
SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY & AFRICAN AMERICAN LAND RETENTION

Newsletter



Welcome back!

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

In this issue, the Sustainable Forestry & African American Land Retention (SFLR) newsletter features our two network partners, the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) and the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources within the Cooperative Extension Program at Prairie View A&M University's College of Agriculture and Human Sciences.

UAPB's Keeping it in the Family (KIITF) SFLR program serves 18 central and southern counties in Arkansas. The project promotes intergenerational land retention, empowering African American landowners through technical assistance from a dedicated team trained in forestry management, conservation, and financial assistance. The KIITF team also provides legal resources to address landowners' property challenges.

PVAMU's SFLR program aims to help African American landowners in Texas avoid heirs' property and land retention issues and understand the value of properly managing forest land. To date, the SFLR program has assisted more than 1,400 landowners who own a combined 99,000 acres, ensuring land assets remain in the hands of historical landowners.

What's inside our latest issue:

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Feature Story

UAPB Forestry Program Keeps Landowner's Legacy Alive



Will Hehemann, Extension Specialist - Communications, School of Agriculture, Fisheries and Human Sciences, at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB)

In 2020, Patrick Gulley, pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in Hempstead County, Arkansas, suddenly found himself responsible for his family's 59-acre property and home site in Nevada County when his father, Henry Gulley, died in an automobile accident. With his mother, Viola, he immediately began looking for ways to fulfill his father's vision of enhancing, protecting, and living off the land that Henry and Viola purchased when they were newlyweds.

Before his father's passing, Pastor Gulley visited the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) local office and asked about ways he and his father could improve their timber stand. Through the NRCS, he learned about UAPB's Keeping it in the Family (KIITF) Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention (SFLR) program. KIITF promotes intergenerational land retention and working forests, through technical assistance from a dedicated team trained in forestry management, conservation, and financial assistance programs. The KIITF team also

provides legal resources to address heirs' property challenges. However, it was not until his father's death that Pastor Gulley could actively start implementing the ideas.



Above: Gulley works as pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in DeAnn, Hempstead County, Arkansas. He says he remains committed to realizing his late father's plans for the family land.

Levell Foote, a retired NRCS district conservationist who now serves as a conservation consultant for the KIITF, was assigned to help the family with their forestland management goals. "From day one, working with Patrick and Viola Gulley gave me a glow in my heart," Mr. Foote says. "It was immediately apparent that they were so passionate about accomplishing Henry Gulley's goals. On the drive back home from our first meeting, all I could think about was how great a visit it was. Ever since then, Patrick and his mother have stayed very involved in transforming their land for the better."

Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)." Those practices included prescribed burning, as well as tree and shrub site preparation and establishment.

Now that tree planting is underway, Mr. Foote is helping Pastor Gulley with enhancing pastureland and raising cattle. "The KIITF team has been wonderful. Thanks to them we have gained so much knowledge," Pastor Gulley says. "We have learned just how many government resources are available, helping families like us stay on our land and reap its benefits in a sustainable and profitable way," he adds.



Above: Site visit of Gulley property with SFLR KIITF partners in Nevada County, Arkansas.

Pastor Gulley asked Mr. Foote for assistance with revitalizing forestland on the property and setting up a viable cattle operation. Mr. Foote explains, "After reviewing the plan, I noticed issues, such as a lack of fire lanes along property boundaries and some inconsistencies regarding the number of trees that would be planted. We corrected the plan and identified several conservation practices that could be implemented and funded through NRCS'



Above: Patrick Gulley and his mother, Viola Gulley, have been increasing the sustainability and profitability of their family land through collaboration with the UAPB Keeping it in the Family Program.

Mr. Foote says that the Gulleys serve as an example for other landowners because of their deep commitment to the land. "Patrick and Viola really took the bull by the horns in refreshing and replenishing their land. They are taking what was recently bare land and turning it back into a productive forest. Their knowledge and interest in the land grows day-by-day. Recently, they have been looking into rehabilitating a pond on their property and have even had wildlife biologists on their land to ensure the health of the species that live out there. They are truly carrying on the legacy of Henry Gulley and making his vision a reality," he says.



Above: Two consultants for UAPB's forestry program, Charley Williams left, and Levell Foote, center, instruct Gulley on how to use the Web Soil Survey application to identify soil type.

For more information on UAPB's KIITF program, please contact Kandi Williams, Program Coordinator, at (870) 571-9428 or williamska@uapb.edu

Site Spotlight



Helping Arkansas' Small Farmers Through Coordinated Outreach and Funding



Will Hehemann, Extension Specialist - Communications, School of Agriculture, Fisheries and Human Sciences, at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB)

Farmers with limited financial resources, those who are new to farming, and women, veteran and minority farmers in Arkansas continue to benefit from a partnership between the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

According to Mr. Charley Williams, a UAPB alumnus, veteran NRCS soil conservationist, and UAPB conservation consultant, the collaboration between the 1890 land-grant university and USDA agency are mutually beneficial. "NRCS wants to get timely information out to the public and provide resources to landowners to aid them with conservation, and UAPB wants to help socially disadvantaged farmers apply conservation practices so their operations will be sustainable and profitable. It makes sense that these two entities would work together to reach out to minority farmers, a group that has been historically underserved in the past," he says.

In addition to bolstering conservation efforts, this partnership also has a positive effect on producers' bottom line. Mr. Williams notes that the official NRCS mission is "helping the people help the land." However, he said it is important to add to this statement when thinking about outreach to small producers. "We at the UAPB Small Farm Program like to say our mission is 'helping the people help the land to help the people,'" he says. "It is important for small farmers to realize that by taking advantage of conservation programs, they are not only going to be benefitting their land, but also will be adding to their own economic prosperity."

Mr. Williams says the partnership between UAPB and NRCS picked up momentum in 2010 when he was appointed coordinator for the Arkansas StrikeForce initiative. The project is designed to address conservation and housing programs in impoverished communities and help residents take advantage of farm loans. "We were tasked with increasing the participation of socially-disadvantaged farmers

in USDA programs,” he says. NRCS trained UAPB Extension personnel to help landowners apply for NRCS’ Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). EQIP financial assistance allows property owners to implement conservation practices that improve irrigation efficiency, promote soil health, and restore pastureland. Access to assistance has also helped producers keep their family farms in business. “Our staff includes trained foresters, conservationists, and retired NRCS employees - everyone knows EQIP like the back of their hand.” Mr. Williams says.

UAPB’s ability to directly help transform its clients’ operations was boosted when the university launched KIITF in 2016. The program provides educational resources and technical assistance to African American forest landowners to protect and retain their family land for future generations.

Mr. Williams says, “KIITF showed so much promise in terms of the number of people it could benefit that it received its own NRCS funding code. This means the people we provide outreach services to are able to obtain forest management plans and be approved for EQIP cost-share funding much faster than usual. This has been a game changer. We now see record numbers in terms of EQIP applications, the amount of EQIP funding awarded to farmers, and the number of people served.”

He adds, “The people on our team have the training and personality to earn the trust of producers who have never participated in USDA programs before. It takes a special personality to look these farmers in the face and tell them that the USDA is going to help them develop their land and not take it away.”



Pictured above: Charley Williams, veteran NRCS soil conservationist, conducts a site visit at the property of a landowner who received EQIP funds for planting timber.

“ *Our staff includes trained foresters, conservationists, and retired NRCS employees - everyone knows EQIP like the back of their hand.” Mr. Williams says.*

Spotlight Article



Promoting Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention



Angela L. Moore, Program Coordinator, Agriculture and Natural Resources (AgNR) Cooperative Extension Program (CEP) at Prairie View A&M University's College of Agriculture and Human Sciences

The department of Agriculture and Natural Resources within the Cooperative Extension Program at Prairie View A&M University's College of Agriculture and Human Sciences continues a collaborative partnership with the Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention Program (SFLR), launched through a two-year grant from the American Forest Foundation.

The University is one of only two 1890 land-grant institutions within the SFLR network, which is comprised of eight partnering organizations nationally. One of the key components of our SFLR commitment includes educating landowners in East Texas about maintaining and sustaining their forested lands. Through various mechanisms, our

forestry experts are educating property owners about the benefits of forest management and the potential for increased and sustainable revenue.

Land retention is a second key component of SFLR. Research shows that land retention in the African American community lags far behind the levels in other population segments. One reason cited for this is a lack of will preparation and estate planning, without which the land becomes heirs' property.



Left: Landowners leading tour of their property with staff from PVAMU and Texas A&M Forest Service during site visit with the landowners. Photo Credit: Dr. Elliott Washington, Forester



PVAMU Staff at Ellis Family reunion in Texarkana, TX discussing legal educational workshops available through the SFLR Program

When land is categorized as heirs' property, it usually means multiple people share ownership of the property. This status quite often leads to the land being lost, either due to non-payment of property taxes, a forced sale, or other means.

Recognizing the vital need for assistance, the SFLR at Prairie View A&M University offers a number of legal services. These include Legal Clinics and the Reckoning Program, an heirs' educational program designed to help minority landowners in resolving their property issues.

Getting the Word Out

By many accounts, SFLR has been an overwhelming success in assisting African American forest landowners with addressing heirs' property issues and forest management planning to retain their land and build wealth.

In 2021, AgNR partnered with four community-based organizations (Landowners Association of Texas, Pineywoods Small Farmers and Ranchers, 100 Ranchers, Inc., and Agroforestry Small Farmers and Ranchers) to host six SFLR outreach workshops in six counties, two SFLR legal clinics and a two-day joint regional conference.

In 2022, the SFLR schedule is dramatically more ambitious and includes eleven monthly SFLR outreach workshops, six legal clinics, four reckoning programs, and a two-day joint regional conference. At the conclusion of external grant funding, AgNR has sustained the SFLR Program which is now integrated into AgNR's program offering under the Small Farm Institute with Program development led by Angela Moore, Program Coordinator, and AgNR CEP County Extension Agents supporting as moderators.



*Above: PVAMU staff and Texas A&M Forest Service staff conducting site visits with landowners
Photo Credit: Dr. Elliott Washington, Forester*

AgNR is grateful for the strong partnerships in the delivery of SFLR programs and creating positive change for African American landowners and their families. These include Texas A&M Forest Service, Texas Forest Association, USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), along with the Phillips Kaiser and Hubbard Law firms.

Individuals interested in learning more about SFLR or attending any of our events should contact their local CEP county extension agent or Angela Moore at (936) 261-5002 or via email at almoore@pvamu.edu.

Spotlight Article



Forest Owners Serve as Models for Success



Elliott J. Washington, PhD, Extension Program Specialist, Agriculture and Natural Resources (AgNR) Cooperative Extension Program (CEP) at Prairie View A&M University's College of Agriculture and Human Sciences

As a forester, I have had the pleasure of collaborating with landowners for many years throughout the State of Texas and, in particular, East Texas. Through the Sustainable Forestry and African American Land Retention Program (SFLR) at Prairie View A&M University's College of Agriculture and Human Sciences, I am often invited to conduct site visits and perform forestry assessments. Although each landowner I have worked with has been warm and welcoming, my experiences with two in particular continues to resonate with me.

One is Mr. Joseph Johnson, who has a 51-acre tract of forestland in Timpson, Texas. I could instantly tell that Mr. Johnson was excited to be a part of SFLR, evidenced by his regular attendance at our virtual workshops, legal clinics, and other SFLR events. I have visited Mr. Johnson several times, giving him guidance but, perhaps more importantly, listening to his vision for the future.

He is steadily working to bring that vision to fruition. He has obtained a forest management

plan through Texas A&M Forest Service (TFS) and received funding through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

With this support, Mr. Johnson has had some of his timber cut and has planted both loblolly and long-leaf pine trees. He is also looking into having livestock and pollinators on his homesite.



Left: Mr. Joseph Johnson's property located in Timpson, Texas

Mr. Johnson understands the role of forest stewardship and agriculture in the African American community. He shares that understanding with his family members and people in the community, so that others can benefit too.

Another landowner that comes to mind is Ms. Jacquelyn Tatum, whose property is in Center, Texas. Ms. Tatum has 4 tracts, totaling roughly 80 acres of forestland. The majority of the timber on her property is natural regeneration from previous harvests. Yet, she shares a common thread with many African American landowners, as she has other heirs tied to the property.

To avert the concerns that might arise with heirs' property, Ms. Tatum and her family routinely get together virtually to discuss the future plans of the family property. She has worked with the attorneys that are a part of our SFLR services to set up a trust so that future generations may enjoy their family property. In addition, Ms. Tatum and members of her family often engage in property owner workshops and conferences throughout the state.

Ms. Tatum's energy and drive is why she is revered as a stalwart in her community, as she works hard advocating for African American forestland ownership.



Above: Jacquelyn Tatum and her family with property located in Center, Texas