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America Reckons With Racial Injustice

'Make Farmers Black Again': African Americans Fight Discrimination To Own Farmland

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Heard on Morning Edition

JILLIAN FORSTADT

FROM **WSKG**

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Daryl Minton, 45, throws chicken feed into a yard where the chickens roam at the Triple J Farm in Windsor, N.Y. Minton lives and works on the farm his grandfather, James Minton, bought it a decade ago. Between lending discrimination and rising costs, many obstacles stand in the way of Black Americans looking to own farmland.

Heather Ainsworth for NPR

At the start of the 20th century, one in seven farmers in the United States was Black. In the decades that followed, however, Black Americans were dispossessed of an estimated 13 million acres of land. Many descendants of Black farmers moved north to seek jobs in other industries, removed from familial agricultural backgrounds.

Now, nearly 100 years later, people of color are leading a resurgence of interest in farming in the Northeast, and yet for these farmers the barriers to starting a farm remain high. Between lending discrimination and rising costs, many obstacles stand in the way of Black Americans looking to own farmland.

The family behind Triple J Farm, a chicken farm in Windsor, N.Y., knows this. That's why they are farming with a message of #MakeFarmersBlackAgain.



James Minton, 85, bought the 20-acre parcel that became Triple J Farm a decade ago because he said he wanted a place his family could find refuge, whenever they might need. In all, Minton has seven children, 28 grandchildren, 40 great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild.

Heather Ainsworth for NPR

James Minton, 85, owns the farm. It's small, at just 20 acres and nearly 300 egg-laying chickens. There is a patch of maple trees from which Minton makes syrup each winter, a barn to hold the cow, and a pond stocked full of fish, where his youngest great-granddaughters like to play.

In all, Minton has seven children, 28 grandchildren, 40 great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild. He bought this land for them.

"It'll be someplace for them to come at any time," Minton said. "Something bad happens to them in the city and they need someplace to stay? Whether I'm alive or dead, this place will still be here. That's what I wanted."



Kwanasia Ginyard (left), Gianna Bridges, Kamani Minton, Shevin Fanklin, Jr., and Micaela Johnson play in their great-grandfather's yard during his 85th birthday celebration.

Heather Ainsworth for NPR

Most of Minton's family lives in New York City, a few hours away from the farmstead in upstate New York. It's not often they get to be around chickens that lay blue eggs.

Minton bought the land a decade ago when he retired from his job and wanted a place of his own. He and his wife of more than 60 years, Wilhelmina Minton, packed up the Harlem apartment where they lived for 40 years and moved upstate. Now, he is growing the farm business with several of his grandchildren and a revolving door of family members enthusiastic to help out.

'Try to build our own wealth'

Last summer, his grandson, Daryl Minton, 45, moved upstate to help manage the farm. In the months since, Triple J Farm went from selling 30 dozen eggs every couple of months to selling close to 200 dozen each week.

Before he started living with his grandparents, Daryl worked 60 hours a week for a big grocery chain in New York City. There, he was building wealth for someone else.



Daryl Minton moved upstate to help manage the farm last summer. He lived on a farm for part of his childhood and studied permaculture after retiring from the military.

Heather Ainsworth

"At the end of the day, that didn't make any sense," Daryl said. "Why couldn't me and my family use the things that we know and try to build our own wealth, or build the wealth to help my grandfather out?"

Daryl lived on a farm for part of his childhood and studied permaculture after retiring from the military. He got involved in urban agriculture through the New York Restoration Project and grew his skills from there.

While urban farming movements like the one Minton joined are growing in cities across the country, Black people remain underrepresented in agriculture. Black Americans own just 1% of rural land nationwide. While 13.4% of the country's population is Black or African American, Black farmers make up 1.34% of all farm producers. In New York, where there are nearly 58,000 farmers, the 2017 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census counted only 139 Black farmers in the entire state.

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Barriers to accessing funding and land persist

There is a growing movement of young farmers led by people of color in the Northeast, but barriers to accessing funding and land persist. Black farmers have historically

faced race-based lending discrimination when applying for loans from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which often denied loan applications from Black farmers, delayed the loan process or allotted them insufficient funds. This systemic discrimination was the subject of the 1999 class-action lawsuit *Pigford v. Glickman*, which resulted in a \$1.25 billion settlement to Black farmers.

According to Olivia Watkins of the Black Farmer Fund, this discrimination is ongoing.

Chickens (left) gather around a feeder inside the trailer turned chicken coop. Daryl Minton holds eggs collected at one of the coops. The farm now sells close to 200 dozen eggs each week.

Heather Ainsworth for NPR

"Lenders tend to be less hesitant to lend certain amounts of money to people based on their preexisting financial conditions, which are determined by what opportunities and privileges people have had in the past to get to the point where they can purchase that land," Watkins said.

Farmland is expensive, and farm real estate prices have been on the rise since 1969. Watkins said young Black farmers with student debt or low credit scores face more challenges accessing the credit needed to put a down payment on viable land for farming. The Black Farmer Fund seeks to provide Black farmers in New York with alternative funding because without access to capital, young farmers won't be able to buy or maintain farmland.

While Minton is still paying off his mortgage, he saved enough over decades of working to cover the initial costs of the land. Unlike many other Black farmers in New York, he bought his farm later in life with money in stocks and a 401K.

Members of James Minton's family help deliver a package of chicken bedding to the coops at the Triple J Farm.

Heather Ainsworth for NPR

"That was the most important thing, the initial payment," Minton said.

There are other costs, too, that go into making a farm profitable, but accessing unrestricted assistance to cover them is often challenging for Black farmers. Even once

a farmer has viable land to plant on, Watkins said purchasing the equipment needed to operate a small farm can cost \$50,000 to \$100,000. Between expenses like these and a wide racial income disparity between Black and white farmers, starting a farm can be cost-prohibitive for many new farmers.

Systemic structures created the situation

And agriculture works off of an economy of scale, so smaller farms may be less profitable than their larger competitors. That also means they can be more expensive for the farm owner to maintain. The Minton farm is just a tenth of the size of the average farm by acreage in New York State. Watkins said most of the Black farmers Black Farmer Fund works with have farms under 100 acres.

Jarrad Nwameme, 32, is another one of Minton's grandsons who coordinates logistics for Triple J Farm, delivering eggs to customers in New York City and running social media.

Heather Ainsworth

"There are systemic structures that have created the situation that we see today," Watkins said.

The Minton family knows they sit on a rare chance, one many of their neighbors in New York City won't get. It's one of the reasons they are stamping their egg cartons with #BuyLand, #MakeFarmersBlackAgain and #GenerationalWealth.

"That's the message that we're trying to promote: Give us our land back. Give us our acres back. Give us our opportunity, so we can give to our children and so we can teach our children," said Jarrad Nwameme, 32, another one of Minton's grandsons who coordinates logistics for Triple J Farm, delivering eggs to customers in New York City and running social media.

Barns at the Triple J Farm in Windsor, N.Y. Black people remain underrepresented in agriculture. Black Americans own just 1% of rural land nationwide. While 13.4% of the country's population is Black or African American, Black farmers make up 1.34% of all farm producers.

Heather Ainsworth for NPR

Black Americans were promised "40 acres and a mule" after emancipation, but that never came to pass. Daryl Minton said he believes land reparations can give other Black people a chance to make something of their own ... but this time, give them 40 acres and a tractor.

"It wouldn't make it right, but it would just definitely even the playing field," Daryl said. "Give people a hand up, it's not like you're giving them tools to destroy the country. You're actually giving them tools to help build the country."

James and Wilhelmina Minton have been married for over 60 years. When he retired, they packed up their Harlem apartment where they lived for 40 years and moved upstate.

Heather Ainsworth for NPR

Triple J Farm is rapidly expanding. In the last few weeks they purchased 20 new chicks for broiler production and 56 for laying eggs and have nearly 100 chicks that will lay dark brown eggs arriving this week. Daryl said they hope to start raising goats, at the request of their Caribbean customers, and even cows in the coming months.

According to Daryl, the farm will be financially prosperous once they can manage to sell 1,000 dozen eggs each week. To him and his grandfather, however, success also means building a place where the family's youngest members can learn to care for the animals and the land.

Shawndell James Ginyard, 18, has been visiting his great-grandparents on the farm since he was a kid. When he's there, he picks up tasks, whether it's chopping firewood or transferring the eggs.

Maribel is the lone cow living at the Triple J Farm, for now. Daryl said they hope to start raising goats, at the request of their Caribbean customers, and even cows in the coming months.

Heather Ainsworth for NPR

"It's just the little things," Ginyard said. "We help my great-grandfather because he's getting to that age."

For James Minton, seeing members of each generation come together to keep the farm business going means he's done his day's work.

"Just to see everybody together, it's like seeing you've accomplished something," Minton said.

Passing down the land through generations is a task the family is proud to carry on.

James Minton blows out the candles of his birthday cake while celebrating his 85th birthday at his home in Windsor. For him, seeing members of each generation come together to keep the farm business going means he's done his day's work.

Heather Ainsworth for NPR

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