

Community Garden Exchange

An e-digest hosted by Cultivate Abundance to inform and inspire community gardeners

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2.25 Tons Divided by 51 Pounds

Rick Burnette, Editor



"At its best, without the need to continually aggrandize to maintain margins, a neighborhood garden can supplement local nutrition without compromising human dignity and health. While in some cases a community garden may expand to meet local needs, it is generally understood that bigger is not necessarily better."

Earlier in the year I had a pleasant morning devoted to harvesting produce. From my own carambola tree, a little over 40 lbs. of starfruit was picked to be shared with farmworker families at Misión Peniel (a ministry of the Peace River Presbytery of Southwest Florida) in Immokalee, Florida. A couple of hours later, I harvested another 11 lbs. of assorted vegetables from the new Misión Peniel Garden; mainly fresh greens such as mustard, cilantro, and lettuce, along with some eggplant and peppers. I felt pretty good knowing that the day's harvest of 51 lbs. of fresh nutritious produce would be distributed, along with other food, to farmworker families from Guatemala, Haiti, and Mexico.

But then again, I have a knack for completely shredding my own positivity. And that happened when I thought about how many tomatoes one farmworker in Immokalee needs to harvest in order to earn the minimum wage during a 10-hour day. The latest figure, provided by the [Coalition of Immokalee Workers](#), is 2.25 tons. That's right – 4,500 lbs. of tomatoes harvested by one worker each day. Fifty-one lbs. being my day's accomplishment, compared to the 4,500 lbs. being picked by one of the guys in the trailer next to the garden. If I got up every morning and collected 51 lbs. of fresh produce, it would take 88 days to match what he's doing daily.

Does 51 lbs. of fresh produce even matter in a nutrition-insecure farming community of approximately 20,000? With the produce I picked that day, the daughter of the two-ton-per-day guy might get one or two of those starfruit at Misión Peniel, and his wife could possibly receive a half pound bag of fresh mustard greens. By now I'm wondering why I'm even bothering to pull up nutsedge at the edge of the garden. Before completely spiraling out, some perspective begins to seep back in as I consider why I'm tending this four-month old garden in the middle of Immokalee, Florida.

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Book Review

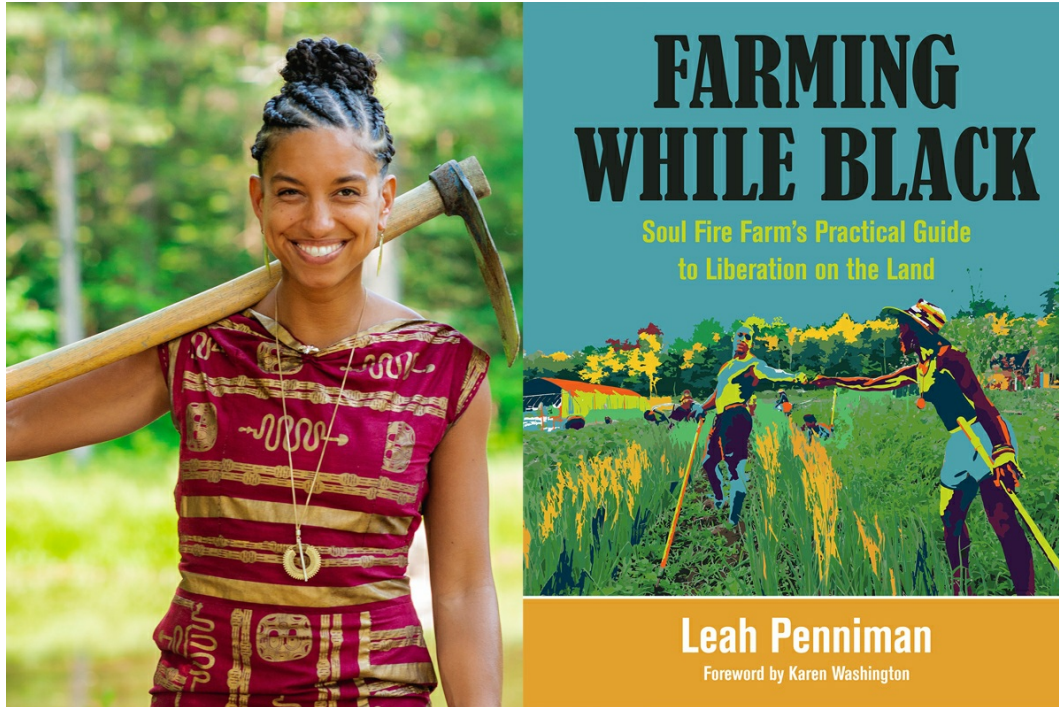


Photo Source: [Civil Eats](#)

Title: Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land

Author: Leah Penniman

Publisher: Chelsea Green Publishing

ISBN: 9781603587617

Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land

A Review By Rebecca Garofano

In the winter, on a beautiful clear day in January, when the snow was several inches deep and after having just made my first attempt to cross country ski, a good friend gifted me Leah Penniman's *Farming While Black* book. She had just listened to Leah speak at the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York's annual conference and was still mulling over some of the things that Leah had shared. I was elated, partly because I had also recently come across the work of Leah and the good people of "[Soul Fire Farm](#)" while perusing the internet. Soul Fire Farm immediately caught my attention for its integrity and unique work, and for the fact that the farm is located just three hours east of my hometown of Syracuse, New York. I had wanted to learn more about what Soul Fire Farm was about, and this book allowed me to sit with Leah and her story during the following winter months, waiting for spring.

Let me begin this reflection by clarifying that this book was not written for me, nor for the

rest of the well-intended white folks who care deeply about the land we cultivate, the neighbors we live next to, and/or about issues such as food apartheid (as Leah aptly describes what is commonly called “food deserts”, citing the fact that they reflect human-created segregation). Rather, Leah has written this book as a love letter and guidebook for “BIPOC” (black, indigenous, and people of color). As an ally and an individual learning about racism and reconciliation, including the uncomfortable ways that I have benefited from inequality, I found this book to be incredibly educational and important.

Farming While Black is a manual of sorts, with sections outlining practical tips for starting and maintaining an agricultural project. An outline of the chapter titles, in order to give a brief overview of the technical topics the book seeks to include, are as follows: “Finding Land and Resources,” “Planning Your Farm Business,” “Honoring the Spirits of the Land,” “Restoring Degraded Land,” “Feeding the Soil,” “Crop Planning,” “Tools and Technology,” “Seed Keeping,” “Raising Animals,” “Urban Farming,” “Cooking and Preserving,” “Youth on Land,” “Healing from Trauma,” “Movement Building,” and “White People Uprooting Racism.” Topics vary broadly, but with each section Leah is careful to weave in lessons from her family’s personal experience in starting a small farm resource center, extensive lists of helpful resources, and several small case studies. The book is scattered with “Uplift” notes that highlight BIPOC work, leadership, and success. It’s evident that her heart and passion are in youth grassroots leadership, justice, and the endless process of working together to bring about effective and needed change. It’s humbling to witness these stories.

This book makes evident the ways in which the contribution and leadership of BIPOC people in our agricultural heritage has been washed over and erased; a common practice in dominant historical narratives (“whitewashing” might be the term to describe the phenomena). While reading I reflected on how often I have found myself, in diverse settings, promoting agricultural practices, the history of which I have little understanding. Leah lovingly outlines the leadership of BIPOC farmers and their contribution to the agricultural legacy of this country and around the world.

Conversely, she sharply presents the ways in which BIPOC have been alienated and marginalized in the American food system. The statistics are staggering. Currently, only 1% of farms in the United States are black-owned, in comparison to the peak of 14% in 1910. This shift was forced in no small part by intimidation and violence, and this book provides incredible accounts of resilience in the face of such discrimination. Referring to *Yes! Magazine*, Leah mentions that if the United States had sufficiently followed through on its promise of forty acres and a mule following the Civil War to compensate individuals for unpaid labor during slavery, an estimated \$6.4 trillion would be in the hands of Black Americans today. If only for challenging one’s assumption of ownership and introduce concepts around structural racism in agriculture, this book is important. If you are interested in the topic of land dispossession in particular, I would also encourage you to read *The Atlantic’s* September 2019 article “[The Great Land Robbery](#),” which provides an in-depth account from the Mississippi Delta region as a way by which to understand the national marginalization of black farmers over the last century.

While reading this book I was stretched and encouraged. It’s so evident that Leah practices what she preaches, and that alone inspires me to hold myself to a new standard. Alongside several other important projects that Soul Fire Farm has initiated and offered to community members in Upstate New York and around the country, they have also been a part of a national network of individuals organizing [reparations and resources](#) for emerging BIPOC farm leaders. The book discusses this effort in greater detail.

This book provided me with an excellent framework by which to reconsider my own assumptions and conclusions that I carry with me as I participate in food system work. These are lessons far from finished in my own life. I’d highly recommend this book to anyone interested in listening and who may be ready to feel uncomfortable. Should you have the chance to read it please feel free to contact me at rebecca.garofano@gmail.com. I’d love to hear from you.

Rebecca Garofano is a graduate student in Nutrition Science at Syracuse University. She is interested in the ways that communities are resilient and address agriculture and nutritional needs, particularly in the context of change. Rebecca serves as Co-Editor and Chief Reviewer of Community Garden Exchange.



Backyard Gardening in Tanzania: a river begins with a drop of water

By Robert Morikawa

Farmers in northern Tanzania have very little land, usually less than three acres. It is becoming more and more difficult for a farmer to produce enough on that small space for his or her family to survive. Farmers in this area — the Kilimanjaro Region — are turning to some innovative approaches, both agricultural and social, that are moving communities from survival to abundance. Families are getting together and pooling their resources in self-run savings groups. These groups are not only about saving money — they are a place where farmers can share and learn about different ways to tackle their food production challenges.

This has resulted in thousands of farmers using innovative backyard gardening practices that allow them to produce large amounts of vegetables in very small spaces. The gardening techniques used are working for farmers from diverse ethnic backgrounds, ecological, and economic conditions. Farmers are learning and applying the principles of bio-intensive agriculture which includes eight key components:

- Double digging
- Use of compost
- Close spacing
- Crop association
- Use of open-pollinated seed
- Carbon farming
- Calorie farming
- Whole system farming

There are many resources available for those interested in learning more about the bio-intensive approach. A good starting place is the [Grow Biointensive website](#), specifically their [Farmer's Mini Handbook](#).

One farmer, Madonna, shown in the video at the link below, has produced enough vegetables not only to feed her family, but to raise enough money to send her daughter to school in Europe. Madonna is a member of a savings group, and many of these groups have worked together not only to solve their problems at home but also in their community, such as the environmental degradation they see going on around them. Community groups plant trees in a part of their watershed that they have identified as degraded. Not just these community groups, but many schools and churches have started vegetable gardens and tree nurseries.

It begins with farmers in a small group thinking about their challenges; it becomes a river of people eating healthier food, earning more income, and changing their watershed.

Bob Morikawa is technical director for Plant With Purpose (plantwithpurpose.org). Plant With Purpose works with small holder farmers around the world empowering them to solve their environmental and economic challenges.



Community tree planting in Tanzania



Farmer in his garden in Tanzania



Thousands of farmers march as part of the annual celebration of village savings groups.



This Swahili language video, featuring Madonna, is from the January 2019 celebration of over 10,000 farmers who have joined savings groups.

Tell Us Your Secrets - An Interview with Josh Jamison



CGE: Tell us where you're from and a little about your background

Josh: My name is Josh Jamison. I am originally from Northeast Ohio and have spent the last nine years in Florida. I originally came to Florida to train at the h.e.a.r.t Village with a deep, but directionless passion for fighting global poverty. It was through this training that I connected the dots between sustainable agriculture and malnutrition and started to find my path forward. I had no clue at that time that I would go on to take the garden manager position at the h.e.a.r.t Village in 2013 and would be working full time in agriculture.

CGE: Tell us about your work and the garden effort.

Josh: The [h.e.a.r.t \(Hunger Education and Resources Training\) Village](#) is a training center in Lake Wales, Florida for those who wish to serve in the developing world in the field of Christian community development. A primary focus of our organization is sustainable agriculture. Our demonstration gardens are roughly 2-3 acres and contain a large diversity of food crops and other useful plants that are appropriate to the tropics. We have a special focus on plants with dense nutritional profiles and those that are easy to cultivate in warm climates. Students who are training at h.e.a.r.t work in the gardens for several hours a day and the bulk of the food we grow ends up in our daily community meals on campus. Our goal is to grow as much as possible of our diet so students learn the essentials of tropical farming and live in an abundant community where they can capture a vision for a world without malnutrition. An increasing focus of my work has become networking with the local Florida community. H.e.a.r.t has become a small repository of unique food crops for which there is a growing demand for, as many people throughout the state become more sustainability minded. We host workshops and other events for the community and have a plant nursery that is open to the public. My hope is that people can walk through the garden gate and be filled with a deep sense that we need not succumb to despair; there is great hope for a better world if we allow ourselves to be compelled to action.

CGE: What are the most indispensable things or techniques in your garden?

Josh: The largest tool in my tool belt is crop diversity. I grow so many types of crops that I stopped counting a long time ago. By embracing diversity, we can have food for the table every day of the year in the tropics and subtropics. There is an overwhelming amount of fruits, edible leaves, tubers and beyond that can meet our nutritional needs. A high level of diversity ensures that no matter what the conditions are, something will be yielding. This strategy allows us to harvest many different types of food every day of the year.

Food for Thought:

A selection of current articles for community gardeners

[The Rise of Community Food Forests](#)

Sustainable America (August 29, 2018): Food forests are described as highly integrated communities of plant species that have various vertical and horizontal plant and root layers that provide edible products. By emphasizing "community," forests become social spaces through physical, cultural, environmental, and emotional connections. The first known community food forest in the U.S. was established in Asheville, North Carolina in 1997. By 2018, more than 70 were growing across the country on a variety of places including churches, universities, and intentional communities. This brief on the current state of America's Community Food Forests was adapted from [The Community Food Forest](#)

[Parishioner turns Missouri church's unused lot into an apple orchard in twist on garden ministries](#)

Episcopal News Service (May 22, 2019): With church-based agriculture in mind, Dale Penrose planted fifteen apple trees of fourteen varieties in 2016, all on an unused plot of land on the property of Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Webster Groves, Missouri. Despite losses to deer and lawnmowers, by the spring of 2019, the orchard was well established. The congregation is supportive of the orchard, seeing an opportunity to beautify their corner of the city, provide produce for the church food pantry, teach lessons in environmental stewardship, and simply “enjoy one of God’s tastiest creations.”

[Food after oil: How urban farmers are preparing us for a self-sufficient future](#)

The Guardian (August 18, 2019): The city of Bristol, United Kingdom encompasses various urban agriculture initiatives and alliances. This list of projects include smallholders, the city government, farmer/grower associations, a local chapter of the “Incredible Edibles,” a guerrilla gardening group that has supported 90 local gardens, and an organization called Street Goat, which enables communities to work together to run a small herd of milking goats, even hiring animals out to those needing their land grazed. This thriving local food movement sparks questions about the quantity of food that Bristol’s farmers can produce. Considering space limitations, while complete food self-sufficiency isn’t practical, self-sufficiency in certain crops (e.g., salad greens) is within the realm of possibility.

[No, Vertical Farms Won’t Feed the World](#)

Medium (August 1, 2018): Tech company-designed vertical farms utilize artificial lights, heaters, water pumps, and computer controls to grow crops indoors. Trays of plants are efficiently stacked to maximize space. However, these operations have drawbacks such as the expense of constructing growing facilities and the cost of production. Large inputs of energy and materials are required to operate these farms, and they are mainly limited to growing garnishes and greens. The author suggests that rather than focusing on vertical farms, more attention is needed to improve a wider range of food-production technologies and approaches, including drip irrigation, grazing systems, and on-farm nutrient recycling, as well reducing food waste and promoting more sustainable diets.

[Does eating ultraprocessed food affect weight gain? It’s complicated.](#)

ScienceNews (May 16, 2019): Whereas whole foods are those in their original state or are minimally changed, ultraprocessed foods, including packaged snacks, premade, canned or frozen dishes and soft drinks, often contain various additives. Flavors and colors are added to enhance their palatability with ingredients processed from industrial farming staples such as corn, soy, and wheat. Previous research has suggested that consuming ultraprocessed foods raises the risk of cancer or obesity. Although exact reasons aren’t clear, higher levels of salt, carbohydrates, sugar, and fat have been suspected. More recent research (Hall et al.) found that when participants were on ultraprocessed diets, they ate about 500 kilocalories more per day than when they consumed whole foods, gaining on average a kilogram (roughly two pounds) over the course of a two-week experimental trial. Although there may other confounding factors related ultraprocessed foods (aside from added sugar or fat) that lead to overeating, the study did not find a conclusive answer for the cause of some to overeat. Even so, the growth of the industrialized food system parallels the rise of obesity and related health problems in the United States, with ultraprocessed foods being the majority of calories consumed.

Something to share?

We are certain that many of you have tips, lessons, and cautionary tales that would benefit other community gardeners. If you have something to contribute, please follow this link for [submission guidelines](#).

We look forward to hearing from you!

Community Garden Exchange

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The mission of Community Garden Exchange is to facilitate a network of community gardeners engaged in sharing information and inspiration for the benefit of our community-based stakeholders.

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