LOUISIANA ASSOCIATION OF COOPERATIVES

E-newsletter

September. 2020

Pandemic & Disasters

ISSUE 190

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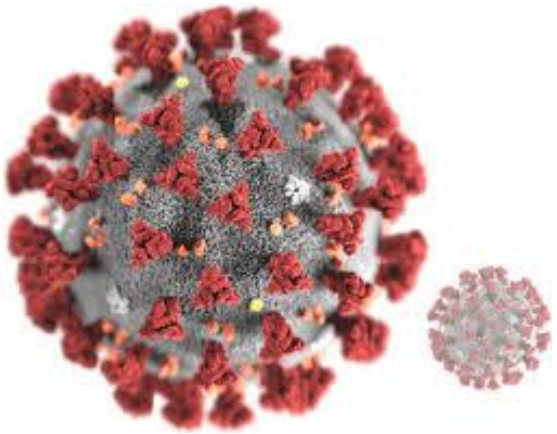
August, 2020 Events



Tennessee State University Cooperative Extension

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2020 TN SMALL FARM EXPO

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VIRTUAL EVENT

Video and Live content will be streaming on:

- Small Farm Webpage (link below)
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FEATURING • Universities, Federal and State Agencies • One Stop Resource Page for Small Farms • Small Farm Grant Programs • Research Plot Tours • Educational Workshops • Food Preservation • Poultry Production • Greenbelt and Forestry Management Topics• Industrial Hemp Field Tour• Organic Vegetable Trials Tour• Ruminant Livestock Management • Small Farmer Recognition

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Feature

Ethics

'Make Farmers Black Again': Fighting Discrimination To Own Farmland

Heather Ainsworth for NPR

There is a growing movement of young farmers led by people of color in the Northeast but barriers to accessing funding and land remain. The family behind Triple J Farm in Windsor, N.Y., knows this.

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.

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.

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.

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.

"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?"

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.

Opinion

The Root: No Aid For Black Farmers

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 hide caption

.

"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.

"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.

"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.

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.

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.

"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.

A potent history of a most vital contributor to urban growth in New Orleans

NEW ORLEANS / SOUTHERN HISTORY / SOCIAL SCIENCE

Cooperatives in New Orleans

Collective Action and Urban Development

Anne Gessler

Cooperatives have been central to the development of New Orleans. Anne Gessler asserts that local cooperatives have reshaped its built environment by changing where people interact and with whom, helping them collapse social hierarchies and envision new political systems.

Gessler tracks many neighborhood cooperatives, spanning from the 1890s to the present, whose alliances with union, consumer, and social justice activists animated successive generations of regional networks and stimulated urban growth in New Orleans.

Studying alternative forms of social organization within the city's multiple integrated spaces, women, people of color, and laborers blended neighborhood-based African, Caribbean, and European communal activism with international cooperative principles to democratize exploitative systems of consumption, production, and exchange. From utopian socialist workers' unions and Rochdale grocery stores to black liberationist theater collectives and community gardens, these cooperative entities integrated marginalized residents into democratic governance while equally distributing profits among members.

Besides economic development, neighborhood cooperatives participated in heady debates over urban land use, applying egalitarian cooperative principles to modernize New Orleans's crumbling infrastructure, monopolistic food distribution systems, and spotty welfare programs. As Gessler indicates, cooperative activists deployed street-level subsistence tactics to mobilize continual waves of ordinary people seizing control over mainstream economic and political institutions.

ANNE GESSLER is clinical assistant professor, First-Year Seminar Program and Humanities Program, University of Houston–Clear Lake. She has published her research in *E3W Review of Books*, *Journal of Southern History*, *Radio Journal*, *Utopian Studies*, and *American Studies in Scandinavia*.

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Panels are warrantied for 25 years. A roof will last about 15 to 20 years. If your roof goes bad, you have to pay to have the panels removed and replaced. An added cost. Plus your panel warranty becomes void in most cases. Not to mention the dangers of encountering a premature leaky roof. As a part of our installation, we build our customers a **Pergola** to deter the added cost. We have several different sizes and shapes to accommodate all type of yard sizes. Solar that reduces or eliminate your energy bill and creates a nice shaded cool spot in your yard to relax. **So break out the lawn chairs and the lemonade**.

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SOLAR PURGOLA

In This Issue

- The end of roof top solar
- Who we are
- Solar Generators
- Customer testimonials
- Surveillance

HOW MUCH DID THE DERECHO DAMAGE IOWA AGRICULTURE?

By
Natalina Sents

Photo credit: Natalina Sents

Iowa secretary of agriculture Mike Naig, along with several other state and national leaders, has been touring damage in Iowa after a derecho brought devastating high winds through the region.

“Millions of acres of corn around the state were impacted by last week’s storm. The severity of the damage varies by field, but some acres are a total loss and it will not be feasible for farmers to harvest them,” reports Naig. “I’ll continue to work with farmers, USDA, and crop insurance providers to identify solutions as we approach a very challenging harvest season.”

GRAIN STORAGE

Preliminary estimates of the damage indicate more than 57 million bushels of permanently-licensed grain storage was seriously damaged or destroyed. Heartland Co-op locations in Luther and Malcom, Iowa, and Key Cooperative in Marshalltown all sustained significant damage. Co-ops in the state estimate it will cost more than $300 million to remove, replace, or repair the damaged grain storage bins.

Photo credit: Natalina Sents

On-farm storage was also lost during the storm. The Iowa Department of Agriculture expressed concern this may create grain storage challenges for farmers as the 2020 harvest season rapidly approaches.

Farmers Business Network conducted a survey of their membership in the storm's path. Based on survey results, FBN chief economist Kevin McNew estimates 50 to 75 million bushels of bin space belonging to farmers in Iowa will be out of commission for the 2020 harvest.

CROPS

USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) reported 57 Iowa counties were in the path of the August 10 storm. There are approximately 8.2 million acres of corn and 5.6 million acres of soybeans in that area that may have been impacted by the high winds.

Using MODIS satellite imagery and Storm Prediction Center preliminary storm reports, the Iowa Deparment of Agriculture estimates 36 counties were hardest hit by the derecho. About 3.5 million acres of corn and 2.5 million acres of soybeans are grown within that region.

Photo credit: Natalina Sents

McNew says 15% of FBN members in Iowa, representing 2.3 million acres, reported laid down corn as a result of the storm. "We expect about 100 million bushels of corn to be lost, if not higher," he says.

Farm Land Grab

[Cameroon: Sheep-breeding community Mbororos challenges a temporary concession of 100,000 hectares in the Adamaoua]

About 100 farmers' households have been exploiting the area for decades and do not intend to leave it.

BusinessInCameroon

[Victims of land grabbing decry rape, torture and assault by multinational companies]

Victims of land grabbing in Kiryandongo district, Uganda have come out to decry the deplorable conditions that they are subjected to by the land evictors at the hand of security officials.

Soft Power

Veterans in Agriculture

Civitas Organics, Anaheim, CA

"Civitas Organics is how I choose to continue service, organically and unconventionally."

While serving in Iraq, Edgar Hercila helped local villagers with farming by bringing in supplies like wheat and barley, as well as working on irrigation efficiency and greenhouse implementation. His work contributed to the formation of the first ever Agriculture Committee in Southern Iraq, bringing together farmers, sheep herders, veterinarians, and local officials. Edgar still serves as a member of the Army Reserves.

Upon returning home to California, Edgar joined the Veteran's Agricultural Learning – Opportunities and Resources (VALOR) program. He was given 3.5 acres to work, which he says is his "motivation for putting on boots in the morning". Also in the VALOR program is farmer veteran Maria Ozvatic. Edgar has attended many FVC workshops and is a member of the Homegrown by Heroes program.

Agriculture was a part of Edgar's life here in the U.S., long before deploying to Iraqi farmland. His father was invited to the U.S. as part of the Bracero program in the 1950's. Edgar's father worked from Washington to Calexico, harvesting everything from lemons to cotton.

Edgar is deeply rooted in Southern California, both in the land and the community. Urban gardening and farming is his passion. He volunteers with the American Heart Association installing edible schoolyards in Los Angeles that provide nutrition awareness to inner city children.

In 2014, Edgar launched his own urban farm, Civitas Organics, built upon a once fallow parking lot. "Every day after 4 pm, a group of enlistees run in cadence through this neighborhood, conditioning before they ship to basic training. I feel having my farm there is an important reminder that service comes in many shapes and forms."

With the generous contributions of Newman's Own Foundation, FVC awarded Edgar a Fellowship in spring 2015. This award has enabled Edgar to purchase a cooling and ventilation system for his greenhouse.

Funding Priority

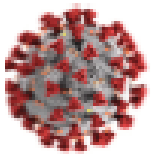
Section 760 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017 (H.R. 244) provides funds to NIFA for a pilot program to provide grants to nonprofit organizations for training programs and services to establish and enhance farming and ranching opportunities for military veterans.

Types of Projects

The AgVets program will accept Training and Outreach project types:

Training and Outreach Projects must conduct programs and activities that deliver science-based knowledge and informal educational programs to veterans through an immersive onsite learning experience leading to a comprehensive understanding of successful farm/ranch operation/management practices. Training and Outreach projects may also include related matters such as certification programs, instructional materials and innovative instructional methods appropriate to help prospective producers successfully manage their operations.

What you should know about COVID-19 to protect yourself and others



Know about COVID-19

- Coronavirus (COVID-19) is an illness caused by a virus that can spread from person to person.
- The virus that causes COVID-19 is a new coronavirus that has spread throughout the world.
- COVID-19 symptoms can range from mild (or no symptoms) to severe illness.

Know how COVID-19 is spread

- You can become infected by coming into close contact (about 6 feet or two arm lengths) with a person who has COVID-19. COVID-19 is primarily spread from person to person.
- You can become infected from respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks.
- You may also be able to get it by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it, and then by touching your mouth, nose, or eyes.

Protect yourself and others from COVID-19

- There is currently no vaccine to protect against COVID-19. The best way to protect yourself is to avoid being exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Stay home as much as possible and avoid close contact with others.
- Wear a cloth face covering that covers your nose and mouth in public settings.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Practice social distancing

- Buy groceries and medicine, go to the doctor, and complete banking activities online when possible.
- If you must go in person, stay at least 6 feet away from others and disinfect items you must touch.
- Get deliveries and takeout, and limit in-person contact as much as possible.

Prevent the spread of COVID-19 if you are sick

- Stay home if you are sick, except to get medical care.
- Avoid public transportation, ride-sharing, or taxis.
- Separate yourself from other people and pets in your home.
- There is no specific treatment for COVID-19, but you can seek medical care to help relieve your symptoms.
- If you need medical attention, call ahead.

Know your risk for severe illness

- Everyone is at risk of getting COVID-19.
- Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions may be at higher risk for more severe illness.

cdc.gov/coronavirus

As Smoke fills air, California farmworkers labor to put food on the table

Danielle Echeverria

Farmworkers pick a crop in a Vacaville field Thursday along Gibson Valley Road amid thick smoke smoke from the LNU Lightning Complex Fire. Many farm workers in the region continued working despite poor air quality.
Photo: Matthias Gafni / The Chronicle

Yellow, ash-filled skies blanketed the Salinas Valley fields that supply much of the nation's lettuce, strawberries and other fresh produce as wildfires from all sides blazed.

But the raging wildfires don't stop the harvest, and many farmers said they had no choice this week but to plow on through the smoke to put food into stores and onto tables. That means farmworkers had to work in conditions already made extremely difficult by the heat wave and pandemic.

"The crops are ready today, and you can't wait until tomorrow, because these are succulent fruits and vegetables that have to be picked when they're ready and when they're ripe in order to get them to the market," Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner Henry Gonzales explained. "We have to harvest every day ... because people eat every day."

Produce needs to be at a certain quality for the supply chain, and farmers have only a short window to achieve that, explained Norm Groot, executive director of the Monterey County Farm Bureau. If you miss that window, he said, you probably have to abandon the field.

Farm laborers harvest romaine lettuce in Salinas Valley on a machine with heavy plastic dividers that separate workers from each other during the coronavirus epidemic in April.
Photo: Brent Stirton / Getty Images

"Unfortunately, we do have to keep the crews moving so that we keep food in the supply chain," he said. "That's really always been the challenge, even with COVID."

This year, farmworkers have already had a host of problems to deal with — as essential workers, they've had to work through shelter-in-place orders and coronavirus concerns, as well as the heat wave sweeping through California.

"The workers are already performing physical work, so it's already difficult physically," Gonzales said. "It's really serious here. ... This is just a very unique situation with just a combination of factors."

As we keep positive thoughts for the families, firefighters, and communities impacted by fires that still burn, please also lift up our campesinos as they continue to work, breathing in smoke 10 hours, risking their lives to feed you.

Keeping farmworkers safe from the smoke means making sure they have masks, said Pete Maturino, agricultural director for United Food and Commercial Workers Local 5, which represents retail clerks, supermarket stockers and food processors in Northern California, including about 1,000 farmworkers.

The state's Division of Occupational Safety and Health requires employers of outdoor workers to protect employees from wildfire smoke by monitoring the air quality and providing employees with N95 masks when air quality reaches unhealthy levels.

On Wednesday, some parts of Monterey County — mostly affected by the River Fire — reached Air Quality Index numbers in the "unhealthy for sensitive groups range." The Monterey Bay Air Resources District recommends that residents stay indoors with the doors and windows closed at this level.

"If the workers do not have a mask, then they're not going to be able to work," Gonzales said, "because it can become overwhelming."

Smoke and ash from nearby wildfires fill the air, turning the sky yellow, in Gonzales in the Salinas Valley. Farmworkers continued to work in the fields despite the smoky conditions.
Photo: Pete Maturino

Beyond that, there aren't any specific rules about working conditions in smoke, Maturino and Gonzales said.

"Nobody really thought about it, because it hardly ever happens," Maturino said.

But even getting masks is no easy task. While most workers are already wearing a face covering because of the pandemic, only N95 masks filter smoke out of the air. The pandemic has shortened supply of this protective equipment, Groot said.

The Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner's office started diverting its supply of N95 masks, usually reserved for workers applying pesticides in the fields, to farmworkers dealing with smoky conditions, Gonzales said. His 10,000 remaining N95s already went out, and he placed an order for another 100,000 from the county's Office of Emergency Services.

But he's still worried about having enough masks. There are about 30,000 farmworkers in fields in Monterey County at any given time, he said, and each of them needs one N95 mask per day, which means they'll go through the new supply quickly.

"From the reports I've been hearing, the fires aren't going to be under control until sometime after August," he said, "so we need a lot of masks."

Farmworkers pick strawberries in Salinas.
Photo: Preston Gannaway / Special to The Chronicle 2013

Farmers — who have already taken a financial hit, with schools and restaurants closing as a result of the pandemic — are also scrambling to adjust to the ever-changing conditions, Groot said. Many are changing which fields they're harvesting to avoid the smoke as much as possible, adjusting hours and considering abandoning any fields where it's simply too dangerous.

"It really presents the farming operation with a really tough choice," he said. "Particularly in a year where nobody's making much money, it's even more impactful."

The economic strain on the industry also means fewer hours for farmworkers, Maturino said.

"They're out there because of necessity, not so much because they're making thousands of dollars," he said, noting that they receive minimum wage.

And for the farmworkers who are undocumented, complaining about conditions or asking for more protection is often too risky, and they have no government safety net.

Announces New Members of the Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers

(Washington, D.C., July 13, 2020) – U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue today announced the appointment of 15 members to serve on the Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers. The newly appointed members serve terms of up to two years through 2022.

"USDA is excited to announce new members of the Minority Farmer Advisory Committee," said Secretary Perdue. "This diverse committee of talented farmers will play an important role in advising the USDA on challenges and opportunities that minority farmers in the United States may face."

Newly appointed members are:

- **Harvey Reed, Louisiana, Chairman**
- **William Miller, Ohio, Vice Chairman**
- Cary M. Junior, Michigan
- Carolyn Jones, Mississippi
- Kimberly Ratcliff, Texas
- Arnetta Cotton, Oklahoma
- Antonio Harris, Louisiana
- Delmar Stamps, Mississippi
- Michelle Cruz, Rhode Island
- Dewayne Goldmon, Arkansas
- Lois Kim, Texas
- Ivan H. Howard, Florida
- Dr. Duncan Marson Chembezi, Alabama
- Dr. Elsa Selina Sanchez, Pennsylvania
- Claud D. Evans, D.V.M., Oklahoma

Background:

The Committee is made up of 15 members, including representatives for: socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, nonprofit organizations, civil rights organizations or professions, and institutions of higher education. Congress authorized the Committee in 2008, and since its inception, it has served to advise the Secretary and USDA on the implementation of the section 2501 Program of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990; methods of maximizing the participation of socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers in USDA programs; and civil rights activities within USDA. The Committee is managed by USDA's Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement

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About the USDA Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement:

USDA's Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement develops and maintains partnerships focused on solutions to challenges facing rural and underserved communities in the United States, and connects those communities to the education, tools, and resources available to them through U.S. Department of Agriculture programs and initiatives.

Hurricane Laura plays havoc with agriculture, forests,residences

Although definitive results won't be available for a few days, the effects on agriculture appear to be less destructive than most people feared before Hurricane Laura struck, but forests and residences sustained significant damage.

Blair Hebert, LSU AgCenter agent for sugarcane in the Bayou Teche area, said cane plants have been blown down, or lodged, throughout the area, and some plants were submerged in floodwater.

Much of the cane appeared to be laying in one direction, which could make harvest somewhat less difficult, he said.

Farmers had not completed cane planting, and that process will be even more difficult because of wet fields and downed cane that will be used for seed.

Sugarcane harvest is expected to begin in mid-September for some mills, and all mills are scheduled to begin by early October. "It's going to take longer to harvest and cost more money," Hebert said.

The surge wasn't as bad as expected, so fields to the north won't be as affected by flooding. "It's not the best-case scenario, but it's not the worst-case scenario," he said.

Hebert is concerned that fields affected by flooding will also be littered with debris. He recalled that farmers had to deal with butane bottles that were washed into the fields after previous hurricanes.

Farmer Ricky Gonsoulin, of New Iberia, said he has about 2,500 acres of sugarcane flooded. The tops of the cane stalks are split "so it's going to take sugar to repair itself," he said.

The flood was about 3 feet lower than the flooding that accompanied Hurricane Rita in 2005, and it doesn't have the salinity of the tidal surge from that storm, Gonsoulin said. It took five to seven years for fields flooded by Rita to recover from the salt level.

The water level didn't rise until 4 p.m. after the storm had passed, he said.

Gonsoulin is concerned about his newly planted cane that's completely submerged.

He has made cuts in levees and has pumps working to drain the water, "but the tides are working in our favor," he said.

Errol Domingue, a farmer near Erath, has 800 acres of sugarcane where water has to be pumped off. But because the water was still above the levee, he has to wait for it to recede.

The sugarcane plants have been pushed over, but the tops don't appear to be broken. "It's down all one way, and not mangled up," Domingue said.

"There's still a great crop out there," Gonsoulin said, adding that harvest will be more of a problem in fields that also have debris.

Todd Fontenot, AgCenter agent in Evangeline Parish, said damage is scattered in his area. "Pretty decent-sized trees are knocked down," he said.

Some rice that had not been harvested yet or was planted for crawfish showed little damage. "The rice around here seemed to have fared pretty well," he said. Soybeans in the area didn't appear to be damaged either.

"A lot of rice was cut over the weekend and up until Tuesday," Fontenot said. One farmer, with help from neighbors, managed to harvest 350 acres of rice in one day.

Farmer Adlar Stelly, of Kaplan, evacuated his family and returned to his home south of Kaplan to discover

everything was ok except for 190 acres out of 2,000 acres of rice that he is unable to harvest.

"I thought I was coming back to a flooded house and every acre of my farm underwater," he said.

The rice was flooded by freshwater, and Stelly expects to start pumping off the floodwater in a day or two
.
He will be making freezer space available to nearby residents who, unlike him, don't have power.

More than 90 percent of the rice in Acadia Parish had been harvested before the storm, said **Jeremy Hebert,** AgCenter agent in Acadia Parish. What rice was left in the field was knocked down and is under water.

"We've got great farmers, and they banded together and teamed up to help get as much rice out of the field as they could the week before the storm," Hebert said.

Hebert's parents' home is a total loss. This is the second time they lose a home to a hurricane.

Andrew Granger, AgCenter agent in Vermilion Parish, said most of the rice still in fields is not under water. He doesn't think the water pushed many fences over because it rose so slowly.

The water only reached 5 feet above normal at Intracoastal City.

Shrimp processing facilities at Intracoastal City had flooded, said AgCenter and Louisiana Sea Grant aquaculture agent Mark Shirley. But water was receding, and the businesses were starting the cleanup process.

While agriculture damage wasn't as significant as farmers feared, high winds uprooted trees, causing losses for forest landowners and residences.

Jimmy Meaux, AgCenter agent in Calcasieu and Jefferson Davis parishes, said residential damage is extensive, including tohis own home.

After returning from Pineville, Meaux found trees had fallen on his house, and the roof was partially ripped off."Everybody's house is damaged," he said. "The whole area in the LeBleu Settlement is like a war zone."

Kyle LeBoeuf, cattle producer a cattle producer at Holmwood, had significant damage to his home. The roof on one side of his house was demolished and torn away, and a horse barn was destroyed.

His cattle behind his house were ok, but "I had some in Creole that got lost," he said.

This is the second time LeBoeuf has had a house destroyed by a hurricane; the first was in Creole. "We lost everything" then, he said.

On Friday his family and friends were trying to get a water pump working and get an ice machine running.

Sugarcane plants near New Iberia lean after sustaining winds from Hurricane Laura. Photo: Bruce Schultz/LSU AgCenter

LeBoeuf's neighbor, Blake Trimeaux, said he rode out the storm in a nearby cinderblock building "where you could feel the cinderblocks breathing when the wind would blow. When the roof would go up, the doors would open, and you could feel the wall breathe," he said.

Trimeaux said all his 25 cattle and home survived, but all his sheds are demolished.

AgCenter forestry agent **Keith Hawkin**s in Beauregard Parish reported significant downed timber in the Deridder area. Many parish roads were inaccessible due to fallen trees, and some homes have been heavily damaged by downed trees.

Hurricane Laura had a major impact on forest landowners in southwest and central Louisiana said AgCenter forestry agent Robbie Hutchins, located in Alexandria.

"Trees have been uprooted and snapped off from the hurricane and associated tornadoes," Hutchins said. Forest landowners are in the process of assessing the extent of the damage. In addition, tens of thousands of shade trees near homes and business have been downed or damaged.

– Bruce Schultz, Louisiana State University

Photo at top: Wagons used for harvesting sugarcane sit on high ground surrounded by floodwaters from Hurricane Laura near New Iberia, Louisiana.