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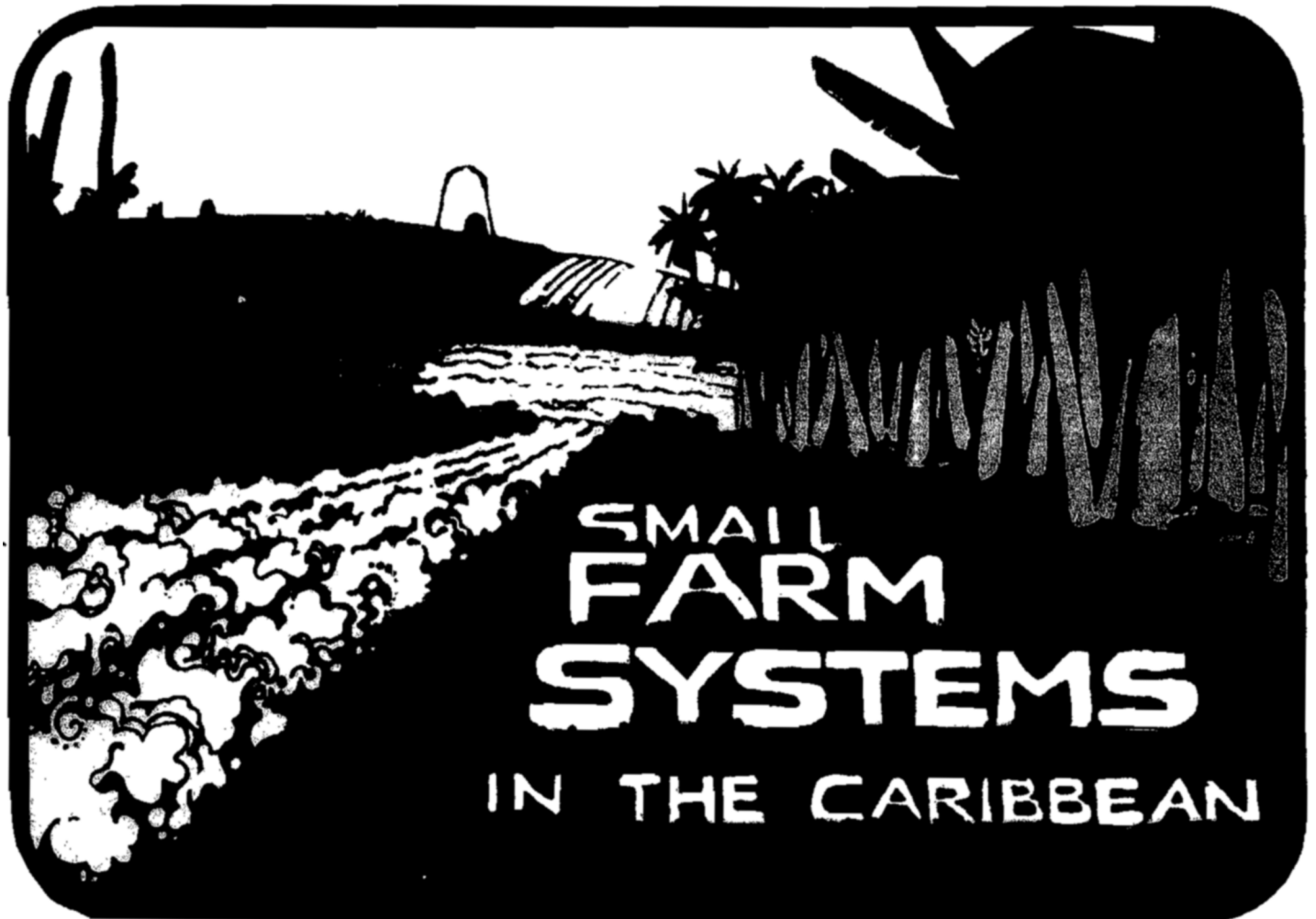
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Farming Strategies for Small Farmers and Limited Resource Farmers in North Florida Through the 80's

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A 1981 report to the Florida Legislature indicated that 75% of Florida's 44,000 farms are small farms. Among Florida's 3,079 black farmers, annual sales range from \$1,000 - \$2,500.

The 1981 Governors' Conference on Small Farmers in Florida listed cost of labor and supplies, cost of equipment, interest rates and marketing as the most serious problems facing farmers.

Based on the above problems, FAMU has developed a plan of action that includes: (1) Development of alternative farming enterprises; (2) Education geared toward more effective management skills; (3) Development of on-farm demonstration projects.

What is a small farm? Historically, small farms consisted of 160 acres with most of the labor being supplied by the family. Decades after the Homestead Act these farms became known as family farms. Small farms were considered small because the operation was not managed on a full time basis. In the 1960's annual sales, rather than acreage, became the dividing line between success and failure. These dividing lines moved from \$10,000 in the 1960's to \$20,000 by 1970.

The USDA has derived a three-part definition of a small farm operation:

1. The family provides most of the labor and management.
2. Total family income from farm and non-farm sources is below the median non-metropolitan family income in the state.
3. Farming provides a significant portion, though not necessarily a majority, of the family income.

The above definition assumes that income will be derived from both farm and non-farm sources.

In contrast, the Tuskegee Institute Small Farm Model emphasizes the importance of the family component and recognizes the family farm as a full time, not part time, operation. I'm sure most of you are familiar with this plan through the nationwide lectures given by my former professor and mentor, Dr. Booker Whatley.

The primary mission of the Division of Agriculture at FAMU is to "help people help themselves." The Division consists of three units: Teaching, Research and Extension. As part of the 1890 land-grant system its job or mission is to provide educational resources and technical assistance to north Florida farmers, most of whom would fit into any one of two or three USDA definitions of a small farmer.

Our clientele occupy the lower-economic strata of the general population. They are made up of varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. The one thing they share in common is that there is usually less than \$10,000 per year family income. Their standard of living is thus dictated by this economic straightjacket.

Although the USDA Extension programs continue to struggle with the perplexing problems facing small farmers, black small farms continue to decrease at an alarming rate. According to the Civil Rights Commission, if the current trend continues, blacks

operating farms will become a part of the United States agricultural history.

Future goals set by the agriculture programs at FAMU envision a more positive outlook for small farmers in the north Florida area. In fact, we take issue with the prophetic forecast of doom for small farmers in our area.

A 1981 report to the Florida Legislature indicated that, based on USDA standards, 75% of Florida's 44,000 farms are small farms. Among Florida's 3,079 black farmers, annual sales range from \$1,000-\$2,500. These farmers cultivate 121,708 acres of Florida land. Approximately 13% (392) of the black farmers are located in eight counties served by FAMU.

The 1981 Governors' Conference on the Future of Small Farmers in Florida cited the following as major problems encountered by small farmers: cost of labor supplies (80%), cost of equipment (51%), interest rates (41%), and marketing (53%).

Based on these and other studies, the problems facing our clients in north Florida are as follows:

1. High cost of equipment and supplies;
2. Inadequate marketing strategies;
3. Inability to secure loans;
4. Poor management;
5. Lack of support by governmental institutions;

Based on the above problems we have developed the following plan of action:

1. Develop educational programs that will inform farmers of the potential income that may be derived from production of alternative farming enterprises;
2. Develop readable educational materials that will provide limited resource or small farmers with information on marketing strategies, farm management, purchasing of equipment and supplies, and securing farm operating loans;
3. Develop demonstration farm projects within target counties on clientele's farm;
4. Develop small farm demonstration center at FAMU.

We support Dr. Whatley's view of the small farmer of the future. The small north Florida farmer of the future will be well-trained, perhaps trained in an agricultural discipline. He will be a successful manager, self-fulfilled by his love of people and the

land. His standard of living and lifestyle will mimic nothing of the stereotype now described by the USDA. He will enjoy a rich family life by working, playing and learning with his family.

Both the 1890 and 1862 Land Grant institutions have wasted valuable hours, not to mention taxpayer dollars defining and redefining this oddity we call a small farmer. We believe this group of American farmers can play a viable and productive role in the food production system in north Florida and in the region. We further believe that they can be self-sustaining and profitable.

At the resource level we must discourage competition with the "big boy," while encouraging production of high yield produce intermixed with profitable small animal and small fruit production systems. These farms must be accessible, have good sources of water and well drained soils.

According to the Wharley Farm Plan developed and demonstrated at Tuskegee Institute, the future small farm must

follow six guidelines in order to assure success:

1. The farm must provide weekly, year-round cash flow or year-round family income. This reduces the need to borrow from FmHA or some other institution.
2. The components of this farm must be compatible.
3. The farm must provide year-round full employment.
4. The farm must be a pick-your-own operation. Two major complaints of small farmers are eliminated—no labor and no marker.
5. The farm must have a clientele membership club.
6. The farm must produce what its clientele demands.

It is believed that the above plan would save about 50,000 small farms in this country and about 1,700 small farms in Florida. Minor adjustment may have to be made in terms of acreage in production, crops to be grown, soil type, irrigation sources and environmental conditions.

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