



Allensworth Progressive Association
Allensworth, CA

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Groundbreaking Farmer Training Program Opens Doors for Women and BIPOC Farmers, Expands Regenerative Agriculture

In the Central Valley, a next-generation farmer training program offers a beacon of hope for a new era of agricultural enterprise and climate resilience.

On February 20, Allensworth Progressive Association (APA) launched its ***Josephine Allensworth Beginning Farmer Training Program***, which aims to bring women and people of color into career pathways in regenerative agriculture.

The seven-month CDFA-funded program will offer a hands-on farmer training course grounded in the nature-based principles and practices of regenerative farming. The program aims to support women, veterans, and BIPOC communities – those who have disproportionately faced structural disadvantage and barriers to pursuing farming as a viable livelihood in California. Adapting a curriculum framework developed by [The Center for Land-Based Learning](#), it's the first beginning farmer training program in California to connect the dots between social and climate justice as interrelated and urgent imperatives.

Sonya Montgomery, the program's education coordinator, reflects on the first class session:

“After so much planning, it was a deeply gratifying moment to welcome our first students into the classroom. We had a really open and heartfelt discussion about the challenges we each face as women and people of color, and what taking the leap into farming means to each of us. As a Black aspiring farmer myself, I’m proud to be playing a role in breaking down barriers and helping our students take on the legal and logistical hurdles as they learn new regenerative farming skills.”

At the end of the course, students hold in their hands not only their harvest, but a certificate and a business plan that's ready to put into action.

The program’s home is in the unincorporated rural town of Allensworth, a community of about 600 residents in the Tulare Lakebed region. Allensworth holds the distinction of being California’s first town founded by and for Black Americans fleeing the South and seeking a place to flourish professionally, economically, and spiritually. It’s an ideal starting place for beginning farmers defying the odds: its 1908 founding occurred just years after a [change in homestead laws](#) made it possible for non-white citizens to own land in California.

The time is ripe for addressing the overlapping social and environmental impacts of agribusiness in California, impacts that again and again land [more heavily on the shoulders of Black and Brown farmers](#) and farmworker communities like Allensworth. They include air pollution and soil degradation; low- access to healthy food in food-producing regions (Allensworth is a food desert, requiring a 40-minute round-trip drive to obtain basic necessities); and unsustainably high greenhouse gas emissions.

“We’re ready for a new generation of farmers and farming in California,” says Tekoah Kadara, executive director of the Allensworth Community Development Corporation, which supports APA’s operations and financial administration. “The next generation is ready to take on these social and environmental justice issues, they’re really feeling the urgency of climate repair. We can make growing food appealing again by opening channels so farmers can get healthy food to our local communities.”

The inaugural class of students will plunge their hands in the dirt first in the greenhouse constructed for the program by laborers from the local pool community, focusing on soil health and planting seedlings and starts. Then, the class will cultivate a plot in nearby Wasco, focusing on direct seeding, transplants of hardier plants like Nopales, and the eventual harvesting and marketing of their crops that, ideally, will end up on Allensworth’s dinner tables.

Registration for the next course will open in November of this year and classes will begin in 2025. Allensworth Progressive Association is fundraising to continue the program, with the ultimate goal of developing farmer housing and to make the program not only sustainable, but affordable and inclusive. All class materials are offered in Spanish as well as English.

About Allensworth Progressive Association

The Allensworth Progressive Association was formed soon after Allensworth's founding to manage the affairs of the newly established town. The forces of institutional racism in the Tulare Lakebed region ultimately denied Allensworth's founders their dream of building a "Tuskegee of the West," but like a Phoenix, still the town rises. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, catalyzed by her involvement in the creation of the Colonel Allensworth State Park, Nettie Morrison became Allensworth's unofficial leader and chief advocate. In 1997, the Allensworth Progressive Association was re-established as a 501 (c) 3. The APA of today thrives, a small but highly organized multi-racial, multi-generational enterprise, including Nettie's children and grandchildren, carrying out a sweeping plan for social, cultural, economic, and environmental revitalization and resilience. APA carries out this work with a commitment to centering Allensworth families in leadership and decision-making, especially its young future leaders, and in respectful partnership with the Tachi-Yokut and other Tulare Basin Indigenous and Native communities in the Tulare Basin. Allensworth Progressive Association has been able to grow planning capacity and undertake the development of major projects with the generous support of many, including the Office of Kat Taylor & The Good Life Pledge; U.S. Department of Food and Agriculture; California Department of Food and Agriculture; California Natural Resources Agency; the Office of the Governor; Self-Help Enterprises; Strategic Growth Council; the California Endowment; the James B. McClatchey Foundation; and a multitude of community members, partners and allies.