agricultural employment is a significant proportion of the labour force (42.6%, 36.9%, 38.3% and 35.0% respectively). By comparison agriculture makes up 1.05% of the British labour force [4], which has decreased massively since the expansion of global trade, due to increased UK food imports. This brings into sharp focus the ironic situation for immigrants and their descendants to be so far removed from agricultural lifestyles in Britain, as in many instances they carry valuable knowledge and experiences in this field [2].

It is recognised that the high reliance on food imports, and dependence on carbon intensive practices is not sustainable and has had a significant negative impact on the resilience and equity of both Britain's and the global food system [5] resulting in a growing political movement around the transformation of food and farming systems.

Both the political movement and the geographical 'return to the land' movement of people from urban to rural are perceived as overwhelmingly white [6], [7]. But BPOC landworkers exist.

This report presents an overview of the literature on racialisation and farming in Britain, and surrounding relevant issues; an explanation of the Black Emancipatory Action Research framework that guides the approach and analysis; findings from interviews with numerous participants; and recommendations to expand support for greater justice in UK farming.

GLOSSARY AND LANGUAGE

Language is important and words can trigger negative feelings and be isolating. It is alarming the extent to which conversations on race can fall apart at these early hurdles. Therefore, it is encouraged to be mindful and observant of your own reactions to particular words and concepts and, where necessary, engage more with the message being communicated rather than any block over particular semantics.

Talking about racial identities

When talking about individuals, if reference to their racial identity is necessary, then their self-identified race is preferred. However, given that this report frequently references collectives of racial identities the terms below are considered.

BPOC (Black and people of colour) is favoured in here, and the acronym's development is associated with global struggles and anti-racist movements with which this report aligns. For all intents and purposes it can be viewed as synonymous with the below terms, which may also appear, where they are used by participants or referenced literature.

global majority is a term that is also used in the report. It draws attention to the higher proportions of non-white versus white people globally.

BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) has been an accepted term in official and government reports, but is now avoided in these institutions, due to excluding certain groups [8].

minority ethnic/ ethnic minority is the preferred government language [7]; it was a precursor to BAME. It includes white ethnic minorities unless otherwise stated (which may refer to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups). Some argue that using the word 'minority' acts to strengthen the power imbalance, and marginalisation, by disguising the reality of a global majority of non-white people.

BIPOC (Black people, Indigenous people, and people of colour) used widely in Canada and the US, to draw attention to the historical legacy of oppression towards the named groups.

POC (people of colour) a precursor to BIPOC and BPOC.

Whilst BPOC and BIPOC are terms that intend to bring more specificity to point to those who are most marginalised by current systems of racial oppression in different contexts, "there is no hierarchy of oppression," and we all suffer under white supremacy [9]. Each term has its own downfalls and benefits, and each is inadequate to represent the millions of individuals it refers to. At the very least, the above terms are not considered to be derogatory.

Talking about racism

white supremacy the notion that white people and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs and actions are superior to those of BPOC. It draws from critical race theory and also refers to a political or socio-economic system where white people enjoy structural advantage and rights that other racial and ethnic groups do not, both at a collective and an individual level. The notion of superiority of whiteness can be embodied and supported by white people and BPOC people alike [10].

whiteness "a political category that refers to a culturally signified construct and representation of identity" [11].

systemic racism the role of systems such as "political, legal, economic, health care, school and criminal justice systems – including the structures that uphold the systems, that produce, condone, and perpetuate widespread unfair treatment of people of color" [12].

structural racism/racialisation “emphasizes the role of the structures (laws, policies, institutional practices and entrenched norms) that are the systems’ scaffolding. Because systemic racism includes structural racism, for brevity we often use systemic racism to refer to both” [12].

microaggression Everyday snubs, slights and insults experienced by marginalised groups, which may be verbal, non verbal or environmental, whether intentional or unintentional. “The subtle, cumulative miniassault is the substance of today’s racism.” [13](p.516).

oppression where one group is subjugated systematically by a more dominant, more powerful group. The oppressed can internalise their role as subjugated victims which brings about, for example, internalised racism[10], [15].

liberation “The creation of relationships, societies, communities, organisations, and collective spaces characterised by equity, fairness, and the implementation of systems for the allocation of goods, services, benefits, and rewards that support the full participation of each human and the promotion of their full humanness.” [10]

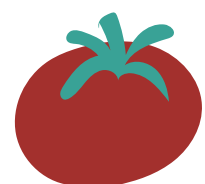
anti-racist someone who is supporting an anti-racist policy through their actions or expressing anti-racist ideas. This includes the expression of ideas that racial groups are equals, and supporting policies that reduce racial inequity [10], [14].

decolonial “relating to the criticism of colonialism and its modern-day impact, especially on formerly colonised peoples, or efforts to mitigate this impact” [16].

reparations “reparations is about redistributing resources to Black and People of Colour, but it is also about creating the space for BPOC to heal and repair. It is financial reparations to secure economic resilience – through the redistribution of money and land. But also reparations must address ecological, emotional and physical repair as essential parts of a wider whole” [17].

tokenism people with power and racial privilege recruiting, hiring or platforming BPOC in order to give the appearance of being anti-racist, but still maintaining their power and privilege, and thus supporting the system of oppression.

A more extensive glossary of terms can be found at www.racialequitytools.org/glossary.





LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarship and practice on racial justice and farming is still in its infancy in Britain, both theoretically and in practice. There is a need for a greater number of voices to be referred to, when it comes to literature, research and media on racialisation in British farming.

The literature review paints a picture of the wider landscape within which the subsequent stories from BPOC landworkers are situated. It provides an overview of: 1) [BPOC farming in Britain](#), 2) [BPOC and the urban rural divide](#), 3) [Food, farming and land justice](#).

1. BPOC farming in Britain

Recent research and media has been important in asserting the existence of a diversity of BPOC farmers in the British psyche, by bringing seldom heard voices to the fore.

In UK and EU statistics on farming there is usually a focus on farm owners and farm managers, so that many of the people who are doing a lot of the food production are not counted [18], [19]. This is also observed through the ways in which the value of urban BPOC growers contributing beneficially to sustainable food systems, is not counted in any formal statistic [3], [20]. Given the challenges in accessing land, and the unlikelihood of BPOC inheriting land, very few BPOC have established farming businesses. Therefore this research includes those who are new entrants with the intention of leading a farming business, and also some individuals in training.

In the Rootz Into Food Growing (RIFG) report, we learnt about urban and peri-urban farmers who experienced barriers related to racial hostility, precarious land leases, demeaning attitudes and warped perceptions and expectations of BPOC growers. The extent to which BPOC farmers are absent from the white British imagination is exemplified by a farmer who was reported to the police multiple occasions when harvesting his own crop, because it was presumed he was stealing [3].

In an urban farming context, St Werburgh's City Farm [17] conducted an Equity Project. They found that staff reacted in different ways to volunteers and service users. For example, someone commented, with prejudiced stereotyping on Jamaican volunteers at the farm, saying that "they are social farmers who only come out when the sun shines," whereas there was a more amicable perception from staff towards Somali and Kurdish communities, noting their agricultural heritage as a positive opportunity for building connections between cultures. The perceptible difference in these reactions suggests potential differences in the experiences between ethnicities. The reasons for the staff's more favourable assumptions about Somali and Kurdish communities can only be speculated about. Perhaps it is related to them being more recent immigrants, and so there is less expectation of cultural assimilation, or perhaps they are refugees, creating heightened power imbalance between them and the staff, and a more paternalistic dynamic. As the number of BPOC farmers in Britain increases, more research related to the experience of specific ethnicities will help to elaborate on these dynamics further.

There are deeply entrenched ideas of what farmers and farming should look like in Britain, which do not allow space for farming practices from other cultural traditions to find space – unless perhaps if they are repackaged in a sanitised way, and presented as permaculture or agroecology [20]. In her thesis, Taylor contends that the framing of an "alternative" food movement is a Euro-American framing that can act to render invisible how this movement has been influenced by Black and Indigenous farming traditions. Taylor's research focuses on Black British farmers, which provides a useful cultural boundary within which she is able to consider culturally specific elements related to unity, health and diet, and to historical Black political activism. By expanding that framing in this research, to consider also all people of colour, some of that nuanced cultural specificity

is lost, and there are indeed risks in drawing generalisations across such racially diverse experiences. The expanded framing is nonetheless relevant for exploring the impact of **white supremacy** in the British food and farming system.

Rather than seeing BPOC farmers as exceptions to the rule, there is a changing trend and a shifting narrative about what it looks like and means to be a farmer in Britain. Creative media allows for more imaginative deconstructing of dominant narratives. For example, *Cultivating Justice* is a creative project that amplifies marginalised communities' voices (such as BPOC and LGBTQIA+ people, women), celebrates joy, and challenges pre-existing ideas of what farmers look like [22]. Coming from a white farming perspective, *Landed* is a personal exploration of land ownership and colonial legacies, and a questioning of the innocence of the family farm model that is so lauded in the agroecological model of the future [23]. Another personal approach is taken in "Unearthed", where Ratinon writes about how her connection with the land and feelings of belonging in Britain grew, as she became a food grower, and learnt to grow the Mauritian foods of her heritage [24].

The perception that the countryside is a white space becomes destabilised when we begin to acknowledge the ways in which people of colour have occupied rural areas historically. For example, there has been an African presence in Britain since the Tudor period [25] and workers, enslaved people, and even owners of National Trust properties, such as Mary Sarah Hibbert Oates of Dyrham Park, as revealed in the Trust's recent report on colonialism [26].

There is a discomfort, and perhaps a perceived attack on Britishness, when ideas of a natural rural **whiteness** are challenged.

Farmers of the global majority

Whether their heritage goes back to Pakistan, Somalia or Barbados, urban BPOC people in Britain often carry with them a more recent agricultural heritage than their white counterparts [2], [20]. Patterns of migration were heightened in the second half of the 20th century, and different ethnicities can be traced in different areas of the country's industry, as Britain drew labour and materials from colonial possessions – from Yemeni people in the steel mills of Sheffield to South Asian people in the textile mills of North England and the Midlands, and Caribbean people in the service sector in the southeast. Many of these people came from agricultural backgrounds [27].

To point to this trend does not advocate the romanticisation of an "earthy," "rootsy" or "backwards" people, but rather to acknowledge that most people migrating from Global South (and global majority) countries are migrating away from societies where a high (nonetheless decreasing) percentage of people grow their own food, or are engaged in agricultural professions.

BPOC people do continue to grow in Britain outside of commercial settings, in urban environments and not for profit. Furthermore it is not uncommon for British Caribbean people to maintain active connections to farmland in the Caribbean. But the identity of farmer carries some baggage in other countries of emigration for British BPOC. In a poem by Jamaican poet Olive Senior, the narrator describes how, in Jamaica, their father, "never wanted to turn back / to that life he'd escaped from / never wanted (in public) / to acknowledge this rooting / in the soil" [28].

Acknowledging the tensions that exist around these phenomena, whereby migration and globalisation has left people untethered from traditional cultural practices, is critical for a nuanced interpretation of structural racialisation.

Diversity statistics within farming and environmental careers

A Policy Exchange report in 2017 revealed farming to be the least ethnically diverse (or whitest) profession in Britain, with other top contenders including horticultural, environmental and craft-based professions [1].

These simple and unsurprising statistics spurred a flurry of diversity and inclusion activity in the environmental and conservation sector, with research such as an NUS survey of students of

environmental studies in 2018 [29], the Institute of Environmental Sciences report on EDI in the sector in February 2022 [30], the ongoing Race Report [31], and the publication of a five-year diversity Route Map in October 2022 from Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) [32]. The route map presents key steps for the 39 pledged environment charities, including the Wildlife Trusts, Soil Association and the RSPB, to take in order to help the sector to become more ethnically diverse.

Evidence accrued by Link in the Route Map shows a lack of language and knowledge around issues of racial diversity, especially amongst CEOs. All minority ethnic staff interviewed declared that there is racism in the sector. The approach of the Route Map and the Race Report includes establishing monitoring for increased transparency, and more training for staff [31], [32].

The survey conducted by the NUS demonstrated that **BAME** students were more likely to consider factors such as the level of respect a career path carries (67%), than white students (55%). Interestingly, they were also more likely to include helping the environment as a motivation (59%) compared to white students (42%), despite being less likely to choose conservation and the environment as a sector they would like to work in [29]. Although more research is needed to better understand these statistics, this suggests that the motivation is there, but there are barriers in terms of how inclusive and also how respectable conservation and environmental sectors are considered to be.

Similar activity in the conventional farming sector has unfortunately been less forthcoming. The NFU represents 46,000 agriculture and horticulture businesses in Britain, and has remained relatively quiet on issues of racial and other forms of diversity. An anonymous review on the job seekers platform, Glassdoor, states the NFU is, “about 30 years behind the curve when it comes to attitudes towards diversity, and there doesn’t seem to be any appetite to change this currently” [33]. Alternative farming organisations such as Soil Association, The Sustainable Food Coop, Sustain, and also the partner organisations commissioning this report, have recognised the importance of racial inclusion in the sector, but in varying ways are still working on their plans of action.

Research that improves data collection on demographics is important, and a necessary angle on combating racism in the environmental sector. However, it has focused on what white-led organisations can do, and solutions are often framed around representation and basic EDI training. This project comes from a **liberation** approach where the BPOC subjects of the research are also the key agents, so whilst supporting improvements and representation in white-led institutions, we can ask how to support a stronger BPOC-led movement.

2. BPOC and the urban rural divide

(Re)Connecting to nature and decolonial healing

There are processes of disconnection and reconnection that BPOC frequently navigate in relationships to nature. There is a perception of unbelonging in nature that is inflicted upon BPOC, which is in actuality the result of an exclusion from nature, and a confinement to the urban [34]. The countryside remains an important site of healing, as is explored in Sewell’s radio series ‘My Albion’ [35], and an important site for recreation, with groups continuing to carve out their space despite encountering hostility, such as Black Girls Hike, Muslim Hikers, Black Men Walking, Bird Girl, Black Girls Camping, Flock Together, We Go Outside Too and Peaks of Colour.

The importance of time spent in nature on mental and physical health is well documented, as is the disproportionate suffering of racialised groups in Britain, with regards to mental and physical health [36], [37]. In studies of BPOC nature connection, farming is often posited as a distant prospect, a next step that might come once greater access to natural spaces has been achieved for our communities. In some instances it is not even on the radar for BPOC respondents in research studies [38].

Such disconnection is however only artificial, as Collier explains. Great caution should be taken around a narrative that presumes BPOC people to be inherently less comfortable or attuned to natural environments, as there is extensive evidence to suggest that many BPOC are indeed connected with nature, rather than fearful of it. A white-centric notion that this is not the case – perhaps because BPOC do not always engage with nature in the same ways inherent in white British culture – acts to exacerbate exclusion [20].

As is illustrated in the stories emerging from this research, how rural areas are perceived can be impacted by early life experiences, level of confidence, and one's level of isolation from other BPOC or a support network. What might feel comfortable for some can feel unfamiliar and alienating for others.

British BPOC living and being in the countryside

In addition to the aforementioned reporting from the conservation sector on their internal staff and work culture, BPOC recreation and connection to nature has been reported on by a number of countryside organisations monitoring the impact of their recreational departments, for example Forestry England [39], Natural England [40] and CPRE [38]. Statistical evidence shows that access to the countryside is limited by income, class, age and disability, but especially race. BPOC children are half as likely to visit the countryside than white children [40]. The CPRE note that, as a predominantly-white, able-bodied, middle-class organisation that is better funded than grassroots organisations, they have not done enough work yet on inequalities in access to the countryside. They also identify food growing as a good area to focus on, given that this is, "one of the ways people who had migrated to England connected with nature in their countries of origin" [38].

The question arises: is rural Britain an unsafe, racist and unwelcoming place for BPOC? Or is this just a perception, which discourages more BPOC to live in or spend time in the countryside? In this understudied area, the existing research suggests that racism and negative experiences related to race are indeed pervasive in rural Britain. It is perhaps more relevant to **anti-racist** progress to interrogate the nature and contexts of these experiences, rather than attempt to measure and quantify whether rural racism is "worse" or "better" than urban racism.

Breaking the white silence: experiences of racialisation in rural Britain

There are a number of PhD theses that elucidate experiences of BPOC in rural Britain. There has been research to demonstrate the prevalence of rural racism in Wales [41], the Scottish Highlands [42] and England [43], despite discrimination policies being in place. Cacho describes the process of silencing racism and discourse of racial difference, in a society that presumes itself to be post-racial [42].

But that is not to say that BPOC are not playing an active role in these communities, nor that they are passively victims of racism.

In her posthumous essay "Your Silence Will Not Protect You" Lorde demonstrates how silence becomes a form of violence [44]. A recurring theme in Postdoctoral students' research, is the presence of the unspoken. In her research Nowak refers to exclusionary "white elephants in the room" in the contested narrative of racial inclusion at OrganicLea in London [11] (p. 70). Cacho explores the "conspiracy of silence" that exacerbates the racial **microaggressions** and racism experienced by minority ethnic youth in the Scottish Highlands [42](p. ix). Chakraborti explains how racial isolation is exacerbated by the "invisibility" of the problem, in three English counties [43].

This points to an existing problem around white articulation on issues of race and racialisation. To begin to address this, Sustain have produced a diversity style guide for, "writing about, portraying and providing a platform for diversity and racial justice in the food and farming system" [45]. This type of resource is valuable to transform silence into language and action.

3. Food, farming and land justice

Accumulation of land in Britain and a case for reparations

Land accumulation within wealthy estates, and an outdated subsidy system are just a couple of issues that obstruct land justice in Britain. The Land for the Many report puts forward recommendations for the 2019 Labour opposition party policies including: reviving county farms, measures to discourage land and housing to be thought of as financial assets, bringing more land into common ownership, tax reforms and an increase in the number of parks, urban green spaces and allotments.

Access to land is fundamental to starting agricultural businesses, but is also entangled with the right to access land for the spiritual, physical and mental well-being it brings, which is campaigned for by the Right to Roam through proposals to extend the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. The ways in which land has historically been enclosed and restricted from public use, and how this is also mirrored in exclusionary thinking in today's political narratives is explained in *The Book of Trespass* [46]. Efforts have been made to draw out the colonial ties of different wealthy estates in Britain [46] and, for example, in National Trust properties [26].

The accumulation of land through feudal and colonial legacies, and the ways in which the exploitation of land continues to contribute to inequity and ecological crises brings into sharper resolution the insidious nature of our farming system. Both land and enslaved Africans were accounted for as property assets to be exploited in the same economic system; ecological and racial injustices are born of the same patterns of exploitation and disregard, as argued by Ferdinand:

"No one can any longer fervently denounce historical colonization and enslavement, structural racial discrimination, and everyday sexism while maintaining the ongoing colonization of the Earth's forests and their human/non-human communities through our own modes of consumption, thereby maintaining our own enslavement to this slave-making inhabitation." [47] (p. 225).

A reparative justice proposes restoring relations to the land through social, cultural and material rebalancing of resources from those that have benefited from historical forms of **oppression** such as the slave trade and colonial empire, towards those that have inherited suffering under such oppression. It includes the repairing of traumatic damage incurred, defined by LION: "**reparations** seek to disrupt systemic and structural violence of racism and colonialism by conceding power and resources in order to give space, both figuratively and literally, to BPOC to repair and heal" [17].

The agro-ecological farming movement

Despite the increasing consolidation of farmland into larger scale farms in high income countries, small scale farms contribute disproportionately to food provisioning on a global scale. Farms of less than two hectares provide 35% of the world's food [48] and whilst there are more small scale farms in Global South countries, research has shown that farming on small areas can produce larger yields [49].

Agroecological practices are orientated towards small scale farming, but due to the reduced use of chemical inputs, there is an over reliance on unpaid or low waged labour. Unlike regenerative or organic farming, the agroecological movement carries a social component that aligns with food sovereignty. Reshaping farming into a system that supports the rights of people to nutritious, culturally appropriate food, that sustains the earth's life support systems, is the central tenet of food sovereignty. So it is necessary for agroecological approaches to consider social and economic frameworks being provided.

Food apartheid and food sovereignty

One in ten families live in a food desert, and given that this falls across racial lines it is also fair to call it food apartheid [50]. Migrants with no recourse to public funds are at greater risk of food poverty [51]. Sustain, Just Fair, Nourish, the Institute of Health & Society at Newcastle University and MP Ian Byrne are promoting a campaign to legally enshrine the Right to Food in Britain, and push for it to become a political responsibility to end hunger, and end reliance on food banks [52].

In the year 2021, 8.8 % of the UK population was food insecure and this was even higher, at 16.3%, in the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic [53][54]. Black families are disproportionately vulnerable to food insecurity, with knock-on health impacts [55]. Increasing not only food security, but food sovereignty is a key motivation for many BPOC engaging with farming and food growing.

The social needs for good food and access to nature are in conflict with property rights that protect private landowners. Farming that is driven by profit first deprives the cultural significance of farming and leads to consolidation of land and power into fewer hands [3].

Hubs and refuges for BPOC growing

There exist a number of projects and initiatives for BPOC growers, that act in some way as hubs, as places where BPOC people can grow, learn and continue practicing their knowledge of growing. These places could also be considered as refuges. Due to being led by BPOC people it may be less likely that challenges related to isolation would emerge. Examples are Black Rootz (Wolves Lane in London), Go Grow With Love (Tottenham), Coco Collective (Lewisham) and Willowbrook Farm (Oxford). It would be interesting to learn if similar spaces are beginning to establish beyond the South of England, as many of the aforementioned recreational BPOC groups have a greater presence in other regions.

Many of these groups are oriented towards food sovereignty. Black Rootz, for example, are motivated by, "an urgent need for the establishment of a Black-led growers' enterprise to pass on traditional and practical growing skills which ensures that indigenous and local food growing knowledge are transferred to Black and minoritised growers and future generations of children and young people, thus securing a legacy" [56].

Access to farming for new entrants

With more than one third of farmers in Britain older than the retirement age of 65 [57], the issue of an ageing farming population is critical. DEFRA, NFU and LWA are a few large organisations trying to attract more young people into farming [57]–[59].

Unfortunately, potentially because there are so few BPOC trainees, studies looking at the pathways and barriers for new entrants into agroecological farming have hardly shed light on the specific barriers faced by BPOC. In general, however, accessing land is a major barrier for all young people entering farming in Europe and they are unlikely to own the land they work in many instances [19]cited in [18]. The new generation of sustainable farmers are more likely to be female, educated and young [60] cited in [18]. The pathway into agriculture can be varied, with some people having no social or childhood connection to farming and others starting from those connections. Unpaid work for new entrants is the norm, presenting a barrier for low income groups: "Getting paid farm work often required previous volunteer experience or training. This meant entrants without capital or access to land needed to be available to work for free or for a low wage in order to gain experience and were unable to save for their futures." ([18], p.10)

Stigma around farming is also pervasive. "One major barrier to entry is socio-cultural: a perceived stigma attached to farming as a pathway and perceptions of who a farmer is and can be. For those from urban backgrounds, farming is seen as undervalued or entirely absent as a career option within schools and wider society. There is also a cultural image of who a farmer is: old,

white and male. For those with different identities, there are more barriers to living rurally and to being able to identify as and be accepted as a farmer.” [18] (p.11)

A survey of Scottish new entrants reveals that they are less likely than established farmers to identify as farmers (although they may identify as crofters), and less likely to be turning a profit; they tend to have different goals, and diverse sources of income [61]. True new entrants (as opposed to those who had inherited farms) were also less likely to claim for subsidies, and the report recommends that policy interventions and support should adapt accordingly to draw people from outside of farming families into agriculture [61]. New entrants were generally more forward thinking with their approach, and more likely to invest in renewable energy, diversify their production and try new technologies.

LWA have a number of specific policy recommendations to support new entrants, and have proposed the introduction of land matching and share farming schemes in England; these already exist Scotland and Wales, but could benefit from more government support [59]. Tenure options for land matching are varied and whether such land matching could fit into a racial reparations framework would depend on the balance of the exchange.

Connecting out to global movements

More research is needed to help guide organisations, individuals and political movements orientated towards the liberation of BPOC from the ongoing impacts and legacies of colonialism and racial oppression. The irony with which races of the global majority have been dispossessed of land, evicted from nature, pushed towards urban lifestyles and then subsequently branded as disconnected from nature is a pervasive phenomenon. Throughout this literature review I have attempted to locate sources within Britain, but we can and should connect with and be guided by similar movements around the world where taking charge of food production is used as a method of liberation for historically oppressed groups. For example; global peasant struggles (La Via Campesina) and lessons from the US where the discourse on food justice, race and reparations is more progressed [62], [63].



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There are many different framings through which the experiences of BPOC farmers in Britain can be explored, and each framing would bring a different emphasis to the findings.

For example, equal opportunities frameworks that are frequently used in EDI approaches might look for indicators of fairness, or equal treatment between races. Whereas decolonial frameworks go beyond this to examine how structural inequity and racial justice interacts with people's experiences, and the potential for emancipation of oppressed groups.

Black Emancipatory Action Research framework

The Black Emancipatory Action Research (BEAR) framework [64], which draws upon Critical Race Theory, Participatory Action Research, Africentricity and Black Feminist scholarship, contributes many elements to the framing, methodology, analysis and dissemination of this research. The four main pillars that have been adapted from this framework are 1) healing, and a commitment to social justice, 2) intersectionality, 3) structural racialisation, and 4) development of a critical consciousness. In the following table I briefly explain each of these and how they are mobilised in this research, as some elements are better suited to the methodological approach, whereas others are applied in the ethics. All are used in the analytical framework of the findings.

This framework helps to connect historical legacies to ongoing exclusions, it helps to keep the research grounded with those it intends to liberate, and it perseveres in highlighting the inseparability of multiple forms of oppression, whether they be related to race, skin tone, gender, class, ability, sexuality or religion.

Through the BEAR framework, this research delivers a decolonizing approach through conceptualisation, methods and analysis. It brings the participants into the process, in that I present my positionality as a researcher upfront, and in that I do not grant superiority to quantified statistics, but rather draw from a qualitative understanding of peoples' stories. The analysis therefore favours a narrative approach that grants a greater voice and agency to the participants. In practice what this means is that this study is not a comparison between how white people in Britain experience farming versus BPOC people. These stories can subsequently be connected to statistical data presented in the literature review and help offer a more detailed and nuanced explanation for phenomena that can sometimes be left out of statistics.

The BEAR framework was initially implemented in educational research, and here I apply it with an decolonial ecology approach, that centres the interconnection between colonialism and environmental destruction. In particular, concerning how colonial empires and globalization have wreaked havoc with the environment via farming systems across the world (Ferdinand, 2021).

BEAR Pillar	What it means	Examples of how it is mobilised in this research
1) healing, and a commitment to social justice	To discontinue harm done to oppressed groups requires an expression of love and processes of healing from trauma.	Ethics – reducing potential harm to research participants by being mindful of the emotional labour and time. The research is positioned to advance social justice and equity.
2) intersectionality	The research process “intersects with race, class, gender, language, religion, sexual orientation, special needs and other axis of social difference” [64](p.121).	Methods – interviews focus not only on experiences related to race, but the full range of experiences in farming that may relate to other dimensions of identity.
3) structural racialisation	A systems approach to understanding race and white supremacy whereby historical legacies, individuals, structures and institutions interact to distribute advantages and disadvantages along racial lines.	Literature review – the individual experiences that are identified in interviews can be interpreted in relation to societal structures and historical oppressions that are explored in the literature review.
4) development of a critical consciousness	Engagement of the intended community at each stage of the research, and a clear emancipatory and action orientated purpose, with limited separation or hierarchy between researcher and researched [64].	Research design – the researcher embeds herself in the research and has affinity and lived connection to the research subject matter. The research focuses on the experiential knowledge of BPOC landworkers, acknowledging their agency to determine what is useful and valid information [65] Action – the dissemination and outcomes of the research are aimed at creating actions to positively improve the lives of BPOC farmers.



METHODS

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with sixteen people who are currently working in the agricultural sector or land-based work. Participants were identified through networks and call-out advertisements shared on social media, and farming newsletters. Seven of these interviews were online, and nine were in person, usually at the land where the participant worked. During the interview, participants were asked about their journey and motivations, challenges faced, land-based practices and perspectives on rural Britain.

An ethical review was conducted to consider questions such as the burden placed on participants and researcher, both in terms of time and emotional labour, how the research would be disseminated, whether and how the research is designed to help the participating communities, and what the limitations are of the project.

Participant selection

Whilst the focus is on people working in agriculture, there are also some participants who align more closely with horticulture. Given that horticulture is an important entry point for many BPOC into farming, and that distinguishing between the two can be blurry – for example in the case of market gardens – this inclusion was valid and relevant. Some participants could not yet be classed as working in agriculture, but have ambitions or plans, which were important to learn about in terms of their challenges in getting started.

Analysis

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, each interview was summarised, and the summaries and transcripts were coded for emergent observations. This emergent coding was then analysed against pillars from the BEAR framework, in order to draw out patterns, similarities and differences.

Limitations

The participants in this research are mostly based in the South of Britain, with only a few in Northern England and Scotland, and none in Northern Ireland.

This report focuses on people that are already engaged with land work. By not engaging with people who have not been able to gain access to farming, it does not thoroughly address all barriers to entry.

Demographics

Three gender identities were reported in the sample of people interviewed. Participants were each asked to self-identify their racial ethnicity. Nationality denotes the country or countries where participants have citizenship.

Age category	Count
20-29	3
30-39	6
40-49	4
50-59	1
60-69	2

Gender	Count
Non-binary	2
Woman	8
Man	6

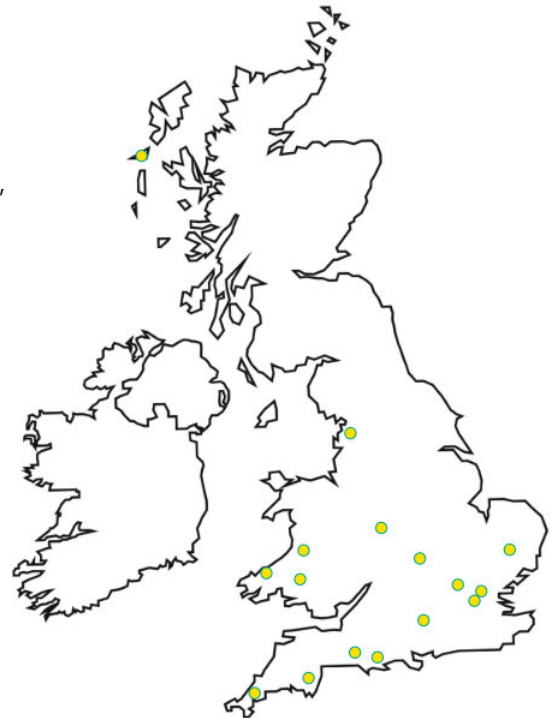
Self identified racial ethnicity
Chicana
Colombian
Black British
Indian
Mixed race – English and Kenyan
Black African heritage
Irish Asian
Guyanese British
British Indian
Asian white mixed
Black British
Somali
Black Kenyan
Asian/African/White British
Black British
Multi heritage – white East Asian

Nationality	Count
British	11
Irish	1
Kenyan	1
Mexican and US	1
Sri Lankan and British	1
US	1



Map

The map shows the approximate location of participants, who were mostly based in southern England, with three people in Wales, and one in the Hebrides, Scotland.



Name or pseudonym	Practice
Alexander Thompson-Byer	Crofting permaculturist and gardener
Cel Robertson	Flower farmer
Cley (pseud.)	Market gardener
Déa Neile-Hopton	Willow weaver and grower
Diego (pseud.)	Aquaponics farmer
Flavian Obiero	Pig farmer
Jey (pseud.)	Trainee farmer
Key (pseud.)	Flower farmer, horticulturist
Kiki	New entrant farmer
Kumar	Dosa production from farm to fork, ex sheep farmer
Nina (pseud.)	Trainee farmer
Lutfi, Adam and Khalil Radwan	Small scale livestock farmers
Rey (pseud.)	Bee keeper, orchard and woodland manager
Sarah (pseud.)	Community herb grower
Mey (pseud.)	Small holder farmer
Zey (pseud.)	Mushroom cultivator and farm worker



FINDINGS

The stories are interwoven with forms of resilience, and the varying journeys, backgrounds and strategies are connected to different values, ethics and motivations. In amongst all this divergence, there emerge threads of shared experience, and ideas for what might have made things easier.

Individuals stories can be read in a separate document, and it is advised to do so, for a fuller and more contextual understanding of the conclusions that have been drawn together in the findings and subsequent recommendations. It may be easier to notice the disparities between these stories than the common threads. Whether ubiquitous or anomalous, collated findings are given at the end of this section.

The findings are presented with relation to the BEAR framework. Whilst recognising that there is overlap across all pillars of the framework, most of the experiences are interpreted through the third pillar, structural racialisation. Three findings are explored in greater depth subsequently: forms of isolation, relationships to profit and ownership and countering narratives of unbelonging.

1. Love, healing and social justice

The different people that I spoke to expressed different connections to land and to nature. For some, being in a natural landscape was an important site for healing or for belonging. Building relationships with natural landscapes also held importance for developing and expressing confidence with farming work, and thus overcoming stigma.

Agricultural places of work or study vary in the way that they create a welcoming and supportive environment for all people. Places that were experienced as racially oppressive were also unsupportive of diverse genders, religions and abilities.



One participant expresses a paradox of healing from trauma in nature, whilst also feeling isolated in rural Britain:

“Whilst I see this piece of land, as my space of healing for sure, in a way that I’ve never experienced in my life before, I still have reminders... So I’ve got this thing where the land itself is, on the whole, a safe space. But with intrusions. And then in the wider community I have very, very, very good, strong close network of friends. A lot of them don’t understand what it’s like to be my skin tone and have my heritage whilst living.”
Zey

The majority of participants had farmers in their recent ancestry, but despite this, multiple participants felt very disconnected from places and practices of heritage, and growing food was an important means of reconnection. Jey, a trainee farmer explained that, “lots of people on my dad’s side of the family were herbal healers.” She thinks about her family’s rituals when she is sowing seeds. However it can be difficult for her to connect with these thoughts and feelings in the market garden where she works, in a very white and Cornish part of the country. Because of this, she considers going back to London to work where there are more BPOC led community garden projects. Cel, a flower farmer also tells how she feels, “more connected with my heritage. Certainly, obviously, on my dad’s side, because even though our ancestors may have been enslaved, they worked with the land.”

People had different motivations for entering land work. A few participants expressed a love of nature, the outdoors and animals as children as being a strong motivator. The majority grew up with very urban lifestyles, with little access to nature, whether that was due to material or cultural barriers. It makes sense then that many people entered into land work through horticulture, which is more accessible than farming in urban environments. The climate and ecological crises, failure of the food system and other political motivations moved many, for example, Jey, Rey, Nina and Alexander, into land work as well as a desire to do practical, outdoor work.

2. Intersectionality

Racially oppressive spaces are also seen to correlate with spaces that do not provide care or openness towards other dimensions of minoritised identities.

As Black feminist theories declare, none of us are free until all of us are free, and so considering intersectionality is entirely relevant to liberation. Other forms of oppression are intertwined and inseparable from racial oppression. In these stories, that is observable as:

- Ability discrimination – unsupportive treatment during illness, with many farming jobs becoming inaccessible.
- Misogyny and gender discrimination – assuming that male bodies are better able to do practical work or specific tasks.
- Class privilege – many do not have the financial capital to buy land or establish a farming business.
- Anti-vagrancy – seasonal migrant labourers are so marginalised that they are often perceived as external to the farming system. There were numerous reportings of hostility towards Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) people.
- Religion, for example experiencing Islamophobia.

Related to both intersectionality and healing, there is also work to be done within communities of colour to ensure anti-oppressive environments for all identities, which Flavian, a pig farmer, expressed:

“There are things that are the same across the board, men are above women – that’s across board. The colourism thing – that’s across board. Poor versus rich – that’s across board. Tribal thing – that’s across the board. So all those levels are there to be to be fixed. Because it’s like having four or five wounds on your body. You fix the big one, which is racism, then you’ve still got three or four here that need healing. And the doctor that can fix the racism one is not the doctor that’s going to fix these others. We’ve gotta do these ourselves.”

Flavian

3. Structural racialisation

Participants exhibited a range of approaches for resilience against structural racialisation – from actively ignoring and decentering it to actively working against it.

What is important here is to not only think about the experiences of the individual, but also how those experiences are connected to and driven by societal and historical patterns, systems, structures and accepted behaviours. A systems approach to conceptualising racialisation and white supremacy in UK farming helps demonstrate the way in which individual and institutional behaviours interact across domains and over time to produce consequences with adverse racialised effects, whether intended or unintended.

Given that ultimately all of our individual experiences are guided by societal norms and structures, it would be possible to examine all the observed phenomena within this pillar. However, I have limited it to include observations that indicate elements of how people exist in relation to others and their environment.

“I personally believe that all of the activism that people need to do is also looking at systemic issues and how to unpack them and how to change them. Because, I don’t think anybody can particularly change things through one variable.”

Mey

To illustrate the processes and systemic nature, we can take, for example, having fewer early experiences of nature.

Someone’s lack of time spent in nature may be caused by a combination of factors such as a) societal beliefs that BPOC are fearful of or less comfortable in nature, b) historical patterns and governing institutions that have resulted in a majority of BPOC living in inner city areas with less access to green spaces, c) a material barrier that relates to “b)” in that fewer people living in inner city areas drive, or have access to a car, which can be necessary to visit many parts of rural Britain. In understanding the individual experience against a backdrop of these societal patterns, we can then also see how some of these patterns can reinforce each other, which perpetuates the problem. Noticing these reinforcing cycles is the first step in disrupting them.

4. Development of a critical consciousness

The ways in which participants are actively engaged in bringing more justice and diversity into farming demonstrates the development of a critical consciousness. Even the motivation to take part in the research often related to wanting to bring about some changes in the industry. Due to most participants being isolated from other people of their heritage, or any other BPOC in their work, much of this active raising of consciousness is enacted individually. For example, the way in which people are demonstrating values of care and justice in their business models, or trying to be

more publicly visible, in order to shift the image of what farmers and farming looks like. However, bridging organisations and social media play an important part in the building of a shared movement, and many people expressed a strong desire for the continued growth of networks such as LION and LWA, with a particular need for more regional networks.

Additionally, there was a prevalent awareness of the dynamics of structural racialisation, and the ways in which one’s experiences are shaped by structures that may not be easily articulated. “Don’t know if that’s a race thing, or is that just an institution thing? Whereby it is what was designed before and the information lies within who you know, and if you’ve done it before, and if you have access to different people who do it themselves, and have the knowledge from that.” Diego.

Developing educational programs was a high priority for many participants, even as they continue to learn themselves, pushing to invite others into the space.

Some participants have a social media presence. Due to being seen as quite exceptional and rare, many have been approached for media opportunities. Others felt like they ought to have more of an online presence. Cley mentions that it’s not really her thing, and that presents a real barrier: “Unless you have money there is really no other model yet if you are socially shy and introvert. This is particularly evident when it comes to social media and promotion for visibility.”

As a flower farmer, Cel Robertson is acutely aware of the need for a solid business plan. She has been growing cut flowers for twenty years, and farms a no-dig one-acre field. She also teaches and writes.



Collated findings

The different individual experiences expressed by participants are given in the table, and each can be analysed as a form of structural racialisation.

1. LOVE, HEALING & SOCIAL JUSTICE

- healing from the land
- healing from racial trauma
- finding belonging in nature
- expressing solidarity and support
- being inspired by early experiences in nature
- resisting inequality and racial supremacy through actions

2. INTERSECTIONALITY

- struggling with disability
- growing up poor
- migrating to Britain
- descending from migrants
- experiencing male superiority
- experiencing Islamophobia

3. STRUCTURAL RACIALISATION

Varying forms of racial oppression

- directly experiencing racial microaggressions and racism related to skin colour
- experiencing physical racial violence
- questioning whether interactions are related to skin colour
- encountering ignorance and harmful stereotypes
- being tokenised
- accepting inequality and racial supremacy as inevitable

Experiences related to (urban) upbringing

- never having early experiences of nature
- experiencing social expectations that orientate away from farming/towards urban living
- not having a driving license

Experiences of isolation and disconnection

- experiencing isolation in rural areas
- experiencing isolation in land work
- searching for relevant role models
- experiencing isolation from one's own racial community
- sticking out from the crowd

Knowledge gaps

- lacking understanding of land legislation
- gaining access, knowledge or support through white proximity

Unfavourable perceptions

- experiencing a presumed incompetence
- not being taken seriously or professionally
- having to be exceptional
- being perceived as a city person or outsider

4. DEVELOPMENT OF A CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

- inviting in others, inspiring the next generation
- experimentation in farming approach
- aligning values to business model
- understanding how own experiences are shaped by larger social institutions
- taking a critical perspective of the world
- learning through YouTube and books
- advocating for the early farming education for BPOC
- participating in research to bring about change



Forms of isolation

A strong finding in this report and also in other similar reports, is the isolation that many people feel. This ranged in source from racial bullying to estrangement from communities of heritage. It was also observable in that snowball sampling was not at all effective for this research – very few people I spoke with knew any other BPOC farmers, apart from perhaps those with a strong social media presence. As such, the sampling in this report represents a broader subsection, whereby only some of the participants are connected in some capacity with each other – so they are speaking from different contexts.

It is not possible to view these people's experience as farmers as separate from other experiences in their lives. For example Alexander, a crofting permaculturist, describes how being profiled by the police as a fourteen year old child, when he was running along the pavement excited about a new camera he had bought and then stopped and searched, was an awakening as he realised he was perceived differently by the world, compared to his white friends. This awareness of how others perceive his difference played out in how he felt as a young black man in garden wholesalers, buying plants or living in rural Scotland. In some sense it motivated him to defy expectations. Realising he had no control of how others would perceive him, as no matter what he did or how successful he was, he would always be assumed to be less competent, also encouraged him to let go of worrying about it, and in a way just get on with what he wanted to do, actively encouraging others to do the same.

Cultivation presented an important means for many to connect with nature, as well as with their heritage. Many participants grow high value products, such as mushrooms, as a more viable business model, given the high labour inputs involved in vegetable growing.



Nonetheless, standing out and feeling out of place can also drive isolation. Having to explain different things about one's culture can be exhausting, especially when people are prejudiced in their assumptions. For example, Willowbrook Farm is a Halal and Tayyib ethically reared livestock farm. A lot of people make negative assumptions about how halal meat is farmed, as Lutfi Radwan explains.

"It's laborious and a little agonizing to have to constantly explain what halal means / doesn't mean. There are a lot of misconceptions. A lot of Sun readers think that halal meat is unethical. A lot of Muslims think that halal meat is better quality. In reality, the meat often comes from the same abattoirs and farms [as non-halal meat], and is mostly farmed in the same unethical and environmentally destructive ways."
Lutfi.

Isolation is perpetuated by forms of bullying, as a consequence of skewed power dynamics in the workplace or farm, which was mentioned by three participants. For one participant a case of bullying at work took a real knock to her confidence. It felt like because she is a non-white woman, having more success than him, as a white man, was a motivator for the way he treated her: "it's a 200 year old organisation that was created by very privileged white men. It's run by very privileged, white people, not all of them men, and it's very, very hierarchical, very patriarchal and very paternalistic. And if you come up against it, you very much feel the power of [that organisation]."

Déa Neile-Hopton talks about a double isolation of working within an already marginalised craft of willow weaving, and being a Black British woman.

"It was quite shocking to see that the town hall in the town nearest to me was letting an office to a UKIP politician. It made me feel that myself and my children aren't safe living where we do." So despite having lots of friendly interactions, there was all this evidence that there are racist people around."
Déa

More experienced farmers and landowners gave examples of neighbours making complaints about planning applications, without good jurisdictions. For example the Radwan family received objections to their planning applications for simple farm infrastructure with neighbours saying, "it's like they're running an immigration centre up there."

The trainees I spoke with talked about differences in the cultures of the places they had worked in, and how that made them feel more or less welcome, depending on whether there was an existing culture of microaggression, and tolerance of racist comments by white people on farms, or on the other hand, if there was a culture and language for openly talking about anti-oppression. Various people have been asked to lead on diversity for organisations that are trying to do better, and it is also important to consider whether this approach can bring harmful burdens to people who are just trying to learn to farm. After multiple experiences of racism on different farms, Nina reflects with exasperation:

"around the Black Lives Matter movement, George Floyd and everything. Everyone was thinking very intensely about race. But a lot of people are just completely racially illiterate, just have absolutely no idea how to talk about these things, or where to start. And the whole thing, this whole experience with the way that people reacted to me, talking about this experience, just made me feel like this sector was just not for me, like, I could never be myself here, or feel safe, or just feel like I could just learn how to grow some fucking vegetables and not have to deal with racism every day, basically."

Similarly, Zey talked about how they feel otherised and unwelcome in rural Wales and have experienced physical aggression in a pub, along with more regular microaggressions in the farm yard, farm supplies shop, local footpaths and pharmacy. "I just have ... experiences where I know that people are like 'who the fuck are you and what are you doing here' and yeah, that could feel really uncomfortable at times and also really isolating because I don't have people who might understand to talk to about it." On multiple occasions people have remarked that they must have proximity to drug cartels, due to being Colombian. On taking a shortcut through a hedge on the property where they live they bumped into a white woman, "it felt like an interrogation and that like she was probably not that many steps away from calling police."

Accumulation of microaggressions was common amongst participants, "I never used to take this word seriously, 'microaggressions', right. I never used to take that phrase seriously, I didn't really get it. I didn't really fully get what that feels like, until I was on work exchange farms."

Whilst some of these experiences demonstrate how overt racism can isolate individuals, even people who did not have such harrowing experiences expressed a remoteness that they would like to see change, by forging greater connection with other BPOC farmers.

When we think about isolation systemically, there are a few things that are worthy to note in these experiences that are acting in feedbacks that reinforce isolation. Firstly, there is in some cases an absence of formal structures of support for grievances. Secondly, the isolation that Jey had felt as a trainee, and the racism that Nina experienced has made both of them think about seeking opportunities closer to urban areas. If this is a common pattern for BPOC, then that would suggest that BPOC trainees who spend time in rural areas may be unlikely to stay there, which means that there is unlikely to be a net increase in BPOC in these spaces, and so it will continue to feel like an isolating situation for new BPOC incomers, less likely to cultivate belonging. Cultivating a feeling of belonging and confidence in nature is also something that can be related to whether someone had early experiences of nature.

Relationship to profit

Participants had different ideas and implementations of business models, but the majority were adopting a model that was based around financial sufficiency, as opposed to the generation of surplus profit. Some participants were specifically focused on growing high value crops such as cut flowers or mushrooms, in part because this was a more realistic way of sustaining a livelihood in a small business. Many participants were experiencing financial scarcity. The motivations, and the ways in which people articulated their relationship to profit and how they aligned their values to their business model, varied.

Jey is very community orientated with her future ambitions beyond her traineeship. She would like to establish her own agroecological community farming project, or support something like that. Similarly to Jey, Nina is not profit driven but would like to create something financially sustainable which in itself is no easy task.

The portrayal of land-based activities in social media has also romanticised the reality, which has had detrimental impacts on Key's negotiations with landlords:

"I think for some landlords they think they might see this resurgence on social media with really gorgeous pictures from influencers and more established farmers. And I think some landlords have a misconception about the profit margins of land based businesses."

Many participants expressed that an orientation to profit could easily lead to compromising on other things. "I don't want to attach my goals to profit and then lose myself in the process," says Kiki, and as she develops her land she focuses mainly on self sufficiency, with an intention to

sell any surplus. Mey, who runs a mixed farm, notes that self-sufficiency is an important part of any small scale farming operation, in order to reduce living costs, “being partially subsistence and being partially commercial is the formula that makes it viable, because actually, you’re providing for loads of your needs. So you’re providing your own housing a lot of the time, your own firewood, your own food, sometimes your electricity, you know, it just brings your cost of living down a lot. So your income that you’re generating through sales of products or commercial products can be at a certain level, but it might be lower than it would be for what they would consider a viable living wage.”

Kumar suggests that a strong profit motive can have a negative impact on the health of farm workers, saying, “you need an income, but it’s not just profit, profit profit... If you’re doing it with the mindset of just making money, you’re gonna break your body.” As well as bringing potential harm to employees, Diego points out that, “because the profit is way more appealing than creating the solutions... when it comes to rural farming or mixed traditional farming, a lot of the times the damage that’s been done on the soil or on the environment is extreme,” and he advocates that soil free farming is a good way to avoid this.

The way in which many farmers are motivated by values, rather than by profit, can also be easily exploited. Zey, Jey and Nina all gained a lot from their volunteering, and said that it’s an important way to get experience in farming. Mey talked about the need to formalise traineeships, to make it really clear what the learning goals are in the exchange and, “to make a really clear expectation of wages when it’s possible.” Cel was amongst many who find unpaid labour problematic. She employs someone, when she knows she could easily get a volunteer trainee, but she factors it into her business plan. There is a paradox at play here, whereby a desire to avoid centring profit can on occasion obscure people’s need to secure an income from their farm work.

By comparison, Flavian, the only participant who is currently working in conventional farming, advocates that more BPOC who are entering farming should go into larger scale operations, because there is much more demand. In his work, the profit incentive is clear and upfront: “my main

Kumar gave up sheep farming due to the emotional stress of taking them to slaughter. Through the ELC he now owns a farm, where he grows supplies for his Dosa food truck business.



objective is to make sure that [the] pigs are making money for my employers.”

There are ways in which profit incentives and ownership are tied to cultural values. Rey says, “my parents always owned our own homes” ... “I’ve been brought up that way. So I try not to lease, I try and buy it out.” A desire for autonomy, self-sufficiency and financial control was prevalent, which speaks to a liberatory process of building agency. For many BPOC people, working for free has distasteful connotations, given historical colonial exploitation of labour. And where race intersects with wealth, it is also less of an option to take on volunteering roles, where there are not the financial means to support that.

The ability to make a living through farming is very much related to wider problems around supermarketization of the food system, and a decreased willingness and ability to pay the true cost of food production.

Relationship to land ownership

Many see owning land as unattainable, so are exploring alternative models. For others, owning the land is fundamental for security. Six participants own their land, two rent, four grow on other people’s land with informal arrangements, and four work for other people’s projects so, again, neither rented nor owned the land they worked. Of those that own their land:

- Mey and the Radwans bought their farmland around twenty years ago, and commented that they would not be able to afford to buy land now, at current prices.
- Kumar bought his land through the ELC stewardship scheme. He spent some time working in IT in New York to gain some capital.
- Kiki bought land recently, but went through significant hurdles in understanding land legislation procedures, and entered significant debt
- Rey earned the money to purchase his land through working in IT
- Alexander and his partner bought land in a relatively more affordable location than where they had been living, so sold their property in Surrey for a croft in North Uist.

In current circumstances, where land is unaffordable and farmland is frequently developed into housing, some participants reluctantly accepted that it may be necessary to explore other models. Many were interested in the ELC model, although in most cases that was not considered an affordable option. There are a couple of people for whom land-based work was not their means of income despite them being very passionate about it. Rey, for example, could not see it as a viable way to support his family financially, and sees his role as an environmental steward, rather than profiting from the land.

Kiki thinks of her role as one of stewardship, rather than ownership, but she notes that these two exist in a complex dynamic:

“when you think about stewardship, you think more about who else is affected and how? What impact are you making? What happens after you’re gone? What is your personal responsibility? Whereas with ownership, it becomes, what am I entitled to? How is this profitable for me? How can I benefit?” ... “And so I think stewardship naturally resonates more with me.

But I am aware, coming from a minority ethnic background, we often find ourselves more interested in stewardship than ownership. We tend to be more connected with nature and have an attitude that everything is to share, and we want to know: how can we benefit the world?”... “but then that’s also an easy way to remain in these situations where we don’t have ownership of anything, and so we don’t have power, choice or access!”... “So, I have a responsibility to empower myself, making it actually really important to get to grips with ownership! It is a real challenge as well, do you get what I mean? Because, well... how do you find that balance?”

Kiki



Shifting narratives: countering expectations from family and society

The majority of the participants expressed that their choice to go into land based work was a defiance of expectations. Both expectations that their family had, and expectations of society.

“Definitely growing up, it was a constant worry whether or not we would be able to pay for things... within the culture as well, there’s an expectation that you’re supposed to be able to support or financially take care of your elders. And so it’s trying to balance those obligations that are unspoken.”

Key

“It’s not a career for thick people, which is what it’s generally considered to be, or something you do as a hobby that anyone can do. There’s a culture, there’s a history, there’s a politics behind it. There’s a reason and there’s custodianship, I think, behind growing food and growing anything, actually.”

Cley

Diego was told when studying agriculture, “aren’t you supposed to just be rapping? What are you doing farming, you’re wasting your time on farming.”

The dominant group (white British farmers and rural dwellers) define what the acceptable mainstream behaviour and aesthetic is. And then it is the job of all the “others” to fit into that, to assimilate. By taking up farming and land work these participants are contributing to a radically different narrative that disrupts the status quo.

Kumar grew up in Sri Lanka and his family owned a dairy farm, so he always had that influence around and saw a lot of people around him who were working in farming. Similarly, Flavian grew up in Kenya, and though they were not farmers, his family always had land where they grew food and kept chickens. Both Flavian and Kumar had confidence when it came to seeking out opportunities in Britain. Flavian took a very direct approach to finding farm work: “I sort of was knocking on doors on different farms – you can imagine, a black lad just turning up to a farm.”

Countering perceived incompetence

Deep set beliefs that whiteness equates with greater intellectual ability can lead to people of colour being continually undermined, and having to prove their intellect.

For Rey, this created a pressure to need to do everything with exceptionalism; he doesn’t want to be the only Asian woodland keeper and present any kind of failure that could be used to represent the Asian community as a whole.

People can be deskilled by this perception, “[someone] once told me in quite direct terms that the farmer is the person who owns the farm and this was when we were discussing what my job title was called. And he said, you’re probably a farmhand.”

Pictured opposite, Flavian has been a pig farmer for the past twelve years. Whilst he works to actively bring more diversity into the farming sector, he recognises that there are also issues around colourism, tribalism and sexism within Black cultures.

A comparison with BPOC urban farming

This report has focused on peri-urban and rural farming and land work, in order to compliment previous research that has painted more of the picture of what BPOC growers experience in cities.

The RIFG research focuses on urban areas because these are the areas where the majority of BPOC live and thus where the majority of BPOC grow food. Jumping Fences brings this research to the next hurdle – BPOC in farming in rural or peri-urban areas.

Whilst there is a considerable amount of literature about BPOC connection to nature, farming is hardly mentioned in this. It is possible that this is because many urban BPOC do not even conceive of this pathway as a possibility for themselves – a testament to the scale and depth of the barriers that exist. As long as going walking in a rural area would be a novel experience for many urban BPOC, farming is a distant and detached ambition.

Through social media, we are seeing many BPOC openly challenge that status quo, by sharing with the world their experiences in nature, growing and farming. It seems that many BPOC growers feel a responsibility to share what they are doing in this way, in order to change the image of farming, and act as role models for others.

By comparing these findings with those of the Rootz Into Food Growing report [3], it is clear that there is a lot of synchronicity between the experiences of BPOC urban farmers in London and those in rural England.

As with the findings, there is also a lot of overlap when it comes to the recommendations outlined in the RIFG report, although because RIFG was focused on commercialising growing in a pan-London context, there are some differences.

The recommendations presented by the research team in RIFG are highly consistent with those that I put forward in the next section.

RIFG growers participate in a farm visit at Aweside Farm, Sussex. Rootz Into Food Growing is building capacity amongst London based BPOC food growers to commercialise their growing operations.



Findings from Rootz Into Food Growing**Comparative findings in Jumping Fences**

- some growers took formal courses, mostly self taught
- inspired to learn to grow food outside of Britain, or in country of heritage
- inspired by a desire to have access to culturally familiar foods, food security

- five participants took higher level formal education
- two are doing traineeships
- many were self taught
- four of the seven most established farmers gained initial experience outside of the UK
- motivated to counter ecological crisis and food sovereignty

-
- new entrants are aged late 20s or older

- most began farming in their late 20s onwards, with the exception of two men who began agricultural college in their teens, and two women who did traineeships in their early 20s

-
- some growers began with 'bridge' professions in horticulture, mining, landscape gardening

- many participants have horticultural backgrounds, and often do not see the transition from gardening to farming as entirely distinct

-
- challenges around access to markets, even being turned away from selling at farmers markets

- difficulty in being taken seriously by potential customers (Diego); choosing to sell in London rather than rurally, so that she can be herself (Key); and taking control of multiple points of the supply chain (Kumar, Flavian)

-
- gatekeeping and bullying, more often experienced by women

- workplace bullying, exclusion from social occasions, racial bullying were all observed, as well as inadequate processes for responding to bullying

-
- being perceived as less competent

- being perceived as less competent was a strong theme

-
- lack of safeguarding and care for women

- it is not evident that women/non-binary are receiving less care and more bullying, but trauma carried does seem to have had a longer lasting impact, suggesting they did not receive care to help process such incidents. Some of the male participants have spoken about the need to have thick skin, and shrug off such incidents

-
- anti-city sentiment

- this was perceptible, but some participants also empathised with this standpoint, due to the problems caused by people buying second homes in the countryside

-
- positive experiences of growing

- all participants were strong advocates for the work and lifestyle they have chosen

-
- BPOC women are the least likely of all demographics to run their own food growing enterprises

- this is inconclusive and would need further investigation. Four (out of eight) women and two (out of two) non-binary participants, and five (out of six) men run their own enterprises.

-
- common practices of long-term volunteering and varying attitudes to unpaid labour

- unpaid and low paid work common, with many participants suggesting volunteering to gain experience as a good piece of advice for getting into farming. Different relationships to profit were expressed, with Flavian suggesting that this problem can be overcome by working on conventional farms. Kumar and Diego also gained experience on conventional farms

-
- access to land for growing identified as major barrier

- access to land for growing identified as major barrier
-

RECOMMENDATIONS

“Well, if Black and people of colour can live here, then why can they not farm?”
Flavian

Here we turn to capacity building and the developing of a critical consciousness. The approach of the recommendations is to focus not only on problems, but also on transformative solutions [64]. The recommendations are for the most part those that have come directly from participants. In addition, I have provided suggestions based on observations of unmet needs for support. It is useful to also consider the different actors that should take up the different recommendations, for example some recommendations are more applicable within BPOC communities, whereas others call for action from racially privileged groups and from government.

As was noted in the RIFG report, whilst much literature from the alternative farming movement talks about the general barriers to farming for small-scale new entrants, they generally skirt around issues of race-based barriers. It is only recently that this topic has begun to gain more traction, but it still takes a back seat, with very little in the way of promising pathways forward. Some of the barriers faced by BPOC are similar to non-BPOC. For example, finding paid farm work, access to land, being given tedious tasks where they are not able to learn, and stigma associated with farm work, especially for those coming from urban backgrounds. Addressing these barriers for BPOC would therefore help in addressing them for all. In addition to these challenges, BPOC trainees also face isolation, microaggressions and being treated as incompetent, which may all be further compounded by any racially targeted experiences they may have encountered earlier in life.

The recommendations fall into six main categories: narratives, culture, support strategy, spaces, networks and land. These need to be implemented in parallel, rather than in isolation.

Narratives

Shifting narratives presents a deep leverage point for systems change, as pervasive narratives define behaviour and societal norms that perpetuate reinforcing cycles of oppression. Shifting narratives requires collective assessments of what we value in a healthy farming system for all.

- Augment media presence of a diversity of farming role models to shift the image of who belongs in farming and in rural Britain.
- Stop ignorance that perpetuates racial bias. For example, misconceptions around BPOC people being less able to farm, or misconceptions of what Halal and Tayibb mean in relation to rearing animals for meat.
 - Educational resources play a large part in shaping narratives.
 - Bring farming into the curriculum at younger ages.
 - British BPOC resources for adult learners – younger trainees in agroecological farming were frustrated by the dominance of white male authors in horticultural and agricultural literature.
 - Shifting narratives should not create more tokenisation – this causes harm and exacerbates feelings of isolation in an industry. It also produces very surface level impressions of change, whilst doing nothing to approach issues of racial inequity at a deeper, more transformative level. It can, in fact, act to sustain racial inequity, by presenting a semblance of change, whilst maintaining the status quo of the same old power imbalances.
 - to avoid **tokenism**, allow people to shape their own narratives, for example, re-share their own social media posts, or give them control over the narratives their image is being used to portray.

Culture

Culture is strongly interlinked with narratives, and changing work culture on farms and in organisations is part of a systemic approach that also addresses more direct and material needs for support.

- Promote anti-oppressive workplace cultures via trainings and clear policies so that farms and related organisations have an understanding of anti-oppression and transformative justice principles.
 - Addressing work culture that tolerates microaggressions.
 - Ensure people feel cared for and supported when they experience grievance. This will necessarily also require trainings in conflict: as organisations open up to welcome different ways of being and thinking (that comes when people from different cultures come together) there will inevitably be conflicts of ideas. If approached well, this type of conflict can be incredibly constructive.
- In agricultural universities take active steps to extinguish oppressive, racist, homophobic and ablist cultures. With evidence of racist microaggressions, more overt racist acts such as black-face, and casual racist jokes, it would be immoral to attempt to convince more BPOC people to attend such colleges, given the potential for harm. So whilst diversity scholarships and programs are encouraged, it is crucial that they are accompanied by appropriate trainings for staff, to ensure that students from different backgrounds would be entering a safe and supportive environment.
- Stop encouraging acceptance of racism. Many participants declared a need for the thick skin in this industry, and this was a moment where I found myself unable to accept this as a long term strategy. By encouraging BPOC to develop thicker skin, and stronger resilience to microaggression, overt racism and **systemic racism**, we give a license for racism to continue. Should thick skin ever be considered as more than a coping strategy?
- Stop audible silences. The prevalence of “white silence” on racism in rural Britain was noted in the literature review and came through in the interviews, where there was no language to discuss these issues with white people. Organisations that do not take an active standpoint to bring about changes in diversity in farming are equally part of the problem.

Support strategies

- Support emerging BPOC teachers and role models who are ready to share their skills.
- Funding for continual support of new entrants.
- There is scope for training on a variety of business models, for example commercial for-profit versus commercial not-for-profit. Many people expressed a desire to earn just enough to sustain themselves through their farm business, but some say that thinking profitably is crucial.
 - Establish guidelines for how to ethically engage in unpaid labour. This should be approached with caution, and whilst there is no desire to encourage an increase in unpaid labour, where it exists, the relationship must be mutually beneficial and not exploitative – preferably there should be more benefit to the labourer in the exchange, than to the manager, given the inherent power imbalance.
- Trade unions, such as Solidarity Across Land Trades which, although still in its early days, will be open to unpaid trainees and volunteers too.

“Being really clear about like boundaries and arrangements, really seeking some clarity, before you enter into an arrangement is really important. I think people are sometimes shy to say, actually, this housing you’re offering me is not good enough”
Mey

“I think loads of people who said they want to try and encourage **BIPOC** people into land work underestimate how much support it takes to get anybody into land work. One course or this or that – it’s not enough, it’s a really long, ongoing process. It takes a lot of time, and it takes a lot of money on all stages of the journey to support that, you know, it’s not like you instantly hold workshop, and BIPOC people are there, and then all of a sudden, they’re gonna be farmers.”

Mey

Spaces

- The hubs and refuges for BPOC landworkers mentioned in the literature review should continue to be supported, and seeds for new hubs sown. Not everyone who goes into farming takes a route through such hubs, in fact many people get involved in the first instance through white-led organisations, and then subsequently connect with such groups for ongoing support. Also, whilst some BPOC are able to integrate well in white spaces, and dismiss any microaggressions, for others this can be a highly vulnerable space to operate in.
- Such established spaces would be well placed to provide recurring workshops and events that can be important BPOC spaces for healing, convening and knowledge sharing, for example, the LWA BPOC retreats BPOC and justice spaces at conferences (ORFC, Land Skills Fair, Caucus).

Networks

- Connecting people through in-person events. One person notes how organisations such as LION don’t necessarily have the capacity to support everyone with what they need, but if LION can make the connections, “we could have supported each other.”
- There is a desire for the establishing of more regional hubs in different areas of Britain.
- Financially support existing networks, such as the RIFG BPOC London network, which is helping to build connections beyond the London region.

“I think by, interconnecting us, with real life, face to face events, as well as virtual events. Because there’s a limited scope of what these organisations can do. But if, if they utilise their power, their network, their visibility to connect the individuals, then there’s a lot more that we can get done.”

Kiki

Land

- One of the participants was able to purchase land through the ELC, which made the acquisition more affordable and accessible, with ongoing support for the business. These schemes are vital for providing more entry points into farming for those that do not have as much access through traditional routes, but alternative models should be explored that can be adapted for smaller amounts of start-up capital.
- Guidance should be created for large landowners and institutional gatekeepers in farming to pursue a pathway in how they may relinquish power and land, and the relevance of directing such land towards communities of colour, as a form of reparation.
- Establishing protocols and blueprints is needed for formalising more secure arrangements for farmers on leased or informally borrowed land.
- Collective buying. Although not interviewed for this report, anecdotally I am aware of groups of BPOC people that are interested in buying land collectively, and are already organizing around this. A major motivation for this is to move into a rural area with a community that holds some shared experience of BPOC, and therefore avoid the feelings of isolation that come with living in rural Britain, however some people also consider other countries, for cultural, financial and climatic reasons.

How may we...

To communities of colour,

- How may we exist, operate and thrive within a farming system that was not made for us?
- How may we transform a farming system that was not made for us into a place of belonging?

Recommendations:

Continue to build networks of support and solidarity;

Reflect on internalised racism, that perpetuates the falsehood that Black people and people of colour do not belong as farmers in Britain;

Work on increasing confidence, healing practices and decreasing isolation;

Create opportunities for knowledge sharing;

Create more opportunities for BPOC to be on the land together.

To farming organisations,

- How may we facilitate the transformation of this system towards racial liberation?
- How may we make millions of displaced or rerouted people, arrivals old and new, feel at home in this land which carries within it the legacies of colonialism, and is a relic of the feudal system?
- How may avoid paternalism and avoid seeing BPOC as poor and needy?

Recommendations:

Address the internal culture of your organisation and open up for new ways of building caring support, and holding potentially uncomfortable conversations. Decolonial collaborations between historically oppressed and historically oppressive groups are often fraught. In order to braid together such "historical dissonance" [66] it is important to consider the conditions necessary to improve relationships that might bring about wiser futures.

Commissioning further research which will strengthen the evidence base for policy making and transformation of practice.

To funding bodies,

- How may we redistribute power through innovative funding mechanisms?
- Design funding that encourages support for BPOC at different stages, and different ages, given that people may be entering the sector in their 20s or 30s with minimal experience or background.

Recommendations:

A crucial material leverage point is to increase funds, and consider how funding is advertised to target a wide and diverse range of applicants.

Focus funds on the areas that have been put forth in these recommendations.

To governmental organisations,

- How may we ensure that communities of colour are seen not only as benefactors of aid and charity when it comes to food system interventions, but also as important producers of Britain's food supply?

Recommendations:

Phase out a farming system that is designed only for large scale farmers, but create further support for farmers from different backgrounds, and policy levers that open up access to land.

Bring farming into the curriculum early

Build capacity for urban and peri-urban farming.

CONCLUSION

The evidence presented in this report goes to demonstrate some of the barriers faced by BPOC in the agricultural sector in Britain. When viewed collectively, and structurally, experiences that might be all too easily dismissed as insignificant begin to emerge as harmful patterns.

Continued targeted research can help guide organisations, individuals and political movements orientated towards the liberation of the global majority from the ongoing impacts and legacies of colonialism and racial oppression.

I hope that the publication of this report and the ongoing work in the sector, outlined in the literature review, will act to draw more relevant people into the conversation, to add further experiences and expertise. I anticipate that these findings will inspire thoughtful conversation and well motivated actions to bring greater racial equity and anti-oppressive culture to British farming.



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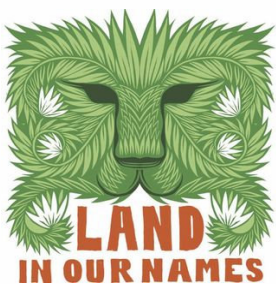


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