**Groundswell Center for Local Food and Farming**

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**Timeline of Agricultural Injustice in the U.S.**

**1619: Beginning of the Slave Trade in the U.S.**

African slaves were first brought to Jamestown, Virginia in 1619 after being captured from a Spanish slave ship by Dutch traders. In the 17th and 18th centuries, black slaves worked mainly on the tobacco, rice and indigo plantations of the southern coast. Close to half a million African people were enslaved in the U.S. between 1619 and 1865.

**1779: The Clinton-Sullivan Campaign**

The Clinton Sullivan Expedition was a military campaign during the Revolutionary War which had the goal of defeating the Loyalists and destroying the 6 nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the first peoples of the Finger Lakes region. Over 40 Haudenosaunee villages and almost all of their crops and winter storage food were destroyed by a scorched earth campaign. Many Haudenosaunee people who survived the battles and diseases were forced to flee and were displaced to Canada, Oklahoma and Wisconsin.

**1793: The Invention of the Cotton Gin**

The cotton gin, a machine that quickly separates cotton fibers from their seeds, increased the demand for slave labor and made Southern cotton plantations grow rapidly. Its invention solidified slavery as a cornerstone of the US economy and global economy. Slavery was key to the agricultural wealth of the U.S. as well as the textile production in northern states and Europe that relied on cheap cotton for their growth.

**1823: The Doctrine of Discovery adopted to U.S. law by the Supreme Court**

The Doctrine of Discovery is a law that was created by European monarchies in 1493 in order to legitimize land colonization of non-Christian inhabitants outside of Europe. This law passed in the U.S. in 1823 and stated that upon "discovery" Native peoples had lost "their rights to complete sovereignty, as independent nations," and only retained a right of "occupancy" in their lands.

**1848: Signing of The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo**

The treaty ended the devastating Mexican-American War and added an additional 525,000 square miles to United States territory that had previously been Mexico, including the land that makes up all or parts of present-day Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Utah and Wyoming. This led to the loss of land for thousands of Mexican people who had been operating community farms under the ejido system (communal control of land) and opened up vast opportunities for agricultural and mineral wealth for the U.S.

**1862: The Homestead Act**

The Homestead Actgave away millions of acres for free of what had been Indian Territory west of the Mississippi. Ultimately, 270 million acres, or 10% of the total land area of the United States, was converted to private hands, overwhelmingly white, under Homestead Act provisions.

**1865-1877: Sharecropping in the Reconstruction Era**

After slavery was abolished in 1865, white landowners resisted the attempts of freed blacks to seek economic independence and autonomy. Freed people widely expected to legally claim 40 acres of land and a [mule](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mule) after the end of the civil war, as promised by Union general Sherman. Instead the Sharecropping system dominated agriculture across the South, with Black people renting land on large white-owned farms and plantations in order to earn a living. For Black farmers, this system most often resulted in debt, poverty, and exploitative sharecropping contracts enforced by violence.

**1877: The Dawes Act** The Dawes Act ended Native Peoples’ communal holding of cropland, allowing the President to survey [American Indian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_people_of_the_Americas) tribal land and divide it into allotments for individual Native Americans. This act both divided tribes and their governments and opened Indian lands to development by settlers, railroads, corporations, national parks and the military. By 1932, Native Americans lost more than 100-million acres they held prior to the Dawes Act.

**1913, The California Alien Land Law:**

The California Alien Land Law of 1913 reserved land for white growers and prohibited "aliens ineligible for citizenship" from owning agricultural land or possessing long-term leases over it. It affected [Chinese](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_people), [Indian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_people), [Japanese](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_people), and [Korean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koreans) [immigrant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigrant) [farmers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Farmers) in [California](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California).

**1934, The Creation of the Federal Housing Administration:** The federal government created the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) after the Great Depression in order to promote home ownership, but people of color were largely left out. Between 1930 and 1950 only 2% of FHA loans were made to nonwhite buyers. FHA policies favored suburbs over cities and White neighborhoods over diverse ones, giving low credit ratings to racially diverse neighborhoods which they deemed risky, known as redlining.

White people moved out of cities to the suburbs where there were higher property values and better loan backing. FHA housing manuals explicitly advised homeowners and brokers in the suburbs to avoid letting people of color and rural people into the newly constructed neighborhoods, labeling “pigpens and undesirable races as equally objectionable”. Jobs and industries followed white people from the cities to the suburbs.

This impacted food justice as:

* Governments directed money away from public transit that connected urban dwellers to jobs and grocery stores and invested it in roads and highways in the suburbs.
* Grocers with healthy food options and other retail operations closed in cities as they lost their retail base.
* Local farmland was lost due to sprawling suburban development and post World War II job opportunities. Small farmers were unable to keep up with increasing land prices in suburban areas and forced to move further away from cities to rural areas, losing a reliable urban consumer base.
* Loss of a strong property tax base in urban and rural areas lead to a decline in public school investment and quality school food programs.

**1935, The Passing of the Social Security Act:** This act provided a safety net for millions of workers, guaranteeing them an income after retirement. But the act specifically excluded two occupations: agricultural workers and domestic servants, who were predominately African American, Mexican, and Asian. As low-income workers, they also had the least opportunity to save for their retirement and often were unable to pass wealth onto their children.

**1947: Congress Eliminates Funding of School Cafeteria Equipment:** With this funding cut, school districts could no longer seek federal dollars to improve their facilities. Property taxes fell in cities in the 1950s and 1960s due to white people leaving for the suburbs. Because most schools rely on property taxes for funding, school budgets in cities shrank. The result was that cities with increasingly concentrated low-income communities of color lacked the resources to install adequate kitchens.

**1963: Congress Passes the first Childhood Nutrition Bill**

As part of the bill, schools were only eligible for agricultural and nutritional funding if they had proper kitchen facilities, but city schools with high numbers of students of color could not afford to construct them and therefore received no funding for school food. Poor white rural communities also couldn’t finance school kitchens. The only options for lower-income schools became a “re-heat and eat program” where schools would microwave or heat frozen, processed foods, both out of convenience and to save money.

**1970s: Increase in Number of Latin American Farmworkers in the U.S.**

As Black workers moved to other industries, the 1970s saw a shortage of farm labor and consequently a large increase in farm workers immigrating from Latin America. Today Farmworkers’ average annual income is $11,000; for a family it is approximately $16,000. This makes farm work the second lowest paid job in the nation (after domestic labor). Farmworkers often face labor abuses ranging from pesticide risks to substandard housing to withheld wages.

**1996: Farm Bill is Passed**

The 1996 Farm Bill marked the shift from the federal government subsidizing production and consumption to diminishing price supports and the subsidization of agribusiness itself. The dismantling of such price controls drove prices down and allowed corporate buyers to profit off heavily subsidized commodities while securing their power over producers. Results of the 1996 Farm Bill, including corporate control of the food system, food worker exploitation, decreased land access for small farms, food insecurity and climate change disproportionately affect people of color in the U.S.

**1999: Pigford v. Glickman lawsuit**

*Pigford v. Glickman* (1999) was a victorious [class action](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Class_action) lawsuit against the [United States Department of Agriculture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Department_of_Agriculture) (USDA), alleging [racial discrimination](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racial_discrimination) against [African-American farmers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American_farmers) in its allocation of farm loans and assistance between 1981 and 1996.  In 1996 Less than 20,000 Black Farmers owned 2 million acres of land in the U.S., down from 218,000 Black farmers in 1910 who owned 16 million acres of land. This is twice the rate of white owned farm loss. The Pigford case highlighted that the USDA practiced discrimination by paper-shuffling, delaying loans for black farmers until the end of planting season, approving only a fraction of black farmers' loan requests, and denying crop-disaster payments.

**2011: Food System Workers**

In 2011, almost half of all white men who worked in the food chain were employed as managers. Across the entire food system, three out of every four managers are white. Workers of color populate rank-and-file positions at a higher rate than management positions. 44% of rank-and-file workers are people of color, while only 15% of managers are people of color. Latina women make up less than 5% of all managers in the food chain, while Asians and Blacks are at 3% or less.

**2013: Food Insecurity**

In 2013, 14.3%, or 17.5 million, of households were food insecure at least some time during the year. Food insecurity is strongly associated with race/ ethnicity. In 2013, 10.6% of white households were food insecure, while 26.1% of Black households, 23.7% of Latino/a households, and 23% of Native American households were food insecure.