



**CORBINHILL**  
**FOOD PROJECT**

475 Riverside Dr. Suite 243  
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corbinhillfoodproject.org  
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## **Joint NY Senate Public Hearing: Diversifying Agriculture and Addressing Food Justice alongside Continuing Inequalities on our Food Systems**

**April 13, 2021**

My name is Dennis Derryck, and I am a member of Black Farmers United NYS, a board member of Black Farmer's Fund and the founder of Corbin Hill Food Project, a ten-year-old 501-c 3 organization. Corbin Hill, while aggregating and distributing food across New York City through our Farm Share Program, has maintained a vision of our community owning its food system while building community wealth.

We financed ourselves as a start-up with seven of the 11 investors being Black and Brown accounting for 72 percent of our equity. We, as investors, looked like and reflected the values of our community – sovereignty, shifting power, and racial equality. With those values 10 years ago, it was no surprise that neither government nor foundations would give us any funding with concepts that then challenged the status quo in which we as Black lived in a food apartheid community.

To make matters more complicated we committed ourselves 10-years ago to transfer ownership of our 95-acre farm to the community since there can be no food justice without land justice. It reflected ideas of our ancestors around land ownership, and, to our ancestors, we say Ashe.

Others, not looking like us, who did not know our history, or the knowledge and skills of our ancestors felt they had the right to speak for us. I thank you today for taking the time to hear our individual stories since it is important who tells our stories. We hope our stories inspire you to action and leave you reaffirming your moral commitment to report a year from now of the actions you took that generated positive measurable outcomes and impact on our Black and Brown communities.

I am fully supportive of [BFU-NYS's nine solutions](#) and I want to address two of the proposed solutions - solution #2 that speaks to funding beginning start-ups and its request for \$10 million and Solution # 3 supplying affordable land.

Ten years ago when Corbin Hill was founded, there was no Black Farmers Fund to structure loans designed for Black Farmers; there were no governance structures that included Black or Brown people in the decision-making process as to qualifications for loans or who had a relationship with our community that could define or identify future success among Blacks. There was no one addressing the underwriting rules then and now that took into consideration our needs as to how loans could be structured. Ten years later there are still no structures that are designed to address these issues. The Black Farmers Fund has created models beyond financial ratios that our legislators can learn from other than trying to fix the programs that you have created that have never worked for us. ***We ask you for yes, for a small down payment of \$10 million to move towards a proof of concept.***

I should note that Corbin Hill did receive a \$350,000 grant from the State in 2005 and returned it since as structured would have bankrupted us and we would have just been another statistic in the black failure column.

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We ask you to learn from these models and historical failures as opposed to making changes to the State's programs in which your assumptions never addressed the needs of Black farmers. The State cannot be held accountable since it is not mandated to collect data that reflect outcomes and impact related to Blacks in the farming community. Yes the disparities exist but they are mandated to collect data on the reasons for the failures of programs to explain the ongoing disparities. Recommendations are made to do more of the same without ever asking why did it not work. Were it not for the effort of Karen Washington, Mamma K, Blacks would not have been counted in the last Agricultural Census. Without her effort we as Blacks would have remained invisible. ***We recommend that you collect data on outcomes and impact related to Blacks in the farming community in order that our communities can to hold you and your agencies accountable***

Let me provide you some examples of access to capital that speaks to both funding Black start-ups and supplying affordable land. The State last week proudly announced its release of "a record \$ 52.5 million that will become available through the Farmland Protection Implementation Grant to help farmers across New York to protect valuable and at-risk farmland." The announcement never acknowledged the history of Blacks never having benefited from this fund. Since 2011, the State has invested more than \$113 million in 143 Farmland Protection Projects.. Not a single award was given to a Black owned farm over that 11-year period. I should note that when funds are being distributed to the disadvantaged or people of color we as Blacks, assumed to be in both categories, are never represented. Our dreams and vision are consistently being deferred through a masking vocabulary that willfully excludes us. ***We recommend that we remove the mask behind these labels and report specifically and make available programs that address Blacks.***

That farmers who are creating the Black Yard Farm at Corbin Hill could be a beneficiary of this grant as they and Corbin Hill working together, obtain a conservation easement to transfer Corbin Hill's 95 acres to five young Black and Brown farmers. Together, with their combined 71 years of farming experience, they would not only protect the farmland but also create a model of land stewardship – a reparations model of land transfer ironically from a BIPOC group to these Black and Brown farmers from the South Bronx. Each of you on this committee would be proud of being part of something new, bold, revolutionary and historic – that of breaking the barrier of yes finally one Black group benefiting from this financing out of the \$166 million spent over the 11 years that this program has existed and NEFOC receiving its 400 acres of land. ***recommend and ask you along with your staff to make this deferred dream a reality.***

We will not be patient as we hear the reasons we will be told why we could not receive this grant, from your soil is not as rich as that in the Hudson Valley or your soil, no pun intended, "is not Black soil as it is in the Southern Tier."

Let me return to land and the challenges we face. White farmers own 500 times the amount of land as black farmers. When Blacks finally raise the funds to purchase land, even among the 30 % of farmers who are retiring, they refuse to sell to us. We recognize 40 percent of the land white farmers grow on is leased –however, leases to Black farmers come with a guarantee that after investing in improving the soil, their leases will not be renewed. Note we are not talking about the South but rather New York State in which by any other name we are but sharecroppers

And if and when we purchase land you live in fear in the rural areas. It has taken my wife ten years before she felt she could stay overnight at our farm by herself. Hence to build community we are all looking at

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cooperative models. ***We recommend that the State should purchase land and donate to Blacks farmers.*** I ask, is that unreasonable with there being only 139 Black farmers in New York State?

We can no longer accept answers in which we are encouraged to apply. You and I know it does not work that way. It is not about encouraging. We need new measures. We ask you to establish outcomes measures that tell us under the farmland protection program and other programs, how many Black and Brown farming groups have received funding, how much they received and why their application was rejected. ***We recommend that given the years of distrust and the limited knowledge of your agencies have of our community that you adopt the successful regranting model utilized to reach Black environmental groups.***

Land, along with access to capital, is a fundamental building block for Blacks building sufficiency and independence. It is the foundation of sovereignty and community wealth building and empowerment. Based on the performance of State programs, they have not supported our building community wealth. They would much rather tell us how many meals and pounds of food they have provided us without mentioning that none of the indicators measuring health disparities has changed over the last ten years. If there is doubt simply look at the data from COVID-19.

When land and access to capital are combined with the other seven proposed solutions we can then speak not only of creating community wealth but also community health. I want in future years when others ask our children and grandchildren, where does your food come from, their response will be “it comes from land owned by Black farmers.” They will be telling you that their land and capital formed the foundation for their new intergenerational wealth, the wealth they clearly know was previously stolen from their ancestors.

At age 81, I am old enough to be running out of waiting time, however, I thank you for taking your time to hear my story.

Dennis Derryck PhD

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