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## GENDER MATTERS: MASCULINITIES AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN FARMING IN NORTH CAROLINA

Marcus K. Bernard

University of Kentucky, bernardmk859@gmail.com

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Marcus K. Bernard, Student

Dr. Rosalind Harris, Major Professor

Dr. Ana Liberato, Director of Graduate Studies

GENDER MATTERS: MASCULINITIES AMONG  
AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN FARMING IN NORTH CAROLINA

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
Marcus Kiry Bernard

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Rosalind Harris, Professor of Sociology

Lexington, Kentucky

2016

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### GENDER MATTERS: MASCULINITIES AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN FARMING IN NORTH CAROLINA

The residue of racism, institutional discrimination, and class warfare continue to displace constructions of masculinity for African-American men in farming by shifting the drive for success onto the sidewalk of survival. The shifting focus migrates from goals of economic and political gain to simply shielding masculinity through acts of providing for and protecting the family. African-American men's failure to acknowledge these quandaries in Western society's social structure entraps their masculine identity by keeping their focus on issues of race and social class which overshadow the broad gender transformations. The deceptive social forces underlying this social structure hurl African conditions are unique to the plight of African American men farming, and their loss of farms and land. One must understand and ask the pivotal questions within the social constructions of masculinities - what factors currently explain the social construction of masculinities for African American men farming in North Carolina and as a result of these constructions what decisions are African American farmers being forced to make as they negotiate issues of survivability for their farms?

The study explores the social construction of masculine identity among African-American men in farming and the impacts of these constructions using ethnographic methods. A total of ten in-depth interviews, three focus groups, and two participant observations were conducted using a quota sampling method. The study population consists of African-American men farming in North Carolina between the ages of fifty and seventy-five. The findings were open coded to build a typology so that a content analysis could be performed. All data was analyzed using NVIVO version 11.0.

Results indicate that the African American men farming in North Carolina between the ages of fifty and seventy-five construct their masculinity around performing acts of masculinity, how they perceive the roles of women in farming, the politics of farming, through the various ways they make community, religion, and healthy food.

KEY WORDS: Masculinity Construction among African American Farmers, African American Farmers in North Carolina, Gender Roles and African American Farmers, African-American Masculinity, Gender and Race among African-Americans Farm Families in North Carolina

Marcus Kiry Bernard\_\_\_\_\_

October 18, 2016\_\_\_\_\_

Date

GENDER MATTERS: MASCULINITIES AMONG  
AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN FARMING IN NORTH CAROLINA

By

Marcus Kiry Bernard

Rosalind P. Harris, Ph.D.

Director of Dissertation

Ana Liberato, Ph.D.

Director of Graduate Studies

October 18, 2016

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Farming is rigidly bound along gender lines as Alsgaard's, (2012: p.1) statement reflects, "...it is farmers' sons, not farmers' daughters, who become farmers." In fact, farming in Western society is rooted in the masculinist ideal that entitles men to own and manage land and to negotiate agricultural knowledge for the maintenance of the family farm and family (Alsgaard, 2012). This system of gendered entitlement in farming concentrates power and presupposes it as a function of masculinity. Generally speaking, its greatest beneficiaries are White men farming who own more valuable farm land, maintain a strong farmer class, and are able to transfer substantial amounts of land to future generations with little to zero debt (Alsgaard, 2012). There is a growing body of literature on gender roles, specifically focused on the construction of masculinist identities of White men farming in this respect (Kimmel and Aronson, 2004; Campbell, Bell, and Finney, 2006; Kimmel, 2013). However, African American men farming are less likely to pursue farming for the symbols of power it proffers or for material gain, but rather for the survival of their land and their families. As a group, they are much more likely to be researched within racialized frameworks with minimal attention to the construction of masculinist identities and their impacts on gender roles. (Spencer and Gilbert, 2000; PBS, 1999; Ficara, 1997; Williamson, 1984).

This study has focused on masculinist constructions of African American men in farming and the impacts of these constructions on gender roles and consequently on farming and the viability, sustainability and survivability of African American farms. The following section will provide a review of literature on: the varied constructions of

masculinity and impacts on gender roles for African American men farming, masculinity on the farm, and the history of African American men farming in North Carolina, where the study took place. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has been critical in shaping both opportunities for and impediments to black farm retention in North Carolina and the Black Belt South generally, therefore the dynamics of its impacts will be examined. The research question guiding this study will also be elaborated.

*Overview: Historical Constructions of African American Men's Identities in Relation to Agriculture and Farming*

African-American men farming in the U.S. are descended from cultures that had varying ideas about masculinity and gender roles. According to Barbarin (2002), prior to becoming chattel slavery within America, farming for Africans was organized around feminine principles. Shiva (1989) describes the feminine principle in farming as women controlling the conservation of seeds, producing crops, and storing grains for consumption and future planting. However, during slavery Abrams (2010) found that slave owners put men and women side-by-side on farms and plantations to carryout planting, weeding, picking, hoeing, and herding. Hallam (2004) suggests this type of field work arrangement on the farm stripped away the masculinity of men because it associated farming with the domestic duties of women within a wholly new western context. Stripping away the cultural beliefs and traditional African gender role practices of the slaves forced slave men and women to adopt the European practices of masculinity and gender roles (Jardine and Dallalfar, 2012). Moreover, the masculine performance of power as illustrated by the slave owners began to further condition the gender role expectations of the newly emancipated slaves. For example, during the post-



reconstruction years, Zora Neal Hurston recalled her father basking in his masculinity discussing the fact that his wife had his eight children and never had to work for or wait on anyone (Lippincott, 1942). Arguably, masculinist acts such as this had fewer harsh consequences for middle class African American families such as that of Zora Neal Hurston. However, Knopf, (1975: 120) quoted an elderly African American man in farming

I was a poor colored man, but I didn't work my wife in the field like a dog. Just as sure as God is sitting in his resting place, I'd be in the field at work and my wife, I look around I see her coming out there with a hoe and hand. I'd say, what you coming out here for? And she said, I thought I'd come out here and help you.

After sending her back into the house, he added, "he wouldn't let his wife go washing for white folks, either." The plantation-slave social structure deftly subjugated African cultural conceptions of masculinity and gender roles by directing the focus onto issues of race and social class. African American men and women's failure to either be conscious of or to acknowledge these changes in the social construction of masculinity over time fuels a deceptive social force that leads to confusion and default decision making that this thesis holds is counter to the current social and political needs of African American men and women and their communities.

It is important to consider and to understand that African American men farming are working with different cultural frames than the frames that their ancestors worked with and that these frames are hegemonic. Confined to years of struggle under impoverished conditions, African American men for centuries have been portrayed as being trapped in the stage of boyhood where they are viewed and presented by the European-American power elite in relation to labor, economics, government, etc... as

being dependent, passive, and waiting for their survival or biological needs to be fulfilled by someone else. Richard Wright's 1945 novel "Black Boy" reflects on his own life experience, by shedding light on the dynamics of the social construction of masculinity and its consequences for being trapped within a social structure that killed off and discouraged acts of independence and manhood among African American men - especially within the Black Belt of the southern United States. Booker T. Washington, a renowned and historical leader, called these "Negro-filled" communities of the South the Black Belt. This was a region of counties within the South where the African American residents were the majority population (Washington, 1965). W.E.B. Dubois, a noted sociologist, also characterized this area by the color of the soil, the fertility of the land, the valuable cash crops, and the condition of its impoverished and oppressed African American work force (Dubois, 1903). In 1936, Arthur Raper a well-known sociologist, described the Black Belt as 200 rural counties being located in the heart of the South stretching from Virginia to Texas. His description covered the plantation areas where many of the slave plantations were located prior to Emancipation Proclamation of 1863.

In this region, the process of oppression has been systemic and egregious. For instance, this was the case with the disenfranchisement amendment of 1900 that implemented poll taxes, literacy tests, and the grandfather clause to constrain voting by African American men (Hornsby-Gutting, 2009). Prior to the 1900 campaign, African American men, many of whom were heavily involved in local, state, and federal politics during Reconstruction believed it to be (1) their duty and (2) a function of masculinity to protect and provide for their communities. African American men had established a rural Black middle class through farming and spinoff businesses during this time. However,

once the disenfranchisement of African American men was legitimized in 1900 (Jim-Crow), increasing numbers of these men began to flee from the South. The Jim-Crow Era influenced many African American men such as prominent leaders including the last African American elected to Congress from North Carolina, up until the Civil Rights Movement to say, “I cannot live in North Carolina and be a man” Anderson (1984: p. 308).

During Jim Crow, many African American men in farming found some sense of manhood through farm life because it allowed them to provide for and protect their families. This was a common life style and mode of survival for African Americans throughout the country and specifically in North Carolina where more than 90 percent of African-Americans living in rural North Carolina survived primarily on subsistence farming. A missing and significant piece of the cultural narrative of African American men in farming is the varied social constructions of masculinity and gender roles that begs the questions: Why did many African American men chose not to migrate out of the Jim Crow South, and why did they chose to farm as a means of survival given the lack of support from the state and federal departments of Agriculture? Investigating the factors shaping the construction of this cultural narrative and the resulting consequences will provide deeper insight into the widespread systematic attack on African American men in farming and African American owned farmland throughout the Black Belt region. Conducting this study across the twelve southern Black Belt states would have been time intensive and cost prohibitive, therefore, I confined this study on the social construction of masculinity and gender roles of African American men farming to the state in the

Black Belt with the largest loss of African American farmers since the Reconstruction Era-- North Carolina (Spencer and Gilbert, 2000).

*Research Question*

The preceding background about African American men farming provides distinct illustrations of how this group develops ideas regarding their masculinity and gender roles. This study seeks to understand and asks, given these historical social constructions of masculinities and gender roles - what factors currently explain the social construction of masculinities for African American men farming in North Carolina and as a result of these constructions what decisions are African American men making as they negotiate issues of survivability for their farms?

The next chapter will include a literature review. The literature review will include sections on gender performance, masculinity and power, masculinity on the farm, masculinities among African American men farming, relevant history of African American men farming in North Carolina, and the USDA modernization of agriculture in the North Carolina Black Belt.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### *Gender Performance*

Sallee and Harris (2011) claim that gender performance is constructed through the medium of norms in social interaction. They add that gender is produced both by the individual and through institutional structures. Some of the structures include: nations, corporations, communities, and families (Carrigan et al., 1985). However, West and Zimmerman (1987) framed gender as a process one carries out, not a position or role one possesses. They explained that the process is determined by (1) context, (2) collectivity, and (3) expectation. Context was explained as actions taken according to the situation. Collectivity was described as groups making gender through behavior. Lastly, expectations took the form of how others believed gender should be represented. In sum, gender is a performance, meaning that in addition to men performing masculinity and women performing femininity, in some contexts, men can perform femininity and women can perform masculinity.

#### *Masculinity and Power*

Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) suggest that a key element of manhood and masculinity is power. Men perform acts such as “claiming privilege”, demanding obedience, and fighting off instances of being misused. Early in the development of the theory, Messner and Sabo (1990) believed that the association of power with manhood could be witnessed in men’s affinity with contact sports, and attitudes of violence and homophobia in the general sporting apparatus. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) claim these acts of power are both seen and unseen. Examples of visual acts of power include:

flashy displays on televised sports (Sabo and Jansen, 1992) and name calling by children, especially by antagonizing homosexual behavior. By contrast, covert acts of power include descriptions of men by the media as villainous. This subtle and sometimes overt depiction across media outlets (TV, radio, and internet) of African American male youth has fueled and maintained an identity of African American boys and men as troublemakers, criminally inclined, and threatening. In addition to social environment (crime, poverty, and place), expectations centered on cultural, gender interpretations of what defines masculinity, have increased the amount of stress experienced by African American men. Moreover, such broad generalizations become popularized and in large part ignore and exclude the masculinity of other segments of the African American men such as farmers.

#### *Masculinity on the Farm*

The majority of farms in the United States are family farms headed by the man of the house, but operated by the entire family- wife and/or child/ren (Campbell, Bell, and Finney, 2006). The authors contend that other members of the family are overshadowed by the farming man because farming is regarded as a traditional occupation carried out by men, within a Euro-American-Western context. Masculinity in farming parallels and in some cases is reinforced by traditional institutions' constructions of masculinity and gender roles. For instance, inscribed within the discourses of most community and state institutions is that men are the providers, protectors, and primary figureheads of the family (Hornsby-Gutting, 2009). The farmer is defined as being a man representing independence, toughness, and also as the conqueror of the natural elements such as the

land and weather and of man-made barriers such as the banks, the government, the machines, and in some cases, other farmers (Campbell, Bell, and Finney, 2006).

Surrounded by his support system (family), he epitomizes what it means to be a man. Images, studies, and representations of this social construction of masculinity are fortified by portrayals of White men in farming. According to Campbell, Bell, and Finney (2006) popular images and representations of this masculinist identity are the Marlboro Man on his horse, farmers driving pickup trucks (e.g. Chevrolet truck commercials with “like a rock” playing in the background), tractors (e.g. John Deere commercials showing men controlling equipment and conquering nature), and commercials crediting farmers with feeding the world (e.g. ConAgra and Monsanto commercials). These images and representations of farmers strengthen masculinist attitudes about men and farming. Many of these representations have been strategically deployed throughout history, revealing the plurality of masculinist constructions of farmers and farming within the U.S.

Campbell, Bell, and Finney (2006) divided social constructions of masculinity in connection with farmers into three distinct categories, based on the type of farming operation. The three categories of farmer operations, according to their typology are agrarian, industrial, and sustainable. Brief descriptions of the categories are provided as follows: the agrarian farmer loves the idea of farm life, values independence, loves to see the fruit of his labor, receives support from and shares responsibilities with family members, and bequeaths land/farm to his son(s); the industrial farmer approaches farming with a business mind to maximize profit, sees the farms as the means to provide for his family, equates man and husband with provider and protector while also equating woman with wife and homemaker; and the sustainable farmer breaks away from the previous

constructions of masculinity and gender roles by approaching farming as a holistic ecological practice where men are free to discuss their shortcomings, mistakes, failures, lack of power over the micro-processes of their farming operation, the need for support from the surrounding community, farm diversification, and the use of non-synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Husbands are less competitive and less phallocentric-focused as evidenced by the modified masculinist ideal of themselves as the protector of the family while wholly acknowledging that the earth is the provider. Also, wives are more involved in the farming operation, specifically assisting their husbands with building networks with other sustainable farm families and researching new technologies for the survivability of their farms. They also found that rural masculinities are situated in historical, symbolic, and spatial contexts. Several contexts they identified are (1) at the household level, (2) in the politics of farming, (3) restructuring of the rural industry, (4) symbolic life of the rural, and (5) symbolic life of the masculine.

#### *Masculinities among African American Men Farming*

According to Riley and Kirkendall (1985), the images and the mystique of farmers are powerfully complex and situated in an ever changing landscape. They found that early twentieth century farm journal writers in response to the changing gender roles of men and women strongly encouraged farmers not to compromise their masculinity. One journal writer purposively wrote that (1) farmers must value success, (2) farmers must love the farming atmosphere and culture, (3) be the family provider and display an ox-like work ethic, (4) be physically stout, (5) a devoted family man, and (6) be actively involved in the maintenance of the community. While many farmers are wrestling with the changing gender landscape, Fanon (1967) implies that African American men



farming are facing their own distinct struggles. According to Fanon (1967: p. 90), the social construction of masculinity and gender roles for African American men are part of an unnatural selection process because “For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man; and the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man.” The lack of resistance is pervasive vis-à-vis the experience and condition of African American farmers—many of whom are forced to surrender their farms, land, and ultimately their masculinity. For example, in 1920, African American farmers owned 14 percent of the nation's farms (PBS, 1999), but according to the 2007 Agricultural Census, African American farmers currently own approximately 1 percent of the nation’s farms. Many demographic and economic indicators reflect similarities between African American farm operators and non-African American farm operators, however there is significant variation in the average size of farms, average value of sales, sales and government payments less than \$10,000, and number of farms with internet access. Currently, the average African American farm is one-fourth the size of the average non-African American farm. Also, on average, African American farm operators only generate about 16 percent of the revenue generated by non-African American farm operators (USDA, 2007).

According to Wood and Gilbert (2000) African American men in farming represent an epic tale where tenant farmers are locked into cash crops such as tobacco and cotton. They found that African American men farming had no financial or program support from the United States Department of Agriculture and also are entrapped by lending institutions to use their land for only cash crops or risk loan default. Kime and Hyde (2015) explain that farmers who diversify their crops minimize their financial risk

in the event of market failure or crop failure. As a result of not being able to diversify farm crops, many African American men farming and their families were forced to leave the farm when cotton markets closed and the tobacco allotment system was dismantled. The inability of African American men farming to provide for the family suggests that their manhood is diminished according to the mainstream socially constructed ideas of masculinity.

The residue of racism, institutional discrimination, and class warfare continue to disturb constructions of masculinity for African American men in farming. Many men are driven by economic and political symbols of success which lines up with the previously reviewed literature as a validation of masculinity, but many African American men farming are driven by the need to survive and ultimately shield their masculinity through acts of providing for and protecting their family. According to Campbell, Bell, and Finney (2006), all farmers must overcome natural and environmental challenges, but PBS (1999) reported that African American men farming are also subject to various racial and economic challenges. Some of the past challenges faced were delayed disbursement of operating loans, incorrect information on farm programs, and discriminatory treatment on the basis of race by county USDA offices (Marable, 1979; US Commission on Civil Rights, 1982; Wood and Gilbert, 2000). Consequently, African American men farming have not been able to own prime farm land, create a strong farmer class, and transfer land to future generations without debt. Woods and Gilbert (2000) share that while non-African American farmers use the government as the lender of last resort, African American men farming have been conditioned to assume that the government is their first and only lender.

### *Relevant History of African American Men Farming in North Carolina*

According to North Carolina State University's History department (NCSU), North Carolina was primarily a rural state made up of farm families between 1900 -1950 where tasks and functions on the farms were gendered. Men and boys worked outdoors performing labor intensive chores, while women and girls were responsible for inside tasks such as housework and raising fruits and vegetables for the family. Men were also responsible for planting, maintaining, and harvesting the crops to feed and support the family. Some of the crops raised were blueberries, tomatoes, snap beans, okra, collards, cabbage, watermelons, strawberries, pumpkins, cucumbers, organic produce and cut flowers (NCDA, 1999). The 2007 US Agricultural Census reported that nationwide 8.6 out of 10 African American farmers are men but Woods and Gilbert (2000) found that nearly 9.5 out of 10 North Carolina based African American farmers are men. The majority of these 1515 farmers are located in North Carolina's Black Belt counties where farmers are raising field crops (corn, soybeans, and grains) and tobacco (1997 USDA Agricultural Census). The 2012 USDA Agricultural Census found that over the past 15 years there was a 25 percent decrease in the total number of African American men farming in North Carolina (USDA-NASS, 2012). The constant decline in African American men farming reflects their perpetual state of crisis. Public Broadcast Service (2004) and Daniels (2013) found that African American farmers represent less than 1 percent of all farms in the United States with 86 percent of the operators being men (USDA-NASS, 2007).

The legitimate oppression of African American men farming is a direct attack on their race, class status, and Euro-western-constructed masculinity. The intentional

devastation wrought upon the livelihood of African American men farming affects their ability to protect and provide for their families despite laws and policies that attempted to restore their voting rights and provide equal treatment under the law because the policies, e.g., Civil Rights Act of 1964 were unable to help them retain their land, way of life, and their masculinity.

*USDA Modernization of Agriculture in the North Carolina Black Belt*

Daniels (2013) found that the USDA deployment of discriminatory policies was transparent for decades throughout the Black Belt South. Literature focusing on African American farmers located in the Black Belt diminished the uniqueness of their plight in relation to the broader Southern experience. For example, in Mississippi, Georgia, and Alabama, reports indicated percentages of African American farmers well over 50 percent in Black Belt counties, but as changing national policies such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 began to dictate equal representation in employment, committees in offices such as the USDA-Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ACSC) would find ways to hide the actual percentage of African American farmers (Daniels, 2013). During this period, in the Black Belt of North Carolina, (Halifax county), over 71 percent of farmers were African American, but the ACSC committee found itself struggling to find African American employees because they claimed there was not a pool of trained African American men to draw from that measured up to their standards (Daniels, 2013).

Daniels (2013) traced the roots of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) growing presence in rural America for the past one hundred and fifty plus years. According to Hughes (2008) the initial role of USDA was to work with farmers on improving crop management and encouraging agricultural research through science and

modernization. However, USDA initiatives such as Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission (CLC) and Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal Agricultural Adjustment Administration (New Deal) became more about transforming the rural landscape by extending the powers and presence of USDA on the farm and in rural America (Roosevelt, 1924 and Daniels, 2013). The CLC did conduct important agricultural research but was actually part of a larger scheme to justify restructuring rural life—especially that of farmers. The CLC focused on increasing farm production with the use of farm planners, agricultural engineers, agricultural economists, and strategic management combined with technology. The New Deal policies concentrated efforts on regulating and controlling production, especially in North Carolina where technology and science was emphasized, e.g., acreage reduction and price support control programs (Jackson, 1992). Daniels (2013) found that large Midwest farming operations benefited greatly from New Deal programs, but in the Black Belt South, these policies and programs wreaked havoc on African American men farming, specifically through the county committee system. The county committee system determined the amount of a commodity a farmer could grow and sell while receiving government payments.

The method and culture of farming in the Black Belt South, especially among African Americans was not conducive to the new ideas of modernization in that there were many tenant farmers, small family farms, poorly maintained houses, weed laden fields, and labor-intensive crops such as cotton and tobacco. These programs not only changed the landscape of the rural countryside, specifically in the Black Belt South, but increased inequality using the widespread patriarchal system of politics that favored power in the hands of White men (Daniels, 2013). For example, during the height of the

1960s Civil Rights Movement, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Rodney E. Leonard implied that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) had evolved into a secret government with its primary interests in rural America (Orville Freeman Oral History, 1964). Encoded in the language and culture of this secret government were the policies of a patriarchal system controlled by White men that claimed to speak for all, but only represented the interests of a few. The far reaching power of this patriarchy could not be derailed by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which was an Act outlawing discrimination on the basis of “race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, or age in hiring, promoting, firing, setting wages, testing, training, apprenticeship, and all other terms and conditions of employment” (National Archives and Records Administration, 2014). The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1965 report on equality in the USDA farm programs found that county, state, and federal offices blocked African American farmers from having any input on policy formation, participation on local agricultural committees, and were denied loans and benefits (Orville, Freeman Oral History 1965). These systemic practices were in part remnants of the South’s broken power structure and partly a tool to control and punish African American men farming.

According to Pearlie Reed, an African American farmer and undersecretary for Dan Glickman, the power of the USDA’s governance is concentrated within the local county agricultural committees. He states in a luncheon keynote address at a black farmer conference in North Carolina that “this committee system is accountable to state and local powers, which in turn, reflect the interests of old plantation owners. It's a patronage system. The President himself can do nothing to change what these farm county committees do. It's in the law,” (Vallianatos, 2014). Daniels (2013) found that these

committees influenced county farming operations, acreage-reduction programs, making loans, 4-H programs, sharing information, and signing up farmers for programs. These committees generally included White men farming and excluded African American men farming. Given the nuanced background and literature for this study, I chose two conceptual frameworks to guide the research. The conceptual frameworks will be discussed in the next chapter and are symbolic interactionism and theories of masculinities.

## Chapter 3

### Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This section provides a discussion of the theoretical frameworks guiding the inquiry into the social constructions of masculinity for African American men in farming and their impacts on gender roles. In general, gender research on the farm is not new, however most gender research in farming is about women in agriculture, the roles of women in farm families, and the woman's responsibility in the division of labor on the farm. This gender study focuses on the social construction of masculinity among African American men in farming. To intimately capture the social construction of masculinity and social interaction of African American men in farming, the theory of symbolic interactionism is employed. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) point out that the theory of symbolic interactionism empowers the researcher to closely explore meanings in the social and cultural world. A second theoretical approach, theories of masculinities, is also utilized to explain intentions, beliefs, rules, discourses, and values that one may associate with masculinist identities.

#### *Symbolic Interactionism*

Blumer (1986) describes the theory of symbolic interactionism as a process by which individuals form meanings through social interaction. Individuals and groups, he adds, engage in social interaction by actively responding to each other's use of language, gestures, and thoughts. The foundation of the theory reasons that (1) the meaning a person places on a thing determines a person's behavior toward that thing, (2) the meaning of things comes from or emerges out of the social interaction with colleagues, friends, and peers, and (3) meanings organize or manage themselves according to the



analytical processes used by people as they confront things. The theory explains how communicative processes shape identities through meanings given to things, people, and socially constructs groups/social systems governing people. For example, Brett (2009) found that a man's ability to protect, procreate, and provide for himself, his family, and his community is a symbolic social construction or social destruction undergirding masculine identity. The symbols of masculine identity act as a bridge connecting the present, past, and future interaction between men and women to manipulate environments, communicate in complex spaces and time frames, and evolve into complex social groups, societies, and cultures (Taflinger, 1996).

The social construction of masculinity for African American men farming represents a complex relationship because during chattel slavery most of their time was spent maintaining farming operations, yet after Emancipation Proclamation, the same farming activities also came to symbolize independence, self-reliance, and control of their destiny. In their first 50 years of freedom, more than 90 percent of African American families living in rural North Carolina survived on subsistence farming, a primary life style and mode of survival for African Americans living across the South. The communicative processes guiding African American men in farming brought to birth an economic base, vis-a-vis a rural and urban middle class, as well as a pathway to political power for African American men in local, state, and federal politics, who believed it to be (1) their duty and (2) a function of men in protecting and providing for their families and communities.

Those African American men and women, such as elected officials, business owners, and those men and women solidly in the middle class, including many farmers,

who were successful economically and politically were attacked by the White power structure. They were viewed as unacceptable symbols of subaltern success. For example, in 1900, the North Carolina General Assembly drove masses of African American men from the state by passing the disenfranchisement act, also known as Jim Crow laws. For example, in North Carolina, transforming the masculinist identity of African American men was systematic, exemplified in poll taxes, literacy tests, and the grandfather clause (Hornsby-Gutting, 2009). The symbolic characterization of African American men in a Jim-Crow society was so diabolical that the last African American congressman, George H. White, prior to the Civil Rights Movement said, “I cannot live in North Carolina and be a man” Anderson (1981: p. 308).

For some African American men, farming continues to be symbolic in relation to their masculine identity because it allows them to provide for and protect their families. As a consequence of technological changes in agricultural production, government policing of production agriculture, and increasing racial tension, many African American men lost their ability to provide for, and protect their families and communities. Employing symbolic interactionism for understanding the symbolism surrounding farm, family and masculinity for African American men on the farm helped to fill in a significant missing part of their narrative. Given the historical and present-day attacks on their identities, it also provided for the critical exploration of the rationale for African American men remaining in farming. In addition to symbolic interactionism, the theory of masculinities is also explored to further understand the gendered processes among African American men farming in North Carolina.

## *Masculinities*

Pini and Pease (2013) assert that researchers are at odds on a unified clear definition and concept of masculinity and often approach understanding the social construction of masculinity through qualitative methodologies. Elwell's Social Science glossary defines masculinity as "the characteristic forms of behavior expected of men in any given culture" however Connell (1995: p. 71) provides a conceptual definition that frames masculinity in relation to time, geography, and women as: "a simultaneous place in gender relations, the practice through which men and women engage in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture." This definition is significant because it fuses together two central ideas in masculinity research: (1) masculinity studies are an addendum to feminist analyses that focus on structural relationships between men and women and (2) masculinity research examines the individual experiences of men through changes in their work, culture, and politics (Campbell, Bell, and Finney, 2006).

A central tenant of masculinity is power. It silently encourages men to perform acts such as "claiming privilege", demanding obedience, and fighting off instances of being misused as manifestations of someone else's power (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009). Early in the development of the theory of masculinity, Messner and Sabo (1990) identified the association of power with masculinity in men's affinity with contact sports, attitudes of violence and homophobia in the general sporting arena. More specifically, Campbell, Bell, and Finney (2006) find masculinity in rural spaces (rural masculinity) taking on a powerful personification through images and behaviors such as the (1) alpha

male cowboy, (2) thick bearded woodsman, and (3) the gun toting, jungle tested, warrior hero. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) claim that acts of power are both apparent and hidden. For example, apparent and overt acts of power include flashy displays on televised sports (Sabo and Jansen, 1992) and name calling by children, especially when antagonizing homosexual behavior. Some of the subtler and hidden displays of power include the Marlboro Man of the American West with his signature cowboy hat, pick-up truck commercials highlighting ruggedness, horsepower, and pulling power, and beer commercials that draw attention to what “real” men drink, representations of men in the media as villainous and acting in a manner to make them seem above the law (Campbell, Bell, and Finney, 2006; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

Connell (1995) indicates that masculinity is multi-dimensional and best conceptualized as plural. It is reasonable to assume the variation in masculinist identities are the consequences of learned, motivated, and reinforced behaviors within social structures (e.g., economics, education, entertainment, family, labor, law, government, race, religion, sex, war, and farming). Newman (2007) indicates that social organizations expect men and women to mirror gender norms in language and culture as they change in expression over time. These gendered practices create multiple variations of masculinity and femininity.

Connell (1995) suggests that plural masculinities are hierarchical, with hegemonic masculinity positioned at the top. Hegemonic masculinity endows power, privilege, and status to some men and in rare cases women but the majority of men (and women) comply and become subordinated to or marginalized by hegemonic masculinity into social groups or systems. In patriarchal societies and within patriarchal social institutions,

men conditioned by hegemonic masculinity have authoritative roles while subordinating women and some men. In general, masculinities are not predetermined, but rather motivated by self-preservation, customary reward systems, and behavioral norms in a culture.

### *Plurality in Masculinity*

Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) describe masculinity as a plural concept demonstrating the variation among types of manhood. Manhood, they claim, varies according to combinations of traits that reflect differences and unevenness in masculinity. For example, men's health behaviors such as ignoring injuries, debilitating health conditions, struggles men have with disability, and high risk sexual practices are not monolithic (Sabo and Gordon, 1995; Gerschick and Miller (1994). In the health care area, the upside of plural masculinities is in the targeted design and delivery of treatment programs such as psychotherapy for men (Kupers, 1993), violence prevention for male youth (Denborough, 1996), and mental health programs for boys (Salisbury and Jackson, 1996).

Connell (1995) outlines plural masculinities within a gendered framework that labels masculinities as being hegemonic, subordinated, complicit, or marginalized. Connell (1995) views gender as a social practice with a pecking order that reinforces (1) institutions such as school, workplaces, and government, (2) race, and (3) class according to power, production, and emotional attachment. For instance, hegemonic masculinity argues for the social practice of gender through patriarchal systems because men are superior and women are inferior. Therefore, in this study, understanding gender as a

relational process and social practice is paramount to explaining the social construction of masculinity for African American men in farming.

### *Hegemonic Masculinity*

Hegemonic Masculinity stands out from other masculinities because it is viewed as the most distinguished form of manhood (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Terms such as “head honcho”, “top dog”, “ace”, or even “alpha male” describe those who embody hegemonic masculinity. Other men form their masculine identities in relation to the hegemonic masculine identity that stands authoritatively over all women and expects them to relinquish their power to men. Connell (1995) explains that the belief in the right to rule and dominate over all is the heart and soul of hegemonic masculinity.

### *Complicit Masculinity*

Complicit masculinity differs from hegemonic masculinity in that men are not forceful or seeking to dominate others but because of the gender wars waged by hegemonic men, they share in the spoils of patriarchal institutions, systems, and societies. Men with complicit masculinity believe women should respect a man’s authority through compliance to gender norms but veer to a more reasonable posture in marriage and fatherhood. For example, men with a complicit masculinity believe in taking care of their families, respect women, and are likely to do a share of the household chores (Connell, 1995; and Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

### *Subordinated Masculinity*

Subordinated masculinity is a consequence of relational practices between groups of dominant and subordinate men (Connell, 1995). The groups most likely identified as subordinated are homosexual men and heterosexual men failing to meet societal

standards set forth as the norms for manhood. McKay (2008) categorizes the areas of manhood as provisioning, protecting, and procreating. Connell (1995) claims that homosexual easily take on feminine traits and are less likely to procreate. Also, exclusion from civic responsibilities, unchecked violent acts, cultural shaming, institutional discrimination, and social snubbing reinforce the subordination of homosexual men. Subordinate heterosexual males do not receive membership into the league of manhood because their identity is synonymous with that of a pansy, coward, or weakling.

### *Marginal Masculinity*

Marginal masculinity is a manhood construction in contrast to hegemonic masculinity that is found on the periphery of masculinity as a result of different treatment and norms defining your manhood as undeserving of full membership benefits (Connell, 1995; Cheng, 1999). Race and class are significant factors positioning men into this category of masculinity. Cheng (1999) suggest that marginal masculinities are a threat to hegemonic masculinities because they maneuver around the deception of the dominant discourse. Hegemonic masculinities attempt to deal with this threatening relationship by making marginal masculinities seem invisible, imaginary, and/or not worthy of recognition, e.g. their lives don't matter.

Studies in farming reveal traditional symbols that reinforce the social construction of masculinity and gender roles such as self-reliance, rugged outdoorsy behaviors, the sexual division of labor, and the political economy's use of land for control and profit (Campbell, Bell, and Finney, 2006). These studies, on the one hand, generally include only White farm families, examine farm practices of White men and their views on the social construction of masculinity and gender roles but, on the other hand, minimize

cultural frames and historical processes unique to the social construction of masculinity and gender roles for other social groups. For example, according to hooks (1992) Whites often misinform themselves on the social construction of masculinity among African American men as being homogenous and monolithic in the form of a threatening, murderous brute with an insatiable sexual appetite. Marable (1994: p. 70) believes the “essential tragedy of being Black and male” is “our inability as men and as people of African descent, to define ourselves without the stereotypes the larger society imposes upon us, and our entire culture.” Dyson (1992: p. 124) adds that the broad cultural narratives and messages about African American men leads to social indifference that “makes the black male’s passage into adulthood treacherous at best.”

African American men farming are a unique sub-population of African American men because most are landowners, self-reliant, and have strong diverse skill sets but like most African American men are trapped within a Eurocentric discourse defining perceptions and meanings of who is entitled to manhood and what it means to be a man. Gender performances of African American men on the farm illustrate through language, thinking, and meaning in the theoretical framework of masculinity the impact of the social construction of masculinity on social interaction and gender processes. Akbar (1991) connects the socialization of African American men to years of mental suppression and emasculation resulting in an inferiority complex and dependency. In his summation, African American manhood is inherently undercut according to the definition: the ability to take on responsibilities, think independently, and to find pride in one’s self-identity.



In the next chapter, I will discuss the methodology and describe how the study was carried out. Sections of the chapter will include a design overview, background, subject recruitment, researcher's role, data collection, and data analysis.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Methodology**

This study was guided by the following research questions: What factors explain the social construction of masculinities for African American men farming in North Carolina between the ages of 50 – 75? and What decisions are African American men between the ages of 50 - 75 who farm in North Carolina making as they negotiate issues of survivability for their farms? Given the broad context underlying these questions, five categories with questions specific to that category were used to determine the factors influencing the social construction of masculinity for African American men farming in North Carolina. The categories were household dynamics, politics of farming, restructuring of the rural industry, the symbolic life of the rural category, and the symbolic life of the masculine (Campbell, Bell, and Finney, 2006). Questions were asked about household dynamics in order to determine if there was an understood division of labor or balance of power on the farm as well as in the home such as who is responsible for chores and tasks, who makes financial decisions for the farm and house, children on the farm, generation of the farm and farmer, and future plans for the farm. Questions were asked about the politics of farming in small communities to better understand the dynamics of relationships with power structures, gain insight into local farm politics, involvement with community organizations, and relationships with other farmers. For the restructuring of the rural industry category, I asked questions to identify how African American men experience the changing rural landscape, impacts of the USDA Farm Bill, structural changes in farming operations, and degree of participation in local and state programs. The symbolic life of the rural category asked questions about the meanings

associated with being a farmer, influence of family or community members in becoming a farmer, meanings associated with living in the rural versus urban spaces, changes in rural life, and things liked most and least in regards to farming. The last category delves into the symbolic life of the masculine with questions that sought meanings associated with being an African American man farming, unique and impactful experiences, reasons for farming given the known obstacles, men's attitudes toward women, women's attitudes toward men, performing acts of family and community and connections to patriarchal institutions. In order to determine the significant factors influencing the construction of masculinity of African American men farming and how they form their ideas about gender roles, an ethnographic approach was employed.

#### *Design Overview*

This is a qualitative study using ethnographic methods to explore and explain the social constructions of masculinity among African American men farming in North Carolina. According to Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey (2005) when seeking to understand a social or behavioral phenomena, qualitative studies provide richer context specific data that accounts for cultural canons, racial identities, gender organization, stereotypes, and class. Also, this methodological approach is useful when studying rurality and masculinities because rural spaces and masculinity cover a plethora of ideas and conceptions. According to Campbell, Bell, and Finney (2006) Ferdinand Tonnies attempted to construct a universal dividing line between rural and urban spaces with the rural-urban continuum theory. However, it was quickly debunked in the 1960s because of the changing rural-urban landscape and merging value systems and behaviors. Along the same lines of contention are the quantitative measures of rurality. For example,

the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) defines a rural county as having a core urban space with less than 50,000 people but Campbell, Bell, and Finney (2006) found that academics harshly questioned rurality's definition because of how a county with a core area of 40K, 45K, or 49,999 versus small towns with core areas of 1K, 10K, or 15K people can be starkly different. Additionally, rural counties adjacent to major urban centers experience high rates of urban sprawl which can distort socioeconomic indicators. They further justify the use of qualitative methods when studying rurality by raising questions about the confusion of industry as it relates to agriculture and rural spaces. Most rural spaces have a landscape that includes farms, forests, or some form of agro-tourism, however, the versatility of rural industries spans far more vastly and influences the social organization of communities constructed around those industries. Some examples include coastal towns, mining towns, mountain communities, landfill towns, counties with nuclear reactors, and undeveloped towns with no industry. In sum, employing qualitative methods such as participant-observations, in-depth interviews, and focus groups to understand and explain the social construction of masculinity among African American men farming in North Carolina yields the richest, most context specific data.

### *Research Background*

Currently, most studies on gender roles and masculinity in agriculture are conducted in agrarian societies outside of the United States, Alesina, Giuliano, and Nunn (2011), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, (2011), Kaufer, (2011), and MuGeDe, Saquina. (2013), however, this gender study in agriculture takes place in a Black Belt State within the United States- North Carolina. This state is unique because of

its cultural history, organization of agriculture, and swath of African American communities. To conduct this study, I chose ethnographic methods (interviews, focus groups, and participant observations) because masculinity construction is both plural and subjective. Lofland and Lofland (1995) argue that researchers should aim to collect the richest possible data, achieve intimate familiarity with the setting, and engage in interaction so as to participate in the minds of the setting participants. The study spans across farming operations in nine counties in central and eastern North Carolina.

According to Public Broadcast Service (2004) and Daniels (2013) African American farmers represent less than 1 percent of all farms in the United States. USDA-NASS (2007) reported that 86 percent of African American farmers are male farm operators. In North Carolina, there were a little over 1,515 African American farmers across the state, of which, approximately 95 percent were men (USDA Agricultural Census, 1997). The 2012 USDA Agricultural Census found that there was a slight increase in the total number of African American farmers in North Carolina (1,637), but the percent of African American men farming dropped to 88 percent (USDA-NASS, 2012). Although counted in the census of agriculture, many African American farmers have rented their farm land out or have let their farm land go dormant because operating costs exceeded potential profit. Farmers in this study are still actively farming and live in varied rural areas where there are still high rates of poverty, low levels of education, and community markers such as churches. Traditional conceptions of gender roles and gender identity are foundational in these communities such that men are responsible for providing for and protecting the family and women are responsible for rearing children and maintenance of the household. On the farm, men and boys are responsible for

outdoor physically demanding tasks and women and girls are responsible for indoor activities and some of the less physically demanding outdoor work such as growing fruits and vegetables for the family.

### *Subject Recruitment*

Subject recruitment for the study was done using a quota sampling method. A total of 30 African American farmers- twenty-five men, five women, and one child participated in the study. The director of the Feast Down East program, an integrated food system initiative, provided me a list of ten African American farmers located in Southeastern North Carolina. Seven of the ten farmers agreed to an interview. Next, I contacted the national office of the Black Farmers and Agricultural Association located in Northeastern North Carolina, where I interviewed 3 African American farmers and also recruited 1 of those farmers for a participant observation. The next 3 farmers were referred by a grass roots, non-profit farm organization in central North Carolina called Operation Spring Plant. The next 2 farmers have farm operations in my local community. The remaining 15 farmers were recruited by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Agricultural Agent for North Carolina A&T State University. The final study participant was recruited while visiting the campus of North Carolina A&T State University when a staff member informed me that a local minister has a small livestock and produce farm in the area. I called his office and informed him about my study and he agreed to be a part of the study. Table 5.1 illustrates where the participants were located.

### *Researchers Role*

According to Esterberg (2002), when conducting qualitative research using a social constructionist or interpretive approach, certain facets of social interaction must be

considered. For example, how does one's background influence research activities? And what is the impact of how research participant's stories are being represented? Moreover, being an African American man, many of the farmers felt some sort of kinship through gender and race which created a delicate balancing act for the researcher. On one side, farmers were comfortable and provided full in-depth responses to questions. On the other side, I had to maintain objectivity even as farmers received me as an insider. Within this delicate balance, I also took into consideration that I knew some of the farmers from previous interactions at statewide functions while working as a Cooperative Development Officer at North Carolina A&T State University from 2000 to 2002. During that time, my primary clients were African American men farming in the eastern part of the state. Also, from 2005 to 2006, I worked for a non-profit organization that tasked me with recruiting and building relationships with African American farmers in North Carolina.

**Table 4.1 Total Participants in Study**

County	Men	Women	Children
Southeastern NC			
Brunswick County	4	1	1
Pender County	2	0	0
Sampson County	5	1	0
Duplin County	7	2	0
Subtotal	18	4	1
Northeastern NC			
Nash County	1	0	0
Halifax County	2	0	0
Subtotal	3	0	0
Central NC			
Orange County	2	1	0
Guilford County	1	0	0
Rockingham County	1	0	0

Subtotal	4	1	0
TOTAL	25	5	1

### *Data Collection*

In qualitative studies, Bourdeau (2000) identifies power differentials as a key issue between the researcher and the researched. Some feminist researchers suggest that researchers should only study those on an equal or higher social footing (Allen & Baber, 1992; Harding, 1987; LaRossa, Bennett, and Gelles, 1981). Growing up in a farm family, working with multiple African American farm organizations, and attending North Carolina A&T State University gave me access and a certain familiarity with the farmers. Therefore, I entered each home, farm, and interaction with the farm families as a humble student researcher recognizing their ever present and inherent fortitude. Being an African American man also established a sense of comfort among subjects. In some instances, the familiarity morphed into a relationship where they respected me and viewed me as a member of their immediate community. As the researcher, this is very important because the African American farm community in North Carolina is small and intricately woven so that a person's name and reputation carry real consequences. Additionally, being able to speak farm lingo and knowing key people in farm organizations also assisted me in gaining entrée.

Whitehead (2005) found that classical ethnographic methods such as secondary data analysis, fieldwork, recording field notes, participant observations, and various forms of semi-structured interviews to include focus groups are often employed when researching communities or cultural groups. He compares the classical ethnographic



methods to the processes used by a child to naturally learn a new cultural system. A child must observe, ask questions, interpret activities, and be a participant observer. For this study, the goal was to capture the factors that are central to masculinity construction among African American men farming through everyday interactions. Therefore, ethnographic data were collected in the form of participant observations, in-depth interviews, and focus groups.

Once farmers were identified, I called them and immediately shared how I got their phone number. Next, I introduced myself as a North Carolina native who grew up farming and as a current doctoral candidate at the University of Kentucky conducting my dissertation research on the social construction of masculinity among African American men farming in North Carolina. Further, I informed them that my study was completely voluntary and respectively consisted of participant-observations, focus groups, and interviews and specified the portion for which I am seeking their participation. For those agreeing to participate, I then got their address and set a date and time to conduct their portion of the research study. I made a copy of all consent forms and questions days before each interview as well as mapped out directions because most farmers lived in remote areas.

Being a member of the racial and gender group I was researching, I understood the need to use multiple methods and be reflexive in order to collect the richest data possible. Reflexivity is defined as “the turning back of the experience of the individual upon [her- or himself]” (Mead, 1934: 134). Therefore, I started with five in-depth interviews and then conducted a participant observation. The interviews informed me of additional questions and topics to discuss with the farmer during the participant

observation. Likewise, the participant observation informed me on conceptions and dimensions of masculinity I had not thought to ask about or to look for. The focus groups were conducted last and were greatly informed by the participant observations and interviews. After about the sixth interview, narratives began to overlap so succinctly, a rooted phenomenology of masculinity construction and making community began to emerge.

The interviews and focus groups yielded approximately 22 hours of digitally recorded audio and 2 and a half days of participant observations. I used the Express Scribe Transcription Playback software to code and transcribe all audio interviews. Once completed, I then used NVIVO 11.0 to perform a comprehensive line-by-line content analysis searching for themes, associations, and patterns in the data.

#### *In-Depth Interviews*

According to Boyce and Neal (2006) in-depth interviews are ideal to collect context specific data on people's attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and thoughts because they provide answers to questions that surveys and quantitative data often overlook. The data collected in this study were compiled mainly through in-depth interviews. Ten in-depth interviews ranging from thirty-four minutes to one hundred and eight minutes were conducted at each farmer's residence. At the beginning of each in-depth interview, the farmer was given a \$10 gift card and a copy of the consent form that provided an overview of the study and rights of the subject. Although I explained to the farmers the procedure for conducting the interview over the phone, many of them eagerly started sharing vital information before we sat down to "officially" start the interview which required backtracking. Each interview started off with the same question, "can you tell me about

yourself and your farm” and each interview closed out with questions asking about meanings associated with being an African American man farming. The closing interview questions required some unpacking because the farmers often took for granted many of the obstacles they have overcome and their general daily demands for survival. The interviews started off in a relatively standard fashion but once the farmers started discussing some of their operating challenges, it quickly became a conversation. After each interview I made 2 copies of the audio recording and wrote reflections and observations about the experience. For example, an often repeated observation was how most of the farmers did not want to take the gift card nor did they understand why I had to give them something in exchange for them participating in the study. Some even referred to “paying” for people’s time and information was one of the problems with the educational system. Each interview was conducted with the man operating the farm and one of them included a father and son because the father was in the process of transitioning his farm to his son.

**Table 4.2 In-Depth Interview Participants in Study**

County	Men	Women	Children
Southeastern NC			
Brunswick County	4	1	1
Subtotal	4	1	1
Northeastern NC			
Nash County	1	0	0
Halifax County	2	0	0
Subtotal	3	0	0
Central NC			
Orange County	2	1	0
Guilford County	1	0	0
Subtotal	3	1	0

TOTAL	10	2	1
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### *Focus Groups*

According to Gill et al., (2008), focus groups are similar to in-depth interviews but differ in their ability to generate collective viewpoints and underlying aims or meanings. Whether delving into a topic for greater understanding or comparing narratives against data using other methods, focus groups provide a vivid mix of experiences and behaviors. I used focus groups for both gaining a greater understanding of factors influencing constructions of masculinity and to compare narratives from the interviews and participant observations.

The focus group portion of data collection in this study consisted of three groups ranging from two to nine people. The focus groups were conducted in the same manner as the interviews with the exception of place and make-up of the group. For the focus groups, we met at central locations within the nearest town and some farmers brought their wives with them. The wives were an active part of the focus group. They each received a consent form and \$10 gift card at the beginning of the interview. The focus groups ranged from sixty-eight minutes to one hundred and fifty-five minutes.

**Table 4.3 Focus Group Participants in Study**

County	Men	Women	Children
Southeastern NC			
Pender County	2	0	0
Sampson County	5	1	0
Duplin County	7	2	0
Subtotal	14	3	0
TOTAL	14	3	0

### *Participant Observations*

Kawulich (2005) found that participant observations have been a fundamental part of sociological research because they provide researchers with ways to look for nonverbal cues such as displays of emotion, observe direct social interaction, understand how subjects communicate with one another, and gauge the amount of time invested in certain activities. I conducted two participant observations with farmers in Northeastern and Central North Carolina. Activities ranged from feeding cows to harvesting cotton and peanuts. The total time spent on the participant observations was two and a half days.

**Table 4.4 Participant Observation Participants in Study**

County	Men	Women	Children
Northeastern NC			
Halifax County	1	0	0
Subtotal	1	0	0
Central NC			
Rockingham County	1	0	0
Subtotal	1	0	0
TOTAL	2	0	0

### *Data Analysis*

According to Esterberg (2002) the aim of qualitative analysis is to find possible meanings in the data collected. Coffey and Atkinson (1996: p29) offer three basic procedures when coding qualitative data: (1) “noticing relative phenomena”, (2) “collecting examples of those phenomena”, and (3) “analyzing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns, and structures.” Therefore, the first step in analyzing the data collected from the participant-observations, in-depth interviews, and focus groups was to openly code the data line by line searching for shared themes and

categories. The coding revealed prevailing patterns and themes in the data. Once patterns and themes were identified, they were then compared and ranked. Some cases were compared using farmer backgrounds, common occurrences in the farming operation, focus groups' responses, and assumed gender roles. The final step of analyzing the data was building a typology to arrange the data in a more manageable format so that a content analysis could be performed to determine what meanings may lay hidden in the texts. In Table 5.5 you will find the frequency of occurring themes.

**Table 4.5 Content Analysis Themes**

Code Name	Number of Sources	# of References
Performing Masculinity	14	273
Politics of Farming	14	108
Making Community	14	94
Performing Femininity	14	93
Women in Farming	12	86
Religion	12	79
Farm Wives	5	75
Generation of the Farmer	13	65
Why Still Farm - Challenges	14	64
Healthy Food and Education	10	50
Independence	13	42
Children and Married	10	37
Like Most	14	35
Meaning to be an AA Farmer	12	29
Participation in Organizations	9	28
Vocational Skills and Training	8	27
Farming Means to me	9	25
Like Least	12	25
Future Plan for the Farm	10	17
Niche in Farming	6	17
Rural vs Urban	6	14

## Chapter 5

### Description of the Setting

#### *Introduction*

This chapter will be divided into two different segments. The first segment will detail four specific situations that occurred while the researcher was in North Carolina collecting data. The other segment will paint a picture of African American men farming in North Carolina. To insure confidentiality as stated in the consent forms, each farmer, farmer's wife, and child's name have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

#### *During Data Collection*

I traveled to North Carolina in late September during the fall of the year to conduct all parts of the data collection for the study- in-depth interviews, focus groups, and participant observations. During this time of the year farmers are beginning to harvest fruits and vegetables as well as commodities like cotton, spring wheat, soybeans, and field corn. Setting up interviews and focus groups to collect data during the harvest season can be challenging because farmers don't want to lose any of their harvest time. To add to the tight windows of time available for setting up interviews, the national and state weather service declared 2015 North Carolina's wettest year since 1948 which meant farmers now had even less time for non-farm related activities. Also, African American men farming are most likely to have older less efficient equipment that decreases a harvest's yield. These factors are significant because commodity market prices are at a 5-year low and farmers must maximize their harvest time. Adding to the already high risk of farming is a mix of local politics that behaves as an invisible hand. In sum, these factors create the environment in which African American men farming

engage in behaviors of survivability that reinforce their ideas and constructions of masculinity.

### *Situation 1*

In late October, I traveled to a farm to conduct an interview in northeastern North Carolina. The farm was about 10 miles off of interstate 95. The small town with a couple of restaurants, gas stations, and a hotel I passed through coming off the exit ramp quickly became fields of soybeans and peanuts. As I turned onto a long dirt road leading to his farm, I came to a closed and locked fence gate with a “No Trespassing” sign posted in front. This was very different from any other farm I had visited. After contacting the farmer on his cell phone, he came to open the gate and explained to me that he was in a long embattled fight for his farm with the local Farm Service Agency office that was attempting to foreclose on his farm. The gate was one of a few ways he kept them from freely coming onto his farm. I had known this farmer for over 15 years and had never seen him in such a state. In fact, the first time I traveled to his farm in 2000, he was operating 2 hog houses, 50 – 60 acres of soybeans, 5 acres of tobacco, and a garden with a tiller. During that time, he bartered the 5 acres of tobacco with neighboring farmers to meet all of his equipment needs. On the day of the interview, he looked not just like a farmer taking his last stand to hold onto his farm, instead, he looked like a farmer trying to hold onto his masculinity. He wrote his own legal briefs to the courts handling his case because he could not afford an attorney. He was also taking care of his wife who had been diagnosed with congestive heart failure and the early onset of dementia. Three months prior to the interview, he suffered a stroke from overheating in a field but showed no visible signs or impairment. He drove himself to and from the doctor’s office to get



some medicine for what he thought was a migraine headache. After finishing the interview of almost two and a half hours, he was still in survival mode as he followed me out to the entrance gate to unlock it, let me out, and re-lock it. About three months later while finishing my last focus group in another part of the state, I received an email that 14 Federal Marshalls in full tactical gear with guns drawn surrounded him on the outside of his house at 7:30am while the local Sheriff served him with foreclosure papers. After the Marshalls entered his house and removed all his weapons, they allowed him to go inside to get his wife who was still sleeping and only had her pajamas on. They had to immediately leave the premises in this state. In a follow-up conversation, he told me “as a retired Special Forces Green Beret, I believe the Marshalls came to kill me because it’s normally just the Sheriff and a deputy that serve papers.” His last few words as we were ending the phone conversation, “well, I let out a few tears but they are gone, it’s time to get back in the fight.” Sadly, I later found out that his farm was purchased at public auction 2 months later by his neighbor.

### *Situation 2*

About an hour away in the heart of the North Carolina Black Belt is a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation African American man farming about 2500 acres. He grows mostly cotton, soybeans, and peanuts. In fact, for probably about 10 miles on the main road, there were cotton fields on both sides of the road that he farms. The town was so remote, the local post office was attached to a little corner store and served as a major land mark in providing directions throughout that part of the county. He shared with me that even though he holds the largest amount of acreage among African American men farming in the state, considerably smaller White farmers often make gestures and sometimes make

offers for him to sell portions of his land to them with the condition that they will give him life time farming rights to the property. He admitted that had it not been for his connection with larger African American men farming in other southern states, it would be tough to survive because “they” are always waiting for you to slip or fall so they can get your land.

### *Situation 3*

The second in-depth interview was conducted around early October in southeastern North Carolina in a coastal county known for tourism. I spoke to the farmer’s wife at length about my study on the phone before being able to get a date, time, and place to hold the interview with her husband. She initially told me that her husband and son were working all day and into the night harvesting corn and fighting the current rainy weather conditions which included planning for the upcoming forecast of storms. During a 3-day spell of rain, I contacted her and she was able to set-up the interview with me and her husband. I spoke to her around 11a.m. and the interview was set for 3p.m. that afternoon because they would be prepping to get back in the fields the next day. As I traveled to the farm, on both sides of the road there were fields of soybeans and corn. It was rural but not remote. In fact, the farms were less than 10 miles from the shoreline of the Atlantic Ocean and one of the issues discussed by the farmer was the dual impact of the tourist industry on their operations. On the positive side, it brought in more potential customers that they could sell fruits and vegetables too. On the negative side, the increased traffic and new housing developments were encroaching on their operations. In fact, the farmer explained the growth in tourism as the biggest change in the rural area. Along with traffic, it brought in new golf courses, housing developments, and a

significant increase in the cost of land, especially rent for farm land. The farmer was transitioning his operation to his son but they were experiencing a few problems. They needed to upgrade all of their equipment. The tractors and combine engines were blowing gaskets and catching fire from overheating because they were more than 25 years old and could not handle the stress of operating 12 to 15 hours a day. The family started a Gofundme.com page in an attempt to raise money for the farm. The farmer also held two other jobs in addition to farming 200+ acres. He's an over-the-road truck driver and a minister. His wife, a retired school administrator grew and sold organic produce. Curious about how she got into organic produce, I asked her to share some of her story. She shared that after a breast cancer diagnosis in 2004 and not wanting to take chemotherapy or radiation, she decided to heal herself with the food she produced. She had gotten so good at growing organic produce that her son got involved and they began to sell it locally. At the time of the interview, she had taken no treatments and showed no signs of any sickness. Unfortunately, the family's attempt to raise money yielded less than 100 dollars and the farmer's wife had a cancer relapse succumbing 6-months after the interview.

#### *Situation 4*

Reflecting on these events between interviews, I hypothesized there may be some randomness to these experiences because of their geographic locations. However, after traveling to an affluent county in the center of the state to conduct an interview, a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation farmer shared many similar experiences. For example, the farmer shared details of a lawsuit he was currently involved in where a neighboring farmer was suing him for a violation of intellectual property rights on a purple variety of sweet potatoes.

He shared that he had paperwork to show the international distributor he ordered his plants from because as a certified organic grower, there are restrictions on what he can plant according to state regulations. To date the case is still active. He went on to share his struggles getting financing for equipment through his local county agricultural offices. With a credit score of almost 800 and a moderate cash flow, he went to apply for a loan at the county office to get a used tractor but the loan officer would not process his application forcing him to apply for a loan at a bank nearly 150 miles from his farm. Consequently, he also had to purchase a new tractor because the bank would not finance a used tractor. This was the 4<sup>th</sup> in-depth interview I conducted and by the last focus group, many farmers and farmer's wives shared similar stories of struggle, survival, triumph, and defeat. Of equal significance during the data collection, I unanimously referred to all farmers as being African American throughout the interviews and focus groups, but the farmers and their wives racialized and gendered their experiences as the path a "Black man" is relegated too in this country.

#### *African American Farming in North Carolina*

The historical and present day experience of African Americans farming in North Carolina is nuanced and deals with considerably more than making a living from the land. In fact, Gilbert, Sharp, and Felin, (2001) found that landowners controlled the political-economy of rural African American communities. For example, the Eastern Carolina Council, later renamed the North Carolina Council trained African American farm families to use cooperative economics, create farmer cooperatives, credit unions, buying clubs, and set-up insurance programs during the 1930s and 1940s (Pitts, 1950). The Council set up 98 African American owned credit unions and 48 alternate

cooperative businesses (9 consumer stores, 32 machinery cooperatives, 4 curb markets, 2 health associations, and 1 housing project). In addition to the North Carolina Council, Mechanics and Farmers Bank, founded in 1907, attributes much of its early success to African American farmers and landowners. This framework presents a very different picture from much of the literature focusing on African Americans in farming. Much of the early literature starts with the early days of Reconstruction in 1865 where the establishment of the second Freedmen's Bureau set out to suppress the efforts of freed slaves to own land and can be traced right up to recent admissions by the U.S. Department of Agriculture on practices that they have actively employed for decades to disenfranchise African American farmers, most of whom were men (Shannon, 1968: p84; USDA-CRAT, 1997; Daniels, 2013). This sub-section will connect the literature with data collected from African Americans farming in North Carolina to create a more complete picture of the agricultural landscape.

Wood and Gilbert (2001) and the U.S. Census of Agriculture show that farming in North Carolina has been dominated by men. Table 6.1 accounts for the total number of African American men and women farming since 1978. Gilbert et. al (2001) found that the early Agricultural Census' may have underreported African American farmers as evidenced by their failure to capture the presence of women in farming until 1982 but since the 1997 Agricultural Census, reporting has been significantly improved. Currently, the average age of African American farmers is 62 and more than 78 percent are over the age of 55. Men continue to dominate the African American landscape of farmers at 88 percent. However, that is a considerable change from 30 years ago in 1982 when nearly 100 percent of African American farmers were men. In the 1997 Agricultural Census,

Wood and Gilbert (2000) found that unlike other southern states whose African American farmers are mostly involved in livestock production, North Carolina's African American farmers were involved in field crops and tobacco production. However, since the tobacco buyout program ended as 2014, many farmers, especially small African American farmers, no longer have the safety net income that tobacco provided and are looking for other means to replace the lost income (Brown, 2013).

**Table 5.1: African American Farmers in North Carolina**

Year	Total Number AA Farmers	AA Women Principle Farm Operators
1978	5,820	-
1982	4,413	4
1987	2,640	221
1992	1,866	165
1997	1,515	90
2002	1,686	119
2007	1,491	192
2012	1,637	198

\*All data obtained from USDA Agricultural Census.

Darling (1982) shared that African American landowners were the foundation of the African American community's ability to establish economic empowerment and social freedoms. Fields (2000) listed patronizing local businesses, property taxes, supporting community organizations, and maintaining kinship networks as a few ways African American land owners create the socio-economic base of African American communities. Gilbert et al. (2001) also found that African Americans have acknowledged some of the benefits of owning land as having a greater sense of self-respect, individual pride, children are more likely to have greater educational attainment, happier countenance, and more likely to be involved in civic activities. During data collection, African American farmers spoke about some of these benefits and experiences associated with land ownership and farming. The following are a few of their excerpts:

LG, a third generation farmer spoke proudly about various community institutions. He said,

we built a grocery store in the community. It was Black owned by DB. PH also had his own store. He was Black.... Yea, everybody in this community owned their own land. As a matter of fact, all the surrounding Black communities owned their land.

MF shared how the strong spirit of community and healthy competition among African American men farming was a collective part of the African American man's identity. He said,

There was no prouder or grander group of men that you could find. It was like, if one of them got a car, the other one said, well I will have mine before the harvest season is over. If one got a tractor, another would say, yea, I'm going to have one of those and it was a healthy competition between them that actually made the community better because it was positive. It was not negative outreach or pulling down the family. It was actually building up the family.

Another farmer, RG, spoke extensively about the self-respect and dignity of family farming for African American men. He said,

When I grew up on the farm with my parents, the farm was self-sustaining and self-supporting. We had cows that we got milk from, cows we killed for beef, hogs we raised on the farm that I could eat- good stuff if you will. We had chickens that were laying the eggs, chickens that we killed, we grew our own vegetables, we were growing our own apples and pears canning them-preserving them, we had plums that we were preserving, we had everything on the farm that it took... So while it was a tough way to make it- the truth is that the foods were far more wholesome, and for us as a family it allowed you to hold on to your dignity...

A farmer in one of the focus groups shared that,

In this job of farming, you got long and late hours. While everybody else is sleep or be setting in the shade, the farmer still got his wide straw hat on out there wiping sweat. It ain't no end. You never get rich as my wife often say but when you look at the deal you are a whole lot richer than you think you are. Actually, like I say, you basically know where all your food come from. You don't have to worry about this salmonella.

MF illustrates another example of how landownership offers examples of empowerment within the African American community,

...15 years ago our county decided it was going to rename all the roads in the county. We had numbers on the roads. 1144, 1141, 1142 and the road that our community center is on is a part of the Resettlement. A White guy who owns the former plantation that adjoins the Resettlement property wanted to name the road, Ravens Nest Plantation, and in order to name the road, you had to get a majority of the landowners to agree to the name of the road. Well, the Concerned Citizens of Tillery own the property that adjoins Ravens Nest Plantation. There happened to be 150 of us landowners and we thought the road should be named Community Center Road. Do you want to know what the name of the road is today? Community Center Road! We had 150 landowners. That's power! And we only own 6 acres among 150 people and he owns close to 100 acres but he is only 1 person. And truly, that is power.

As with any experience or enterprise, there are bound to be some negatives or undesirable encounters. It's a given that farmers will grapple with market changes and sometimes disastrous weather cycles but African American farmer obstacles go far beyond the givens. According to Darling (1982), many African American farmers experience forms of racism and unjust treatment among lending institutions and U.S. Department of Agriculture officials. For instance, she found that some African American landowners in Warren County, NC were told they have to sell their land in order to meet the requirements of certain government programs. The 1997 Civil Rights Action Team report (CRAT) found that African American farmers were habitually being approved for operating loans and receiving the funds well after the planting season. Additionally, if a discrimination complaint was filed, USDA offices would set in motion the foreclosure process without processing or investigating the complaint. The following are some encounters farmers experienced:



A third generation farmer, SH, was generating a substantial income and needed to upgrade equipment but ran into problems. He said,

I went to a bank when I thought things were going pretty good. I saw this tractor that I wanted. I had done borrowed money from FSA to build a hog facility and I needed a tractor so I went to the bank and he was asking me all about what I had and I told him about where I had already got money to build a hog facility. Do you know that—the man dropped the pencil!! He didn't do any more writing so I had to get up and leave. Then I went on to another place and got the tractor through a dealer. He financed me but I got a new tractor. I was trying to get financed to buy a used tractor which was more economical for me and something I could pay for. See, that new tractor put me in a bind. But, I needed a bigger tractor and that's why I went ahead and got the new one. Cause I know what I needed—but if I had been a White man, he would not have did me like that.

While LG, a farmer, was trying to get a loan to build a house for him and his wife, he found that there was different treatment for Blacks,

I went and fought a war for this country. I came back and tried to build a house. I was going to build a house when I first got married through FHA. Somehow or another, I got the wrong blueprint and I went to get the application. The woman got mad- she snatched the blueprint out of my hand and said “you ain't supposed to have this.” But they had different houses for Whites than they did for Blacks. They had all the FHA houses designed the same way- that was a lie. I had one of the White people's blueprints and she snatched it from my hands. She did!! When I got ready to build a house- I had A1 credit. My credit score was above 800 and they would not let me have a loan. They refused the loan.

The Black Farmers and Agriculturalist's Association (BFAA) distributed a petition for the farmer I described earlier, EW, whose farm was foreclosed on during the data collection phase of my study. BFAA shared that with tears in his eyes, the farmer described part of what he was feeling when the Federal Marshals surrounded him and his house with guns drawn. He said,

“I believe if I had shown one ounce of resistance, the Federal Marshalls would have killed me. I actually believe that's what they came to do.”

The reputation of discrimination and lack of support from USDA and industry institutions is quite widespread among African American farmers. Many have documented the discriminatory practices throughout the twentieth century at both the state and federal level (Marable, 1979, and Daniels, 2013). One farmer did not identify a specific experience but instead shared a strong feeling of distrust when it comes to dealing with government offices:

When you go in to apply for something with USDA, you might be the only one who applied for that thing and they say we will notify you when the money comes in. You are the only person on the list. The money comes in but you don't ever be notified because Sam or Joe will come over there and he was put first even though you signed up first.

The following citations were provided to offer a more balanced view of what is an intricately laced background lived out by many African American men farming and their families. Each farmer will be more thoroughly introduced in the following chapters. Some of the universal themes associated with each farmer's highlighted experiences were an unencumbered right to self-determination, sense of self-worth, sense of purpose, and racialization. The majority of participants in the study are at least 2<sup>nd</sup> generation farmers and their understanding of what it means to be an African American, a farmer, a man, a woman, a family, and community has primarily been passed through an intergenerational transfer of knowledge. I raise this point because the construction of masculinity and assignment of gender roles has a strong intersectionality with race among African American men and women farming.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Findings**

In this chapter, I will provide a detailed description of the study findings. The findings are presented in three segments: (1) in-depth interviews, (2) focus groups, and (3) participant observations. The first segment consists of ten in-depth interviews that included farmers, farmer wives, and a son in the process of taking over the family farm. The second segment consists of three focus groups that included farmers and farmers' wives. The third segment consists of two participant observations that included two farmers. I have also included charts as a visual aid in showing the distribution of data across the ten most referenced content areas within each segment. Prior to the detailed description of each segment I will briefly elaborate on the overall process of data collection.

The proposed plan was to have each in-depth interview and focus group at a respective county Cooperative Extension office with the assistance of agricultural extension agents referred by North Carolina A&T State University. However, after multiple unsuccessful attempts to make contact with the Cooperative Extension office, I transitioned to an alternate plan that involved using a list of African American men farming provided by the Director of the Feast Down East Program in southeastern North Carolina. The list contained names and contact information for seventeen African American men farming across five counties in southeastern North Carolina. From the list, I recruited three in-depth interview participants and five focus group participants. The remaining participants were recruited through an informal referral process by other farmers. During the in-depth interviews and focus groups, no subject was off limits and

many of the participants brought up topics that I would have not thought to ask about. The data were quite voluminous and have been collapsed into broad categories that are informed by my theoretical framework and research questions. The categories will highlight content on the respective participant's household dynamics, the politics of farming, restructuring of the rural industry, symbolic life of the rural, and symbolic life of the masculine. To insure confidentiality as stated in the consent forms, each farmer, farmer's wife, and child's name have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

### *Segment 1: In-depth Interviews*

#### *Doug Lance*

The first in-depth interview was conducted with a farmer that has never been married and has no children. I met him at his house which was located behind a set of fields he farmed. A border of trees and brush separated his house from the fields. As I pulled up to his house, he was standing in the driveway with boots on as though he had just come out of the field. His house was quite large and my instincts suggested to me that he may have built his house. I got out of my truck and we spoke. He tells me that he is just returning from one of his fields where he was spraying some crops. I complimented him on having a very nice house. He proudly said, "my brother and I built this house." We entered the house and sat down in the den area where I gave him a copy of the consent form and conducted the interview. One of my first thoughts upon entering the house was, how does he manage both the farm and the inside upkeep of the house as a bachelor but he offered very few comments on the maintenance of the inside of his home. His comments were primarily centered on the politics of farming and how it has changed rural life for African American farmers and generally small farmers. He spoke

extensively about the agricultural policies of the Secretary of Agriculture under President Nixon. He said,

You did not ask but if I may make a comment- The political structure has had a lot to do with why you see so few small farmers. The system. I should like to say it is-- The system. You may not remember it but i'm old enough to remember back when the Secretary of Agriculture under President Nixon said the big thing in farming was too-- get big or get out of farming. The black farmers were too small mostly to really take advantage of the big farming.

Mr. Lance is a third generation farmer. After being discharged from military service and leaving a civilian job, he started farming on his own in 1975. With over 40 years of farming experience, he provided very detailed information about how the families in the surrounding communities supported themselves off of 3-5 acres of tobacco and gardening. He expressed that the elimination of the tobacco allotment system pushed many families out of farming completely. Many of the families still own their land and rent it out to him or other farmers to keep their property taxes paid. He rents many small farms to grow corn, soybeans, and wheat. However, current grain market prices are flat and that has pushed him into more fruit and vegetable production. He is currently working with a couple of organizations to create a food hub in the county that can serve as a much needed outlet for him and other struggling farmers.

He spoke with fervor when talking about working the land as a means of survival, yet sounded sad that so many young people have no interest in farming He said,

You young people don't even think about it. That is the great danger! They see what their uncles, and fathers and grandfathers have gone through and they don't even think of farming as a future. And that's the great danger.

According to him, churches, which are widespread in his community have done little to support African American farmers. He said,

today the church if they would do it has the opportunity to be one of the most effective tools for reorienting people. So, that is one thing and it's difficult to do that and because the ministerial organizations are about strictly religion—telling the public what to do after they die, but nothing about while they are living on earth. I don't mean to be critical but that's the bottom line. They don't really think about the farmer. Now, some of the churches do prepare their own food but they go to the supermarket and get it. In some cases, I have donated some food and I am trying to do more of that just to try and get more people into growing fresh foods. But that-- the bottom line-- in other words, they prepare dinners the home cooked way but they go to the supermarket to buy it

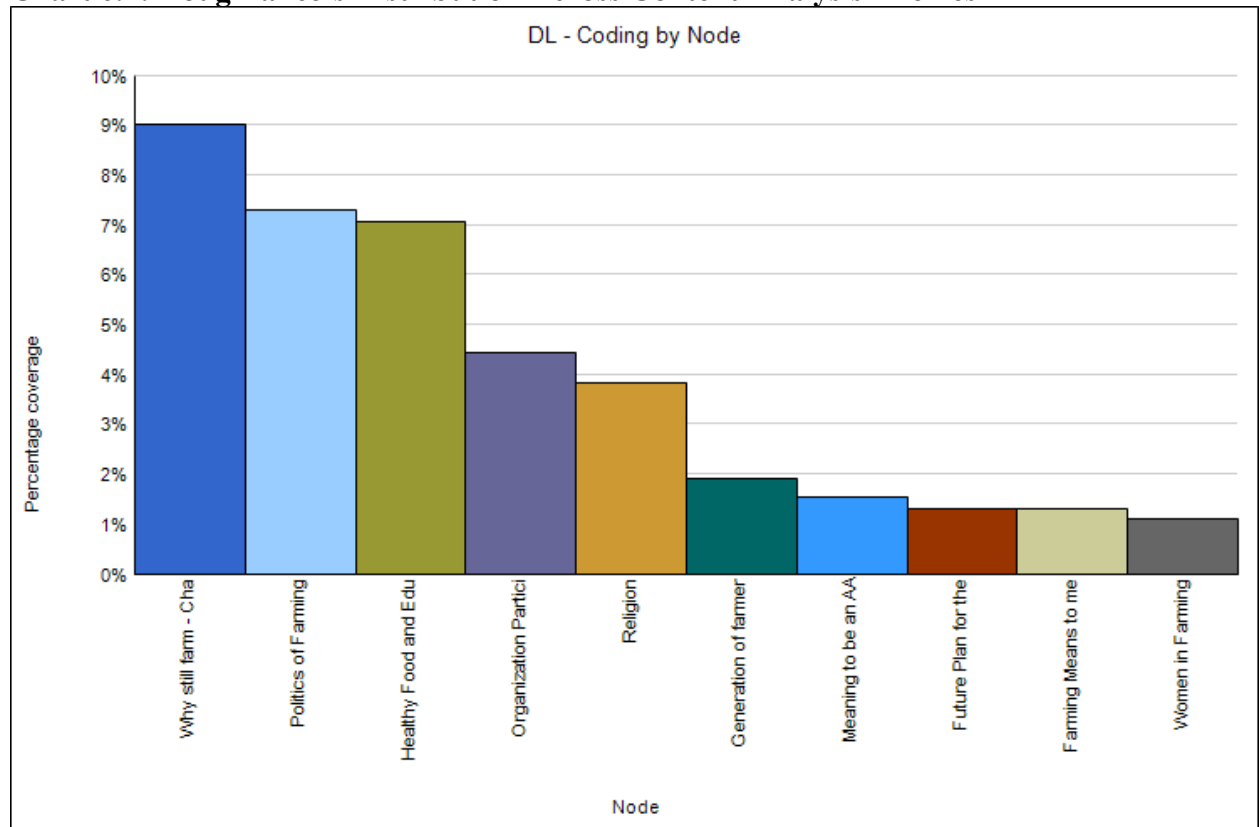
In addition to flat commodity markets as a problem, he talked about the size and cost of equipment that are being tailored toward the needs of large-scale farmers. He shared that African American farmers and landowners have got to start training younger people how to farm and equipment manufacturers have to create cost-friendly products for small farmers with 50 - 100 acres.

As an African American man farming he felt proud to be part of a rich heritage that can be traced back to agrarian societies in Africa. Working the land made him feel closer to his roots and he talked about many of the health benefits associated with growing your own food. In that same regard, he also talked about his frustration with how uninformed the masses are regarding the way food is produced, what it should look like, and even taste like. He suggested that the lack of food education has also contributed to the ruining of many African American rural communities because it was growing our own food that tied us together.

He is currently training a younger African American man to take over his farm but will only transfer official ownership if he can acquire financing. On the topic of women in farming, he shared that even though there are some women farming, it will be a long time before they will be seen as equals with men in farming because participation

rates are still too low. Doug’s responses and experiences were consistent with much of the literature I have read on African American men farming with the exception of not having a family of his own. Chart 6.1 illustrates the most frequently occurring themes during the interview.

**Chart 6.1: Doug Lance’s Distribution Across Content Analysis Themes**



The low percentage of coverage reflects the amount of detailing he provided for each theme. Because of the many challenges he has faced and is still struggling to overcome, his two most significant content themes were “Why still farm / Challenges” and “Politics of Farming”. Conversely, “Women in farming” and “Farming means to me” were the two least significant themes which reflect his responses on family and why he farms. Lastly, I also observed that as Doug spoke about his farm and presence in

community politics, there was little self-awareness of his impact, influence, and modeling for other community members, especially younger generations. This correlates with the low frequency of occurrences on the symbolic meaning to be an African American farmer.

### *Harry Ford*

Shortly after completing the first interview, my mother asked me to ride with her to pick-up a couple of bushels of black-eyed peas and freshly caught fish. We traveled about 15 minutes from her house to a community where I remembered hunting and fishing as a child. I saw a large sign at the entrance of a recently paved road that said “Welcome to Ford Brother’s Farm.” Having lived away from home, I did not recall the family or farm from my childhood but my mother told me they have been farming around 700 - 800 acres for decades and I should ask them for an interview. While she was getting the black-eyed peas and fish, I talked to the patriarch of the family explaining my research study and he gladly agreed to participate in the study. Ironically, his name was on the list of farmers provided by the director of the Feast Down East program but I had not gotten around to calling him yet. I returned to his farm the next day at 6 p.m. as scheduled. There were a few young guys working on equipment by a large shed and an older gentleman working on a pick-up truck by the side of the shed. Mr. Ford was sitting on a picnic table under the garage attached to his home shelling some peas and talking to his grandson. When I entered the garage, he told his grandson to go in the house so pa-pa can take care of some business. After giving him a copy of the consent form, I started off the interview by asking him to tell me about his farm and farming background.



A 2<sup>nd</sup> generation farmer and Vietnam veteran, he started his path into farming the same as his father. He worked on a public job for some years but the company was closing down, so he started shrimping commercially and then farming on a small scale. He no longer shrimps commercially but was able to expand his farming operation to well over 700 acres spread throughout all parts of the county. He spoke proudly about starting his farming operation on a small scale in the local community and growing to now being the largest African American farmer in the area. In addition to corn, soybeans, and wheat, he also grows a few acres of fresh produce that his granddaughters sell at a farmer's market and in the local community. He also grows chickens for eggs and meat as well as hogs and beef cattle for family consumption. As the man of the house, he shared that outdoor tasks and the farm are handled by him and that his wife is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep inside the house. He added that she is the primary cook but he will cook some days because it's a labor of love. He makes all the farming operation decisions but he and his wife make decisions on the household together.

To my surprise, he didn't offer much in the way of how rural industries have been restructured. Regarding the politics of farming, he spoke about receiving benefits from farmer protections in the farm bill and that about 75 percent of the farm land he manages is rented. He did not say that local politics have been be a big problem for him. He gave some examples of how farming on a large scale gives him access to information and resources that smaller farmers are not able to access. For example, he talked about the problem of morning glory flowers growing in corn and how their vines pull the corn stalks to the ground. To deal with this problem he uses a high-rise sprayer that can apply weed killer to corn up to 5 feet tall. I looked up the cost of such a machine on

www.tractorhouse.com and found that prices for a model year in the last 10 years range from \$95,000.00 to \$245,000.00 dollars.

As we began to focus the discussion on the symbolic life of the rural, he blossomed into another person. He went on and on talking about his joy of planting a tiny seed and watching it grow into a tall plant. He added that having the autonomy to make his own decisions has everything to do with why he farms. The only thing he disliked about farming was extreme weather, such as hurricanes that can lay an entire crop down. One of the biggest changes he noticed in rural life is how people no longer grow what they eat. Unlike his mother and people in the community during the 80s and 90s, people today rather go to the grocery store to get their food. Regarding a man's role and responsibility, he said, "number one is being able to support your family and supplying the needs of my family. And being able to give young people advice on the right way to go in life."

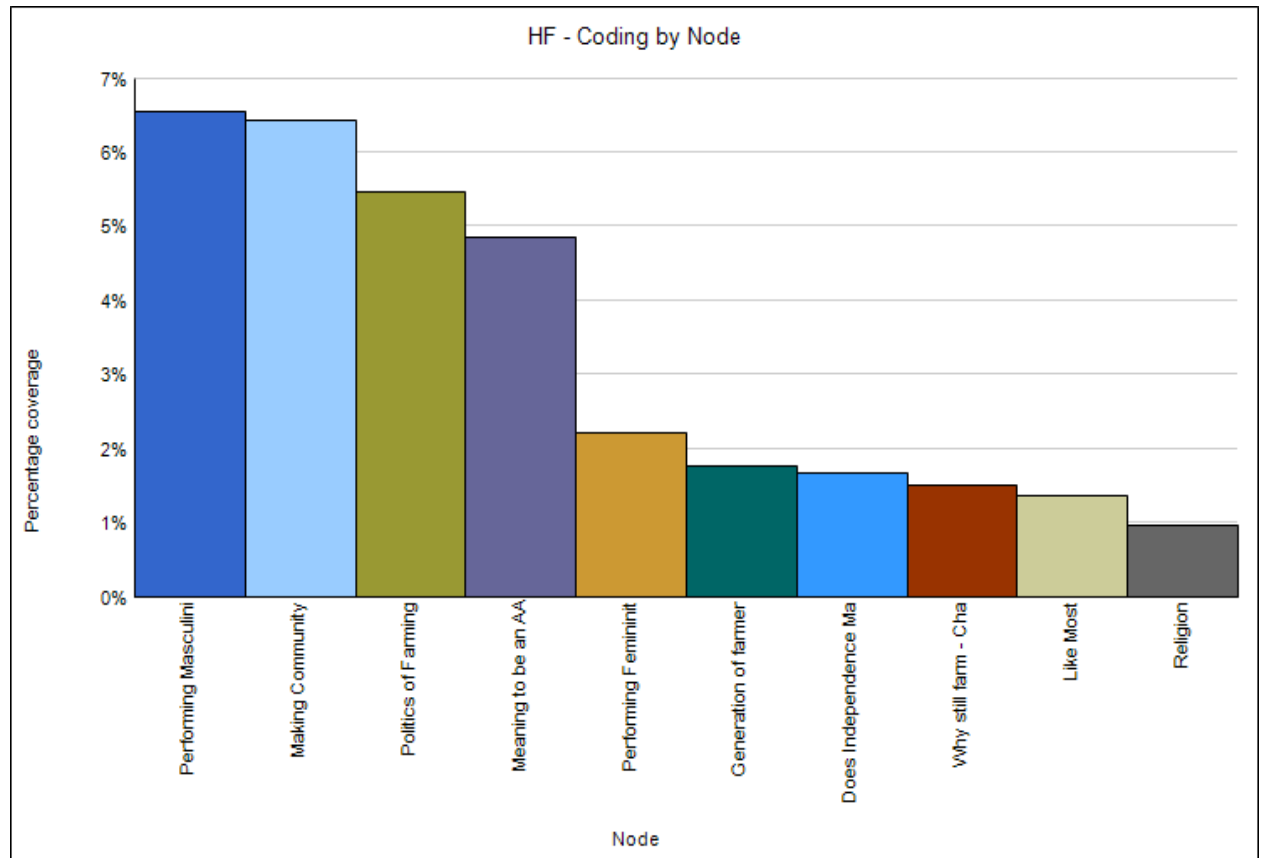
In the transition to questions on the symbolic life of the masculine, he said,

my father instilled in me to never give up no matter how bad it gets. I believing in myself—and believe me, there are a whole lot of things being a black farmer- but still, believing in myself and being able to work around a lot of obstacles and being successful. That's the most important thing and that's what makes me move forward.

He attributed those messages to being able to overcome many of the problems he's faced as an African American man farming. Additionally, as an African American man farming, he said, "you have to possess a strong mind, and a whole lot of faith, and will power, and think very wisely to be successful." Regarding women in farming, he acknowledged their presence in farming and ability to farm but pointed out that their numbers are still really small.

A couple of days after the interview, I found out that one of his brothers is president of the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) chapter and sits on many county government boards. I surmised that may be an additional reason he may not be directly involved in organizations focused on the politics of farming or the restructuring of rural industry. Surprisingly, on Chart 6.2 it is his 3<sup>rd</sup> strongest content area. Harry was very humble during the interview and it was evident that his self-confidence was shored up by a history of success in his farming operation--all of which conditioned how he constructed his masculinity. Harry's strongest interview content areas were performing masculinity and making community as illustrated in Chart 6.2. The examples he shared of overcoming challenges and taking care of his family seemed to work together to further validate his masculinity and his ability to help other members of the community.

**Chart 6.2: Harry Ford's Distribution Across Content Analysis Themes**



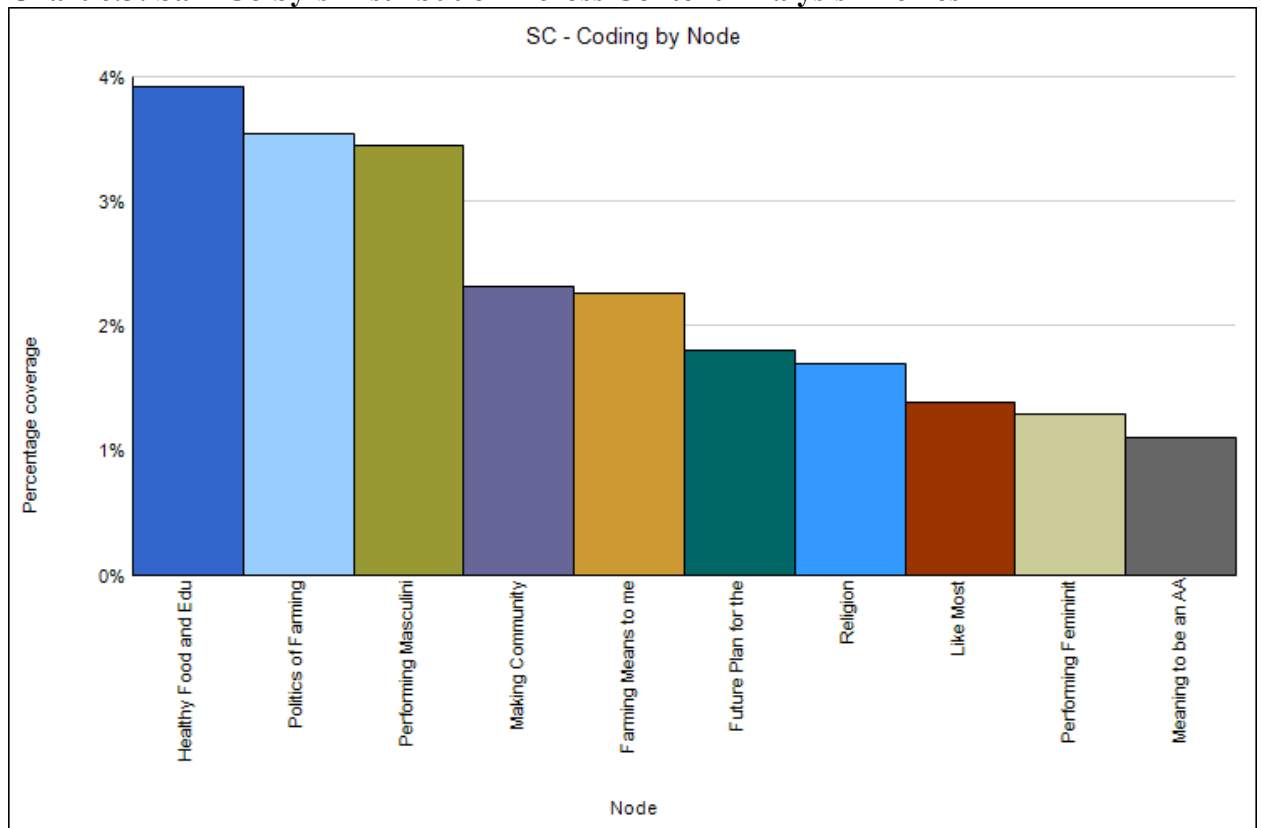
*Sam Colby*

As I attempted to set up this interview, the farmer's wife was a true gate keeper as she explained that her husband was unavailable because he was in the fields harvesting corn from sun up to after sun down. She asked me about my study and where I was from. When I told her where I was from, she interrupted me and said, "I know who this is and you are going to laugh when I tell you who I am. This is Mrs. Colby, your middle school assistant principle." We both laughed as she expressed being proud of my accomplishments and perseverance in pursuit of the terminal degree. She went on to tell me that her husband would do the interview but it really was a matter of finding a good time given their current harvesting schedule. During a 3-day rain spell, I called and was

able to speak to the farmer to set up the interview. When I arrived at the location, there were several tractor implements on both sides of the house and a grain truck parked in front along with a pick-up truck and a small car. In addition to the farmer, his son, wife and an elderly woman family member were at the house. The women went into the kitchen and started watching television while we sat in the den to conduct the interview. As I gave him the consent form, he asked if his son could participate in the interview with him because they were a team. I said, “sure.” I thought interviewing both father and son simultaneously would result in a stronger performance of masculinity but Chart 6.3 illustrates that the politics of farming and healthy food were the two most occurring content items during the interview.

A third generation farmer, he grew up sharecropping tobacco with his father and has been farming on his own for many years. He raises corn, soybeans, and wheat on a little over 300 acres. In addition to farming, he also is a truck driver and preacher. When asked about managing all 3 things, he mentioned that many days he has thought about giving up farming but he’s being obedient to the Lord’s plan. He said, “He {the Lord} tells me there is a reason to be a farmer.” Further into the interview, he echoed a few times that farming was in his blood and it was a complete joy.

**Chart 6.3: Sam Colby's Distribution Across Content Analysis Themes**



He introduced his son, Sam Jr., who is taking over the farm. Junior is in his mid-20s and talked about his love of being outside and his fascination with tractors since being a small child. He's been active in 4-H Cooperative Extension programs at the local and state level as well as youth agricultural programs at North Carolina A&T State University, North Carolina State University and Virginia Tech. He also shared that his wife, Mrs. Colby, is into organic farming and has hoop houses, a high tunnel, and only eats what she produces. Sam shared that there wasn't much of a division of labor in the household. He said, "everybody pitches in with whatever needs to get done." For instance, he shared that his wife would often times rather be outside with him and their

son than be inside the home and similarly, there were times when he would come in late from farming or driving trucks and join in with household chores.

Regarding the politics of farming, Junior spoke more on the topic than his dad. Sam mentioned that he leaves the politics of farming to Junior because in taking over the operation, he will need to know how to maneuver and respond to changes when I am not around. The biggest portion of the land they farm is rented. Junior shared examples of changes in the 2014 Farm Bill that have hurt their operation such as modifying the direct payment programs which now extends program payments to one year after the calendar year reported. Similarly, he expressed frustrations with the current company that purchases their corn. For example, on the day of the interview, the market price of corn was \$3.90 per bushel (60lbs) but it cost him \$200 dollars to buy 50lbs of seed. He was happy that fuel prices have come down but shared that the prices of fertilizer and chemical weed killer are going up every year. The lack of public outcry has convinced Junior that nobody cares about the farmer.

As I segued into the symbolic life of the rural by asking about motivations to still farm in the face of a changing rural industry, Junior shared that farming is what he grew up doing and what he loves. At this point, I expected there to be a silver lining somewhere in their operation but he presented an even dimmer picture. Over the past two years, he said,

the tractor blew up after the combine caught on fire, and after my other tractor blew a head gasket, and my other tractor had a wrecked transmission. I thought about it and said, ya know Jesus, yet I still will press on... Yes sir. I say, why stop now?! I don't see any point in quitting. It's either do that or go back to working for somebody else for a pizza and a pork chop. I got my independence. I got my sanity and I can do something—I got an individuality in the fact that I am doing something that nobody else is doing.

He set-up an online fundraising campaign for the farm but was unsuccessful in garnering financial support and eventually closed the campaign website. Sam shared that even with the downs of farming, he liked above anything else being able to see the bountiful blessing of his hard work in the form of a great crop. He added that, knowing where your food comes from is also important to him. Junior identified freedom as the thing he likes most about farming.

As I shifted to questions seeking to find out the meanings they associated with being a farmer, their responses were unclear. In an attempt to understand their responses more clearly, I approached the topic differently by asking both Sam and his son how they define a man and a woman. Sam said,

first of all, a man should be God-fearing and he should take care of his responsibilities. A woman stands by her man and does what she needs to do to help out and I guess I would define a woman as someone who, when you are in a situation and they see where you are at and see the level it's got to go to—they are willing to spend the time to help you get there.

Junior defined a man as one not afraid to step up and take responsibility. Junior seemed to be reflecting on his own masculinity because he added,

I am not going to be a broken man. With all that's going on with the operation, and everything that's going on with the economy and everything else in terms of farming. Even with this foot and half of rain that we got—you can't let it break you!! You have got to be able to survive—even when it gets rough!! I look at farming as survival of the fittest!! Only the strong survive!!

This interview provided a lot of information about their farm operation and life experiences even though I had to sometimes ask using two or three versions of certain questions. The wife came into the room at the end of the interview and talked to me extensively about her organic farming operation, even inviting me to stop by and look it



over. I did not spend as much time with the wife but she provided me with significant information about her organic operation and its connection to her health. That information along with her husband and son's responses on healthy food and education explained why it's their largest content area as illustrated in Chart 6.3. She told me her deep faith in God's healing power and the food coming from her hands and hard work was keeping her alive. After being diagnosed with breast cancer in 2004, she radically changed her diet and refused to take radiation or chemotherapy. If she had not shared her story, I would not know she had been sick. Sadly, about 6 months after the interview, she fell ill and passed away.

#### *Henry Silas*

After finishing the previous interview, I began to get more comfortable with the process of conducting the interviews. I was learning how to shift the interview exchange to more of a conversational dialogue so I called Henry Silas, who was not on the Feast Down East program list of farmers. I vaguely remembered him from a previous job working with African American farmers in North Carolina. I called him and after explaining my study, he was willing to participate. When I arrived at his farm there were a group of about five people working behind a large shed. I approached the group, introduced myself and then asked the whereabouts of Henry Silas. They told me he would return shortly as they were grading organic tobacco and hanging it to be cured in a barn. The youngest in the group, an African American woman, introduced herself as his daughter. The oldest in the group, an African American woman, asked if I had ever worked in tobacco before. When I told her "no, I had not." She said, "come around here so I can teach you how it's done!" She showed me how to stack the leaves and to look for

leaves without any blemish or spots. The daughter asked about my research and my major in school as she began to tell me about her college studies. About that time, Henry pulled up and greeted me. We left that area and went across the street to another of his farm sheds to conduct the interview.

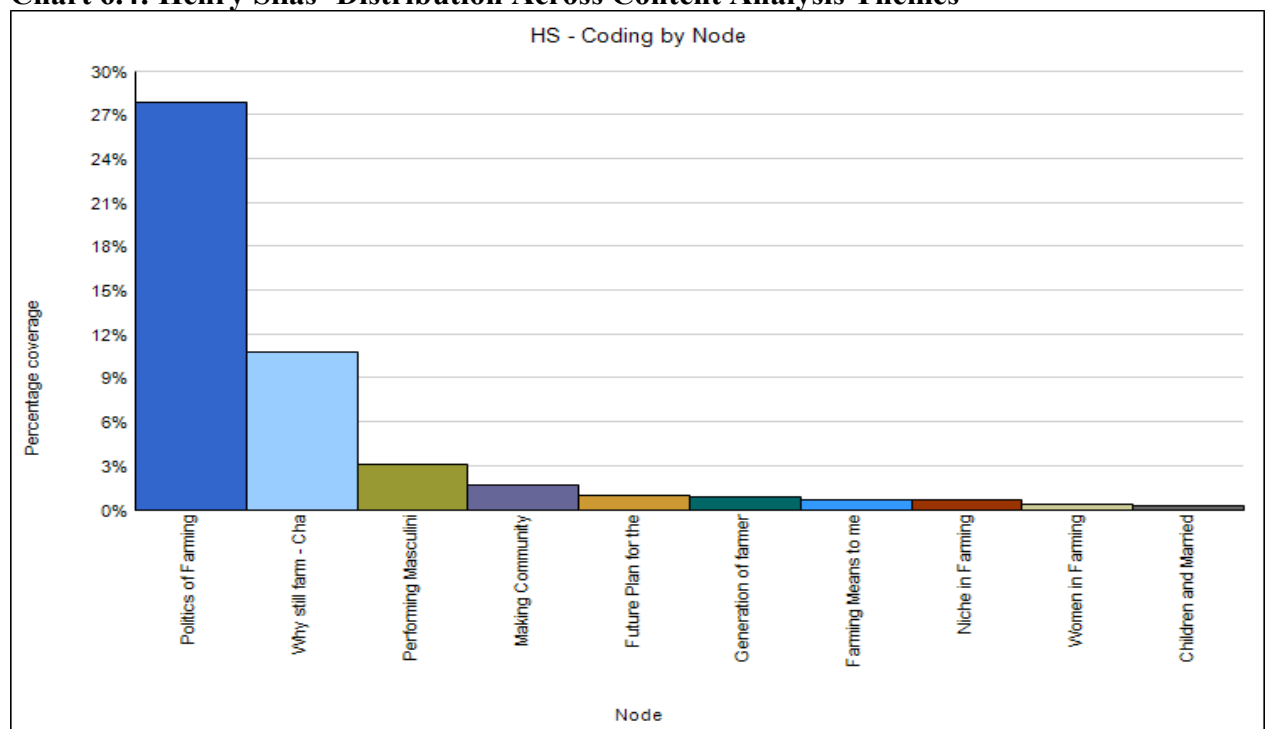
Henry shared that he is a third generation farmer that grows organic tobacco, organic sweet potatoes, and organic collard greens. He went on to mention that he's been farming on his own for more than 40 years and was primarily influenced by his parents and grandparents who farmed conventional tobacco. Henry has been recognized by many statewide organizations for being able to keep his family's farm operational now for over 100 years. His wife works a full-time off the farm job and is not involved in the farm operation but does take care of all the household maintenance. His daughter, an only child, works with him during the summers and when on break between semesters. In addition to the daughter, he has 4 other employees because he specializes in labor intensive crops. The employees generally work independently around the farm which allows him to do paperwork and payroll. He currently does not have a succession plan for the farm but would like to pass it on to another African American farmer. He owns about 50 acres and rents about 200 acres. He grows both for the local farmer's market and on contract. I complimented him on his success as a farmer. He stopped me and explained that

although I'm doing well, there is a difference between independence and being your own boss. Specifically, many people think that as a farmer I have some independence and I am my own boss but when you have to borrow money to buy equipment and grade your products according to customer specifications, then the bank has your independence and the customer is your boss.

He shared that those sentiments are due in-part to the high standards of his specialty big box store customer base.

Mr. Silas participates in a couple of state and federal agricultural programs to assist with the overall maintenance of his farm but has little involvement in traditional political and community organizations. However, his greatest interview content area was the politics of farming because of the constant interaction with local farmers, local financiers, organic farming boards, and specialty markets which has become necessary for him to overcome the challenges that have put many farmers out of business. Chart 6.4 provides a visual illustration of how the politics of farming and overcoming obstacles have trumped other content areas.

**Chart 6.4: Henry Silas' Distribution Across Content Analysis Themes**



Henry mentioned that being an organic farmer is the only way he can afford to farm. He spoke at length about many of the changes in the rural industry that are affecting his operation. For example, there are considerably more rules and regulations due to a growing base of health conscious consumers. A growing market is good he shares, but it adds to your cost of operating because you are constantly changing your set-up and paying inspectors to visit your farm for the latest certification. Some additional changes in the rural industry he pointed out are that his father once supported 3 families on 125 acres and now 125 acres can't support 1 family. Also, "there is new equipment coming out every year that Black farmers can't get which makes it more difficult to compete because only White farmers can get the financing." That kind of thing he believes diminishes the value of being a farmer because it makes survival more difficult.

As an African American man farming, he thinks there will never be a level playing field because there's a White man or woman at every turn ready to set a trap. Moreover, he shared that there are no African Americans seed dealers, equipment dealers, or banks willing to take the risk. As we moved into the last category, symbolic life of the masculine, I asked him, "given the challenges, why still farm?" He laughed as he could only say, "I reckon it's just a love for it and willingness to fight because it is tough!" He shared that people expect you to fail and at his age no one is going to hire him so you deal with a nonstop struggle every day. Lastly, on the topic of women farming he believes that times have changed because in his county they have a strong presence in produce and horse farming.

Henry seems to manage his operation more tightly than the other farmers interviewed. He didn't go into as much detail as some of the other farmers but provided

enough to make his points. A true fighter, he had to declare bankruptcy to avoid losing his family's farm through foreclosure and even with the bankruptcy, he still had to come up with over \$10,000 to avoid losing the land and equipment. Very confident in his standing as a farmer and a fighter, he was very sarcastic while talking about many of his experiences. As I was preparing to leave, he referred another African American farmer in the area to participate in the study.

*Matthew Franks*

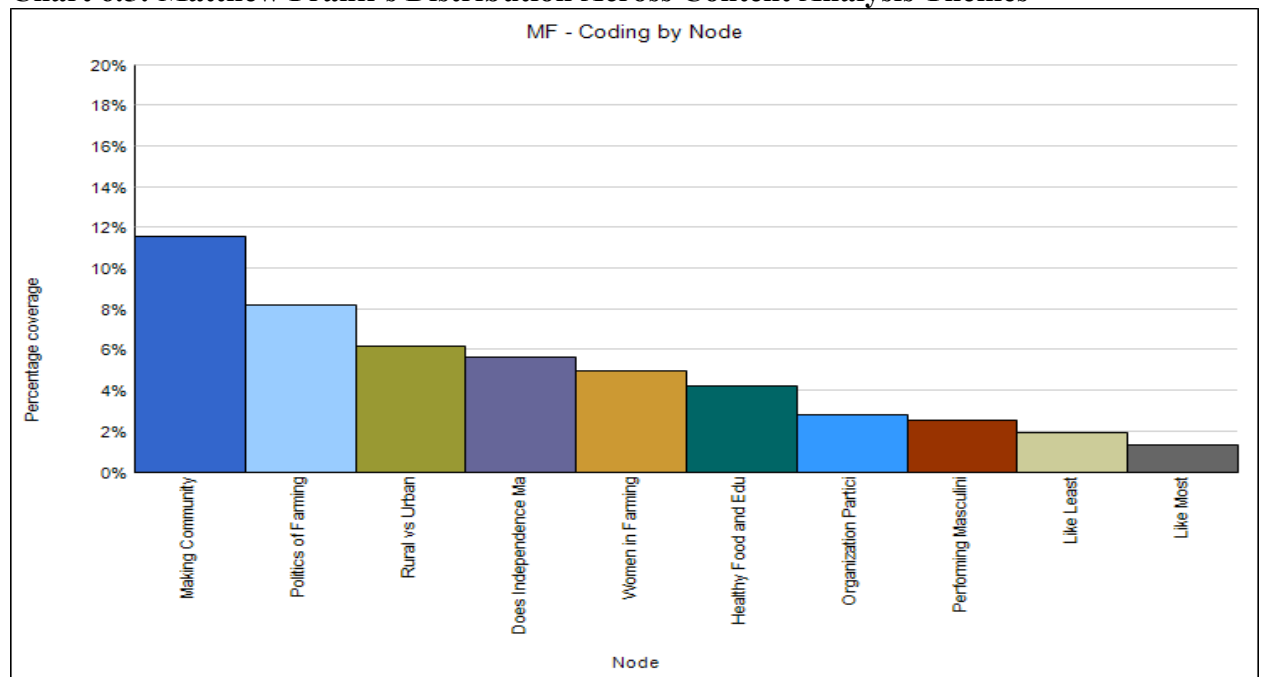
My first internship in college was at the headquarters of the Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association (BFAA) in Tillery, North Carolina. I contacted the president to explain my study and after he agreed to an interview, we set a date and time. Located in the heart of North Carolina's Black Belt, when I pulled up to his office, it looked the same as when I interned in 1998. BFAA's office was located in a small warehouse with a family-owned casket making company and another community organization. Instead of being greeted by the secretary, I was welcomed in by the president as he informed me that due to budget shortfalls he had to lay off the secretary. As we sat down in his office, I started off the interview by asking him to tell me about farm and farming experience.

Matthew, a third generation farmer with no children or wife, shared that he and his siblings are in the process of paying off a thirty-year debt with USDA that started at forty-seven thousand dollars and grew to three hundred and fifty thousand dollars with interest and fees. He shared that the case stems from discrimination his mother and father experienced in being denied debt forgiveness similar to other local farmers because of a three-year period of drought and flooding in the mid-1970s. He is currently paying one thousand and two hundred dollars monthly for the family's two homes and one hundred

and fifty acres. To assist with the monthly payments, they are renting the land to a local African American cotton farmer. He pointed out that after having nearly three hundred African American farm families in their community, they now only have four and none of them are children or direct descendants of the original three hundred. He believes that unless something is done to reconnect the grandchildren and great-grandchildren to the land, it will primarily be bought up by local large White farmers.

Matthew spoke extensively about the local politics many African American farm families and landowners experience. He is still the national president of BFAA and operates another non-profit community organization. Additionally, he is involved in several social justice organizations and maintains contact with African American farmers across the South. His embattlement with USDA and involvement in community are reflected in Chart 6.5 where his two most occurring content areas of making community and the politics of farming.

**Chart 6.5: Matthew Frank's Distribution Across Content Analysis Themes**



For the symbolic life of the rural category, he shared that two of the greatest meanings associated with being a farmer are family and community. For example, he explained the road he lives on is about a half a mile long and produced 50 children among 8 families. Also, he shared that farming was never drudgery because you were with your family and there was always a reward at the end of a long day. He's observed that since the exodus of many manufacturing companies to other countries, their community has suffered. He talked about the community grocery store, gas stations, and small restaurants that closed down shortly after the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). He shared that many middle-class working families found themselves in welfare lines. He now travels about 25 miles to shop at a decent grocery store and 15 miles to get to a gas station. Moreover, the rural community suffers from brain-drain and has shifted from being relatively self-sufficient to now being completely dependent and struggling. He expressed that there is a great need to educate both urban and rural African Americans about farming today because there is true power in land ownership and farming today is so technologically driven that you really don't have to break a sweat.

In the symbolic life of the masculine category, when talking about African American men and farming, he said,

Black men really became men. We did not have as much alcoholism, in the resettlement as we had in the sharecropping area. We didn't have absentee of male students at school in the resettlement as we had in the sharecropping area of the community. The difference being—am I working for me or am I working for somebody else.

Farming allowed African American men to take care of their families in a way that made them feel good about themselves. He shared that farming gave you a real sense

of power and made you believe you were able to control your fate. His thoughts regarding women in farming were the most insightful so far but he thinks that it's still a long way off before they are regarded as equals with men in farming. For example, while organizing farmers for the Pigford I and II Class Action lawsuit against USDA, he recounted the surprise of everyone to see so many African American women farmers from all over the country. He said,

those of us that were involved in the Pigford Class Action lawsuit didn't realize how many Black women were actually heading up farms all across the country. And the other thing is when my father signed the loan with Farmers Home Administration, my mother's signature was required also. We over look that. When my brother signed his loan, his wife's name is on the loan also. It's just that it had never been taught to us that this segment of the family was also a farmer.

He added that their presence and role is very significant. Not simply as homemakers but as the nucleus of the operation. He remembered seeing his mother making a home, working in the fields, and driving trucks loaded with corn, peanuts, and cotton. He thinks it's a terrible oversight within our community that we have never fully recognized women with the title farmer. He shared that no African American man farming should ever discount African American women's contributions to farming.

In conclusion, Matthew discussed many aspects of African American men farming that focused on empowerment, a positive self-identity, and the family's experience. In addition to making community, the politics of farming and restructuring of the rural industry categories were heavily emphasized due primarily to the legal battle with USDA and paying off the agreed upon settlement. After the interview, he took me on a tour of his family's farm and told me how he and other families in the New Deal Resettlement community are reframing their rural experience by changing the labels on



their community. He said, “we don’t own marginal land in the Black Belt region, we own prime riverfront property next to the Roanoke River.” So far, he shared that one of the families in the community sold 6 acres of their riverfront property to the executive vice-president of a famous company in New York for \$25,000 per acre. While giving me the tour, he also showed me a small screen wrapped cabin he built and rents it to nature enthusiasts. While on the tour, it was also the first time I had ever been picked cotton. As I was leaving, he suggested I contact William Early, an African American farmer he speaks with frequently to be in my study.

### *William Early*

When I called William Early, I told him I spoke to Matthew Frank and then explained my study. He was glad to hear from me and after setting up the interview, wanted to know how things have been going in school. I pulled up to his farm at 9 a.m. as agreed only to see the cattle steel-tube gate at his farm’s entrance padlocked with a no trespassing sign. The farm was located in a remote area and my cell phone service was going in-and-out but I was able to get a call through to inform him I was at the gate. He came to unlock the gate and embraced me as though the prodigal son had returned home. We talked a few minutes about me being in school. He then started talking about many of the things that he’s been dealing with over the past couple of years. I told him I wanted to get all the details of his experiences in the interview so he relocked the gate and we began to go to his home but first we stopped at his hog houses to make feed for the adult hogs and a new litter of piglets.

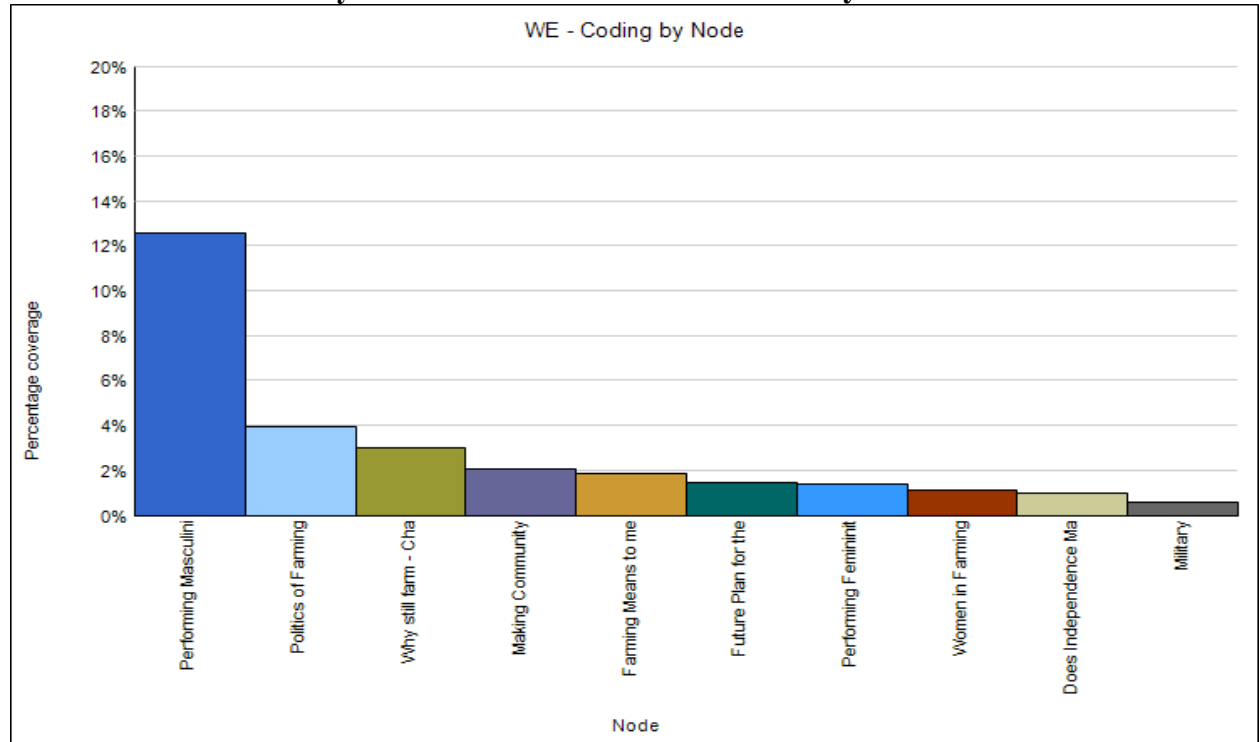
William Early, a second generation farmer and three-tour Vietnam veteran, {had} a one hundred and six - acre farm with 2 hog houses. His parents were sharecroppers in

his early childhood and I surmised that may be one of the reasons he is cautious about contract farming. He added that although sometimes frustrating, he farmed the entire time he was in the military. For example, as a Green Beret Special Forces officer, having taught at Georgetown University, Howard University, and University of Maryland at Eastern Shore, he raised Duroc hogs and sold them at the Delaware feeder pig market while also growing soybeans to make his own feed. When stationed at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, he mentioned that he had his largest hog operation with over 200 head of hogs but had to absorb a \$50,000-dollar loss when his commission relocated him to the Washington, DC area. I asked, “Given the unpredictability of his schedule in the military, why did he try to maintain a farming operation?” He laughed and talked about being marked to be a hog farmer while in his mother’s womb. He shared that before his mother and father moved to the plantation to be sharecroppers, they were poor and ate mostly fruits and vegetables from the garden but on the plantation his father was responsible for raising and caring for hogs. As a small child he would go with his mother and father every day to feed the hogs.

Regarding the division of labor on his farm, early on his children helped out around the house and farm. Now that his children have all moved away from home, he takes care of all the direct farm operations and his wife, a retired grants manager at Howard University, took care of his paperwork before getting sick. He pointed out that except for the past couple of years, they both cooked and shared the responsibilities inside the house. However, since his wife has been sick he takes care of her, maintains the house, and manages the farm. He admitted it’s a lot and that he’s been talking to one of his sons about coming to take over the farm but his first task is to save the farm from

foreclosure. He's been in a legal battle with USDA for the past 8 years. Juggling so many responsibilities and fighting the government to keep his farm makes it easy to see why performing masculinity is his greatest content area as illustrated in Chart 6.6.

**Chart 6.6: William Early's Distribution Across Content Analysis Themes**



He spoke in great detail about the politics of farming. For example, he talked about his history raising all-natural Duroc hogs. He shared that Duroc are a lean-meat type hog and when crossed with a Poland-China hog, you get the perfect mix of fat-to-muscle ratio for products like sausage and bacon. He belongs to a local pork-grower cooperative but has not been active the last few years because he didn't want a lot of people asking questions about his legal battles with USDA. He also shared two examples of African American buddies that are contract growers and doing very well. I thought about his social network consisting of successful farmer friends and wondered if they could help him get back on solid financial footing. I didn't pry too much because I got a

strong sense that he was not the kind of guy that asked for help but instead provided it. I did ask, “Why wouldn’t he contract?” given his financial challenges. He said, “because they control everything!! Why do I need to contract when I can produce my own hogs?!!” One of the things impacting his financial standing is the restructuring of the rural industry, specifically, the tobacco buyout. He pointed out that with the government no longer regulating tobacco, companies will not give you a contract if you are growing less than 100 acres. He believes that knocks out mostly all African American farmers and a few small-scale White farmers. Also, he added in regards to contracting, now that Smithfield Packing Company has been purchased by a Chinese corporation, they have changed the weight requirements for a topped out hog from 280lbs to 380lbs which significantly increases facility maintenance expenses.

In the symbolic life of the rural category he doesn’t say it explicitly but his deep love for farming is connected to the pride he feels in carrying on the work that he was born into, that was his parents legacy. For example, under all the stress of possibly losing his farm, he talked about how much he enjoyed raising hogs. He smiled reminiscently as he bragged about winning 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> place in hog competitions at the North Carolina State Agricultural Fair. A number of times during the interview, he also emphasized the independence he feels as farmer. However, I think the compounded stress of his 20+ years entangled with USDA, losing his tobacco allotment, and taking care of his wife has worn him down both physically and mentally. I deduced this because when I asked about farming challenges and what he liked least about farming, he replied, “It’s very little I dislike about farming.” Not sure whether to press that question given all that he’s shared, I decided to move on to ask about changes in rural life.

He mentioned that a lot of farmers are selling off parts of their farm because they are getting older and their children don't want to take over the farming operation. He provided me with lots of information, examples, and stories but it was the manner in which he delivered them that gave me pause in the symbolic life of the masculine category. For example, when discussing what it means to call himself an African American man farming, he referenced his father's early influence as to why he chose hog farming. Even in regards to intimidation tactics by other farmers and bureaucrats, he referred back to being unruffled because of what his father taught him. I didn't realize how long he's been dealing with the racialized environment of agriculture until he talked more in-depth about his winnings at the State Fair in the early 80s. He explained that after winning, he sat on a barrel beside the hogs, probably looking more like a farm worker than a farmer because a couple of older White gentlemen stopped to compliment the hogs and wanted to speak to the farmer who raised such prized animals. Upon introducing himself as the farmer, he shared that they turned beet red and walked away mumbling. He also spoke in great detail about being a walking encyclopedia on the science of raising all-natural healthy pork and how many hog farmers come to him when they have problems with their animals. As with the other interviews, we closed out on the topic of women in farming. He shared that his wife is his rock. He pointed out that a changing trend in many families without boy children is the training of girls to successfully operate the farm.

This interview was bitter-sweet because I remember the farmer as being very energetic and actively involved in various community organizations as well as Cooperative Extension projects. I could see the stress in his countenance. Three months

after the interview, I called to check-up on him and found out that he and his wife were forced off of their farm in a foreclosure that involved 14 U.S. Marshalls with guns drawn and the Sherriff with a couple of deputies. I spoke to him a few days after it happened and expressed my sentiments. He said,

I broke down and had a few water works shortly after it happened.  
Now, my biggest worry is making sure that my Brown Sugar is  
okay.

I asked about his future plans given what just happen. He replied, “I need to stay close to the farm and continue fighting to try and keep these suckas from auctioning off my farm.” Two months after that conversation, his farm was sold in an open auction to an African American woman that was suspected to be bidding on behalf of his neighbor, a White farmer. A week after the auction, I received an email from BFAA soliciting prayers and support for the farmer as pictures were shown where the farmer looked completely broken.

#### *Jack Jones*

The president of BFAA also referred me to Jack because he is one of the largest African American farmers in North Carolina and currently rents his family’s farm. After speaking with him on the phone and explaining my study he was happy to participate. I originally scheduled his interview the same day as William Early’s because they are about sixty miles apart but two-hundred and fifty miles from my home. Upon arriving at his farm, a couple of his employees shared that he was at a funeral and should return shortly. After waiting about thirty minutes, he returned from the funeral and apologized to me for the wait. He also asked if we could reschedule the interview for the early part of the coming week because he only had a couple of minutes before leaving to go pick up

some equipment with his brother. I was so impressed with the size and setup of his operation that I agreed and also asked if I could spend the day with him for a participant observation. He agreed and told me to be back at his office around 8 a.m. the following Tuesday. The reason that I scheduled both an in-depth interview and a participant observation with him is because he is an outlier. The closest farmer in size to him is in a different part of the state with about 750 acres. Moreover, his office, a double-wide trailer with a small porch was larger than some of the farmer's homes I had previously interviewed.

Jack Jones, a graduate of North Carolina A&T State University and retired Cooperative Extension Agent is a second generation farmer. In addition to the size of his operation, he is different from the other farmers because he set his farm up as a limited liability corporation. Jack shares ownership and decision-making power with his brother and son who each are responsible for a third of the production and harvesting in the operation. He described his farm operation as a collection of other farms he has purchased over the years. The division of labor for Jack and his wife is pretty well defined because he has such a large and demanding farm operation. He explained that his wife takes care of maintaining the house and he keeps the grass cut and the bills paid.

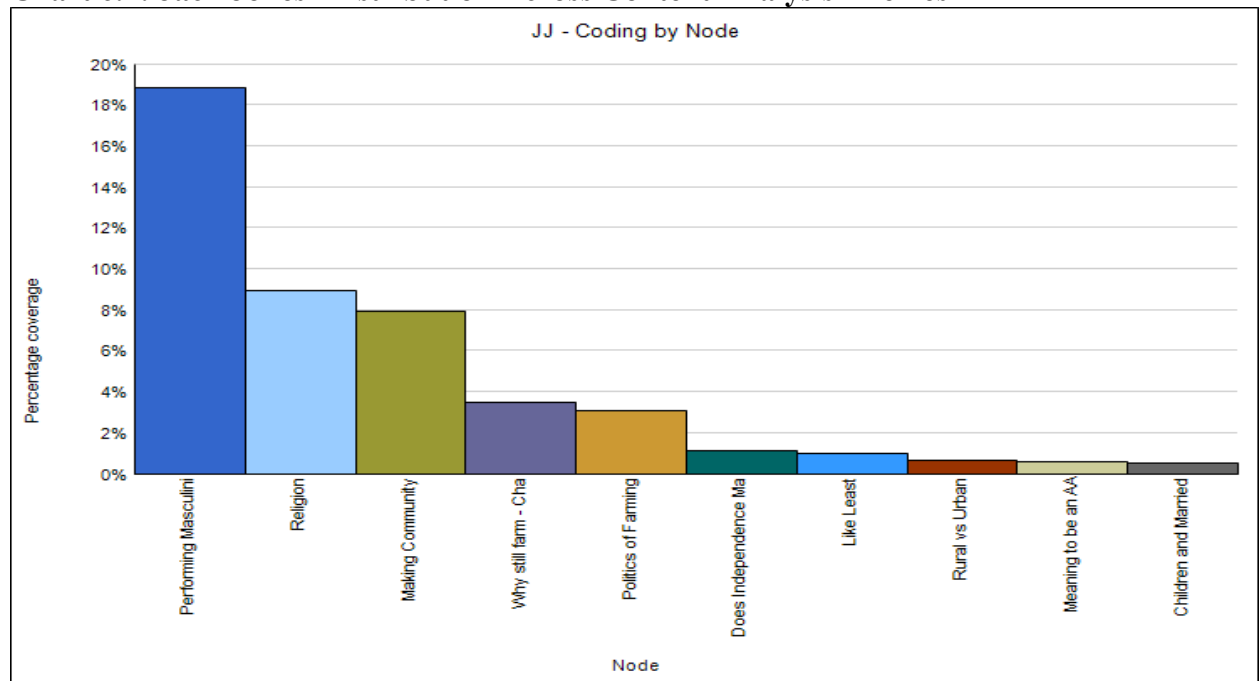
On the topic politics of farming, he shared that he farms about two-thousand and five hundred acres of which he owns about seven hundred acres and leases the rest. He primarily grows cotton but also produces several hundred acres of peanuts and soybeans. He is also exploring solar farming opportunities. He used to do some contract farming but now he sells or stores his harvest based on market fluctuations. He's also active in his community but only mentioned belonging to one farm organization. He spoke proudly of

his membership with a group called the National Black Growers Council (NBGC). He explained it as a group of about dozen African American men farming between two-thousand and five hundred to thirteen thousand acres across the South. In addition to the networking and tricks of the trade information they share with each other, he shared that it's a real blessing to know you are not alone. Working with such a distinguished group of African American men is part of the reason why performing masculinity towers above the other content areas in Chart 6.7. Jack is not boastful but admitted to being calculating and confident in all that he does.

Jack is also a leader within his community. He was wearing a walkie-talkie that he turned on low while we were conducting the interview. I thought it was how he communicated with his workers but he shared that he is a volunteer firefighter and he's on-call. He mentioned that one of the benefits outside of taking care of others in their time of disaster is being able to extend a number of civic benefits to the community. For example, he talked about recently convincing the fire department to have a fundraiser for a local African American family with little means that lost a young family member to cancer. He added that many stores just donate things and others give significant discounts. He's also active in the church and has served as head deacon, head trustee, and financial secretary. A few times during the interview, he talked endlessly about how God has really blessed him and that's why he gives back to his community. He stressed the importance of being a tither and a giver. He also maintains a seven-acre cemetery as a free service to the community.



**Chart 6.7: Jack Jones' Distribution Across Content Analysis Themes**



In the restructuring of the rural industry category, he shared that he works with USDA for some financing, participation in commodity specific programs, and getting insurance on his crops. He also mentioned that he plans to set aside some land for solar farming because he wants to help out a young African American company working to get established in the alternative energy sector. Overall, he provided very little input for the restructuring of the rural industry category. I surmised that could be because he farms in a persistently poor county in the Black Belt of North Carolina that has experienced little change over the past 20 years.

The thing he likes most about farming are to see things grow. He said, “you put it out there and see what the Lord can do with it.” He had to think for a while on the question of what he likes least. He finally raised the issue of steadily increasing prices for farm equipment as something he doesn’t like. He referenced a conversation he and a

couple of guys in the NBGC had about the cost to operate where one of the guys said, “you can’t do much farming with a million dollars!” He shared that his father, a sharecropper who eventually purchased his own farm, has been his greatest influence in becoming the man he is today. He reminisced on past times when family members that lived in metropolitan areas would come to the country during the summers. He mentioned that people working jobs had to be in the bed early so they could be productive at work the following day but his father didn’t have a boss and was able to party and fellowship freely with the out of town family members.

In response to a question in the symbolic of the masculine category, he deepened his voice and said, “there’s not a whole lot of Black farmers, so there’s a certain amount of pride that you have!” He shared that there are a lot of obstacles in farming and you must have a deep spirituality to manage the stress. For example, he said,

you just got to believe and leave room for the Lord to add to it. I’ve had 30 to 40 thousand dollar notes due and I couldn’t see how it’s going to work but something always happens so that I get through and then you just got to believe you are going to make it.

On the topic of women in farming, he acknowledged their growing presence in farming but pointed out that there are not many in big commodity farming.

The in-depth interview with Jack presented a very different narrative of African American men farming today. The degree of community involvement and success he has achieved in production farming more closely resembles African American men farming during the Reconstruction Era. He also plants about seven-acres of cabbage, collard, mustard, turnip, and kale greens to give away freely to the community. He seemed to get joy out of taking care of his community. During the in-depth interview and participant

observation, about five to seven African American men and women stopped by for greens.

*Tim Johnson*

The network of African American men farming is small and woven very tight because upon the mentioning of the farmer that referred me, Tim Johnson agreed to an interview. As with the other farmers, upon contacting him I explained my study and he asked where I stayed. I told him that his farm was about three and a half hours away from me. He expressed interest in participating but during this busy time he could not split-up his day and said “be here at 7 a.m.” I arrived at 7 a.m. and when he answered the door, he angrily said, “what the f#ck are you doing knocking on my d#m door at 7 a.m. in the motherf#cking morning? Have you lost your d#m mind?” As I was thinking of how to respond, he laughed and said, “I’m just f#cking with you man, come on in!” I didn’t realize until about 30 minutes into the interview that he was interviewing me to determine how much time he was going to give me. For example, a few minutes into the interview he explained that he likes to catch people off guard and that time is very important to him as a farmer. Moreover, my punctuality informed him that I was serious about my research and meeting with him given the distance and time I had to travel.

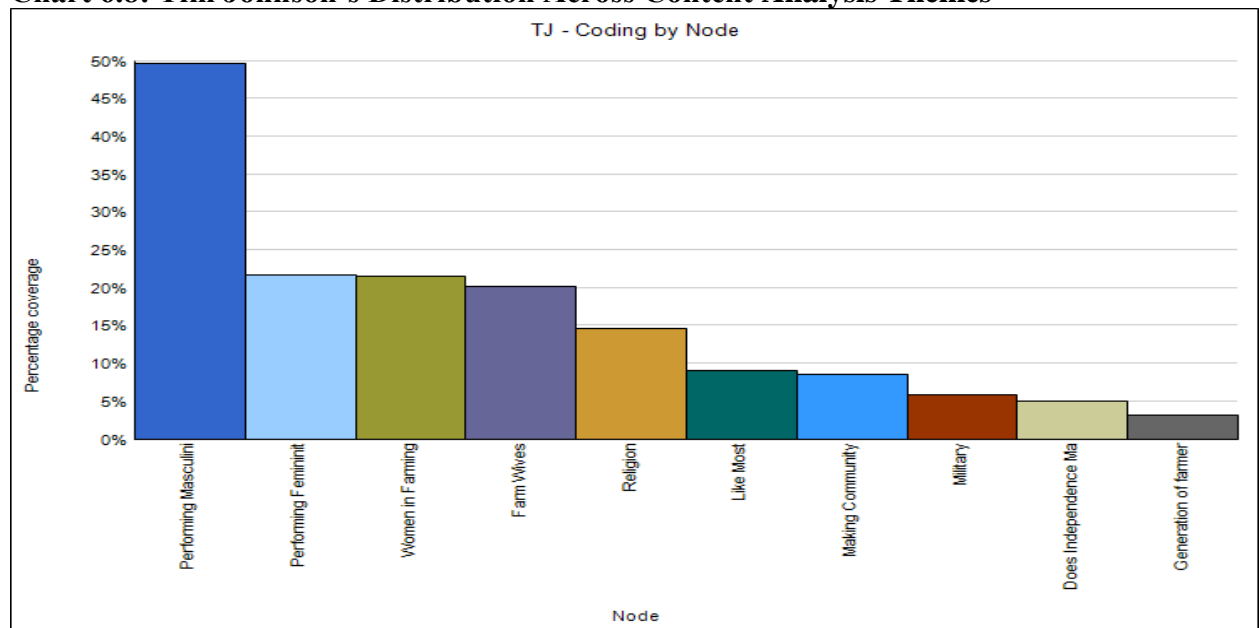
Tim, a Vietnam veteran and second generation farmer, raises a little over two-hundred acres of soybeans, wheat, rye, barley, and corn. He also raises produce and niche farms fresh water prawns. There did not appear to be a clear division of labor between Tim and his wife because she helps him in every aspect of the farm. He admitted several times that he could not make it without her. I asked, “if you could put it into words, how has she helped you be successful?” With a raised voice, he said, “GET OUTTA THIS

HOUSE!! WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU??? GOT OUT THERE, YOU KNOW YOU GOT WORK TO DO OUTSIDE!!!! That's the way she motivates me." Additionally, he said,

Evelyn is the type of woman that will work her tail off. She will help me on the farm, she went and got a job when I run out of money- she will go borrow money for me- that's her! You need a woman that will get behind you. Somebody who will push you. You ain't gonna make it by yourself, I don't care who you are. I can't make it without her. I'll be frankly honest with you-- that woman has seen what's wrong with me before I knew what was wrong with myself.

In Chart 6.8, his performing masculinity content area is higher than any other farmer. An even more interesting thing to point out here is that the next three content areas after performing masculinity all have to do with his wife. In fact, when adding the three content areas together, it shows that he talks more about the various ways his wife shows up on the farm and in the house than he talks about himself.

**Chart 6.8: Tim Johnson's Distribution Across Content Analysis Themes**



In the restructuring of the rural industry category, he shared that he has gotten funding through grants and microloans to construct a greenhouse and participated in demonstration projects. He also serves on county agricultural boards and works closely with his cooperative extension office. He spoke extensively about his relationships with other farmers in the area. Specifically, that he and his neighbor, also a farmer, are the best mechanics in the county and both of them have a reputation for being able to fix anything from small to large engines when they have time. Currently, he's talking to his son about taking over the farm but nothing definite has been decided. In regards to impacts from the Farm Bill, he expressed excitement about the tobacco buyout because he felt that as a true farmer he doesn't need tobacco to be successful. He used his tobacco settlement to pay off some debts and continues to plant corn and grains.

When discussing the symbolic life of the rural, he shared that he both likes most and dislikes most the hard work of farming because there's no greater satisfaction than working hard and seeing the fruit of your labor. However, he lamented that it's no greater dissatisfaction than to see the weather destroy all your hard work. He attributes his love for farming to his family and that God put it in his blood. He said, "When God gives it- it strengthens your soul." His wife, whom we did not know was listening from the kitchen said, "you didn't tell him that you are a Vietnam veteran!" To which he replied, "Sometimes a woman needs to stay in a woman's place." He addressed her statement by admitting that he is crazy but he knew long before going to war that he wanted to be farmer. He believes that people don't understand the value of farming and farmers. For example, in his community he's watched lots of farm land be turned into housing communities or space for neighborhood stores.

In progressing to the symbolic of the masculine category, he expressed immense pride and a couple of expletives in regards to being an African American man farming and added that nobody can put him out of farming. As illustrated in Chart 6.8, he affirms his masculinity with the belief and expression, “I am a man among men and it’s not but a few men and I am a MAN among men!!” He talked about all he’s had to overcome in order to still be farming: bad weather, police, health, banks, government, and family. Given all that he’s faced as a farmer, I asked “why farm?” He said,

cause I got fired at every job I had! I was hard headed. Didn’t take no junk off of nobody!! I mean, I didn’t listen to nobody but me. I totally don’t believe in change. Telling me- you can’t do this- I say, I can do what I want to do. And, I’m just hardheaded. I don’t need nobody to tell me what to do. To me, the way I’m talking to you, I’m just energetic. I don’t believe in you- I believe in me!! It’s nothing you can tell me. That’s just the way I am. And people like me you can’t put no harness on them. You can’t put me in a stable. You put me in a glass jar and I’m going to break that jar. Some people are just not made to be held in. And that’s just me.

Also, he shared that people in the community respect him and he helps so many people in the community. He talked at length about the joy he receives from helping people. For instance, he shared stories of taking out loans to help people and not expecting them to help him pay the loans back. In regards to women in farming, he acknowledged their growing presence in farming but by the end of his statement he brought the point back around to two heads being better than one. In other words, women and men should be farmers together to make the best possible decisions.

An interesting paradox presented by Tim and his wife centers on their religious beliefs. His wife pastors at a church but he doesn’t support her ministry because he was raised to believe that women are not supposed to be preachers. In spite of that, he declares to love the ground she walks on and believes that she is a woman of God. When

I spoke to his wife at length, she talked about growing up in a farm family and making up in her mind as a teenager that she was not going to marry a farmer. She shared that she has no regrets in being a farm wife and there is never a dull moment. As we were talking, she was picking some mustard greens on the side of their house and Tim came to the porch and said, “don’t be getting fresh with my wife!” as he laughed and waved a pistol at me. I included this paradox because it illustrates the complexity of masculinity construction among African American men farming. Other farmers have their own intricately laced examples but this instance stood out more than any other.

*Greg Roper*

In attempting to setup this interview, I was not sure I would be able to get access to this farmer because he is also a high ranking federal government official that travels constantly. He was not on my list of farmers from the Feast Down East Program nor was he referred by any of the other farmers. I tracked down his phone number from a relative and called him. After introducing myself, I explained my study and he agreed to participate but I would have to meet him once he got off work. While traveling to his house, I looked around and this was not like any other interview. His home was in an exclusive neighborhood in the county of a major urban area of the state. When I arrived at his house, he was in a t-shirt and dress slacks. He said, “Don’t mind the boxes, me and my family are in the middle of a move.” As we enter his house, he is doing laundry and shared with me that he is waiting for his wife to come home so he can take her out to dinner. After he puts another load in the washing machine, we start the interview.

Greg, an Iraq war veteran and college graduate, is a third generation row crop farmer. Growing up, he primarily raised tobacco, corn and soybeans. Currently, he farms

about 225 acres of soybeans, wheat, and corn. Given the household chores, the division of labor in his home resembles that of a couple of other farmers where the men help out as needed although the wife does the primary work in maintaining the home.

He is in the middle of changing over his farm operation from row crops to livestock and hopes to get his son involved with the new operation. He owns some land but primarily rents. The primary government program he participates in is crop insurance. Being an employee of USDA has allowed him to stay abreast of changes in policies and programs but the biggest benefit he believes is the ability to network and learn from other farmers. At the moment he is not active in any political or community organizations but does plant a large community garden.

He mentioned some structural changes in the rural industry that are impacting the vitality of the rural landscape. First, he's observed a quiet re-segregation in rural communities across the state. He found that the most talented teachers are being drawn away from rural and public schools to places with more resources. Following these teachers are many of the families that are socially mobile. Left behind are concentrations of black and brown children in lower performing and rural schools. Next, he talked about the re-organization of agriculture. Specifically, the cost to operate, he said,

if you could stay close to your projections, it wouldn't feel like you were cheated because oftentimes, in rural areas, the person providing you with supplies, they are the same person you are selling your grain too. So if they get to determine the price- they can say seed for corn, fertilizer, chemicals and so forth- are at a cost in their favor and you come back to sell your harvest to them-- it's still in their favor. Then, you squeeze the margins even more.

He shared that this set-up is slowly eroding the independence of farmers. Lastly, he felt that changes in the agricultural landscape have prompted many rural schools to



eliminate vocational training programs. He talked about the importance of those programs and their role in providing essential identity skills. For example, men learned how to change a tire, do a little handy work around the house, and women learned how to cook. He expressed that today many young men could not hang a picture on a wall or plant their mother a rose garden and many women know nothing about keeping a house or cooking.

As we shifted to questions on the symbolic life of the rural, he did not explicitly say his father was his primary influence to become a farmer but did speak extensively about farming experiences with his father. As he reflected on his rural experiences, he said,

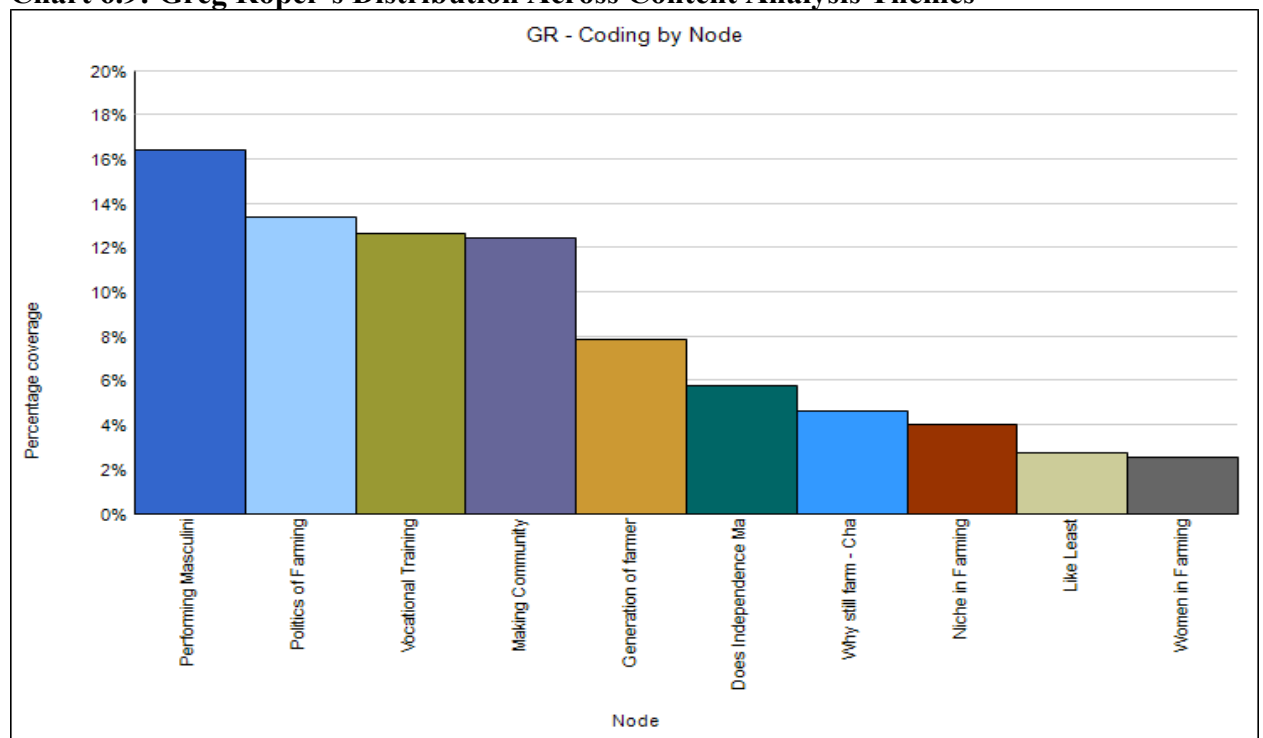
I mean, there is so much more to derive from doing it yourself. You scratch it out from the ground up- so you earned it by the sweat of your brow. And you controlled your destiny if you will. Again, we raised our own sweet potatoes, grew your own vegetables, and where I grew up- you could go to the creek and did your own oysters, clams fish – your own seafood and salt it away. It was just a holistic way to make a living and to sustain a family. And the other part of it is, you derive work ethics and other things you don't derive in today's society. You knew that if you were going to eat that you had to put forth some effort. And it created a sense of community.

He also mentioned that the influence of his vocational agricultural teacher and men in the community were significant influences. Chart 6.9 illustrates his greatest content area as performing masculinity, followed by politics of farming and vocational training.

Quite descriptive on the things he likes most about farming, he shared that it takes him home. He gets to be a steward of the land, watch a vigorous crop grow and get paid from it, smell diesel fuel at 5 a.m., smell freshly broken ground, and experience all that's connected to nature. In short, he said, "it's therapeutic." In farming he dislikes most the

system where profit margins are squeezed by suppliers and buyers, fighting with wildlife, and the uncertainty of the weather. On meanings associated with being a farmer, he spoke passionately about farming and farmers being the foundation of American industry. He explained that agricultural policies under the 1980s Reagan administration strongly impacted farming. For example, during that time in his home county there were over 110 active farm families and today there are less than 20. After talking about many of the obstacles and challenges of farming, he expressed that for him “it’s a labor of love that keeps him farming.” He added that “it also serves as a pathway to Christ because it cultivates humility and grows your faith.” He recognized that farming has become quite diverse but is still relatively segmented. He shared that men still are the primary growers of row crop commodities while women are gaining a presence in livestock markets like sheep, chickens, ostrich, and pork.

**Chart 6.9: Greg Roper’s Distribution Across Content Analysis Themes**



Hardly any African Americans working at USDA and the state department of agriculture that I have interacted with especially at the senior executive level speak with his fervor about farming and community. He implied that politics for African American farmers are varied because of different farming dynamics. Some examples of those dynamics include: the fluctuating purchase and selling prices at the local level for farmers and the economies of scale to keep up with the technology of equipment in production farming. An education advocate, he added that Science, Technology, Agriculture, Engineering, and Math (STEAM) should get the same focus as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) because of agriculture's importance in society. This was probably the most noteworthy interview because of (1) the breadth of topics covered and (2) although income from farming is not his primary income, it is still a very significant part of his cultural identity, gender identity, and racial identity.

*Gary Long*

While reading a local newspaper in North Carolina, I came across an article that featured an African American man farming that referred to him as “the Collard King.” I contacted him and referenced the newspaper article and my desire for him to participate in my study. After agreeing to participate in the study, we set a date and time for the in-depth interview. As I pulled up to his house he was sitting on his porch in a wooden rocking chair. I walked onto his porch where he directed me to sit in the closest rocking chair to him to conduct the interview.

Gary, a Vietnam veteran, widower, and third generation farmer primarily grows fruits and vegetables for his family and community. He still lives on a large portion of the forty-acres his grandfather owned in the latter part of the 1800s. He shared that his

grandfather raised tobacco, peanuts, produce and hogs. He currently grows heirloom varieties of collard greens, speckled butter beans, corn, clay peas, watermelons, sweet potatoes, and banana cantaloupes. He saves his own seed and cultivars from season to season.

He was drafted into the military at an early age and is not sure if he would have taken over the farm but he spoke extensively about working in the operation. By the time he got out of the military in the late 1970s, there was major restructuring going on in farming so he started working a job and grew fruits and vegetables on a small scale. He is not a member of any farm organizations but does participate in collard green festivals and works closely with a cultural geography professor at a university in Virginia. He is a member of his community improvement association and a minister at the local African American Baptist church. He shared that over the past ten or fifteen years, all but two of the farm families in his community have gone out of business and there are only about three or four serious gardeners left in the community.

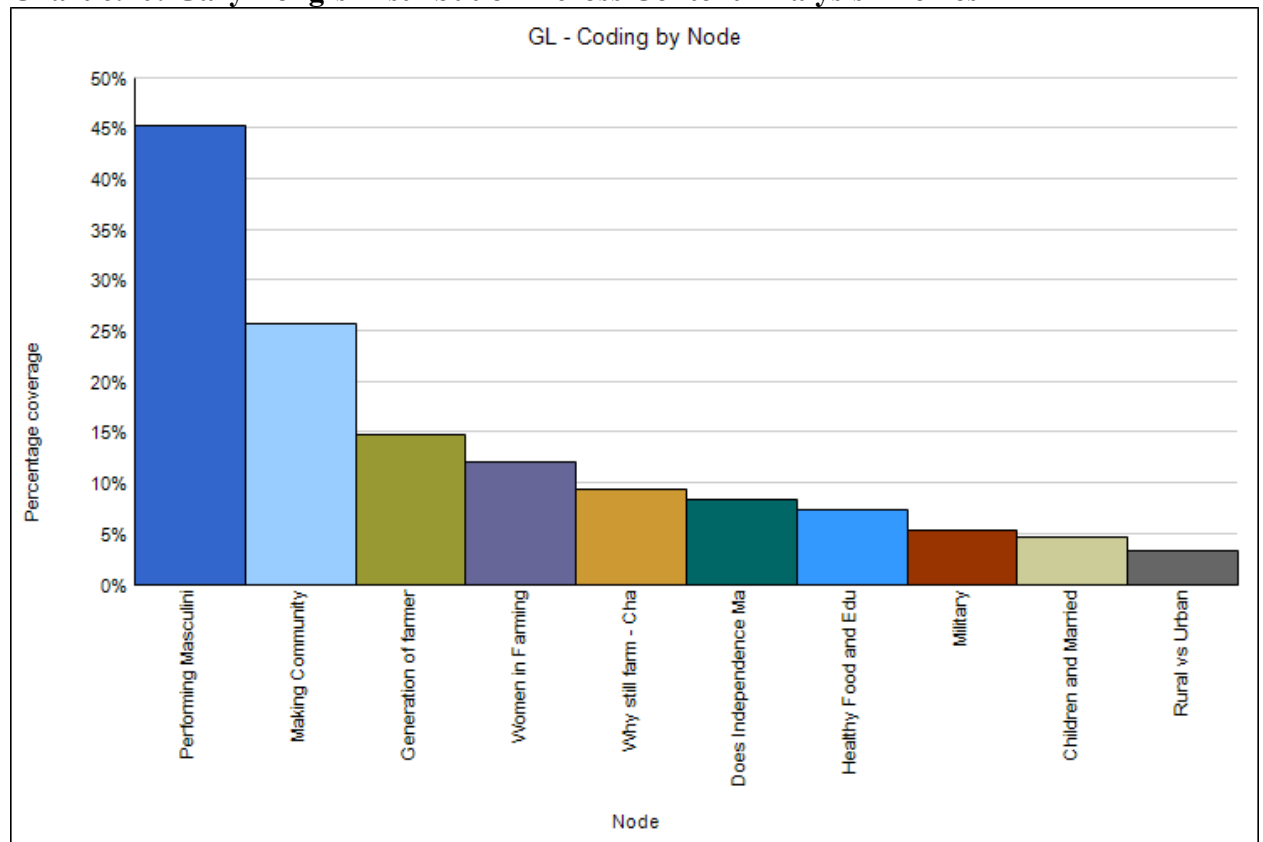
He added that the greatest impact to his land from changes in the rural industry are environmental in nature because the downturn in the rural economy prompted some neighboring landowners to be not so neighborly. He said, “construction companies are paying landowners to use their property for illegal dumping.” Such activities seemed to make him a little distraught about the future of agrarian culture in his community.

He shared that the thing he liked most about farming is being able to share the fruits of his labor with members of the community. The thing he liked least about farming is the amount of fruit and vegetable seeds that are genetically engineered or modified. When discussing meanings associated with being a farmer and an African American man

farming, he responded by lumping all men together and specifying that regardless of their race or profession, a man is willing to do whatever it takes to provide for his family. He said, “a man should go the extra mile within his limitations to do everything he can and not ask for no handouts!” He concluded the point by saying that “God gave every man and woman self-determination and self-preservation.” The passion he displayed when talking about the responsibility of a man reflects his greatest content area in Chart 7.10. His demeanor and responses reminded me of the interview with Tim Jones, the farmer with the highest percentage points in the performing masculinity content area. Gary ranks as the farmer with the second highest percentage points in that content area.

This interview did not provide much in the way of reflection on the politics of farming and the restructuring of the rural industry but provided a strong cultural framework when contextualizing African American men and women in farming. Also, the interview made a significant contribution to the various ways African American farmers and landowners make community amongst themselves. During the interview, Gary gave me a walking tour around his land that included showing me a slave cemetery, hundred-year old artifacts from his grandfather’s farm, and an eight-foot tall collard stalk he grew a couple of years ago. He proudly claimed it was so tall he had to get on a ladder to crop some of the leaves. As we concluded the interview, a community member stopped by for sweet potatoes and a church member stopped by for collards.

**Chart 6.10: Gary Long's Distribution Across Content Analysis Themes**



### *Segment 2: Focus Groups*

The focus groups are similar to in-depth interviews but differ in their ability to generate collective viewpoints and underlying aims or meanings. In this segment, focus groups were used to get a greater understanding of factors influencing constructions of masculinity and to compare narratives from the in-depth interviews and participant observations.

#### *Focus Group 1*

The first focus group was organized using the list of African American farmers provided by the Feast Down East Director. I arranged for a small group of farmers to meet me at a centrally located county library. I arrived at the library about 20 minutes

before the focus group was scheduled to start so that I could set up the room. Once the first two farmers arrived I gave them the consent forms to read over as a way to pass the time until the others arrived. After waiting about 15 minutes, I decided to go ahead and start the focus group because I didn't want to risk these two farmers not showing up for a rescheduled meeting.

Both of the men are third generation farmers that have worked off the farm jobs but used the farm to generate supplemental income. They grow fruits and vegetables, chickens, turkeys, pigs, and cattle. They claimed that approximately 60 – 70 percent of the food their families consume comes from the farm. One of the farmers has a meat handler's license and custom butcher's meat for the retail market. They shared that there isn't much of a division of labor on their farms. For example, the farmer's wives help them in the fields and with butchering animals while they help with household maintenance. One of the farmers shared that his wife also handles all the paperwork for their farm. His farm is registered with the state under his wife's name. He mentioned that she was the boss so it did not bother him. One of the farmer's children that did not want to continue working on the farm as an adult owns a barber school, barber shops, and a beauty salon.

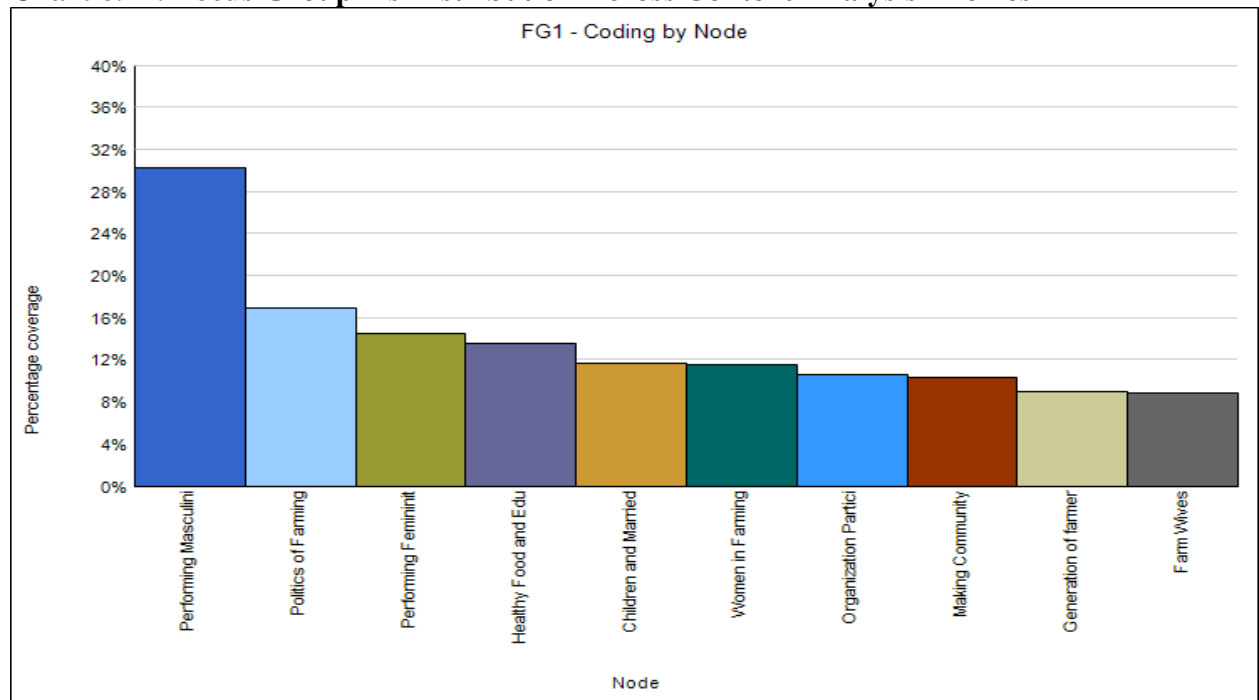
The farmers specified that the boys did most of the outside work but when they planted tobacco, the daughter(s) would chop weeds and help with the harvest. Currently, both of them shared that they are trying to convince some of their children to come back to the farm but at this point they are not interested. They both expressed some sadness about the uncertainty of their farm's future. One of the farmers grows for roadside stands in the area while the other is part of a community-supported agriculture (CSA) group, a

natural-raised pork cooperative, and also sells to a big box specialty store. They also participate in a number of farm organizations around the state and work closely with North Carolina A&T State University's Cooperative Extension office. They have received funding on some projects to put in drip-irrigation and also use black plastic but after the projects were completed they discontinued use of the irrigation and plastic. They expressed frustration with some of the projects because funding organizations would educate them on the potential benefits of a project but rarely mention the downside of a project. For example, the black plastic project was designed to increase efficiency and production of watermelons but the funders failed to mention that you can't burn the plastic and landfills will not take it because it doesn't break down.

As we discussed the restructuring of the rural category, they shared that the USDA is for large farmers and as small farmers they get very little from the Farm Bill. For example, one of the farmers talked about applying to participate in an environmental impact program and was repeatedly turned down because as a small farmer he was making a minimal impact on the environment when compared to large farmers. Chart 6.11 illustrates how performing masculinity and the politics of farming are the two strongest content areas among the farmers in this focus group.



**Chart 6.11: Focus Group 1's Distribution Across Content Analysis Themes**



One of the farmers also shared an experience where he and his wife participated in an international project that allowed African American farmers to share models of farming for people living in the Congo. He reflected for a moment and shared that during the project he was brought to tears because it made him think about everything his mother and grandparents went through to purchase and hold onto their farm. He places high expectations on himself in regards to preserving the land and farm because losing the farm he believed would be likened to losing all the hopes they mustered up for the next generation.

While moving to topics in the symbolic life of the rural category and the symbolic life of the masculine, one of the farmers discussed the long hours of farming. He said, “While everybody else is sleep or be setting in the shade, the farmer still got his wide straw hat on out there wiping sweat.” He added, “the long hours are a deterrent for

women getting heavy into farming. Some will go into floral or organic farming but not into grains and livestock.” They both talked about city people not understanding how to recognize healthy food. For instance, they shared that one of the complaints from city people to them has been about worms being in ears of sweet corn. They mentioned that city people don’t understand the amount of chemicals needed to get rid of the worms. Also, most city folk and a lot of country folk, they believe, have never visited a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) to see the inhumane manner hogs are raised in and do not question pork companies regarding their meat. Even with the customer complaints, they were glad to call themselves farmers. One of the farmers used the term “accomplished” to describe himself as a farmer because it was a testament to the risks taken and rewards achieved in spite of facing many obstacles. The other farmer said, “in farming, you always have to have a plan!” The other farmer explained that farming is an addiction for an African American man farming. He said, “It’s something you love and you want to give it up, but you can’t.” He even compared it to an alcoholic that a doctor has given a death sentence to if he drinks again. “He might want to quit but he just can’t!”

A few of the things they loved most about farming are having control over what you eat, good exercise, and independence. Some of the things they like least about farming are weather, stubborn equipment, and farm programs where agricultural specialists disappear when funding runs out. One of the farmers shared his final thoughts during the focus group. He asked me, “How do we get country folks back into the age of making?” He challenged me to address that question somewhere in my research because to him that represented a shift back to values of self-sufficiency.

### *Focus Group 2*

About two months into the in-depth interviews, I successfully made contact with a North Carolina A&T State University Cooperative Extension agent. After explaining my study, he was happy to assist me in setting up the focus groups. Because of the time of the year, we played phone tag a couple of times and I decided to stop by his office to inquire about getting the focus groups setup so that I could complete all of my data collection. While I was sitting in his office, he took about 3 hours and set up Focus Group 2 and Focus Group 3.

Focus Group 2 was held at a local restaurant during dinner hours. There were a total of nine participants (seven men and two women). About an hour into the focus group, the audio recorder fell into a glass of water. I was able to extract about half of the data from the recorder. So that I didn't have to risk rescheduling and no one showing up, I used my phone's voice recorder in the place of the digital audio recorder. When I got home, I also wrote down all that I could remember. All the farmers and their wives were second and third generation farmers. Most of the men started out working a job and then either decided to enter into farming on their own or returned home to assist their father with the family's farming operation. The men shared that going into farming at that time was an easy endeavor because of the money farmers were making. The wives shared that they were raised on a farm but had no plan of marrying a farmer or working on a farm as adults. The division of labor in their homes and farms was determined more by need than gender identity. The wives shared that they had large families and the farm kept the children busy with house chores and farm responsibilities. Some of those responsibilities included harvesting fruits and vegetables, cleaning, and cooking. The wives shared that

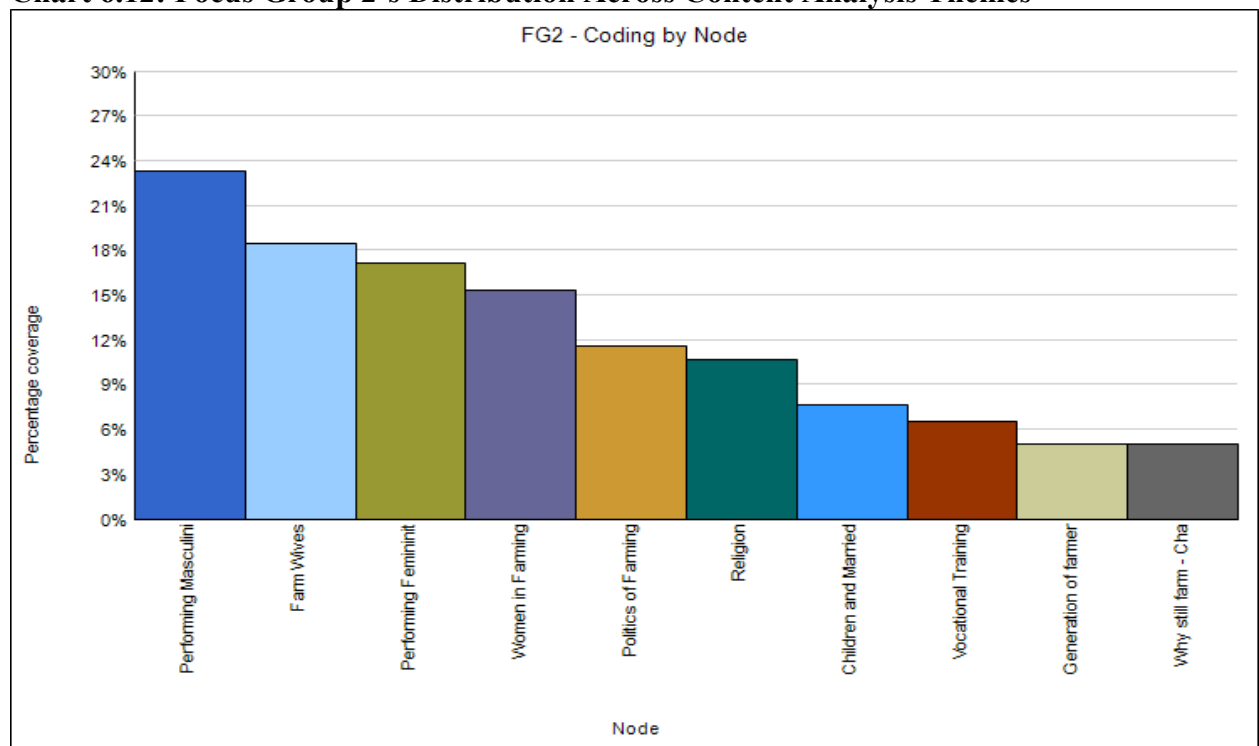
they could not do the heavy physical tasks around the farm but would often drive a tractor or grain truck during harvesting season. The husbands that were not working from sun up to after sun down shared that they would help out around the house as needed. One of the farmers shared that the farm was also used as a motivator for children that wanted to play hooky from school because they knew it meant a full day of extra hard labor on the farm. Currently, most do not have a succession plan for their farm but are hoping that their children will eventually take over their operations because they do not want to lose their land. The farms range from thirty-acres to about two-hundred and fifty acres in size. Some of them have small livestock herds of goats, cattle, or pork while others are growing produce and commodity grains. One of the farmers shared that just as he was trying to phase out of farming his wife got the farming bug and she now grows strawberries, Bok Choy, cabbage, collards, and tomatoes in two greenhouses. His wife shared that she had a light stroke and the doctor instructed her to eat healthier. She shared that it has helped her health and she uses the organic food to feed the children in her daycare business. She got the greenhouses through a grant program targeting women in farming around the state.

They are all active in farm organizations and with Cooperative Extension programs. The farm organizations assist them with marketing outlets and some cost-share projects. They did express frustration with participating in annual trainings and workshops, especially on writing business and marketing plans because it felt like a pointless exercise since they are constantly denied access to capital. Some of the produce growers did acknowledge the Feast Down East program as an outlet that takes most of what they grow. Other than the effects they endured as a result of the elimination of the

tobacco quota program, the restructuring of the rural industry category is the category with the least amount of responses.

In the symbolic life of the rural and symbolic life of the masculine categories, the men talked about the joy of farming, the health benefits of exercise, learning different skills on the farm, and the opportunities they have been afforded as a result of farming. Their wives talked more about the aspects of healthy eating, keeping the family together, and being an entrepreneur. All of the men were primarily influenced by their father's but they also talked about how good the money was when they first started in farming during the early 1970s. Although there were only 2 women, their content areas add up to be significantly greater than performing masculinity which was the single greatest content area in Chart 6.12.

**Chart 6.12: Focus Group 2's Distribution Across Content Analysis Themes**



Having the women at the table for this focus group changed the discourse to a more representative discussion on gender roles and the construction of masculinity. After the interview, one of the wives shared with me the frustration she feels when her husband uses “I” instead of “we” given all that she has done to make their farm successful. She’s not sure why he does it but she insisted that she has no problem helping him find the correct pronoun usage- “we” instead of “me”!

The things they all disliked about farming focused on discrimination through local political structures. Even though they participate in local politics, they feel like no one ever speaks up for their interests. One of the farmers talked about his frustration with the rising cost of equipment and changing technologies. For example, he declared that his 113 horsepower tractor was not worth enough to give away for free. Another farmer also talked about how much farming has changed. He explained that at one point you could have one or two years of bad luck and recover in the third year but now things are so tight that if you have one year of bad projections on paper you can’t get operating support.

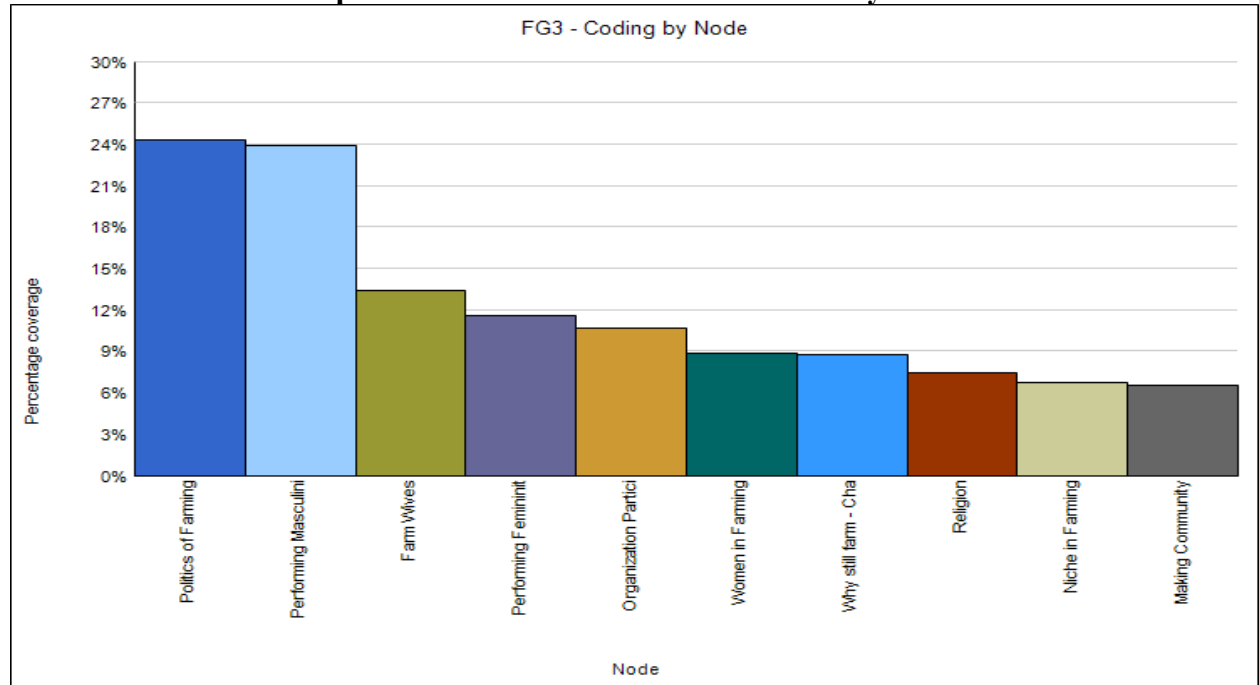
### *Focus Group 3*

This focus group was held at a local restaurant during breakfast hours. There were five participants in this focus group (four men and one woman). They were all second and third generation farmers except for one man whose family did not own a farm. His pathway into farming started after he finished grade school when he worked as a fruit and vegetable picker starting in Florida and traveling up the eastern seaboard into the Hudson Valley of New York. He referred to himself as the “original migrant laborer.” Everyone acknowledged blurred lines when it came to the division of labor between the home and farm. For example, the men talked about helping around the house while one farmer’s

wife talked about managing paperwork, driving tractors, feeding hogs, going to livestock auctions, and even getting bitten by a hog. They all expressed concern over the future of their farms. Most had a son or daughter they wanted to pass their farm on to but with no guaranteed income, the future generations didn't see the value of land ownership. One farmer shared that his son is not interested at all because he is young and doesn't want that kind of lifestyle. The farmer's wife nodded her head and said, "you give up a lot of things in this life such as traveling, dinner and movie dates, and socializing." With the exception of the farmer who started as a fruit and vegetable picker, each farmer talked about their family growing tobacco, soybeans, corn, and cucumbers. A couple of families grew small herds of cattle or pigs. Currently, they are all niche farming. Two of the farmers grow organic vegetables, one is a sheep farmer, one grows natural-raised pork, and the last one recently leased his farmland because he could make more money putting up high tunnels for other farmers throughout the county. One of the organic farmers and both of the livestock growers contract with specialty processors and a big box retailer while the other organic farmer sells his produce wholesale to retailers at the local farmer's market. They all serve in leadership positions with at least one farm organization and are active in a number of organizations. Some attributed their involvement to an ever-changing specialty marketplace. New certifications, inspections, or standards are always coming out and they emphasized the need as African American farmers to be at the table where these changes are taking place. Additionally, they participate in Cooperative Extension programs, all of which may explain why the politics of farming trumps masculinity as the group's greatest content area as illustrated in Chart 6.13. Also,

when combining the three categories focusing on women, their content area becomes greater than performing masculinity.

**Chart 6.13: Focus Group 3’s Distribution Across Content Analysis Themes**



In discussing the restructuring of the rural industry, similar to other farmers, the elimination of the government controlled tobacco system had forced them to change how they farm. A couple of them also pointed out how they have equipment between 25 – 30 years old while their White counterparts are able to lease the newest equipment. The farmer’s wife described a situation where large farmers that hunt were bringing wild boars into the county and their population was getting out of control. As a result of some of the diseases they carry, the state requirements for farmers with pasture-raised pork changed from single-fencing to double-fencing. She claimed that such changes are easily absorbed by large farmers but for small farmers, the cost can be crippling.



When discussing the symbolic life of the rural category, the farmer's wife spoke at length about the pride associated with farming and being a farmer. She believed that it connected you to the struggle of our ancestors. The men talked about the honor and pride associated with being a farmer, especially an African American man farming. The farmer's wife also referred to farming as "the best marriage counselor you can have" because it brings a husband and wife closer together. She said, "We got married and I saw how much the value of farming and holding on to the property meant to him and that got me interested in it. So, I'm holding on to his dreams." Some of the things they listed as dislikes in farming are racism, long and unpredictable hours, and discrimination.

One of the changes in rural life they all talked about is the increase in women farmers. The farmer's wife shared her experience going to meetings across the state and in some of the meetings, women farmers outnumbered men. She told the men jokingly, "I think you all's days are over!" The farmer that builds the high tunnels added that over 95% of his customers are women. He laughed as he shared with the group that the husbands will grab a chair and watch their wives assist him in putting the high tunnels together.

As we moved into the symbolic life of the masculine category, the men talked about the importance of African American men carrying on the legacy started by their fathers and grandfathers. The farmer's wife offered a different perspective by regarding African American men farming as being the glue that holds the family farm together. The sheep farmer talked about courage as being part of the responsibility of African American men farming. He believed they must constantly step out of their comfort zone to engage people and organizations when applicable. The obstacles faced by the farmers are similar

to other farmers in the study: high feed costs and low market prices, weather, labor shortages, and increased values of land rent/ownership. Their perseverance in farming was associated with carrying the torch of legacy and some even implied that it's part of God's plan for their lives.

The focus groups provided information that is consistent with data collected during the in-depth interviews. Having farmer's wives participate in two of the focus groups added a rich dynamic because African American men farming responded with language that reflected the contributions of their spouse and family. After the final focus group, some of the interesting factors weaving the themes together were legacy, tradition, and the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and experiences. The factors are intricately woven into the lives of African American men and women farming. The factors are so strong that African American men and women farming continue to operate in an agricultural arena where racial identity, gender identity, and cultural identity can be major obstacles to financial success and social mobility.

### *Segment 3: Participant Observations*

The participant observation portion of data collection was conducted to see how well observations triangulate with in-depth interviews and focus group responses. While there were many parallels in the data, it became obvious that (1) the categories of masculinity for men farming need to be expanded to capture behaviors associated with race, class, gender, and culture and (2) because of the seasons and cycles of farming more time taken with each farmer would greatly enrich the data.

*Participant Observation 1: Pastor Hinton*

I arrived at Pastor Hinton's farm about 8:30AM. He came to the door in his pajamas, greeted me, and then said "he had forgot about the observation." He instructed me to come in and have a seat while he got dressed. As I was waiting, I noticed how nicely his home was decorated with lots of family pictures, flowers, magazines, and books. After getting dressed we went to his back porch to talk while the dew was burning off the grass. Pastor Hinton retired from the military and is currently a first generation farmer.

As we were getting ready to start the day, his wife shared with him that her father passed away overnight at the hospital so she was going to see her family and would be gone for most of the day. Her leaving minimized the opportunity to actually see how tasks are carried out around the house, however from the care and cleanliness of the house, it was clear that she maintains the house. He helps her but primarily handles the farm and outdoor responsibilities. As his wife left, I expected her to drive the family car but she drove the pick-up truck.

His owns thirty-three acres. He raises cattle, grows fifteen acres of hay, and has about a half-acre garden. He did not grow up on or around a farm except for during the summers when he traveled to his uncle's farm in South Carolina. He shared that he grew up in an urban area and had a yard about the size of a porch. On his uncle's farm, he helped with tobacco, produce, and some livestock. He found that while his other 5 siblings did not take an interest in farming, he loved it. Currently, all of his children are in college or the military and he plans to leave his farm to one of his grandchildren.

While feeding the cattle and picking greens, he shared with me that farming is therapy for him. It gives him an opportunity to connect with his spirituality, make some money, and give back to his community. He admitted that many of his sermons have come to him while working on his farm. He also took me into the woods to show me all the borders of the farm and shared some of his future plans while doing so. To me it was quite a bit of walking, but he walks his property about 2 - 3 times per week. He has no dealings with the USDA or other farm organizations but does try to donate his excess produce to the church and local food banks. He showed me some of the mistakes he's made around the farm and attributes them to not coming from a farming background. For example, he put up a cattle fence and used the surrounding tree lines. He anchored the fence on the outside of the trees not realizing that if a cow leans on the fence, its weight will break the fence or knock it to the ground. The fence should have been placed on the inside of the trees so that when a cow leans on the fence, the trees serve as a counter-weight to the cow. Another example had to do with how he plants his garden. At first, he would broadcast his seed for the garden which made it difficult to manage with his equipment. During his third year of farming, he purchased a row maker that allows him to better manage his garden and get better productivity from the vegetables. He said, "It feels good to be a farmer!" Being able to grow things for yourself and help others were the two primary things he liked most about farming. He shared that some of his friends in the ministry look down on him for farming.

The observation was held on Saturday so I asked about attending his church on Sunday to which he was happy for me to attend. The church was very large and the parking lot was full. After finding a parking space, I entered the sanctuary that looked to

seat around four hundred to five hundred people easily. Everyone was dressed in semi-formal attire. Some of the women even had on gloves, scarves, and hats. It was a true southern African American church. The service lasted about 2.5 hours. During his sermon, he talked extensively about gender roles and gender identity. The following are some snippets from the sermon: men and boys should not behave like girls and women; girls and women should not act like boys and men; boys and men should dress appropriately and respectably and take care of their families through legal means; girls and women should also dress respectably and don't try to tell a man or boy what to do; and lastly don't try to emulate the opposite gender's behavior or thinking.

In addition to the categories I had already included in the study, the farmer made me think reflectively on the role of religion, ways of making community, and the role of women in farming. Each farmer and farmer's wife during the focus groups and in-depth interviews spoke at length on the role of each in their identity.

#### *Participant Observation 2: Jack Jones*

The following participant observation was conducted on the same day as an in-depth interview with the farmer. I never considered him for a focus group because his experiences may have had a sobering effect on the responses of farmers with acreage one tenth his size. Originally, I set out to involve each farmer in only one segment of data collection, however, upon finding out this farmer is among the three largest African American men farming in the state, I wanted to get as much information as possible. Since I have already addressed each category in the theoretical frame with responses from Jack Jones in-depth interview, I will highlight some different, but relevant experiences from the observation.

In a typical day on his farm, he is troubleshooting and making plans according to the weather. In addition to his brother and son, he has five employees carrying out daily tasks around the farm. He actively jumps in to help out in farm duties but manages to stay mobile because there are many moving parts to his farm. For example, when I first arrived at his farm, two employees were cleaning spindles on the cotton picker so that it would pick the cotton more efficiently while three employees were at another one of his farms preparing to harvest peanuts. When he arrived from running an errand, he jumped in to help out the two employees on the cotton picker. Before he could finish cleaning spindles, one of the employees working on the peanut farm came over to inform him that the diesel pump at his fueling station was not working. We gathered some tools and jumped in his pick-up truck to head over to his fueling station. He discovered that the electric pump was not getting any power. Without thinking, he cutoff the power to the whole area and re-wired two blown electrical outlets close to the diesel pump. He plugged in the diesel pump, cut the power back on, and it was working without any problems. We gathered up all the tools as he looked at me with a grin on his face and said, “as a farmer, you have to be prepared for anything!” As we were leaving that area, three African American women flagged him down to ask him if they could get some of the greens he planted. After joking with them, he insisted they get all they can harvest and added that there was another two to three-acre field at the end of the road with all kinds of greens they were welcomed to harvest. I asked him about his love of green vegetables because he planted so many. He informed me that he doesn’t really eat green vegetables and it wasn’t an attempt to create another source of income. He planted them

because he wanted his church and community members to have access to fresh greens when they wanted them.

He then showed me the borders of his farms and shared the history of how he acquired so many different tracts of land. Before going back inside his office, he showed me the first tractor he purchased in 1975. It was rusted out and not working but his countenance was overcome with pride as he said, “I started farming with this tractor and twelve acres, now I have tractors that cost over three hundred thousand dollars and farm over two thousand and five hundred acres.” He expressed to me in that moment and many more times throughout the day how God has richly blessed him. We went into his office for a few minutes before getting a call that one of the peanut harvesters was jammed and needed to be pulled back into alignment. As he was about to gather his things, an African American woman knocked on his office door. She came to inquire about a dinner plate sale he and some other community members were having for a local family that lost a young man to stomach cancer. She was handling the sides and desserts but came to find out about the chicken. He informed her that we were picking up the chicken that afternoon around 4:30 p.m. Upon leaving the office, the woman jokingly said, “after you pick up the chicken, how about pick up some of the stuff in your office and clean it up in here.” He laughed and replied, “if you don’t like it, that’s fine. Better yet, if you want it to look a certain way, you are welcome to come anytime and straighten up. This is my office and as long as I am comfortable, its ok!” We all laughed and he asked me to wash out the back of his truck while he finished getting all the paperwork together to pick up the chicken. After doing so, we headed to the peanut farm and assisted his employees

fixing the peanut harvester. He shared that, if he didn't have employees, he would not be able to have the flexibility to work on multiple things.

We then went to the neighboring town about twenty miles away to get twenty-four boxes of freshly dressed chicken from a butcher. Glad that I kept my work gloves in my back pocket, I jumped in to help load the boxes on his truck. The chicken was so fresh that blood was dripping from some of the boxes. We returned to the farm and placed the chicken in his cold storage unit. After we finished that, I was ready to conclude the day as it was dusk dark but he laughed because he just got a phone call that one of his tractors was bogged down in the mud at the peanut farm. He gave me the opportunity to call it a day but I chose to accompany him to get the tractor out of the soft place in the soil. By the time we arrived at the field it was dark and there were still four different tractors harvesting peanuts. His son arrived before us and his brother along with a couple of employees had connected a pulley and some cables to the tractor and instructed everyone to get back because if the cables or pulley breaks it could inflict deadly harm. The front tractor slowly increased acceleration and the bogged tractor slowly moved forward. He explained that the weight of the harvested peanuts was too heavy for the saturated soil. It was about 8:30 p.m. and once the tractor was free, he told everyone to let's quit for tonight. The employees driving the tractors jumped in the truck with us as we followed his brother who was hauling a trailer loaded with peanuts back to the barn so they could be hooked up to the peanut dryer. We then went to his office and after recapping the day with his son, they began putting a plan together to maximize the harvest over the next day and half because extended rain was in the forecast and they did



not want to lose any of the harvest. Completely exhausted, I left his office about 10 p.m. and got home about 1:30 a. m.

## Chapter 7

### Analysis

#### *Interpersonal Ties*

Growing up in a rural African American farm community, conceptions of masculinity were built into the fabric of the culture and expressed through behaviors associated with gender identity, which enabled me to recognize cultural phenomena in the findings of this study. During data collection and interviews with volunteer participants, I found myself being very conscious of their verbal and non-verbal communication, from slight head nods of approval to awkward silent moments of reflection. Essentially, they shared many experiences similar to those occurring in my own family and community. Before I present the data analysis findings, I would like to briefly discuss some of my experiences germane to this study that made me reflect objectively about how I construct my own masculinity.

Growing up in a farm family heavily influenced my construction of masculinity and gender roles associated with being a man. In hindsight, as a child I didn't understand how economically, historically, and culturally farming creates a social environment where gender identity gets pushed behind an ever changing mix of norms and values. For example, both sets of my grandparents and great-grandparents farmed as a means of taking care of their large families consisting of 8 – 10 children. In fact, on both sides of my immediate family, everyone had at least a half-acre garden while some grew up to 35 acres of fruits and vegetables to sell at a roadside stand or to local grocers. During that era of society, farming was done out of necessity and family lineage. However, my parents, uncles, and aunts came along during a period where their career options

increased from only farming to going into the military or working in some type of manufacturing/industrial setting to earn an income to take care of their respective families. Even with the added career options and income, every one of them held to the family tradition of planting and growing their own food. Hearing other farm families talk about similar experiences piqued my interest in further exploring beyond the obvious farmers' "love" for his or her work and to focus more on deconstructing her or his untiring ambition for independence outside a workplace hierarchy. Like my young cousins, I always thought it was less expensive and took less time to get fruits and vegetables from the grocery store versus growing them whereas the older ones in my family were insistent about doing for self. Today, I understand it was tradition, the inter-generational transfer of knowledge, experiences, and memories that live on through each generation that motivated my family and others families in the community to continue a culture of farming.

#### *Unwritten Codes of Conduct*

The culture of farming heavily influenced one's self identity. The practice of farming instilled a value for landownership, doing for self, and responsibility. For example, girls learned to cook, clean, and all that's involved in maintaining a home while boys learned how to grow, maintain, and harvest crops to support the family. There were many times when my father and I would pick up to 10 bushels of butterbeans and dump them onto unfolded newspapers while girls and women in the family set on the porch shelling them. As far back as I can remember, the women and girls only picked butterbeans twice but always took care of shelling, cleaning, washing, and packaging them for the freezer. My father would give each represented household an equal share of

the harvest. He would do the same with sweet corn which would easily be 50 – 60 bushels. On the second corn harvest, after he and I would break the corn, we went throughout the community freely giving it to senior citizens, widows, and families unable to grow their own food. Sometimes it was frustrating because I wanted to charge them for all of our hard work and time invested but he would always tell me it was our duty to take care of our family and community. Most of the men and women in the community shared the same value system and offered some form of their time or talents to the larger community.

Within this strong community fabric were some unwritten codes of conduct operating both in homes and community institutions. In both, it was improper for a man to show weakness or vulnerability. Boys and men wanted their physical prowess and fortitude compared to fierce animals with reputations known for their strength. For example, it was common and desired to say that a man was "...as strong as an ox." My father's favorite symbolic gesture was, "if you see me and a bear fighting, you help the bear!" Another unwritten but popular code conferred upon men the position head-of-household and charged them with paying all household bills and the maintenance needs of the family even if the wife worked. This particular code was loaded with Western cultural historic norms, traditions, and was reinforced by the community with strong undertones of religion, reinforced by the local Christian church. Growing up in church provided many symbolic examples of gender identity. For example, I noticed that women were active in every facet of the church, even serving as trustees of the church but since the erecting of the church in 1872 never has a woman been allowed to enter the pulpit during a church service. That privileged space was for men only. Observing these codes

during my childhood was instrumental in how I developed my ideas about masculinity and gender roles.

My father was also very active in community politics, serving multiple terms as president of the community association as well as serving in other civic organizations focused on rural community issues. In addition to business meetings and fellowshipping, men in the community set aside two days a month for community maintenance. The first day involved Saturday morning roadside trash pick-ups and the second day involved grooming the community cemetery. These examples of men in the community were also key to how I constructed my masculinity and understanding of gender roles. Even today, my mother will note that I don't do much on the inside of the house but can and will take care of any outside task, oftentimes without asking. Remembering these instances helped me to see how my subconscious thinking and behavior were shaped by the intergenerational transfer of knowledge from my grandfather to my father to me. Even today, the cultural conceptions of masculinity imprinted on me by my father remain strong as I still find ways to participate in community gardening, small farming, and civic participation. Collectively, these memories and experiences crafted the broad lens that allowed me to clearly see the themes and linkages among African American men farming in this study.

#### *Data Analysis: Top Five Themes*

While analyzing the data, the themes organically emerged. Initially there were 21 themes identified, but with ongoing analysis five themes emerged as the investigation reached saturation. The data revealed that the top five themes among the subjects interviewed are slightly different from the top five themes among focus group

participants. The top five themes among interview participants are: (1) performing masculinity and gender roles, (2) role of women in farming, (3) making community, (4) politics of farming, and (5) faith, tradition, and religion / why still farm given the challenges. The role of women category is a combination of two different themes (performing femininity and women in farming). The top five themes among focus groups are (1) performing masculinity and gender roles, (2) roles of women in farming, (3) politics of farming, (4) healthy food and education, (5) faith, tradition, and religion / married and children. In the focus groups where women were a more significant part of the dialogue, the role of women was reflected in three themes: farms wives, performing femininity, and women in farming. Each theme is defined differently but they are all centrally focused on the role of women in farming. I have also included charts to show the distribution of each theme across participants. Participants are listed on the X-axis and percentage of the theme throughout the in-depth interview or focus group is on the Y-axis. Also, the charts below focus on themes that can be cross-referenced with charts in the previous chapter to identify consistencies as well as outliers. The first sub-section concentrates on findings from in-depth interviews while the second sub-section centers on findings from the focus groups.

### *In-Depth Interviews*

#### *Performing Masculinity and Gender Roles*

For the theme, performing masculinity and gender roles, eight sub-themes arose from the content analysis that allowed the researcher to determine and differentiate the factors significant to the construction of masculinity for African American farmers in North Carolina. Many citations, experiences, and situations were collapsed into relatable

sub-themes. The most prominent sub-theme deals with the farmer's desire to be independent and free to make his own decisions. The farmers believe that by being their own boss, they can have more control over their lives and are in a better position to minimize vulnerability. In fact, this position makes some of them feel needed through a heightened sense of purpose and they ultimately take on a no-nonsense direct approach to all matters, especially farming.

The second most prominent sub-theme focused on their love of farming and all things outdoors in nature. Their love of farming ranged from the smell of freshly turned soil to operating farm machinery and watching the power of God transform a seed into a bountiful harvest. Many of the farmers also expressed a strong sense of pride in their knowledge and practice of farming. Their love of farming became an identity that endowed them with special skills, especially vocational skills, through manual labor. Most of the farmers took vocational classes in high school but nearly all of them expressed their first learning of vocational skills was around the farm as a child.

The third and fourth most prominent sub-themes were tied. The third most prominent sub-theme centered on their responsibility for taking care of their family and community while making a living. Sometimes this would mean working two or three jobs to meet the family's needs or staying up past midnight working in a barn or field. There was a dogged attitude of committing to a thing and seeing it all the way to its end in this generation of farmers. Many of the farmers helped others in their community and framed this as part of being accountable for how they have been blessed to be stewards of the land.

The fourth most prominent sub-theme focused on resiliency. Each farmer talked about challenges, conflicts, and seemingly insurmountable odds they had to overcome in order to call themselves a farmer. Some have lost their farms to foreclosure and fought to buy them back while others are struggling with changing farm policies (e.g. ending tobacco quota system). Staying on the farm and keeping a manageable quantity of livestock or crops is symbolic to winning while being forced out of business is losing. It's here where many farmers showed some degree of both hyper masculinity and humility. There was little expressed in the way of aggression, sexual attitudes, or physical strength but instead, there was an acknowledgement of a God force that helped them live to fight another day. For example, a livestock farmer that lost his farm in a foreclosure sale during this study fought all the way up to being out-bid at the farm auction and although beaten, weary, and left with nothing, a month later he was working with a group to rent a house with a few acres so he could restart his livestock operation. From weather to equipment and people operating lending programs, the farmers know there's a battle they are going to be faced with in order to stay on the farm. Another farmer noted that in the 1960s and 1970s, you could have one or two bad years farming and recover but now margins are so tight, there's currently little guarantee to make it on a good year of production.

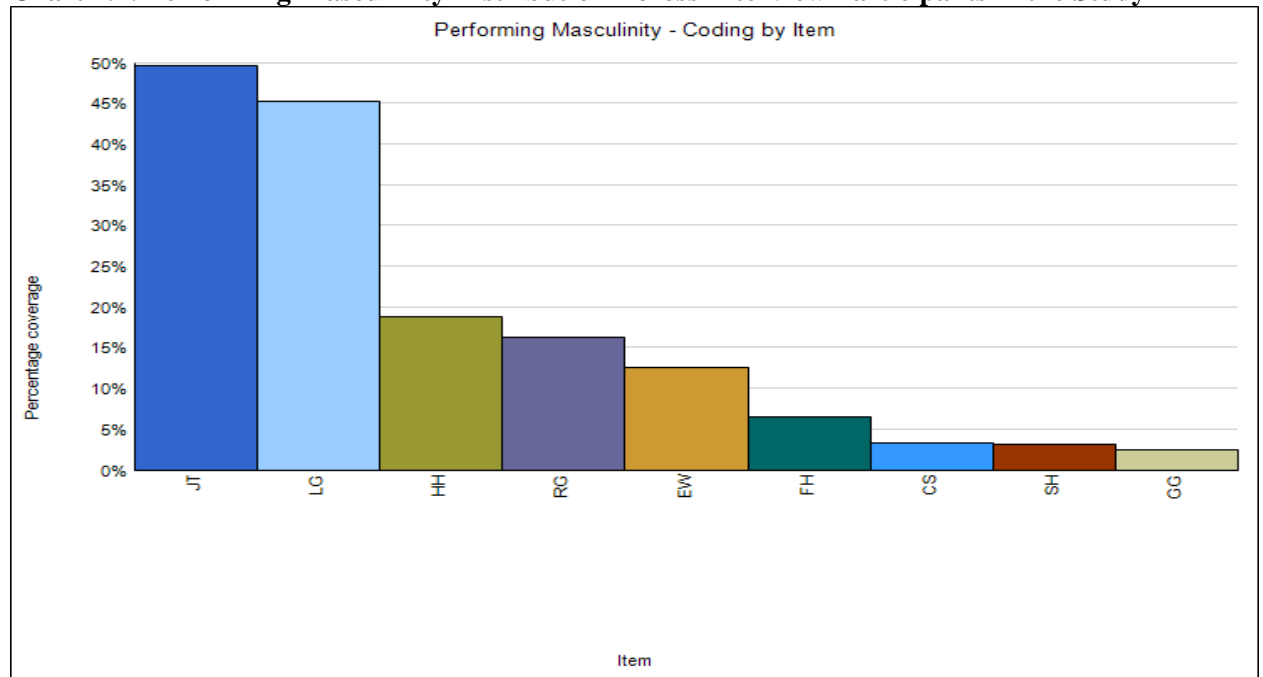
The fifth sub-theme is an amalgamation of heritage, succession, and being able to train those close to you, especially children, how to farm and the value of keeping the land in the family. All subjects interviewed were second or third generation farmers and admitted to not being able to get away from farming even in retirement. Some expressed wanting to leave the farm for an urban lifestyle in their young adult years but came to



appreciate all that rural life offered as they got older. Having gone through that stage, many shared that they are more understanding when their children don't want to immediately takeover the farm.

In Chart 7.1 there is a distribution across these subthemes that shows how farmers perform masculinity and gender roles. Not surprisingly, the two least represented subthemes were (1) women/wives performing tasks associated with masculine identity and (2) men performing tasks associated with feminine identity. There were a couple of instances where men took care of their wives or assisted with inside work but a circumstance such as sickness a special occasion usually prompted the behavior. There were no boastful constructions or rigid lines defining masculinity or gender roles however, gender identity and roles seem to be constructed in contrast to each other. About half of the farmers were military veterans with four being Vietnam veterans. The two farmers that appear as outliers are both Vietnam veterans and actively farming. The other two Vietnam veterans are experiencing extenuating circumstances that altered their distribution.

**Chart 7.1: Performing Masculinity Distribution Across Interview Participants in the Study**



### *The Role of Women to African American Men Farming*

The subjects interviewed explained the role of women in their lives and their farming operation to be quite significant. The two sub-themes were created because of the changing landscape in agriculture where women are getting more involved in the overall operation and in some cases starting their own separate operation. There was a significant amount of overlap in the two sub-themes but enough of a difference to categorize them separately. Also, separating the sub-themes allows the researcher to highlight how much of the African American farmer's operation centers around the woman's role.

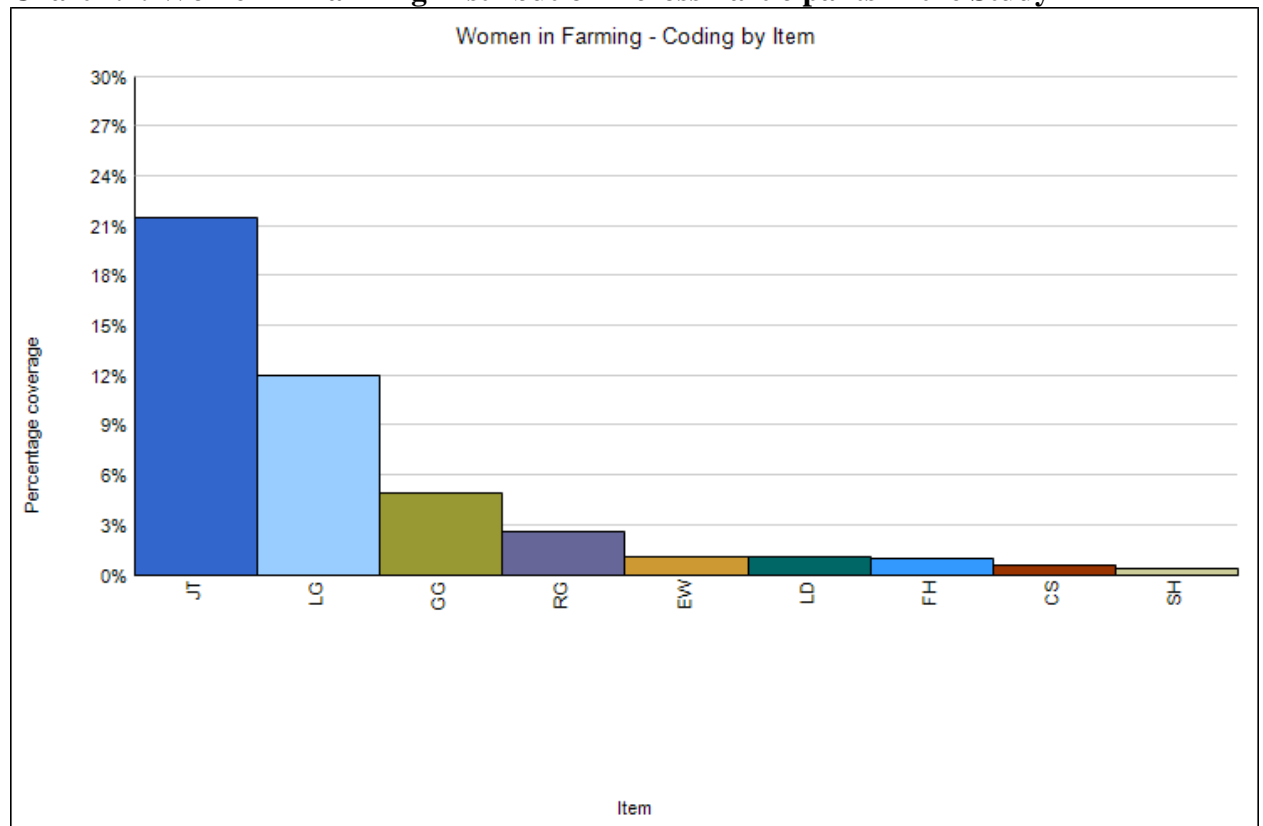
### *Women in farming*

The sub-theme women in farming focuses primarily on the various ways African American men frame a woman's contribution in agriculture and farming. In Chart 7.2, the distribution shows how men farming discussed their wives as part of their operation and

in general women in farming. Each farmer acknowledged the growing presence of women operating their own farms but it was at such a low rate they were nowhere close to being equals in the marketplace. Acknowledging the growing presence of women in farming was the second most discussed item in this sub-theme. They also regarded women farmers with a high degree of respect because of the challenges and hard work required to be a farmer. Most of the farmers differentiated women farmers as primarily into some type of livestock, organic, or niche production versus row crop commodities like wheat, corn, soybeans, cotton, or peanuts.

The most discussed area of women in farming was how women's contributions are overlooked. Some of the men farming emphasized how the wife is just as important as the husband but is not equal to a man, when it comes to farming. One farmer was adamant about not being able to survive without his wife. The farmer's wives appear to be pivotal to their operations. They often handle documents and organize paperwork. Some farmers shared that on operating loans, the wives were required to sign the loan papers before it could be processed. During busy seasons, wives would even assist in the fields with planting and harvesting, drive commodity trucks (corn, peanuts, soybeans) and even drive tractors when necessary. In sum, it appears that while African American men farming do recognize the growing presence of women as sole proprietors in farming, they still frame women as playing a supportive role to them on and around the farm. As we see in the next sub-theme, women are overwhelmingly positioned in a supportive, or passive role within the hierarchy of farm-life.

**Chart 7.2: Women in Farming Distribution Across Participants in the Study**

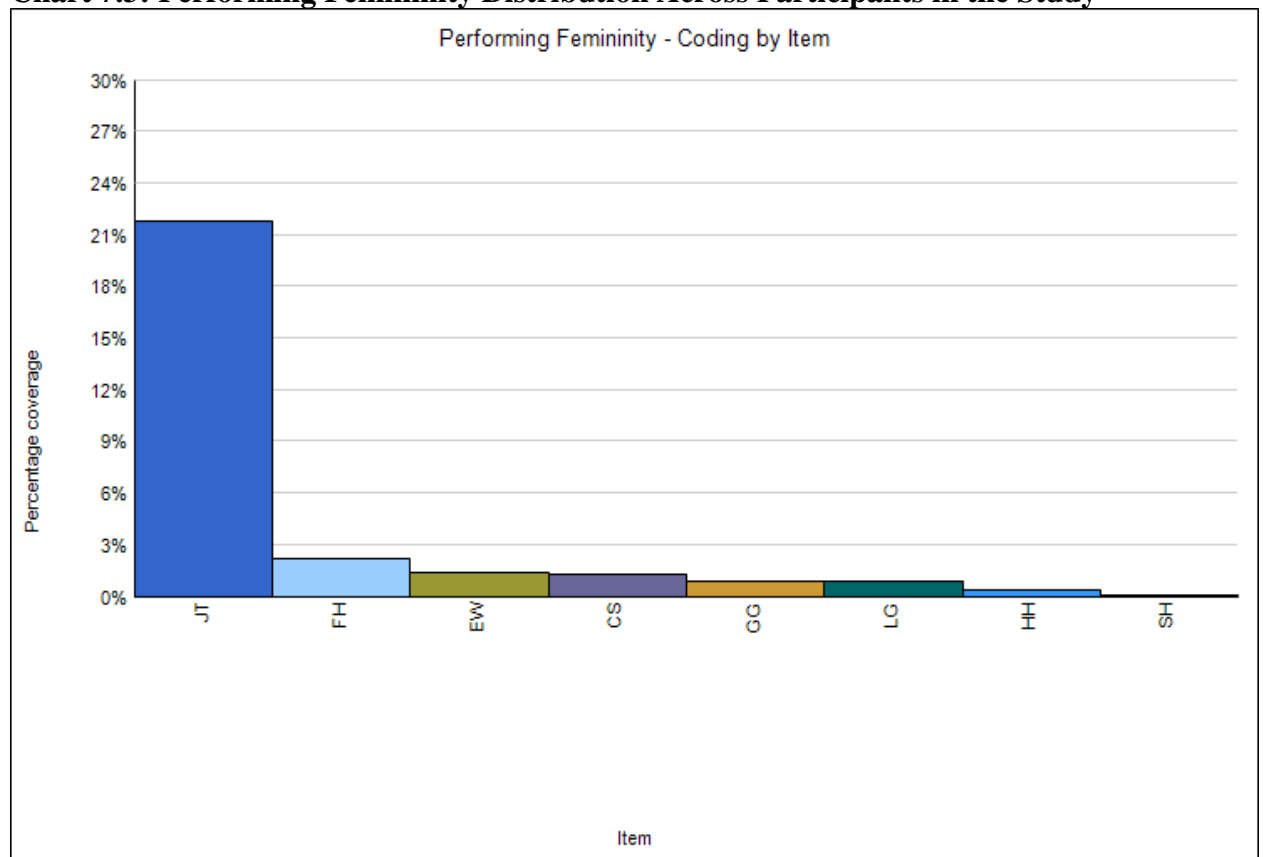


### *Performing Femininity*

The sub-theme performing femininity differs from women in farming by focusing primarily on the various ways African American men view and frame a woman's role and responsibilities revolving around family. The gender line demarcating the performance of femininity was rigid in that all farmers referenced household maintenance as a territory controlled by their wives. Household maintenance activities included but were not limited to: cooking, cleaning throughout the home, raising children, grocery shopping, decorating, caretaking of elder family members, and maintaining a warm nurturing home environment. While this area of responsibility was delegated to the woman, men helped their wives inside the home similar to the way wives help their husbands with farm

activities. I think what is important here is that these roles become so fluid given the nature of the work that the intermix of masculinity and femininity are not consciously acknowledged. In Chart 7.3, most of the farmers have such a low frequency of performing femininity because they would only rarely engage in those activities. Tasks were performed primarily when asked and when available. The farmer in Chart 7.3 with the high frequency of performing femininity shows a combination of performing inside tasks and expressing a strong attitude about what is a woman's versus a man's work.

**Chart 7.3: Performing Femininity Distribution Across Participants in the Study**



### *Making Community*

A very important and central theme each farmer discussed in some context was the various ways making community would take place. Farmers were quick to reference

their experiences growing up in tight knit families and communities that worked together to ensure the needs of everyone was met. Often times they would point out how the common threads connecting the community were more about a value system that yielded to the greater good not individuals or families. In fact, when I conducted a content analysis on this theme, the most talked about subject matter focused on helping each other in the community. This included things such as helping those who couldn't do for themselves, sharing helpful information, and sometimes raising money for those in need. Some of the farmers even talked about building networks with other farmers near and far that exist as a resource in maintaining and growing their operation.

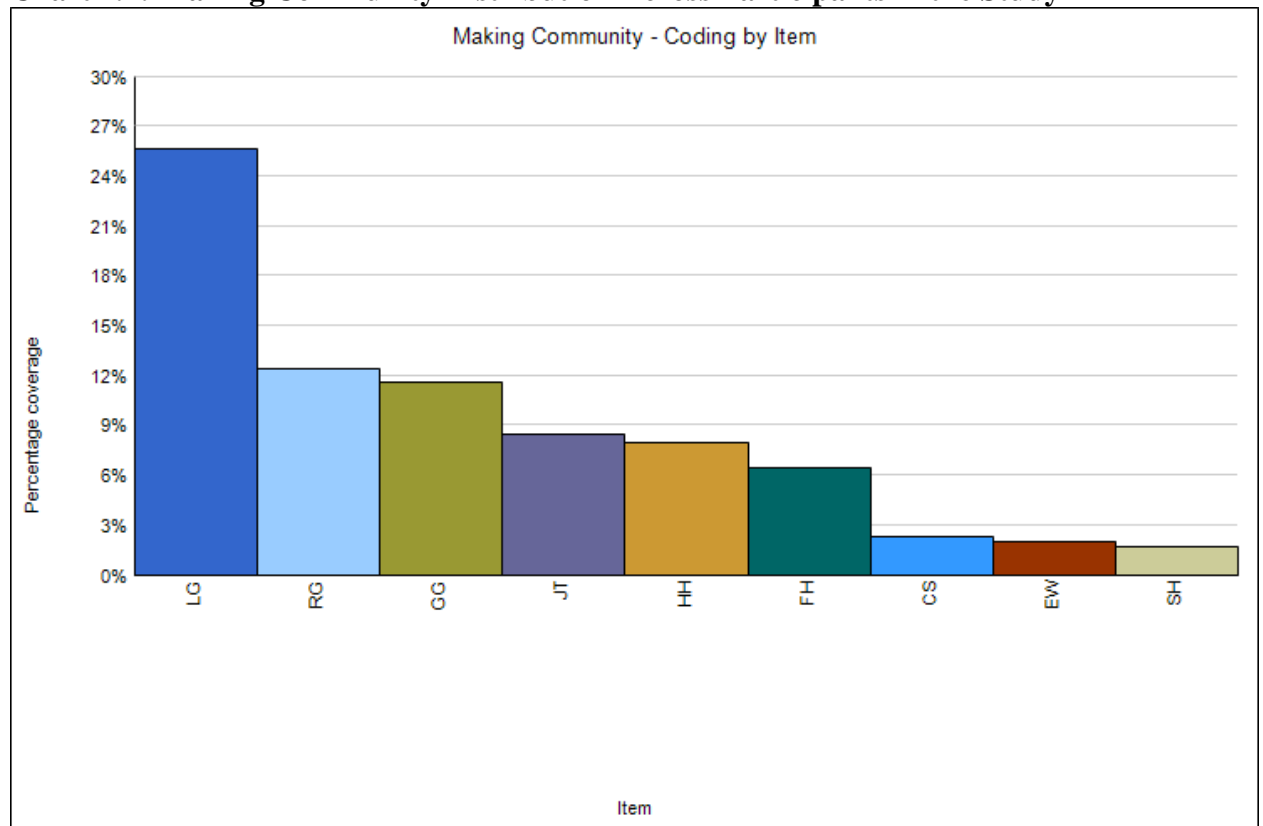
The second most discussed topic focused on independence and doing-for-self-value systems. Farmers and their families understood the value of land and equated it with power. For example, farmers shared that people were intentional about being self-sufficient and owning the land in the community. Some communities even held programs to create emergency funds for farmers in the community, especially during disaster crop years. Among the study population, there was a deep respect for others' property and the idea that if you don't work, you don't eat. Many talked about the long days and nights working around the farm and giving up social events and other creature comforts in order to be successful. They also spoke pridefully about the dignity of being able to grow your own food as well as learning vocational skills (small and large engine mechanics, electricians, plumbing, horticulture, animal husbandry, meat handling, cooking, and home maintenance, e.g.) that people pay thousands of dollars to learn. Instead of pining over missed opportunities in recreation and entertainment, most shared their satisfaction

from living a holistic way of life and recognized the quality of what they were able to offer their family and community.

The third and final most expressed concern related to this theme was the generational departure from the farm and farm life. The farmers spoke about their children and other community members migrating to more metropolitan areas in search of better paying jobs and educational opportunities. While there seemed to be understanding about the migration, there was also a delicate hint of trepidation related to succession planning. The farmers expressed a strong desire to leave their farm to their children or family member because of how hard they worked and sacrificed for it to be a resource for their family and community. At a minimum, if they had to sell their land, they expressed a desire for it to be sold to another African American. They also spoke about the changing community dynamics related to brain drain and the dwindling number of families growing gardens. For example, the out-migration resulted in a lack of youthful hands for labor and in this microwave generation, there was more value placed on saving time by simply going to a grocery store instead of the back yard.

In sum, the second and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation farmers identified with very a different conception of community and made every attempt to sustain the remaining fabric of community. They also attribute the current structure of agriculture and growth of urban centers as a key dynamic in changing community fabric. Some of the farmers such as GL in Chart 7.4 gives most of his produce away freely to church and community members, especially senior citizens. Other farmers raise community gardens, serve in some area of emergency management services for their community, or work in grassroots community organizations.

**Chart 7.4: Making Community Distribution Across Participants in the Study**



### *Politics of Farming*

The politics of farming for African American men in North Carolina is reflective of the historical political-economy of the Black Belt South. Dubois (Foner, 1988) stated over 100 years ago that: *race prejudice was a retarding factor for Blacks in the economic world, and that most White-Americans will make a concerted effort:*

- a. *To keep him (Blacks) from all positions of authority.*
- b. *To prevent his promotion to higher grades.*
- c. *To exclude him entirely from certain lines of industry.*
- d. *To prevent him from competing upon equal terms with the White working men.*
- e. *To prevent his buying land.*



*f. To prevent his defense of his economic rights and status by the ballot.*

The results of this study show that many of these very intentional proposals to restrict the enfranchisement of African Americans appear as true today as they were nearly one hundred years ago. For example, across the three topic areas I will discuss from the farmers interviewed, there will be examples that can be associated with these proposals. The first two topic areas are related: 1. federal agriculture policy and program expectations, and 2. no power to resist oppressive forces. The farmers reached all the way back to the 1960s during the Nixon years, when the message to farmers from the Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz was to “get big or get out and plant corn from fencerow to fencerow.” It was during this restructuring of agriculture where the cost of farming started to become too costly for many African American family farmers who were located primarily in the South and were increasingly losing land, while farmers in the Midwest grew in size and support as a result of USDA policies. Other farmers alluded to this smoking gun by talking about the effects of the Reagan era farm policies that increased small farm foreclosures and the monopolization of farming. Some of the farmers in this study are still fighting off the effects of those oppressive policies. In fact, a couple of the farmers concluded that the federal agricultural programs set-up to specifically assist African American farmers were the biggest contributors to the decline of African American farmers. One of the farmers referenced a period of over 30 years where African American farmers in his county were consistently treated unfairly through the execution of supervised loans. This meant that although the loans were approved for the farmer, they could not make any expenditures of the monies without getting additional approval from local loan officers. The lack of power to resist the impacts of

these policies by African American men farming in North Carolina forever changed the rural landscape by eroding the power of African American communities to influence political agendas ranging from education to property taxes. Consequently, the farmers provided examples of many rural areas that are quietly re-segregating schools as a result.

The next most frequently discussed topic area deals with how industrial and technological changes reinforce policies, programs and practices that further marginalize African American men farming. The increase in contract farming and the consolidation of agricultural companies has resulted in more controlled production and lower commodity prices that make it more difficult for African American men farming to make a profit. Also, new seed and equipment technology emerge almost yearly. This prices many of the African American men out of the marketplace. For example, one of the farmers explained that the same company that he buys his inputs (seed, fertilizer, and chemicals) is the same company that buys his harvest. They control his profit margin and ultimately his capacity to grow in size. Other farmers expressed that sometimes the system can seem fixed, especially when you haven't inherited land, equipment, and social networks like many White men farming. The African American farmers share that this is more than about their family because many of them who are still farming provide jobs to members of their community who may not be employable because they know that this affects other families and the community as a whole.

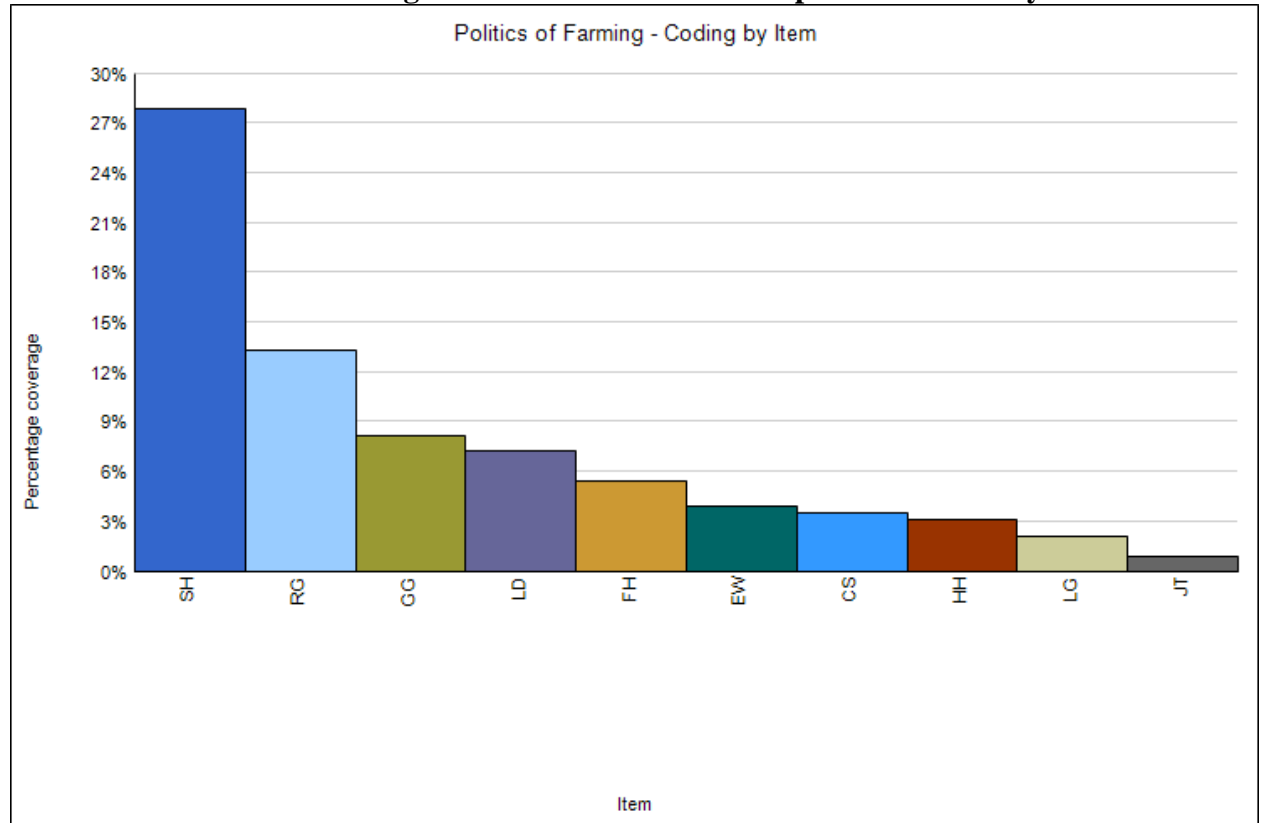
The last topic focuses on attempts to even the playing field through legal means and re-writing the narrative of African American farmers and landowners. Funding sources often refer to African American farmers as minority or socially disadvantaged farmers but many African American farmers are calling themselves family farmers to

minimize the effects of alienation. One of the farmers living in the floodplain of a Black Belt county shared that his neighbor, also a farmer and landowner has benefited from their attempts to change the narrative. He sold a few acres adjoining the Roanoke River that was once labeled as marginal property in a flood plain to a corporate executive as premier riverfront property. These examples were few but the attempts to re-imagine their land and communities have been many. Discrimination within state and federal offices seems to be deeply ingrained. In 1971, Black Cooperative Extension agents took a discrimination case all the way to the Supreme Court and won, however, it did not stop or change a cultural ideology, or way of thinking about discrimination. Some years later, some of the farmers interviewed were involved in the 1997 Black Farmer Class-Action lawsuit against USDA but shared that because there was no debt-forgiveness included in the verdict, many of them profited little to none. Additionally, they shared that foreclosures and loan practices changed very little at the local level because local offices continue to practice manipulative terms of programs and control the flow of information which usually results in the withholding of information from non-white farmers.

In Chart 7.5 the farmer with the highest frequency shared considerably more experiences dealing with local, state, and federal politics. He even lost his farm through foreclosure and fought to buy it back before it went up for public auction. He has lost equipment, harvests, and lots of sleep just to maintain his identity as a farmer. He has even been sued by other farmers who accused him of violating intellectual property rights. The most absurd thing he shares is how a local farmers market would no longer allow him to sell his produce because they thought he was buying from a wholesaler and retailing at their market. He shared that those experiences and many other experiences

have left him with a unique brand of cynical humor and sarcasm. Although not as striking and expressive, all the farmers seemed frustrated by the impact of local politics on their farming operations.

**Chart 7.5: Politics of Farming Distribution Across Participants in the Study**



### *Faith, Tradition, and Religion*

The most fascinating of themes to tease out among the African American men farming was the role of faith, tradition, and religion. Each farmer mentioned in some way an associated aspect of this theme with their life or operation, but it was very nuanced and filled with irony. For example, some farmers talked about having faith that God would multiply their efforts in a way that leads to a bountiful harvests and at the same time questioned God with expressions of frustration at the lack of support from their church or church leadership. In Chart 7.6, the farmer with the greatest frequency was

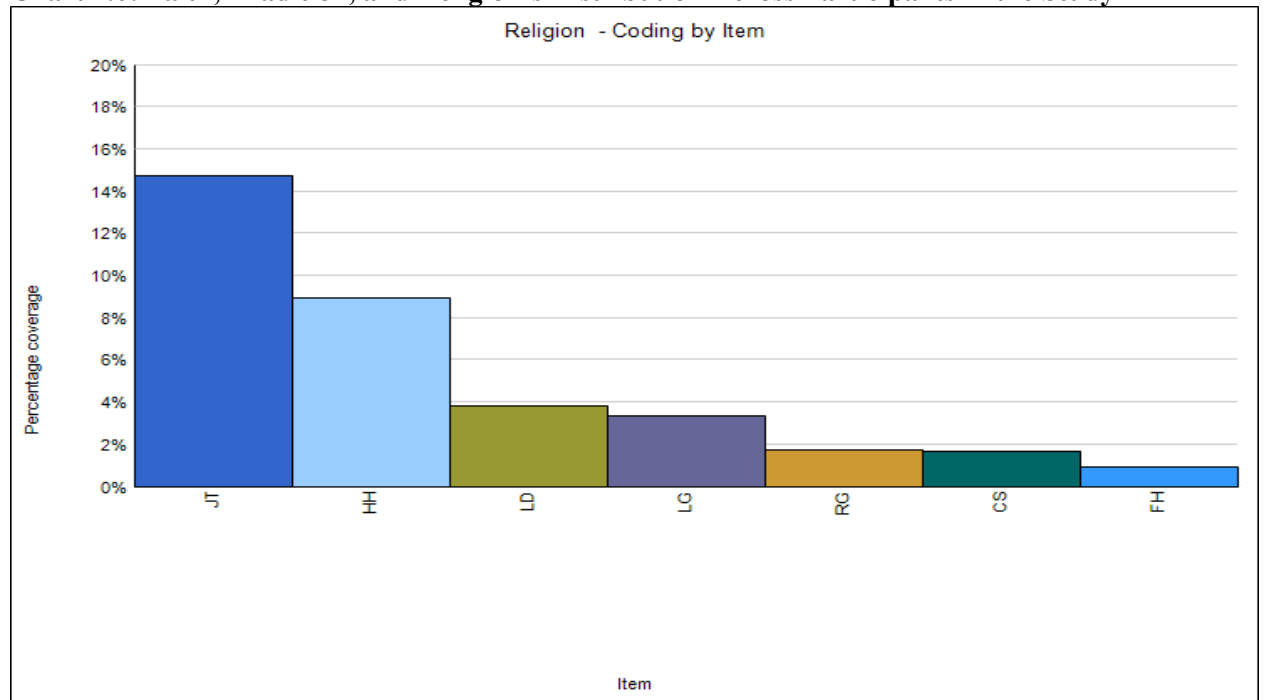
adamant about what God has endowed him with as a man, hates false preachers and televangelists, and wasn't raised to believe in or support women preachers but his wife whom he refers to as his oxygen is a minister. While there are many other examples, I want to shift the focus to the most discussed issues related to this theme. The first one deals with a deeply rooted faith and spiritual belief. The King James version of the Bible describes faith in Hebrews 11<sup>th</sup> chapter and 1<sup>st</sup> verse as "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." This parallels the farmers varied expressions of something that rests on the inside and when God gives you a thing, working it strengthens your soul. I often got a sense that it was faith that many of the farmers believed would be the additional input that would multiply their crops or livestock. Farmers summarized these scenarios such that God added to their efforts and to be a successful farmer it takes a strong faith. Some shared that in farming, it's faith that keeps you humble and helps you build a relationship with the Savior. Having a strong faith was the most discussed topic but more importantly, it was contextualized alongside self-determination which God gives everyone. I surmised that the farmers associated this with the scripture from the King James Bible in James 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter and 17<sup>th</sup> verse that states "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."

The second most discussed topic reflected their framing of God. Some stated directly and others used colloquialisms inferring that God is all powerful and in control of everything. The result of their obedience to God's word (the Bible) and his ways meant they could not fail or lose regardless of any scenario or outcome. For example, they may work well into the night six days a week for a month or more during harvest and planting season and because the scripture writes about observing a Sabbath day for rest, they will

not work on the observed Sabbath day. As the researcher, the intersection of faith, tradition, and religion on this topic is so complicated given the marginal position of most African American men farming. As the farmer, I imagine this intersection is crystal clear because their conceptualization of God lends to what is found in the King James Bible 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 15<sup>th</sup> chapter and 22<sup>nd</sup> verse, “And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

In this final discussion topic, the intersection becomes even more intricate. Among the farmers were pastors, ministers, deacons, trustees, and dedicated church members. There was a relatively high degree of church involvement and most made it clear they are tithers and givers. They simultaneously expressed frustration with ministers not being more supportive of farmers in the community. For example, all the churches have at least one large event where they serve food, but will buy their food supplies from the grocery store instead of a local farmer. Some farmers equated this with telling congregants more about living after they die than how to live here on earth. They also associated this as a pie in the sky kind of ministry used by televangelists, especially those with a strong focus on money. The farmers did not discuss their religious beliefs regarding gender roles but Christian faith, religion, and tradition are woven in tightly into their identity and are patriarchal in nature.

**Chart 7.6: Faith, Tradition, and Religion's Distribution Across Participants in the Study**



### *Why Still Farm? / Challenges*

Every farmer is faced with challenges such as lack of financing, discrimination, equipment failures, crop disasters, livestock disease, changing market prices and the list can go on. Even though farmers are faced with these challenges and often faced with the decision to quit or press on another year, if able, they seem to unanimously decide to continue farming. Whether it's the smell of freshly turned soil or raising a vigorous crop, farmers take up the fight year after year. Ironically, this theme tied with faith, tradition, and religion in its frequency of occurrence but was much easier to analyze. The most discussed topic in this theme focused on challenges faced by most of the farmers. Most of them believe the greatest challenges they face included blunt discrimination, playing by a different set of rules, and avoiding foreclosure because of financial problems. Additional challenges mentioned by the farmers dealt with the struggle to get youth interested in agriculture. The two main hypotheses posited by farmers for this struggle are that (1)

youth associate farming with slavery and long working days in the heat and (2) young people watched the agony their uncles, fathers, and grandfathers experienced to hold on to the land and don't want to go through similar experiences.

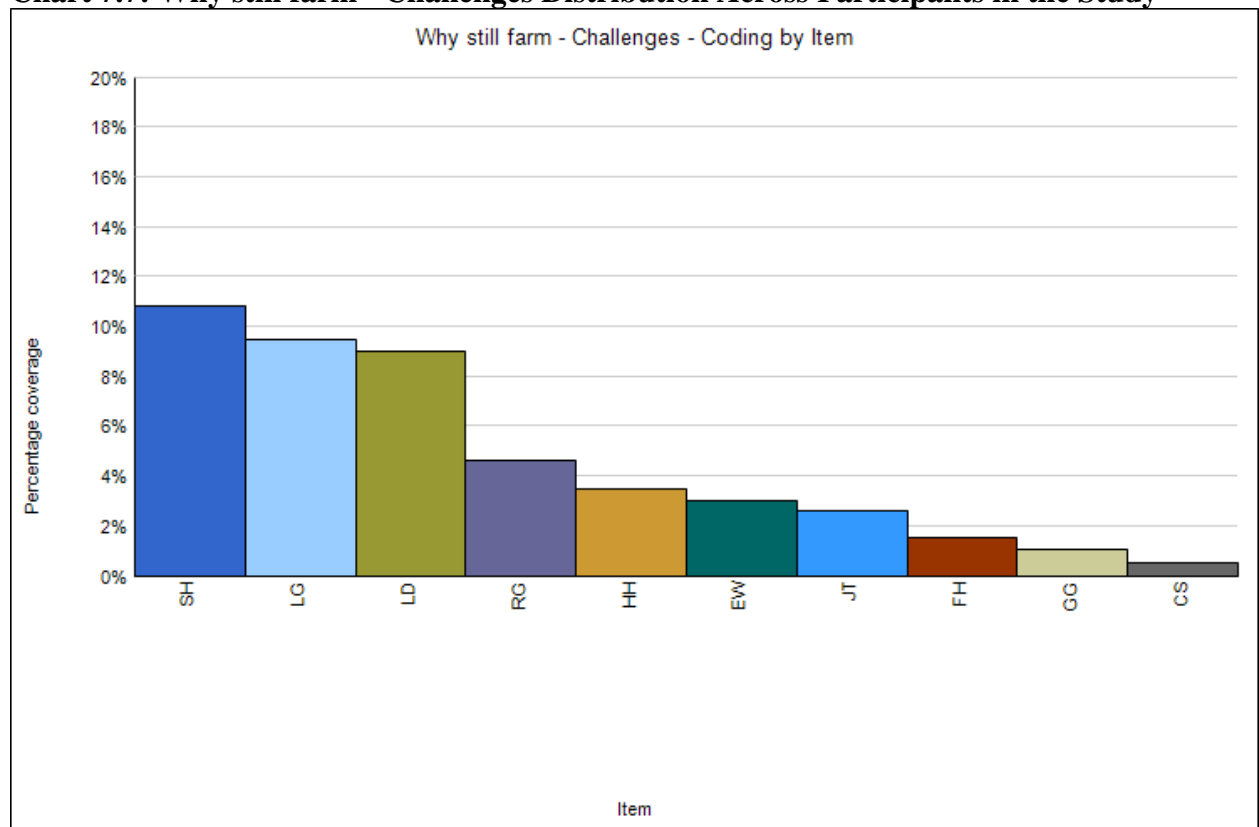
The second most discussed topic centered around resilience. Farmers shared that being able to negotiate working with a myriad of obstacles was vital to farming. A farmer shared that upon sight, an African American man's hardships increase tremendously and sets up in our mind the attitude that to get through a door, we must kick it down or find other means to force our way through. In other words, it appears that these farmers have normalized their farming experience to expecting hurdles and managing setbacks. One farmer shared that his strategy for dealing with hardships included "taking the low side of the road and saving money to avoid financial stress." Another farmer admitted to the constant struggles experienced as an African American man farming, but believes that if one bad year creates distress the farm was already in a vulnerable position. When talking about these experiences, many farmers passionately expressed how tough surviving on a farm can be, but with an addictive love for farming they resolved to believing that better days will be coming in the future.

The final most discussed area in this theme deals with examples of the barriers and impediments disallowing the farmers to grow and transform their conceptions of being an African American man farming. Between low commodity prices, disastrous weather cycles, and the cost of dependable equipment, the farmers shared that these difficulties often make them feel like a trick is being played on them. One farmer shared that all of his equipment was over 30 years old and he could not afford to purchase used equipment. He also opted not to get a loan because of the risk in losing his land. Many of



the farmers attributed their struggles in farming to their children and other youth not being interested in taking over the farm. As I reflect, I think this struggle correlates with the minimal emphasis on succession planning. In Chart 7.7, only three of the ten farmers had a succession plan.

**Chart 7.7: Why still farm - Challenges Distribution Across Participants in the Study**



### *Focus Groups*

#### *Performing Masculinity*

The topics discussed in the focus groups for various ways African American farmers perform masculinity were similar to those in the in-depth interviews but the most prominent content areas were ranked differently. A total of seven topical areas for ways African American men farming perform masculinity emerged from the focus groups but the four most frequently discussed topics will be elaborated in this section of the findings.

The most mentioned focus group topic under the performing masculinity theme deals with the farmer's pride in his knowledge of and love for farming (the second most discussed topic under the performing masculinity interviews). The farmers shared that the amount of manual labor and unpredictable schedule will make you either love or hate farming and many hypothesized those conditions as central to why there are so few women farmers. There's heavy lifting, late hours, early mornings and no guarantee of profitability. In Chart 7.8, focus group 1 has the greatest percentage of performing masculinity distribution because it was the only group without women and farmers spoke in depth about the rigors of farming. They declared that farming easily becomes a part of you, especially when you were raised from a toddler doing something around the farm. Moreover, many told stories of how they learned vocational skills working around the farm that were not taught in school. For instance, a couple of farmers talked about measuring the length of a row with very simple instruments and sometimes with no instruments at all. Measuring the length of a row was not so important for seeded row crops like corn or cotton but was imperative for transplanted crops like tobacco. Overall, farmer's sentiments were positive and felt that farming has treated them and their family well. A major component of their sentiments had to do with them being able to keep control of things which meant they were in constant planning mode and oftentimes on guard to protect their operation. One farmer shared a story of getting emotional because he carried on his shoulders the weight of not losing the farm his grandparents worked so hard to acquire and his parents sacrificed so much to keep. Ironically, in each focus group, farmers talked about carrying their respective weights as a badge of honor that represented an enduring legacy because of what they believed it symbolized for an

African American man to still be farming. This topic and the farmers' examples are consistent with the literature on masculinities among African American men farming (Riley and Kirkland, 1985). The behaviors of African American men on the farm are validated by their attitudes and ideas about masculinity. Furthermore, the examples suggest that the farm encourages a hegemonic masculinity among African American men farming because to be a successful farmer, one must actively work to conquer or bring under one's control as many elements on the farm as possible. Consequently, this is problematic because African American men farming are marginalized in farming as being a socially disadvantaged group and often times display behaviors associated with marginal masculinity.

The second most discussed subject deals with the generational aspects of farming (the fifth most discussed topic under the performing masculinity interviews). While it connects very closely to the prior topic, it differs by emphasizing the intergenerational influence of grandfathers to fathers, and fathers to sons. All except one of the farmers talked about how they started farming with their grandfathers and fathers. They believed that farmers are made and the first step is to hook a child into farming at a young age because waiting until a child becomes a teenager is too late. Part of the hooking process involves getting children to integrate the idea of farming as core to their identity formation. Some of the farmers believed that children's lack of interest in farming can be associated with two problems experienced by African American boys today: (1) their lack of skills and (2) identity formation. They expressed that the farm gives boys and men a useable skillset, a sense of authority, and minimizes fear because survival in an unpredictable business like farming dictates moving beyond your comfort zone. The

intergenerational influence of grandfathers to fathers to sons shows how the symbolic interaction of these African American men in farming establishes a legacy (Blumer, 1986). As sons are being taught skills from working around the farm with their fathers and grandfathers, they are subconsciously developing their farm identity. In theory, the symbolic farm identity instills the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors such that the cycle of African American men farming develops into a culture and possibly a community as social networks are established. However, because African American men farming in many cases have been boxed into taking on a marginalized masculinity, many of their sons are looking for other masculine identities to adopt.

The third most discussed topic deals with taking care of your family. Ironically, among the interviews, this was the third most discussed topic. I think this topic was central to the focus group discussion because of the participation of farmers' wives. For example, the farmers' wives talked about how important the farm was to keeping the family together, especially keeping the children safe, focused and building a strong work ethic. The farmers shared stories that supported their wives' convictions. For example, one farmer shared that after he and his wife started their family, instead of taking over his father's farm he moved to New York where found a good paying job and was making arrangements to move his family there with him. However, upon returning to pick up his family, he had a vacillating moment where he ultimately decided not to take his family into the urban environment. He said, *"I made up my mind that I was not going back. There's no telling what they would have made out of themselves because it was street boys all over."* Other farmers shared similar examples that illustrated their belief in the man being the head of the household and responsible for the family's well-being. This

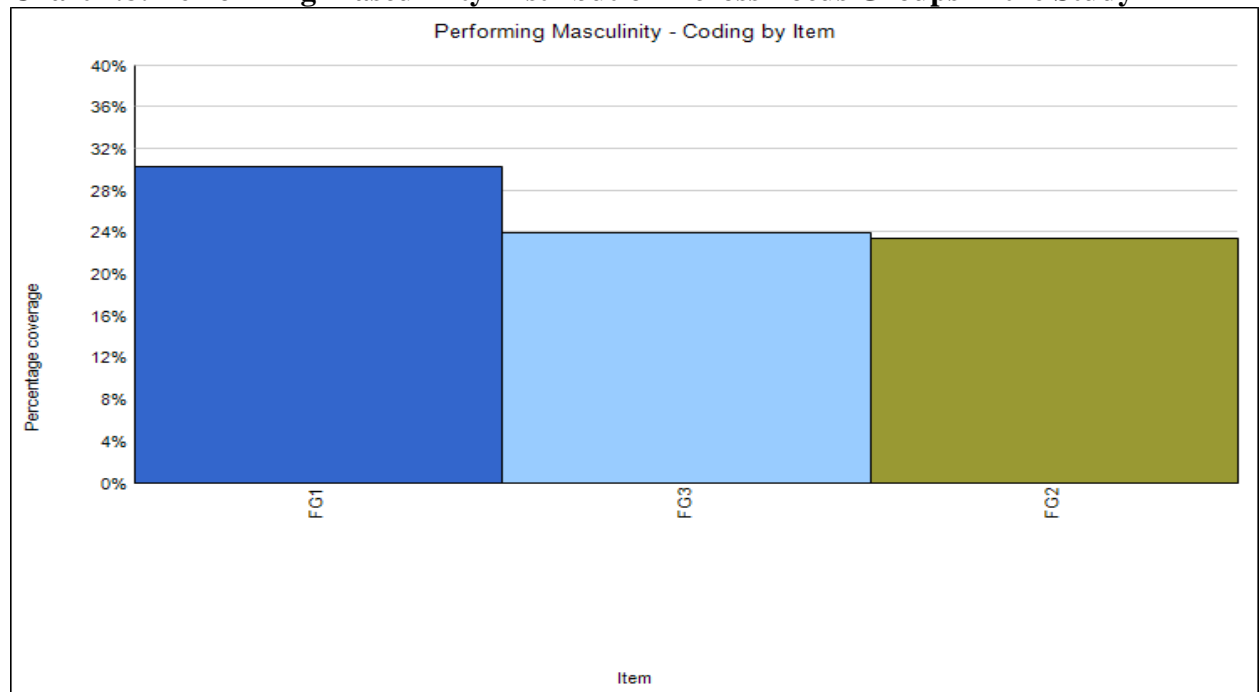
topic is frequently referenced in the literature. For many decades, farming was the primary way African American men were able to fulfill their duty of provisioning for and protecting the family (Hornsby-Gutting, 2009). This topic opens the door to begin understanding the forces seeking to diminish the masculinity of African American men farming. While it suggests that a not taking care of your family means you are not a man it also affirms in the African American men farming a marginalized masculinity. Cheng (1999) found that marginalized masculinities are a threat to hegemonic masculinities because they maneuver around the deceptions of the dominant discourse.

The fourth most discussed focus group topic under the theme performing masculinity is centered around independence. This was the most noted subject among interviewees under the theme performing masculinity and I believe this was because of the participation of farmers' wives. The content of the theme even proved to be different in its focus. While there was a strong emphasis on ownership and being your own boss, there was a stronger emphasis on knowing where your food comes from. Since farmers are constantly growing food, they were very suspicious of buying food from grocery stores and some farmers' markets. They preferred to eat what they grew and found solace in knowing what inputs were used to grow the food. When asked why knowing a food's source was such a big issue, many of them expressed that commercial food buyers often required a greater use of chemical treatments before taking products into the marketplace because presentation and the absence of bugs were paramount. According to Campbell, Bell, and Finney (2006), independence is a key characteristic of being a farmer. Independence also supports the idea that masculinity is associated with power because a boy may be but a man is not dependent. The centrality of independence to African

American men farming also agrees with the general nature of farming because at one time, a man could provide food, water, clothing, and shelter from land resources.

However, the structure of rural communities has changed the nature of farming but the ideas around independence for a farmer appear to be frozen in time.

**Chart 7.8: Performing Masculinity Distribution Across Focus Groups in the Study**



### *Role of Women in Farming*

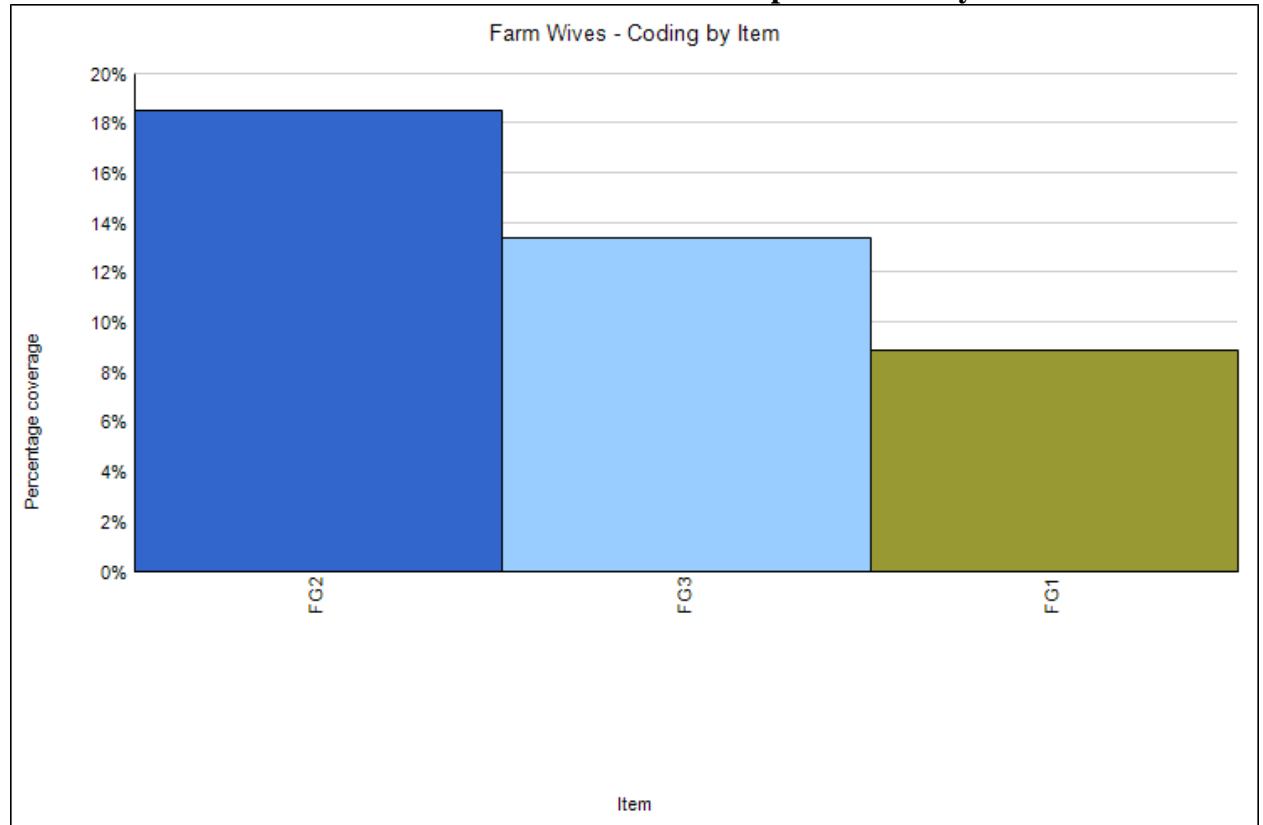
#### *Farm Wives*

The role of women in farming for African American men farming in North Carolina has shown to be quite significant. During the interview phase of the study, they were reported to have minimal participation but still showed up in two different capacities for farmers. Not surprisingly, during the focus group portion of the study where they actively participated in the study, they showed up in three different capacities: farm wives, performing femininity, and women in farming. There was some overlap among the roles but I will attempt to minimize duplication of data in the description of

each role. The most noted role among the three was the farm wife. Primarily, farm wives were responsible for inside tasks and rearing the children but were also found to have active leadership roles with decision making power in the farm operation. One of the wives had the farm registered in both her name and her husband's name with the state department of agriculture so they could apply for grants and other funded projects. Her husband upon finding out that she is listed as the principle operator of the farm was unbothered. He jokingly said, "that's about right, she's the brains. I'm just the worker." Other farmers shared examples of wives having their own niche within the operation, working side by side in the fields, researching more profitable markets, and finding ways to ensure the land stays in the family. One of the most striking examples of how these wives embraced their role on the farm is captured in the following statement: "I seen how much the value of farming and holding on to the property meant to him and that got me interested in it. So, I'm holding on to his dreams." In Chart 7.9, focus groups two and three have the greatest distribution because farmer's wives participated in both of these groups. A central tenet of these farmer's masculinity was revealed in this theme because even though farmers acknowledged the various leadership roles and activities headed up by their wives, they did not hold the wife responsible for any losses or the financial standing of the farm. They shouldered that responsibility. This topic is consistent with the literature. This both supports and enriches the literature on roles of women for African American farmers as well as provide insights into the kind of decisions African American men are having to make for survivability. Many of the African American men farming in the study would be identified as either an agrarian farmer or sustainable farmer (Campbell, Bell, and Finney (2006). The agrarian farmer loves farm life, values

independence, loves to see the fruit of his labor, shares responsibilities with family members, and bequeaths the operation to his son(s). The sustainable farmer is similar but the wife has more of a leadership role in the farming operation.

**Chart 7.9: Farm Wives Distribution Across Focus Groups in the Study**



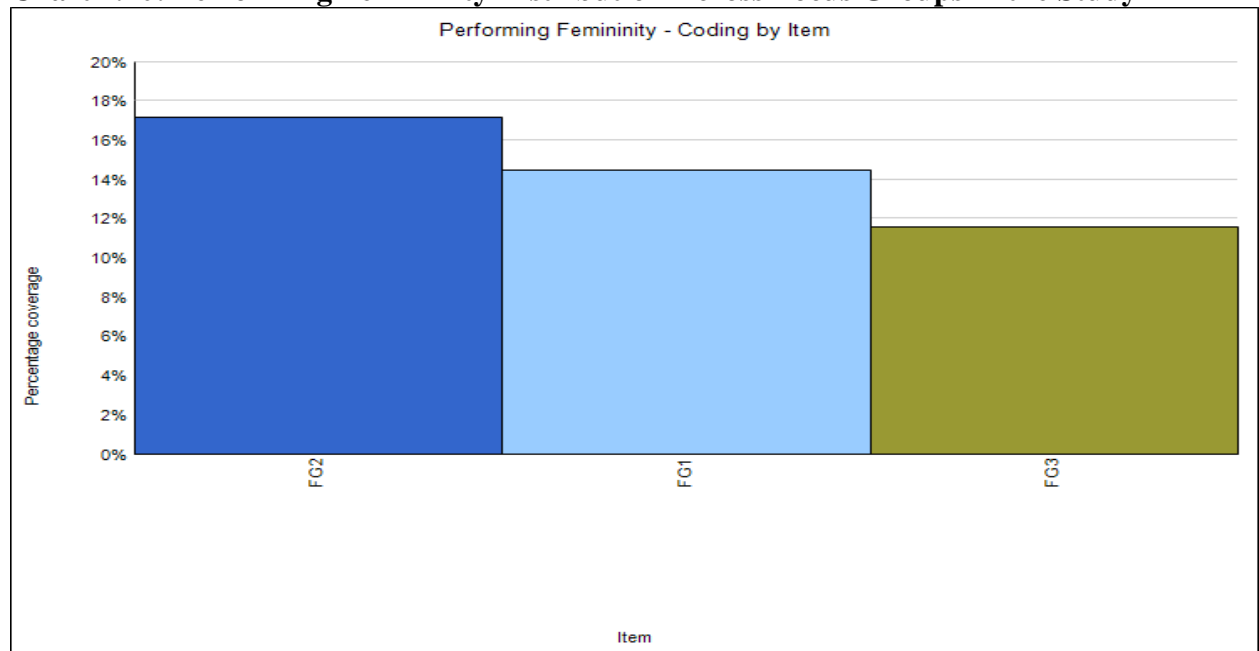
### *Performing Femininity*

The second role of women, performing femininity, was difficult to tease out in the focus groups. Following the rationale used in the in-depth interview section to describe the various ways African American men viewed and framed a woman's role and responsibilities revolving around the family, I found that all participants minimized this role. Even among the wives, there was more of an emphasis to show their contributions around the farm rather than their contribution inside the home. For example, one farmer only referenced his wife as doing a lot of leg work around the farm to fulfill grant



requirements. Additionally, all of the farmer's wives talked about being supportive around the farm and ensuring their husband's sense of authority was always intact. After asking several versions of the same questions on this topic, a couple of the farmers shared that their wives took care of the children, cooked for the family, and in some instances made clothes for the family. Some additional tasks women performed included making things like milk, butter, and preserves. There was a very subtle sense, an almost invisible air that some of the men did not think the women worked as hard as they did. Based on stories shared by the farmers, some of this comes from their childhood experiences and some comes from what they taught their children. Specifically, the idea is that the girls don't work as hard as the boys and many women don't farm because of the hard work and long tiresome hours. An important consideration regarding this perspective is that all the participants in the focus groups were in there late 50s to early 70s and although they were second and third generation family farmers, most of the focus group participants were retired with adult children that farmed for supplemental income only. In Chart 7.10, focus group two has the greatest distribution for this theme because it had the greatest amount of participation from farmer's wives. In this section, symbolic interactionism is working in a manner where the wives are putting more emphasis on the man's responsibilities than their own. Partly due to the associations of masculinity having more value and worth than femininity. Also, both men and women are taught that the contributions of a man are greater on the farm than a woman's contributions and Taflinger (1996) suggests that the symbols of masculine identity can manipulate interactions between men and women such that the women are taking on the role of farmer instead of homemaker.

**Chart 7.10: Performing Femininity Distribution Across Focus Groups in the Study**

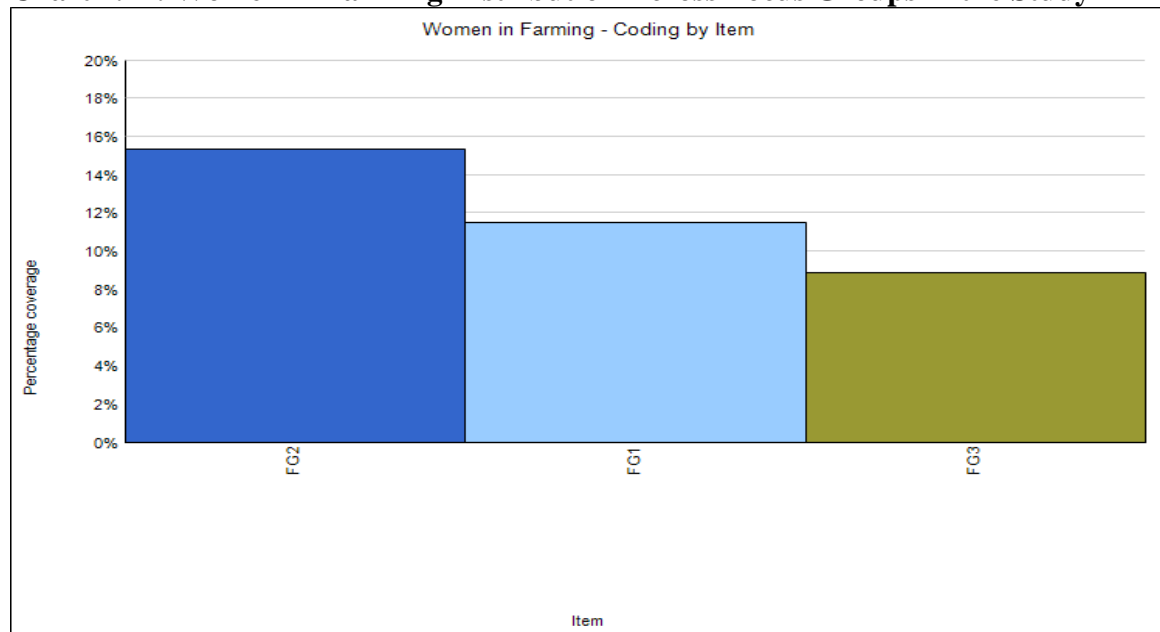


### *Women in Farming*

The third role, women in farming, was the most frequently discussed role of women in farming for the in-depth interviews. It was less significant in the focus group section because some of the data that would have fallen under this theme fell under the farmers' wives' theme. However, the content for this subject area still focuses on the various ways African American men frame a woman's contributions in agriculture and farming. A major emphasis here is on participation in farm organizations and programs targeting women in agriculture. Women shared that organizations and programs would often assist them in establishing small livestock operations while other groups helped them set-up high tunnels to grow specialty crops. This role also emphasized the commitment and sacrifices required to be a successful farmer. For example, one of the women talked about her love for farming but the challenge as a woman knowing that you are not the priority. A couple of the women shared that because the farm is the number

one priority, they had to give up things like traveling, recreational dining, movies and entertainment. One of the farmer's wives added that although you give up some things, you find that farming is a great marriage counselor because working with your husband on the farm strengthens your bond. In Chart 7.11, focus group two has the greatest distribution for this theme because it had the greatest amount of participation of women. Schrocke and Schwalbe (2009), suggest that power is a key element of manhood and masculinity. Women participating in farm organizations is a means to establish power. Blumer (1986) describes the foundation of symbolic interactionism as (1) the meanings a person places on a thing determines a person's behavior toward that thing, (2) the meaning of things come from or emerges out of the social interaction with colleagues and peers, and (3) meanings organize or manage themselves according to the analytical processes used by people as they confront things. In short, this topic shows that women are attempting to gain the power, rights, and privileges in farming as men but their purpose is to use their power to support their husbands, not replace them.

**Chart 7.11: Women in Farming Distribution Across Focus Groups in the Study**



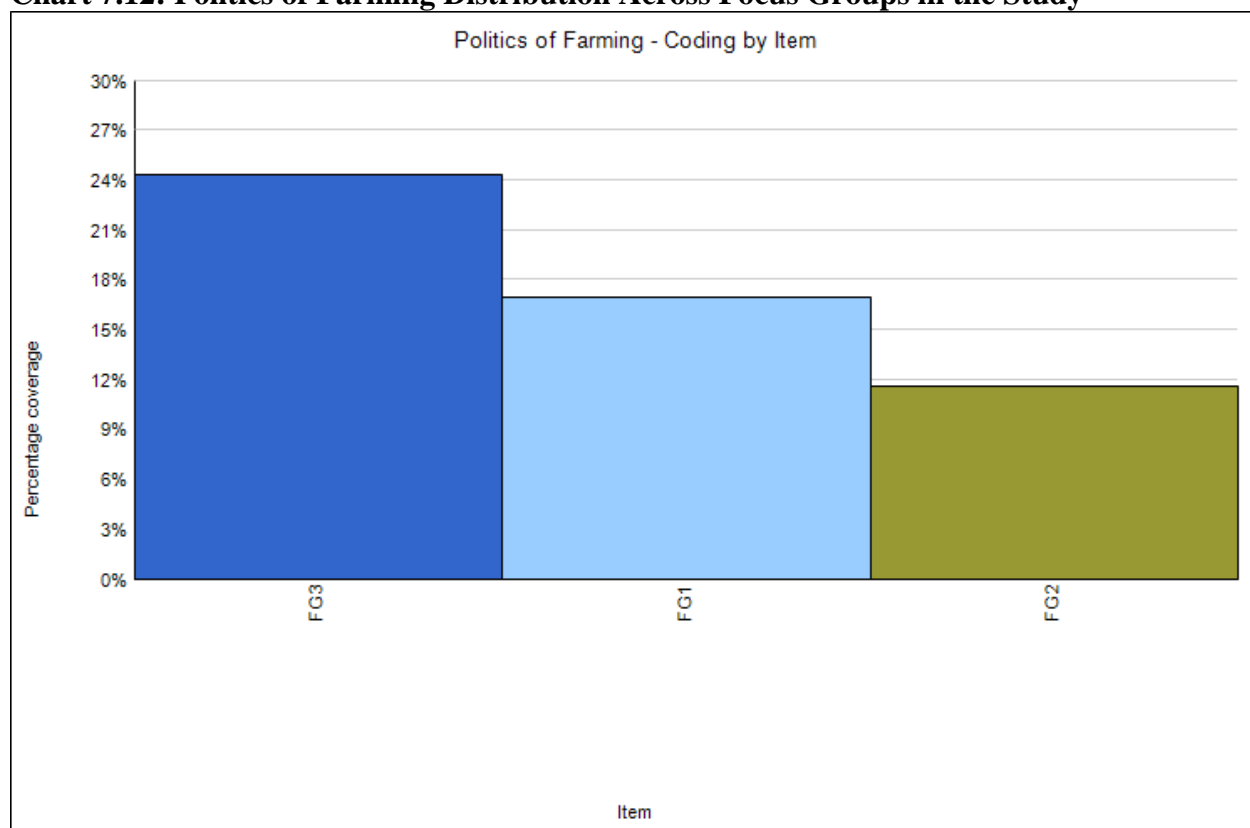
### *Politics of Farming*

The politics of farming for all African American men and women farming are nuanced and as mentioned earlier, steeped in history. Many of the decisions and negotiations farmers are making for survival are politically influenced. Participants in focus group 3 shared the most examples of how local politics influenced their operations (see Chart 7.12). Many of the participants also live in majority African American communities and commented on their lack of influence and control over the resources and policy making entities in their communities. For example, one of the couples in focus group 3 raising specialty market pork shared that the pigs have to be fenced in and given a restricted diet. Some of the large White farmers in her county belong to hunting clubs that ship in wild boar hogs to hunt. The wild hog population has gotten out of control and now she and other small farmers raising the specialty market pork have received mandates to double-fence their hogs to prevent any kind of contamination. They have to absorb the additional fence cost but have not found any consequences directed at the hunters for creating the problem. This example is a good segue to the most discussed topic under this theme—programs, rules, and regulations that lead to increased bureaucracy and cost for the farmer. One of the farmers spoke extensively about applying for the USDA environmental stewardship programs and could not understand why his application was being constantly denied. After further research he shared that, the programs were initially geared to farmers having the largest environmental impact—large farmers who are mostly White. He believes it was the barrage of complaints from small farmers that spurred the USDA to create an environmental stewardship program geared toward small farmers. His overall feeling was that Farm Bill programs and policies have

been primarily geared toward large farmers. Some also talked about their growing costs as regulations continue to differentiate organic, natural-raised, and conventional standards. They shared that they have little bargaining power so either they comply or search for a new market.

The second most discussed topic focuses on the prejudice and discrimination experienced along various intersections of race, class, and gender. For example, many of the farmers – both men and women, talked about attending workshops on keeping organized records, farm management, and writing strong business plans but felt that their participation was pointless because ultimately financiers won't lend them money. Other farmers spoke about the lop-sided treatment White men farming large acreage receive. For example, they thought it unfair that many of the White men farming are in leasing programs with farm equipment companies. Although there are no direct restrictions for getting in a leasing program, many African American farmers do not have the upfront cash or cash flow to support such an endeavor nor have they found any leasing programs geared toward socially disadvantaged farmers. The focus group participants also provided examples of small, medium, and large scale White farmers that have secured solar farming, hog house, and poultry house contracts but could only name 1 or 2 African American men and no African American women with those type of contracts. In fact, one of the African American women applied for financing to get two turkey houses but was refused and later filed a discrimination lawsuit. The farmers shared that the politics of discrimination and prejudice in farming is difficult to prove and they often time don't have the money or time to fight every battle but it is frustrating.

**Chart 7.12: Politics of Farming Distribution Across Focus Groups in the Study**

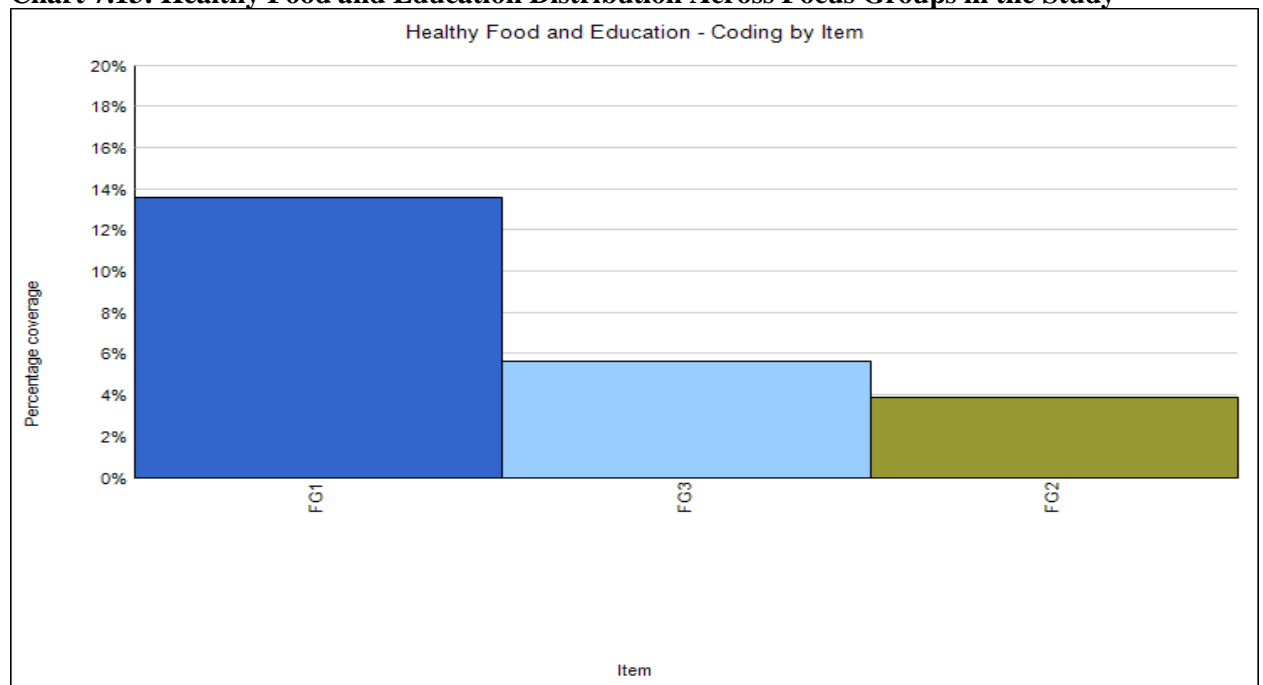


### *Healthy Food and Education*

During data collection many farmers spoke at length about what they considered to be one of the most important benefits of farming—healthy food. These sentiments came from row crop and livestock farmers, conventional growers, and organic producers. This theme teased out an experience for the farmer as a consumer and as a seller in the marketplace. As a consumer, farmers and their wives spoke in detail about wanting to feed their family healthy food. As a seller, they believe the consumers lack the knowledge for identifying healthy food as a problem. For example, the farmers shared examples of dealing with more food conscious consumers that wanted pesticide free products but then wanted a price discount if they saw one or two worms or small bugs. As can be seen in Chart 7.13, this was a heavily discussed issue for participants in focus

group one because they grew fruits, vegetables, and livestock primarily for the retail market where there is more contact with consumers. This theme focused heavily on knowing where your food comes from and being educated about fresh food in general. Some farmers expressed strong suspicion about eating at restaurants and shopping at grocery stores because of differing standards on food production. After I pried a little deeper, they shared stories of witnessing diseased animals being culled and processed into feed for non-diseased animals as well as seeing tomatoes and other produce ripened with ethylene gas. They seemed concerned that most citizens are unaware of what happens along the corporate food supply chain. Moreover, they believed that most people don't know how to recognize the look, taste, smell, and texture of ripe produce because most produce on grocery store shelves is harvested before it ripens to maximize shelf life. Consequently, the famers preferred to grow their own food for family consumption.

**Chart 7.13: Healthy Food and Education Distribution Across Focus Groups in the Study**



### *Faith, Religion, and Tradition*

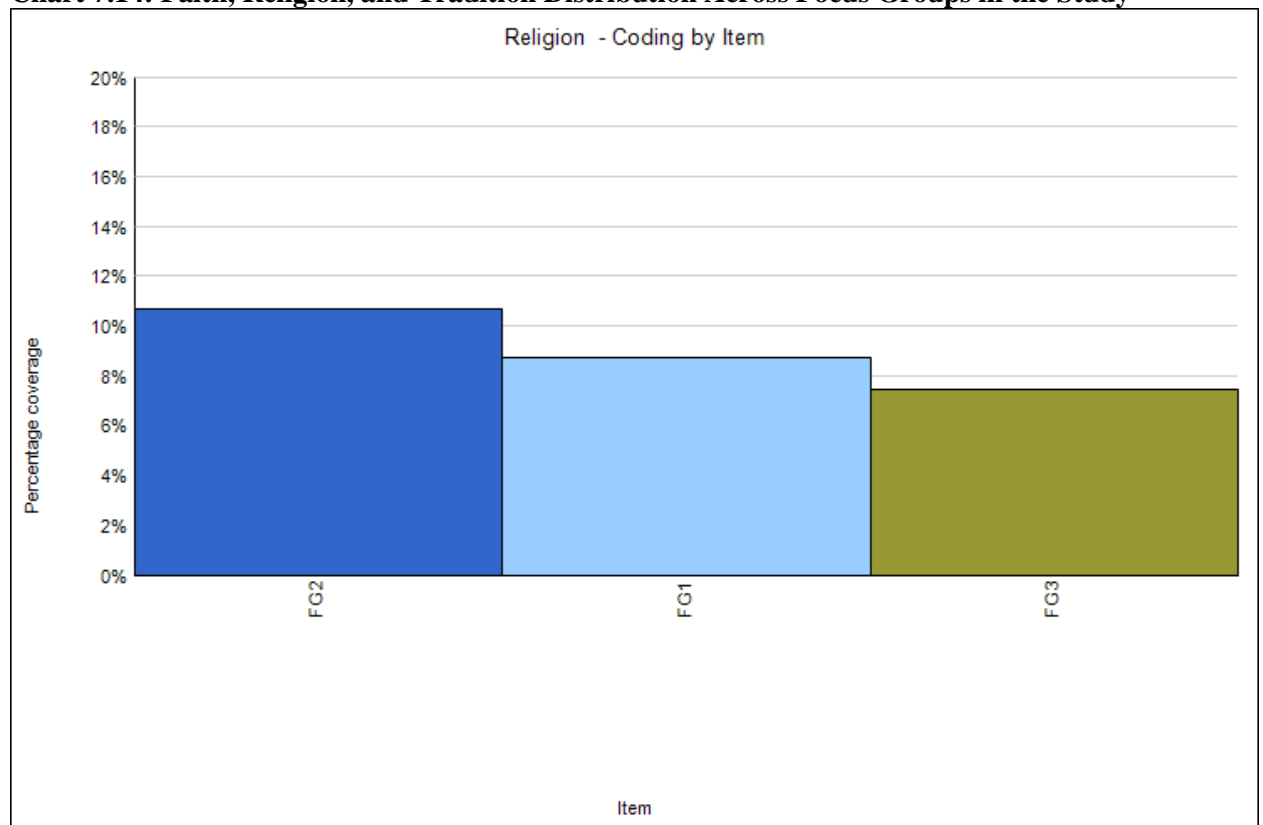
In the focus groups, participants discussed faith, religion, and tradition similarly to in-depth interview participants. However, there were some differences. Overall the greatest difference was in the manner that the topics were contextualized. Similar to interview participants, the focus group participants mostly discussed topics centered around the faith that God will provide for all of their needs. For example, one farmer shared his experience planting watermelons. He believed that once the last side dressing is applied, all that's left is for the Lord to show up with some good rain. Having a strong relationship with God seemed paramount because there were consistent remarks about "God is in control." Some even referred to President Barack Obama as evidence of God's intervention in this world's affairs and witnessing the change many have been praying to see. Also, similar to the interviewees, they subscribed to the scripture from the King James Bible in James 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter and 17<sup>th</sup> verse that states "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." Interestingly, these were the repeated sentiments of the men while the repeated sentiments of the women focused on being obedient to God's charge of holding the family together. This is reflected in Chart 7.14 where the wives in focus group 2 contributed significantly to the discussion.

The second most prominent subject area concentrated on the community impact of religious teachings. All participants belonged to a church and compared their experiences in church today with memories decades ago. They shared that church business and community affairs were once connected because as Christian people, they all looked out for one another. However, many felt that the focus today is on looking out for one's self interest, money and telling people to behave in a manner that prepares them



for a great afterlife experience. In response to this, some of the farmers shared deep frustrations regarding the disorganization of their community and church. For example, remarks were made about churches gathering their congregation weekly with little teaching on how to live a practical and healthy life. A few even commented on the culture of self-sufficiency in the church and community that will die out with the older folks. Examples of killing and preparing animals, preserving food, growing food, and looking after one another's kids lovingly were some of the things the farmers shared as not having been taught to younger generations. One of the farmers captured the overarching feelings of each focus group when he dropped his head in pain, while shaking it back and forth saying that "the old folk in the community built churches with pennies, and now we got \$100s and can't keep them because we don't work together."

**Chart 7.14: Faith, Religion, and Tradition Distribution Across Focus Groups in the Study**



## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion**

African American farmers were once fourteen percent of the U.S. farmer population, according to the 2012 Census of Agriculture. African American farmers now make up less than two percent of our nation's farmers as a whole. In North Carolina, the estimated one thousand seven hundred and forty-four African American owned and operated farms are about three percent of all farms in the state and are mostly headed by men. This study set out to understand how African American men farming in North Carolina construct their masculinity and also understand gender roles. The study was guided by the research question: what factors currently explain the social construction of masculinities for African American men farming in North Carolina and as a result of these constructions what decisions are African American men making as they negotiate

issues of survivability for their farms? There were a total of ten interviews, three focus groups, and two participant observations among African American men and women farming in North Carolina. The theory of masculinities and symbolic interactionism were utilized to conceptually frame the study. Data collected were divided into categories using a content analysis to determine the most reoccurring themes. In this conclusion, I will provide a summation of the study, research implications, and study limitations.

### *Summation of the Study*

While reviewing literature for this study, I found that most researchers primarily studied the culture, economics, politics, and communities of African American farmers in the context of race. Yet, I designed this study to focus on issues of gender, specifically masculinist constructions for African American men farming, with due respect to how they negotiate issues of survivability on the farm because these negotiations are not without consequences to their masculine identity, families, and communities. I drilled down on masculinist constructions and gender roles because I wanted to gain a greater understanding of how attitudes, beliefs, and understandings of masculinity and gender roles among African American men were formed. The intentional focus on masculinist constructions also captured a unique aspect of race through the lens of African American men and women farming because this study asked them to focus more on gender than race. For example, many of the African American farm families in this study are keenly aware of the marginalization in their farming experiences due to racism and racialized phenomena and can speak at length about how they force them to seek out pathways to survive and empower themselves. Moreover, they associate the significance of race with the long history of racism, discrimination, alienation, and structural problems as a major

factor that has amplified the struggle of African American men and women farming since being in the Western Hemisphere. However, when asking the African American men and women farming to frame their identity through a gendered lens, there was a visible change in their dispositions. For some participants, the change in the identity frame seemed imposing and for others it was empowering.

As I started the study, I expected many of the farmers to display qualities associated with a hegemonic or marginalized masculinity because in addition to the obstacles all small farmers are faced with, African American men's struggles have the added factor of race. The study discovered a fine line here. Whereas most farmers construct their masculinity around being able to overcome their struggles, African American men farming are more likely to construct their masculinity around resilience. Overcoming is associated with beating a problem or adversary but resilience is associated with absorbing the blow and fighting back to survive whether or not the problem or adversary is defeated. Further evidence of this resilience can be found in their professed association with gender roles to duty (family), responsibility (community), and religion (church). Each of the men participating (and some women) shared stories of economic hardship, racism, and family struggle that influenced their gender identity and gender roles in their family, community, and church. While carrying out these roles within their families, communities, and churches, a complicated picture develops. For example, the study reveals that African American farmers' wives are central to the success and stability of the farm operation, community, and church but from the outsider's perspective, their presence and contributions are often overlooked and not acknowledged by the men that are farming, in the community, and at the church. Yet, from an insider's

perspective the optics show that the identity and roles are central to how African American men farming explain their masculinity as they exhibit qualities that associate them with both hegemonic and marginalized masculinities.

According to Campbell, Bell, and Finney (2006), constructions of masculinity for men in farming are highly discernable. For one thing, the vast majority of farms in the U.S. are owned and operated by men. Even though most studies of masculinity on the farm, to date, focus on White men, this study focused on masculinist constructions of African American men farming in North Carolina between the ages of fifty and seventy-five. The African American men and women farming displayed behaviors that showed gender roles were fluid. For example, the African American men were recognized as being the patriarch of the family and farm however, issues of race and survivability compelled the men to make farm decisions that required the efforts of the entire family. Simply put, the wife, children, and sometimes extended family members all contribute to the success of the farm but the man farming is the only person recognized as the farmer. This distinction has been passed down in farm families and farm communities such that the boy children are expected to inherit the farm and associated responsibilities even if not interested. This pattern of inheriting the land along with the attendant ideas about masculinity were recognized by women as well because they were often compelled to play a supportive role, as assistants to farmers even as young girls. Again, this intergenerational transfer of attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs was fluid but also complex. While it shaped very rigid gendered behaviors, it seemed to provide a strong sense of self through the learning of skill-sets that are now taught at the high school and college level such as: home economics, cooking, canning/food preservation, carpentry, electrician,

painter, animal husbandry, and plant science. Lastly, the gender roles built around these commonplace farm skill-sets contributed to the norms and constructions of both masculinity and femininity.

Finally, the study affirmed that for many African American men farming in North Carolina, making a living off of the land was about more than contributing food and fiber to their family and rural communities. It was and still remains a pathway to fulfill their expectations associated with manhood and masculinity. As the men and women in this study have aged, their attitudes and beliefs about gender roles, masculinity, and femininity have remained intact but their approach and framing of the farm has changed. In addition to seeing the farm as a valuable asset and revenue generating entity, they now see the farm as a key part of their heritage and legacy that they do not want to lose. Unfortunately, only about three of the thirty farming men and women in this study had a succession plan. For instance, farms at one-time were automatically passed down in the family to male children but now potential heirs are choosing careers that allow them more flexibility in the construction of their masculinity and overall attitudes regarding gender roles. While some may view male children leaving the farm critically, this creates opportunities for and encourages women to have a greater role in taking over family farms. Some of the expressed fears around the topic of succession planning by the farmers were that their children would sell the farm for lack of interest or simply not comprehend the true value of the land and all that was sacrificed to own the land. Others expressed a fear that if their children knew the true measure of the intense labor associated with operating a farm with no guarantee of net profit they that they would also sell the land. This desire to hold on to the legacy of the land and fear of losing a cultural

asset is a topic that was not addressed in the literature reviewed for this study nor the study itself. This gap suggests topics to explore in future research because these concerns reflect considerations of dynamics that could lead to absentee land ownership, land tenure and heir-property issues, problems contributing to the loss of African American owned land, legacy, and culture. I raise this concern not to deviate from the topic of farming and masculinities but rather as an entry point to further enrich and enhance engagement in this discussion.

### *Research Implications*

#### *Significance of the Research*

In the literature, I found that most gender-based agricultural studies involve White men and women farming (Campbell, Bell, and Finney, 2006; Watts, 2008; Friend and Glover, 2004). This research study provides scholarly contributions to the literature that focuses on African American men and women farming in the Black Belt South and this holds great significance for a number of reasons. Generally speaking, many studies have been conducted on African Americans farming but they generally focus on race and are quantitative in nature. The studies focus on the demographics of African American farmers by looking at size of operation (Wood S. & Gilbert, J., 2000), type of operation, land holdings, and heir property (Pennick, E. J., 1990; Mitchell, T. W., 2001). Other studies have looked at racial and discrimination issues with regard to African American men and women farming (Gilbert, J., Wood, S., & Sharp, G., 2002). Those studies all contribute to the literature of African American farmers. However, a major difference in this study is that gender is the primary focus not race or the overall farming operation and

I focus more on the men and women's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward masculinity construction and gender roles.

Given that this study took place on farms across North Carolina, it would be classified as a rural-based study. During my literature review, I found that most studies on African American masculinity have been focused in urban spaces, and on overall identity, film depictions, crime, and sexuality (Hine, 2001; Abdel-Shehid, 2005; Belton, 1995; Chan, 1988; Conner, 1995; Estes, 2000; Hall, 2011). In fact, of the four ideal types of rural masculinity offered by Campbell, Bell, and Finney (2006), the cowboy, the woodsman, farmers, and hunters, African American men are rarely profiled within any of these categories. I conclude this because African American men farming exist on the margins of the farm economy and largely are described as a racial group not gender type. The lack of emphasis on gender, specifically masculinist constructions and gender roles of African Americans on the farm restricts the frame for analysis and minimizes the complexity of their experiences, as well their agency, contributions to their families, farms, and communities. Race, in this sense provides a compelling case for strengthening the analysis when studying African American men farming.

### *Deep Inside*

An "insider" in research is someone that is a member of the population they are studying. Kanuha (2000) notes that a researcher may become an insider when they share such things as an identity, language, or experiential base. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) shared that the more a researcher has in common with a participant, the more accelerated the process of acceptance becomes and more open the participant is with researchers. This usually allows access into more deeply rooted discussions so that a greater depth of



data is collected. While collecting data in the field being an insider can be a great advantage but Dwyer and Buckler (2009) emphasize the challenge researchers might struggle with due to role conflicts if they are caught on the hinges of group loyalty. They indicate that if the researcher incorporates disciplined bracketing, and detailed reflection along with being aware of their own personal biases and perspectives, they can minimize this struggle.

As mentioned earlier, this is not the first study focusing on African American men farming but this study brings a unique perspective because I am an “insider”, many times over. I am a man. I am an African American. I am from North Carolina. I grew up in a rural community. Lastly, I grew up on a small farming with row crops, animals, and produce. Some of the participants shared very personal information and experiences with me due to my being viewed as an insider. A couple of participants even shared that I was not the first researcher to interview them but there were certain things they would not share with the other researchers. The data shared in those moments were rich and valuable to the study, yet I often reflected on how to use the data and simultaneously not betray the participants’ trust. As I struggled with role conflict a couple of times in this study, I frequently consulted my advisory committee members to remain objective and on task. Also, I kept a journal detailing some of my reflections on the data and participants’ experiences. This allowed me to remain objective and write with minimal bias during the study.

#### *Implications for Future Research*

This study was designed and conducted as an exploratory study and its implications for future research are significant. The rich data and expansive findings in this study yield a wide range of possibilities for future research. For example, the study starts with an initial research question but leads the researcher to ask more compelling questions during the study regarding how masculinist constructions are formed as well as

linking gender roles and identity construction to concerns of participants like succession planning and African American land loss. The study's focus on masculinist construction and gender roles on the farm also sets up departure points to design studies that investigate African American women farming, family, ways of making community, religious foundations, and politics for African American men living in rural spaces. This study contributes a gendered perspective to scholarly literature in those areas that have been mostly researched from a racialized perspective. Hence, future researchers should acknowledge the significance of race but study African American men as more than a racial group.

Another point of interest that stands out in this study is the use of narratives. According to Etherington (2013), using narratives allows the researcher to use meaningful information to connect layers of experiences about a group, their culture, and how they change over time. The use of narratives fits well with the theoretical framework - symbolic interaction because narratives allow the researcher to discern patterns and pull together examples of identity construction and reconstruction. The farmers' narratives enrich the study with powerful interactions that illustrate their values, beliefs, and interpretations of phenomena. This study uncovers the connectedness of African American men and women with regard to gender roles and how their construction of gender identity is tied to those roles. Unfortunately, this study did not fully capture the voices of the women in the study. Therefore, future research should be intentional about capturing narratives from the wives of African American men farming. Future research should more evenly capture the many and varied tasks women execute for the survivability of the farm operation and how their leadership does not emasculate their

husbands. In sum, the use of narratives and a gendered perspective opens up more space to evaluate discourses that should illuminate the relationship between African American men and women farming and the rural communities in which they live.

Lastly, an area for future research is how data are collected from men. The initial plan for the study was to conduct the interviews and focus groups at a local Cooperative Extension Office but in each instance, I ended up at the farm of the participant. In the majority of the cases, the farmer and I were carrying out various activities while I was collecting data. We were feeding animals, running errands, picking greens, working on machinery, or just walking around the farm in order for me to get a complete picture of their operation and land. The men were responsive and reflective as we discussed a variety of topics. As I reflect back to the interviews and participant observations, the men appeared to be moving around and speaking with purpose but I also sensed that they were giving me permission to make observations in the space where most of their time is spent. During these activities, it was clear that most of the participants were unaware or rarely assessed the value of their presence to other African American men farming, their family or community. Therefore, when working with this particular group, gaining access into the space where most of their time is spent can yield rich data for future research.

### *Policy Implications*

There are a number of policy implications issuing from this study. Many agricultural production policies overlook the contributions of women and children to the success of the farm. Some of the participants provided examples of how White farm families have found ways to unofficially capitalize on those contributions. Some include setting up the farm as an LLC and hiring their children and wives as employees of the

farm and then laying them off seasonally, but paying into the social security system so that they are eligible for unemployment and retirement benefits. As a policy or program, African American men and women farming would benefit greatly from pursuing such strategies because it encourages a more equitable model of operating. It could also reduce heir-property and succession planning issues among African Americans farming in a more sustainable way.

The Farm Bill has policies and programs that are focused on providing opportunities for African American men and women who desire to farm through the designation of being socially-disadvantaged and/or a minority. While that is helpful, many African American youth don't want to go through the same experiences as their parents and grandparents on the farm. Providing alternative farming programs for families such as tree farming and agroforestry allow for younger generations to still have the land in production, and to be classified as farmers, and plan generationally for the future of the land. This study also highlights the cultural significance of African American men farming within respective communities. Policymakers should consider creating community-based vocational programs that allow African American men farming to address educational gaps affecting young men and women in rural communities. Lastly, African American women on the farm have a long overlooked history that needs to be acknowledged and researched. This study reveals the strategic importance of women for survivability of the farm. Encouraging African American women's participation in programs may be a one of the most viable survival strategies for Black farms.

### *Study Limitations*

This study provides a rich insight into the struggles of African American farm families but contains a number of limitations. The first limitation is that the researcher's time and financial resources were limited and only allowed for a small sample of African American men and women farming to be included in the study. The second limitation has to do with quota sampling. Of the nonprobability sampling frames, quota sampling is the best fit for the study but according to Babbie (2010) there are a couple of problems with the quota sampling frame. They are (1) proportions in the different cells may not be accurate and (2) categories within a cell may be inherently biased.

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MARCUS K. BERNARD, M.S.  
CURRICULUM VITAE

Office Address

Rural Training and Research Center  
Federation of Southern Cooperatives  
575 Federation Road  
Epes, Alabama 35460  
Phone: 336-392-6476  
E-Mail: [marcusbernard@federation.coop](mailto:marcusbernard@federation.coop)

EDUCATION

*North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, Greensboro, North Carolina,  
May 2008*

Master of Science, Agricultural Economics

Thesis: "Determinants of Health Status in The Black Belt Region of the United States"

*North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, Greensboro, North Carolina,  
December 1999*

Bachelor of Science, Agricultural Economics

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

August 2016 – Present	Federation of Southern Cooperatives / Land Assistance Fund, Epes, Alabama, <i>Director – Rural Training and Research Center</i>
May 2015 – August 2015	University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, Lexington, Kentucky, <i>4-H Intern</i>
August 2008 – May 2015	University of Kentucky Sociology Department, <i>Research and Teaching Assistant</i>
January 2010 – September 2015	First Baptist Bracktown, Inc.-- Black Male Working Academy, Lexington, Kentucky, <i>Youth Development Mentor</i>
September 2005 – August 2006	Concentric Management Applications, Greensboro, North Carolina, <i>Assistant Project Manager.</i>
May 2002 – August 2003	Glory Foods, Inc., Columbus, Ohio, <i>Produce Sales Officer</i>



May 2000 – May 2002

North Carolina Agricultural & Technical  
State University, International Trade Center,  
*Cooperative Development Officer*

### GRANTS and FELLOWSIPS

Dissertation Fellow - 2015-2016, Southern Regional Education Board Doctoral Scholars Program.

BEERS Summer Research Fellow 2010-2011. Consumption and Oral Health in Appalachia: Parents' Construction of Food and Drink Decisions Affecting Children.

Brea Perry and Marcus Bernard. "Food Related Health Problems in Children: Oral Health and Obesity." University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research Large Grant (\$11,414.00). Lexington, Kentucky. January 2011.

Marcus Bernard. "Oral Health in Appalachia." University of Kentucky, Department of Sociology. BEERS Summer Research Fellowship (\$1,000.00). Summer 2010.

Lyman T. Johnson Fellowship August 2009 – August 2012.

North Carolina Institute of Political Leadership Fellow, 2001.

### HONORS AND AWARDS

National Chapter of the Year - 2015 Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS).

Torch of Excellence, University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment. Lyman T. Johnson Alumni, October 2011.

Student Paper Award (2008). "Exploring the Relationship between Obesity and Physical Activity in Rural North Carolina." Southern Rural Sociological Association, Dallas, Texas, February 3-5 2008.

### PUBLICATIONS (REFEREED JOURNALS)

Rosalind Harris, Marcus Bernard, Maureen Mullinax, Dreamal Worthen, Sokoya Finch, Veronica Womack. (2012) "Attending to Place, Race and Community: Trans-Local Partnering Between Scholars and Activists in Central Appalachia and the Black Belt South." *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1/2 (Spring/Fall 2012), pp. 206-219

### OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Davis, Alison and Marcus Bernard. "The Economic Contribution of Kentucky's Hospitals," Kentucky Rural Health Works Publication, August 2009.