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The Decline of Black Farmers and Strategies for Survival

Robert Zabawa, Arthur Siaway, and Ntaw Baharanyi

ABSTRACT  By most accounts, black farmers in the United States are categorized as either limited resource or subsistence producers given an historic lack of access to credit, mechanical, and land resources. Additionally, advanced age and limited education have placed black farmers on the "endangered" list. Given these constraints to financial and human capital, black farmers have adopted survival strategies in an attempt to maintain their farms. Results presented here from research conducted in the Black Belt region of Alabama indicate that there is a high degree of participation in the off-farm workforce and reliance on off-farm income for black farm family survival. On the other hand, research findings also indicate that the disposition of farm land from one generation to the next continues to follow informal and traditional paths that may not be conducive to farm preservation strategies. The minority farm constituency can benefit greatly from programs that develop and encourage strategies to save the farm. Examples discussed include special education, efforts by minority owned financial institutions, access to expertise programs job training, and off-farm employment opportunities.

Introduction

By most measures of economic viability (population, sales, and land ownership) black-operated farms, as a significant part of the American farm structure, are failing. In 1910, there were 920,883 black-operated farms in...
the United States. These farms were based on 46.6 million acres and they averaged 51 acres per farm. At the same time, 74 percent of these farm operators were either managers of someone else's farm or tenants on someone else's land, and less than 16 million acres were in full black ownership (USDC, 1920-1987; USDC, 1923). By 1987, black farm numbers had declined by 98 percent to 22,954; black land use by 94 percent to 2.6 million acres; and land in full ownership by 92 percent to 1.2 million acres. The only positive indicator is average farm size, which increased by 127 percent to 115 acres. In comparison, white-operated farms have also seen a decline in numbers (62 percent), but land use has increased by 10 percent (from 832 million to 912 million acres), and average farm size has increased by 192 percent—from 153 to 447 acres—(USDC, 1920-1987; USDC, 1923).

If one looks at the South in general, where most black-operated farms are located, and at Alabama in particular, a similar trend is found. From 1910 to 1987 Alabama black farm numbers declined by 98 percent (from 110,443 to 1,828), and black land use declined by 96 percent (from 5 million to 198,315 acres) while average farm size increased by 135 percent (from 46 to 109 acres). White-operated farm numbers, in comparison, declined by 73 percent, land use declined by 43 percent, and average farm size increased by 110 percent—from 103 to 216 acres—(USDC, 1920-1987; USDC, 1923).

Black farm operations are not only "small" in terms of size in acres; they are also categorized as "excessively small" in terms of farm-generated sales (Banks, 1986:9). Ninety-three percent of black-operated farms in the United States generate less than $20,000 in gross sales (USDC, 1920-1987; USDC, 1923), and less than $7,500 in net farm income (Singh and Williamson, 1986). In Alabama, 87 percent of the farms operated by blacks have gross sales of less than $10,000. This is a category that has a net farm income potential of less than $2,500 (Brown and Larson, 1979:156). Given these circumstances, black farms are surviving at or below the subsistence level (Molnar and Adrian, 1980:11) or are relying on off-farm income in an environment characterized by discrimination and declining employment opportunities (Hoppe et al., 1986:8-9).

Given structural barriers to development, black farmers have adopted strategies for survival including the substitution of family labor for machinery (see Bethel, 1981; Groger, 1983; Raper and Reid, 1941; Zabawa, 1987a) and farm production for home consumption (see Bethel, 1981; Brown and Larson, 1979; Gladwin and Butler, 1982, 1984; Shimkin et al., 1978; Webber, 1987; Woodson, 1969; Zabawa, 1987a,b).

In this paper we describe three areas that impact on farm survival. First, because of the widespread interest in part-time farming and off-farm employment in general—and the role the farm spouse (i.e., wife) plays on and off the farm in particular—we examine an off-farm orientation—employment. Second, due to the critical nature of black-owned land loss and its affect on
social, political, as well as economic and agricultural development, we examine a social orientation—land preservation. Thirdly, at a time when the general agricultural sector has experienced profound downturns and has required government intervention, we examine a program orientation—to see how minority farmers have and have not been the beneficiaries of assistance.

Sample and Methodology

The 26 farmers (25 males and one female)\(^2\) presented in this research were participants in the Small Farm Rehabilitation Project (SFRP) sponsored by the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA), administered by Tuskegee University, and described in detail in the third section of this paper. The farmers lived in nine counties in or near the Black Belt region of Alabama\(^3\) and were selected by their FmHA County Supervisors on the basis of need (financial, technical, instructional) and their willingness to participate. Though not a random sample, these farmers exhibited characteristics common to the average black farmer in Alabama: they were older, owned limited acreage, and participated in the off-farm workforce. The data presented here were collected during monthly on-farm visits over an 18-month period. This data included financial, production, social, and historical information from the farmers as well as additional financial information from the FmHA county offices.

Off-farm orientation: employment

The small size and limited income-generating potential of black-operated farms make part-time farming and off-farm work logical avenues of action. In some cases, what black farmers have lacked in farm income has been compensated for with off-farm income to the point where they have kept pace with their white counterparts (Gladwin and Zabawa, 1985). Furthermore, research in North Carolina by Thompson et al. (1986) found that off-farm work was the one significant variable that distinguished between poor and nonpoor farmers. Historically, however, there has been a lower percentage of black farmers than white farmers in the off-farm workforce (Banks, 1986:11; Hoppe et al., 1986:2; Lewis, 1976:17; Munoz, 1984:8). Reasons

\(^2\)Though the sample size is not very large it was sufficient to provide a sound basis for statistical inferences about the researched attributes of farming and land loss by Blacks. The findings are corroborated by evidence from numerous previous studies cited in the text.

\(^3\)The "Black Belt" region of Alabama first received its name due to the rich soil in the area. Sociologically, this region retains its name due to the large numbers of Black residents and farmers in the area who formerly worked in pre-mechanized agriculture and whose ancestors were slaves.
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for lower off-farm work participation by black farmers include their advanced age (Molnar and Adrian, 1980:11; Munoz, 1984:8, 11), their lack of education (Brooks, 1983:41; Hoppe et al., 1986:7), the lack of industrial growth in non-metropolitan areas where there is a heavy concentration of blacks (Brooks, 1983:41; Fratoe, 1980:3; Hoppe et al., 1986:11), and the "personal preference for farm work and farm income" by blacks (Brooks, 1983:41).

On the other hand, 60 percent of black farmers nationally (Banks, 1986) and 56 percent of black farmers in Alabama (Molnar and Adrian, 1980) have either full-time or part-time off-farm work. It must be re-emphasized that due to their advanced ages and low levels of education, black farmers tend to find themselves in off-farm jobs that fall in the manual, low skill and, therefore, low pay category (Banks, 1986; Bhola, 1987).

Regardless of the nature of off-farm employment, this avenue for income is critical for black farm survival. Nationally, the ratio of off-farm income to total family income is 84 percent. This ratio rises to 97 percent for farms with gross sales of less than $20,000 (Banks, 1986). And finally, a more recent preference for greater off-farm income by the younger generation is siphoning off potential heirs to farms who are in search of a higher standard of living (Beauford et al., 1984:409; Beauford, 1986:34; Beauford and Nelson, 1988:116).

Off-farm income played a major financial role for the farmers participating in the SFRP. Fifty percent of the farmers had either full-time or part-time off-farm work and, on average, the ratio of off-farm income to total family income was 147 percent. These farms survived because of the income generated off the farm.

To illustrate the specific influence of off-farm work, the farmers are divided into subgroups, or recommendation domains (DeWalt, 1985:108), with age acting as the major criterion. Three 20-year "generations" were established: 20-39 years old, 40-59 years old, and 60 years and above. The critical structural characteristics of these generations are presented in Table 1.

Age was considered an important attribute because of the relationship between age, education, and participation in off-farm work; or more specifically, the older the farmer, the fewer the years of formal education, and the least paying off-farm job (if any). As Table 1 indicates, all three age domains are significantly different from each other (column 1), and there is also a significant difference between the educational levels of the three age domains (column 7). The combination of age and education is important as a factor to help determine a person's employability.

Table 1 illustrates that while the young and middle generation-sets are similar in terms of off-farm income ($13,090 and $15,555), both are significantly higher than that of the oldest generation ($4,162). Finally, the youngest generation's advantage in off-farm income vis-a-vis the oldest generation is
Table 1. Structural characteristics of farmers along recommendation domains (n=26)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education (Yrs)</th>
<th>Off-Farm Income ($)</th>
<th>Total Farm Income ($)</th>
<th>Net Farm Income ($)</th>
<th>Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>13,090</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>-12,654</td>
<td>20-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.1)***</td>
<td>(4.62)***</td>
<td>(0.75)***</td>
<td>(2.51)***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>15,955</td>
<td>4,020</td>
<td>-3,156</td>
<td>40-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10.2)***</td>
<td>(4.20)***</td>
<td>(1.74)***</td>
<td>(2.20)***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>12,400</td>
<td>4,162</td>
<td>1.014</td>
<td>60-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.80)***</td>
<td>(4.77)***</td>
<td>(3.05)***</td>
<td>(2.70)***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>3,002</td>
<td>5,182</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80-144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6.34)***</td>
<td>(5.18)***</td>
<td>(1.25)***</td>
<td>(4.09)***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>7,878</td>
<td>-3.699</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers in the parentheses are r-values of the difference between means. The t-values after the second row compare the middle and oldest age groups; the t-values after the third row compare the oldest and youngest age groups. Significance levels of the one-sided t-test are:

- **: **0.05, ***: < 0.01
- >: offset by the youngest generation's greater involvement, risk taking, and subsequent losses in farming so that their total farm income is less than that of the oldest generation ($436 versus $5,182).

What is masked by the general category of off-farm income is the role played by the farm spouse (farm wives for this group of farmers). Recent research has begun to focus on the contribution of the farm wife to farm survival in terms of on-farm activities (e.g., gardening, bookkeeping, and full-time participation), decision making, and off-farm income (see Buttel and Gillespie, 1984; Coughenour and Swanson, 1983; Gladwin, 1982, 1983, 1990; Garrett and Schulman, 1989; Sachs, 1983). Consequently, if the off-farm income for the households under consideration is categorized according to contributor, the significance of the farm wife's contribution is clearly made (see Table 2). For the total number of households, the spouse's off-farm income contribution is equal to that of the farmer ($5,770 versus $5,989).

An important difference in off-farm income appears when the contributors are divided along age lines. For the youngest generation, the spouse contributes over twice as much in off-farm income to the family budget than the farmer ($9,150 versus $3,940). On the other hand, the off-farm contribution of the middle and older generations, while smaller on average, is not significantly different from that
of their husbands.

Research by Schulman and Greene (1986) shows that off-farm work by both the farm operator and spouse makes a significant contribution to total family income. At the same time, "off-farm family labor may not produce stable part-time farmers even though it may improve total family income. Instead, off-farm operator labor may hasten the transition out of agriculture . . . " (1986:215). In this case, off-farm income by the farm spouse (i.e., wife) may play a crucial role in family farm survival if it allows the operator more time on the farm. It has been acknowledged that the off-farm efforts of the farm wife have made a significant impact on farm survival. The data presented here support this claim.

**Social orientation: land preservation**

Land is an important requirement not only as an element in the agricultural production process but also in terms of the generalized development of the land owners themselves. Considered a prerequisite for the economic and political evolution of a people in a capitalist society (Nelson, 1979:83), land ownership is vital, and the separation of blacks from land ownership is considered a major reason for the lack of development in a black
capitalist class in this country (Hogan, 1984; McGee and Boone, 1979). This resource is important historically because black land owners have played an important leadership role in the black community, first as mediators between the black and white power structures (Raper, 1936:113) and later during the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s (Shimkin et al., 1978:58).

Given the importance of land ownership, there is great concern surrounding the phenomenon of black land loss from a social, community, economic, and political perspective (Schulman et al., 1985:43). Unfortunately, the historical trend of decline is continuing (see Table 3). For example, over the last census period, from 1982 to 1987, the USDA reported a 24 percent decline in agricultural land utilized by black farmers (from 3.5 million to 2.6 million acres). This trend continues if black farmland in full and part ownership is considered (-23.1 percent). Importantly, black land in full ownership declined by 26 percent (from 1.6 million to 1.2 million acres).

Black farmers in Alabama and in the Black Belt counties are experiencing a similar trend with land losses ranging from 24 to 33 percent over the five-year census period. Indeed, there are some Black Belt counties (e.g., Bullock and Lowndes) that have experienced a 50 percent decline in black land owned and in productive agriculture. This trend, from the national to the local levels, leads some to predict that there will be no black-owned farmland by the year 2000 (USCCR, 1982:2).

Farmland ownership plays a significant role in small farm survival (Schulman and Greene, 1986:215), and productive agriculture plays a significant role in terms of farmland preservation. Farmland ownership played such a role for the 26 farmers in the SFRP. For example, the longer owned-land stays in the family, the larger the present holding of owned land. Non-landowning farmers (n=5) obviously averaged zero acres of owned land. On the other hand, first generation land owners (n=9) averaged 90 acres of land, and multigenerational land owners (n=12) averaged 123 acres of owned land. Furthermore, if a farmer had land-owning parents (n=13) his current holdings of owned land are almost twice as large than if his parents were not landowners (113.7 acres versus 62.5 acres). Finally, a history of land ownership was a factor affecting when a farmer started as an independent operator (as the first primary occupation versus leaving and then returning to the farm) and how a farmer started out whether renting or purchasing land (Zabawa, 1988).

Clearly, given the importance of family land to future generations of farmers, the formal planning of the intergenerational transfer of land (i.e., writing a will) and the strategy involved in that planning (i.e., who gets what and how much) is of primary importance. As Beauford comments: "The ability to hold on to farmland is intimately intertwined with the financial conditions of black farm operators and their ability to provide for the transfer of property to successive generations. Thus, for blacks, holding on to farmland
**Table 3.** Black farmland loss, 1982-1987

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1982 (ACRES)</th>
<th>1987 (ACRES)</th>
<th>PERCENT CHANGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>United States</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Land in Farms</td>
<td>3,474,573</td>
<td>2,636,896</td>
<td>-24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full and Part Ownership</td>
<td>3,058,137</td>
<td>2,351,303</td>
<td>-23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Ownership</td>
<td>1,637,799</td>
<td>1,207,980</td>
<td>-26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alabama</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Land in Farms</td>
<td>296,589</td>
<td>198,315</td>
<td>-33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full and Part Ownership</td>
<td>275,235</td>
<td>192,372</td>
<td>-30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Ownership</td>
<td>155,633</td>
<td>104,170</td>
<td>-33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black Belt of Alabama</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Land in Farms</td>
<td>166,777</td>
<td>119,531</td>
<td>-28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full and Part Ownership</td>
<td>153,357</td>
<td>109,868</td>
<td>-28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Ownership</td>
<td>88,526</td>
<td>67,551</td>
<td>-23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bullock County, AL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Land in Farms</td>
<td>13,426</td>
<td>5,907</td>
<td>-56.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full and Part Ownership</td>
<td>10,819</td>
<td>5,907</td>
<td>-45.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Ownership</td>
<td>5,613</td>
<td>3,461</td>
<td>-38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lowndes County, AL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Land in Farms</td>
<td>11,872</td>
<td>6,958</td>
<td>-41.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full and Part Ownership</td>
<td>10,884</td>
<td>6,611</td>
<td>-39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Ownership</td>
<td>6,197</td>
<td>3,006</td>
<td>-51.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data in this category includes Black and other races. Bullock and Lowndes County Data are for Black Farmers only.*


is a dilemma with both economic and legal dimensions* (1986:116).

Traditionally, the transfer of land from one generation to the next has occurred informally without wills in the form of heir property.* It should be noted that heir property is not only the result of a plan of transfer because it keeps the land in the family, but it is also a strategy where all family members inherit shares as dictated by law. Unfortunately, legal strategies employed against heir property in the form of partition sales and tax sales are a leading cause of black land loss (see Browne, 1973:51-57; McGee and Boone, 1979:55). Despite the problems associated with heir property, it continues to be "the traditional form of farmland ownership among blacks" due to a distrust of the legal system (Schulman *et al.*, 1985:41), a lack of

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*When a person dies without a will, or intestate, his or her property goes to the next of kin as "heir property." In the case of multiple heirs, no one heir owns a specific piece of property, rather, they own a percentage of the property (see Browne, 1973:51-57).
formal education (McGee and Boone, 1979:64), superstition, and a reluctance to make a decision concerning property that could cause family dissention.

Not only is the formal document important to the intergenerational transfer of land, so too is the strategy involved important in terms of how that land is transferred. The traditional and most common strategy is to divide the land equally among all of the children. While this strategy may prevent family disputes, it also divides a scarce resource and jeopardizes its agricultural potential; and a new generation will not replace the old on the farm unless there is a viable chance of economic success: "Increasingly, farm children are agreeing to 'take over' the farm home only if it is large enough to provide incomes that are comparable to those earned in nonfarm employment" (Beauford et al., 1984:409; Beauford, 1986:34; Beauford and Nelson, 1988:116). If the farmers in the SFRP were to divide their owned land (averaging 88.1 acres) equally among their children (averaging 6.4 children per family), a desire the majority of farmers want to pursue, the land would be divided into 13.8-acres parcels.

Program orientation: access for black farmers

In terms of assistance from the public and private sectors, black farmers historically have experienced neglect and discrimination (see Hoppe et al., 1986:8-9; Schulman et al., 1985:40; USCCR, 1982). There is an extensive amount of literature that documents how government tax, credit, and commodity programs have benefitted larger farms more while neglecting the small and minority-operated farm (see Beauford et al., 1984). In the area of traditional agricultural programs, the United States Commission on Civil Rights severely criticized the Farmers Home Administration for discriminatory policies in its hiring of agents as well as its allocation of loans (USCCR, 1982).

In an effort to serve a neglected clientele, the FmHA funded several projects, including the SFRP, to assist farmers "who could benefit from special and intensive training and technical assistance to enhance their skills in farm management and production practices" (USDA, 1985). The SFRP at Tuskegee was composed of a multidisciplinary team of research scientists that included an agronomist, an animal scientist, an agricultural economist, and an anthropologist. Through monthly on-farm visits, the team's goals included 1) introducing farmers to practices (e.g., custom farm plans, alternative marketing strategies, and record keeping) that could increase farm production (crop and livestock); 2) helping farmers become more economically efficient; and 3) increasing the farmers' standard of living. Each farmer received assistance directed towards his or her situation in terms of production assets (land, labor, machinery), economic assets (capital, credit), and personal assets
(health, education, time). (For a more detailed description of this project, see Zabawa, 1989).

The farmers participating in the SFRP had access to FmHA financing (in some cases for several years), but financial assistance alone does not create a successful program. If the project farmers are compared to their counterparts in Alabama and the United States in general (see Table 4), key differences appear in the areas of finance (debts, assets, debt-to-asset ratios) and structure (full and part ownership).

That is, financial assistance was used to expand the farm operation through the purchase of new machinery and the rental of new land, which increased asset values and part ownership; but at the same time, this expansion occurred during the years of high costs, low returns, and drought, which increased debts and debt-to-asset ratios.

Though well intentioned, the loan program had limitations due to: 1) an over-emphasis on production agriculture versus a more holistic approach to the farming system; 2) the extreme diversity of the clientele involved in terms of age, level of education, and ability; and 3) the short duration of the program given the severe depression in the agricultural sector at the time (Zabawa, 1989; also see Mehdian et al., 1988 for an evaluation of another FmHA program). Beauford observes that the lack of access to credit prevented black farmers from expanding, particularly during the farm boom years of the 1970s. At the same time, these farmers were spared, to some extent, during the farm bust years of the 1980s (1986:28-29). The data presented in Table 4 help to illustrate how access to financial resources can have a negative impact if not supported by other (planning and technical) program efforts.

**Implications and Conclusions**

The main significance of studying the strategies of black farmers is that it helps to provide useful insights into the social and economic problems of African Americans who historically have been the target of discrimination, public neglect in terms of economic benefits from government programs, and continuous accusations for societal woes.

The agrarian transition in the United States has reached a critical point for black farmers where they are forced by macro-economic circumstances and policy makers’ neglect to decide between maintaining their family farms or seeking off-farm employment to generate the income necessary to pay for their children’s education. A conflict of values emerges. On the one hand, "The idea that a family can independently own and operate a farm has always been an important part of American tradition and ideology" (Beauford et al., 1984:405). On the other hand, given the dramatic decline in terms of both the number of black-operated farms and black-owned acreage, we see this...
Table 4. Black farmer characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>UNITED STATES¹</th>
<th>ALABAMA²</th>
<th>PROJECT FARMERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (yrs)</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owned Land (acres)</td>
<td>104.0</td>
<td>89.0</td>
<td>88.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debts ($)</td>
<td>8,082</td>
<td>11,208</td>
<td>63,562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assets ($)</td>
<td>78,200</td>
<td>34,195</td>
<td>72,322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debts/Assets (%)</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>88.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Owners (%)</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Owners (%)</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>65.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Owners (%)</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: ¹Banks, 1986 ²Molnar and Adrian, 1980

tradition is far from reality. Therefore, one important question that emerges from this study is, where do those who lose their farms go?

This study reveals that despite the skillful use of traditional survival strategies to avoid debt and subsequent farm and land loss, more black farmers—especially in Alabama—are finding it difficult to save their farms and lifestyles with subsistence practices, particularly in the younger generation. The loss of land is the loss of economic power and independence. Most of the landless, traditionally, have migrated to urban communities where, if ill-prepared for the urban industrial labor force, faced certain poverty and social problems.

This research clearly shows the great disparity in land loss between black and white farmers in terms of magnitude and causal factors (i.e., racism). And while venturing white farmers lost their farms due to foreclosures and other problems with financial institutions, the majority of black farmers, out of necessity, sought refuge in traditional, non-mechanized subsistence farming. This "survival" farming is less efficient and less competitive in the global agricultural economy (Beauford, 1986:31); and eventually the need to move out of agriculture is the only viable alternative. Thus many black farmers are preparing their children for employment in the non-agricultural sector.

The motivational factors that are drawing increasing numbers of black farmers away from agriculture and resulting in land losses have been set forth. But what should be done about black farmers who want to maintain their family farms? This is an increasingly important question because as the United States competes aggressively with the European Economic Community (EEC), which is known to have the most elaborate farmer assistance and farm subsidy programs in the free world, there is no doubt a need to redress the many problems that have weakened its ability to use its technological advantage. This will require the careful targeting of agricultural programs.
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Special assistance for black farmers should include the following: 1) Special education, perhaps through local continuing education and extension programs, to teach: 1) new marketing strategies, 2) record keeping techniques, 3) the importance of writing a will to keep the land and farm in the family, and 4) how to get information on and participate in government programs. This educational component must give equal attention to women. 2) Concerted efforts by minority-owned financial institutions to initiate special assistance programs for black farmers. Once the initial support is given, additional resources can be sought from local, state, and federal sources by drawing on the support of concerned legislators. 3) An "access to expertise" program which goes beyond the current extension outreach should be funded through the land grant system and other interested institutions. Such a program would provide expertise in all areas of farming—for example, soil preservation, alternative crops, and local and global marketing outlets. Institutions of higher learning, especially those that have historically served blacks (e.g., the 1890 land grant system) should take the lead in this area.

It should be noted that underlying these recommendations is the crucial element of rural community development. Formerly, common wisdom stated that a sound farm economy was the basis for a sound rural economy. The last twenty years have seen this wisdom turned on its head.

A sound rural economy is now essential for farm survival. This is particularly true for those farm segments that rely almost exclusively on off-farm income—small, limited resource, and black farms. If these clientele groups are to survive, then the surrounding rural communities must be revived and include off-farm job training and employment opportunities for the farmer: "policy makers who are concerned with the well-being of farm families should consider national employment policies before formulating farm programs. A second consideration should include job training programs for farm operators who are quite dependent on off-farm employment" (Thompson et al., 1986:194).

Similarly, another critical clientele category is the farm spouse. Nationally, over half (58 percent) of the spouses on black-operated farms who work off the farm are employed in the service sector. At the same time, 20.5 percent have professional and technical occupations, and 9.1 percent are machine operators (Banks, 1986:26).

The spouses of the SFRP farmers, similarly, have a wide range of occupations: from teacher and nurse to machine operator, bus driver, and home-based entrepreneur. This clientele group requires not only increased services in terms of education and job training, but in terms of health and child care as well.

In conclusion, these areas offer new challenges for the land grant system, particularly the 1890 institutions (Marbury, 1979), and government policy
makers. As illustrated in this paper, if the black and limited resource farmer is to survive, then concerns relating to off-farm rural development and employment, education, and policy initiatives will have to be addressed. Towards this goal, it is for the land grant system to define problem areas and to develop solutions. At the same time, it is for a concerned constituency, as represented by their elected officials, to provide the arenas whereby social policy is debated and then directed.

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