

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Abstract title: Demystifying USDA AMS Funding Pathways: Building Resilient Food Systems and Preventing Chronic Health Issues in Underserved Communities

Author names:

Virginie Zoumenou PhD CNS¹ Kritika Gupta PhD PMP, CHES² Verona Mulgrave PhD RD³ Dionne Ray MS⁴

Author affiliations:

- 1: Extension Nutrition and Health Programs Director-University of Maryland Eastern Shore -USA
- 2: Research, Evaluation & Data Analyst | Institutional Research Analyst III-University of California Riverside -USA
- 3: Extension Nutrition Specialist- Delaware State University-USA
- 4: Project Coordinator-Child Development Expert -University of Maryland Eastern Shore -USA

Background

BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) farmers face significant challenges when applying for USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) funding, including complex applications and insufficient technical support. These barriers limit their ability to build sustainable businesses, reducing access to fresh, nutritious food in rural and underserved communities, contributing to food insecurity and chronic health issues. Past community nutrition education efforts have struggled to drive lasting behavior change, further hindering public health improvements. This study evaluates these challenges and highlights the strategies participants recommended to overcome them.

Objectives

1. Identify key obstacles through focus groups and interviews with BIPOC farmers.
2. Highlight proposed strategies, including youth involvement and community partnerships, to improve access to funding.
3. Explore how combining community nutrition education with farmers success and improved food access could drive consumer action and improve health outcomes.

Methods

- **Qualitative Data:** Conducted 302 focus groups and semi-structured interviews with BIPOC farmers across the U.S. and its territories. The analysis was conducted using an inductive approach to identify key themes regarding barriers and strategies.
- **Literature Review:** Reviewed published studies (2010-2023) on the impact of pairing community nutrition education with improved food access on consumer behavior and chronic disease prevention.

Results

- **Barriers Identified:** Complex application processes, lack of technical assistance, and limited awareness of funding opportunities were the main obstacles.
- **Proposed Strategies:** Farmers emphasized youth engagement, community partnerships, and simplifying the application process to improve access.
- **Health Impact:** Empowering BIPOC farmers and expanding food access, combined with youth and community engagement and nutrition education, may have the potential to improve dietary habits and lower the risk of chronic diseases.

Conclusion

Empowering BIPOC farmers by addressing USDA AMS funding barriers, combined with youth and community involvement, may strengthen food access, promote healthier behaviors, and create resilient, equitable food systems in underserved communities.