



ROOTED RESISTANCE

A Black Food
&
Land Toolkit



PURPOSE & OVERVIEW



This toolkit explores the connection between Black land ownership, food systems, and community development in Selma and across Alabama's Black Belt. Through both historical context and present day efforts, it examines how access to land has shaped economic opportunity, food security, and community well being for generations.



Its purpose is to inform, educate, and raise awareness about the challenges that have contributed to land loss while also highlighting the individuals, organizations, and community-led solutions working to create positive change. By connecting the past to the present, this toolkit encourages a deeper understanding of how land, food, and community remain closely linked and why these issues continue to matter today.



WHAT READERS WILL LEARN:

- The history of Black land ownership and loss in the Black Belt
- How food connects to culture, survival, and community
- The impact of environmental injustice on Black communities
- How local organizing and agriculture create change
- The importance of preserving knowledge, land, and tradition
- Ways communities are building a healthier and more sustainable future



WHY LAND MATTERS

Land has always meant survival, freedom, and power in Selma, Dallas County, and throughout Alabama's Black Belt region. After emancipation, formerly enslaved Black families sought land to build stable lives, support their families, and create opportunities for future generations. However, the promised redistribution of land never happened. Instead, many Black families were forced into sharecropping arrangements that kept them economically dependent. Over time, discriminatory lending practices, unequal access to agricultural programs, heirs' property issues, and tax sales made it increasingly difficult for Black landowners to keep their land.

As a result, Black land ownership across the region steadily declined. The loss of land had consequences far beyond property ownership. As families lost land, they also lost opportunities to build wealth, grow food, and make decisions about their own economic futures. Although the Black Belt's fertile soil helped generate agricultural wealth for the region, much of that wealth did not remain in Black communities. These patterns contributed to many of the economic and food access challenges that continue today. Land matters because it influences who has security, opportunity, and a voice in shaping their community.

**"Revolution is based on land. Land is the basis of all independence.
Land is the basis of freedom, justice, and equality."**

-Malcolm X



A HISTORY OF ORGANIZING

In Selma and across the Black Belt, Black communities didn't wait for fair systems, they built their own. Even with limited land, families grew food, shared resources, and supported one another. Food wasn't just survival. It was strategy, protection, and power.

Community was the system.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ORGANIZING?

Community organizing is when people work together to solve shared problems and create solutions using local knowledge, relationships, and resources.

Throughout Black history, organizing has helped communities respond to food insecurity, economic hardship, discrimination, and lack of access to services.

HOW COMMUNITIES BUILT AND SHARED



FAMILIES & NEIGHBORS

Families planted gardens in yards and on vacant lots to feed households and share with others. These gardens helped provide fresh food when stores were too expensive or too far away.



BLACK CHURCHES

Churches were more than places of worship. They hosted food drives, organized mutual aid efforts, provided childcare, and served as trusted gathering places during times of need.



NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS

Neighbors shared rides, tools, skills, food, and labor. These informal support systems often filled gaps left by public institutions.

FOOD IS POLITICAL

Food access in Selma did not develop by chance. Policies, lending practices, land ownership patterns, and government decisions helped shape who had access to land, grocery stores, and economic opportunity.

KEY TERMS & WHAT THEY MEAN

REDLINING:



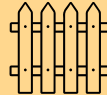
A policy that labeled many Black neighborhoods as risky for investment, making it harder for residents to get loans, buy homes, and attract businesses.

DISCRIMINATORY FARM LENDING:



The unfair treatment of farmers when applying for loans or farm assistance. Many Black farmers received fewer resources or faced delays and denials.

LAND LOSS & BLACK-OWNED FARMLAND:



The loss of land owned by Black families and farmers due to discrimination, legal challenges, and limited access to financial support.

USDA & BLACK FARMERS

Many Black farmers argued that local USDA offices treated them unfairly by delaying or denying loans and assistance.

These concerns eventually led to the landmark *Pigford v. Glickman* settlement in 1999, which addressed claims of racial discrimination in USDA lending programs.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

HISTORICAL POLICY	WHAT HAPPENED	COMMUNITY IMPACT
REDLINING	Investment avoided Black Neighborhoods	Fewer grocery stores and business opprotunities
DISCRIMINATORY LENDING	Farmers received fewer resources	Increased land loss
UNEQUAL SUPPORT	Farms struggled to survive	Reduced local food production

RECLAIMING THE LAND

The systems that created land loss and limited access to food were designed, but they can be changed. Reclaiming land is about restoring our right to grow food, build wealth, and determine our own future.



WHY LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION MATTERS

Communities that grow and control more of their own food often experience:

- Greater food access
- Stronger local economies
- More community ownership
- Increased resilience during emergencies
- Stronger relationships among neighbors

WHAT IS HEIRS' PROPERTY?

Heirs' property occurs when land is passed from generation to generation without a legally clear transfer of ownership. Multiple family members may inherit interests in the same property. This can create legal complications that make families vulnerable to losing land through court-ordered sales or development pressure.

WHAT DOES RECLAIMING LAND MEAN?

Reclaiming land does not always mean buying large farms. It can mean restoring vacant lots, creating community gardens, supporting local farmers, preserving family-owned property, protecting inherited land, and investing in neighborhood food systems.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

LEARN

- Research your community's land ownership history
- Learn about local food systems
- Explore the history of Black land ownership

SUPPORT

- Buy from Black-owned farms
- Volunteer with community gardens
- Advocate for equitable food policies

PRESERVE

- Talk with family about land ownership
- Create a will
- Learn about heirs' property protections

GROW

- Start a garden
- Grow herbs in containers
- Join a community garden
- Share food-growing skills with others

FOOD IS OUR POWER

Food is more than something we eat. It connects us to culture, family, and survival. Food is tradition passed down, meals shared with family, and a connection to home!



FOOD, LAND, & SURVIVAL

In Selma and across the Black Belt, food has always been tied to land and survival. For generations, Black families farmed the land and sustained local communities, even while facing systems that limited ownership and access.

Even with disinvestment over time, people have continued to grow, share, and preserve food traditions through gardens, farms, and everyday knowledge. Food is more than sustenance, it carries culture, memory, and strength.



THINK ABOUT IT



What meals
feel like home
to you?



Who taught
you how to
cook?



Where does
your food
come from?

DID YOU KNOW?

Many crops common in Southern cooking, including okra, black-eyed peas, sweet potatoes, and collard greens, were grown in Black communities long before they were widely available in stores.

ROOTED RECIPES

SOUTHERN GARDEN SALAD BOWL



INGREDIENTS

SALAD-

4 cups chopped romaine or leaf lettuce
1 large tomato, chopped
1 cucumber, sliced
½ cup corn kernels
¼ red onion, sliced thin
½ cup cooked black-eyed peas
1 boiled egg, sliced
¼ cup shredded cheddar cheese(optional)

CORNBREAD CROUTONS-

1 slice cornbread, cubed
1 tsp olive oil
Pinch of paprika and garlic powder

DRESSING-

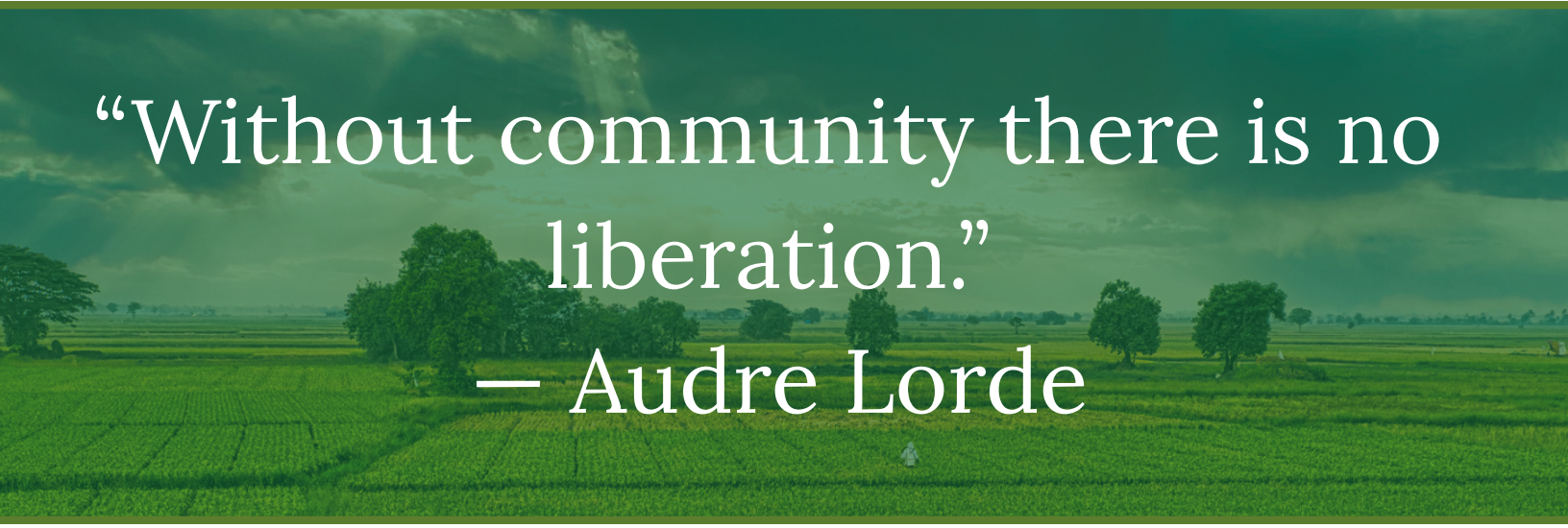
2 tbsp olive oil
1 tbsp apple cider vinegar
1 tsp honey
Salt and pepper to taste



DIRECTIONS

1. Add greens to a bowl.
2. Top with veggies, peas, and egg.
3. Toast cornbread cubes until crisp.
4. Drizzle dressing and serve.

LOOKING AHEAD



“Without community there is no liberation.”
— Audre Lorde

REFLECTION

The history of Black land ownership, food systems, and community organizing shows how people have worked together to overcome barriers and create opportunities. Learning this history is an important step toward building stronger and more equitable food systems. Awareness creates understanding, and understanding can inspire action.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Real change begins with everyday actions. You can make a difference by supporting local farmers, shopping at farmers markets, growing your own food, volunteering in community gardens, learning about your family's land history, and sharing what you've learned with others. Every small action helps strengthen your community.

TAKE ROOT

The choices you make today can help shape the future of your community. Plant something, support someone, and leave the land better than you found it.

THANKS FOR READING



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Learn more about our mission, programs, and
community by scanning the QR code
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