



BLACK FARMER GROUNDINGS SYMPOSIUM:

Fellowship, networking, and adaptation

FEBRUARY 26, 2026



SUMMARY

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Introduction

Black farmers, like others across the globe, are navigating climate shifts (increased and new pests, heat, drought, water scarcity, floods, and changing seasons). In Canada, there is a disproportionate ability to grapple with climate change based on the identity group of the farmer given that climate adaptation overlays longstanding and systemic inequality which keeps them deprived of critical resources including money, access to farm resources, and a seat at policy tables.

Black farmers must still find ways to safeguard and ensure their livelihoods. The Black Farmer Groundings Symposium was a space requested by and delivered for Black farmers to come together to share, learn, network, and celebrate.

This symposium stemmed from work done by Dr. Marsha Myrie as part of Dr. Andria Jones's case study of climate mental health research among equity-deserving farmers in Canada. This work is part of the Interdisciplinary Mental Health Perspectives on Adapting to Climate Threats (IMPACT) project led by Dr. Sherilee Harper at the University of Alberta and funded through the New Frontiers in Research Fund (NFRF).

The Black Farmer Groundings Symposium created a rare and deeply valued space curated by and for Black farmers, food workers, and community researchers. Across five sessions, participants explored Black food and land sovereignty as lived practice—rooted in ancestry, healing, land, and collective power—rather than as a theoretical or emerging concept.

The symposium foregrounded care, cultural grounding, and community comfort, affirming that “Black comfort is bound up in Black food.” Participants repeatedly emphasized that such spaces are not ancillary to food systems work; they are foundational.

What emerged was a shared understanding that Black food sovereignty is not something to be built anew, but something to be remembered, reclaimed, and structurally supported.



BLACK FARMER GROUNDINGS SYMPOSIUM

BLACK FOOD and LAND SOVEREIGNTY in CANADA

TOWARD

EQUITABLE, SUSTAINABLE, and JUST FOOD SYSTEMS



RACISM

DISPOSSESSION

TRAUMA

REPARATIVE JUSTICE

EXPLOITATION

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN POLICIES

INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

SOIL HEALTH and BIODIVERSITY

RECOGNIZE EXISTING RESILIENCE MODELS

CLIMATE

DEEPLY LINKED, DEEPLY LIVED

COMMUNITY

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

LAND JUSTICE

WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FOOD SOVEREIGN

BLACK FOOD SOVEREIGNTY STARTS from the BEGINNING

ELDER ANAN LOLOLI and PEACHTREE

Visual summary of major themes that arose during the discussions at Black Farmer Groundings Symposium, February 26, 2026, University of Guelph. Synthesized and illustrated by Alex Sawatzky, PhD, Creative Lead at the Arrell Food Institute.

BLACK FARMER GROUNDINGS SYMPOSIUM

CONVERSATIONS, RESEARCH, and CAPACITY-BUILDING

AGRICULTURE is ABOUT the PEOPLE

LEADERSHIP REMAINS LARGELY WHITE...



...MAKING SPACE for THESE CONVERSATIONS is ESSENTIAL

PEOPLE in POWER MUST LISTEN to WHAT COMMUNITIES SAY THEY NEED

PRIORITIZE BLACK-LED SPACES, FELLOWSHIP, and JOY

CONVERSATIONS WITH AGRICULTURAL STAKEHOLDERS

HELP EACH OTHER

CONNECT EACH OTHER

RE-ALLOCATE RESOURCES and FINANCES to LAND

WE LIVE in an EVOLVING SYSTEM DO NOT NIGHT BY NIGHT

LAND = IDENTITY, POWER, BELONGING

SOLID ACTIONABLE COMMUNICATION DO NOT SEPARATE BLACK LAND and FOOD WORKERS from FOOD SYSTEMS

EXISTING SUPPORTS are LIMITED

USE the SYSTEM to our BENEFIT BUT

WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN INVOLVED in AGRICULTURE

OUR FOOD = OUR CULTURE

SYSTEMIC ANTI-BLACK RACISM PERSISTS and is PERSISTENT MAKE SAFE SPACES for BLACK FOOD

CAPACITY BUILDING in the BLACK FARMING COMMUNITY

ELDER JACQUELINE DWYER and TOYIN KAYO-AJAYI

Visual summary of major themes that arose during the discussions at Black Farmer Groundings Symposium, February 26, 2026, University of Guelph. Synthesized and illustrated by Alex Sawatzky, PhD, Creative Lead at the Arrell Food Institute.

Key reflections and themes

SOVEREIGNTY IS BOTH MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL

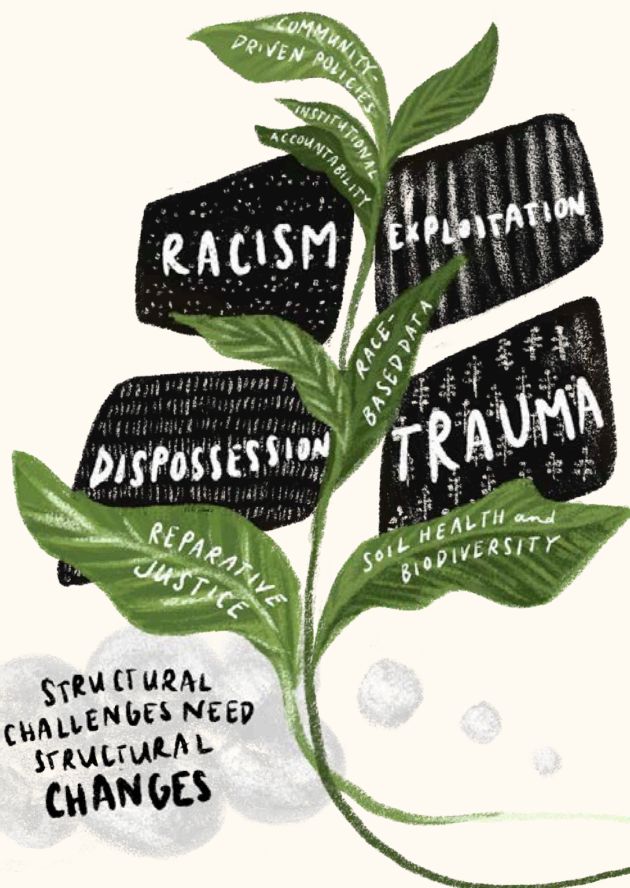
Across the symposium, sovereignty was articulated as inseparable from land, agency, lineage, wellbeing, and continuity. As Elder Anan Lololi reminded participants, “We have always been food sovereign.”

Speakers emphasized that farming predates enslavement by thousands of years. Before Africans were kidnapped and forced into free agricultural labour, they were farmers and had extensive agricultural knowledge. Black people have always been involved in agriculture—before colonization, during enforced slavery and after.

Land is not just access. Land is belonging, continuity, and return. Reclaiming land is both a material and spiritual act.



STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES REQUIRE STRUCTURAL CHANGES



Participants were unequivocal: the barriers facing Black farmers are structural, not individual. These include land dispossession, lack of access to capital, extractive research practices, underrepresentation in policy and funding decisions, and the ongoing erasure of Black agrarian histories.

Speakers stressed that solutions must match the scale of harm. Calls for reparative justice—particularly land redistribution—were consistent throughout the sessions. Elder Anan Lololi highlighted the urgent need for race-based agricultural data, noting that while Canada’s agricultural sector generates billions annually, Black farmers remain largely invisible in policy and funding systems. Without data, inequities remain obscured and unaddressed.

BLACK FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IS ANCESTRAL

A major corrective throughout the symposium was the insistence that Black food sovereignty is not a future aspiration, but an ancestral inheritance. Participants spoke of seed-keeping traditions, herbal medicine, communal farming models, and land stewardship cosmologies carried from Africa and the Caribbean into present-day practices.

Carlton Adamson, drawing on farming traditions from Jamaica, spoke of returning to agriculture in Canada to secure unprocessed, nourishing food for his family and community. “Put your hands in the soil,” he urged, “you will never regret it.” This sentiment echoed across sessions: Black communities are not learning food sovereignty—they are remembering it.



HEALING IS CENTRAL TO BLACK FOOD WORK

The symposium deliberately blurred the boundary between agriculture and healing. Farming was described as a site of recovery—from trauma, displacement, grief, and intergenerational harm. Chris Prince, a seventh-generation farmer in Ontario, reflected that “sometimes the things you plant you don’t get to harvest,” invoking ancestral stewardship and long-view responsibility.

Healing also took the form of reconnecting with traditional plants, remedies, and practices, as well as building care infrastructure alongside farm infrastructure. Participants emphasized that wellbeing, mental health supports, and community care are essential components of sustainable food systems—not optional add-ons.



RECOGNIZE
EXISTING
RESILIENCE MODELS



COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE IS EXPERTISE

Throughout the symposium, community knowledge emerged as a primary form of expertise. Participants highlighted multigenerational farming histories, beekeeping, regenerative practices, herbalism, and community-led economic strategies—such as developing independent revenue streams to avoid grant dependency.

This emphasis extended into discussions of research ethics. Speakers underscored that skepticism toward researchers is justified, given long histories of extractive practices. Participants insisted that research must be conducted with communities, not on them, guided by OCAP principles—Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession. Communities must define the terms of engagement.

RACISM IN AGRICULTURE PERSISTS, AND IS PERVASIVE

A recurring and explicit theme was that systemic anti-Black racism continues to shape every part of the food system—from land access and financing to leadership demographics and research relationships. Participants stressed the importance of naming racism directly, rather than relying on euphemisms that obscure present-day harm.

Leadership across agricultural institutions remains predominantly white. True allyship, speakers argued, requires listening, supporting, connecting, and being willing to sit in discomfort—while creating real safety and space for Black farmers.



CLIMATE CHANGE IS RESHAPING BLACK FARMING FUTURES

Climate change was described as both a threat and a driver of adaptation. Farmers spoke of shifting crop viability—such as the emergence of okra and cotton in Ontario—alongside rising food costs and increased precarity for youth. Black farmers are already adapting to these changes, often without targeted support, drawing on deep ecological knowledge and diversified skill sets.



THE POWER OF BLACK-LED SPACE, FELLOWSHIP, AND JOY

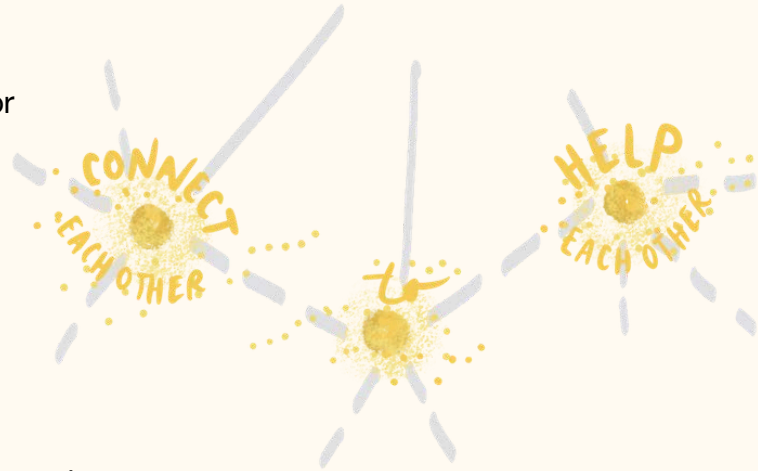
Finally, the symposium itself stood as a powerful intervention. Participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of Black-led spaces that are not shaped by institutional agendas. This gathering offered affirmation, comfort, and cultural rootedness—conditions that enabled honest dialogue, collective strength, and joy.

In this sense, the symposium was not only a forum for discussion, but an enactment of Black food sovereignty itself: grounded, relational, future-facing, and rooted in care.

PRIORITIZE
BLACK-LED
SPACES, FELLOWSHIP,
and JOY

Resources

Most agricultural supports are designed for farmers who are already established. As Nicole Sinclair shared, many Black farmers begin “in the hole,” facing prohibitive infrastructure costs such as water access before a single seed is planted. Programs may support growth—but offer little help getting started.



However, supports do exist, and it’s important that we continue to connect each other to help each other.

OFA — BEGINNER FARMER FINANCING PATHWAYS

- [Advanced Payment Program](#)
- [Agricultural Credit Corporation](#)
- [Farm Credit Canada](#)
- [Ontario Soil and Crop Association](#)
- [AG Pal](#)
- [Rural Ontario Development Program](#)
- Farmland tax factsheet: [Piecing Together the Farmland Tax Puzzle](#) (OFA may be able to provide additional support navigating the Farm Business Registration process).

BLACK FARMER MENTAL HEALTH

- The [Farmer Wellness Initiative](#) provides unlimited, confidential counselling free of charge. Folks can request to work with a Black therapist specifically.

Acknowledgments

Organizers

The Black Farmer Groundings Symposium was co-organized by Dr. Marsha Myrie and Dr. Andria Jones at the University of Guelph. It stemmed from work done by Dr. Myrie as part of Dr. Jones's case study of climate mental health research among equity-deserving farmers in Canada.

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