

WOMEN FOR THE LAND IN THE SOUTHEAST



Hearst Project
Report - 2021



OVERVIEW

American Farmland Trust (AFT) is grateful to the Hearst Foundation for supporting the Women for the Land (WFL) program over the past year and a half. The focus of the WFL program has been to build momentum, foster relationships, develop trust, and expand our capacity to serve women producers, particularly African American women, in the American Southeast, with a focus on North Carolina and Kentucky. Our program is working to address both gender and racial discrimination that women farmers and landowners often face when accessing financial, technical, and informational resources to support their farming operation.

As a result of this work, we have cultivated new and existing networks of women landowners, farmers, aspiring farmers, and agricultural service provider partners (such as staff from Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Cooperative Extension and the US Department of Agriculture). We engaged these partners to co-develop programming tailored to the needs of the women we are trying to serve. To this end, we have accomplished all stated program deliverables while also making relevant changes to our programming as we learned more about local needs and adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report explores updates by stated deliverable, interweaving qualitative and quantitative evaluation work into each section.

Gabrielle Roesch-McNally

WOMEN FOR THE LAND DIRECTOR



PROGRAM DELIVERABLES

ESTABLISH A STEERING COMMITTEE

In both Kentucky and North Carolina, we engaged advisory partners to help us strategically move to support African American women producers and landowners. Based on feedback from partners, we modified our strategy and instead created informal working groups with core partners in both states and additional implementation service providers to gauge needs and interests in the region. We felt that a somewhat more informal advisory group would be less taxing on very busy partners and allow us flexibility in engaging a diverse and new audience.

In Kentucky, we built a relationship with a team at Kentucky State University Extension (KYSU) that is already engaged in farmer outreach and education on the ground. This group was essential in helping us identify women participants in Learning Circles and is committed to furthering our joint programming beyond the life of this grant. KYSU helped to facilitate relationships and recruit partners to take part in a Learning Circle training during the project. KYSU's goal is to strengthen long-term program engagement with women operators throughout the state of Kentucky. We have also brought in several partners from the KY region to help deliver programming. Partners include USDA liaison with KYSU focused on reaching farmers of color, Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rural Development, Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development, and Grow Appalachia. We have also forged new relationships with University of Kentucky Extension, Kentucky Women in Agriculture, and the Norton Family Foundation.

In North Carolina, we hosted a formal discussion with advisors in December 2020 to gauge programmatic needs and get partner buy-in. Our on-the-ground consultant, Grace Summers, and Ebonie Alexander at the Black Family Land Trust, Inc have been essential, doing the grassroots work of building relationships and trust. Core partners include representatives from NRCS, FSA, Rural Development, non-profit Vacation Vittles and community organizer Randolph Keaton, and NC State Extension partners. We also had seven African American women leaders join in the discussion—all of whom run their own farm business. These partners helped us to craft some next steps for engaging African American women farmers and landowners in the region.

PROGRAM DELIVERABLES

DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN:

As a result of discussions with our advisors, we modified our original plans for the region to incorporate their feedback. We discovered that we had more to learn from Kentucky partners, especially if we were to reach a more diverse group of women. Therefore, we conducted two formal focus groups, in lieu of two of our Learning Circles, to better understand the needs of the women we were hoping to serve. In North Carolina, we found that partners were hungry for engagement, but we realized that a huge need among our potential participants was basic information about how to navigate the complex web of federal, state, and local financial and technical resources available to support their farm enterprise, as well as potential support navigating Heirs Property issues. COVID-19 made this work more challenging given that the audience we sought to serve, African American women farmers/landowners, were at particular risk of COVID. Early on, this led us to host virtual focus groups. And in both states, we also held some of our Learning Circles virtually.

CONDUCT OUTREACH TO IDENTIFY PARTICIPANTS:

We worked together with our core partners at Kentucky State University, the Black Family Land Trust, Inc and consultant Grace Summers to conduct outreach with women farmers and landowners in their respective networks and beyond. In addition to traditional networks via the U.S. Extension Services and NRCS, we also reached out to non-traditional women's networks and leaders, including women in agriculture networks in Kentucky and North Carolina that are loosely affiliated with University Extension Services in each state. This outreach resulted in reaching 158 participants in both states for our Learning Circles, Field Days, and Coffee Hours, who now receive regular communication from us about grants, resources, and future program offerings in their area. In addition to those participants added to our network, we engaged 28 service providers in both states to support the delivery of our programming. These service providers are now connected to more women in their area and have gained exposure to our non-hierarchical model, should they choose to employ it within their own work in the future.

WHO WE ENGAGED

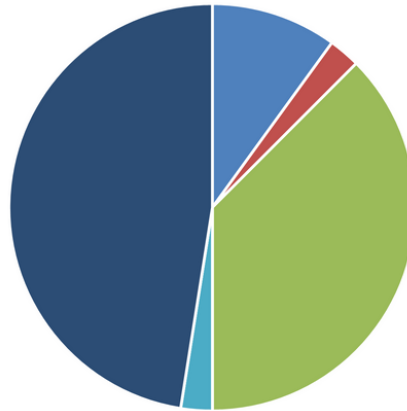
83 WOMEN ON 9,406 ACRES

In North Carolina, we hosted a two-part Learning Circle in spring 2021 and for our summer 2021 field day Learning Circles, we hosted our North Carolina session virtually. This was accompanied by a video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YeaHv9M19k>), which we developed in lieu of the in-person “farm tour” we had hoped to provide. Nearly all participants at this virtual event were African American women, and the stories featured in the farm tour video were all about accomplished African American women farmers and partners. Overall, in NC, we reached 38 women and impacted over 1,400 acres of land.

	KY ATTENDANCE	NC ATTENDANCE	ACRES IMPACTED
ASPIRING FARMER	7	2	369
OPERATOR	5	0	30
OWNER & OPERATOR	17	10	5986
OWNER	8	6	1550
OTHER	8	20	1471
TOTAL	45	38	9406

Based on input from our advisory partners, we decided to pivot plans for KY and host two virtual focus groups with stakeholders in lieu of two of the committed Learning Circles. We hosted two focus groups in KY and two Learning Circles in both KY and NC. In Kentucky, our first Focus Group listening session was focused on Central/Western Kentucky and we reached eight women, the majority of whom were African American. All of the women who joined were farmers around the region with a diversity of production systems. The second Focus Group listening session was focused on Eastern Kentucky and we had six women join who had a diversity of racial identities. All of those who joined were involved in some form of agriculture, usually with a mixture of fruit, vegetables, and livestock and some were already involved in the Kentucky Women in Agriculture network and advised us on how our program could add value to existing work in the region.

Demographic Characteristics (n= 40)



- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White

For our KY Learning circles, we focused our first virtual Learning Circle on the “Basics on Accessing Financial and Technical Resources for your Farm” and then a second Learning Circle that comprised a field day focused on diversifying the farm, promoting soil health, and accessing USDA and state-level resources to support farm enterprises. The field day included a robust, in-person program with hands-on experiences on a working ranch, as well as soil health demonstrations and a shared meal with the diverse group of women in agriculture and partners gathered. In Kentucky, our Learning Circles attracted a diversity of women in agriculture, with about half of the women identifying as African American. In total, for our KY work, we reached 45 women and impacted over 8,000 acres of land.

The exit survey data found that almost half of respondents identified as African American/Black, four identified as Native American, and the rest identified as White/Caucasian. Forty-two percent had post-baccalaureate degrees with nearly all having some college or a college degree. The majority were between 40-59 years of age, Gross farm income ranged quite a bit, with 38% not selling their goods to 27% reporting an income between \$10,000 and \$50,000.



SUPPORTING NETWORKS

BUILDING NETWORKS OF CONNECTION

The first goal of our project is to build knowledge and strengthen women’s connections to networks that improve access to resources that would help them achieve their goals. As a result of our summative evaluation efforts in both NC and KY, 100% of respondents (note that due to the virtual nature of the evaluations, our response rates are not particularly high) indicated a desire to stay connected with other women farmers or landowners through future engagement in meetings and the vast majority indicated a desire to at least stay connected to one another via an online network. In North Carolina we have started a google group that is hosted by our partner, Black Family Land Trust, Inc. We are still discussing the best way to engage women in KY, but we have been sharing resources via an email list as we wrap up formal programming, and participants have stayed in touch with the Kentucky State Extension team about their program offerings.

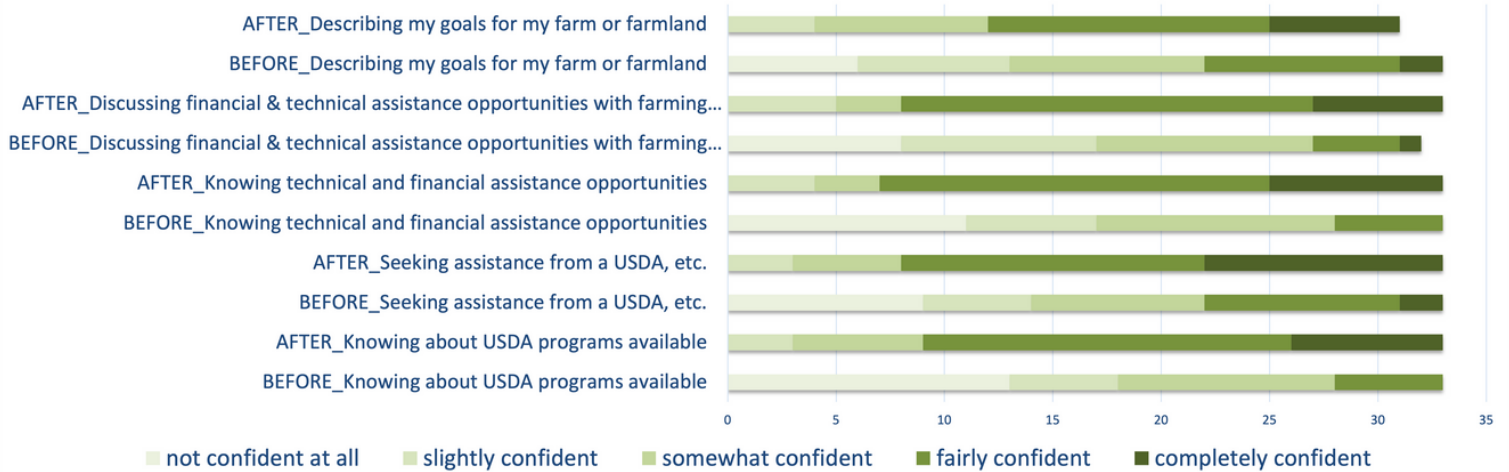
“I very much enjoyed it. It was very enlightening. I gained a lot from it. I really, really liked all the women that were there. And I do need to connect with them more. I appreciated that community feel... it was like a family.”

-Kentucky Participant



BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Increase in Confidence (n=33)



WOMEN GREW THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND CONFIDENCE

The second goal of our project was to support these underserved women farmers and landowners and help them to build their confidence in seeking support and additional financial and technical resources to bolster their operations. Based on exit evaluations filled out by a subset of our attendees, we see a large increase in confidence across all areas of programmatic intervention. Across the board, women were more confident navigating new resources, particularly from USDA, and in describing goals for their farm.

“A major thing has been that you all offer information that pulls together a lot of things. Women have been on the sidelines for hundreds of years. With more women getting into ag, they have to get into the business aspects more not just the work itself. I think it’s going to be good once we build critical mass of women in the future.”

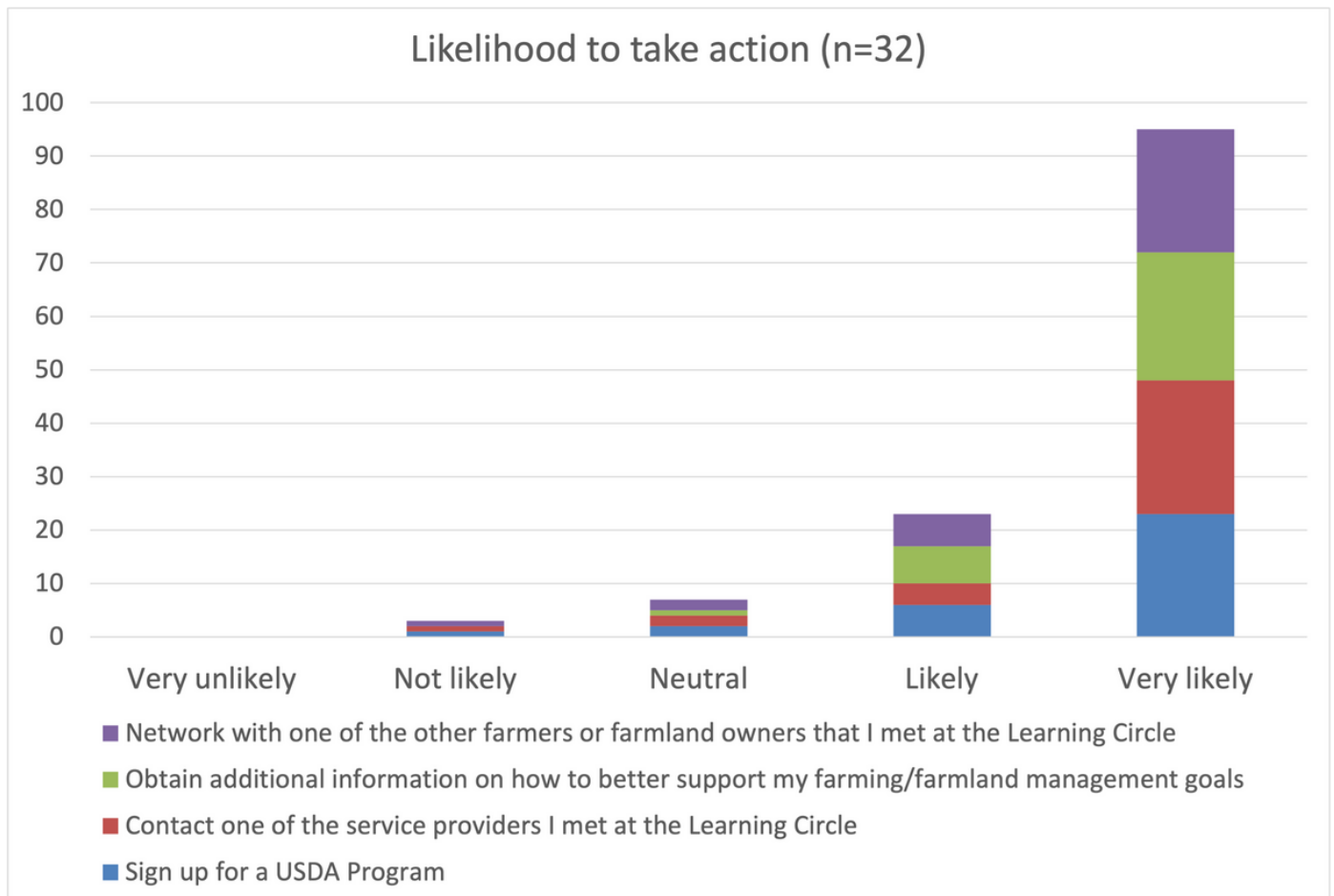
-Kentucky Participant



ACCELERATING ACTION

WOMEN INTEND TO TAKE ACTION TOWARD CONSERVATION & FARM VIABILITY

Respondents reported a significantly increased likelihood of taking action after participating in a Learning Circle. Respondents were very likely to do all of the following: Network with one of the other farmers/farmland owners they met at the Learning Circle, obtain additional information on how to better support farm/farmland management goals, contact a service provider met at the Learning Circle and sign up for a USDA program.



OUR IMPACT



“Because of your organization, I was able to really get the COVID relief funds [from FSA]...Oh, and also as a result of that meeting, I think somebody was talking about water supply and irrigation and as a result of that, we connected with NRCS here and we are going to get one of the wells, probably in the spring.”

-North Carolina Participant

“I will start incorporating no-till as we did spend quite a lot of time on no till. I would like to try that not everywhere, but where I can, definitely. I was very much inspired to think, bigger, in terms of where I would like to be in 2022. I had smaller goals in mind but seeing all the resources that were available and how incredible women could be, I was definitely inspired to go bigger.”

-Kentucky Participant

“I think that Women for the Land, gave me that final push to apply for the scholarship to get into the Farm Beginnings program. So it’s been a huge, huge drive in me as I get this farm back on its feet and propel it forward for success to never forget this time and give back.”

-North Carolina Participant

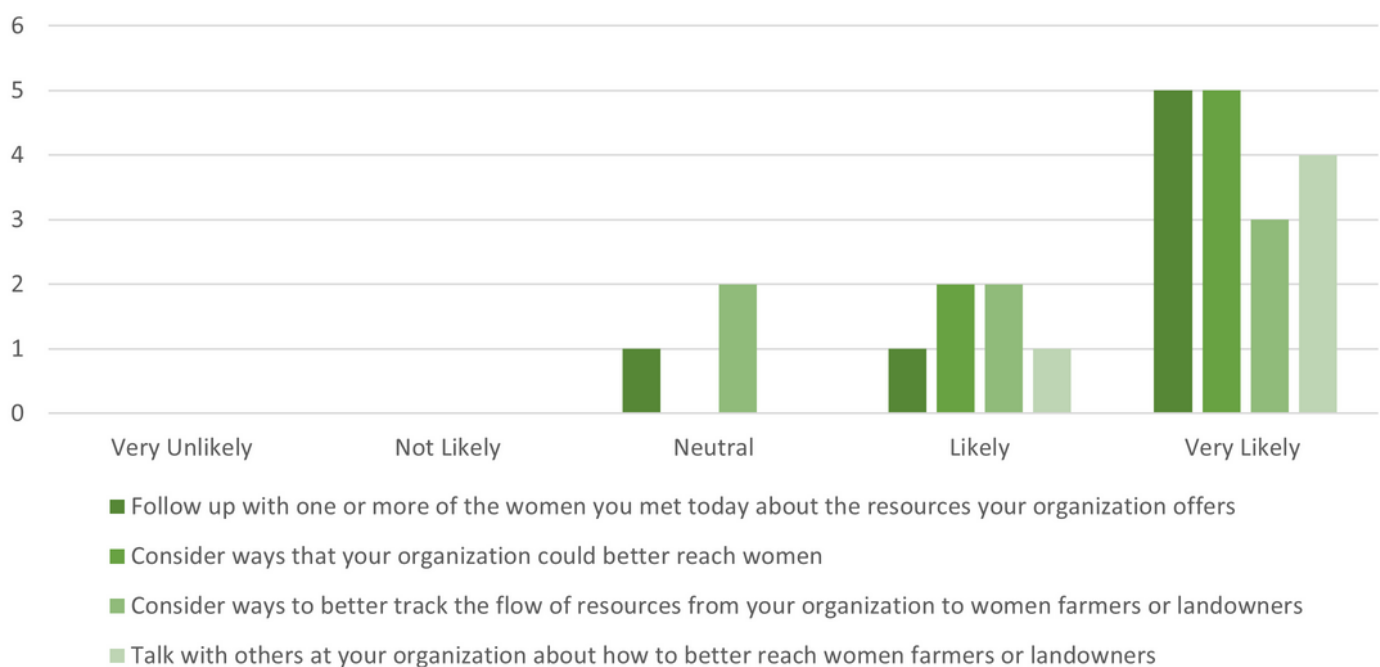
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

EMPOWERING SERVICE PROVIDERS

The third goal of our project was to provide additional support to agriculture agency staff and advisors partnering on Learning Circles to gain knowledge on how to serve women landowners and farmers more effectively, particularly as it relates to improving access to conservation and land protection opportunities among historically underserved producers.

We are incredibly proud of the broad-based support we have received from partners on-the-ground in KY and NC. Based on a review of our resource provider exit evaluations, we found the majority had strong intentions to act following the Learning Circle events in both states, with particular interest in following up with women they met to share more resources about their organization and improve the ways their organization could better reach women in general. Finally, all respondents reported wanting to stay connected to each other and others working in this space following our events.

Resource Provider Intentions to Take Action (n=7)



INCREASED VISIBILITY

IMPROVED STORYTELLING

Funding from the Hearst Foundation was leveraged with additional funding from Patagonia, which enabled us to create a new promotional video for our program, highlighting women we worked with in Kentucky as well as California:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRth2XXxkV4>

Hearst Foundation funding also supported us in creating a virtual farm tour with recorded interviews with North Carolina women partners and farmers:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YeaHv9M19k>

Kertis Creative and Steady Rein Productions helped us create amazing Stories from the Field videos of women participants:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6kH004Kij1Jir4NUTWJr0UCwVgKVDaJv>

To learn more about the Women for the Land Initiative, visit www.farmland.org/women, contact Gabrielle Roesch-McNally at groeschmcnally@farmland.org.



Photo Credits: Cover photo courtesy of Elora Overby during the KY Field Day in 2021. All other photos are courtesy of Kertis Creative, collected at a Women for the Land Field Day hosted at Foxhollow Farm, KY.