

Generational knowledge, passion for farming

With time and, most honestly, after painful seasons of maturity, we learn that there is a divine moment for every purpose, embracing silence or choosing to speak.

After being married, I agree that there is a time for everything and that mindful communication is a skill and a blessing. But this is something I have struggled with in my life. I have always had something to say and share, hoping to gently open minds, shift mindsets, and, most importantly, listen to others.

I frequently revisit Proverbs 16:23-24 which reads, 23 The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, And adds learning to his lips. 24 Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, Sweetness to the soul and health to the bones.

Isn't that beautiful? I am honored to have this platform to share my thoughts and perspectives with a community where I am from and that I love. I hope to bring you pleasant words, raise awareness, and bridge divides for the betterment of our community. I hope you enjoy my column, and I look forward to sharing the column with other natural resources and justice advocates.

But first, a little bit about me.

My family has been farming in Lane County since the late 1800s. Growing up as a sixth-generation farmer in rural Lane has given me an innate appreciation for agricultural and natural resources. I became fascinated with food and natural resources production early, inspired by my parents and the generations before me. My mother was raised on a cattle and vegetable farm in Kenya, and my father's family has produced timber, hazelnuts, peppermint, vegetables, and seed crops in Oregon. Today, my husband and I have a small farm, raising cattle, hay, and hazelnuts.

I attended Oregon State University, majoring in Crop and Soil Science with a minor in Horticulture. I practiced research in entomology, soil and water quality, organic food production, and viticulture. Although my education in agriculture was multifaceted, I wanted to gain experience sharing scientific information through non-formal education focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion, and racial justice. I was delighted to find the Community and Leadership Development master's program with a concentration in Agricultural Education at the University of Kentucky. This was a valuable degree, exposing me to the social sciences of agriculture, community development, curriculum design, and curriculum assessment and reporting.

After obtaining my master's, I became the first African-American female agriculture and natural resources agent in Kentucky Cooperative Extension history. As a farmer, I naturally understood the challenges farmers and land stewards faced and could provide realistic solutions for their unique and diverse operations. I later worked for the Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA) in the Office of Marketing and Product Promotion. During this time, my father's cancer returned. After his second brain surgery, I moved back to Oregon.

After returning to Oregon, I started a farm with my husband, have created close ties to local small-business networks, and continually seek ways to support Oregon's agricultural and natural resources sectors. I served as president of Lane County Farm Bureau and president of Lane Families for Farms and Forests. I was eventually appointed to Gov. Kate Brown's Racial Justice Council (RJC), now chaired by Gov. Tina Kotek, with the role of co-chairing the RJC Environmental Equity Subcommittee. I am also a member of Oregon's Environmental Justice Council. Most recently, I joined Oregonians for Food & Shelter, conducting grassroots efforts at the state- and county-level to strengthen relationships and facilitate community participation in local and statewide regulatory and legislative processes.

My work experiences, leadership, and passion for natural resources provide a well-rounded foundation to generate positive impacts for communities in Oregon. I look forward to sharing more with you soon!

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