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This Land is My Land: racism and antiracism in farmland succession in Auburn,
Maine

An Honors Thesis

Presented to
The Faculty of the Program in Environmental Studies
Bates College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By
Jesse Bull Saffeir
Lewiston, Maine
March 25, 2020

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Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	2
<i>Introduction</i>	5
<i>Chapter 1: Literature Review</i>	13
Chapter 1.1: Overtly racialized farmland dispossession – 1492 to 1960’s	15
Chapter 1.2: Structurally racialized farmland dispossession – 1960’s to 2000.....	22
Chapter 1.3: Racialized rhetoric of farming: contemporary racism in farmland access, 2000 to 2020 ..	28
<i>Chapter 2: Methods and Ethics</i>	43
Chapter 2.2: Research ethics and positionality	48
Chapter 2.3: Research design	53
<i>Chapter 3: Results</i>	57
Chapter 3.1: Material outcomes of racism in farmland access.....	57
Chapter 3.2: Racialized discourses of farmland access.....	68
Chapter 3.3: Antiracism	84
<i>Chapter 4: Discussion</i>	88
Chapter 4.1: Comparison to previous findings.....	89
Chapter 4.2: Building farmland justice	96
<i>Conclusion</i>	108
<i>Works Cited</i>	111
<i>Appendix A: Pitch to Interviewees</i>	118
<i>Appendix B: Ginger Cookies</i>	119
<i>Appendix C: Interview Questions</i>	120
<i>Appendix D: Thesis Summary</i>	123

Abstract

White people own 99% of all farmland in Maine. While white farmland owners are aging out of farming, which puts this land at risk of development, a new generation of farmers of color is currently seeking farmland. However, institutional racism poses significant barriers to entrant farmers. Additionally, research suggests that farmland succession also relies on informal social networks that actively exclude people of color, although little scholarship has focused exclusively on this topic. In this thesis, I conduct a case study with farmland owners and service providers to better understand how the social networks of farmland owners impact the ability of farmers of color to access farmland in Auburn, Maine. I find that farmland owners and their neighbors create significant barriers to farmland access for farmers of color. Farmland owners interact with the racist distribution of farmland by hesitating or refusing to sell to farmers of color, selling to the highest bidder in a racist economic structure, willing farmland to white family members, and opposing reparations. I also study the rhetoric of farming owners, finding that participants employ rhetorical tropes that disguise racism, blame racism on people of color, and attempt to define racism in nonracial terms. I also find several examples of farmland owners practicing antiracism. I suggest that future antiracist work to address racism within farmland owner social networks should focus on implementing antiracist national farming policy, educating landowners, creating a Farmer of Color Farmland Succession Program, and exploring models of land access beyond capitalist structures of ownership.

Introduction

“Revolution is based on land. Land is the basis of all independence. Land is the basis of freedom, justice, and equality.”

– Malcolm X

Farming is the second whitest profession in the US (Thompson 2013). Topped only by veterinarians, farmers are whiter than even CEO's. Over ninety-five percent of farmers and ranchers are white (Thompson 2013). The racial gap among farmland owners is even more striking. White people own 98% of all farmland and generate 98% of all farm-related income from farm ownership (Horst and Marion 2019, 1). These statistics are not an accident, but rather the outcome of centuries of systematic discrimination that attempted to rob people of color of the ability to own farmland and maintain a living from it.

Before colonization, all farmland in what is now the US belonged to Indigenous Peoples (Williams and Holt-Giménez 2017, 2). Genocide and land theft dispossessed Indigenous Peoples of the vast majority of their land and relegated them to unproductive areas (Horst and Marion 2019, 2). By 1920, Black families had accumulated 16 million acres of farmland, making up 14% of all US farmland (Gilbert et al. 2002), but during the 20th century, structural racism dispossessed African Americans of most of this land. The number of Black farmers in the US declined by 98% (Quisumbing King et al. 2018 682). Black farmers now own less than 1% of US farmland (Gilbert et al. 2002; Schell 2015, 6). Nonwhite immigrant farmers experienced racial exclusion from farming as well, with specific laws in the 20th century prohibiting them from owning farmland (Suzuki 2004). These forms of institutional and structural racism in

farmland access have gendered dimensions, impacting women of color the most severely (Horst and Marion 2019, 3). That farmers and farmland owners in the US are overwhelmingly white and male is the direct result of centuries of systematic racial and gendered exclusion from farmland ownership.

My thesis is grounded in the recognition that land and food are intertwined sources of power and tools of oppression. Land ownership is a source of power; owning and controlling land has been the key to upward mobility for white Americans, and for the people of color who kept hold of their land in the face of systematic land grabbing, this land has become a source of empowerment, identity, sovereignty, and wealth (Quisumbing King et al. 2018). Likewise, food is a source of power because it is powerful determinant for who thrives and who goes hungry or becomes sick. Food and land are tools that maintain white supremacy, but they also contain the power to overturn and transform systems of oppression. Recognizing the dual power of land and food, I write this thesis to contribute to an ongoing endeavor led by farmers of color, activists, scholars, and farming NGOs who are currently asking: *how can we create equitable access to farmland?*

Previous research on equitable farmland access has focused on this question from the perspective of the farmer, describing the injustices committed against farmers of color, and highlighting the ways in which farmers of color have overcome structural barriers to farm successfully. More research has focused on the role organizations and programs that support farmers, documenting widespread institutional racism, and evaluating what best practices have created more equitable farmland access. However, farmland owners are also important actors in farmland accessibility, particularly at this moment when one third of farmland is projected to change hands in the next 15 years (American Farmland Trust n.d.). Little research has focused

explicitly on the role of landowners in farmland transfer to farmers of color. Because 98% of all farmland is bound up in the hands of white landowners, (Horst and Marion 2019, 1) efforts to create racially just farming systems will need to consider how farmland owners influence farmland succession. In this thesis I ask, *what is the role of settler-descended landowners in facilitating or challenging farmland transfer to farmers of color in Auburn, Maine?*

Race and farming systems

I situate my thesis within a greater body of work that seeks to understand how historical and present forms of racism structure our national farming system, and how we can transform this system towards land justice and food justice. This body of work contextualizes present racial disparities in access to food and farmland within a centuries-long history of systematic racism. Farmland dispossession took many forms, from slavery, sharecropping, post-reconstruction policies that effectively barred African Americans from farmland ownership (Bowens 2015; Castro and Willingham 2019; Gilbert et al. 2002; Grant et al.; 2012; Holt-Giménez and Harper 2016; Horst and Marion 2019; Penniman 2018; Quisumbing King et al. 2018; Schell 2015; Tyler and Moore 2013; Taylor 2018; Wood and Gilbert 2000; Wood et al. 2012) to 20th century policies prohibiting immigrants of color from owning land (Bowens 2015; Horst and Marion 2019; Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011; Suzuki 2004) and designating them as farm laborers (Mandee 2014; Zatz, Calavita, and Gamboa 1993). Farmers of color experienced land confiscations, relegation to unproductive and dangerous farmland, unequal access to disaster relief, racial violence, denial of USDA loans, and boycotts by white merchants (Newman 2017; Schell 2015; Taylor 2018; Wood and Ragar 2012). The history of farming illustrates how “racism is built into the DNA of the US food system,” (Penniman 2018, 5).

Centuries of racist farmland dispossession eroded the number of acres owned or controlled by farmers of color, resulting in the present-day racial disparities in farm ownership. While the land and food systems in what is now the United States were once entirely controlled by people of color, by the 2014 Ag Census, white people owned 98% and operated 94% of all farmland, and made 98% of all farm-related income (Horst and Marion 2019, 11). Farmers of color are much more likely than white farmers to be tenants, and they generate on average less income and wealth from farming (Horst and Marion 2019, 11).

This history of discrimination and of farmland dispossession has led to such an overwhelming majority of white farmers that many people assume people of color are simply not interested in farming (Flora et al. 2011, 123; Newman 2017; Penniman 2018). The national imaginary of a farmer is steeped in whiteness (Slocum 2006b, 528), delineating who people can see as a farmer, and who can imagine themselves becoming a farmer (Bowens 2015, 3). Inequalities and representation thus become mutually reinforcing (Guthman 2008, 388).

While the assumption that people of color not want to farm recognizes the trauma inflicted by slavery and exploitative farm labor practices, as Penniman writes, “many of us have confused the terror our ancestors experienced on land with the land herself,” (2018, 263). To reduce the heterogenous experiences of people of color on farmlands to trauma and exploitation is to overlook the complex identities and histories of people living in the US who are marked as nonwhite, and to overlook the ways in which the farm can become a site of resistance and resilience, offering healing, material gain, and cultural survival for farmers of color (Bowens 2015; Quisumbing King et al. 2018). It overlooks the contributions people of color have made to agriculture, including the inventions of modern organic agriculture, urban gardens, cooperatives, and community land trusts (Bowens 2015; Penniman 2018). Finally, assuming that people of

color do not want to own farmland risks diminishing the impact of structural racism in determining who can benefit from farmland and farm labor.

Race and farmland succession

I draw from this larger body of research on race in farming, narrowing in my case study on a small subfield on race in farmland succession. Currently, only a few scholars focus on this topic specifically. The number of acres of farmland has declined in the last century, due to farm consolidation, urbanization, and the rising cost of land (Carlisle et al. 2019; Horst and Marion 2019). Farmers are aging, and most farmland owners have not identified a successor for their farm (Freedgood and Dempsey 2014, 2). Beginning farmers are often not able to afford the high cost of this farmland, particularly near urban centers (Horst and Marion 2019). Barriers to farmland succession put farmland at risk of development and discourage a new generation of farmers (American Farmland Trust n.d.).

Beginning farmers of color face additional barriers to purchasing or accessing farmland. The racial wealth gap in the US makes affording farmland more difficult to begin with, and farmers of color are less likely to inherit farmland and capital (Carlisle et al. 2019, 3). Moreover, in practice, land access requires more than simply land availability and financial means, because actors in land transfer mediate land access through a set of social relationships (Calo and Demaster 2016, 115). Despite formal rights to participating in markets for land, farmers of color must navigate “social and relational mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion,” that in practice constrain their ability to purchase secure and suitable farmland (Calo and Demaster 2016, 116). Since nearly all farmland is owned by white people, the social relationships that are integral to land transfer operate in ways that create racial exclusion.

Structural barriers and social relationships combine to disproportionately relegate farmers of color to tenancy, creating “a power dynamic imbricated with the legacies of white agricultural land ownership and racism,” (Carlisle et al. 2019, 6).

Race in farmland succession is one of the most understudied areas of food justice, and yet the future of farmers of color hinges on equitable participation in farmland markets. One of the most widespread challenges experienced by all farmers is finding and negotiating affordable farmland that fits their needs (Freedgood and Dempsey 2014, 1; Williams and Holt-Giménez 2017, 3). Currently, farmers of color experience even greater difficulty finding and affording secure and suitable farmland due to structural barriers (Calo and Demaster 2016; Carlisle et al. 2019; Minkoff-Zern 2013; Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011). Despite this, few researchers have focused specifically on land access for farmers of color, and few farm programs support farmers of color in accessing land. No public land trusts or land link programs in the US, and no public or private land trusts or land link programs at all in Maine are geared specifically towards farmers of color. Given this gap in the literature and in programs, much work is needed to understand how to create farmland justice. Farmland justice is the right of marginalized communities and communities of color to “access, control, and benefit from” (Kerksen and Brent 2017, 286) farmland and farm resources. Recognizing that farmland justice hinges on both structural privileges and social relationships, and that structural privileges and social relationships are mutually reinforcing, I ask what role racism and antiracism play in farmland transfer between predominantly white landowners to farmers of color. To answer this question, I interview key informants from farmland access organizations in Maine and I conduct ethnographic fieldwork with farmland owners interested in selling their land to remain as farmland, in order to better understand how racism and resistance feature in these farmland transactions.

Study Context

I began my research by consulting with leaders from Maine organizations that support farmers of color, in order to design a research focus that could meaningfully contribute to the work already being done in the state related to race and farming. While the number of farmers of color in Maine is growing rapidly (USDA 2019; Watters 2015), many are struggling to find farmland. These leaders identified secure and long-term access to farmland as one of the most persistence challenges they face, and so I chose this as my area of focus. In this research I intend to describe the current social barriers to equitable farmland access, and do my best to find land owners committed to land justice who would like to see their farmland owned by farmers of color in the future. In my conversations with these current farm landowners, I attempt to fill a gap in the literature by focusing on the role of farmland owners in perpetuating or contesting racial inequities in farmland access and ownership. I conduct an ethnographic case study in which I ask how landowners imagine race, racism, and reparations in farming, and seek to understand what impacts these imaginaries have on the potential for transferring farmland from aging white farmland owners to a new generation of farmers of color.

Chapters to come

In this introduction I briefly summarized the previous literature on race and farmland access that informs this thesis, I explained what motivated me to research this topic, and I summarized the ethnographic case study I will carry out. Chapter 1 will be a literature review and historical overview of racism and resistance in farmland ownership in the United States. I trace the history of land injustice, beginning with genocide and land theft from Native Peoples,

and continuing into the present, weaving in theory of the racial state, theory of discourses within food and farming, and racialization theory, or theory which attempts to describe how racial meaning is ascribed to people and practices (Barot and Bird 2001; Selod and Embrick, 2013), in order to make sense of this history within greater racialized structures of power. In chapter 2, I introduce the methods I use to collect my data and conduct my ethnographic study, and discuss the ethics of environmental justice research. In chapter 3, I describe my interviews with landowners in Auburn, Maine interested in selling their farmland. I examine the role that racism and antiracism play in these interactions, analyzing my participants' rhetoric about race in the context of theory introduced in my literature review. In chapter 4, I will discuss the implications of my ethnographic research for efforts to create farmland justice in Maine, and identify ways that land justice work can take into consideration the role of landowners in perpetuating or contesting racial inequities in farmland access.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Introduction

Racism and farming have deep and tangled roots in US history. Beginning with colonization and continuing on to the present, racism and farming have intertwined in multiple ways to structurally disadvantage farmers of color. In my literature review I introduce a brief history of racism in farmland access in the US, and describe the ways in which this history remains tangible in the present. Rather than detail a comprehensive history of the struggle of all farmers of color to acquire and maintain ownership of farmland, I highlight examples that illustrate how racism in farmland access has evolved throughout US history. A concise history comes at the expense of the many stories of both oppression and resistance untold, and so many important moments in this history are absent from my literature review. Rather than a complete historical narrative, I hope to leave readers with a conceptual understanding of the cyclical nature of racism in farmland access. This history has not been a linear trajectory from more racism to less racism, but rather a process of resistance to racism and subsequent racist backlash (Kendi 2017; Omi and Winant 1994, 85). Many of the racist processes I describe are still ongoing today – particularly the occupation of Indigenous land, the disparities in wealth created by slavery and Jim Crow, and the exploitation of farmworkers – only now these forms of racism are defended with less overtly racialized language (Bonilla-Silva and Foreman 2000).

I break the history of racism in farmland access into three conceptual eras, which I distinguish by the ways in which racism manifested. In the first era, spanning roughly from colonization to the Civil Rights Movement, farming policy discriminated overtly on the basis of race. In the second era, from the Civil Rights Movement to late the 1990's, racist intentions in

farming policy became unspoken and unacknowledged, although farming systems continued to reproduce racist outcomes (Kendi 2017, 8). For the first two eras, I draw from theories of the racial state (Kurtz 2009) to explain how the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and wider farming systems allocate material benefits differentially based on race. In the third era, 2000 to the present, I analyze the ideologies and discourses that allow racism to persist unacknowledged in farming, even after a series of lawsuits against the USDA attempted to root out structural racism. In this section I unpack the theoretical tools I use to make sense of contemporary racism in farming: theories of racialized discourses of farming politics (Schell 2015), and racialization theory, which studies the process through which racial meaning is constructed, applied, and transformed (Selod and Embrick 2013, 647). I draw on both of these theories to explain how inequitably distributed material benefits become justified and invisibilized in the present.

The material processes (the racial state) and the discursive processes (racialized rhetoric) that establish and reinforce structural racism have been active forces throughout the history of farming in the US. While I distinguish between both processes for conceptual clarity – the first occurs mainly through policies, and the second mainly through ideologies and rhetoric – both processes are self-reinforcing and deeply interconnected. In practice, overt and structural racism are not stages in a linear progression, but rather have emerged in different forms throughout US farming history (Kendi 2017). Ultimately, regardless of the form that racism takes in farming, the end result has been that farmland and farm-related wealth has overwhelmingly accumulated in the hands of white people.

Chapter 1.1: Overtly racialized farmland dispossession – 1492 to 1960's

I use the racial state as my theoretical framework for examining the ways in which legal structures have distributed material resources inequitably to farmers on the basis of race. Omi and Winant define the racial state as a racialized system “composed of institutions, the policies they carry out, the conditions and rules which support and justify them, and the social relations in which they are embedded,” (1994, 83). Thinking about farming through the lens of the racial state uncovers the continuity between overt and systematic racisms in the history of farming. While the history of discrimination towards farmers of color has included multiple legalized practices from outright colonial land theft, to loan denial (Schell 2015; Taylor 2018; Wood and Ragar 2012), to disproportionate exposure to natural disasters and subsequent denial of disaster relief (Taylor 2018, 49; Wood and Ragar 2012, 20), to restrictive land laws that applied only to immigrants of color (Suzuki 2004, 125), these apparently disparate practices all serve to reinforce white hegemony in farmland ownership. The racial state as a theoretical framework helps explain racism in farming, as it allows us to see racism not only as individual, intentional events (Kurtz 2009, 687) but also as practices woven throughout political and social spheres that structurally enforce white supremacy (Kurtz 2009, 695). Racism is more than racist language or actions. It is a system of social and political relationships that subordinate people of color. Farming in the US offers a concrete example of the racial state, as white supremacy was built into the foundation of our national farming system and continues to perpetuate racism through institutions, policies, and social relations.

People have lived in the land that is now the US since the beginning of time (Steeves 2015). Indigenous Peoples cultivated this land for food, constructing vast irrigation systems, building farming villages, and managing wild crops on an ecosystem level (Holt-Giménez and

Harper 2016, 1). In 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued the Doctrine of Discovery, which gave Christian nations the right to enslave non-Christians and take ownership of their lands. This Papal Bull gave rise to both the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism. European settlers killed 90 percent of the population of the Americas, an estimated 56 million people (Koch et al. 2019). Settlers stole nearly 1.5 billion acres of land, much of which was farmland, from Native Americans (Kerssen and Brent 2017, 289; Williams and Holt-Giménez 2017, 4). Colonial land theft is not a historical event, as it continues today. The Doctrine of Discovery was last cited in court as recently as 2005, when the US Supreme Court denied the Oneida Nation of New York full sovereignty over their lands (Newcomb 2005). The land where the following struggles for control and ownership of farmland ensued is occupied Indigenous land.

From 1526 to 1857 twelve and a half million Africans were kidnapped from their homelands and brought across the Atlantic to the Americas for forced agricultural labor. Slavery itself lasted legally until 1865 in the US, and enslaved people generated an estimated \$14 trillion (in 2016 dollars) in wealth for their enslavers (Williamson and Cain 2016). Many enslaved people resisted however, from Gullah/Geechee communities who created their own language, culture, foodways and crafts (Bowens 2015, 105), to Sojourner Truth who escaped slavery in 1828 with her daughter and became an outspoken activist advocating for land justice and reparations for African Americans (Penniman 2018, 291). Truth and Black ministers in the South convinced Union General William T. Sherman to implement the “40 acres and a mule” plan (Penniman 2018, 291). For a brief moment after slavery legally ended, African Americans who had fought for the union received 400,000 acres of land. President Andrew Johnson took this land back one year later (Williams and Holt-Giménez 2017, 5).

The end of slavery marked a transition to new forms of exploitation of African Americans through agriculture, including Black Codes, convict leasing, and sharecropping. The 13th Amendment to the Constitution abolished slavery, except in cases where people were convicted of a crime. Black people were systematically arrested for “crimes” such as being unemployed, particularly around harvest season when white farmers needed extra hands on their farms (Penniman 2018, 267). For many formerly enslaved people who avoided arrest for unemployment, employment itself became a form of neo-slavery. Few freed people could afford land, having no previous access to wealth or income, and landowning whites took advantage of Black farmers. White landowners charged them such a high price to rent farmland and purchase seeds and equipment that many owed more money the end of the season than they had earned (ibid. 267). Sharecropping ensnared Black tenant farmers in a system of perpetual debt that made them legally beholden to the white landowners who, year after year, took the money they earned.

Meanwhile, white farmers were expanding Westward, taking more land from the Indigenous Peoples who lived there. The Homestead Acts of 1862 provided land grants to settlers who moved west (Williams and Holt-Giménez 2017, 5), transferring 270 million acres of farmland from Native Americans to whites (Penniman 2018, 266). While Black people were legally allowed to participate in these programs, many were still enslaved at this point, and discrimination barred most free Black people from taking advantage of them.

While Black citizens could (theoretically) legally own farmland in the late 19th century, most farming policies from the late 1800’s to the mid 1900’s explicitly discriminated against nonwhite immigrant farmers. Legislation banned most nonwhite immigrants from citizenship, and thus farmland ownership as well. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 classified all immigrants from Asia as nonwhite (Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011, 66). At this point in US history, all

nonwhite immigrants to the US were deprived of the rights to citizenship, voting, and property ownership (Minkoff-Zern 2013, 4; Smith 2003). The Chinese Exclusion Act not only restricted the rights of Chinese immigrants already in the United States, but strictly limited further immigration from China, based on the fear that Chinese laborers would take jobs from white Americans (Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011, 69). The Chinese immigrants already in the US had very little opportunity for upward mobility or farmland ownership, mostly remaining as farm laborers working for poverty wages. The Chinese Exclusion Act was foundational to laying out racial inequality in farmland ownership, as well as legally designating what evolved to become modern conceptions of racial categories (Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011, 70).

The Chinese Exclusion Act inspired many more laws restricting farmland ownership among immigrants and refugees classified as nonwhite. In 1913, California passed the Alien Land Law, prohibiting Japanese immigrants from purchasing or leasing farmland (Suzuki 2004, 125). The law, which explicitly barred “aliens ineligible for citizenship,” (Suzuki 2004, 128) from farm-ownership, specifically targeted immigrants of color, because whiteness was still, in the early 20th century, a prerequisite for attaining citizenship (Minkoff-Zern 2013, 4; Smith 2003). Proponents of the law were transparent about its racist impetus, advertising it with the slogan of “Keep California White,” (Suzuki 2004, 130). Over the next thirty years, fourteen states passed similar laws (Suzuki 2004, 130) which resulted in a 47 percent decline in the acres of farmland owned by Japanese farmers (Suzuki 2004, 137).

However, Japanese farmers were remarkably successful at circumventing these laws, creating “dummy corporations” through which they bought land, and buying land in the names of white neighbors or children born in the US (Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011, 72). This changed during World War II, when Japanese American farmers were deprived of most of the land they

had managed to gain. Japanese American farmers across the West Coast were incarcerated in concentration camps, losing their farms, homes, and businesses (Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011, 73). After the war, most were unable to regain their land. The Chinese Exclusion Act was finally repealed in 1943, and the Alien Land Law Act was repealed in 1956 (Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011, 72). By this point, three quarters of nonwhite immigrant farmers were landless tenants, while three-quarters of white farmers were landowners (Suzuki 2004, 140).

The state actively worked to keep nonwhite people landless in order to supply cheap farm labor. In 1942, the United States and Mexico struck a deal, known as the Bracero Program, to import Mexican peasant laborers to work as manual farm laborers in the US (Mandee 2014, 171). The program created short term labor contracts between individual Mexican workers and US farmers. While the contracts intended to give workers rights including fixed income, free housing, and affordable food (Zatz, Calavita, and Gamboa 1993, 852), in practice, US farms exploited Braceros, paying them low wages, and using them as strike breakers against domestic workers as the program prohibited striking (Mandee 2014, 179). Undocumented immigration increased alongside the Bracero Program (Mandee 2014, 179), and growers preferred undocumented workers, as they had less ability to demand fair pay and safe working conditions (ibid. 179). Even after the Bracero Program ended, US growers relied on cheap, imported Mexican labor. Without documentation, farmworkers had little ability to organize for their rights, and few pathways to farmland ownership.

Despite efforts to keep farmers of color as landless farmworkers, many were still successful in purchasing farmland. By 1920, African American farmers accumulated 16 million acres of farmland, 14% of all US farmland at the time (Gilbert, Sharp, and Felin 2002). Given the magnitude of discrimination due to sharecropping and Black Codes, this was an incredible

feat of resistance. Many Black sharecroppers managed to save up money and purchased this land in spite of the reversal of 40 acres and a mule, while others occupied abandoned plantations following the Civil War (Penniman 2018, 291). Cooperatives, a common form of collective farm ownership today, were created by Black farmers in the South during the late 19th century as a way of affording farmland and sharing costs (Taylor 2018, 70), allowing many Black farmers throughout the 20th century to purchase and retain their farmland in the face of efforts to keep them landless (ibid. 56). Black farmers founded farming schools including Tuskegee University, a Black farming university aimed to support Black students transitioning from sharecropping to owning farmland (Taylor 2018, 52). The early 20th century saw a flourishing of Black agrarianism and advances in agricultural techniques created by Black farmers. George Washington Carver, an African American farmer and Tuskegee professor, invented modern organic agriculture (Penniman 2018, 3), and with the help of Tuskegee professor Booker T Whatley, pioneered regenerative agriculture, created the first CSA's (community supported agriculture) and founded pick-your-own farming (Penniman 2018, 287). Black farmers found freedom, pride, community, and sufficiency in farmland ownership, and white farmers began to fear that they would no longer have a monopoly on agriculture.

As Black farmland ownership reached its peak in 1920, it was met with racist backlash. The number of Black farmers subsequently declined by 50% every 10 years (Grant, Wood, and Wright 2012, 3). Throughout the course of the 20th century, Black farmers lost 98% of their land (Quisumbing King et al. 2018, 682). Black farmers who became farmland owners faced widespread violence from their white competitors. Over 4,000 African Americans were lynched between 1877 and 1950 (Penniman 2018, 267). Many of these lynchings targeted Black landowners and were meant to punish them for not “staying in their place” as sharecroppers

(Penniman 2018, 267). In her memoir, Shirley Sherrod, African American farmer and former Georgia State Director of Rural Development for the USDA, recounts the terror her family and other Black farming families experienced at the hands of the police and white landowners. Sherrod's father was murdered by a white farmer over a livestock dispute, and the murderer was never convicted (Schell 2015, 13). State sanctioned domestic terrorism was a daily reality for Black farmers. Between 1908 and the present white people violently stole at least 24,000 acres of land from Black people (Penniman 2018, 268). In some cases, they killed Black landowners, and in others they forced Black landowners to sign papers giving over their land (Penniman 2018, 268).

While the state overlooked violence against Black farmers, it simultaneously further dispossessed them of their land through a series of farming policies. In 1937, the USDA's Resettlement Administration, later renamed the Farm Service Administration (FSA), created New Deal farming settlements in response to the national decline of farmers of all races (Grant, Wood, and Wright 2012, 7; Taylor 2018, 53). These policies placed Black farmers on the most unproductive and dangerous pieces of land (Taylor 2018, 53; Wood and Ragar 2012, 20). Black farmers experienced floods that damaged their homes and destroyed their crops at a much higher rate than did white farmers (Taylor 2018, 54; Wood and Ragar 2012, 20), while simultaneously being denied the disaster relief and emergency loans available to white farmers (Schell 2015, 7). The FSA knowingly placed the Tillery farming community, a settlement of Black farmers in North Carolina, in a flood zone at the request of white farmers, where a decade later a flood swept away half of the project (Wood and Ragar 2012, 20). Explicitly racialized policy decisions destroyed the livelihoods of many Black farmers in the early 20th century. Despite these racist

policies, however, Black farming communities in the South, including the Tillery Project, persisted, and later became hubs of resistance against USDA racism.

Chapter 1.2: Structurally racialized farmland dispossession – 1960's to 2000

During the mid 20th century, much of the racial language was removed from agriculture policies impacting farmers of color, and yet the structure of agriculture programs continued to perpetuate white supremacy. These structures offer a concrete example of Mill's assertion that "power relations can survive the formal dismantling of their more overt supports," (2003, 179). Returning to Omi and Winant's definition, the racial state "is composed of institutions, the policies they carry out, the conditions and rules which support and justify them, and the social relations in which they are embedded," (1994, 83). While policies no longer contained obviously racially targeted clauses, farming policies in the late 20th century reflected wider racialized ideologies and were situated within racialized social relationships. As farming legislation became colorblind (Wood and Ragar 2012, 23), discrimination became diffuse and invisible to white people, allowing for the apparent lack of success of farmers of color to become weaponized and used as a justification for further withholding of government support (Wood and Ragar 2012, 20). The structure of USDA programs in the later 20th century can best be understood as a manifestation of colorblindness and neoliberalism, that emphasizes universal opportunity while masking lived inequity (Alkon 2014). As a Civil Rights Action Team report later observed, "Black farmers suffered their most debilitating discrimination during the Civil Rights era when laws supposedly protected them from racist policies," (Wood and Ragar 2012, 25).

Racism is a widely employed and loosely understood concept. Popular definitions of racism have long focused on acts of intentional racism as being the only type of racism

(Crenshaw 1997). However, racist intent is perhaps not the most useful way of conceptualizing racism, because racist intentions became shrouded in supposedly nonracial language in the 20th century (Kendi 2017, 8). In his book, *Stamped from the Beginning* Ibram X. Kendi, argues that “the shrewdest and most powerful racist ideologues have managed to define their ideas outside of racism,” (2017, 5) creating considerable confusion about what racism actually is, and allowing white people to imagine their actions and ideologies as nonracist. Because intentionality has become a sticking point for misunderstanding the structural nature of racism, I here define racism as a disproportionately negative impact to a group of people racialized as nonwhite. Minkoff-Zern et al. argue that “dispossession is racialized when laws, policies, or practices specifically affect particular racial groups, whether purposely or unintentionally,” (2011, 68). Thus, a system can be racist even with no overtly racialized language or clear racist intent, if that system leads to negative consequences being allocated disproportionately towards people of color.

Chris Newman, a Black Indigenous farm owner illustrates the structural nature of racism in this simple analogy, asking his fellow farmers:

Ever been left-handed and used dangerous power tools like chainsaws and weed whackers, only

to have a mouthful of sawdust or a rock to the groin violently inform you that everything on those tools— from the safety mechanisms to the trigger placement to the ergonomic sweep of the handles—are designed for right-handed people? That’s what racism is like, except the chainsaw was designed by a guy who didn’t want left-handed people cutting firewood, trimming weeds, or sleeping with his daughter (2017).

The most harmful forms of racism are often not overt but structural, and invisible to those who do not experience them. Racism is not necessarily about language, or obvious intent, but is most importantly a matter of impact. Farming in the United States perpetuates racism because it is a

“system run by, and in the interests of, whites,” (Mills 2003, 179). Farmers of color must try to make a living in a farming system that was explicitly not designed for their benefit.

While mid-20th century USDA policies contained no hint of any overtly racialized language at the national level, the FSA established a system of loan offices that allowed for discrimination at state and local levels (Taylor 2018, 54; Wood and Ragar 2012, 19). The FSA was comprised of a federal office and a network of state offices run by committees of local farmers. The federal office allotted equitable funds to each state office, and then local commissioners were charged with determining whether individual farmers qualified for loans (Wood and Ragar 2012, 19). The local committees were disproportionately comprised of white farmers who were in direct competition with their Black neighbors (Taylor 2018, 54; Wood and Ragar 2012, 19). The committee structure itself, rather than legislation, led to blatant racism.

During an investigation into USDA loan discrimination, Garnet, a white loan officer, was asked if he had trouble giving loans to Black farmers after he was accused of throwing a loan application from a Black farmer in the trash in the early 1990’s. He responded by saying “Well, yeah. I think they’re lazy and want a paycheck on Friday, but that has nothing to do with me doing my job. That’s just the way I feel personally,” (quoted in Schell 2015, 8-9). The farmer whose loan application he had just thrown out was John Boyd, the President of the National Black Farmers Alliance, who has a Ph.D. in agricultural economics (Schell 2015, 8).

Garnets’ behavior serves as a microcosm for the ways in which the USDA failed to serve farmers of color. It was common practice at the USDA to deny farmers loans and disaster relief on the basis of race. The USDA is a lender of last resort, and at a time when Black farmers were frequently denied loans from local banks, either explicitly on the basis of race, or because building credit is a privilege disproportionately accessible to white people, the USDA was often

the only option for Black farmers seeking loans (Quisumbing King et al. 2018, 687). Farmers frequently rely on loans since they have to buy seeds, inputs, and equipment in the spring, but must wait until harvesting to recoup the profits. Since Black farmers were forced to operate without loans, a few bad years meant foreclosure, since they could not front the money for planting (Quisumbing King et al. 2018, 687). During the Civil Rights Movement in particular, the USDA would punish Black farmers who protested by denying them services (Penniman 2018, 268). On average, Black farmers received \$21,000 less in loans per year than white farmers owning comparably sized farms (Taylor 2018, 60). Moreover, for the Black farmers who did qualify for loans, untimely payouts posed an enormous barrier. It took an average of 60 days for the USDA to process loan applications for white farmers, and an average of 220 days to process loan applications for Black farmers (Taylor 2018, 58). By the time Black farmers received their loans, it was too late in the season to plant crops. So many Black farmers filed civil rights complaints with the USDA that the agency could not process them all. In response, the USDA dismantled their Office of Civil Rights in 1983 (Taylor 2018, 61). From that point forward no civil rights claims were processed, investigated, or addressed (Taylor 2018, 61).

The magnitude of discrimination in the FSA was startling. In 1982, the Civil Rights Commission issued a report that found the USDA responsible for the decline of Black farmers in the US and uncovered that Black farmers had received “1% of all farm ownership loans, only 2.5% of all farm operating loans, and only 1% of all soil and water conservation loans,” (Schell 2015, 8). As Garnet’s reference to laziness suggests, colorblindness allowed white farmers to create a vicious cycle in which Black farmers were discriminated against, blamed for their lack of success, and then further discriminated against under the justification that they were lazy and did not deserve loans. Colorblind policy perpetuated racism because “if everything is reduced to

individual will, work, and responsivity, there's no need to consider group exclusion," (Villanueva 2006, 4). By assuming all individuals are equal while overlooking inequality, the USDA systematically discriminated against Black farmers without any racially targeted legislation.

Meanwhile, outside of the USDA, wider economic and political forces related to farmland succession were driving farmers of color out of farmland ownership, including agricultural consolidation and heir property. Like the discrimination at the USDA, this wider discrimination occurred under colorblind policy. Following World War II, agriculture became increasingly mechanized, offering an advantage to wealthy, white farmers who could afford to expand, while disadvantaging farmers of color who did not have the same access to loans (Kerssen and Brent 2017, 291). While white-owned farms expanded, farmers of color saw their land base shrink through foreclosure, USDA discrimination, and through forced sales.

Heir or partition sales occur when a landowner dies without leaving a will, and because Black farmers harbored a valid distrust of institutions and paperwork, many did not write wills (Gilbert, Sharp, and Felin 2002, 7-8). Without a will, a farm property is transferred to all eligible heirs as a joint inheritance (Gilbert, Sharp, and Felin 2002, 7). If one person sells, the entire property goes up for forced sale (Gilbert, Sharp, and Felin 2002, 8; Taylor 2018, 54). White landowners would strategically buy small shares of heir property, forcing the sale of the rest of the farm. In situations where no heirs sold, the property was often still subject to forced tax sale (Gilbert, Sharp, and Felin 2002, 8). Coordinating tax paying among so many dispersed heirs made it extremely difficult to pay taxes on time, leading a farmland sale to pay back owed taxes. Heir property also contributed to denial of disaster relief as lack of clear title to the land was used a valid reason to deny disaster relief to Black farmers. In a clear example of historical continuity,

heir property is still currently used today as a supposedly nonracist reason for denying USDA and FEMA disaster relief to Black landowners in the wake of natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina (Malloy 2009).

The late 1990's marked the first instance in which structural racism in farming was acknowledged, and, at least somewhat, addressed. Black farmers from around the country organized in 1996 to protest at the White House against USDA discrimination (Grant, Wood, and Wright 2012, 5). A year later, Black farmers based in the Tillery Project organized into the Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association, and sued the USDA in *Pigford v. Glickman*, the largest class action lawsuit in the history of the US (Grant, Wood, and Wright 2012, 5). *Pigford v. Glickman* was followed by a 2000 class action lawsuit on behalf of Hispanic Ranchers and Farmers (Minkoff-Zern 2013; Schell 2015; Taylor 2018; Wood and Ragar 2012). Over 70,000 Black farmers filed claims of discrimination in the *Pigford v. Glickman* lawsuit, and it is estimated that there are nearly 50,000 more eligible claims (Wood and Ragar 2012, 28). Approximately 14,000 farmers have qualified so far (Taylor 2018, 62) and have been awarded \$50,000 each. The USDA has admitted to discriminating against Hispanic farmers and ranchers and is in the process of awarding \$50,000 to \$250,000 based on the severity of the claim (Minkoff-Zern 2013, 8).

The lawsuits were a victory for farmers of color in the sense that they formally acknowledged the structural nature of racism in farmland access. However, they were insufficient to address the magnitude of discrimination. The lawsuit payouts were not nearly enough to buy back the lost farmland, nor even repay the debts many farmers owed after being foreclosed on due to loan denials (Schell 2015, 11). Moreover, thousands of farmers did not receive notice of the lawsuit on time and filed late claims, many of which have been dismissed

(Wood and Ragar 2012, 28). Farmers of color who experienced discrimination after 2000 are not eligible to submit claims (Minkoff-Zern 2013, 8). While the USDA has changed its programs following the lawsuits to better serve farmers of color, it continues to receive complaints of racial discrimination (Minkoff-Zern 2013, 9). Many Black and Latinx farmers are now reluctant to apply for government loans as they believe, based on past experiences of discrimination, that they will not receive them (Minkoff-Zern 2013, 7; Taylor 2018, 69). Finally, these lawsuits only addressed the racism at the USDA, but failed to acknowledge the wider structures that made that discrimination possible, or the diffuse systemic racism that compounded with USDA discrimination to disfranchise farmers of color.

Chapter 1.3: Racialized rhetoric of farming: contemporary racism in farmland access, 2000 to 2020

Attempting to address structural racism did not end racism in farming, but rather allowed it to become even more elusive, demonstrating again how “power relations can survive the formal dismantling of their more overt supports,” (Mills 2003, 179). Current farm policies either make no mention of race, or are specifically aimed to support farmers who the USDA defines as “socially disadvantaged.” Despite this, farmers of color are negatively impacted by these programs as well as by racism embedded in greater social relations. Racist outcomes in USDA programs persist (Horst and Marion 2019, 1) because the farmers facing the fewest structural barriers are most able to take advantage of USDA programs (Calo 2018, 377). Wider racisms ranging from exclusion from alternative, white food spaces (Newman 2017; Slocum 2006b) to laws that privilege Western notions of labor and family (Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011) currently make it difficult for farmers of color to run a successful business. Racism in farmland access

evolved into new forms that structurally disadvantage farmers of color, but that are not widely perceive as being racism.

Rather than the result of ignorance, Kendi argues that racist outcomes such as these are quite intentional (2017, 9). He observes that “time and time again brilliant men and women have produced racist ideas in order to justify the racist policies of their era, in order to redirect the blame for their era’s racial disparities away from those policies an onto Black people,” (Kendi 2017, 9). Racist policies create the need for ideas and rhetoric to justify them, and so these racist ideas get packaged in a nonracial manner (ibid., 9). Racist ideas then compel further acts of hatred and violence towards people of color. Kendi summarizes progression of racism as “racial discrimination →racist ideas →ignorance/hate” (ibid., 9). Studying racist ideas through the racialized rhetoric of farming sheds light onto the ways in which the racial state has evolved into the present moment.

Scholars of contemporary racialized rhetoric argue that examining how people speak about race can make visible the racism inherent in apparently nonracial ideas. Like Kendi, they maintain that the “new racism” of the post-Civil Rights era operates through silence, and exists because of a cognitive dissonance between how racism is spoken about and how it operates (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000). Racism is popularly mis-defined as racial hatred rather than a system of privileges (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000, 68; Crenshaw 1997, 255). That this system of privileges exists at all is unacknowledged, and a new “racetalk” has emerged in which white people maintain white supremacy without ever mentioning race (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000, 52, 78).

While rhetoric is the study of speech, it is useful for understanding silence as well, because the absence of language conveys just as much as language itself (Villanueva 2006, 5).

Speech constructs our social realities (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000, 69; Crenshaw 1997, 256) and so does silence (Villanueva 2006, 5). The silent rhetoric of the new racism allows racism in farmland access to be construed as something other than racism, and allows it to remain uncontested. Analyzing this rhetoric helps uncover the ideologies that it makes possible, and sheds light on the persistence of racism within contemporary farming systems. While Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) argue this “new racetalk” emerged in the 1960’s in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, I argue that while this language was present in farming systems since the 1960’s, it is most relevant to the ways in which racism is perpetuated in farming systems since 2000, because farming systems did not legally address civil rights until the lawsuits of the late 1990’s and early 2000’s.

In her essay “Racialized Rhetorics of Food Politics,” Schell (2015) investigates the ways in which the rhetoric of farming contributes to the process of racialization. She analyzes “the racially coded complexities surrounding food and farming politics,” (Schell 2015, 2) by breaking down common rhetorical strategies that drive ongoing racism in farming. She draws from Victor Villanueva’s (2006) four racialized rhetorical tropes, based on the classic tropes of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. Villanueva emphasizes the important of recognizing that these tropes play an enormous role in constructing reality, arguing that “‘figures of speech’ are also ‘figures of ideology,’”(Villanueva 2006, 6).

Metaphor, the first trope, is a conceptual linking that allows one thing to stand in for another. In the context of racism, metaphor allows other words to signify race so that one can allude to race without speaking about it directly (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000, 52; Crenshaw 1997, 254). Metaphors for race appear in farming politics through the use of words such as “ethnicity,” “nationality,” “identity,” and “culture” (Schell 2015, 4; Villanueva 2006, 4), and

allow people to make universalizing claims that serve to further marginalize farmers of color, while maintaining that their language is not racist (Schell 2015, 4).

Another way that metaphor perpetuates racism in farming is through accusations of so-called reverse racism (Schell 2015, 4). Reverse racism is a fabricated phenomenon made possible by the metaphorical linking of racial oppression with affirmative action. Harkening back to times when laws discriminated overtly on the basis of race, it assumes that any mention of race is racist. If a policy or hiring practice prioritizes people of color with the intention of correcting for past racism, it must then be “racist” against white people. Reverse racism is one of the mechanisms through which racism gets misdefined as an action overtly motivated by race, rather than a system of privileges that subordinates people of color.

Metonymy, the second trope, is a process of reduction (Schell 2015, 4). In farming politics, metonymy manifests as individualism. Villanueva argues that “if everything is reduced to individual will, work, and responsibility, there’s no need to consider group exclusion,” (2006, 6). Because the new racism is not overt but structural, discovering that racism is occurring is a matter of identifying inequitable impacts to an entire racial group, rather than finding intentional and overt racism. For example, because late 20th century farming policy was officially colorblind while systematically disadvantaging farmers of color, the *Pigford v. Glickman* lawsuit had to rely on statistically demonstrable differences in funding distributed to Black versus white farmers, that could only be explained by racist policies or actions, in order to prove that racism was in fact occurring. By aggregating the experiences of Black farmers to show that they had collectively received less than 2% of farming loans (Schell 2015, 8), the plaintiffs were able to demonstrate that discrimination had occurred. Conversely, allegations that any *individual* Black farmer had been discriminated against would have been dismissed as anecdotal, as there was no racist

language on the books to back up this claim. The metonymy of individualism effectively invalidates group trends by refusing to consider them. Individualism leads to the assumption that oppressed peoples are not in fact oppressed, and with no other plausible explanation for their lack of success, leads people to believe that they simply did not work hard enough. Individualism is deeply tied to neoliberal discourses within food systems that assume that individuals are responsible for ensuring their own wellbeing through participation in the free market (Alkon 2014, 31), while overlooking the ways in which racism constrains participation in wealth building and land ownership.

The third discursive trope is irony, which Villanueva identifies in racialized rhetoric as colorblindness. Colorblindness is the refusal to acknowledge any racial difference under the assumption that discussing race is racist (Guthman 2008, 391). The initial irony of colorblindness is claiming not to see something that you clearly see. A deeper irony of colorblindness in farming is that the very farming officials who claimed to not see race betrayed themselves by creating and executing programs that had clear racialized outcomes (Schell 2015, 5). A final irony of colorblindness is that not noticing race means also not noticing racism (Villanueva 2006). Colorblindness itself becomes a form of violence, by erasing the “violence that the social construct of race has wrought in the form of racism,” (Guthman 2008, 391). Over time, while structural racism led to systematic disadvantages for farmers of color, it mostly went unacknowledged by white farmers and USDA staff, who assumed since their policies did not reference race, farmland loss was the fault of farmers of color, rather than their policies and programs (Wood and Ragar 2012, 23).

Colorblindness is a danger as well for its universalizing impulses. Universalism is the assumption that values held by whites are “normal and widely shared” (Guthman 2008, 391).

When white people create changes in farming systems meant to support all farmers, without considering how these changes interact with race, the result is often a program that works best for white people. This demonstrates how “one can be nominally nonracist and still contribute to a racist society,” (Guthman 2008, 390). Colorblindness and universalism combine to create what theorists commonly refer to as “the knowledge deficit approach,” where white people think they can solve oppression by educating the oppressed (Minkoff-Zern, 2014, 1190). In her essay, “If They Only Knew: Colorblindness and Universalism in California Alternative Food Institutions,” Guthman (2008) points out that efforts (almost always white-initiated) to educate communities of color about “healthy food” and alternative agriculture not only impose white values on people of color but also draw attention away from white supremacy, which actually created land injustice and food apartheid (the human built system of segregation and poverty responsible for food insecurity) in the first place (Guthman 2008, 391). Like racialized metonymy, universalism feeds into neoliberal assumptions that economic security is achieved through hard work and self-improvement (Minkoff-Zern, 2014, 1191).

The fourth and final racialized trope is synecdoche, a figure of speech in which a part stands in for a whole. While metonymy attempts to ignore the whole by focusing only on the part, synecdoche attempts to convey the whole by focusing on the part. A common synecdoche in English is “can you give me a hand with this?,” a phrase in which you are actually asking a whole person to help you, not just their hand. In racialized rhetoric, synecdoche functions by bundling race inside other markers of identity. As Villanueva argues, “synecdoche carries it all. No more talk of races; no more talk of religions, or nationalities, or languages, while talking about all of them, mixing them up in the most unseemly ways,” (2006, 9). While metaphor conceptually equates culture and race, synecdoche goes a step further, literally redefining race.

Synecdoche builds off of the colorblind assumption that culture and class structure exist completely unrelated to the outdated notion of racism, and yet simultaneously invokes racism through suggestion. Villanueva summarizes, “The new racism is racism without races,” (2006, 13). Racism becomes cloaked behind value judgments based on language, religion, culture, and civilizations (Villanueva 2006, 15). Race is no longer defined phenotypically; instead culture becomes the avenue for explaining the inferiority of people of color (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000, 78). For example, people believe that “Black folks aren’t biologically lazy; it’s a cultural pathology tied to history,” (Villanueva 2006, 6). Synecdoche allows people to subscribe to old racist tropes such as casting people of color as lazy, while still maintaining this is not racist since, laziness is a quality they believe is foundational to nonwhite, and particularly Black, *cultures*, rather than *people* (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000, 69).

In the context of racialized rhetoric of farming, synecdoche allows racist outcomes in USDA programs to be passed off as issues of translation. For example, Latinx farmers tend to document farming progress orally rather than in writing (Minkoff-Zern and Sloat 2017, 632), which makes it difficult to keep up with the requirements of USDA grants. The grant requirements clearly result in racialized outcomes, yet a recent USDA funded report emphasizes language and cultural barriers, rather than racism (Marinez and Gomez 2011). Racialized synecdoche reduces the program participation to an issue of clashing cultures, while ignoring the fact that USDA programs were not designed by or for farmers of color, and thus do not adequately reflect their needs.

Racialization theory is a useful tool for unpacking synecdoche in racialized rhetoric. Racialization is the process through which “racial categories are formed, occupied, transformed, and dismantled,” (Selod and Embrick 2013, 645). Racialization theorists examine how race is

constructed – how racial meanings are applied to groups, and how they change in response to policies, current events, immigration, economics, and discourses (Barot and Bird 2001, 608; Selod and Embrick 2013, 645). The “new racism” (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000) of the post-Civil Rights era constructs racial difference in terms of identity and culture, and racialization theory explains how other forms of identity and cultural markers, such as gender, language, beliefs, religion, and clothing, become Othered, and serve as elements of racial identity (Garner and Selod 2015). In the context of farming, racialization makes it possible to understand how the dominant culture labels cultural practices, such as collective farming or unpaid, reciprocal family labor, as deviant (Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011), while maintaining that this is not racist.

Racialization theory is also useful for understanding how farmers of color are racialized differently based on other markers of identity. For example, studying race alone would ignore the ways in which African American farmers and Black refugee farmers are treated differently, while racialization theory acknowledges the ways that culture, religion, language, citizenship, and history converge to create racialized experiences. Applying racialization theory to synecdoche in farming rhetoric can demonstrate the racism inherent in farming practices that uphold one “culture” as legitimate and universal.

The four tropes of racialized farming rhetoric “bleed into each other” (Schell 2015, 5) in practice and must be studied synergistically. Considered together, they offer useful tools for deconstructing and analyzing the racialized rhetoric of farming. I apply these tropes to the contemporary state of farmland access in order to unpack the silent racism embedded within current farming policies and practices.

After the *Pigford v Glickman* lawsuit, the USDA restructured its programs to address racism and reinstated the Office of Civil Rights. In a terribly ironic turn of events, the only

USDA employee so far to be penalized for racial discrimination was Shirley Sherrod, a Black farmer, who was forced to resign in 2010 on unfounded accusations of so-called reverse racism (Schell 2015). Sherrod was the former Georgia State Director of Rural Development for the USDA whose father was killed in a livestock dispute, and who lost her own land after she was denied USDA loans (Schell 2015, 13). Sherrod was caught in a media firestorm in which she was accused of denying a white farmer a loan. In reality, she had given him a loan that saved him from losing his farm, and she was misquoted in a speech in which she recounted how her decision to give him this loan was a pivotal moment of forgiveness and healing from the trauma she herself had endured when she lost her own land (ibid., 13). The USDA subscribed to the rhetoric and ideology of colorblindness, designating any overt discussion of race as racist, while overlooking the ways in which it and other government agencies maintained structural racism.

While the USDA has restructured its programs to better support farmers whom it refers to as Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers, these programs have not adequately supported farmers of color in practice. A recent study found that Latinx farmers use USDA programs at one-third to half the rate of white farmers (Minkoff-Zern and Sloat 2017, 632). This lack of participation is due in part to USDA programs that assume fluency in English, literacy, and Western farming practices (Minkoff-Zern and Sloat 2017). Similarly, Hmong farmers in California have encountered a USDA structure that is incompatible with their culture. Extended families help each other during the harvest by providing free, reciprocal farm labor (Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011, 78). Because Hmong farmers have a more encompassing definition of family than is common in the US, they are regularly fined for violating labor laws by supposedly forcing non-family members to work on their farms for free (Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011, 78). While these labor standards are intended to protect worker's rights, they have racialized outcome

for Southeast Asian farmers in the US. Minkoff-Zern and Sloat conclude that “a lack of translations, both linguistic and cultural,” is responsible for immigrant farmers of color’s disproportionately low rates of participation in USDA programs (2017, 641). Culture and language serve as a synecdoche – the low rates of participation map onto race.

Recently, the Trump administration has been attempting to undermine some of the progress made at the USDA to address the racism in its programs. Trump appointed Naomi Churchill Earp as USDA Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (Castro and Willingham 2019, 12). In the past, Earp has slowed down civil rights complaints at the National Institutes of Health, where she created an “unofficial white male affirmative action program,” aimed at increasing the number of white staff (Castro and Willingham 2019, 12), and has served as Director of the Office of Civil Rights at the USDA from 1987 to 1990 where, under her leadership, USDA employees failed to address any civil rights complaints (ibid., 12). Clearly, USDA policy does not reflect a linear process away from overt racism, but rather racism in farming policy is cyclical, and emerges in different forms throughout time.

Outside of the USDA, farmers of color continue to face both overt and structural racism that obstructs their ability to maintain a farm. In order to sell at many farmers markets, farmers must get a Certified Producer’s Certificate, which requires a personal ID, and thus bars undocumented farmers from full participation in food systems (Minkoff-Zern 2013, 7). Language barriers and illiteracy make it difficult to market to white customers (Minkoff-Zern 2013, 8). Even liberal, alternative food spaces actively exclude farmers of color, as these are places where “whites come together, stick together and then become impenetrable to others despite their desire to be otherwise,” (Slocum 2006b, 526). Many white participants in local food movements interpret the lack of diversity in alternative food spaces as an indication that people

of color are just not interested in food and farming (Flora et al. 2011, 123), playing into the trope metonymy, that assumes that the impacts of systematic oppression are actually just the results of individual decisions. For the farmers of color who are able to overcome barriers to running a successful business, the current whiteness of farming means their belonging in food spaces is constantly in question.

NGO's have increasingly begun to recognize that racism in USDA programs and wider social structures impacts farmland access, but many proposed solutions to farmland injustice are still entrenched in racist power structures. Incubator farms are one proposed solution to the high barriers to entering farming (Lelekacs et al. 2014), and nearly half of the farm incubators programs in the US are aimed at serving refugee and immigrant communities (Calo and De Master 2016, 112). Depending on the structure of these programs, they can provide important resources to beginning farmers of color. However, it is worth noting that often farm incubators fall into the knowledge deficit myth (Calo and De Master 2016; Guthman 2008), educating farmers about farming techniques and marketing, rather than challenging the structures that maintain racism in farmland access (Calo 2018). After graduating from incubator programs, the high cost of farmland coupled with structural racism makes it difficult for farmers to transition into farm ownership (Calo and De Master 2016, 111; Freedgood and Dempsey 2014, 1; Niewolny and Lillard 2010, 70; Ruhf 2013, 4). The knowledge deficit approach thus downplays the significance of racism and fails to meaningfully address barriers to land access (Calo 2018, 367; Calo and DeMaster 2016).

In fact, secure access to affordable and suitable farmland is one of the most persistent barriers to starting a successful farm that farmers of color currently face. Finding and affording land is an enormous challenge for all farmers, due to suburban development, the rising cost of

farmland (Carlisle et al. 2019, 5), and speculative investment in farmland (Kerssen and Brent 2017, 295). Land nearest urban markets is often the least affordable. While farmland is changing hands at a rapid rate as farmers age out of farming (American Farmland Trust n.d.), entrant farmers often cannot afford this land (Ruhf 2013), and USDA loans are still disproportionately inaccessible to farmers of color (Minkoff-Zern and Sloat 2017, 632). Meanwhile, centuries of racialized access to land and wealth leaves people of color least able to finance land with their own capital. As of 2014, Black families have on average \$7 in wealth to every \$100 in wealth held by white families (US Census Bureau 2014). Racialized metonymy, by reducing group patterns to the level of the individual, makes invisible the racism inherent to this wealth distribution. If a person of color cannot afford to purchase farmland, metonymy allows this to be framed as an issue of individual finances, rather than placed into the context of the system of racial privileges that has allowed white families to accumulate wealth. Due to the racial wealth gap, the high cost of farmland cannot be separated from racism.

Because of the rising cost of farmland makes owning farmland economically unfeasible to most farmers of color and many white farmers as well, most farmland is currently purchased by investors (Kerssen and Brent 2017, 295) who then lease land to tenant farmers (Carlisle et al. 2019, 6). Currently, 38% of farmland is leased, and landlords have the power to decide who farms this land and how it is farmed, “creating a power dynamic imbricated with the legacies of white agricultural land ownership and racism,” (ibid. 6). Tenant farmers have limited decision making power over the land. Those who have short-term or undefined leases cannot invest in farm infrastructure that will lower their costs in the long-term, and are disincentivized to take measures to build soil fertility and increase long-term yields (ibid. 6). For many immigrant farmers who do lease land, language barriers and cultural barriers increase the likelihood that

they will be coerced into a predatory lease agreement that benefits only the landowner (Minkoff-Zern 2013, 8, 12).

Who has access to land in the first place, either through a lease or purchase, depends largely on social networks. Calo and De Master (2016) note that while land access is often framed as a matter of land availability and a prospective farmer's financial means, in practice, social relationships play an overlooked and crucial role in mediating land access (Calo and De Master 2016, 115). Despite formal rights to participating in markets for land, farmers must navigate "social and relational mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, including knowledge, sociocultural identity, authority, [...] and social relationships," (Calo and De Master 2016, 116). Social networks in the US are highly racially segregated (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000), and a growing body of evidence shows that race is central in the informal vetting process that landlords use to select their tenants. Calo (2018) asserts that, "sociocultural identity can mediate the many access points in the process of acquiring secure tenure and other supports as a beginning farmer. If landowner tenant dynamics are fraught with ethnic disparity as regional statistics indicate, then ethnic identity can be connected to the perceived credibility of a prospective farmer," (Calo 2018, 376). As with finances, considering social networks on the level of the individual obscures the overall pattern of racialized outcomes in access to farmland. Exposing this perspective as a reduction demonstrates that these social networks are a form of racism.

Despite the findings that farmland owner social networks contribute to racism in farmland access (Calo 2018, Calo and DeMaster 2016; Minkoff-Zern 2013), little research has focused on describing this phenomenon or proposing solutions to it. While farm service providers often serve as intermediaries between farm seekers of color and farmland owners, little research has described how farm service providers can intervene in racialized social dynamics. A

more complete understanding of farmland owner racism and how to resist it is an important element of building farmland justice for farmers of color.

Going forward

While institutional racism in farmland access has historically been overlooked and normalized, activists and scholars are increasingly focused on describing the scope and intricacies of this racism and proposing solutions to combat it. Much of the previous scholarship on racism in farmland access has attempted to understand racism from the perspective of land-seeking farmers of color, focusing on what strategies could better support farmers of color in accessing land in a structurally racist farming system (Bowens 2015; Freedgood and Dempsey 2014; Gilbert, Sharp, and Felin 2002; Marinez and Gomez 2011; Taylor 2018). More research on racism in farmland access has focused directly on institutional racism, describing the role of service providers, from NGO's to government programs, in facilitating or challenging farmland access for farmers of color. This body of research identifies ways that governmental and nongovernmental service providers contribute to racism, recommends changes to program structures that would increase equitable farmland access, and identifies strategies service providers are using to build land justice (Bowens 2015; Calo 2018; Calo and De Master 2016; Carlisle et al. 2019; Castro and Willingham 2019; Flanders n.d.; Gilbert, Sharp, and Felin 2002; Horst and Marion 2019; Marinez and Gomez 2011; Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011; Minkoff-Zern and Sloat 2017; Newman 2017, Taylor 2018; Williams and Holt-Giménez 2017). While much of the existing literature has focused on institutional and structural racism within alternative food movements, farm labor practices, and the USDA, it has focused very little on racism within the social networks that mediate farmland access.

In practice, actors in farmland access include not only farmers and USDA and NGO service providers. Current landowners are also important players, and yet previous research has only tangentially addressed the role of landowners in either supporting or impeding equitable farmland access for farmers of color. The social dynamics at play in farmland transfer remain under examined, yet previous research has shown that positive landowner-land seeker relationships are particularly essential for creating successful farmland access (Calo and De Master 2016). Because one third of farmland is projected to change hands in the next 15 years (American Farmland Trust n.d.), and 98% of this land is owned by white people (Calo 2018, 11), understanding the extent to which racial exclusion impacts land transfer is critical for understanding how to combat racism in farmland access. While previous research on race and farmland access has determined that racism from landowners constrains the abilities of farmers of color to lease and purchase farmland (Calo 2018; Calo and De Master 2016; Carlisle et al. 2019; Minkoff-Zern 2013), the role of landowners in cultivating racism or antiracism in farmland access remains critically under-researched.

In this thesis, I attempt to begin to fill this gap in the literature by answering the question, *what is the role of settler-descended landowners in facilitating or challenging farmland transfer to farmers of color in Auburn, Maine?* I conduct interviews with settler-descended farmland owners looking to sell their land, and with farm service providers who have worked as intermediaries between farm seekers of color and farmland owners. I use the racial state as my framework for studying the material impacts of racism and antiracism, and I analyze farmland owners' rhetoric of race and farming to explain how language justifies or confronts the inequitable distribution of farmland.

Chapter 2: Methods and Ethics

Introduction

I began this research during the summer of 2019 through consultation with leaders at the Somali Bantu Community Association (SBCA), the largest farmer of color-led organization in Lewiston, Maine. Leaders identified secure, long-term access to suitable farmland as one of the most persistent challenges that farmers of color in Maine are facing right now. In response to these conversations I ask, *what is the role of settler-descended landowners in facilitating or challenging farmland transfer to farmers of color in Auburn, Maine?* To answer this question, I designed my methods with objective of understanding how farmland owner dynamics impact the SBCA and other farmers of color having equitable access to farmland in Maine.

To achieve this research objective, I conducted a case study consisting of 15 semi-structured interviews with 18 farmland owners and farm service providers, between September 2019 and January 2020 in Auburn, Maine. I chose this location because it has both a large and diverse population as well as substantial amounts of agricultural land. The twin cities of Lewiston and Auburn are the third and fifth largest cities in Maine, respectively, and a large portion of the city of Auburn, called the Ag Zone, is zoned with the aim of encouraging agriculture (Meter and Goldenberg 2018). Lewiston is Maine's second most racially diverse city after Portland; over 150 refugee and immigrant families farm in or near Lewiston/Auburn (Carrington 2018). As farmers of color attempt to purchase farmland in a state where nearly 99% of farmland is owned by white people (Land in Common Community Land Trust n.d.), understanding how racism and antiracism play out in these land transactions is an important element of building farmland justice.

In this chapter, I first introduce my case study and provide a very brief history of farmers of color in Maine and Auburn to contextualize Auburn's current structures of farmland ownership within a history of racism. I then describe my positionality and the implications for my research methods and ethics. I conclude by detailing the methods of my case study.

Chapter 2.1: Case study background

Like the rest of the United States, Maine has a long history of structurally racist forms of land ownership and access. The Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, MicMac, Maliseet, and Abanaki Nations, collectively known as Wabanaki, or "People of the Dawnland," all lived in what is now Maine since the beginning of time (Abbe Museum n.d.; Steeves 2015). Before colonization, the Wabanaki Peoples hunted, fished, farmed, and encouraged the growth of food plants through controlled burning (Francis 2008). After the Revolutionary War, Massachussets rapidly began negotiating land treaties with the tribes (Pawling 2010). Settlers exploited Wabanaki farmland and crops as a part of the colonization process, turning their cattle loose on the Wabanaki's unfenced cornfields so that they could feed their animals for free while decreasing the food security of their Indigenous neighbors (Pawling 2010, 115). Through a combination of treaties and unauthorized intrusion, settlers invaded and occupied Wabanaki land. However, none of the land treaties from 1790's onwards were in fact legally binding, because they were never ratified by the US government (Girouard et al. 2019; Brimley 2004, 14). The tribes sued for this land – over half of the state of Maine – in 1968, and after a twelve year court battle, the state of Maine settled the claim, compensating the tribes \$81 million (Brimley 2004, 18). While the settlement allowed the tribes to purchase back several thousand acres (Brimley 2004, 20) Maine tribes still own only 1% of land in the state (Maine Tree Foundation n.d.).

Beyond this, the history of farmers of color in Maine is not well documented. However, in 1912, motivated by eugenics and the promise of waterfront property development, the state evicted the residents of Malaga island, a mixed-race fishing community in Midcoast. The state committed eight residents to the Maine Home for the Feeble Minded, dug up the islanders' graves, and reburied their remains on the mainland (Philbrick and Rosenthal n.d.).

In more recent history, large numbers of migrant farmworkers began travelling to Maine for seasonal work. Eighteen percent of hired farm labor in Maine is provided by migrant workers (Maine Department of Labor 2015). Maine relies on migrant labor particularly for its blueberry, poultry, seafood, and wreathmaking industries, but the state does little to recognize the contributions or existence of the over 20,000 seasonal and migrant farm workers who make these industries possible (Girouard et al. 2019;). The work is exhausting and dangerous, and employment is seasonal and irregular. Workers have few benefits and limited access to healthcare, and do not own the land they farm. While most migrant farmworkers travel from Central America, MicMac workers travel South from Canada to participate in the blueberry harvest on land that belonged to their ancestors (Unique Maine Farms n.d.).

While these examples of racism in land ownership and access mirror greater land-based inequalities in the US, Maine is an outlier in that the number of farmers of color is rapidly increasing (Watters 2015), mainly due to recent Somali Bantu refugees. In Somalia, Somali Bantus were persecuted as ethnic minorities, and fled the country during the civil war (Besteman 2014, 427). After years in Kenyan refugee camps and a traumatizing and intrusive vetting process (Besteman 2014, 429), many Somali Bantu refugees were resettled in Maine in 2006. Here, Somali Bantus were racialized as "Black Islamic foreigners," (Mills 2012, 54) and have experienced employer discrimination, as well as a lack of jobs, educational opportunities, and

opportunities for upward mobility (Besteman 2014, 433-435). Faced with poverty and food insecurity, many Somali Bantus resisted by reconnecting with their cultural heritage as agriculturalists. Immigrant and refugee farmers in Lewiston have started community gardens, founded a cooperative farm, established farm market stands, and opened food-related businesses including a food truck, Isuken Co-op, that sells farm to table Somali Food. While Indigenous, Latinx, African American and Asian farmers are likely also farming in the Lewiston/Auburn area, most of the farmers of color in Lewiston/Auburn are African refugees and immigrants, and the organizations I was able to connect with during the process of writing my thesis overwhelmingly serve African farmers.

Currently, the SBCA is seeking long-term, stable access to productive farmland near Lewiston/Auburn, where members could farm cooperatively. Finding stable access to affordable farmland has been challenging, particularly for people resettled into poverty, and the organization has found that because past lease agreements are short-term and often restrictive, farmers have not been able to invest in the farm infrastructure needed to create a sustainable farm. Other similar organizations have also found that multiple forms of racism have impacted their ability to access farmland, from unequal enforcement of local building permit laws to predatory farmland lease agreements that relegated them to unproductive land (Carrington 2018).

Meanwhile, Wabanaki and African American activists in Maine are voicing the need for the state, and the US more broadly, to take reparations seriously (Girouard et al. 2019), recognizing that theft of land from Indigenous Peoples and labor from African Americans was foundational to the current distribution of land, wealth, and power (Flanders n.d.). Reparations require that the “government, responsible corporations, and other institutions that have profited off the harm they have inflicted” on African Americans and Indigenous Peoples repair the harm

they have done (The Movement for Black Lives n.d.). Meaningful reparations would entail a substantial transfer of wealth and land from government and corporations to account for the magnitude of centuries worth of dispossession, exploitation, and exclusion (Horst and Marion 2019, 14; Penniman 2018, 301; The Movement for Black Lives n.d.). Land-based reparations are particularly relevant to farmland justice, because they could begin to remedy the racialized distribution of farmland. However, it is worth clarifying here that reparations are a specific subset of land justice. Land justice is equitable land access for all people, and reparations address a specific historical harm. In a place like Maine where the majority of farmers of color are recent refugees and immigrants, it is important to stress that land-based reparations are intended for Indigenous people and the descendants of enslaved people, rather than farmers of color more broadly. Nevertheless, reparations are an important part of building land farmland justice for African American and Indigenous farmers in Maine.

For non-African American and non-Indigenous farmers of color – and for African American and Indigenous farmers until Maine enacts meaningful statewide reparations – purchasing or gaining access to land, will almost unavoidably involve interfacing with white farmland owners, as they own nearly 99% of the state’s farmland (Land in Common Community Land Trust n.d.). Now is crucial time for anyone wishing to farm to gain access to farmland, because it is rapidly going up for sale for development. Eighty-two percent of farmland owners do not have strategies for passing on their farms (Ruhf 2013, 5) and in the next 10 years, an estimated 400,000 acres of this farmland will become available as farmers in Maine age out of farming (Maine Farmland Trust n.d.). The US loses 1.5 million acres of farmland to development each year (American Farmland Trust n.d.), but Maine is in a unique position of having a new generation of farmers intent on accessing land. However, the high cost of farmland coupled with

racism makes this farmland challenging to access (Freedgood and Dempsey 2014, 3). Moreover, it is unclear to what extent the social networks of farming further exclude farmers of color. I go on to detail the methods I use to attempt to describe the role of farmland owner social networks, but first, I believe it is important to discuss how my own positionality interacts with this research.

Chapter 2.2: Research ethics and positionality

Informed by decolonization theories (Smith 2012), I recognize that research can be a form of domination through knowledge and has been “inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism,” (Smith 2012, 1). Due to my positionality, it is particularly important for me to be attentive that my research not reproduce racism, the very structure I hope it will help erode. My positionality separates me in many ways from farmers of color in Auburn. I am a white, middle class, nonreligious, college educated woman. I grew up in rural Maine, thirty minutes from Auburn, on fifteen acres of farmland that my parents own. While I share a home state and a history of farming with farmers of color in Lewiston/Auburn, my positionality affords significant power.

The potential for power imbalances in my research brought up several major ethical questions: Would I be a white person explicating what farmers of color already know about racial oppression from landowners? On the other extreme, if I found that landowner racism impacts the abilities of farmers of color to purchase farmland in ways that they were not already aware of, would my results create feelings of hopelessness and disempowerment? And most importantly, would my positionality lead me to further marginalize farmers of color through my research?

Privileged researchers in working-class communities and communities of color run the risk of parroting in academic language what people already know, thereby gaining recognition for other people's stories without benefitting the people to whom those stories belong (Gillan and Pickerill 2012, 138; Smith 2012, 3). To participate in this type of research would be a waste of resources, and of my research participants' time. To avoid restating to farmers of color their own experiences of racism, I instead study racialized discourses from farmland owners. As the daughter of settler descended Maine farmland owners, my belonging to this community gives me unique access to information about the qualities and scope of farmland owner racism and antiracism. Moreover, this research is intended not just to describe or theorize racism or antiracism in farmland access, but, more importantly, to speak to the interests articulated by of farmers of color-led organizations in Lewiston/Auburn.

Another ethical problem this research raises is that if my research uncovers forms of racism that were previously not widely recognized, I do not want to create feelings of helplessness and disempowerment by identifying additional sources of inequity. However, this is not an excuse for inaction, but rather a caution to approach my research questions and results with great consideration of how farmers of color will receive them. If the results of this case study demonstrate prevalent racism, and I tell farmers they are being oppressed without taking further action, I would neglect my commitment to social justice in my community and abuse my position of privilege. My intention in this thesis is to offer examples of resistance, and to place my own findings into the context of larger structural solutions to just farmland access.

Privileged researchers can perpetuate systems of oppression through their research, and a decolonial approach to research requires asking, "Whose research is this? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its

scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?” (Smith 2012, 10). Because these ethical conversations are inseparable from the entire research process (Gillan and Pickerill 2012, 135), I had hoped before beginning this research that my thesis could take the form of a collaborative project where local farmers of color would receive funding to work with me, to ensure the project accurately reflected questions that their communities had. However, theses at Bates are not set up to pay wages to community collaborators, and, even if this funding did exist, farming is such a time intensive and demanding job that farmers of color barely had the time to talk to me at all, let alone work with me. Because of this, the extent of my work with farmers of color was consultations and interviews with representatives from organizations that support farmers of color. I feel that the lack of meaningful collaboration in this thesis is one of its greatest shortcomings.

Instead of studying the experiences of farmers of color, which, as a class-privileged white person, I would not be able to accurately or ethically describe in the absence of full collaboration, I have chosen to study my own community: rural, settler descended farmland owners. How does my own community imagine, discuss, and interact with racism and antiracism, and what are the implications for farmland justice?

Working with rural farmland owners, I found that I share many overlapping identities with my research participants. Like me, my research participants were white or of predominantly white ancestry. They all own land in Auburn, Maine, thirty minutes from where my own family owns farmland. Nearly all my participants participated in intergenerational wealth transfer, either having inherited land, or intending to pass land on to future generations. Many had college educations. Those who farmed, which comprised around half of the participants, indicated being working class. The other half, who owned farmland but worked white collar jobs, I marked as

upper-middleclass or upper-class based on assets they referred to possessing. I would place my own socioeconomic status closer to that of the participants who owned land but did not farm it, and I recognize that because of this I must be attentive to the ways in which my positionality might lead me to maintain classism through the interpretation of my data and presentations of my results. Overall, I found that my participants and I shared common phrases, references, and ways of viewing the world. In many of the instances in which they participated in rhetoric that I would define as racist, I remembered times in my own life when I subscribed to those same ideologies. I grew up in the same culture and was steeped in similar rhetoric as they were. While I do not want to flatten the experiences of my participants, and while I recognize that each participant comes from a unique background, I feel confident in the assertion that my research participants and I have much in common.

Because research is a form of domination (Smith 2012, 1), I thought that turning the lens on a privileged community to which I belong would be an appropriate way of insuring that marginalized people are not harmed by my research, and that, if my research has any effect at all, it would be to bring some forms of racism within this community into visibility. Placing racism, rather than its impacts on farmer of color, at the center of my research frames racism, rather than people of color, as the problem. I hope that this research will challenge the knowledge deficit approach to racial inequity in food systems (Calo 2018; Calo and DeMaster 2016) that places the onus on oppressed people to navigate systems of oppression.

In studying the role of landowners in racially just farmland ownership, I felt it was still equally important for me to consult with organizations that support farmers of color, as people most impacted by racism in food systems are the people who know best how to transform these systems towards justice (Penniman 2018, 302). I supplemented interviews with farmland owners

with additional interviews with farm service providers doing antiracist work, in order to better understand how farmland owners fit into broader efforts to create farmland justice. As someone who wishes to be in solidarity, it is important that my research support already existing initiatives led by farmers of color (Penniman 2018, 304; Slocum 2006a, 330). My intentions in conducting this research are to support as best as I can the antiracist farming organizations working in Maine, and to hopefully yield results that could be useful in other states as well.

While I am studying racism from landowners, I want to stay out of the trap of calling out overt racism while overlooking structural racism. I believe it is essential to distinguish between structural and interpersonal racism (Newman 2017), and I also believe it is important to understand the two as mutually reinforcing. Racism is structural, and solutions need to be too. Racism and the maintenance of racial identities is also a social and rhetorical process. Because farmland access depends both on structural privileges and on social interactions (Calo 2018; Calo and De Master 2016; Carlisle et al. 2019; Minkoff-Zern 2013) studying social dynamics between white farmland owners and farm seekers of color is particularly relevant to understandings how racism and antiracism operate in contemporary farming systems.

In studying racism in farmland access, I do not think it is useful for me to assign blame to individual landowners. They exist within a structurally racist social and political system (Mills 2003) and their racialized understanding of the world is informed by greater discourses and practices. Rather than call out individuals, my intention is to contextualize the beliefs they express to me within the history of farming in the US, which I believe will shed light on why they hold these beliefs, and, most importantly, illuminate alternative pathways forward to create more just distributions of farmland. I acknowledge the harm that the racist tropes they have come to understand as the truth have on farmers of color, and I simultaneously acknowledge that the

beliefs they espouse stem from a lifetime spent living in a country where racism permeates all aspects of society. I write my thesis in the spirit of sharing knowledge and bringing together very different understandings of how racism operates in US. I am grateful to my interview participants for sharing their stories with me.

Chapter 2.3: Research design

Before beginning my case study, I used the Bates College Institutional Review Board online questionnaire to determine whether I needed IRB permission to conduct interviews (Institutional Review Board n.d.). My research qualified as exempt from needing IRB review.

I applied to a Community Engaged Research Grant through the Bates Harward center to cover the cost of gas to drive to my interviews, snacks for my research participants, transcribing software, a White Pages membership, and an NVivo license.

Francis Eanes, a professor of Environmental Studies at Bates college, conducted a survey in 2019 to better understand the priorities of landowners in Auburn's agricultural zone, or Ag Zone (Eanes and Zhou 2019). This survey offered the most up to date and comprehensive data that I could find on farmland owners in Auburn who intend to sell their land. Using data from the Ag Zone survey, I compiled a list of Auburn landowners who were interested in selling their land for farming within the next 10 years. I included only respondents who listed the option "sell your land to other for farming/forestry" as "very desirable" or "desirable." From this new list, I analyzed data on how many of these landowners were interested in selling to New Americans specifically. Landowners responded to the question of how desirable it was for them to "sell your land to nontraditional farmers (e.g. New Americans)." Of farmland owners who wished to sell their land, approximately 44% were interested in selling to nontraditional farmers or New

Americans (stating that it was “very desirable,” or “desirable”), 25% were neutral (“neither desirable nor undesirable”), 27% were not interested (“undesirable,” or “very undesirable”), and 3% did not answer the question (Figure 1).

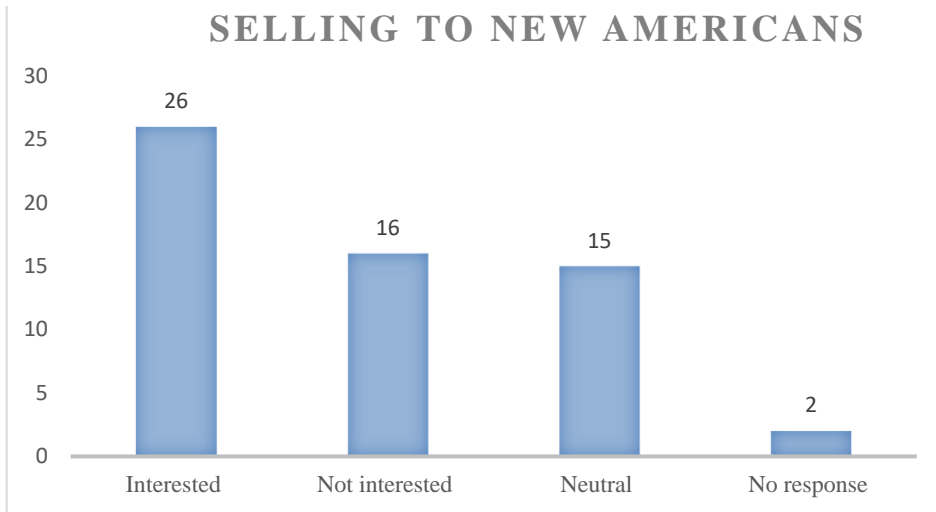


Figure 1. Farmland owners in Auburn, Maine rank their willingness to sell to Nontraditional Farmers (i.e. New Americans) (Eanes and Zhou 2019).

Of the landowners who responded that they wished to sell their land for farming in the next 10 years, I further narrowed the pool of eligible contacts by removing respondents who indicated that their land was entirely forested or did not contain cropland; in other words, land that could not easily be farmed. I included all respondents regardless of whether they expressed interest in selling to New Americans. This yielded 35 farm properties. Using contacts provided in the Ag Zone survey or numbers listed in White Pages, I contacted farmland owners via email or phone, using the script in Appendix A. I made two attempts to contact each person. Of the 35 people I contacted, 14, or 40%, were willing and able to meet with me.

I conducted 11 interviews with 14 settler descended farmland owners, as some neighbors and family chose to interview together. Before each in-person interview I baked cookies for my

participants as a thank you gift (Appendix B). I drove to wherever my participants asked me to meet them. Nine asked me to come to their house, 3 asked me to come to their work, and 2 chose to interview over the phone instead of in person. I began the interviews by getting to know each participant and asking about their hopes for the future of their land. Once we felt more comfortable talking with one another, I asked questions about their understanding of the role of race in farmland access and their interest in selling their land to farmers of color. I structured my interviews with the questions in Appendix C, but kept the interviews conversational, asking follow-up questions, and letting my participants speak about issues of interest to them. In all but one of the interviews, participants consented to me using my phone to record our conversation. The participant who did not want me to record allowed me take notes by hand. I informed all participants that their responses were fully anonymous and that they had the option to not answer any questions they did not want to. The interviews lasted on average 37 minutes.

To place these interviews into the context of local land justice work, I interviewed four farm service providers who have served as brokers between farmers of color and white landowners in the Lewiston/Auburn area. Two of the farm service providers work for a farmer of color-run organization, one works for a white-led, traditional farmland protection organization, and one acts as a consultant and writes grants for a farmer of color-led organization and founded the first New American farming organization in Maine. I gave service providers the option to meet wherever was most convenient for them, and I bought them snacks and coffee or baked them cookies depending on whether we met at a café or an office. In our interviews, I asked service providers about the mission of the organization they worked for, how they envision antiracism in farmland access work, what characterizes a successful landowner-farm seeker relationship, and how their past experiences working with farmers of color and landowners had

been (Appendix C). I let the service providers choose whether to remain fully anonymous or have the name of their organization attached to their comments. All four service providers consented to being recorded. Service provider interviews lasted an average of 58 minutes.

I transcribed all interviews, using a combination of Transcribe's automatic transcription, and my own transcription when the audio quality was poor. I coded the interviews by theme using NVivo. I put the interviews in conversation with theories of the racial state and racialized rhetoric. I detail the findings from the interviews in the following chapter.

After writing my thesis, I created a short summary of my findings and recommendations which I shared with people working in Maine's farming systems (Appendix D).

Chapter 3: Results

Introduction

This case study yielded pervasive examples of racism within the social networks of farmland owners that pose substantial barriers to farm seekers of color. While I interviewed individual landowners about their farmland succession planning and their views on selling to farmers of color, these results are intended to illuminate broader racist structures that have shaped the thoughts and actions of farmland owners. I do not blame any of the following examples of racism on the individual landowners who participated in this case study – to do so would be to fail to acknowledge the structural nature of racism. As a service provider put it, “It always feels really important to remember that these are all good people. They're just part of a white supremacist culture that's shaped their thinking.” Because racism resides in social conditions as well as policies (Omi and Winant 1994, 83), interrogating social conditions can offer insight into how racism operates on a broad scale beyond just the farmland owners to whom I spoke. In chapter 3.1 I identify ways that farmland owner social networks contribute to racist material outcomes in farmland ownership. In chapter 3.2, I analyze the rhetoric that normalizes this racism, and in chapter 3.3, I discuss the role that farmland owners play in challenging racism in farmland access.

Chapter 3.1: Material outcomes of racism in farmland access

In part one of this chapter I ask, *How does racism in social networks manifest materially in farmland access, transfer, and ownership?* Farmland owner social networks contributed to material racist impacts by facilitating an inequitable distribution of farmland through sales,

inheritance, and opposition to land-based reparations. In some cases, such as farmland owners hesitating to sell to farmers of color, racism was driven by farmland owner's racist beliefs. In many others, such as sales to the highest bidder and farmland inheritance, racism within the social networks of farmland ownership was structural in nature; it existed with no racist intent on the part of landowners, as the result of centuries of unaddressed racial wealth disparities. In section one of my results I detail how racism manifests materially in farmland sales, farmland inheritance, and opposition to land-based reparations.

Chapter 3.1.1: Farmland sales

Racism in farmland sales took three forms: hesitation to sell to farmers of color, refusal to sell to farmers of color, and encounters with the racial wealth gap. In the first form, farmland owners felt unsure about selling to farmers of color, based on racist ideas circulating through the Lewiston/Auburn community. In the second form, a few farmland owners justified the refusal to sell to farmers of color based on similar ideas. In the third form of racism, the racial wealth gap, landowners did not express racist views, but found themselves caught in an unjust economic system, where the greatest economic security for them would most likely mean selling to class-privileged white buyers with the greatest purchasing power.

Chapter 3.1.1.1: Hesitation to sell to a farmer of color

Based on the Auburn Ag Zone Survey data, I expected to find that approximately half the interview participants would be interested in selling to a farmer of color, while a quarter would oppose selling to farmers of color, and the final quarter would remain neutral on the issue (Eanes and Zhou 2019). However, during the interviews, only two participants said that the race of a

farmland seeker would have an impact on their decision to sell their land. One participant who would take race into consideration declared that “Americans should sell to Americans,” while a second participant, after I spoke about the history of racism in farmland ownership, expressed some interest in selling to farmers of color specifically, saying that, “I think if there was a program helping to enable people of color to farm more, I think I would certainly be interested in, you know, thinking about it, or talking to people about it.” These two examples were outliers, however. Contrary to the survey data, farmland owners initially said that the race of a farmland seeker would not impact their decision to sell to them.

When I began asking follow-up questions, the majority of farmland owners indicated that while they were theoretically interested in selling to any buyer regardless of their race, in practice, race would play a central role in their vetting process for potential buyers. The following quote illustrates the progression landowners would typically go through – first expressing the desire to sell to anyone, and then backtracking and describing a reason why selling to a farmer of color would be either unfeasible or unfavorable:

“I want everybody to farm! I don't care who you are. Yeah, if you could farm and you have the money by all means feed the world! Because that's what we're all trying to do. And the thing is, the only thing that agitates me about having the Bantus and Somalians [...] is that they get state and federal funding to buy the farms! Okay, that's not fair to me.”

This landowner went on to express his belief that farmers of color would be given the money to purchase land,

“Yeah, you know if I sell that land down there, what it will all set up? [...] It's all going to be state money. I'm going to get paid for it. I know it for a fact, you know, and it's my money I'm getting. I put that money in. I'm getting it back. You know what I'm saying? I pay taxes. So, it's my money going into these farms, [and] they're undercutting me when they get to the farmers markets!”

The false perception that farmers of color are more likely to be given government subsidies, when in fact farmers of color remain underfunded by government programs (Minkoff-Zern and Sloat 2017, 632), became the basis for this outrage at the thought of selling to a farmer of color. This quote constructs government funding as a zero-sum game, where funding a farmer of color would not only create unfair competition, but also directly deprive a white farmer of money they rightfully owned. It also illustrates that while landowners are theoretically colorblind, racial stereotypes feature centrally in their decisions to sell their land.

While some landowners justified their hesitations to sell to a farmer of color by arguing that farmers of color had too much money already, others justified it with the argument that farmers of color had no money. When I asked landowners about whether they would sell to farmers of color I would frequently get the incredulous response, “Where would they get the money from?” One landowner responded that he didn’t know about selling land to immigrants, because,

“They don't have a lot of income or money. I don't know how they could afford buying it. Yeah, what I might be asking for, how could they meet my needs? You know, I don't think they could. I think it would have to be, it would almost have to be a charitable thing.”

This statement recognizes that immigrant and refugee farmers experience poverty, but rather than delve into the historical and political reasons for why this might be, simply posits it as a given. With poverty framed as an essential quality of immigrants, oppression of refugees and immigrants becomes mobilized as a justification for ruling them out as eligible buyers. The assumption that selling to a farmer of color is an act of charity, when paired with the assumption that any money or grants that farmers of color do have was not fairly earned, places farmers of color in a double bind where farmland owners object to selling to them both for having money and for not having it. In nearly every interview I conducted, participants initially expressed a

willingness to sell to farmers of color, and then went on to give reasons why, in practice, they would likely feel they had a valid reason not to sell.

Chapter 3.1.1.2: Refusal to sell to farmers of color

In practice, hesitation to sell to farmers of color is, in some cases, translating into farmland owners refusing to consider selling to farmers of color. While only one participant directly expressed to me that he would not sell to farmers of color – immigrant farmers specifically – service providers stated unequivocally that “there are people who will refuse to sell us land, or even consider leasing or selling us land because they don't want people of color on it.” As part of my research, I attempted to identify a parcel of farmland that the SBCA could purchase. I did not find any landowner who was interested, despite their initial assertions that they would theoretically sell to anyone regardless of race. In some cases, they simply did not have the acreage required for such a large farm, in some cases they were considering selling their land for development, and in some others, they were not interested in selling until proposed zoning changes take place. It was inconclusive to what extent the overall lack of interest was the result of racism and to what extent it was the result of unrelated circumstances.

Service providers doing similar land searches have also struggled to find landowners willing to sell to farmers of color. A farm service provider at a large, mainstream farmland protection organization sent out letters to farmers currently selling their land, asking them if they would set up a meeting with group of Somali Bantu farmland seekers. I asked her about the responses, and she said, “We got very few. So, we sent 30 letters maybe. One landowner invited us to set up a meeting.” At this point in the interview the service provider hesitated and said,

“I mean, I don't know how to read that situation. You know, I don't know what the landowners were thinking. Some of them could have been like, I'm not ready to make my

land available. I don't want to make my land available to these people specifically [...] we didn't have any other interaction with them other than send them the letter.”

The one farmland owner who responded was particularly committed to social justice. She invited the Somali Bantu farmers out to tour her land, and the farm visit went smoothly. Then she called back a week later and said she couldn't sell. “Her neighbors had called the police when they saw that these farmers were in the community, and there was very strong racism that entered into the situation. The landowners felt like, ‘we are not prepared to like deal with this sort of thing.’”

The organization finally got a second response to the letter writing campaign from a landowner willing to lease to the Somali Bantu farmers, but once they started leasing, it attracted negative attention from neighbors. The landowners began complaining that “There was a lot of really openly racist things that were said [...] kind of threatening them because of them allowing the program to be on the land.” In spite of these dynamics, the Somali Bantu farmers went on to buy this land a few years later and founded a cooperative farm.

While in many ways this turned into a story of success, their land search process was clearly complicated by racism from both prospective farmland sellers and their neighbors. Racist ideas held by farming communities, particularly centering around immigrants and refugees, are resulting in some farmland owners refusing to sell to farmers of color. Notably, this racism is not always held by landowners themselves, but may be reflective of wider racist ideas within farming communities that put pressure on farmland owners. Racism from neighbors can complicate farm sales; in two of the above examples, landowners who were interested in selling to farmers of color experienced racist backlash from their communities.

Chapter 3.1.1.3: Farm sales and the racial wealth gap

Due to the racial wealth gap, farmers of color have, on average, less ability to pay for farmland. When I asked farm service providers working for farmer of color-led organizations what they felt was the biggest factor preventing them from purchasing good farmland, they responded that it was cost. Meanwhile, farmland owners also experienced financial insecurity, and expressed the need for their land to be a source of wealth for them in order to afford retirement. Farmland seekers and farmland owners are players in a racist economic system that constricts the agency of both parties, making farmland seekers of color less able to afford farmland, and pressuring farmland owners to sell their land for development.

For many of the farmland owners I spoke to, their land was their retirement savings, and many expressed worries about their finances. One woman hesitated, clearly ashamed as she admitted, “I would sell it to the person giving me the most money. That sounds so horrible, but I mean it's sort of true.” An older man who was no longer farming was grappling with the idea of selling his farmland for development. He drove me around his field in a pickup truck because he wanted to show me how beautiful the land was, and he looked pained as he told me, “I have a lot of sentimental value, but everything is for – everything can be bought. You can't take it with you, you know, and long-term, for a retirement, it ain't a lot of money either.” Farmland owners worried that in order to afford retirement, they would not be able to sell their land to a farmer, and would instead have to sell their land for residential development.

A farm service provider expressed his frustration with the economic structures of farmland ownership, rather than any individual landowners. He observed that “a lot of times the farmer's made into the bad guy.... they've spent their whole life on the land, and they want to retire and they need some capital to come out of that. They're not a bad guy for wanting that.

They deserve to have a secure retirement or whatever it takes.” He recognized that racist economics structures were contributing to white farmland owners selling to other white people, and argued that solving it would require NGO and government intervention to create equitable land access for farmers of color while ensuring that farmland owners are able to afford retirement.

Chapter 3.1.2: Farmland inheritance

Nearly every farmland owner to whom I spoke expressed some form of desire to keep their land in their family, and several had acquired this land through inheritance to begin with. The distribution of farmland is racialized similarly to how land sales to the highest bidder are racialized; because white families have had historically – and continue to have – disproportionate access to land and wealth, farmland inheritance is one of the ways that racial disparities persist in farmland ownership. Farmland inheritance also had gendered dimensions. Men seemed to control the decision making regarding the future of their land, and nearly every potential heir they referenced was male. Both for gender and for race, farmland inheritance created a continuance of historical inequities. Farmers I spoke to stressed that farmland inheritance is a central component of farm viability, saying, “the only farms are going to keep making it are intergenerational farms.” Because white families own 98% of US farmland (Calo 2018, 11), and because access to farmland is one of the biggest barriers for any beginning farmer (Carlisle et al. 2019), white farmers who inherit land are at an incredible advantage.

When I asked farmland owners about their ideal scenario for the future of their land, most imagined passing it on to family members. For some, they hoped their children would buy the land from them and let them live on a small piece of it. Others hoped their children or

grandchildren would take over their farming business after they died. One man nearly leapt out of his chair with excitement as he told me about how his grandson was taking to farming, “Yeah, my grandson, totally interested! Nine years old. He loves it. We raise hogs together! We raise turkeys together and we hay together, we do it all together and he feeds out, he runs his equipment, he does everything!” His dream is that his grandson will take over his farm after him. While his desire to pass his farm on to his grandson is motivated by their shared love of farming, and in no way reflects any personal racist motivations, familial preferences reproduce the concentration of white farmland ownership.

Some farmland owners, without me prompting them, raised the point that inheritance was likely contributing to the racialized distribution of farmland. In each interview, I would tell participants that farming is the second whitest profession in the US and ask them why they thought this might be. While I got a wide range of speculative answers, many centered on inheritance. One farmland owner responded “I believe it. The commitment and dedication, that's what I'm gonna say. I think you need to look at [how] it's generational too.” Another told me he doesn't think white farmers and farmers of color have equal access to the resources needed to start a farm. “I assume that the white people been here, and they got all the land [...] whereas the others that come, first thing, they're gonna have to acquire the land, and then maybe then they'll have the equal ability.” While no one explicitly identified inheritance as a form of racism, many recognized that inheritance creates a racialized impact.

However, farmland inheritance could be an opportunity for anti-racist intervention. While farmland owners wished to pass their land on to family members, no one had a concrete succession plan for their farmland. A service provider confirmed that this is typical for farmland owners, telling me that “more than 90% of the farmers in Maine do not know who their

successor will be [...] and then they die, and the next generation gets it and they sell it. Because they're not prepared for that level of responsibility.” This situation contributes both to the rapid development of farmland, and to racial disparities in landownership. Creating farmland access for farmers of color through succession planning could be a place to tackle the dual problems of farmland development and farmland injustice.

Chapter 3.1.3: Opposition to reparations

When I interviewed farmland owners about their views on land-based reparations to African Americans and Indigenous Peoples, they were generally opposed to the idea. Four were reluctant to give a definitive answer regarding their position, and the remaining ten opposed them. However, farmland owners overall were not educated about reparations. Many said they had never thought about it before and expressed confusion about why reparations would be necessary. Others who had heard of reparations likely were exposed to misinformation, as they imagined reparations as something they, rather than the government or racist corporations, would pay for.

Farmland owners who were reluctant to answer the question would typically express some interest in the idea, but simultaneously convey serious reservations. One woman speculated,

“I might have to think about it a little bit more, but at the same time – and then part of me, and I'm just being totally honest, part of me was listening and thinking about reparations for race... But then as women... Sometimes I think, well what about, you know, like can you go too far with that? I guess. Like how far do you go?”

Like several other participants, she had not encountered many conversations about reparations, and had not yet fully decided her position, although her inclination was to oppose them. This quote also demonstrates a common assumption I often encountered in interviews, that racial

oppression could be equated to gendered or classed oppression, and should not be addressed differently.

For farmland owners unequivocal about their opposition to reparations, some of this opposition took the form of denying that racism took place or downplaying the severity of that racism. Since these arguments take place on a much deeper ideological level, I detail the rhetorical strategies that excuse and justify racism in chapter 3.2.2. Other farmland owners did acknowledge that racism was real and harmful but suggested that instead of attempting to repair harms from the past, “people’s needs should be recognized” in the present. The thought of reparations, which address specific historical events and implicate white people, made farmland owners uncomfortable.

Several arguments against reparations were rooted in misunderstandings of reparations as direct harm to white people. Participants believed that reparations would take land away from people who paid for it, and worried that land-based reparations would entail a loss of land to them personally. One farmer responded that, “I don't think it's quite fair to me, you know. And I feel for them. I'm sorry for them. But I don't think it's fair for me to have to sacrifice for somebody else.” Participants imagined reparations as a loss to working-class and middle-class white people, rather something the government or corporations would pay for. The misunderstanding of reparations was likely genuine, as many farmland owners told me reparations were something they did not know much about.

The responses of several farmland owners suggested that if they did understand more about reparations and racism, they might actually support reparations. One woman, who initially told me she felt hesitant about the idea of reparations went on to remark that, “You know, like I know our town owns a lot of land. Like I would be all for the town-owned land going to people.”

Because she imagined that reparations would involve forcibly taking money or land from white people, she did not realize that what she was advocating for was actually reparations. Another man who was vehemently opposed to reparations, and who did not believe that racism was a problem later announced that, “I tell you if the government is proven to be biased against a group because of their color or race or anything else, I don't care what it is, then they should pay. They should somehow have to – it should be set straight because we are not supposed to be doing that.” If landowners like him understood the structural nature of racism, and how racism from the past impacts present material realities, they might become advocates for reparations. If farmland owners were educated about what reparations are and why they are necessary, many would be motivated by a sense of justice and fairness to support them.

Chapter 3.2: Racialized discourses of farmland access

In part two of my results, I analyze the rhetorical and ideological processes that normalize and invisibilize racial injustice in farmland access. I ask, *what forms of rhetoric contribute to the maintenance of racism in farmland access?* I identify two overarching themes: blindness to racism, and denial of racism. Within blindness, four rhetorical tropes emerge: colorblindness, universalism, individualism, and “reverse racism.” Within denial, rhetoric centers around three common tropes: conflating race and culture, imaginatively relegating racism to a distant past, and using shields (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000, 50) such as “I’m not a racist, but...” to guard against being perceived as racist. During the interviews, the rhetorical processes acted both as responses to and drivers of material outcomes. The tropes allowed participants to imagine racialized outcomes as something other than racist, thus maintaining racism by rhetorically negating its existence.

Chapter 3.2.1: Blindness

Colorblindness, universalism, individualism, and “reverse racism,” were four major tropes I encountered that contributed to the inability of farmland owners to perceive the racism going on around them. Colorblindness blinded farmland owners to racism rather than race. The belief that race does not matter led participants to universalize the experiences of people of color. Individualism made it so that farmland owners blamed individual people of color for having caused the symptoms of their own oppression. Finally, “reverse racism” allowed participants to interpret attempts to address racism as disadvantaging whites. These rhetorical tropes combined to conceal structural racism within farming social networks. They also present significant barriers to efforts to create farmland justice, because when farmland owners do not recognize racism, they feel personally attacked by efforts to remediate it.

Chapter 3.2.1.1: Colorblindness

Throughout our conversations, over three quarters of farmland owners expressed some form of explicit colorblindness. While no participants actually claimed not to see race, they overwhelmingly aspired towards colorblindness, believing that acknowledging race is racist, and arguing that creating a racially just society involves treating everyone the same regardless of their race. When I asked farmland owners about their interest in selling to farmers of color I would frequently get responses such as, “whether they're white, curly haired, blue-eyed, olive, dark, it really doesn't matter to me,” or “it doesn't matter if you're black, white, yellow, long as they are going to pay you.” Farmland owners would even create skin colors that do not exist in a healthy human being – “I don't care if you're white, black, blue or green,” – to demonstrate their belief that race is entirely arbitrary.

As illustrated in previous examples about farmland sales, assertions of colorblindness would often be followed by either a racist suggestion or very overtly racist trope. Embedded in the idea that, “it doesn't matter if you're black, white, yellow, long as they are going to pay you,” is the assumption that a farmer of color might not pay you. The statement, “I don't care if you're white, black, blue or green,” was directly followed by, “don't expect it to be given to you because I don't agree with that. Yeah, I don't agree. With the funding funneling through the state and the federal government to start these people off coming here. They don't know the soil until they get here.” Initial colorblind statements were followed by the age-old tropes of farmers of color as outsiders and welfare recipients, looking for a handout and ill equipped for farming. These ideas demonstrate how colorblindness, rather than allowing people not to see race, allows them not to see racism.

Colorblindness led participants to significantly downplay the role of racism in not only mediating farmland sales, but also in organizing broader structures of society. One farmland owner, who has also been member of local government, suggested that when people speak out against racism, they have an ulterior motive, “I don't think for the most part any of us are looking at what color somebody is when we're dealing with them. Yeah, if that gets raised it's because somebody has interjected something into the mix that gives people pause to wonder if there's an issue.” I asked him if might give an example of this, and he responded,

“If you learn and verify that somebody's got a lot of criminal activity going on, you may not want to deal with him because of that. It doesn't mean just because he's black, it's just because it's criminal activity. It could be a white guy. So, you're going to stay away from him. That could be misinterpreted as, I'm not dealing with him because he's black. No, I'm not dealing with him because he's got a criminal record and I don't trust him.”

This example of so-called colorblindness fits neatly into the trope of Black Muslim men being racialized as violent threats¹ (Mills 2012). The quote does rhetorical acrobatics, first suggesting we should all be colorblind and that claims of racism are false and politically motivated, then giving an example of a so-called false claim of racism that is in fact a wildly common trope employed against Black Muslim men. Associations of criminality and Blackness get ironically resurrected in a colorblind discussion of farmland succession planning as an example of why we shouldn't see race, only individual (Black) criminals.

While some farmland owners juxtaposed colorblindness with overtly racist language, others who believed they were embracing progressive views on race and racism also viewed colorblindness as the solution to racism. One farmland owner, who works for a culturally diverse company, talked to me about how making friends with people from different cultures and of different races has opened her mind to new perspectives. While her lived experience reflects that she values racial diversity, she still had internalized the widespread belief that antiracism is created through colorblindness. She spoke hopefully of a colorblind future,

“I think the goal is your generation, but even the younger generations, is over time it shouldn't be an issue because you just see people from, you don't see the color – when you're a little kid you don't see color and if you're exposed to it – then hopefully you become you know, more and more accepting.”

While colorblindness from some interview participants came from a genuine desire for people of all races to thrive in Maine, they did not understand that in a racist society, failing to acknowledge race also means failing to acknowledge racism.

¹ This quote is particularly interesting given the history of African Muslims being cast as criminals in Lewiston. When refugees first started arriving in Lewiston, the city erupted in hysteria over the possibility of gangs developing, despite the fact that crime rates actually fell with the immigration (Besteman 2014, 158). A memo written by an investigator at a public housing project warned Lewiston police to prepare for a gang war, and listed the potential “gangs,” one of which was a Somali girls’ afterschool soccer team (Besteman 2014, 157).

Chapter 3.2.1.2: Universalism

Participants generally did not have a grasp on the extent to which race and racism are factors that shape people's lived experiences. This led to them to universalize the values and lived experiences of farmers of color, assuming they are no different than the values and lived experiences of white farmers. Universalizing values often took the form of farmland owners hoping their successor would farm in the same way they did. One farmer told me she would be open to selling to a farmer of color, but that "what's important is that we just begin to really focus on raising our own food and feeding ourselves." Universalizing experiences generally centered around immigration. Participants would compare recently arrived African immigrants and refugees to their own white ancestors, telling me, "I know when my ancestors came here, I heard the stories being told and it was like they wanted to learn English and become Americans very quickly. Their goal was not to remain with their ancestors." They would blame the lack of assimilation on refugees and immigrants themselves, speculating that, "the Muslims have a tendency to keep things more in house." When I asked them if they thought race might be a factor in why the Lewiston community had not welcomed African refugees, they were inclined to dismiss or diminish the impact of racism, saying, "Of course. Sure. Poor does, racial does." By assuming that their white lived experiences and values were universal, farmland owners failed to see the ways in which race and racism influence the community around them.

Chapter 3.2.1.3: Individualism

Individualism was a mechanism through which participants became blinded to the realities of race and racism. Individualism is an example of metonymy, which allows people to miss the proverbial forest for the trees. Instead of viewing color, participants argued, we should

see people as individuals. Farmland owners proposed individualism as the best way to prevent racism, following colorblind statements with assurances that “I look at personality, attitude. Yeah. What kind of a person is that? Is this a person that’s serious? A person that's going to put some effort into it and has a goal?” Participants also believed that individualism was the best way to address already existing racism. They opposed reparations or affirmative action but contended that, “If we have individuals who are still hurting, and we have plenty of them, for lots of different reasons, we need to address those and help those people.” Participants upheld individualism as the way to avoid and address racism; however, because racism in farmland access is predominantly the result of racist systems, rather than individual acts of racial hatred, individualism blinded farmland owners to many forms of racism currently impacting farmers of color.

Individualism made it such that farmland owners not only did not see racism, but also interpreted the impacts of racism as a failing of people of color. Many of these failings centered around work and laziness. One participant argued that if people just worked harder there wouldn’t be food insecurity in Lewiston/Auburn. He told me, “But we’re worried about food insecurity? I call that lazy, not food insecurity. I call it lazy because if someone had enough gumption, they'd be out there in the fields.” Of course, food security is one of the reasons why farmland justice matters (Kerssen and Brent 2017), and metonymy reduces all the barriers to food security – from unemployment and employer discrimination (Besteman 2014) to the high cost of farmland (Freedgood and Dempsey 2014) – to matters of individual hard work.

While individualism allowed farmland owners to ignore broader trends regarding the impacts of racism, these trends would actually reemerge later in our conversations as evidence for supposed cultural failings of people of color. Farmland owners were explicit in the belief that

the statistically low number of people of color farming in Maine and beyond was not the result of racism, but of a laziness they attributed to an entire racial group. When I asked participants why they thought the overwhelming majority of farmers are white, they told me things like, “The commitment and dedication, that's what I'm gonna say,” or,

“The mentality of a hard-working farmer today... call them lazy. Okay, I feed out the floor anywhere between 2 in the morning and 4 in the morning to get going. They milk three times a day over there. You tell me how many of them people going to get up at 1 o'clock 1:30 in the morning to be in a barn at two. Ain't gonna happen.”

Individualism was not just a simple a reduction. Farmland owners would reduce discrimination to the level of the individual – at which it became invisible – and then once racism no longer mattered to the conversation, they would broaden back to the scope of racial groups, casting farmers of color responsible for their lack of success, and attributing this lack of success as a cultural or mental failing inherent to that entire racial group.

Other farmland owners picked up that individualism and hard work had become racialized, and used hard work to strengthen their case that race did not matter. The arguments centered around proving that they were not a racist because they did not buy into the racial stereotype of laziness, or that they were not a racist because they believed exactly the opposite of the racial stereotype typically applied to that racial group. Farmland owners would validate immigrants and refugees, saying “I know the Somalian are hard workers,” or, “We had a lot of Jamaicans and they're very good at finishing concrete. They're the nicest guys you ever did want to see, and they were very meticulous in how they finish the concrete, and they were very good workers.”

However, immigrants or refugees breaking the stereotype of being lazy was framed as their symbolic right to be welcomed into Maine society. As one landowner put it,

“If they're hard working people and they're pleasant [...] why can't they be a neighbor, you know? If anything, you can learn their language and they'll work with you and you help them. I have no problem. I'm not a racist. I have no problem with color. If you're willing to help me and I'm willing to help you, that works. Yeah, that works for me. I don't care who you are.”

While this suggestion expresses the unusually antiracist statement of longtime Mainers learning the languages of New Mainers, it designates hard workingness as a prerequisite for any immigrant or refugee towards whom antiracist actions are extended. In a community that perceives the impacts of racism as proof of laziness, the visible impacts of racism thus gatekeep the full acceptance of farmers of color into dominant Maine farming communities.

Within the trope of individualism, the theme of laziness was deeply tied to a second theme, deservingness. Farmland owners conceptualized farmers of color as looking for a handout, and thus inherently undeserving of government support. Farmland owners were angry about the USDA grants that refugee and immigrant farmers had received, remarking that, “I think that the new Mainers have been given an awful lot of opportunity.” When I pressed them to say more about this, often the things that they believed were being given to New Americans were not in fact being given at all. One participant recounted that,

“Asylum seekers have been given everything, you know, and that's just not my – I've hear it from everybody, it's like they come here and they get settled in – and you got your veterans that are sleeping on the side of the streets – and they're getting a new car and they're getting so much a month and, you know, they don't speak the language.”

The myth that Somali's get cars when they arrive in Lewiston has been debunked time and time again (Besteman 2014, 155), yet somehow is still alive and well. As the above example illustrates, farmland owners have no idea what refugees are getting or not getting when it comes to cars or farm loans, but one thing they are sure of is it is more than they deserve.

Racialized notions of deservingness extended to the Wabanaki tribes as well as to recently arrived Mainers of color. When I asked participants about their views on reparations for

the land taken to the tribes, my question was met with confusion, “I think that a lot of opportunities have been given, in other states at least, to Indians and Indian tribes. I mean look at every gambling casino, right?” or outrage,

“We have a whole section of Maine that’s set aside for Native Americans. Yeah, and if you take a look at what's going on there, they have done a terrible job of maintaining that land. Or their police departments or anything else with regard to that. Should we give them more, back? [...] I can't do anything about their drinking. I can't do anything about the other kinds of things that happen there that you would not want to see happen to people. I'm not allowed to because they're an independent group. They have certain set of privileges that we're not allowed to step on and it's not helping them.”

In this monologue, deservingness of land was predicated on having a system of governance and cultural norms associated with whiteness. Drinking and crime, rather than understood as symptoms of trauma caused by colonial occupation, were seen as an indications of poor moral choices on the part of individuals, and thus became the justification for further removal of the tribe’s rights. Universalism emerges in this quote as well, with the assumption that the Wabanaki have a deviant system of governance and would do better without the “set of privileges” of being a sovereign nation. Farmland owners felt strongly that people of color did not deserve any different, or as they implied, preferential, treatment than did whites. As another farmland owners put it, “I think if things are given it's just too easy not to work hard for it.” They suggested that people of color did not deserve farmland justice, because this would further contribute to their laziness.

Chapter 3.2.1.4: Opposition to affirmative action

Colorblindness, universalism, and individualism all converged into the final trope of blindness: opposition to affirmative action. When farmland owners didn’t see race or racism, when they believed everyone is the same and should be treated the same, and when they believed

that groups do not matter, only individuals, the typical offshoot of these ideologies was to view affirmative action as “reverse racism.” Claims of reverse racism are made possible by a metaphor in which racial oppression is conceptually linked with affirmative action. The logic behind this association is that if any mention of race is racist, policies and programs that give supposedly preferential treatment to people of color must then be racist. Of course, this misses the larger picture of privilege and oppression, and, by extension, the very need for these programs in the first place.

White farmland owners felt frustrated at programs that offered grants and funding to farmers of color. Several farmers talked about the system of scoring that determines how much federal funding they will receive. Race was one of many factors that affect a person’s score, and participants felt that this had gone too far and was hurting white people. When I asked a couple whether they think farmers of color in Maine have equal opportunities to start a farm, the husband responded, “No. I think there's probably programs out there to help them get started and different things like that.” The wife added, “They probably have, probably have more than.... more opportunities than probably... than local people have I would assume.” In this statement, farm service programs that attempt to correct for racism get constructed as disadvantaging whites. As one participant declared, “I think white male’s the minority, being honest.” White farmland owners felt victimized by affirmative action. Because they were blinded to racism, they did not understand the need to address it, and viewed affirmative action as anti-white racism.

Chapter 3.2.2: Denial

The second category of rhetorical trope that participants employed to justify racism was denial. Denial of racism manifested in three distinct ways: through a synecdoche in which race

and culture were conflated, through arguments that racism is a thing of the past, and through shielding oneself rhetorically against being perceived as racist. Each of these tropes attempted to negate the existence of racism in a different way. Synecdoche reframes discussions of race as discussions of cultures, so that making universalizing claims about a racialized group is not being racist, it is simply stating facts about a culture. By relegating racism to a distant past, participants argued that racism is no longer relevant, thus attempting to negate both present racisms and the legacies of historical ones. Finally, participants denied their own racism quite persistently throughout our conversations. All of these forms of denial combined to diminish racism or package it as something other than racism. Combined with blindness, denial was one of the ways that the racialized distribution of farmland access is justified rhetorically.

Chapter 3.2.2.1: Synecdoche

Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part stands for a whole. In the context of race, synecdoche allows people to speak of and imagine race without any discussion of race, instead implying race by using other markers of identity – such as language, culture, and nationality – that have become racialized (Barot and Bird 2001; Selod and Embrick 2013; Villanueva 2006). Farmland owners typically presented racist statements as statements about *cultures*, rather than *races*. We saw an example of this earlier where “local” people were constructed as white, a theme which resonated with many other participants. When I referred to refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers collectively as New Americans, one woman mocked the term, “oh we’re supposed to call them *New Americans*?” leaving me with the impression that she considers them permanent outsiders.

Race, citizenship, country of birth, and religion combined and transformed into new and confusing formations. Several participants supported landowners refusing to sell to people of color on the basis of immigration status rather than race. One man asserted that “Americans should sell to Americans,” while another told me he personally was in support of selling to immigrants, and even had met with a group of Somali Bantu farmers to discuss leasing his land, but that he defends other people’s rights not to sell to immigrants. “I mean if they own the land it's their choice plain and simple. They're paying the taxes on it. They own it, then if they don't want to lease it to Somalians, that's up to them. Or another type of immigrant. That's up to them.” Meanwhile, landowners maintained that this was not racist. It was about culture, nationality, or religion, but not race.

Farmland owners then blamed the visible impacts of racism on qualities inherent to the *cultures* of people of color, rather than on the fact that they lived in a racist society. One man complained that it was taking Africans a really long time to integrate. I asked, “Do you have a sense of why that's happening in this case? Why people aren't assimilating as quickly as you might expect?” imagining I would get an acknowledgment of the racism Black Muslims experience here, to which he responded, “That's been the tradition for the Muslims for thousands of years. They, I mean, they would go into places, would, whether by war or however they did it, take over churches, turn them into mosques and maintain their identity as Muslims, and that's – it's just who they are.” This rhetoric, rather than construct people of color as *biologically* inferior, argues that they are *culturally* inferior. While both biological and cultural arguments posit that “it’s just who they are,” the conflation of race and culture allowed participants to maintain that they were not racist while simultaneously making sweeping and demeaning assessments of people of color. Moreover, assumptions about inherent cultural failings allowed participants to

deny that racism was one of the reasons why Muslims were excluded from spaces in Lewiston/Auburn communities.

Even among more politically progressive farmland owners who condemned xenophobia, they still condemned it as xenophobia, rather than racism. One farmland owner told me it's been a challenge for refugees and immigrants to be accepted here, because, "I think there's a misunderstanding, and there's a lack of cultural competency across the community. Things have got better, but there's definitely a lack of cultural competence and cultural understanding and that can be a barrier." Notably, she used the phrase "lack of cultural competence" rather than racism to refer to the exclusion and discrimination Black Muslim refugees and immigrants experience. The majority of farmers of color in Lewiston/Auburn are racialized both as Muslim and as Black, yet all discrimination against farmers of color – whether on the basis of religion, culture, or race – was packaged as xenophobia. Synecdoche made it possible for racialized markers of identity to stand in for race, thus allowing participants to universalize farmers of color and normalize the refusal to sell land to them, while simultaneously denying that this was racism.

Chapter 3.2.2.2: The past is the past

A second major theme within the trope of denial was the tendency to relegate racism to a distant past entirely isolated from the present. The arguments went something along the lines of, *Racism happened long ago, and we are beyond that now*. The temporal distancing allowed participants both to deny that racism occurs in the present, and to deny that past racisms are materially alive in the present as well. Finally, when participants had no plausible way to argue that racism did not occur and does not continue to impact the present, they would attempt to argue it really did not have such an overwhelmingly bad impact on people of color.

When I spoke to participants about contemporary racism in farming systems many did not believe me. In one interview, after I explained the how the USDA discriminated against Black farmers, and how Black farmers went on to win the *Pigford v. Glickman* lawsuit, a farmland owner listened to me, and then denied that any of what I said had actually happened. He explicated,

“So if these Black people come in and they never filed income taxes in their life, the federal government don't recognize them, they're not going to give you a check. Yeah. You see what I'm saying? So, when you get into this a little deeper you find out the true reasons, because they're [the USDA] not stupid and they don't usually lose in a federal case, in a lawsuit.”

It was inconceivable to him that such pervasive racism could have happened only a few decades ago.

Farmland owners argued not only that racism was a thing of the past, but that past racisms did not have any present impacts. This often came up in discussions about the need for reparations, with participants questioning, “What is the point of giving that to somebody who wasn't a slave? I mean, they're all dead. All the owners are dead,” or, “I know the colonists probably fought with Indians and took their land away which isn't right, but I, I have to pay for those people that did that a hundred years ago?” When it came to racism, farmland owners concluded that, “history is history and you know, you gotta kind of move on from it.”

In some cases, the visible impacts of past racisms were so obvious that it was not possible to deny their existence, so instead participants denied their significance. One man told me about a Wabanaki village that was submerged in the Androscoggin River in Auburn when the city dammed it to make a reservoir. When I asked him what he thought about all this land being stolen from the Wabanaki tribes, he struggled to answer, but finally concluded that,

“The Natives, I think, were pretty much a wandering people. They never stayed in one place or anything. So they never really improved the land or did anything to the land

other than were here... They migrated all over the place, so they can't say they own the whole darn thing [...] They just used everything and never owned nothing, tell you the truth.”

Confronting the magnitude of racism that allowed settlers to kill Native Peoples and steal their land – racism that was presently visible in the white occupation of the land on which we were standing – was too immediate, so instead this quote attempts to downplay the harm that racism caused.

Chapter 3.2.2.3: “I’m not a racist...”

The final manifestation of denial of racism was through shielding oneself from accusations of racism. Shielding against accusations of racism took two forms: asserting that one was not racist and then saying something racist, and asserting that one was not racist before saying anything remotely related to race, even if it was not a racist statement.

A shield for a racist comment would always contain an internal contradiction. As illustrated in part one, respondents would claim to be willing to sell their land to anyone regardless of race, “I want everybody to farm! I don't care who you are,” then follow it up with a tirade against immigrants receiving USDA grants. Farmland owners would first assert colorblindness, and then say something that very clearly showed that they were not only *not* colorblind, but that they were comfortable espousing racial stereotypes.

A shield for a nonracist comment would involve a farmland owner interrupting themselves every time they talked about race with an assurance that they were not racist. One man remarked that he no longer found it profitable to farm himself, although he had noticed that African immigrants and refugees were still farming in Lewiston/Auburn. He told me, “You can say what you want about farming and how you want to keep it here. But yeah, the city is not

making it feasible to be farm[ing]. Yeah and don't get me wrong. I'm not racist in anyway, but I seen Somalians coming in and utilizing land and you know doing things, but to me that's not feasible for me.” While he was simply making the observation that some people were still farming, he felt the need to clarify that he was not racist for mentioning that they were African. Comments like these were likely driven by the colorblind assumption that noticing or mentioning race was racist.

Throughout nearly every interview, participants were somewhat wary about overtly discussing race, and the fear of being thought of as racist appeared to be the driver of this discomfort. They employed a slew of semantic maneuvers, as detailed above, to appear nonracist and to not be associated in any way with racism. When someone found themselves talking too much about race, they would attempt to divert the conversation towards something else. When the farmland owner told me that “Americans should sell to Americans,” his mother, who owned an adjacent plot of land and was also interviewing with me, was stunned speechless for a moment, then interrupted in a flustered voice to offer me a cup of coffee, which I felt obliged to take, even though it was 8 at night, just to lessen the palpable tension in the room. People would use metaphors for race, like “local” or “culture,” or “they don't know the soil until they get here,” to attempt to sidestep around the topic. While no farmland owners explicitly said this, I was left with the impression that to them, “racist” had become an insult that hurt white people, rather than describe a system of oppression that hurts people of color.

Through equating race with culture, through relegating racism to the past, and through shielding themselves from accusations of racism, farmland owners denied the significance, and often the existence, of racism. Or rather, it was not always that farmland owners fully denied the existence of racism; it was simply that they did not see any of their own opinions, actions or

lifestyles as racist, no matter how overtly racist they were. To them, racism was always a thing of the periphery; something from a distant past, or something they believed a few bad people believed in (although not enough people to negatively impact people of color). This misdefinition of racism led to further racism – farmland owners believed that the marginalization of farmers of color was the result of their own, inferior, cultures.

Chapter 3.3: Antiracism

While I found patterns of racism throughout multiple conversations with farmland owners, I did not find consistent patterns of anti-racism. However, I found a few examples of landowners challenging racist systems that I believe are worth mentioning, as they give some suggestions for ways that the social networks surrounding farmland access could move toward racial justice. Challenges to racism centered around four main themes: empathy, justice, diversity, and being a good neighbor. While not all of these examples could be called anti-racism (sometimes they were even sentiments imbedded in a racist statement) they offer promising examples of how the values that resonate with rural, white, farming communities in Mainerns could translate into a more racially just farming system.

A few farmland owners expressed empathy for farmers of color. Notably, these were working-class people who themselves had farmed for a living and understood how difficult it is to make money as a farmer. One man, after I told him about how the USDA denied loans on the basis of race, appeared quite moved, and exclaimed,

“It's not an easy life! And there you are, gonna shoot em down like that when you go to get a loan? I mean come on, they're already behind the eight-ball taking on the challenge of working land, you know, which like I said, it's, to me, it's down by the wayside [...] and now you're going to take them, you know, take them another step lower, harder to get loans and stuff... but I can understand that. That's how America is I guess, and I don't think that'll ever change.”

This quote demonstrates the power of stories in building solidarity. The farmland owner who expressed this empathy for farmers of color had never heard of USDA discrimination, or any other form of contemporary racism in farming systems before, and he was dismayed when I told him about it. He found common ground with farmers of color because he understood how difficult it is to farm, and he acknowledged how unfair it was that farmers of color face even more challenges to farming than he did.

Mainers pride ourselves on having a strong sense of what is just and fair. Several farmland owners expressed a desire to help right injustices committed against farmers of color, with one woman speculating that she might be interested in selling specifically to a farmer of color. Another farmland owner, who vehemently opposed affirmative action and reparations, in a very bizarre turn, actually advocated for reparations as the way to address crimes against an entire racial group. He told me that the law should be one individual at a time, but that, “I tell you if the government is proven to be biased against a group because of their color or race or anything else, I don't care what it is, then they should pay. They should somehow have to – it should be set straight because we are not supposed to be doing that.” Of course, he was either unaware or in denial that this is exactly what has happened and continues to happen, but at the very least this statement shows that there is potential that, if farmland owners were educated about the structural and pervasive nature of racism, they might be driven by a sense of justice to support land-based reparations and other forms of land justice for farmers of color.

A third way that budding anti-racism appeared in interviews was through participants acknowledging that they value diversity as a tool for dismantling racist ideas. Despite claims to colorblindness, many participants believed that working in multiracial environments has made them more aware as people. One woman told me that “we're proud to be diverse in our building.”

While another woman, who also works for a racially diverse company, was quite excited that in our last local election a young Somali woman won a seat to the City Council. She said it “has been very positive for the city” to have a woman of color in a leadership position. Working in diverse environments has offered farmland owners opportunities to become educated about race and racism. One woman’s job required that all employees take a class about racial diversity in Lewiston/Auburn. She told me, “there were perceptions, ‘Oh every immigrant comes and they get a car,’” and that the purpose of the class was “you know, give us a dose of reality.” I asked her if the class was helpful for getting a handle on what was true and what wasn’t and she responded, “Yeah, definitely. Definitely.” Participants felt strongly that working in diverse environments had made them more tolerant towards people of color and immigrants.

The final theme that could provide the foundation for antiracism from farmland owners is being a good neighbor. Farmland owners believed in building community through sharing their land. About a third of participants told me that they allow the public to use their land in some capacity, hunting, snowmobiling, hiking, cross country skiing, and mountain biking. While neighborliness was not always explicitly directed towards people of color, farmland owners did link neighborliness with anti-racism. As one farmer put it (although admittedly with some subtly exclusionary undertones, as discussed earlier), “Why can't they be a neighbor? You know, if anything you can learn their language, and they'll work with you, and you help them.” Being a good neighbor was a value that resonated with many farmland owners and offers a potential avenue for framing the importance of white Mainers meaningfully including farmers of color in farming communities.

The examples of anti-racism from farmland owners pale in comparison to the examples of racism, but these four examples could become a foundation on which to build future anti-

racist work and expand already existing anti-racist initiatives. While my conversations with farmland owners painted a grim picture for the prospects of a racially just farmland access in Auburn, my conversations with farm service providers offered many examples of resistance and of creative ideas for building land justice in Maine. The service providers I interviewed spoke of the important anti-racist work that farmers, activists, and NGOs are undertaking related to farmland access. In the following chapter, I introduce some of the antiracist land justice work already being done in Maine and discuss the implications of my case study findings for current anti-racist farmland access projects.

Chapter 4: Discussion

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I attempted to answer my research question: *what is the role of settler-descended landowners in facilitating or challenging farmland transfer to farmers of color in Auburn, Maine?* I conducted a case study with the objective of understanding how farmland owner dynamics impact the SBCA and other farmers of color having equitable access to farmland in Maine. In response to this goal, I found pervasive examples of material racism in farmland access, including farmland sales, inheritance, and opposition to reparations. I identified key rhetorical strategies farmland owners employed to justify material inequity in farmland ownership, and found that racialized rhetoric made possible further material inequity, including refusal to sell to farmers of color. Finally, I found a few examples of farmland owners practicing antiracism.

In this chapter of my thesis I discuss the implications of my findings for farmland justice projects in Maine. Returning to my earlier definition, farmland justice is the right of marginalized communities and communities of color to “access, control, and benefit from” farmland and farm resources (Kerssen and Brent 2017, 286). Many organizations in Maine, including the SBCA, Wabanaki REACH, Land in Common, and Cultivating Community are already undertaking the important work of educating the public about land justice and land injustice, and working to build more just forms of land access for farmers of color and people of color more broadly (Girouard et al. 2019; Slocum 2006a). This chapter discusses the need for land justice projects to consider the role that farmland owners play in challenging and maintaining racism in farmland access. I begin this chapter by evaluating how my findings are

consistent with and how they diverge from the findings of previous research on race and farmland access. I identify drivers of racism within this case study, and then point to specific solutions to address those drivers. I offer suggestions for how land justice organizations, mainstream farming organizations, as well as broader political and social structures could address racism within farmland owner social networks. I conclude the chapter by considering alternative forms of farmland access that would create land justice for all farmers.

Chapter 4.1: Comparison to previous findings

Here I compare my findings to previous literature both on racialized discourses and on racism in farmland access. My results yielded similar rhetorical themes to those identified by scholars studying post-civil rights discourses of race and racism. Farmland owners' rhetoric, like other contemporary rhetoric of race, strayed away from language widely recognized as overtly racist, instead using veiled themes to express racialized ideas. My findings also show similarities to findings about the role of racism in mediating farmland access. Calo and De Master (2016) found that sociocultural barriers complicate access to farmland, and Minkoff-Zern (2013) found that Latinx farmers experienced racist backlash from former employers when starting their own farms. I found that racism within farming social networks leads to farmland owners hesitating or refusing to sell to farmers of color, which further substantiates that racism within farmland access is both institutional and social.

Chapter 4.1.1: Racialized Discourses

In my conversations with farmland owners, I found widespread examples of each of the four racialized rhetorical tropes – metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony – identified by

Villanueva (2006). These tropes either blinded people to the ways that their actions or the actions of other community members were contributing to structural racism in farmland access, or gave them a foundation on which to deny that racism was in fact occurring. The result of these tropes was that racialized material distribution of farmland (through sales and inheritance) was not recognized as racism, and more obvious forms of discrimination against farmers of color, such as the refusal to sell to immigrants, were packaged as the natural outcome of cultural differences.

While studying participants' rhetoric uncovered significant racism, in my analysis of Eanes and Zhou's (2019) AgZone survey data (figure 1) more than 70% of respondents claimed that they were not opposed to selling to New Americans. This mirrors previous observations by scholars who study the rhetoric of racism, that interviews yield much higher rates of racism than do surveys (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000, 62). Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) theorize that this is because whites will not state outright contempt for people of color (understanding this form of overt racism as racist) but are much more comfortable embracing colorblind racism. They suggest the fact that surveys conceal the racism that interviews reveal, "gives credence to the argument that Whites' racial aversion for Blacks is deeply ingrained into their unconscious," (ibid. 62). Farmland owners were hesitant to express overt racism, but comfortable speaking about race through suggestion. Because white people now "express their racial views in a sanitized way," (ibid. 76), studying rhetoric uncovers the ways that racism is denied, made invisible, and sold as something other than racism (Villanueva 2006).

Participants were generally unaware of their own racism. No matter how overtly racist their ideas were, and no matter the extent to which they participated in materially racist farmland ownership and transfer, they did not perceive their behaviors, ideologies, and relative wealth as forms of racism at all (Crenshaw 1997). The misdefinition of racism as an overt and intentional

act, rather than a system of advantage and oppression, led to participants failing to see the ways their own ideologies and actions maintained racism (Crenshaw 1997). The results from my case study support theories that post-civil rights era racism is characterized by whites denying that racism is structural, believing instead that racism is only a matter of a small number of white racists (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000, 78 Villanueva 2006).

Racism was also misdefined as acts motivated by supposed biological hierarchies, rather than supposed cultural hierarchies. Bonilla-Silva and Forman argue that racist rhetoric in the post-civil rights era has evolved from the argument that nonwhite people are *biologically* inferior, to the argument that they are *culturally* inferior (2000, 69). Participants made sweeping gestures about the inferior cultures of farmers of color, framing Black farmers as lazy (“how many of them people going to get up at 1 o'clock 1:30 in the morning to be in a barn at two?”), or blaming Muslims for supposedly self-segregating (“that's been the tradition for the Muslims for thousands of years”). Because participants operated under a misdefinition of racism that did not understand the ways in which other markers of identity, such as culture, become racialized (Barot and Bird 2001; Selod and Embrick 2013), they failed to see how ideas about cultural inferiority were also forms of racism.

Misdefinitions and misunderstandings of racism allowed participants to maintain and amplify structural racism, all the while failing to see this as racist. Participants expressed colorblind statements followed by the belief that people's value should be assessed at the level of individuals. Because they did not understand the structural nature of racism, they overlooked how structural racism shapes people's abilities to purchase farmland or farm successfully. They thus perceived farmers of color as lazy or as recipients of too much government support. These were the very same tropes the USDA has historically mobilized to explain the lack of success

among farmers of color, even as their offices denied them loans (Schell 2015). The rhetoric of farmland owners similarly constructed the impacts of racism as the fault of farmers of color themselves.

Misunderstandings of the definition of racism also led to farmland owners failing to recognize the need to address racism. For example, many farmland owners objected to agricultural programs that offer specific support for farmers of color, believing these programs hurt white farmers. Cries of “reverse racism” follow directly from the assumption that overt acknowledgment of race is racist. Arguments that affirmative action is reverse racism jettison any notion of structural racism, and posit that a program that supposedly favors people of color over whites, rather than correct for past racisms, is discriminatory against whites. Similarly, participants did not understand the need for reparations. This opposition was driven by a failure to recognize the ways that the past impacts the present, a lack of understanding of one’s own personal wealth being related to racism, a tendency towards colorblindness, and a misunderstanding of reparations as a forcible seizure of property from white people to give to people of color. Because of misunderstandings of racism and subsequent misunderstandings of proposed solutions to dismantle it, many farmland owners did not see the need for any changes in the distribution of farmland ownership.

My findings support the conclusions of Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000), Crenshaw (1997), Schell (2015) and Villanueva (2006) that whites’ defense of white supremacy is accomplished through a “new racial ideology” (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000, 77) that emerged in response to the Civil Rights Movement and condemnation of overt racism. The new racial ideology avoids overt racism based on phenotype, while maintaining structural racism based on racialized notions of culture. Because this new racial ideology is not popularly accepted

as racism (Crenshaw 1997, 255; Kendi 2017, 8), efforts to create land justice in Maine may face opposition from those who do not recognize this racism for what it is. However, farmland owners wished very much to be nonracist, or at least appear nonracist. If they fully understood what racism is, how it operates in farmland ownership, it is possible that they would join in solidarity with farmers of color, or, at the very least, avoid contributing to some forms of racism in farmland access.

Chapter 4.1.2: Racism and farmland access

Previous research on the barriers to farmland ownership for farmers of color identified social relations as a driver of inequality (Calo 2018; Calo and De Master 2016; Carlisle et al. 2019; Minkoff-Zern 2013). My research supports these findings. Calo and Demaster (2016) found that because farmland access is mediated by relationships between farmland owners and tenant farmers, and because social networks are racialized, landlord tenant relationships perpetuate racist and inequitable access to farmland. They found that land availability and affordability did not always translate to access for farmers of color, because landowners can decide to whom they sell or lease. Carlisle et al. found that “landlords exercise ultimate discretion in taking on new tenants, creating a power dynamic imbricated with the legacies of white agricultural land ownership and racism,” (2019, 6). Although my research focuses on land sales rather than leases, my findings are similar: farmland owners expressed serious reservations about selling their land to farmers of color.

My case study yielded additional mechanisms beyond those identified by Carlisle et al. (2019) and Calo and Demaster (2016) through which social networks contribute to racist material outcomes in farming. I found that inheritance and opposition to reparations are major

social drivers of racism in farmland access. In US farming systems, inheritance of farmland allows the overtly racialized farmland dispossession of the pre-*Pigford v. Glickman* era to live on in the present. The institution of inheritance authorizes settler-descended farmland owners to pass farmland and farm related wealth – acquired at a time when people of color were actively excluded from the same opportunities – on to their settler descended family members.

Inheritance is both a social process, occurring within families, and a political process, sanctioned by the state and riven with past and present racisms. Inheritance offers a clear illustration of how the racial state resides both within political and social institutions simultaneously (Omi and Winant 1994, 83). Opposition to reparations went hand in hand with inheritance in my case study; farmland owners did not recognize inheritance of land and wealth as a form of racism, and so did not understand the need for reparations. While opposition to reparations was an idea that existed within farmland owner social networks and allowed participants to deny the ways in which their own lifestyles maintain racism, opposition to reparations also bleeds into political institutions by justifying past actions of the racial state. While both inheritance and opposition to reparations are related to institutions and policies, I argue that they must also be considered as social barriers to land justice. While my case study identifies these additional social barriers to equitable farmland access for farmers of color, my overall findings strengthen Calo and DeMasters's (2016) conclusion that programs intending to create land justice, beyond addressing the socio-economic impacts of racism on farmers of color, will have to address racism itself as a barrier.

While I found racism within social networks that would likely constrain the abilities of farmers of color to access farmland, the majority of research on the topic of race and farmland access has focused on institutional racism, without addressing racism embedded in social

conditions and social interactions. This is not at all to downplay the significance of these findings; they have yielded crucial information about ways that the USDA (Castro and Willingham 2019; Gilbert, Sharp, and Felin 2002; Horst and Marion 2019; Marinez and Gomez 2011; Minkoff-Zern and Sloat 2017; Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011; Wood and Gilbert 2000) and nongovernmental farming organizations (Calo 2018; Flora et al. 2011; Gilbert, Sharp, and Felin 2002; Grant, Wood, and Wright 2012; Niewolny and Lillard 2010; Ruhf 2013; Slocum 2006a) can better serve farmers of color. The USDA and many white-led NGOs have much work to do before their programs promote equitable farmland access for farmers of color. However, based on the magnitude of racism present in farmland owner social networks, as well as wider racist structures such as inheritance and the racial wealth gap, conceptualizing racism in farmland access as entirely institutional racism overlooks some of the social barriers to land justice for farmers of color.

Interviews with service providers in Maine drove home the point that addressing institutional barriers does not fully solve land injustice. Both farmer of color-led and white-led farming organizations in Maine understand the various forms of institutional racism from the USDA and NGOs, and have established creative workarounds. A service provider charged with conservation easement monitoring on a farmer of color-owned property told me that when farmers make improvements to their property that they did not have permission to do under the easement, she fudges retroactive letters of permission so that the farmers are not penalized. She believed a language barrier has caused the confusion, and understands that lack of cultural fluency was one way that institutions such as the one she worked for often discriminate against immigrant farmers. Meanwhile, the SBCA has hired a native-English speaking professional to write some of its larger grants, in case the USDA rejects their applications based on wording.

Similarly, a service provider who works for an organization that distributes grants explained to me that their policy is to judge grants based solely on the project they propose, not on the wording of the grant. The service providers from farmers of color-led organizations whom I spoke to told me that receiving grants has been relatively easy for them. While these examples should not be misunderstood as an argument that institutional racism in farming has been solved – research shows that it is still pervasive (Castro and Willingham 2019; Horst and Marion 2019; Marinez and Gomez 2011; Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011) – they do illustrate that significant anti-racist work is being done in Maine to combat institutional racism. Meanwhile, racism from farmland owner social networks constrains the abilities of farmers of color to purchase land, and greater racist structures including the racial wealth gap, inheritance, and lack of reparations allow racism to persist even as service providers attempt to address institutional barriers. My research suggests that in addition to challenging institutional racism at farming organizations, anti-racist farmland access work must involve considering the racial state as a whole, comprised of social relationships, ideologies, and policies, as well as institutions.

Chapter 4.2: Building farmland justice

While the racism I encountered in my case study existed within the social networks of farmland owners, this racism was not created by farmland owners themselves, but rather was reflective of wider racist structures. Following Kendi's (2017) breakdown of racism, it originates in laws, is justified through racist ideas, and finally compels acts of hatred. I encountered examples of each of the three steps of racism in my case study. Farmland owners' social networks perpetuated structural racism through inheritance and the racial wealth gap, then farmland owners employed racist ideology and rhetoric to justify this structural racism, and

finally, these same forms of racist ideologies compelled further acts of ignorance and hate, such as the refusal to sell to farmers of color. Because all three forms of racism originated in racist laws and policies (Kendi 2017, 9), antiracist farmland access work in Auburn, Maine will have the greatest leverage on all levels of racism if it intervenes in the policies that allowed farmland ownership to become concentrated in the hands of whites.

In the final section of my discussion, I use Kendi's breakdown of racism to organize potential land justice solutions. I begin by discussing objectives that could be carried out by laws and policies. Next, I offer suggestions for ways education could combat racist ideas within farmland owners' social networks. I then consider ways that NGO's could directly intervene in farmland sales to address more overt forms of racism. However, I stress that both education and nonprofit work are not substitutes for policy changes, but rather should be considered in tandem with policy to create lasting farmland justice. Finally, I consider ways in which structures of farmland ownership could be transformed to create land justice for both farmers of color and settler-descended farmland owners.

Chapter 4.2.1: Law and Policy

In my results I found that farmland inheritance, wealth inheritance, and opposition to land-based reparations are three ways in which farmland owners interface with the material impacts of structural racism in farmland access. While farmland owners take part in these forms of racism, addressing them effectively takes place at the level of policy as well as at the level of individuals, as they originated as state practices. As one farm service provider observed, interventions at the government level could potentially reach more people. She encourages land justice advocates to ask, "are there policies that we could implement where we don't have to

work on changing individuals minds, that we could make larger structural policy changes?” Here I discuss some forms of law and policy that could begin to decrease the racial disparities in farmland ownership.

Inheritance and lack of reparations are tandem processes that allow the racial inequities in farmland ownerships that were created by slavery, colonization, Jim Crow, and USDA discrimination to persist in the present. Given that inheritance legalizes the transfer of stolen wealth, farmland justice would either have to involve abolishing inheritance, or involve a nation-wide transfer of land and wealth-based reparations to African Americans and Native Americans. Because abolishing inheritance would harm the majority of Americans, while reparations would benefit the majority of Indigenous Peoples and African Americans while harming only large corporations and institutions that have profited off of racism (Movement for Black Lives n.d.), I consider land-based reparations a much more feasible solution than abolishing land-based inheritance. Reparations would not only help to create a more racially just distribution of farmland, but would also go a long way towards addressing the ideas that allow Americans to continue to ignore past and present racism. Kendi argues that if we “eradicate racial discrimination, then racist ideas will be eradicated too,” (2017, 509). If Americans acknowledge the need for reparations, they acknowledge that racism is present, structural, and has material impacts on people of color.

Perhaps even more important than reparations for ensuring that all farmers of color have equitable access to farmland is antiracist governance more broadly. While reparations are crucial for creating land justice for African American and Indigenous Peoples, building land justice involves creating equitable farmland access for all farmers of color. If racist policies create racist ideas which create racial hatred, then similarly, antiracist policies will have cascading effects,

transforming ideologies and everyday interactions (Kendi 2017, 510). Kendi advocates that eradicating racism in the US will require antiracists controlling decision making at a national level; making policies and defending these policies with antiracist ideas until antiracism becomes common sense and common practice (ibid., 510). For agriculture, this would require an overhaul of the USDA and other state agencies tasked with programs relating to farmland, land, and wealth, replacing those in positions of authority with antiracists committed to restructuring the agricultural system. Farmland justice work in Maine could contribute towards the goal of an anti-racist national farming system by helping to elect a President and members of Congress who would enact reparations and address income inequality, by lobbying for appointments of antiracists to leadership positions at the USDA, and by advocating for antiracist changes to national farming policy.

Creating antiracist national farming policy would include restructuring USDA programs to fit the needs of all farmers, as our current system privileges the needs of white farmers running large farm operations (Calo 2018; Carlisle et al. 2019). USDA programs can better support farmland access for farmers of color by hiring agents who are representative of the demographics of the area they serve (Minkoff-Zern and Sloat 2017, 641). This is particularly important for refugee and immigrant farmers, who should be able to be connected with an agent who speaks their language fluently, and who can assist them with paperwork (Marinez and Gomez 2011, 51). Furthermore, USDA programs should allow farmers to document their progress by taking photos rather than being required to incessantly document everything in writing and in English (Minkoff-Zern and Sloat 2017, 641). Because the USDA has historically made substantial efforts to hinder complaints of civil rights violations, a step towards remedying this problem would be creating an online civil rights complaint database (Castro and Willingham 2019, 15). The USDA

should focus on strengthening outreach to farmers of color, and insuring that farmers of color feel safe in USDA offices (where agents allegedly used to hang nooses on the wall to intimidate Black farmers) (Castro and Willingham 2019, 14; Minkoff-Zern and Sloat 2017, 642). The USDA should create programs to support migrant farmworkers in becoming landowners (Penniman 2018, 293). It should establish a farmer of color land link program (Castro and Willingham 2019, 13; Penniman 2018, 293) to ensure that Black farmland stays within Black ownership. Finally, the USDA should consult with farmers of color, who could offer additional solutions to help ensure that farmland access programs better serve their communities (Minkoff-Zern and Sloat 2017, 641).

Racist laws outside of the USDA have also historically been integral in building racism into the US farming system, and in addition to restructuring the USDA, dismantling racism in farmland access will require overturning these laws. Outlawing partition sales, legally protecting heir property, and offering estate and succession planning would protect the land already owned by farmers of color (Castro and Willingham 2019, 13). Because lending discrimination from the USDA, other federal lending agencies, and private banks caused land loss and debt forgiveness for farmers of color, current and former farmers should be offered debt in cases of lending discrimination (Penniman 2018, 295). Because farmworkers are overwhelmingly people of color (Carlisle et al. 2019), and because farmworkers are not guaranteed the rights of other workers, updating the Fair Labor Standards Act and the National Labor Relations Act to guarantee farmworkers living wages and equal protection under the law would go a long way towards helping farmworkers transition to farm owners (Penniman 2018, 293). Additional policies to support migrant farmworkers include creating pathways to US citizenship for all undocumented

people (ibid., 293), since citizenship has long been used as a tool to keep nonwhite immigrants from owning farmland (Suzuki 2004).

In Maine, land justice work in the political sphere could involve supporting tribal sovereignty, drafting antiracist farming legislation, and lobbying at Maine's Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, where the new Commissioner, Amanda Beal, supports progressive causes. Currently, LD 2094, *An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act*, is a bill in the Maine Legislature that would increase tribal sovereignty for Maine's tribes, who currently do not have the same protections afforded to other tribes under federal Indian Law (Maine Indian Claims Task Force 2020). Support for this bill and future bills regarding tribal sovereignty, and protecting tribal sustenance rights that give Wabanaki tribal members the right to hunt, fish, and gather on all land in Maine, would help secure land justice for Indigenous farmers and people practicing subsistence. Advocating for policy and laws including Maine State Representative Craig Hickman's proposed Right to Food amendment to the Maine constitution that gives Mainers the legal right to food sovereignty and freedom from hunger (Hickman 2020), and Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition's policy demands would indirectly strengthen the abilities of farmers of color in Maine to access and afford farmland (Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition n.d.).

While advocating for the above policies may seem far removed from farmland inheritance, wealth inheritance, and opposition to land-based reparations in Auburn, Maine, enacting comprehensive antiracist laws would have far reaching impacts, both on the material distribution of farmland and on the ideologies that justify the current racist distribution of farmland (Kendi 2017, 510). Moreover, these laws and policies, beyond building land justice for

farmers of color, would also increase food security, reduce the racial wealth gap, protect immigrant rights, and protect tribal sovereignty.

Most importantly, any efforts to build land justice must be flexible and holistic. Throughout history, racism has kept pace with antiracism (Bonilla-Silva and Foreman 2000; Kendi 2017; Omi and Winant 1994, 84), and thus the most successful land justice work will need to adjust itself to combat the specific forms of racism of the present moment and be prepared to adjust again to future iterations of racism. Only when the state is entirely controlled by antiracist policies will the ideas that justify antiracism trickle out into wider social conditions and ideologies. Returning to Kendi's analysis of racist ideas, intervening comprehensively at the level of national policy is the only way to truly build lasting antiracism (2017, 510). Otherwise, as has happened time and time again in the history of racism in farming systems, old racist systems will be replaced with new racist systems that are less visible to current understandings of racism (Kendi 2017, 509).

Chapter 4.2.2: Education

Changes to laws and policies will not happen immediately, and in the meantime, nongovernmental organizations and individuals can take steps to directly resist racist ideologies and material inequities. Solutions targeting racist discourses and ideologies should center around educating the people who maintain these ideas. Educating farmland owners instead of farm seekers challenges the ways that education has traditionally contributed to the knowledge deficit approach (Calo 2018; 377); rather than putting the burden on people of color to navigate a racist farming system, this type of education challenges white people to consider how their actions maintain racism. While this work should not be considered an alternative to policy changes, it

could help facilitate the process of antiracism becoming accepted as common sense in Maine's farming communities.

While Kendi argues that educating lawmakers about antiracism is a lost cause because they already know the facts and simply do not care (2017, 507), ordinary white Americans have internalized racist discourses, believing them to be true (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000). As discussed earlier, many of the participants I spoke to genuinely did not understand how racism works. Not a single farmland owner I spoke to knew about the history of USDA discrimination against farmers of color, very few felt educated about settler colonialism, and participants were confused about what reparations are. The one farmland owner I spoke to who had attended a workshop about immigration felt that education had helped her and her classmates dismantle racist myths. There is a clear lack of knowledge among white farmland owners about how racism impacts farmland access, and because this racism does not actually benefit farmland owners, education could help farmland owners challenge oppressive ideologies.

Farmland justice education should aim to meet farmland owners at their current level of awareness of racial justice and solidarity. This education could begin with the themes that farmland owners themselves identified as ways they understand antiracism: empathy for other people's stories, a sense of justice and fairness, the value of racial and cultural diversity, and the importance of being a good neighbor. Important topics to illuminate are the history of farmland injustice, the structural nature of racism, dispelling myths about immigrants, refugees, and the Wabanaki tribes, understanding reparations, and uniting in a common struggle rather than viewing antiracism as a threat to white people. Alternative forms of adult education, such as popular education, could be useful models to explore for teaching farmland justice, as they center

on the experiences of participants and compel participants to carry out actions to create social change related to discussion topics (Beder 1996).

One important fact to note in thinking about education to reduce the impacts of more overt racism from farmland owners, is that some of this racism does not come from farmland owners themselves, but rather from their wider communities. In conversations with service providers I heard of two examples of neighbors complicating what would otherwise have been successful farmland transactions between white farmland owners and farm seekers of color. Educational strategies should thus consider the broader community of which farmland owners are a part.

Several organizations in Maine have already created education programs that teach settler descended people about topics related to farmland justice. Maine-Wabanaki REACH educates non-Native people about colonization and white privilege (Maine-Wabanaki REACH n.d.), Cumberland County Food Security Council offers a Racial Wealth Gap Learning Simulation (Cumberland County Food Security Council n.d.), and Land in Common is currently in the process of laying the foundation for developing a Land Justice popular education curriculum in partnership with frontline communities in Maine. Further land justice education in Maine could respond to gaps in farmland owners' knowledge by teaching people how racism gets defended by apparently nonracial rhetoric, how past racisms impact the present, how reparations work, and why reparations would not harm white working-class and middle-class people.

Chapter 4.2.3: Directly combatting racism in farmland sales

Acts of ignorance and hatred are the result of racist ideas, which are the result of racist policies (Kendi 2017, 9), and addressing racist policies and racist ideas will do much to eliminate

acts of racist hatred. However, antiracist work in Maine could implement immediate solutions to deal with the problem of farmland owners who do not wish to sell to farmers of color. This work involves bypassing farmland owners in linking beginning farmers of color to farmland. Since farmland sales rely on social networks (Calo 2018, 376), third parties can intervene in the relationship between seller and buyer. Several organizations in Maine, including Land in Common, Agrarian Trust, and Cooperative Development Institute, are already working to link farmers of color to farmland (as well as undertaking many other antiracist projects). Future work in this area could involve creating a Farmer of Color Farmland Succession Program. Such a program could build on or recreate the infrastructure created by Maine Farmland Trust (MFT), a statewide organization focused on farmland succession. MFT has a database of farmers selling land, as well as a program called Buy, Protect, Sell, where they purchase farmland, encumber it with a farming easement, and sell to a new farmer for agricultural value (Maine Farmland Trust n.d.). Two such programs could be combined to override the need for farmers of color to interface with landowners. Farmer of Color Farmland Succession Program would be a short term, Band-Aid solution to landowner racism impacting farmland access as it does not address racist policies or ideas, but it would address the immediate need for more equitable land access.

Chapter 4.2.4: Transforming structures of land ownership

All of the previous suggestions for building equitable farmland access for farmers of color assume a social and political system that regards land as a commodity to be bought, owned and sold. However, many activists and scholars understand land justice as incompatible with capitalist forms of land ownership (Flanders n.d; Guillen 2016; Girouard et al. 2019; Kerksen and Brent 2017, 308). In a recent panel on Land Justice in Maine, Cron argued that because

capitalism was born hand in hand with colonialism, imperialism, and racism, building land justice will require transforming the ownership of land (Girouard et al. 2019).

Removing land from capitalist forms of ownership would be a form of collective liberation that would benefit both farmers of color and current landowners. Collective liberation is an approach to social transformation that involves thinking about solutions that benefit the people most impacted by a form of oppression, that also equitably benefit all others in society (Girouard et al. 2019). A useful metaphor Linneken (Girouard et al. 2019) offers for imagining collective liberation is that a crowd of people are trying to enter a building, and both the staircase and the ramp leading to the building are covered in snow. One person is in a wheelchair, and the rest are able bodied. Collective liberation would involve first shoveling the ramp, because everyone can enter the building that way, even though it takes slightly longer to walk up a ramp than to walk up stairs (ibid. 2019). Applied to land justice in Maine, collective liberation involves creating forms of farmland access that benefit farmers of color, while still ensuring that current landowners have access to farmland as well.

A collective liberation approach to farmland justice could unite farmers of color and current farmland owners around a common struggle. As landowners expressed in our conversations, many working class and middle class settler-descended people also spoke of their struggles to make a living in a capitalist system of land ownership. Many understood secure retirement as hinging on selling their land for development, and this need for their land to serve as a crucial form of wealth was at times deeply at odds with landowners' personal wishes to remain on and conserve their land. Moreover, land ownership pits working class and middle class white people against people of color. Landowners imagine reparations and farmland justice as zero-sum games, where gains to people of color mean a loss to them. While the landowners

personally benefit from racialized land accumulation, they are also a part of an economic and political system that distributes land and wealth inequitably, creating both classed and racialized oppression. Fundamentally transforming structures of land ownership could build solidarity between current farmland owners and current farm seekers of color. Racism and classism are inextricably linked, and building land justice involves addressing both simultaneously (Kerssen and Brent 2017).

One avenue for reimagining ownership of land in a way that benefits people experiencing racial or classed oppression is community land trusts. Community land trusts decommodify land, taking it out of capitalist forms of ownership and bringing it into common ownership. Members of community land trusts steward land collectively and practice democratic decision making (Flanders n.d.). Some examples of community land trusts with an emphasis of racial justice in Maine and the Northeast region include Land in Common, Agrarian Trust, and Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust. Expanding this type of collective stewardship of land to include the US as a whole offers an intersectional and lasting pathway to farmland justice.

In a country where ownership of land and racial injustice have gone hand in hand for centuries, farmland justice work must involve reimagining ownership of land in ways that benefit marginalized people. Creating pathways for land access outside of capitalist forms of land ownership is an important area for future land justice work. Future research, activism, and conversations on land justice should center on asking, *What would antiracist, anti-capitalist forms of farmland access look like?* and, *How can we transform our food systems towards this future?*

Conclusion

In my thesis I set out to describe how farmland owners in Auburn, Maine impact the ability of farmers of color to access secure and suitable farmland. I found that racism within farmland owner social networks constrains the abilities of farmers of color to purchase farmland. Farmland owners maintained and justified structural racism, and then perpetuated further racism by defending acts of overt racism. I also found a few examples of landowners challenging racism that could serve as foundations for further antiracist farmland access work.

Farmland owners maintained the racially inequitable distribution of farmland through farmland sales, farmland inheritance, and opposition to land-based reparations. In farmland sales, farmland owners hesitated to sell to farmers of color based on racist assumptions, and in some cases outright refused to sell to Black Muslim farmers. Other farmland owners defended the right of landowners to refuse to sell to immigrants. Some farmland owners who wished to sell to farmers of color have not done so because they received racist backlash from their neighbors. Because of the racial wealth gap, farmland owners were more likely to sell to a white buyer. Farmland inheritance, by allowing white families to pass farmland onto white children, maintained historical inequities in the distribution of farmland. Finally, farmland owners opposed land-based reparations to African Americans and Indigenous Peoples, although the majority of farmland owners were confused about the definition of reparations, imagining that they might personally lose money or land if the US were to enact them.

Farmland owners further maintained materially racist distributions of farmland by justifying racism rhetorically. Much of this justification involved language that was not overtly racist, and that attempted to explain racism as something other than racism. Farmland owners used four rhetorical strategies to blind themselves and others to racism: colorblindness,

universalism, individualism, and claims of “reverse racism” against whites. They used three additional tropes to deny the existence or significance of racism: conflating race and culture, imaginatively placing racism in a faraway past, and shielding themselves from accusations of racism by claiming not to be racist before any discussion of race. These tropes downplayed the significance of racism and blamed farmers of color for having caused their own oppression, through laziness or cultural differences. Racialized rhetoric from farmland owners not only justified the racialized distribution of farmland, but also made possible additional forms of racism. Believing racism was not an issue, farmland owners opposed actions to dismantle it, and some supported further discrimination against farmers of color, under the assumption they were getting too much already.

Some farmland owners expressed antiracist sentiments. Farmland owners conceptualized antiracism as empathy, justice, diversity, and being a good neighbor. Farmland owners expressed empathy for farmers of color after learning about the history of racism in farming in the US. They were motivated by a sense of justice and fairness to argue that something should be done to create equitable farmland access. They believed that interacting with racially diverse communities has taught them to challenge racist beliefs they once held. Many participants spoke of the importance of being a good neighbor, and some extended neighborliness to farmers of color.

In light of the racism within the social networks of farmlands, I argue that antiracist farmland access work needs to address social forms of racism in tandem with structural racism. Antiracist farmland access work will have the greatest leverage at the level of national farming policy. Antiracist national farming policy would directly combat racism, as well as give rise to antiracist ideas needed to justify the existence of such laws, and eventually these ideas will seep

into the consciousness of farming communities. In the meantime, however, antiracist work within Maine farming communities could also take the form of educating farmland owners about racism and how to dismantle it. Creating a Farmer of Color Farmland Succession Program could intervene immediately in the problem of farmland owners refusing to sell to farmers of color. Finally, antiracist work could explore the possibility of transforming structures of individual farmland ownership towards collective ownership, thus uniting current farmland owners and farm seekers of color around a common struggle of building land justice for all people in Maine.

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Appendix A: Pitch to Interviewees

Hi [name],

My name is Jesse Saffeir and I'm doing follow up research on the Ag Zone Survey. I'm a student at Bates working with Professor Eanes, who conducted the survey, and I'm writing my senior thesis on farmland succession. I'm also a lifelong Mainer, so the future of farming in Maine matters a lot to me.

In your survey, you expressed interest in possibly selling your land to keep it in farming. I would love to have a conversation with you about your land, what you care about, and what you'd like to see happen to your land in the future.

Would you be willing to meet with me for a conversation? I'm happy to drive and meet you wherever and whenever is most convenient for you, and as a plus, I can treat you to a coffee and a snack!

If you'd be interested, please give me a call or text at 207 329 8961.

Thank you so much for considering helping me with this research! I hope you have a great day.

Appendix B: Ginger Cookies

Ingredients

1 c. white sugar
1 egg
2/3 c. canola oil, or similar light flavorless oil – peanut oil is too heavy
¼ c. molasses
2 c. flour
2 t. baking soda
1 t. salt
1 t. cinnamon
½ t. cloves
1 heaping teaspoon ginger

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

Whisk together the sugar and egg, then stir in oil and molasses.

Combine all dry ingredients in a separate bowl, and stir. Add dry ingredients into wet ingredients and mix with a spoon until fully combined.

Roll the dough into 36 balls. Roll balls in sugar, ensuring that they are fully coated on all sides.

Bake for 9 minutes, until the tops just begin to crack; too much longer and the cookies get too crunchy once they have cooled.

Appendix C: Interview Questions

All responses are anonymous. I avoid including any details that might allow a person to be identified.

Questions for farmland owners:

- Can you tell me a little bit about your land?
 - What led you to buy your land, and what led you to hold onto it?
 - What do you hope will happen to your land in the future?
 - Who do you imagine will be the next generation of Maine farmers?
 - What can Maine be doing to encouraging people to keep farming?
 - Explain a little bit about why I'm interested in the topic of farmland succession and race:
 - The USDA discriminating against farmers of color
 - I'm interested in researching what Maine can be doing to give farmers of color a fair chance at buying farmland and starting a farm. Part of this is making connections with landowners.
- A. *Wants to work with farmers of color:*
- You indicated on the AgZone survey that you are interested in selling to nontraditional farmers or New Americans – can you tell me a little bit more about your answer?
 - Want to start off by saying that race can be an uncomfortable topic to discuss. I'm here to understand and not judge, and everything you say is anonymous.
 - Would you be interested in selling or renting land to an Indigenous, African American, Asian, Latinx farmer? Why or why not?
 - If future farmers who leased or bought this land from you farmed differently from what you're used to (different crops or growing methods, lots of farmers on the same plot) how would you feel about this?
 - Would you be interested in working with a third-party organization to help your farmland be more affordable to a farmer of color?
 - Do you think farming white farmers and farmers of color have equal opportunities to run a successful farm?
 - What do you think about the idea of reparations to Indigenous and African American farmers? Why or why not?
 - If you are interested in your land being owned in the future by a farmer of color and would like to be connected to people who can help make this happen, I can give you information on different organizations that can support this process.
- B. *Does not want to work with farmers of color*
- You indicated on the AgZone survey that you are interested in selling your land, but not interested in selling to nontraditional farmers or New Americans. Can you tell me a little bit more about your answer?

- Want say first that I'm here to understand what people are thinking about, and I'm not here to tell you that how you think is right or wrong. Everything you say is anonymous, and hearing how you honestly feel is really valuable to my research.
- Would you be interested in selling or renting land to an Indigenous, African American, Asian, Latinx farmer? Why or why not?
- (If not already clear) What are your main concerns with selling to New Americans or farmers of color?
- Would you prefer to sell to a white farmer? Why or why not?
- When you think of farmers of color, what do you think of?
- In the US overall, farming is the second whitest profession (after veterinarians) why do you think this is?
- Do you think farming white farmers and farmers of color have equal opportunities to run a successful farm?
- What, if anything, would make you more interested in selling to a farmer of color
- What do you think about the idea of reparations to Indigenous and African American farmers?

Questions for Farmland Access Brokers:

A. Farmland access brokers working for farmer of color organizations:

- How did you begin supporting farmers?
- What motivates you in doing this work?
- Can you tell me a little bit about the work your organization does? What is the organization's mission, and what values guide this work?
- In what ways does racial justice or equity feature in your mission and goals?
- What does this look like in practice?
- How satisfied are you with the land you're farming on now?
 - If you feel satisfied, what is helping to make this a good piece of land to farm on?
 - If not, what are you hoping to find in a piece of land?
- Was it difficult to find the land you're farming on now?
 - If so, what made it challenging?
 - If it was easy, do you have any advice for other farm seekers?
- In what ways have you felt supported by programs that offer assistance to beginning farmers?
- What other types of support would be helpful?
- In what ways have you felt supported and understood by the landowner?
- What does a good landowner/tenant relationship look like for you?
- What does your organization understand as the role of race in farmland access?
- What structural changes to our food system do you think could create more equitable farmland access?
- What kinds of resources would your organizations find most helpful in achieving your goals?
- What could other organizations be doing to make it easier for farmers of color to find farmland that fits their needs?
- Finally, would your organization find my research useful?

B. Farmland access brokers working for traditional farming organizations

- Can you tell me a little bit about the work your organization does? What is the organization's mission, and what values motivate this work?
- In what ways does racial justice or equity feature in your mission and goals?
- What does this look like in practice?
- What does your organization understand as the role of race in farmland access?
- (If the organization identifies racism as a problem), does your organization know of ways that it can help to address this issue? And has your organization been able to take any steps to address this issue?
- (If not a problem) how does your organization understand the lack of racial diversity among farmers?
- How often do you work with farmers or landowners of color? Can you tell me more about these partnerships?
- Do you have programs to meet the specific needs of farmers of color?
- Do you ever partner with organizations that specifically support farmers of color?
- Does your organization have any interest in developing programs specifically to fit the needs of farmers of color?
- What structural changes to our food system do you think could create more equitable farmland access?
- How diverse is your organization? How diverse is your organization's leadership?
- Do you think that people of color have had adequate say in the mission and goals of your organization?
- How well versed do you think your staff is about race and racism?
- What kinds of resources would you find most helpful in achieving your goals of racial equity?
- Finally, would your organization find my research useful?

Appendix D: Thesis Summary

Introduction:

My thesis is grounded in the recognition that land and food are sources of power for those who have access to them. This power is inequitably distributed; white people own 99% of all farmland in Maine. While white farmland owners are aging out of farming, putting farmland at risk of development, a new generation of farmers of color is currently seeking farmland. However, institutional racism poses significant barriers to entrant farmers. Additionally, previous research has suggested that farmland succession also relies on informal social networks that actively exclude people of color. In this thesis, I research the impact of these social networks, asking, *what is the role of settler-descended landowners in facilitating or challenging farmland transfer to farmers of color in Auburn, Maine?*

Methods:

To answer this question, I conducted 18 interviews with farmland owners and farm service providers, between September, 2019 and January, 2020 in Auburn, Maine.

Results:

Farmland owners and their neighbors in Auburn, Maine create significant barriers to farmland access for farmers of color. In some cases, they interact with a racist social and political system, and in others, farmland owners take part in more overt discrimination. Finally, some farmland owners are taking small steps to challenge racism in their communities. Here I detail: 1. How farmland owners interact with structural racism, 2. How farmland owners contribute to overt racism, 3. What ideologies allow farmland owners to support racism, and 4. How farmland owners understand antiracism.

1. Structural Racism

- **Farmland sales to the highest bidder:** Because of the racial wealth gap, white buyers on average have greater capacity to purchase land. Farmland owners who are struggling financially will be forced to sell to the highest bidder.
- **Inheritance:** Inheritance allows white farmland owners (who historically and currently already have fewer barriers to purchasing farmland) to then pass this land and wealth onto their children, thus maintaining the disproportionate white ownership of farmland.
- **Opposition to reparations:** Farmland owners vocally opposed land-based reparations to African Americans and Indigenous Peoples. However, they did not understand what reparations are, and imagined they would involve taking land directly from white people. They actually supported reparations from the government to address specific historical harms, which indicates that they support reparations in everything but in name.

2. *Overt Racism:*

- **Hesitation to sell to farmers of color:** While most farmland owners initially told me they would sell to anyone regardless of race, they later expressed many reasons why in practice, they would be hesitant to sell to farmers of color. Many of these hesitations involved false assumptions that farmers of color are receiving handouts from the government to purchase farmland, or conversely, that farmers of color would never be able to afford farmland.
- **Refusal to sell to farmers of color.** One participant said he would not sell to an immigrant or refugee, and several other participants defended their neighbors' "rights" not to sell their land to immigrants.
- **Racist neighbors:** Farmland owners selling or leasing to farmers of color have received backlash from neighbors, including threats and neighbors calling the police.

3. *Racist ideas*

Several racist ideas allowed participants to become blinded to the racism in their community and in the wider US. These ideas normalized existing racism, and compelled participants to commit further acts of racism.

- **Colorblindness:** Participants argued that the way not to be racist is not to see race. However, in practice, colorblindness led them to think race was insignificant, and thus made them blind to the ways that people of color are discriminated against.
- **Universalism:** Participants assumed that people of color will always have the same values and lived experiences as them. They assumed that refugees and immigrants of color should have just as easy a time assimilating as their white ancestors did, and then blamed the apparent lack of assimilation on the cultures of people of color, rather than on hostile white Americans.
- **Individualism:** Participants preferred to think in terms of individuals rather than races. They believed that if an individual works hard and obeys the law, they will have equal ability to succeed in America. Overlooking structural racism, they blamed farmers of color for their own oppression, arguing that farmers of color just weren't working hard enough.
- **Accusations of "reverse racism":** Failing to understand structural racism and the need for affirmative action, participants argued that any program that attempts to correct for past racism is racist against whites.
- **Conflating race and culture:** Some participants believed it is okay to discriminate against people for their culture, religion, or country of origin, but not their race. They were unaware of how culture, religion, and country of origin are all part of the ways that

we implicitly mark racial categories in the US. These types of ideas allowed participants to explain racism as something other than racism (xenophobia, islamophobia, or benign interactions with cultural differences).

- **Imaginatively relegating racism to a distant past:** Participants believed that racism is a thing of the past, and that it does not impact people's lived experiences anymore. They denied that racism exists in the present, and that racism from the past still impacts people in the present. They argued solutions to address past forms of racism were unwarranted.
- **Shielding against accusations of racism:** Participants prefaced any statements about race with phrases like "I'm not a racist." They were uncomfortable talking about race, and afraid to be perceived as racist, which led them to disengage in important conversations about race.

4. *Antiracism:*

- **Empathy through stories:** Farmland owners expressed empathy for farmers of color after learning about the history of racism in farming in the US. Many farmland owners did not know about this history, and were moved by learning about it. They found common ground with farmers of color because they understood how difficult it is to farm, and acknowledged how unfair it was that farmers of color face even more challenges.
- **Justice:** Participants were motivated by a sense of justice and fairness to argue that something should be done to create equitable farmland access. After learning about USDA discrimination, many farmland owners expressed a desire to help right injustices committed against farmers of color.
- **Diversity:** Farmland owners believed that interacting with racially diverse communities has taught them to challenge racist beliefs they once held.
- **Being a good neighbor:** Neighborliness was a value that resonated with many farmland owners. Being a good neighbor offers a potential avenue for framing the importance of white Mainers meaningfully including farmers of color in farming communities.

Recommendations:

In light of the racism within farmland owner social networks in Maine, I argue that antiracist farmland access work should address social forms of racism in tandem with structural racism. Future antiracist work to address farmland owner discrimination will be most effective, however, if implemented at the level of national or state farming policy. Racist policy creates the need for racist ideas to justify it, and racist ideas compel further acts of racial hatred. Conversely, antiracist national policy would create the need for national antiracist ideas, eventually creating a more racially just society (Kendi 2017). However, additional short-term strategies can also alleviate some of the racism from farmland owners and their communities. Here, I recommend: 1. National and state policies to address racism, 2. Educational

strategies to intervene more immediately in Maine’s farming communities, 3. Programs to avoid the need for farmers of color to interact with racist landowners, and 4. Alternative forms of farmland access that create land justice for all farmers.

1. *National and State Policy:*

- **Reparations:** The lack of reparations allows the racial inequities in farmland ownerships that were created by slavery and colonization to persist into the present. Supporting a nation-wide transfer of land and wealth-based reparations from the government and responsible corporations would go a long way towards building land justice for African Americans and Indigenous Peoples in the US.

- **Additional antiracist work at the national level:**
 - Help elect a progressive President and members of Congress
 - Lobby for appointments of antiracists to leadership positions at the USDA.
Lobby for antiracist changes to national farming policy including:
 - Hire agents who are representative of the demographics of the area they serve and who speak the languages of the farmers they serve
 - Alter USDA programs so that farmers can document their progress by taking photos rather than being required to document everything in writing and in English
 - Create an online USDA civil rights complaint database
 - Strength USDA outreach to farmers of color
 - Create USDA programs to support migrant farmworkers in becoming landowners
 - Outlaw partition sales, legally protect heir property, and offer estate and succession planning to protect the land already owned by farmers of color
 - Offer debt forgiveness in cases of lending discrimination
 - Update the Fair Labor Standards Act and the National Labor Relations Act to guarantee living wages for farmworkers

- **Additional antiracist work in Maine:**
 - Support legislation to ensure Maine tribes have full tribal sovereignty
 - Protect tribal sustenance rights
 - Support Maine State Representative Craig Hickman’s proposed Right to Food Amendment to the Maine Constitution

Most importantly, any efforts to build land justice into policy must be flexible. Throughout history, racism has kept pace with antiracism, and so the most successful land justice work will need to adjust itself to combat the specific forms of racism of the present moment, and be prepared to adjust again to future iterations of racism.

2. *Education*

Changes to policies will not happen immediately, and in the meantime steps can be taken to directly resist racist ideas through education. Several organizations in Maine are already teaching settler-descended people about topics related to farmland justice, including Maine-Wabanaki REACH and Cumberland County Food Security Council. Land in Common is currently in the process of laying the foundation for developing a Land Justice popular education curriculum in partnership with frontline communities in Maine. Here I offer some suggestions for ways to address farmland owner racism through education:

- **Topics:** Farmland owners did not know about the history of USDA discrimination against farmers of color, very few felt educated about settler colonialism, and all were confused about reparations. Important topics to highlight are the history of farmland injustice; the structural nature of racism; dispelling myths about immigrants, refugees, and the Wabanaki tribes; understanding reparations; and uniting in a common struggle to overcome racism rather than viewing antiracism as a threat to white people.
- **Methods:** Farmland justice education should meet farmland owners where they are in regard to understanding racial justice and solidarity. This education could begin with the themes they identified as ways they understand antiracism: empathy for other people's stories, a sense of justice and fairness, the value of racial and cultural diversity, and the importance of being a good neighbor.
- **Including Neighbors:** Because some of racism that impacts farmland transfer comes from neighbors rather than farmland owners themselves, education efforts should include the broader community of which farmland owners are a part.

3. *Farmer of Color Farmland Succession Program:*

Several organizations in Maine, including Land in Common, Agrarian Trust, and Cooperative Development Institute, are already working to link farmers of color to farmland. Future work in this area could involve creating a formal Farmer of Color Farmland Succession Program. Such a program could build on or recreate the infrastructure created by Maine Farmland Trust (MFT). MFT has a database of farmers selling land, as well as a program called Buy, Protect, Sell, where they purchase farmland, encumber it with a farming easement, and sell to a new farmer for agricultural value (Maine Farmland Trust n.d.). These two types of programs could be combined to override the need for farmers of color to interface with landowners.

4. *Alternative forms of farmland access:*

Many activists in Maine understand land justice as incompatible with capitalist forms of land ownership. Future antiracist work could explore the possibility of transforming structures of individual farmland ownership towards collective ownership, and thus uniting current farmland owners and farm seekers of color around a common goal of building land justice for all people in Maine. Community land trusts, such as Land in Common, offer a promising model of farmland justice beyond capitalist structures of ownership. Expanding this type of collective farmland stewardship offers an intersectional and lasting pathway to farmland justice.