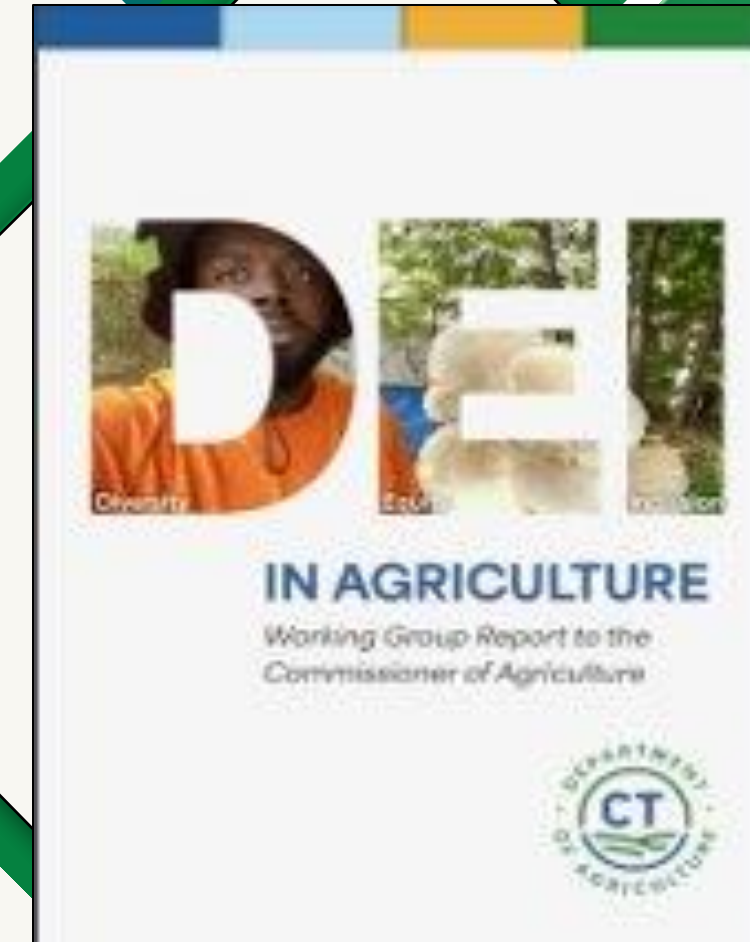


Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in CT Agriculture

2024 Update



www.CTGrown.gov

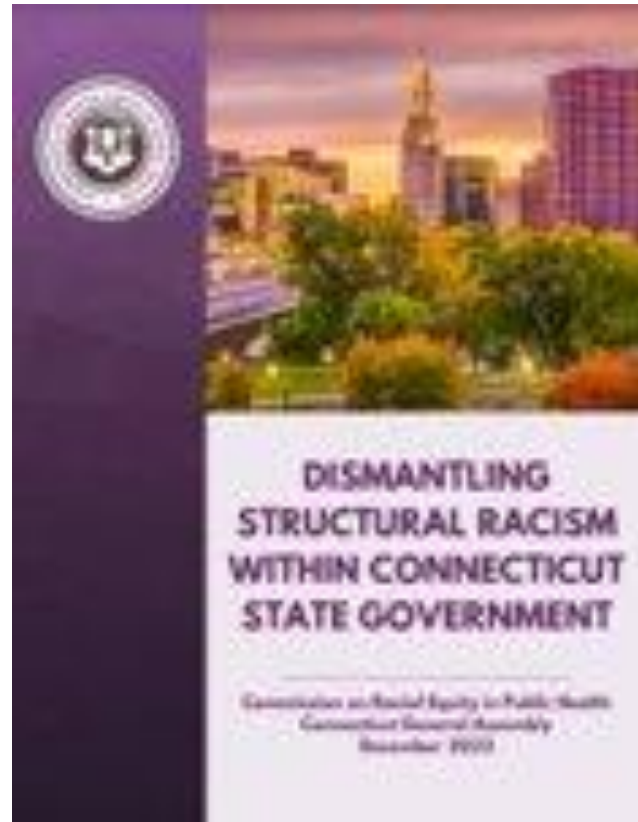


About DoAg's DEI Work

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, there are 134 producers in Connecticut who identify as Black, Indigenous, or a person of color (BIPOC) amounting to 1.4% of all Connecticut producers. Yet, 20% of the state's population identify as people of color (US Census Bureau, 2010). Acknowledging the disparities, the agency embarked on an effort to engage BIPOC producers and seek their feedback on how the agency and industry service providers could reshape their programming and assistance to be more inclusive and intentional in their support of BIPOC farmers.

In June 2023, after a year and a half of meetings amongst 43 individuals and four, topic-specific working groups, 21 high-level recommendations for implementation were put before the agency.





Racial Equity in Public Health Report, 12/2023



CT Equity Study, 1/2024

In July 2024, Governor Lamont issued an executive order to establish an office to promote equity and inclusion within Connecticut state government.

Executive Order 24-2

Governor's Press Release



The reports were released after DoAg and the DEI Working Group had already concluded the process of analyzing how CT Agriculture can better serve BIPOC producers. Thank you for supporting DoAg with being the first.

Agenda

SHORT TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

MEDIUM-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

UPCOMING IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

FEEDBACK & WRAP UP



SHORT TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9 Recommendations
- 1-2 years to complete (by June 2025)
















  **60% Complete & Ongoing**

 **30% In Progress**

 **10% Development**



SHORT TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

-   **1.1** Establish Agency Goals for BIPOC Producer Inclusion and Tracking of Associated Data
-   **1.2** Improve Diversity of Representation on Agency Boards, Councils, Commissions
-  **2.5** Work with stakeholders to organize an annual or biannual conference (virtual or in person) on anti-racist work in Connecticut agriculture.
-    **3.1** Improve Access to Grants
-  **4.3** Commission a report on cooperative land trusts and other models of cooperative ownership/incubators models and how they could function in Connecticut with a focus on urban and suburban areas.
-  **5.1** Improve Community Engagement to Shape Agency Programs
-   **5.2** Solicit public feedback during the development of grant guidance documents and publicly post comments
-  **5.3** Improve Producer Tools & Guides Published by the Agency
-   **6.1** Increase Representation of BIPOC Producers in Consumer-Facing Agency Marketing



1.1 Establish agency goals for BIPOC producer inclusion and tracking of associated data

YEAR	# OF APP'L REC'D	BIPOC APP'L	% APP'L	% AWARDED TO BIPOC
2024	71	10	14%	13%
2023	58	4	6.80%	5%
2022	57	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
2021	65	5	7.7%	10%

Farm Transition Grant Data

Three demographic questions have been incorporated into all agency grants.

- What gender do you identify as?
- What describes your racial/ethnic heritage?
- What historically underserved group do you identify with (if applicable)?



UPCOMING IN 2025: Work to increase the overall percentage of BIPOC producers and BIPOC led organizations who apply and are awarded grants. These goals will be based on the baseline demographic data collected in the 2024 funding cycle and prior years when available.

UPCOMING IN 2025: A separate set of demographic questions are being refined and incorporated into all agency grants and relevant licenses and permits for non-profits, municipalities, and school applicants where the beneficiary of the funds vs the applicant itself is considered.

UPCOMING IN 2025: Building out an area of the agency website to highlight the aggregated data.

1.1.4 Collect qualitative data on programming about perceptions, ability to access, and satisfaction

1) Contracted with Camelo Communications (6/2023) to **hosted four focus groups with 23 producers** comprised of beginning and tenured producers, those farming in both urban and rural areas, BIPOC producers, LGBTQIA+ producers, and Spanish-speaking producers.

[This research](#), along with other data points, informed a producer focused [marketing and communication plan](#) for the agency developed by Camelo Communications.

2) **Integrated feedback questions in the FY 2025 CT Grown for CT Kids Grant application**, the first grant program opened for FY 2025. This served as a test for evaluating whether this was an effective place to integrate request for feedback.

Producers are looking for specific information and resources that will help them manage and grow their farm.

The three areas where producers are most in need of information are:

Practical Resources

Producers are looking for advice on how to:

- Access land
- Buy the best supplies
- Fix equipment

“One of the most difficult things is getting land to cultivate. That is one of the biggest obstacles we as farmers have.”

“Where can I get straw or hay or aged wood chips? Where is the local compost? What’s the best quality compost?”

“I want to know vocational stuff, metalworking.”

Financial Aid

There are many problems with how grants are organized right now, including:

- Complex language and jargon
- Difficulty accessing writing support
- Third-parties disseminating grants

Grants are particularly complex for beginning producers who may not have the infrastructure or insight to handle grant deliverables.

“There are so many grants out there. How do we get them? Who are the grant writers?”

“Direct, no-cost grants for farmers, especially beginning farmers.”

Business Management

Business management advice is especially important for small and beginning producers.

These producers are often learning the business-side of farming on the fly; many desire:

- A guide to the tax system
- Advice on maintain records
- Assistance in hiring employees

“What do I need insurance-wise? I didn’t know how to set up with the state, now I need to go to the federal government?”

“How do you do your taxes? And what information do you need to be tracking?”



UPCOMING IN 2025:

Implement finding from the focus groups into agency programs to improve perceptions, ability to access and satisfaction in addition to incorporating aspects of the marketing plan into the CT Grown RFP and other agency communication.

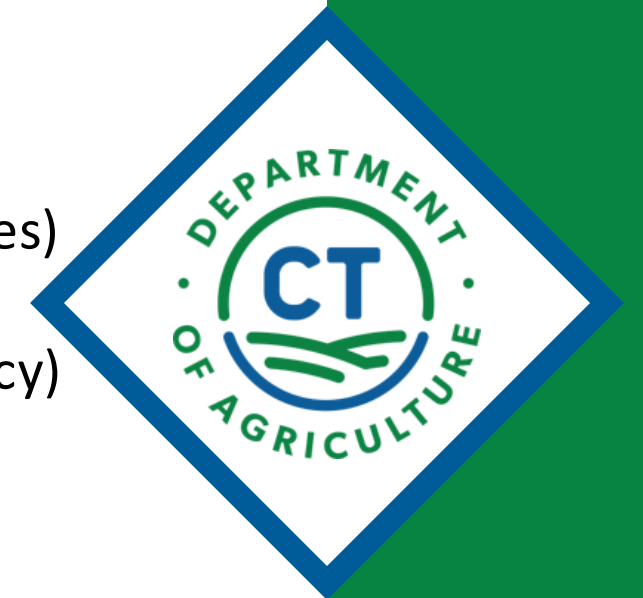
1.2 Improve diversity of representation on agency board, council, commissions

Goal: At least 10% of members appointed to agency boards, councils and commissions identify as BIPOC, or from a protected class.

Outcome: 10% minimum is met on all currently seated agency BCCs

- **CT Food Policy Council:** 11 active members of which there are 2 members of color, 7 women (1 vacancy)
- **Farmland Preservation Advisory Board:** 10 active members of which there is 1 person of color, 3 women (2 vacancies)
- **CT Milk Promotion Board:** 7 active members of which there is 1 woman
- **CT Farm Wine Development Council:** 11 active members of which there are 2 members of color, 4 women (1 vacancy)
- **CT Seafood Advisory Council:** In the process of being appointed
- **Governor's Council for Agricultural Development:** In the process of being appointed

For more information, please visit the [agency's website for information on boards, councils, and commissions administered by DoAg](#).



UPCOMING IN 2025: Establish an application process for people to apply when there is an opening to be passed onto the appointing authority.



2.5 Work with stakeholders to organize an annual or biannual conference on anti-racist work in Connecticut agriculture



Aarvah Quiñonez of The Aasaaska Foundation, photo by Camelo Communications



UPCOMING IN 2025: Pursue federal funds to issue a request for proposal for a statewide, BIPOC-led organization to host the conference in collaboration with the agency to bring together stakeholders for networking and dissemination of resources to interested communities. It will serve to coordinate efforts around the state and obtain feedback on ongoing programs, connect with organizations already doing the work to elevate and support them. There shall be specific sessions regarding youth engagement and BIPOC leadership in agriculture training.



3.1 Improve access to grants

Changed the payment schedule and advance percentages

Changed the percentage of funds advanced to producers under the Farm Transition Grant, Microgrant for new farmers (1-3 years) from 25% to a 50% advance. More established farmers (3+ years) can now request a 25% advance, last year, an advance was not possible. For other DoAg grant programs, all awardees can now receive a 50% advancement.

Improved access to technical assistance

Contracted with three entities to provide one-on-one services, including but not limited to grant coaching, market diversification and development, supply chain coordination, and business and financial planning.

- CT Small Business Development Center (SBDC)
- Carrot Project
- New England Farmers of Color Land Trust (NEFOC).

DoAg is utilizing funds available through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Resilient Food System Infrastructure Grant Program (RFSI). For more information, please visit the [RFSI webpage](#).

Improved language equity

- 1) All DoAg **grant programs have guidance translated to Spanish** and the online application portal is available in several languages.
- 2) For the CTG4CTK grant program, **additional Spanish interpretation and technical assistance** for completing the grant application in Spanish was made available and the agency received two Spanish applications in 2024.





3.1 Improve access to grants (cont.)

Increased available grant opportunities for BIPOC and historically underserved producers in cooperation with industry partners

Climate Smart Agriculture Grant: Sub granted to five (5) entities to design and implement Climate Smart Agriculture grants which included a required priority to projects which support historically underserved farmers, including but not limited to BIPOC producers, veterans, new and beginning farmers, and anyone in a protected class.

Local Food Purchase Agreement Program: Sub granted to eight (8) entities to purchase local farm product (at least 80% CT Grown) and distribute to underserved communities. As of September 2024, \$4,152,716 have been spent purchase local farm products from 140 farms (136 in CT). If those farms, 33 self identified as socially disadvantaged and approximately 1 million was paid to those farmers. Food was distributed through 516 local organizations.

Increased diversity on review panels

Created an [open application](#) to indicate interest in serving on a DoAg review panel, available on DoAg's webpage. Recently added in demographic questions.

UPCOMING IN 2025: Sustain initiatives and pursue federal funding to continue initiatives where necessary.



Lauren Little of Lauren Little Edutainment, photo by Camelo Communications





4.3 Commission a report on cooperative land trust and other models of cooperative ownership/incubator models and how they could function in Connecticut with a focus on urban and suburban areas

REPORT COMMISSIONED: December 2022

ORGANIZATION CONTRACTED: CT Land Conservation Council

PERSONS CONDUCTING REPORT: Yaw Owusu Darko, Sr. Project Specialist

REPORT COMPLETED: May 2024

UPCOMING IN 2025:
Issue an RFP to further investigate findings of the report.

[Farmland Access & Ownership: An Overview of Barriers, Models, and Actions to Increase Land Access for Connecticut’s BIPOC Farmers](#)



Barriers to Farmland Access and Ownership



Models for Farmland Access and Ownership



Models for Potential Implementation in CT



Paving a Path Forward



5.1 Improve community engagement to shape agency programs

Established Feedback Avenues through Advisory Groups

- CT Grown for CT Kids Advisory Committee
- Land, Capital, Market Access Advisory Committee (9 individuals, 8 identify at BIPOC)
- Camelo Focus Groups

Roles and responsibilities of advisory groups include:

1. Providing feedback and recommendations on program design and implementation
2. Assisting with developing a communications and outreach strategy to the target audience
3. Serving as advisors to review farmer applicants and make recommendations to the Commissioner of Agriculture on potential projects to be funded (if applicable)

UPCOMING IN 2025: Sustain initiatives and consider other programs where similar feedback avenues can be implemented.



Herb Virgo of the Keney Park Sustainability Project, photo by Camelo Communications





5.2 Solicit public feedback during the development of grant guidance documents and publicly post comments

Surveys and Feedback Forms to Determine Priority Areas

The agency issued surveys to gather public input on state priorities for the 2024 [Specialty Crop Block Grant](#) and for the 2024 [Resilient Food System Infrastructure Grant](#).

Specialty Crop Block Grant: Three new priority areas from the DEI report were added for 2024:

1. Programs for training, mentoring, apprenticeships, farmer circles, specialty crop conferences/stipends to support specialty crop farmers who identify as black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC).
2. Projects and programs which support agricultural career development for specialty crop farmers who identify as BIPOC
3. Training programs for individuals who identify as BIPOC that are aspiring to become agriculture service providers but require additional training and exposure to agriculture

Resilient Food System Infrastructure Grant: Funding Priorities for 2024 and 2025:

1. Projects that increase aggregation of farm products through food hubs and informal producer networks, which focuses on, but is not exclusive to, wholesale buyers.
2. Projects that increase the number of and access to processing facilities including commercial kitchens and co-packers, to preserve farm products and create value-added food products.
3. Projects that increase delivery infrastructure (such as vehicles) benefiting multiple farm business with eligible products and cold storage for aggregated produce, dairy, and aquaculture products. (Please note that there will be a smaller no match equipment only round in 2025.)
4. Projects that support underserved communities and demonstrate local support for the project.

UPCOMING IN 2025: Sustain initiatives and collect public feedback to inform the 2025 Farmland Restoration, Climate Resiliency, and Preparedness grant.





5.3 Improve producer tools and guides published by the agency

[View Guidance](#) 

[Ver orientación sobre subvenciones](#) 

Para ver todos los documentos en español, haga [clic aquí](#).

Highlighted alternate funding sources

- 2025 CT Grown for CT Kids provided information about DEEP's urban/community garden programs
- 2025 Transition Guidance included information about NRCS service centers for funding alternatives and links to RFSI for equipment only projects that support the middle of the food supply chain, as a comparable grant opportunity with advantageous award/match amounts that farms may prefer to apply for

Improved language equity

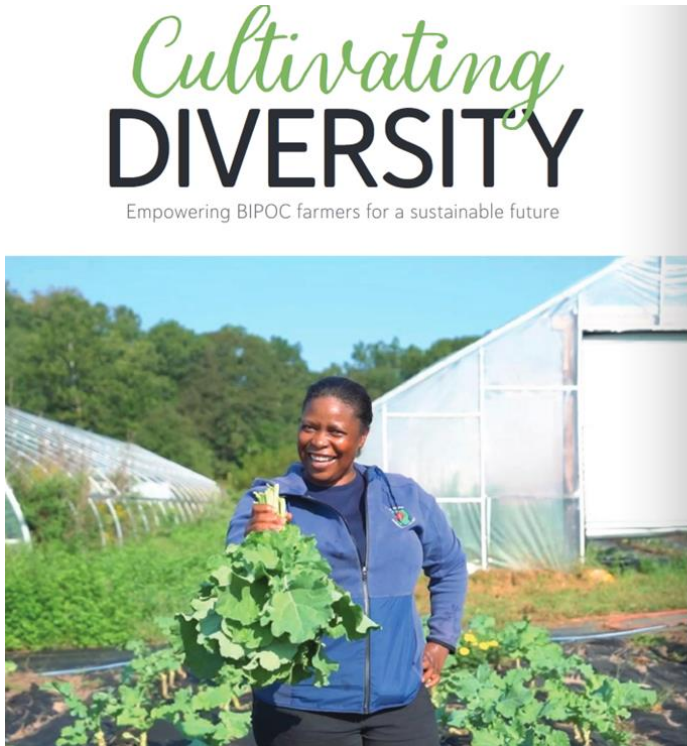
- CT Weekly Ag Report is translated into Spanish with additional languages available and posted on the [agency website](#).
- The Spay/Neuter Low-Income Voucher Program Applications are translated into Spanish. Available on our website once the program opens for 2024.
- Issued a Spanish Consumer facing newsletter and sent to identified Spanish speaking audiences.
- All 2023/2024 grant guidance documents were translated to Spanish and will be for the 2025 grant season. Spanish guidance and other applicable documents are posted on each grant webpage.
- Farm Bulk Milk Collection and Sampling Procedures and exams were translated to Spanish.
- In 2024, the agency held a Farmers' Market Nutrition Program farmer certification training with an in-person translator



UPCOMING IN 2025: Sustain initiatives and consider additional improvement options and areas to increase language equity



6.1 Increase representation of BIPOC producers in consumer facing agency marketing



2024 CT Grown Magazine

Cultivating DIVERSITY
Empowering BIPOC farmers for a sustainable future

Nationwide, fewer than 7% of farmers identify as Black, Indigenous or people of color (BIPOC). The numbers are even lower in Connecticut where just 1.5% of farmers are BIPOC. "Some of the students I've talked to have never seen a Black farmer or a woman farmer; they didn't know that farming was an option for them," says Lauren Little, farmer, educator and founder of Lauren Little Edutainment. "That has to change."

BIPOC farmers across Connecticut have created programs to provide culturally relevant education, resources and communities that create connections to their agricultural roots and inspire a new generation of farmers. Little created Lauren Little Edutainment to teach schoolchildren about growing food and received a CT Grown for CT Kids Grant from the Connecticut Department of Agriculture to support the farm-to-school programming. But planting school gardens is about more than providing hands-on education in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Little believes it introduces children to new foods and encourages them to diversify their diets, which offers myriad additional benefits. "When there's more nutrient-dense locally produced food, students have a higher chance to learn and be better environmental stewards," Little says. "We need more farm-to-school programs to create the next generation of farmers."

Empowered Education
Elizabeth Guerra and Hector "Freedom" Gerardo uncovered the need to provide education and resources to BIPOC farmers after starting a farm in Danbury. Through their nonprofit organization, 1 Freedom for All, the pair are partnering with UConn Extension to offer two innovative programs for BIPOC Farmers. The Leaders of Color in Conservation Training Project launched in 2023. During the 10-week program, which included virtual lessons, field days and a visit to a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) field office, participants learned about addressing natural resource concerns through conservation practices. The goal of the program, which was funded with a \$55,000 grant from the USDA NRCS Conservation Innovation Grants Program, is to train a cohort of people of color to conduct conservation outreach with an emphasis on introducing BIPOC farmers to the USDA's ability to provide technical and financial assistance. In 2024, 1 Freedom for All and UConn Extension launched the Venture Farming Institute, an 18-week intensive "farm school" targeting BIPOC beginning farmers in Connecticut and Rhode Island. Funded by the USDA NIFA Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement, the course features online training and farm field days building skills in production, farm finance, marketing, mental health and well-being, and how to access

"We need more farm-to-school programs to create the next generation of farmers."
- Lauren Little, educator and founder of Lauren Little Edutainment



Freedom Gerardo of Seamarron Farmstead, photo by producer



Autumn Curran of Sweet Ring Farm, photo by Camelo Communications



- Contracted with Camelo Communication to create 8 farmer highlight videos - <https://www.youtube.com/@ctgrown>
- Utilized photos from Camelo Communication across media platforms (blogs, social, and consumer newsletter).
- DEI in Ag feature article in CT Grown Magazine, 2024 edition.
- Increased representation in consumer facing blogs- [Black Farmers in CT Working Toward a More Inclusive CT Grown Future](#)
- Increased representation across agency run social media content on @ct.grown, @connecticutdairy, and @ctapples

UPCOMING IN 2025: Incorporate findings from the Camelo focus groups and the subsequent marketing recommendations, increase focus on highlighting ethnic specialty crops and collateral in future agency promotions and social content

MEDIUM TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8 Recommendations
- 3-5 years to complete (by June 2028)

 **12.5% Complete & Ongoing**

 **50% In Progress**

 **37.5% Development**



MEDIUM TERM RECOMMENDATIONS



1.3 Increase DEI Trainings for Agency Staff



1.4 Establish a non-discrimination clause to be associated with usage of the CT Grown logo to work to rectify and prevent instances of price discrimination and unfair treatment.



2.1 Improve funding and resources to support BIPOC producer training



2.3 Improve funding and resources to support BIPOC agricultural career development



2.4 Develop and strengthen programming, in partnership with agricultural education organizations like University of Connecticut Extension, Future Farmers of America (FFA), 4H, and others, for BIPOC youth to increase exposure to agriculture and agriculture as a career path.



5.4 Improve Marketing of Agency Programs and Resources



5.6 Support and establish a dedicated marketing program to conduct outreach to BIPOC farmers and farmworkers.



6.2 Improve Marketing of Agency Administered Nutrition Assistance Programs

2.1 Improve funding and resources to support BIPOC producer training



Photo by Camelo Communications

Pilot BIPOC Apprenticeship Program

Developed the framework, including the skill list and a mentor/apprenticeship agreement, application, and selected 10 BIPOC specialty crop producers as mentors (out of 20 applicants) who worked with a total of 19 of BIPOC apprentices from May 2023-end of September 2023.

1. **Each mentor received \$5,000 for payment** to their apprentice(s) for the 2023 growing season.
2. **19 BIPOC apprentices** were engaged in work on specialty crop farms through the 2023 growing season,
3. **17 out of the 19 apprentices have active plans/aspire to own their specialty crop farm business (mixed vegetables, herbs, and mushrooms)**
4. **All** felt like the apprenticeship program provided a solid foundation towards their goals. The other two apprentices expressed that while they were unlikely to start their own farm, they were pursuing paths to become service providers to aid specialty crop producers

UPCOMING IN 2025: Pursue federal funds to issue a request for proposal for a statewide, BIPOC-led organization to continue this work.



LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6 Recommendations
- 5-7 years to complete (by June 2030)







  **0% Complete & Ongoing**

 **67% In Progress**

 **33% Development**



LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

-  **2.2** Support the establishment of a BIPOC-owned farm-based training center(s) which can contribute to the success and growth of the BIPOC farmer community
-  **3.2** Improve Access to Technical Assistance
-  **4.1** Increase Land and Parcels Available to BIPOC Farmers
-  **4.2** Pursue an expanded policy around Connecticut's PA 490 law so that this classification can be applied to urban parcels.
-  **4.4** Work with Municipalities to Increase Land Access
-  **5.5** Develop the digital hub in 5.4 into physical hubs in partnership with local community groups already doing the work that can serve as conduit/gateway for getting information to BIPOC urban farmers.

OVERALL PROGRESS

 **24.17% Complete & Ongoing**

 **49% In Progress**

 **26.83% Development**



Upcoming in the Next 12 months



Develop data-specific questions for other agency programs; analyze grant program data, establish area on CTGrown.gov to display findings.

Implement finding from the focus groups into agency programs

Issue RFP to advance findings in CLCC report

Launch producer resource website GrowCTFarms.com

Improve diversity in next iteration of CT Grown marketing campaign and focus on highlighting ethnic specialty crops

Pursue federal funds to enable advancement of recommendations or sustaining recommendation outcomes

Develop implementation schedule for medium- and long-term recommendations

Upcoming, cont.: Land Capital Market Access Program

- USDA awarded approximately \$300 million for 50 projects across 40 states, D.C. Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands
- CT DoAg is the only state agency to be selected for an award of the 50 projects selected (national, regional, and state level projects.)
- Proposal based off several recommendations from the DEI in Ag report

Three Main Components

- 1. Farm Business Navigator** a new position established within UConn Extension to support interested farmers and offer the Land Ownership Readiness Course
- 2. Access to technical assistance through consultant referrals** (legal, tax, accounting, business planning, etc.- goal of at least 25%, preferably 50% or more are BIPOC) Free for participating farmers.
- 3. Funding to purchase land** through the CT Farmland Access Fund

Accomplishments to Date

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Nov '23: | Officially awarded, began negotiations with USDA |
| April '24: | Finalized negotiations |
| May '24: | Executed contracts w/project partners: Held partner kickoff meeting & began biweekly partner mtgs |
| Sept '24: | Began Advisory Committee meetings and release application for technical assistance advisors |
| Oct '24: | Hired Farm Business Navigator at UConn Extension and Finalized Land Ownership Readiness Course |
| Nov '24: | Release of LCMA Letter of Interest Guidance |



LCMA Process



Land Capital Market Access Program

Program Guidance

1. Release [initial program guidance](#) to announce the program and open the [interest form](#)
2. Complete and share the interest form to enroll in program, non-competitive rolling basis
3. [Application for technical assistance providers](#) open on a rolling basis
4. Please visit the program [webpage](#) for more details

Program Webinar

There will be a virtual workshop held on **Tuesday December 10, 2024, from 11:30am to 12:30pm** where the program and process will be reviewed as well as ample time for Q & A.

Please [register for the webinar here](#) or on the [program webpage](#).

Questions, contact Cyrena.Thibodeau@ct.gov or 860-895-3094



Request For Feedback

Please complete the agency's [feedback survey](#) to evaluate progress towards meeting the recommendations and to help the agency prioritize efforts for 2025.



For more information and to view the update report when released visit the [DEI in Ag working group webpage](#)

Questions, Comments

Cyrena.Thibodeau@ct.gov or Jaime.Smith@ct.gov

