

## **Fighting Alone: The Lived Experiences of African Women Immigrant Farmers Acquiring Land in the United States**

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### **Abstract**

*The study adopted phenomenology to understand the lived experiences of African Women Immigrant Farmers (AWIFS) acquiring land in the U.S. Seven participants were interviewed through semi-structured interviews. The study found that AWIFs acquire land from friends, and organizations serving immigrants, including government agencies. AWIFS also partners with spouses or close relatives to purchase agricultural land. Nonetheless, AWIFS experiences numerous challenges such as limited social networks which restrict access to land-related information. Other challenges include a lack of knowledge of American land structures and tenure systems, financial challenges, and stringent funding requirements. To overcome such barriers, AWIFS, engage in expanding their social networks and research to acquire land-related information. The study recommends that organizations supporting immigrant farmers focus on building close relationships with immigrant farmers as a springboard to effectively address their unique needs. Additionally, organizations serving immigrant farmers should provide a bundle of services including capital, land, extension services, and market infrastructures to alleviate financial stress and unlock AWIFS' full potential.*

**Keywords:** Africa, Challenges, Immigrant farmers, Land Access, Women Farmers

## **Introduction and Literature Review**

The face of United States (U.S.) agriculture although once white-male-dominated, is rapidly changing with diverse farmers emerging including people of color, immigrants, and women (Sachs et al., 2016). The latest United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) report documented a growing population of women farmers, representing 38 percent of total farmers in the U.S. (Viswanath & Samanta, 2022). These monumental shifts sprang from an amplified call for diversity, increased education access for women, policy changes, and the expansion of spaces in alternative agriculture systems (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Sachs et al., 2016). The proliferation of alternative agriculture encouraged new farming techniques and welcomed new players including African Women Immigrant Farmers (AWIFS) (Hightower, 2012; Minkoff-Zern, 2019).

The population of African immigrants in the U.S. has grown in the last two decades, with a concomitant increase in the number of African women immigrants from 25 percent in the early year 2000s to the current 40 percent (Echeverria-Estrada & Batalova, 2019). The shift in the population of African immigrants accelerated the demand for culturally appropriate foods (McElrone et al., 2019). Culturally appropriate foods refer to foods individuals or groups consume that directly or tangentially link to their cultural practices, including the preparation and serving of such foods (Via Campesina, 2007).

The growing demand for culturally appropriate foods among the African immigrant communities in the U.S., unlocked agribusiness opportunities for African immigrants, including AWIFS to satisfy this growing demand (Hightower, 2012; McElrone et al., 2019; Oliphant, 2019). Successful agribusiness depends on access to factors of production such as land, capital, extension services, and markets (Fremstad & Paul, 2020). Nevertheless, African immigrants' access to such resources hinges on their ability to leverage their community capitals, both from their native and host countries (Smith et al., 2019).

Flora and Flora (2008) defined community capital as forms of capital existing in communities that can be leveraged individually and collectively to foster community change. Flora and Flora (2008) identified seven categories of community capital: human, social, political, natural, built, cultural, and financial capital. The integration of immigrant women into the host community centers around their ability to reassemble their community capital in the host countries or communities (Chaumba, 2016; Djamba & Kimuna, 2011). The ability of immigrants to rebuild community capital including social capital in the host country is quintessential to overcoming the challenges of beginner farmers such as land access.

Land access consistently ranks as an impediment to beginner farmers, especially immigrant farmers (Fremstad & Paul, 2020; Scott & Richardson, 2021; Smith et al., 2019). USDA defines beginner farmers as having less than ten years of farming experience (Smith et al., 2019). In this context, beginner farmers acquire land in multiple ways including marrying into a farming family, inheriting land, or purchasing land individually or through a partnership (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Fremstad & Paul, 2020; Pilgeram & Amos, 2015). Other land acquisition channels included sharecropping, tenancy, or crop lien systems (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011). Additionally, beginner farmers acquire land through farmer incubator programs and community-supported agriculture programs (Scott & Richardson, 2021).

However, most land acquisition options are often inaccessible for AWIFS due to their limited social networks, financial strength, and conflated systemic discriminations (Alkon &

Agyeman, 2011; Chaumba, 2016; Flora & Bergendahl, 2012). Sachs et al. (2016) further posited that agriculture is predominantly male space and new entrants like women farmers encounter existential challenges of cultural norms and beliefs. These challenges are amplified among women of color due to the intersectionality of immigration status, gender, and race (Hightower, 2012). Alkon and Agyeman, (2011) noted that the historical racial stratifications and the hegemony of white America persist today and are magnified in the agrifood systems. Consequently, AWIFS encounter similar discriminatory treatment in accessing resources like land (Russell et al., 2021).

Land rights are intricately linked to access to extension services, credit, and other agricultural inputs (Fremstad & Paul, 2020; Sachs et al., 2016). Giving women access to land and involving them in the decision-making process elevates their status, confidence, and power to self-identify as a farmer and not as helpers or farmers' wives (Pilgeram & Amos, 2015; Sachs et al., 2016; Wright & Annes, 2016). Self-identity as a farmer has reverberating effects on the productivity of women farmers (Sachs et al., 2016).

Owing to the increasing population of AWIFS albeit with mounting challenges of limited financial capacities and social networks (Flora & Bergendahl, 2012; Sachs et al., 2016), it is imperative to understand how AWIFS access land. To the best of our knowledge, no research has explored land access among AWIFs in the U.S. The paucity of research in this area underscores the need for further investigation to fill the research gap in understanding land access among AWIFS in the U.S.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) proposed by Flora & Flora (2008). CCF is useful in identifying capital or assets that facilitate and sustain AWIFS' participation in agriculture. Flora and Flora (2008) identified seven types of community capital: human; cultural; social; natural; financial; political; and built capital. Such capitals are malleable, overlap, and can be transformed from one form of capital to another. Immigrant farmers come from their native countries with resources such as social networks or indigenous knowledge which they leverage to sustain their farming endeavors (Minkoff-Zern, 2019; Thompson, 2011). It is against this backdrop that Freire (1974) advocated for participatory community development by first assessing the foundational knowledge and resources in target communities. In other words, long-term development stems from meeting communities where they are and building on their experiences and resources (Flora & Flora, 2008).

Thompson (2011) adopted a qualitative approach and community capital framework to examine factors inducing Latino immigrants to become farmers in Iowa. The study found that human, cultural, and social capital significantly influenced Latino participation in agriculture. Similarly, Blaise and Allred (2021) used the Community Capital Framework to investigate the role of community forestry on community capital. The study evaluated the differences in community capital between groups engaged and those not engaged in agroforestry in Haiti. This study found that participation in agroforestry fostered the expansion of community capital like social, financial, and human capital. Additionally, Mulema et al. (2020) used the Community Capitals Framework to understand the process of rural women's empowerment through agricultural interventions in Ethiopia. The study revealed that interventions that enhance

women's different community capitals are crucial for their upward spiral by fostering their voices and personal agency in development.

Although other capitals are essential, we focus on understanding the financial and social capital of the African women immigrant farmers. AWIFS rely on their social and financial capital to kickstart farming. Bourdieu, (1986, p. 248) defined social capital as "institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" that provide each member with "collectivity-owned capital". On the other hand, financial capital refers to a variety of financial instruments invested to create extra monetary value (Thompson, 2011). Although all community capitals are pivotal in immigrant integration processes, immigrants' social capital is the most essential as it expands opportunities for other types of capital (Chaumba, 2016; Oliphant, 2020). For example, immigrant farmers can borrow money from their friends and families (social capital) to kickstart farming. Essentially, community capitals overlap and significantly contribute to developing each other.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the study was to examine the lived experiences of African Women Immigrant Farmers acquiring land in the U.S. The overarching research question was, how do AWIFS describe their experiences acquiring land in the U.S.?

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design and Study sites**

Phenomenology was adopted to understand the lived experiences of African women immigrant farmers acquiring land in the U.S. Phenomenology is defined as the study of the essence of a lived experience or a lifeworld (Moustakas, 1994). van Manen (1997) posited that to understand human lived experience, individuals who have experienced the phenomenon should be engaged to understand their meaning-making process. Accordingly, seven AWIFS from Georgia (1); Massachusetts (2); Minnesota (1); Texas (2); and Wisconsin (1) were recruited through purposive and snowballing sampling methods. The initial participant was identified and recruited from the lead researcher's social networks. The remaining six participants were recruited through a snowballing process. Moustakas (1994) advocated for an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of a few participants rather than seeking data saturation.

#### **Data Sources and Data Collection**

The researchers developed an interview protocol covering land access, challenges, and ways of navigating such challenges. The interview protocol was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. After IRB approval, the researchers tested the interview guide with one African woman immigrant farmer to ensure clarity of questions. Feedback obtained from the interview guide test was incorporated into developing clear, targeted, and fit-for-purpose questions.

Table 1. Participants' Socio-demographic Information

Name	Age	Marital Status	State	Length of Stay in the U.S.
Bella	48	Married	Minnesota	15
Georgina	52	Married	Georgia	29
Tasha	43	Married	Texas	23
Juliet	55	Married	Wisconsin	22
Isabel	35	Married	Massachusetts	21
Rachel	40	Married	Texas	20
Lidia	66	Married	Massachusetts	21

Data collection was done through semi-structured in-depth interviews via Zoom. Interviews were conducted at a time of convenience to the participants and lasted between 45-90 minutes. Questions involved land access, challenges, and ways of dealing with emergent challenges. Participants' verbal consent was sought before recording interviews. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim word-for-word using otter.ai software. The first researcher listened to the audio recordings and manually cleaned the otter.ai transcript for accuracy. Participants' identifying information was retracted and replaced with pseudonyms as shown in Table 1. The transcripts were shared with research participants for member-checking and validation. The lead researcher kept a reflective journal throughout the study period to control his potential biases and judgments that could potentially influence the study findings (van Manen, 1997).

### Data Analysis

Van Manen (1997) argued that there is no specific phenomenological data analysis procedure. Instead, he advocated for line-by-line, sentence thematic analysis or selective analysis approaches. Selective highlighting of key elements related to the phenomenon of acquiring land as AWIF was pulled and categorized for this study. Data analysis was conducted in line with van Manen (1997) who suggested: a) reading the text; b) noting certain critical texts relating to the phenomenon under study; c) reflecting on the texts to identify emerging themes; d) looking for connections between emergent themes; e) describing the experiences using the textural and structural texts and going through a cyclic process of reading, writing, and re-reading. The textural description focused on *what* was experienced and the structural description focused on *how* the phenomenon was experienced. The textural and structural descriptions were collated and developed into a composite description to understand the essence of the phenomenon. Researchers then converged and discussed emerging themes which were then compiled into three themes and six sub-themes.

## Findings

Data analysis generated four themes: fighting alone, researching opportunities, using social networks, and impacts of small money.

### **I am Fighting Alone**

The theme of fighting alone substantiated how AWIFS struggles on their own to navigate the U.S. farming landscape to access land. Participants described how accessing land in the U.S. was challenging due to a lack of information about the processes of land access in the U.S. Bella and Juliet lamented how the lack of information on where to find land pushed them to seek information from the internet and the church. Juliet said:

We have challenges getting land. These people don't know us, and we don't know them. I mean, you don't wanna bring a stranger to your farm and yet you don't know them. I would do the same thing because I don't know your agenda. You can't walk into somebody's home like in Africa and say, hey, I want to rent land. They don't know you. They might even shoot you because really, who are you coming into my compound? So, that's the challenge we have, the way the American people live. They are not people like us in Africa where you connect with everybody. You find somebody on the street you can just connect with them just like that. This country is not like that.

The above sentiments revealed the limited interaction between immigrants and the host communities. Leasing or renting land, especially from individuals, is facilitated through relationship building. In cases where such relationships were non-existent, AWIF farmers fought alone to address their challenges by gathering information and building networks online and in person. However, the eminent risks associated with visiting local communities as a stranger derailed the desire of AWIFS to connect, build relationships, and trust with host communities.

### **Researching Opportunities**

All seven participants underscored the cardinal role of land access for successful farming and noted the different strategies and approaches adopted to navigate the land access challenges. The strategies oscillated around research to gain a deeper understanding of U.S. land access systems. The research involved using social media platforms like Facebook to connect with other like-minded farmers, and learn from friends, and the community in general. For instance, Tasha, Rachel, and Juliet noted how they use the internet to learn about organizations providing land, new techniques of farming, and soil management. Rachel stated that:

We learn mostly from our neighbors and friends. Like if some people have something you don't have, I gather information from people including my parents and the internet. Just learning from people really, we're just absorbing information right now.

Additionally, friends and other social networks like churches were found to be crucial in acquiring land. Friends provided information about existing opportunities even outside their

states of residency which prompted other AWIFS to farm in other states. For example, Juliet mentioned that she moved from Minnesota to Wisconsin to farm when she couldn't find a farming space in Minnesota. She said:

I couldn't find any land in Minnesota. I don't know the people or the farmers. Plus, another reason, we live in the city where you can't just drive into somebody's home who doesn't know you, a stranger. So, when we live in the city, we are limited in connecting with those farmers because we don't know them, they don't know us. I don't know any organization that can connect me to any farmer in Minnesota.

The above sentiments underscored the indispensable role of connections or relationship-building to land access, especially if the host communities did not know you. The first step to land access meant getting to know people and being known by the farming communities.

In addition, other immigrants accessed land through government-sponsored programs such as community gardens or beginner farmer programs. However, Tasha lamented how such places are sometimes encumbered with bureaucracy, especially when she visited USDA:

I have tried to go through those areas, but I don't know, sometimes it requires a lot of paperwork and a lot of time just to figure out if you can get some sort of support. But I have reached out to USDA just to figure out some ways to improve my land in terms of soil erosion and things like that, and they did come on-site, and they gave us a few tips here and there which we are trying to implement.

### **Using Social Networks for Land Access**

The theme of using social networks to access land meant that AWIFS leveraged their close relationships with friends, family, community, and organizations supporting immigrant communities to become farmers. Hence, sub-themes included acquiring land from friends, buying land through partnership, and acquiring land from organizations.

### **Acquiring land from friends**

Participants noted friendship as a pathway for acquiring land-related information and land. Three participants, Bella, Juliet, and Georgina illuminated how friends facilitated their land access by connecting them to people or organizations providing land for rental. Georgina specifically mentioned that her friend allowed her to temporarily use her land for growing vegetables:

I also have a friend here in Georgia with a farm seven minutes away from my house. She does not live on that property; she had a house that she tore down. But then the school around it was telling her to keep the place clean and make sure there was no bush growing, I went and helped her for the first time. And we said why do we keep on cutting this bush we might as well clear this place and plant this stuff. So, I went and took a tractor, plowed the area, and planted all the vegetables. It is a very big space, and this is the second year I am farming there.

Friends and close family members were integral to AWIFS' land access. Both close and distant friends are a critical part of land access by providing land, information about funding opportunities, and related requirements. Additionally, friends facilitated access to

complementary services like seeds, and markets. Friends acted as advisors, risk analysts, marketers, and extension agents in the absence of mainstream extension services. However, engagements with friends rested on the principles of trust and reciprocity.

### **Buying land through a partnership**

Four participants, Tasha, Rachel, Bella, and Georgina noted that they purchased land through a partnership with their spouses and close family members such as husbands, sisters, and aunts. Nonetheless, immigrants participated in community gardens first, to provide latitude for experimentation and market analysis before purchasing farming land. Rachel said:

You know, in Kenya, they tell you to invest in land and all this stuff but then together with my husband, we realized that if we buy land in Kenya, we won't get to enjoy it. We wanted something where we could go out and enjoy, even if it was just hanging out on a piece of land. So that's how we started, we finally found a piece of land that worked for us, and we purchased it.

Since most farmers started farming as a hobby, the impetus for purchasing land came only after a thorough market analysis. Lidia said:

I mean, it was a hobby at first, like when my mom used to when she started earlier on, she was sharing, and then the business opportunity developed with connection to the communities and then me becoming more involved in the family business and deciding to branch out into marketing.

Some Immigrants like Tasha and Rachel relied heavily on their previous farming backgrounds in Africa to purchase land in the U.S. Such approaches to land-buying resulted in the purchase of land with bad soil, infested with pests, and wild animals, and unsuitable for agricultural production. The purchase of unsuitable agricultural land was due to unfamiliarity with land structures in the host country. For example, Tasha described how she had to amend her clay soil as everything she planted failed to grow:

The other challenge is my soil. The soil that I have the entire land is clay. So, I have to purchase soil to amend my soil. Based on my research and through going to school, it may take three to four years for me to amend that soil to be favorable to my plants.

The need to amend the soil sprang from the lack of information on the type of soil structure in the U.S. AWIFS' frame of decision-making on purchasing land was based on their prior experiences in their countries of origin.

### **Acquiring land through Organizations**

All seven participants emphasized how organizations such as government, non-profits, and private actors like farmer-based organizations facilitate immigrant land acquisition. Governments including counties, cities, and states have initiated programs on urban green spaces as well as community garden programs to promote food security. Through such programs, immigrants, and communities in general, gain access to small plots for community gardens. In addition, such organizations provide auxiliary services such as water to enhance production. Bella mentioned her satisfaction with the services provided in community gardens:

Ten years ago, I went to the church I always attended, and I talked to some people about my interest in growing some vegetables. I asked them whether there was a place I could get to plant. Then one of the Christians told me like, oh in the city if you go to the recreational office, they give some. They rent small pieces to anybody who wants to plant anything. So, I got a small piece. I don't know how to measure wherever it was, but a small piece, like the size of a normal-sized living room, or less than that. For one piece we paid twenty dollars but if you wanted more pieces, if they were available, you add as much money as you want for one season. And those people were so good I can say. So, I started planting vegetables just to eat and I could share with my friends and all that.

The community gardens provided AWIFS with an initial platform to taste the waters as a farmer in the U.S. The outcome of such experiences provided AWIFS with the impetus to look for more land to expand production, remain in the community garden, or quit farming altogether. It is also intriguing to note that conversations about farming and information about community gardens began at church, signifying where immigrants might frequent.

At the same time, non-profit organizations in different states also facilitate beginner farmer programs by renting out local spaces for agriculture at a small fee. In addition, land grant University extension systems in some states also work in tandem with communities to integrate them through the provision of land for agriculture, research, and extension services. Such plots serve a dual purpose of integrating immigrants into the community by researching their food systems and cultures in general, while concurrently increasing access to culturally appropriate foods. For example, Juliet mentioned how the training and land they received from the University of Minnesota, leapfrogged their farming experience:

The University of Minnesota has areas that allow people to go there and plant especially from different countries. So, they will rent you the land and they will pretty much plant organic. Because they go there to study to know what kind of greens these are. It's a research area that they have set apart so that they can allow people to plant things and some, some they don't know. So, they can research them and know what healthy benefits of that kind of plant.

Nonetheless, access to information about the existence of farmer support programs or community gardens rests on individual social networks and connections. Organizations supporting immigrant farmers evaluate their potential and commitments before allocating resources as Isabel remarked:

In the first year, the land is free because people are evaluating their potential to become farmers or continue in that farm farming aspect, they come we just assume that a lot of people that come to the program, come from agrarian backgrounds so that 30 by 50 is just a space for them to explore and see if they are ready number one for the climate. Number two are they able to keep up with the weeds because this region with the heat gets the weeds to outgrow the vegetables. So, the first year was an exploration year and then the second year, we were charged \$30 for the plot and land preparation.

AWIFS access land from organizations serving immigrant communities and the general population though participation depends on their goals and aspirations.

### **Small Money**

Participants also highlighted how limited financial resources determined land access. Four participants purchased land from mainstream financial institutions and noted the stringent requirements needed to qualify for a mortgage or land financing. Lidia said:

I can say infrastructure is a big challenge. We are used to farming on your back with hoes in Africa but here you need proper infrastructure. But getting funds to source infrastructure is a big hindrance to people because then they're not able to expand as much as they would like.

African women Immigrant farmers have competing needs albeit with limited resources forcing them to make hard choices. Georgina lamented that:

Working with small money, you know. Sometimes you have little money you are like, can I invest this money in this, you know you have to make hard choices when you don't have enough money.

The small money limited AWIFS land access by limiting the areas or zones they could purchase land in and the sizes of land their pockets could afford. Hence, AWIFS lived on the margin and used the limited resources to get resources that supported their farming endeavors.

Besides, participants also noted the different requirements like credit score and minimum payments to acquire a mortgage. Some mainstream financial institutions had specific requirements on the sizes of land they could finance. Cumulatively, the strict requirements locked out some potential farmers from owning land. Tasha stated:

The thing about acquiring land is always going to the banks that promote farmers. Get a credit check and then the one we did find they were requiring us to put down 20 percent and then they cater for the rest. Some banks have specific requirements, they won't give you a loan if the land is less than 10 acres, and you have some that will give you a loan when it is less than 10 acres. So, it just depends on the bank you find and most people don't know about the banks, they think you just have to go to the regular banks that are out there. But you have to find one that promotes farmers.

Knowing banks serving farmers was one way to access financial resources to purchase land. However, accessing loans was only guaranteed with good credit scores and down payments.

### **Discussion, Recommendation, and Conclusion**

This research aimed at understanding the lived experiences of African women immigrant farmers' access to land in the U.S. The study provided valuable insights into the processes of land access among African Women Immigrant farmers in the U.S. AWIFs are highly motivated to become farmers and produce their foods and serve other African immigrant communities. Accordingly, AWIFs diversify land access channels including acquiring land from friends and

renting from organizations like government agencies including City councils. In addition, AWIFs also partner with close relatives to purchase land backstopped by mainstream financial institutions. In general, access to land is imbued with both financial and social challenges, corroborating the role of the financial and social capital tenets of the community capitals in determining land access among immigrant farmers.

AWIFS faces informational challenges regarding the intricacies of purchasing land in the host country. This includes how and where to acquire land and the types of land or soil that are most appropriate for agriculture. Moreover, AWIFs encounter challenges accessing factors of production like obtaining credit, renting, leasing, and or purchasing land. As a result, AWIFS rely on friends, families, and organizations to address land accessibility challenges, as well as gain knowledge of American soil structures. These findings reinforced the critical role of social capital in immigrant farming endeavors. AWIFs' social networks serve as informational nodes about existing farming resources. African immigrants often live in ethnic or national enclaves which foster easier diffusion of information about resources and opportunities for social mobility (Chaumba, 2016). Moreover, AWIFS' cultural orientation toward family and collective approaches bolsters access to information from close friends, family, and communities like immigrant churches. These findings echoed Minkoff-Zern, (2019) who observed that immigrants' social networks were the backbone of their integration into the host country.

AWIFs develop and expand their social networks through participation in the community, and attending social events, and churches which expand their social networks within and outside the community. AWIFS' engagement in community gardens and other shared spaces, expanded their social networks and provided them with initial land for exploration and testing of the waters. The community gardens also served as fertile grounds for social learning and social cohesion. Immigrant farmers learn new agricultural techniques and farming practices through observation and imitation (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011). At the same time, participating in collective spaces increases AWIFS' access to auxiliary services like seeds, funding, and new farming techniques from other cultures. Hence, social networks, both bonding and linking networks are crucial in augmenting the skillsets of the new American farmers to innovate and sustain production. Flora et al. (2011) echoed similar findings and asserted that immigrant social networks are critical for their success as farmers and cushion them from stress and anxiety related to moving to a new country.

Although immigrant farmers might be successful in building social networks within their communities, this research confirms that sometimes fundamental support also comes from their external networks or what Granovetter (1973) calls weak ties. Organizations supporting immigrant farmers evaluate their potential and commitment to agriculture as a basis for allocating resources. The more committed individuals are, the more resources they can access. The weak ties include people from other migrant communities, churches, farmer organizations as well as host communities. According to the strength of weak ties theory, the networks serve as an oasis of information to facilitate successful farming enterprises (Granovetter, 1973; Scott & Richardson, 2021). Therefore, organizations supporting immigrant farmers should prioritize broadening immigrant social networks beyond their immediate families and friends.

Furthermore, organizations serving immigrants should focus on building relationships with immigrants and host communities. Such relationships are fundamental in fostering trust and mutual understanding between immigrant farmers and organizations serving them. Understanding the needs of clientele is a precursor to serving them (Witkins & Atschuld, 1995).

Through relationship building, immigrant-serving organizations are better positioned to understand the needs of AWIFS, including prior knowledge and cultural hegemonies around gender and power relationships (Scott & Richardson, 2021). Additionally, relationship building invites immigrant farmers to co-exist with the host community by understanding each group's unique dispositions. Alkon & Agyeman (2011) observed similar findings and asserted that relationship-building is necessary to enhance trust among people and communities and reduce barriers to entry into agriculture.

At the same time, there is a need to reduce bureaucracy to allow immigrants access the crucial agricultural resources. Although one participant mentioned avoiding going to USDA because of paperwork, it would be very simplistic without further inquiry, to conclude that USDA bureaucracy is discrimination. Viswanath and Samanta (2022), pointed out that government organizations are inherently bureaucratic, which could potentially vindicate USDA from accusations of discriminatory practices. Nevertheless, Russell et al. (2021) alluded that paperwork could sometimes be selectively applied to block certain races from accessing critical government services. Hence, we suggest further research should explore whether immigrant paperwork is an intentional strategy of USDA to prevent AWIFS from accessing critical farming resources or an inherent government bureaucratic policy.

This study also revealed that online research is the first step for immigrants to access land. Increasingly, immigrant farmers and other smallholder farmers are relying on social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp groups among others, to research farming opportunities and augment their agricultural knowledge. Organizations serving immigrants, including community gardens should maintain an active online presence with relevant and culturally appropriate services to foster immigrants' access to critical resources.

Our findings show that although more African women are getting into agriculture, their access to land is still directly tied to male partners. Such findings were confirmed by Pilgeram and Amos (2015) who asserted that land access for women occurs through inheritance, marrying into a farming family, or purchasing land through partnerships. Although our research corroborated purchasing land through partnership, this study found no evidence that AWIFS accessed land through inheritance or marriage into a farming family. Nonetheless, this finding does not insinuate that African women immigrants do not intermarry with the host communities, quite the contrary. Instead, we acknowledge that AWIFS' lack of land inheritance or marriage into farming families could be due to our limited study sample. This revelation could be a potential limitation of this study although it unlocks opportunities for further research exploration about the lived experiences of AWIFs using a larger sample size.

The major contribution of this study to the body of knowledge was the discovery of AWIFs' pathways to land access. Immigrants acquire land primarily from friends, and organizations, as well as purchase land as partners with close family members and friends. Nevertheless, the land obtained from friends and organizations was a temporary solution as it did not give women decision-making rights. Giving women land rights involves empowering them with decision-making abilities (Fremstad & Paul, 2020; Mulema et al., 2020; Sachs et al., 2016).

Access to decision-making abilities provides women with the power to self-identify as a farmer and not farmers' wife or helpers (Sachs et al., 2016). Wright & Annes (2016) further posits that access to land provides women with four types of power: power over, power to, power with, and power within. Power to, refers to the ability to access resources, make decisions, and exercise authority. Power with is achieved through collective agencies and social connections.

Power within is the confidence and reflexivity of individual farmers to identify sources of oppression and leverage their self-efficacy and personal agency to overcome the barriers against women. Thus, women's endeavor to access land rights is one way of developing different power typologies necessary to root out discrimination and oppression (Mulema et al., 2020; Pilgeram & Amos, 2015). Unlocking AWIFs' land access and decision-making is integral to their integration into the host communities and overcoming the existential challenges of being black, a woman, and an immigrant.

Furthermore, Sachs et al. (2016) alluded that land access approaches involving either owning, renting, or leasing, lead to different outcomes and tasks performed by women such as decision-making. That is to say, the dominant typology of land ownership underpins the decision-making abilities of women farmers. Schlager and Ostrom (1992) identified five typologies of land ownership: access rights; withdrawal rights referring to the permission to take something from the land; management rights which refers to the power to modify land in any way; exclusion rights referring to the right to prevent others from using the land; and alienation rights which refers to the right to transfer land to others voluntarily. Whereas access and withdrawals are user rights, management, exclusion, and alienation are decision-making rights and are necessary for women farmers to self-identify as farmers (Fremstad & Paul, 2020; Sachs et al., 2016; Schlager & Ostrom, 1992). Such decision-making rights do not necessarily come from temporary land access or through partnerships with men, especially in the presence of male chauvinistic tendencies.

Djamba & Kimuna (2011) alluded that African immigrant men have remnants of chauvinistic tendencies which might reduce the decision-making abilities of women farmers in partnership arrangements. Understanding the complex histories and backgrounds of women is crucial in locating them in the farming context. African women immigrants are also encumbered by cultural hegemonies that underpin their property ownership and participation in decision-making. At the same time, women engage in child-bearing and other reproductive activities limiting their abilities to expand their social networks. As Smith et al. (2019) asserted, there are complex sociocultural and economic barriers including race and power relations beneath price and availability barriers that collectively determine land access. Thus, holistic approaches are necessary to address the complex needs of women farmers. Most importantly, understanding the contexts of clientele is an antecedent to providing effective and demand-driven services (Malema et al., 2020).

In this regard, we recommend that organizations serving immigrant farmers should be intentional in building inviting relationships by seeking to understand AWIFs' motivations, aspirations, and challenges. Understanding the needs of people facilitates tailor-made land access programs meeting the unique needs of AWIFS. Equally, organizations should focus on expanding the social networks of AWIFS to accelerate access to information and other key resources. Lastly, government, non-profits, and farmer organizations should meet immigrant farmers where they are. Utilizing immigrant churches and ethnic associations is an excellent opportunity to engage with them and promote farming. Sometimes what AWIFS are waiting for is someone to pull the trigger and pulling the trigger means going where immigrants are and supporting them in their farming journeys. Bolstering the number of AWIF farmers and achieving food security calls for concerted efforts to leverage the social and financial capital immigrants bring from their countries of origin and the host country.

This study is not without limitations. First, our sample size was small which might affect the generalizability of our study. Nevertheless, we are not seeking to generalize but to invoke further research on this hidden research of African women immigrant farmers in America. Secondly, our participants were drawn from different states which might not give a clear picture of the experiences of AWIFS in different States. However, our research serves as an eye-opener to the emerging needs of these unique farming communities. Thus, we recommend future research explore the lived experiences of AWIFs using a large sample size and or, mixed methods design. Secondly, future research should investigate how other tenets of the Community Capitals Framework, including natural, cultural, political, human, and built capital influence the lived experiences of AWIFs. Additionally, further research should explore whether immigrant socioeconomic status like education determines their desire to access land and engage in agriculture. Equally, further research should investigate what influences the aspirations of AWIFS to continue farming. Lastly, since access to land enhances the confidence and status of women farmers, it would be interesting to explore the impacts of land access on the productivity and self-esteem of African immigrant farmers in the U.S.

**Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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