



## Membership Policies & Practices Document

### Table of Contents

- Statement of Purpose of Membership Policies and Practices
- Organizational Values
- We Believe Statements
- Code of Conduct, Culture of Member Participation
- Active Participation and Engagement
- Statement of Function of Dues
- Land Retention
  - Interrupting Land Loss
- Network Standards of Farming Practices Statement
- SAAFON's Commitment to YOU

### Statement of Purpose

SAAFON is one of few regional networks for Black farmers committed to environmentally sustainable farming practices. Our success is based on a relationship between our farmer network and YOU. We all thrive when we benefit from, and hold ourselves accountable to, each other. The purpose of this agreement is to guide us all in the decisions we make as businesses and individuals, and to keep us in alignment with the principles of organic/afroecological agriculture and ethical business practices.

### Organizational Values

**Farmer-Centered and Farmer-Led.** We see Black farmers as the cornerstone of our work and the foundation upon which a whole new agrarian movement must be built. We see the farmer and their inherent value as the solution, centered in the work and at the center of community. Everything we do aims to support our farmers, including generating the resources necessary to build them up and their ability to exercise leadership in decisions. We aim to create a farmer centered and farmer led reality.

- We embody this value by ensuring that the majority of our board members are farmers.
- We aim to create structured engagement to ensure we are able to get feedback from our members to make recommendations on the development of the institution.

**Collectivism & Connectivity.** We value collective self-determination that is generated from within. We value collective control of processes and economies, as it relates to agriculture. It is a part of our cultural inheritance to rely deeply on each other, as a way to build interdependence and collective power. We have created this network to deepen and strengthen our relationships with one another, and to share in the resources the network generates. As our founder Ma Cynthia puts it, *"Growing farmers is the key, farmers are the 'fabric,' and that's just the way I look at it, it's like a quilt; we are just building a quilt of farmers. That is what we are doing."*



- SAAFON’s work is grounded in building connectivity between farmers; we invest in opportunities for farmers to come together and develop trust amongst each other. Relationship building is core and unique to our organization, and is embedded in all of the programming that we offer.

**Innovation Rooted In Legacy.** We value the renewal and reactivation of ancestral practices, leading with legacy in mind. We believe in the return to survival strategies and tactics as a way forward. We value solutions that are in dialogue with the past. As we are remembering and activating these sacred practices, we honor storytelling as a tool that enables us to do so.

- As we move forward with legacy in mind, the programs we are piloting are rooted in the knowledge of what’s come before us.
- Through remembering, we commit ourselves to stewarding a Black agrarian revival in the rural south.

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**Wholeness. Honoring Complete Personhood.** We believe the farmer is more than their farm. We value showing up as full authentic self, building full authentic people and building relationships that honor that. We believe in fostering non-transactional, caring relationships to push back on a system that is built on exploitation that *is not* about and for the people.

- In our belief that farmers are more than just their farm operations, we create programming that not only addresses the deep need for investment, infrastructure, and technical support, but also programming that shares the experiences, stories, and ways of life that are unique to families, small-scale, and rural Black agrarians. Much like nature, our approach to working with farmers has to be holistic.
- We’ve moved beyond the language of “farmer services,” into “farmer support.” Our work is informed by our culture and our humanity.

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**Uplifting Voices From The Margins.** We value placing intention in decision making and resources to those in the margins. Elders, youth, women, disabled and queer and gender expansive farmers exist in the margins of our communities. We believe in telling their stories and the needs in their voices. We help to create active narratives that make visible the margins and informs our actions.

- When considering members in our programmatic development, sourcing farmers to be featured in our storytelling projects, our online representation, or any other aspect of organizational development, we prioritize featuring a range of experiences and stories that encompasses the wide spectrum of stories that are as plentiful and diverse as our people.

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#### SAAFON “We Believe” Statements

- We believe that **race and place matter**, that being Black farmers in the Southeastern United States and U.S. Virgin Islands have unique legacies and heritages that must be acknowledged, honored, and engaged.
- We believe in **self-determination** - the right of Black farmers to define their own truths, priorities, needs, and strategies.



- We believe in **transparency** - in our communications, in our operations, and in our relationships.
- We believe in **accountability** - it's important to be honest, to be reflective, and to accept responsibility for one's own actions, especially as it relates to being in right relationship with one another.
- We build our work by doing, by going deep, by serving, following through, *"going through it together,"* **boots on the ground, hands in the soil.**
- We believe in **Collective power**
- We believe in a **just food system** that is based on cooperative ownership models, non-exploitative labor practices, ecologically regenerative and agroecological practices, and whole-istic human development
- We believe in **Black land ownership and collective stewardship models** that include legal ownership as a mechanism for land access and social/cultural care and use. We believe that land is power. We believe in being in partnership with the land for shared goals.
- We believe in **restorative work** that regenerates the land, heals our people through reconnection with natural systems, and creates just, mutually beneficial relationships.
- We believe in **Black farmer prosperity** that provides economic mobility, allows production to feed their families and communities, and to achieve a level of well-being and self-actualization that farmers vision for themselves. We believe farmers should be able to make a living from their life's work. Thriving and not just surviving - subsistence as resistance.
- We believe in a **variety of production methods** that achieve truly environmentally sustainable and ecological agriculture, including but not limited to biodynamic, organic, and agroecological growing techniques.
- We believe in **diasporic relationships**. We believe in building and deepening relationships with other Black-identified folk located in other regions, countries and cultures who are also engaged in transformative land-based work.
- We believe in producing **clean food** that is ecologically healthy, not subject to genetic modification, and is affordable and widely available in order to sustain our families and communities.
- We believe in engaging in **radical work**, i.e., getting to the root of problems to effect meaningful change.
- We believe in **intersectionality** understood as the ways in which our diverse identities and social positions can co-create our shared analyses and solutions.
- We believe in the value of placing **families at the center** of farm operations and culture.
- We believe in the inherent **dignity in land-based work**, and Black farming as an honorable way to make a living and to live.
- We believe rural life is beautiful and viable and we work to support a **rural agrarian renaissance through Black farms.**

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### Code of Conduct, Culture of Member Participation

Within SAAFON, it is our goal to create a space that is inclusive, supportive, and engaging for all staff and members – regardless of age, background, religion, ability or experience, education, gender, or sexual identity. Our primary work together is rooted in the relationships we hold between one another, and maintaining honest, transparent, and respectful relationships as the basis of all of our interactions is



critical for the continued success of our network. Each of the prescribed values in this code of conduct apply to both member-to-member interactions, as well as member-to-staff, and vice versa. We believe that the following cultural values are vital for maintaining the integrity of our network:

- **Solidarity for Black liberation:** We must stand in solidarity in carrying the ongoing, multi-generational work of Black liberation. Each of our interactions should hold this long-term goal in mind.
- **Preservation of our cultural legacy:** Recovering, uplifting, and honoring our traditions is vital for the flourishing of Black Agrarianism for future generations. We each have a unique set of experiences to be honored.
- **Recognizing how we as a network are unique – and not diluting that image:** SAAFON is incredibly unique as the only farmer-centered organization uplifting the voices of sustainable Black farmers in the southeast. When representing SAAFON, please keep the integrity and sustainability of the organization in mind.
- **Acknowledgement of trauma – we are here to heal together:** Each person will come to the work with their own experience of trauma. It's important to respect that everyone is at a different point in their journey, and work together in accordance.
- **Mindfulness + Emotional Intelligence:** Mindfulness is becoming and maintaining awareness of a situation or person as they are, where they are. Emotional intelligence is being willing to respond compassionately to those same people or circumstances.
- **Care:** Treat any and every member in the same way that you'd like to be treated – in words as well as in action. We believe in going beyond the Golden Rule – being present to listen to other's preferences, ready to be responsive in terms of correction if necessary, while exercising kindness and patience in the process of learning to work together.
- **Mutual Flourishing:** When each interaction is approached knowing that our shared goal is to help each other in the long-run, we are able to focus on the larger picture of each individual helping the collective to flourish.
- **Collective Work:** Interdependence helps to guarantee that we are able to accomplish our goals together.
- **Biodiversity:** Our differences and the diversity of our natural world are what make us stronger, with more varied experiences, we are able to uplift what makes each of us unique with wisdom to contribute.
- **Respect:** Each individual will certainly have their own opinions, ideas to contribute, and perspectives. No one should be treated differently or made to feel as an outsider for their beliefs, even if they are different than your own.
- **Consent:** Every staff and member of SAAFON has the right to state their own physical and emotional boundaries around any stated preference, including communication, physical touch, etc. Every stated boundary should be respected, regardless of your own preferences. Consent is required before taking photographs, asking personal questions, or touching any other member, or any other situation in which a boundary is likely to be expressed.
- **Honesty & Transparency:** Working together honestly and with full transparency around our goals and motivations are critical in maintaining the integrity of the network as a whole.
- **Accountability:** All members and staff of SAAFON are expected to take responsibility for their actions, as well as to be able to present a satisfactory representation of their actions.



As a member of the network, your interactions with SAAFON staff and members will be expected to honor these cultural values. We ask that when interacting with any other member of our network you are ready to recognize that mistakes and miscommunications happen, and that trust is built slowly.

*Violations of the agreements made here will be reviewed by the SAAFON Board of Directors or a duly appointed Committee of the Board of Directors and may result in the rescinding of membership. Appeals to membership decisions will be considered at the Board or its Committee's discretion.*

*By signing below, I confirm that I have read, understand, and agree to the above stated policy regarding the SAAFON Member Code of Conduct.*

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First and Last Name

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Date

### **Active Participation and Engagement**

As a member of SAAFON, you will have access to our network of other like-minded, community driven farmers. While there are no formal requirements at this time for member participation, you are encouraged to plug into the network as much as you are able! Working collectively with other farmers to accomplish goals, move projects forward, share knowledge, and deepen our fellowship with each other are some of the most valuable aspects of engaging with SAAFON's network.

As a new member, one of the easiest ways to get involved are to plug into our **monthly GROW Calls!** These are calls that are led by farmers in the network with expertise to share with others. Some examples of previous GROW Calls have been Hemp Cultivation, Seed Saving, and Organic Peanut Production. **For information regarding the next GROW Call, please check the Upcoming Member Events Calendar that can be found at [Membership Events - SAAFON](#).**

Throughout the year, SAAFON also facilitates opportunities for in-person gatherings, including:

- Farmer Brigades (work exchanges based on regional proximity)
- Agroecology Exchanges (opportunities to learn and refine skills of ecological production with other farmers)
- Cluster Gatherings (regionally organized, cooperative multi-farm partnerships)

Each of these gatherings are regionally focused to help connect farmers that are local to each other, as well as increase the resiliency of each individual member's farming operation through collective labor and knowledge sharing. For more information on how to get involved with our in-person gatherings, **please check the Upcoming Member Events Calendar.**



Every other year, all SAAFON members are invited to a **General Assembly**, offering our members and staff a chance to all get together in person for fellowship, farm tours, and exploring our shared interests as a member-focused organization. **Expect more details regarding the General Assembly to be announced later in the year** – we are considering safety concerns regarding COVID-19, and will be adapting our plans to ensure the safety of our staff and members as a highest priority. We are looking forward to hosting our first General Assembly, in which we anticipate gathering feedback regarding the future format and frequency of these network-wide assemblies – including the possibility of hosting more frequent virtual assemblies.

As a member, you are welcome and encouraged to engage with as many of these opportunities as you'd like! As a member-centered organization, active engagement from each of our members is the best way to help our network thrive. If you have any questions about how to get involved with our network or other farmers in your area, please feel free to email the Membership Coordinator at [membership@saafon.org](mailto:membership@saafon.org).

***By signing this agreement, you are agreeing to receive regular communications (via email or phone) from SAAFON, although you are welcome to opt-out at any point in time. We recommend that each of our members save SAAFON contacts as trusted senders on their emails to ensure that SAAFON related emails aren't accidentally filtered as spam.***

*By signing below, I confirm that I have read, understand, and agree to the above stated communications opt-in.*

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First and Last Name

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Date

#### **Statement of Function of Dues**

All members of SAAFON, regardless of member tier, will be asked to contribute to the organization annually in the form of membership dues, which are \$25/year. SAAFON also accepts in-kind donations, although they are certainly not expected. **As an exercise in community economics, our member dues are intended to aid SAAFON in investing in our members directly, and the use of member dues will always be made public to members of the network.** Membership dues will be due within the first (60) days of your new (or renewed) membership with the organization - **Existing and New Membership dues will not take effect until 2023.** Your membership dues are a direct way to support and invest in other Black farmers in our region, as well as find support for yourself within our network. No individual will be turned away from SAAFON for lack of ability to pay membership dues. For requests related to membership dues, please feel free to reach out to the Membership Coordinator at [membership@saafon.org](mailto:membership@saafon.org) with any questions or concerns.



## Land Retention

SAAFON understands that the land is basis of belonging, kinship, and sustenance. SAAFON recognizes that land loss and theft are serious issues and is willing to support in any way necessary.

- Please let us know if you are at risk of losing your land (default on loans and/or taxes, harassment or threats, eminent domain). *Do not hesitate to ask for assistance, we want to support you keeping your land.*
- While we do not provide legal support, we are networked with other organizations that can provide you with legal assistance:
  - [Land Loss Prevention Project](#) (NC)
    - In service to Black, Indigenous, people of color and limited resourced farmers and landowners in North Carolina seeking to preserve their farms, homes, land and rural livelihoods. The LLPP protects vulnerable landowners from land loss and environmental degradation through legal representation and outreach statewide and empowers farmers to access business resources including credit in a timely manner.
  - [Black Family Land Trust](#) (NC)
    - Offers the *Wealth Retention and Asset Protection (WRAP)*, designed to reduce the rate of African American and other historically underserved population's land loss by educating landowners about: heir property and estate planning, intergenerational financial management, conservation easements, and 21st century options for land use.
  - [Center for Heir Property Preservation](#) (SC)
    - Offers legal education and direct legal services to help families reach agreement, clear title to family land and probate estates.
  - [Georgia Heir Property Law Center](#) (GA)
    - Helps heirs property owners, nonprofits, and municipalities remediate fractured title, increase equity, and transfer wealth to the next generation through title clearing, wills creation, estate planning, and facilitating access to government, private sector, and nonprofit land management/home improvement programs.
  - [Heirs' Property Retention Coalition](#)
    - Comprehensive list of organizations that provide legal aid and services to landowners with land tenure issues.
  - [Legal Services Alabama](#) (AL)
    - The LSA law firm provides free civil legal advocacy to low-income Alabamians
  - Federation of Southern Cooperative's [Regional Heir Property & Mediation Center](#) (GA, MS, LA)
    - Assists in the resolution of disputes between participating USDA agencies and their program participants. The mediation program also seeks to resolve disputes between farmers and private agricultural lenders. These services are

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offered free of cost in Georgia, Mississippi and Louisiana. Visit their [website](#) for assistance.

- [F.A.R.M.S](#)
  - is a legal non-profit, committed to assisting farmers and landowners retain land for future use of next generation farmer. Organization run by lawyer, Jillian Hishaw
- [Black Belt Justice Center](#)
- [Acres of Ancestry Initiative | Acres of Ancestry/Black Agrarian Fund](#)

### Network Standards of Farming Practices Statement

The aims of SAAFON's farming standards are to help our member farms thrive through focusing on improving soil quality and crop yields through using **naturally available inputs, preserving biodiversity, and uplifting our cultural practices**. We believe that the best soil management **prioritizes rotational cropping, allowing the land to rest, and utilizing the natural timing of the seasons**. SAAFON recognizes that there are many different approaches to achieve more sustainable types of agriculture, and are happy to support our members in developing their skills around holistic pasture management, forest conservation, composting and vermicomposting, water catchment, etc.

We believe in a variety of production methods that achieve truly environmentally sustainable and ecological agriculture, including but not limited to biodynamic, organic, agroecology, heritage, regenerative, and ancestral techniques. SAAFON is committed to supporting our members with opportunities to learn hands-on from other farmers in our network to strengthen our collective model of sustainable farming. **We ask that each of our members refrain from the use of synthetic fertilizers, as well as refraining from using chemical herbicides, pesticides, or fungicides.**

As a SAAFON member, if you do not feel as if you're currently able to commit to agroecological practices in the current or upcoming growing season, there are specific member commitments and organizational support which is geared towards helping you transition your farm to a more sustainable model. SAAFON recognizes the historical challenges which contribute to the use of synthetic fertilizers, chemical pesticides, GMO seeds, etc. **Farmers who are considered to be in a transitional member tier will be expected to commit to a SAAFON-led timeline of meeting criteria based on sustainable practices to continue to be considered a SAAFON member.** As an organization, it is our goal to support our member farmers in the transition to more sustainable practices long-term.

*By signing below, I confirm that I have read, understand, and agree to the above stated policy regarding Network Farming Standards and Practices.*

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First and Last Name

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Date





#### **SAAFON's Commitment to YOU**

- SAAFON commits to be an aggressive and proactive advocate for our membership.
- SAAFON commits to grow and manage the organization responsibly and legally.
- SAAFON commits to provide full financial and management transparency and accountability to members.
- SAAFON commits to support the holistic development of our members.
- SAAFON commits to creating tangible benefits, programs, and resources for our membership.
- SAAFON commits to operating with integrity in our landscape of partner organizations.
- SAAFON commits to continuing to work as a vehicle for connecting our farmers to resources in meaningful and impactful ways.
- SAAFON commits to exemplifying our beliefs and values through action, and modeling processes that allow for democratic representation of our membership.
- SAAFON commits to the facilitation of relationship building, while centering the interests and collective healing of our member farmers.