

## **1. Description of proposed project or activities.**

Circling Back is a mobile art and photography exhibit in installation format. It's intended to provide opportunities for the community leaders to partner for an overarching purpose of empowering communities around art, food, health, environmental stewardship, legacy of black farmers, career pathways in agriculture and sustainable practices. Our historical photography and panel art will be presented with an array of panelists will share their first-hand experiences and statistics on the challenges, concerns and policies to educate, inspire and empower attendees.

Circling Back is a mobile installation and will be featured at the event site in Oakland at the Freedom Farmers Market and Telegraph Community Center. Farms to Grow' will screen the video trailer for Rhythms of the Land, a documentary project underway which interviews dozens of black farmers, sharecroppers and basket weavers throughout the Southern States and California, and will present its Circling Back exhibit at the Freedom Farmers Market site on Telegraph Avenue. This exhibit is aimed primarily at the African American community in and around Oakland to increase people's understanding and knowledge of the art and culture of food and farming throughout our history as Africans in America. The exhibit, which is a multimedia installation, introduces the history of food as culture, the impact that the Slave Trade had on creating a colonized food system (and on exploiting the land). It will be viewed alongside a panel of California's black farmers who will speak about their experiences and their concerns for the future. Included in the discussion will be information about climate change, how it will impact our food system, and possible adaptation strategies for small family farms. Attendees will be able to sample fresh from the farm fruits and vegetables and healthy alterations to traditional recipes that can preserve culture and taste but contribute to a healthier outcome for a population that experiences unparalleled incidences of obesity and diabetes.

These events are aimed primarily at African Americans, though all peoples are welcome and encouraged to attend. Many of the attendees will be low to middle income families. We will perform outreach for our events—which will take place at the Freedom Farmers Market site and at two additional venues in West and East Oakland—through fliers, social media, information to local schools, and person to person outreach at local churches. The exhibit is free of charge and will provide healthful, fresh from the farm produce as refreshments.

## **2. Objectives and Outcomes: Why this Project is Important**

The Freedom Farmers Market connects African American urban communities in need of fresh food with African American farmers in need of new markets for their produce. FTG sees the market as a replicable model and a means of building and educating community and connecting urban youth with the land and its rich historical traditions and culture. There are only 320 African American farms remaining in California, and that number is steadily declining due to the difficulty farmers have had in establishing new outlets for their produce. Meanwhile, Oakland has a poverty rate of over 20%, or 82,000 people, and many of these people living in poverty are African Americans concentrated in neighborhoods where few grocery stores or fresh food outlets are located. Thus, while poor African American residents in Oakland's flatlands lack access to fresh locally and regionally grown food, African American farmers in the region have limited opportunities for marketing their produce directly to consumers. The Freedom Farmers Market connects these groups. We have created a culturally specific, historically rooted market experience that is bringing African American residents together with African American farmers in a setting reminiscent of an African marketplace. The Freedom Farmers Market serves as a gathering place while offering a variety of produce, fruits, and healthy foods. People come to the Market to celebrate

cultural and spiritual traditions and to reconnect with a history that ties food to land and community building. The Market came about through multiple meetings with community members, farmers and healthy food vendors in which we addressed the challenges which have caused our target communities to be so poor.

This Circling Back exhibit will feature long term farmers include Willing Scott, President of the African American Farmers of California Association, Maya Blow of Soul Flower Farms and School of Earth Medicine, a world respected Permaculture Design instructor and urban sustainable farmer, and Rev. Roosevelt Tarlesson, an African farmer in American. Dr. Myers, Executive Director of Farms to Grow is a cultural anthropologist and nationally recognized authority on black farmers in the US. She has published recent scholarly articles on Decolonizing our Food System and has been featured in Roots Magazine, on Africa Now (KPFA) and will be teaching full time at Ohio University beginning in the Fall. Humanities experts who are advisors to this project include Carl Anthony who provided expertise on the ties to Big History and the impact of the Slave Trade and industrial agriculture on current climate change threats, Alice Walker, writer, author, activist and daughter of a Georgia sharecropper, and the Director of the Museum of the African Diaspora. Dr. Myers will speak on the colonization of our food system, and there will be a number of chefs who will feature the produce in healthy recipes. FTG believes it is critical to bring the elders and the youth together for celebrations of culture and an informed look at the role of history on the current landscape for African Americans in urban communities if we are going to heal from a history of trauma. In addition, in the face of climate change, our food system is going to be severely burdened and we need to have the inherent knowledge to produce food ourselves, something that is rapidly being lost in the mainstream urban black community. The program will include an interactive component in the form of blank panels placed strategically in the progression of history depicted. The participants/audience will be encouraged to remark on information and stories learned, tell their own story, or evaluate the usefulness of the program in their individual and collective lives. These panels will become a part of future exhibitions.

Outreach for this event will be conducted through the black churches in the Oakland, Berkeley, Emeryville, Richmond area, through our social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), with calendar ads and listings in the East Bay Express, the Tribune group, and on local radio stations.

#### Outcomes:

Participants will engage in activities over the course of 3 hours that allows them to explore parts of the collective African American experience that has largely been overlooked by mainstream media outlets and textbook companies.

Speakers will have a chance to tell their stories, and to learn about the concerns that threaten the legacy of black farming in California.

Farms to Grow, E.D. and Program Director will implement the event, produce informational media highlighting the opportunities to learn from the past while re-thinking the future.

We expect to reach 1000 people with this event.

#### Resources needed:

Resources needed to complete the project include honorarium for the speakers/farmers, some of whom will be joining us from the central valley, Stockton and Sacramento areas.

