

Mo' Better Food For Mo' People

African-American farmers Deliver Fresh Foods to Bay Area Urban Communities

by [Maahum Chaudhry](#), staff writer

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The smell of fresh produce is abundant in the air around the Fillmore Farmer s Market every Saturday morning, as customers stock up on their fruits and vegetables for the week. The farmers come from different backgrounds and sell different types of produce, each with their own specialties. Among the many farmers is a group of African-American farmers that sell organic produce.

Mo Better Food is an organization founded by David Roach. It unites African- American farmers and helps them set up markets in urban communities where fresh products are not available. It is important to have outlets in communities- especially in California, which is known for its agriculture- to obtain fresh and healthy, produce.

West Oakland is described as an insecure community, says Roach, It s a disgrace to be here in California and see that fresh food doesn t make it to it s own state.

The idea of bringing together African-American farmers isn t new, according to Roach. However over the years, there has been a decline in the number of African American farmers.

We re just trying to preserve something that was there before, says Roach. There are still African-American farmers out there.

And why not bring together farmers to distribute healthy food to their community?

Benefiting the community is not complicated, said Roach. It s happening in other places, and it can happen here too.

Robert Dorsey, chef-owner of the Blackberry Bistro in Oakland, agrees with the idea of preserving the community of African-American farmers. As a community, they have a history of farming, and the job they did was very important to the community.

Young people don t realize how important soil is how important it is to the community, Dorsey said. Flavors don t discriminate. Everything

PHOTO



[Zainab Khan](#) | staff photographer

Veron Thomas, shops at the Fillmore farmers' market every Saturday, he feels the market provides him with a fresher selection of ingredients.

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just kind of blends in.

He is proud to play his part in helping the African American farming community. Dorsey thinks it s important for African American farmers to be represented and sell their produce in urban areas.

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The program started at McClymonds High School in West Oakland, where Roach used to teach. It educates young people about farming by having them work on the farms and help at the farmer s market. Roach hopes that many of the graduating alumni of the school will stay involved in the organization to help preserve the African-American farming community in future generations.

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According to the Mo Better Food website, out of the 89,000 farmers in California, only 288 are African-American, meaning less than one percent. With such a small group, and the increasing rate of farmers of color selling their farms, Mo Better Food hopes to keep African-American farmers in the industry. They also encourage passing on the family business to later generations.

The organization distributes organic foods to urban areas through farmer s markets and distribution to restaurants and corner stores. They try to connect African-American farmers to those living in urban communities by giving the farmers a market from which to sell their produce, and by bringing healthier foods to urban areas.

Andrea Ali, owner of the Guerilla Caf in Berkeley, gets her produce through Mo Better Food because she doesn t want to serve over-processed food. We want customers to have food like our own home, Ali said.

The art gallery/cafe hoped to support the African-American community by getting their produce from Mo Better Food. Ali believes it is the role of African American farmers to provide their community with good foods. Farming is an ancient form of sustainable living, she said.

Other restaurants that obtain their produce through Mo Better Foods are glad to support an organization that unites farmers of color and brings healthier food to areas overwhelmed with corner stores heavily stocked in over-processed foods.

Seeing this organic food popping up and becoming accessible is beautiful, especially when it s being done by African Americans, he said.

Even though many of the vendors of Mo Better Food are African American, they try to reach out to all members of the community of different ethnicities. Roach says their customers are as diverse as Oakland.

Agriculture is a major part of culture in all different ethnic communities, said Roach.

» E-mail Maahum Chaudhry @

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