

To the Program of Agroecology,

We are writing as a group to urge the Agroecology Program to make a tangible commitment to support the national movement to defend Black lives. The purpose of this message is to highlight what we, as students, would like to see happen within the program in response to the brutal murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, Tony Robinson and so, so many other Black men, women, queer, non-binary, and transgender people at the hands of the police. As academics we must recognize that the systemic racism and white supremacy “out in the world” exists here and has historically benefitted UW-Madison and our program. The boundary between what happens to students in the program and “in the world” is artificial.

The Agroecology program is special in many ways, including that we are not a department. Instead we are composed of students, staff, and faculty who have department homes all over CALS. However, all of our work interacts with the land. We research socio-ecological systems of agriculture and food on multiple levels including plant breeding, nutrient cycling, cropping systems, IPM, markets, policy, and so many other socio-bio-geo-chemical processes with, in, and of the land. Ultimately, we work for more livable and just futures.

We recognize that the land of the University, including the agricultural research stations, was forcibly taken from Native Nations, and the wealth that created the Land Grant Institutions was built on the backs of Black and Brown peoples. We also recognize that institutional barriers exist for People of Color who are seeking land, rooted in historically racist policies that persist today (e.g. [Pigford vs Glickman](#)). Our program and other CALS departments must think critically about the land we use for research, who it benefits, and how we can use our institutional power to help to provide land access to those seeking it, especially for growing diasporic and culturally relevant crops.

Systems are made to perpetuate themselves; we live and *breathe* in a world that is embedded with the legacies of our collective past. Without continued, concerted action to dismantle racist institutions and the systems around us, academic work by itself will only serve to further entrench white supremacy/anti-Blackness and distance the academy from the rest of the world. If this continues, we fear the program will fail its non-white (and especially Black) students and the diverse communities it purports to serve.

Steps the graduate student body will be taking

- We as Agroecology graduate students commit to making the graduate student group more inclusive and anti-racist. We commit to work on long-term structures that are sustained past our graduation.
- We will push on our faculty advisors to further embed racial justice in the curriculums of their courses.
- We will support the faculty, the staff, and the program to continue to evolve and further work toward racial justice.

We are urging the Agroecology Program to:

1. Actively support students, community organizations (such as Freedom Inc and Urban Triage), and CALS-wide efforts in asking for significant changes in structure and funding of UWPD. In fiscal year 2018-19, UWPD had a budget of \$12.8 million, which is almost five times the national average budget for campus law enforcement. UWPD also has a record of using excessive force disproportionately against Black people; UWPD's 2019 reporting revealed that 40% of use-of-force incidents involved Black people which is an egregious, disproportionate exertion of violence, especially considering Black students account for around 2% of the student population.

Supporting efforts to divest from UWPD can entail speaking up in Faculty Senate and other college-wide meetings, or writing a collective letter calling on the University to take action (e.g. [this letter](#) written by faculty at UCLA). This action joins national and local movements calling on institutional reform and divestment from police by higher education. We call on the money divested from UWPD to be redirected toward financial aid for Black students and programs that support communities of color. We present these measures in solidarity with Freedom Inc.'s call to remove police from Madison Public Schools (which was accomplished) and the demand by the Movement for Black Lives to divest from the police and invest in Black communities.

2. Bring in BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, & People of Color) speakers for seminars and the annual agroecology symposium; commit to going to campus events led by BIPOC

The symposium, like many other extracurricular aspects of the Agroecology Program, is student organized. This means, like most other financial matters related to each cohort, the fundraising is also student organized. Funds for this symposium need to go toward centering the BIPOC voices in Agroecology. The program should expect this from the symposium and affiliated faculty must be committed to having their departments financially support it each year.

2. Re-evaluate course requirements to ensure that social and racial justice are integrated into the graduate curriculum.

- Ensure that every Agroecology 710 seminar includes discussions of race and identity. This could include topics like Black farmers, food apartheid, migrant farmworkers, Indigenous farmers and Traditional Ecological Knowledge, etc.
 - The format can still exist just as it does with the affiliated-faculty rotating to teach it. However examples of social and racial resilience as well as injustice abound in agriculture, and these histories and narratives must also be included. These histories should not just be included in the social science courses.
- Integrate a more explicit racial justice lens into 701, 702, e.g.,
 - History of land access / land theft / race, discrimination, and farming in US
 - More focus on seed, food, and land sovereignty (in US and global contexts)
- Consider existing seminars and courses that offer graduate coursework options that could be integrated into the curriculum
 - e.g. HORT 375/875 Indigenous Food and Seed Sovereignty
- Teaching faculty in all affiliated departments should review course syllabi with the intention to reflect on the current proportion of BIPOC scholars, and include more BIPOC scholars in course content by the start of the Fall 2020 semester. [Citational Justice](#) is a necessary action for academics.

3. Work to increase Community Based Participatory Action Research as well as more funding opportunities for the Public Practice Track. This must be conducted with the goal of long term relationships with Tribal Nations as well as organizations that center racial and social justice in agriculture and the food system.

As Agroecology is a science, a movement, and a practice, we would like to see more long term relationships with Tribal Nations as well as food justice organizations. The College of Menominee Nations is a 1994 Land Grant college and efforts must be made to support their Food Sovereignty and Sustainable Agriculture initiatives. Furthermore, we would like to see continued support for the Public Practice Track of the Program. These students could be funded by co-writing or subcontracting on grants with community partners. Efforts to connect with the Tribal Nations could be made through the Native Nations_UW Strategic Working Group. Other funding opportunities include the [Higher Education Challenge Grant through the USDA](#).

4. Acknowledge and take steps to mitigate the risk for graduate students of color to do fieldwork in potentially unwelcoming, or even dangerous environments

- Steps could include but aren't limited to providing uniforms and/or official-looking equipment, allowing grad students to do research in pairs or groups, having an established system for reporting and addressing harassment or other issues in field or research settings.
- Basic introductions to staff and researchers of the Agricultural Research Stations
- Mandating that staff and researchers of the Agricultural Research Stations participate in anti-racism and bystander intervention training.

5. Create a fund that brings prospective Agroecology students of color to campus for a visit.

Over the last 10 years, less than 5% of the Agroecology cohorts have been BIPOC students. We ask that the program and faculty reach out to their departments on campus and encourage them to participate in outreach, recruitment, and financial support for BIPOC students. We look to CALS to be a moral leader in continuing this effort.

In addition, we forward several department-level demands that we recognize individual faculty and staff may not have control or authority over. However, as the Agroecology program consists of affiliated-faculty from many different departments, we ask that each faculty member bring these demands to their respective spaces, to their colleagues, and to their departmental chairs.

1. Commit resources to ensure the sustained effort to support BIPOC graduate students.

Some measures include:

- Take action to develop a relationship with a historically black, 1890 institution, and 1994 institutions, and collaborate on grant proposals and research.
- Adopt the CALS Student Climate Survey to assess student experiences; include open-ended questions in the faculty and course evaluations by Fall 2020 including: "has this teacher made microaggressions towards you or any classmate in particular, or any racial groups on the whole in teaching?"

- Support a University-wide effort to fund and institutionalize an academic support unit by Fall 2020 for Black students to receive and have access to tutoring, specialized study skills, career mentoring, and financial support. This also includes supporting Black professors with funding and paths to tenure, assisting Black and POC students in the graduate application process (eliminating application fees) and eliminating the [outdated and discriminatory GRE](#) when considering student admissions.
- Use connections to industry and any other means at the department's disposal to get BIPOC **paid** internships, jobs, and positions at companies or in the program.

2. Increase Diversity in Faculty Hiring.

This not only supports the BIPOC professionals but also makes the community a more comfortable and safer space for students of color. These new faculty could be made through future cluster hires allowing for more specificity in research topics such that racial and social justice are centered academically as well.

3. Assist our Societies (SSSA, CSA, ASA, etc.) and associated companies to implement programs that bring in black students and students from other minority groups.

Please share your ideas with SSSA via email [here](#). Call on societies and companies to implement programs like [Project SEED](#) through the American Chemical Society where students from disadvantaged backgrounds can “participate in research at academic, industry, and government labs across the United States and U.S. territories”.

4. [Following the 2017 recommendation by the UGEC Ethnic Studies Subcommittee](#), increase the Ethnic Studies Requirement for undergraduates to 2 domestically-focused Ethnic Studies courses (1 lower division & 1 upper division)

We are past the point of just creating a committee to investigate the possibility. This recommendation was made 4 years ago, and it is time to take action. For further information, the chairperson for the committee was professor Dr. Cindy I-Fen Cheng.

5. Support the TAA's Demand for Segregated Fee Relief for All Students.

Segregated fees are applied to all graduate and undergraduate students regardless of race, but their impact is not felt equally. Students who do not have generational wealth to supplement their wages must take additional jobs to stay afloat, and this hinders their ability to thrive in school. Black Americans and Indigenous peoples have significantly less access to generational wealth than White Americans. We ask that faculty draft a statement in collaboration with graduate students calling on UW to remit seg fees for all students and determine further ways they can leverage their power with UW on this issue.

6. Make anti-racism learning and training a mandatory component for faculty, graduate students, and non-academic staff. Classes and research should actively address the racism built into our systems, while also working toward racial justice.

Just as graduate students are required to take Violence Prevention training, we support the development of anti-racism and bystander intervention training that is mandatory on a yearly basis for all students, faculty, and staff. We also ask the program require annual mandatory

professionally paid anti-racist and bystander intervention trainings for faculty and staff beginning in academic year 2020-2021. If the program looks to in-person training, we suggest land-based organizations like [Soil Generation](#), in Philadelphia or [Soul Fire Farm](#) in New York, both of which do anti-racism training.

7. Acknowledge and address places where Extension and FISC courses could grow to better serve the BIPOC community, and provide places for microaggression reporting at research stations, on-farm, and with Extension.

The mission of extension is to “work in local communities throughout the state...to ensure cutting-edge research at the campus benefits the people of Wisconsin, our children and our communities.” How can extension better serve BIPOC communities across the state? What do these communities need or ask of extension? Faculty associated with extension have a responsibility to directly address social and racial justice in agriculture specifically in these programs, seek guidance from BIPOC communities, and provide support/resources for BIPOC-led projects. Additionally, we suggest creating a fund to waive participation/class fees (i.e. for short courses) for BIPOC to make the courses more accessible.

8. Faculty and researchers need to critically acknowledge inequalities inherent to field work, who the research serves, and historical oppression that allows for research in agriculture.

- Work/research with and for more BIPOC and historically marginalized farmers
- Shift the way we conduct research by attaching explicit racial and social justice language to proposals, RFPs, research agendas/objectives.
- Do more cross-departmental (C&E Sociology) and cross-campus collaborations, especially given the historic connections between SoHE and CALS. When applying to do research, consider land access for historically-marginalized students and student groups that might be seeking land but have not had the means to secure access.

In addition to these asks, interpersonal support of Black students is needed at this time

Here are tangible and relational actions that faculty, staff and graduate students can take to support the national effort to defend Black lives by supporting and affirming the livelihoods of Black students and students of color who continuously experience violence in the real world AND within academia

- Reach out to graduate students of color. This does not mean sending half-hearted messages about how much you care. **It means creating space to understand and actively work to improve their lived realities.** If you are going to reach out to someone and ask them how they are doing then, only do so if you are able to hold space for their truth.
- Check in on your students and remind them that it is normal to feel unwell or unfit to even think about work. It is outrageous to expect students to “be productive” after watching Black people die at the hands of police and white violence as if it were reality TV.

- Support Black colleagues using [these tips](#) for addressing white supremacy from an anti-racist lens.

Our priority is to ensure that the Agroecology Program commits to supporting Black lives through concrete actions. We as graduate students commit to a sustained effort to support the BIPOC community, and we would like to see the same from our program. White supremacy is embedded within this institution, and we hold the institution accountable. Over the next few months, we look forward to continuing this conversation. We ask the Agroecology program to put action into symbolic gestures of solidarity and concrete actions to dismantle systems of oppression.

Sincerely,

The graduate students of the Agroecology Program at UW–Madison