

**#AgCrit: Imagining Just Agricultural Futures in a Justice-Based Agricultural Education Course**

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### Introduction & Framework

As we continue to educate the next generation of globally competent agricultural professionals, we must be aware of the historical and contemporary agricultural issues, such as food justice, environmental justice, and labor and land injustices (The National Academies, 2009). The tri-fold mission of the land-grant university (LGU) seeks to bring the teachings of college to everyday people to solve everyday problems through instruction, research, and extension. Further, LGUs prepare future extension agents, faculty, K12 educators, and industry leaders who must have empathy and cultural awareness to work with and serve those from different cultural backgrounds. As such, an interdisciplinary agricultural education course called *Critical Perspectives in Agriculture* was developed to enhance students' knowledge on how power structures, lack of access, and identity shape the experiences of marginalized groups in agriculture. We discussed this history of marginalized folks in agriculture, issues marginalized folks are facing now, and how we can imagine and prepare a better future for ourselves and the next generation. This study will focus on those imaginings of six college of agriculture students enrolled at an LGU.

Social justice can be used as a learning tool to help educate and transform future generations of agricultural professionals. Though social justice has been defined in many ways, we use Fraser's (2009) description of social justice as the critiquing of social systems; transforming thinking; and enacting action for social, political, and economic justice. Social justice uplifts the voices of marginalized folks and examines the ways we as a society (re)produce injustices. Further, examining social justice in agriculture can help students process how they have historically been and are currently situated within the discipline and consequently, become more engaged in the course (Cummings, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Martell, 2018). We as a discipline must consider what changes need to be made that can enhance the lived experiences of our students and communities we serve.

### Purpose & Research Questions

This research is part of a larger study concerning the overall learning experiences of college of agriculture students enrolled in a justice-based agricultural education course. The purpose of this current study is to explore and describe how college of agriculture students visualize a just future in agriculture after participation in a social justice agricultural education course. The research question that guided this study was: How do college of agriculture students enrolled in a justice-based agricultural education course imagine a just agricultural future?

### Methodology

As previously mentioned, this research is part of a larger single case study to examine students' learning experiences. The class was composed of five graduate students and one undergraduate (Table 1). Students completed a pre- and post-course questionnaire and participated in a semi-structured interview at the conclusion of the course. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were video and audio recorded via Zoom. I took notes during the interviews. The interview data was transcribed via third-party transcription service. I also used student reflections and other course assignments as data points. All data were

triangulated and organized into categories and themes. I used triangulation, member checking, audit trails, field notes, and memos to ensure trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, I recognize that my prior experiences as a minoritized agricultural education graduate student, identity as a Black woman in agriculture, prior experiences with the students enrolled in the course, and experiences as a minoritized agricultural educator collectively informed how I gained entry and trust to collect, analyze, and interpret data for the study.

Table 1. Student Demographics

Pseudonym	Major	Program & Year	Race
Iris	Agricultural Communication	Undergraduate, Senior	White & Latinx
Amaya	Agricultural Education	MS, 1 <sup>st</sup> Year	Black
Missy	Agricultural Communication	MS, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	White
Nicole	Agricultural Education	PHD, 1 <sup>st</sup> Year	Black
Charles Henry	Agricultural Education	PHD, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	Black
Daisy	Animal Science	PHD, 3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	Black

### Findings

As I analyzed the interview data, field notes, and student artifacts, I began to recognize three themes regarding the students' vision of the future of agriculture: a skeptical hope for increased diversity, equity, and inclusion; equitable access to resources (land, water, and information); and how the course helped them to see themselves making change in the agricultural future. For the first theme, students hoped to see increased diversity, enhanced equity, and intentional inclusion strategies to keep minoritized groups engaged in agriculture. Sadly, students also mentioned they "do not see it happening" within their lifetimes. For the second theme, students' visions of a just agricultural future included equitable access to various natural resources. What I found interesting was how students recognized that our future generation must learn about the knowledge, hardships, and history of marginalized people in agriculture in order to be better informed agricultural leaders. Moreover, this information can help marginalized groups recognize that they have a place in agriculture. For the third theme, students felt that the course helped them to shape their vision for a just agriculture. Further, they saw themselves in their vision making change for a better agricultural future. This is particularly important for the Black students in the course, as Black folks and other marginalized groups often struggle to feel a sense of belonging within agriculture (Jordan, 2011).

### Conclusions & Recommendations

It is important that we hear from folks who are up next to take the ranks in agricultural professions. From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that these up and coming agricultural professionals see the future of diversity, equity, and inclusion in agriculture slow to improve. However, they feel they are up to the challenge to make changes for those who will come after them. Regarding the course, these findings show that courses that challenge what we think we already know about our history, who represents agriculture, and what our futures could look like and our place in that future should be encouraged for all disciplines within the agricultural umbrella.

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