

Institutional Racism's Erosive Impacts

LSP Farmer-Members Lead Effort to Listen, Learn & Take Action

By Nick Olson

When I joined the Land Stewardship Project staff in 2008, I came with a formal education background and five years of teaching experience. It was a great fit to jump into facilitating classes for the Farm Beginnings course (see page 25). During the past nine years, I have had multiple opportunities to acquire experience and training in community organizing. As a result, I have seen firsthand the power that people have when they come together around shared values on a common issue.

Recently, my role at LSP has shifted and I am now using my newly acquired skills and passion to engaged in grassroots organizing with members of the organization. My current organizing work is built on years of relationships that I have built with members through the Farm Beginnings Program. In late 2015 I hit the road and visited 30 younger farmers on their farms to listen to their joys, frustrations, challenges and hopes for themselves, their farms, their families and their communities. I hoped to learn from younger LSP member-leaders about issues that were important to them and how we might engage our members in these issues. During these visits, a common thread that emerged was concerns around racial justice issues.

In response to this interest, in 2016 LSP, working with Voices for Racial Justice and the Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance (AOR-TA), held three racial justice trainings involving over 100 LSP members and staff. The majority of participants in these trainings were farmers living in rural communities. Through these initial workshops, LSP members gained clarity about how the current food and farming system is not serving their needs.

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Insights were shared around how infrastructure, community attitudes and public policies combine to pose significant barriers to beginning and diversified farms.

But was also made clear during these trainings is that no matter what barriers white beginning farmers face, the structural racism that exists within the food and farming system makes barriers for farmers of color even greater.

Out of these initial racial justice trainings came the first ever LSP Racial Justice Cohort. This cohort consists of 17 LSP member-leaders and three LSP staff members. The purpose of this cohort is to make LSP more effective at advancing racial justice by training and elevating LSP farmer-leaders to advance a just food and farming system and advocate for racial justice. Starting in December 2016 and running through April 2017, the Racial Justice Cohort has been meeting monthly to learn about privilege, power, structural racism, self-interest and land rights. The trainings are led by ally organizations working with Latino/a, Native and Asian-American farmers.

The cohort is learning firsthand about the additional structural barriers that beginning farmers of color face within the current food and agricultural system. In future *Land Stewardship Letter* articles, we will hear directly from members involved in the cohort. Stay tuned for opportunities to engage with members of this cohort around issues of racial justice. □

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LSP's Racial Justice Cohort recently met at the headquarters of the Hmong American Farmers Association in Saint Paul, Minn. Pictured are front row (left to right): Cella Langer, Amy Bacigalupo, Elizabeth Makarewicz, Sara Fried and Nick Olson. Back row (left to right): Caroline Devany, Ben Doherty, Annelise Brandel-Tanis, Julie Arnold, Molly Schaus, Andrew Ehrmann, Hannah Breckbill, Tyler Carlson, Klaus Zimmerman, Nolan Lenzen and Scott DeMuth. Not pictured but part of the cohort: Paul Fried, Jason Montgomery Riess, Julie Montgomery Riess, Margaret Hanson and Katie Doody. (LSP Photo)