

BIOAg Project Report

Report Type: PROGRESS

Title: Staple Crop Assessment Within BIPOC Communities of Washington State to Support Regional, Culturally Relevant Food Systems

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Abstract:

While some barriers have been removed over the last few years, BIPOC communities, including immigrant, refugee, tribal, and farmworker communities, have not fully participated in USDA Programs. Gaps still exist within the agricultural system that limit access to land acquisition, farming education, and capital for small to mid-scale BIPOC farmers which limits culturally relevant food solutions in regionally adapted staple crop markets. WSU Food Systems' proposal will support the creation of a BIPOC-led Steering Committee and the subsequent development of a needs assessment of consumers and producers to identify gaps and map opportunities for thriving regional, culturally-relevant, small-to-mid scale, ecologically grown (biologically-intensive, organic and sustainable) staple foods (grains, pseudo-grains or seed crops, pulses, oil seeds, and nuts) within BIPOC communities in Washington.

WSU FSP hypothesizes that a culturally relevant needs assessment will ultimately reduce the barriers of BIPOC farmers in creating sustainable, culturally-relevant staple crops enterprises. The needs assessment will include a market analysis to better understand potential within the BIPOC and wider communities for staple crop businesses. The creation and outreach strategy for the farmer needs assessment and consumer market assessment will be designed by the BIPOC-led Steering Committee of farmers, educators, and processors, and will be available in several languages. The WSU FSP sees this work of refocusing staple crop systems to meet relevant cultural and economic needs within BIPOC communities as vital to furthering food sovereignty and creating a more equitable, sustainable food system in WA.

Project Description:

This initiative aims to better understand the market potential for BIPOC farmers in creating culturally relevant, community scaled, ecologically grown, staple crop food systems. This will be achieved by conducting a needs assessment of both consumer and farmer groups through a survey, and be supplemented with a qualitative analysis using PhotoVoice and Most Significant Change methodology. The formation of a BIPOC-led Steering Committee will inform culturally relevant practices, assist in deploying the needs assessment to relevant communities, analyze the data, and support actionable next steps based on the results. This project also intends to create a report that compiles the results of the research and identifies prioritized next steps for regional market development of culturally significant crops within BIPOC communities.

Outputs

1. Overview of Work Completed and in Progress:

- a . The core project team used 2021 to draft the quantitative and qualitative survey aspects of this work. Using a rich collective process to guide decision making that was rooted in racial justice, researchers met weekly over zoom throughout 2021 to develop the survey structure and larger initiative. The core project team discussed intersectional aspects of this work, striving to ensure that this project is centered within a slow and relationship-driven context that will truly benefit BIPOC communities and place survey participants as experts in their field.
- b . A larger team of the BIPOC Steering Committee was convened and met monthly throughout 2021. This team of community leaders, farmers and ag professionals took advantage of rich discussion time to ensure that this project is in line with it's values, and offered practical suggestions for how this survey will have real and meaningful impact. In the fall of 2021 meetings ramped up to three meetings a week to discuss in detail the nuances of this statewide survey, working collectively in Qualtrics.
- c . To date there are two draft surveys currently in review within the Qualtrics Platform, one for BIPOC Farmers and one for BIPOC Consumers. These surveys are intended to be impactful to the participants, and aim to encompass the nuance of relationship culturally relevant foods, while gathering meaningful data.
- d . The team also drafted culturally relevant consent language and a suite of promotional materials to be submitted with the IRB.
- e . One of the achievements of this past year was to ensure that our Project Manager Mercy Kariuki-McGee was able to be listed as the PI on the IRB. Current statutes within WSU dictate that non-faculty positions cannot hold PI status, even though Mercy is the leader of this work and has been guiding the group throughout the year. Through rich discussion with the IRB team we were able to ensure that Mrs. Kariuki-McGee was able to rightfully be listed as the PI on the IRB application. This is just one example of how the individual steps of this work strive to be in line with the values that it supports: to ensure that BIPOC voices are honored for their expertise and that traditional systems which have prevented that are addressed and adjusted.

2. Methods, Results, and Discussion (discussion for final reports only):

- a. The quantitative portion of this project will utilize two surveys, one directed towards BIPOC Washingtonian staple crop growers, the other open to all BIPOC Washingtonians who eat, utilize, or are otherwise interested in staple and culturally significant crops. The grower-facing survey will offer respondents an avenue to share details relating to their engagement with, production of, and hopes relating to staple and culturally significant crops. The consumer-facing survey will focus on providing BIPOC eaters an arena to share about their consumption of and access to staple and culturally significant crops.

Both surveys are now in final phases of development. The iterative design process has centered in-depth collaboration between project leads, the BIPOC-led Steering Committee, and other food system professionals from across the state, together representing a wide array of institutions and community organizations, cultural backgrounds, and areas of expertise. Survey development has been approached with an uncompromising commitment to racial justice – incorporating critical evaluation of other research instruments, and prioritizing the wellbeing of project participants at all times. Striving to construct research that will offer the greatest value and assurances of safety to participating communities has ensured that the project team move cautiously and meticulously through design processes.

The qualitative portion of the project will be fielded separately from the quantitative surveys. Drawing directly from the PhotoVoice and Most Significant Change methodologies, qualitative participants will provide self-guided and personally curated photo essays relevant to project topics and reflective of their individual experiences. The project team is currently engaged in clarifying the recruitment and guidance for this qualitative work. Target participants will likely be primarily staple and culturally relevant crop growers.

3. Publications, Handouts, Other Text & Web Products:

- a. Plans - for launching the survey and engagement
 - i. Once completed, both quantitative surveys will be finalized in Qualtrics. The surveys will be distributed by the project team, with help from a state-wide network of collaborators and stakeholders, and will be available to take on computers and mobile phones. The project team is currently finalizing the specifics of other avenues of participation, and are weighing the feasibility of paper surveys and live translators, among other possibilities.

It is not yet decided how qualitative participants will be identified.

- b. How end product will be used

- i. The project team is acting in express support of BIPOC communities and individuals throughout Washington. It is the hope of all involved that the outputs of this work will be used and amplified in ways that provide maximum value to all communities in question. Results will be shared among professionally and culturally involved communities, and community interaction and feedback will be encouraged. Quantitative products will likely be analyzed as well as shared publicly to some extent, at least among participating communities; however, acknowledging the potential for deeply personal and socio-culturally sensitive content, specifics are not yet decided. Among other impacts, the project team hopes that results of this work will add to a growing but under-supported body of actionable, equity-oriented food systems research, and serve as foundation for future work.
- Outreach & Education Activities:
To create a robust and inclusive study, the team has developed a pool of survey collaborators who are currently working within the PNW food system. PNW has many urban and rural farmers of color who are engaged in growing food for direct community consumption. Majorities of the producers engage in small-scale farming and focus on growing food that is more relevant to their communities. Over time these communities have developed the community trust needed to engage at a grassroots level in order to create better food access for their families. Working with the collaborators will enable the team to collect real time data and engage with those who grow and consume the culturally-relevant staple foods.

The team has developed an outreach strategy that will drive the online consumer and farmer survey as well as in-person interviews with those engaged in the food system network. To engage everyone in these communities the survey will be made available on mobile and text style for ease of access. Surveys will also be translated into the mainly spoken languages within specific communities that are going to engage with the study. Further, through a PhotoVoice style of engagement, participants will come together to share their ideas and learn from each other. All these segments of the study will be brought together through an online social media campaign, infographics and word-of-mouth campaigns.

To complete the study within a timely manner, WSU Food Systems has offered to support the BIPOC community leading this work. Three producers organizations have been identified to support: Haki Farmers Collective, Viva Farms and International Rescue Committee to be the point of contact and facilitate the need assessment study with other collaborators/contributors.

Impacts

1. The short term and intermediate goals for this project is:
 - To understand the needs of the community of color and their staple foods.
 - Establish what these communities eat and how they find what is culturally relevant to them
 - Understand what is culturally-relevant staple food to individual consumers and producers

2. Intermediate-Term:
 - Understand what producers grow
 - Understand what gaps exists on staple crop farming and access
 - Start a conversation of the importance of culturally-relevant foods both for health and traditional relevancy of these foods

3. Long-Term:
 - Find what the extent of culturally-relevant staple crop is in the PNW
 - Understand the long term needs for culturally-relevant staple food in the PNW
 - Create a database of most commonly used staple crops for medicinal, traditional and nutritional health needs
 - Create a database of current producer and crops they grow and can grow
 - Understand future market needs and penetration
 - Create new controlled markets for staple crops and value added products
 - Create a foundation for future studies that dive deeper to the staple crop growing and market trends within the US and globally.

Additional funding applied for/secured: N/A

Graduate students funded: N/A

Looking Ahead

Balancing the project with real time data collection

Financial limitations and scope of work

Correcting data in real time as the landscape dynamic is changing

Snowballing Research Methodology using community partnerships