



Veteran Women in Agriculture

A Regional Needs Assessment for the Pacific Northwest

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Veteran Women in Agriculture

A regional needs assessment for the Pacific Northwest

Executive Summary

American Farmland Trust’s Women for the Land (WFL) initiative launched a *Veteran Women for the Land* program, funded by USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture (Award # 2021-77028-35278). The program aims to address an important gap in knowledge and education related to the needs of veteran women in agriculture. It also intends to foster a community of practice among veteran women farmers in the Pacific Northwest. The project represents a partnership among [American Farmland Trust](#), [Farmer Veteran Coalition](#), [Farmer Veteran Coalition–Washington Chapter](#), [Annie’s Project](#), [Rogue Farm Corps](#),

[Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs](#), [Washington Farmland Trust](#), [Oregon State University Small Farms Team](#), and [Insight for Action](#).

This report provides a synthesis of research conducted for this project, which was designed to fill gaps in our knowledge about how to better serve veteran women in agriculture, particularly in the Pacific Northwest. To better understand how to reach and serve this diverse demographic, we hosted a series of virtual interviews with 23 veteran women, as well as with people who



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offer technical assistance to veterans, during the spring of 2022.

As a result of our analysis, we identified three core “headlines” that characterize the main findings associated with developing programming and conducting outreach with veteran women. The core headlines in this report explore the following findings:

- Veteran women farmers are a diverse group.
- Intersectional and layered barriers exist for veteran women in agriculture.
- Outreach to veterans and carefully curated spaces for education and networking are important.

The findings from this study highlight a diverse set of needs, challenges, and opportunities to better serve veteran women engaged in agricultural pursuits. Our findings highlight a number of tangible recommendations to support programming, outreach, and engagement with

veteran women. The recommendations were informed by our regional research in the Pacific Northwest, yet they are likely universal. Employing new ways of working with this audience will enable our community of practice to more meaningfully meet the needs of veteran women in agriculture. To guide our collective work, we share 11 main recommendations grounded in the study findings.

Women are growing in prominence in agriculture, and we know they are critical to the success of meeting agriculture’s important goals of feeding people, sustaining rural and urban communities, and stewarding agricultural lands. Veteran women bring a unique skill set and, for many, a direct need for healing and connection to the field of agriculture. Many public and private institutions have not served this audience adequately in the past. It is our hope that this report will enable people and institutions engaged with this audience to better serve this community here in the Pacific Northwest and beyond.

Veteran Women in Agriculture

AN EMERGING PROGRAM AREA OF WOMEN FOR THE LAND

For over 40 years, American Farmland Trust (AFT) has worked to save the land that sustains us by protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. AFT is a national leader in the protection of farmland and has spent decades promoting environmentally sound soil health farming practices through efforts that include farmer training, demonstration programs, and partnerships to provide technical and financial assistance to farmers.

AFT's Women for the Land (WFL) initiative launched in 2019 to address the needs of women farmers and farmland owners, with the goal of accelerating the protection and stewardship of America's farmland. Roughly two million non-operating landowners (retired farmers, farm widows, and family members who inherited farms) own about 31% of all U.S. farmland, and 37% of this group is composed of women landowners.¹ Further, the National Agricultural Statistics Service estimates that 56% of all U.S. farms have female producers who are actively involved in management.²

Despite these statistics, women often do not have access to the support and resources they need to establish farm-based conservation measures. To achieve broader adoption of conservation

practices on America's farmland, we must include and focus on women. AFT's WFL initiative combines research, training, and on-the-ground projects to empower women landowners and farmers to conserve and protect their land. With *Veteran Women for the Land*, AFT is expanding its WFL programming to serve veteran women farmers and landowners.



In recent years, due to the groundbreaking work of the Farmer Veteran Coalition and similar groups, there are increased resources to support veterans entering and working in agriculture. However, veteran women tend to access veteran services less frequently than their male counterparts, although those trends are changing,³ and many struggle to identify as “veterans.”⁴ As a result, resources to support veteran women in agriculture are few, and research about the specific challenges and barriers faced by this group is sparse. This is in part due to the fact that it is a small demographic relative to the national population. There are an estimated two million living veteran women in the United States, who make up only 10% of the overall veteran population. Of the total American population, 14% of men but only 1.5% of women are veterans.⁵ Further, we understand that this population is not a homogeneous group, but we know that veteran women tend to be younger,

1. Bigelow, D., Borches, A., & Hubbs, T. (2016). U.S. farmland ownership, tenure, and transfer [PDF file]. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Services. Retrieved from www.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/74672/eib-161.pdf.

2. Farmland Information Center (FIC). (2014). Tenure, ownership, and transition of agricultural land survey [PDF file]. Northampton, MA: American Farmland Trust. Retrieved from farmlandinfo.org/publications/2014-tenure-ownership-and-transition-of-agricultural-land-survey-talking-points.

3. U.S. Veterans Eligibility Trends and Statistics, va.gov/vetdata/docs/Quickfacts/VA_Utilization_Profile_2017.pdf.

4. Strong, J. D., Crowe, B. M., & Lawson, S. (2018). Female veterans: Navigating two identities. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 46(2), 92–99. doi.org/10.1007/s10615-017-0636-3.

5. U.S. Department of Labor. Women Veterans Research: Demographics, dol.gov/agencies/vets/womenveterans/womenveterans-demographics#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThere%20are%20nearly%202%20million,only%201.5%25%20are%20veterans.%E2%80%9D.

more racially diverse, and more educated than their male veteran counterparts.

Veteran Women for the Land aims to address an important gap in knowledge about, and education targeted toward, the needs of veteran women in agriculture, while fostering a community of practice among veteran women farmers in the Pacific Northwest. The project represents a partnership among American Farmland Trust, Farmer Veteran Coalition, Farmer Veteran Coalition Washington Chapter, Annie's Project, Rogue Farm Corps, Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington Farmland Trust, Oregon State University Small Farms Team, and Insight for Action.

The project broadly seeks to accomplish the following:

- Increase a regional understanding of the unique needs of and challenges faced by veteran women farmers and farmland owners.
- Develop program interventions aimed to meet the needs and address challenges faced by a diverse constellation of veteran women farmers and farmland owners.

- Foster a broad community of practice among veteran women farmers and landowners to improve networking and resource sharing.
- Build the capacity of agricultural and veteran service providers, including AFT, to better serve veteran women farmers and farmland owners by sharing lessons learned to guide engagement.

This report provides a synthesis of research conducted as part of this project, which was designed to fill gaps in our knowledge about how to better serve veteran women in agriculture. This work was particularly focused on meeting the needs of veteran women in the Pacific Northwest interested in pursuing agriculture. In order to better serve this group with programmatic outreach and education, we sought to better understand how to reach and serve them. We hope this report improves our own programmatic strategy and outreach approach with veteran women in agriculture, while contributing to the community of practice that seeks to improve the resources available for this important group.⁶

6. We are defining women as individuals who identify as women (including trans and non-binary individuals) AND those who were identified as female at birth (cisgendered women) or other femme-identified people who experience the impacts of, and have been marginalized due to, their gender identity.

Methods to Learn from Women Veterans and Technical Assistance Providers

To fill our gaps in knowledge about supporting veteran women in agriculture, we hosted a series of virtual interviews with 23 veterans and those who offer technical assistance (TA) to veterans (for full breakdown see *Table 1*) during the spring of 2022. Thirteen of the respondents were based in Oregon and the rest in Washington. Two identified as men, the rest as women. The majority were white-identifying, although we had six individuals who identified as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC). Approximately 20% identified as LGBTQ+, although the proportion may have been higher, as some people opted not to report their sexual orientation.

Interviews lasted 45–90 minutes and focused on questions related to outreach strategies and programmatic needs of veteran women and the challenges they face in accessing resources. We also asked about the resources they’ve accessed (or are aware of) and their engagement with existing networks.

After conducting in-depth interviews, we hosted two listening sessions in June of 2022 to share preliminary results with our Advisory Committee members, interviewees, and other project partners. These listening sessions helped refine our thinking about what we learned and provided.

As a result of our qualitative analysis of interviews, iterative internal discussions with the research team, and the listening sessions, we identified three core “headlines” that characterize our main findings associated with developing programming and conducting outreach with veteran women. These headlines are explored in detail in the following sections. Each section provides a

TABLE 1. PARTICIPANT TYPE BY STATE

PARTICIPANT TYPE	STATE	COUNT
Veteran ONLY	OR	4
	WA	3
TA Provider ONLY	OR	6
	WA	1
TA Provider AND Veteran	OR	2
	WA	6
Veteran Spouse ONLY	OR	1
	WA	0
Total		23

synthesis of the headline, the core themes associated with that headline, and descriptive quotes from the interviews themselves. All quotes are attributed to “veterans” or “TA providers” but are presented anonymously.

The core headlines explored in the sections below are:

- Veteran women farmers are a diverse group.
- Intersectional and layered barriers exist for veteran women in agriculture.
- Outreach to veterans and carefully curated spaces for education and networking are important.

For each section, we provide an overview discussion of the themes that emerged within that headline and an illustrative table with qualitative data examples. We synthesized broader programmatic implications associated with the findings in a separate section of the document to guide outreach to, and engagement of, veteran women in agriculture.

Findings

Veteran women farmers are a diverse group.

Veteran women are a diverse group, and though we already knew this was the case, our interviews deepened our assessment of the specific ways they vary. Three core themes emerged as factors associated with this headline (See *Table 2*).

The first theme is that the diverse reasons that women pursue agriculture. Many of them were

interested in agriculture as a source of income or as a profession, but many indicated that they were also interested in agriculture for what we have termed “honorable pursuits” (e.g., self-sufficiency, cultivating life, contributing to community food justice, or healing self/others) and were motivated to engage in agriculture as a lifestyle tied to their

TABLE 2. SYNTHESIS DATA SUPPORTING THE HEADLINE “WOMEN VETERAN FARMERS ARE A DIVERSE GROUP”

THEME	CORE SENTIMENTS	DESCRIPTIVE QUOTE
Motivations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career path/source of income • Honorable pursuits, sense of purpose, healing 	<p>“ There’s a greater purpose in life for me. I’m meant to be a steward of the land. I know I’m meant to grow things for people. I know I’m meant to feed people. I’m meant to rehabilitate the land with sustainable agriculture practices. It’s just the highest calling there is for me.” —VETERAN</p>
Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veteran identity is one of many, much more intersectional assessment of identity 	<p>“ A huge part of my personal identity is also my cultural identity and ethnicity . . . There’s a lot of stigma about indigenous agriculture as not having the same value because we culture what’s considered weeds. . . so trying to face internalized stereotypes on all of that, as well as external stereotypes, has been a big part of my experience with ag.” —VETERAN</p> <p>“ I found that a lot of those women, that wasn’t the thing out of their mouth, they would even some of them retired and they were like, yep, you would never know [I was in the military] because we don’t talk about it. And we’re a basketball mom, we’re a dance mom, we’re, you know. . . I was a preschool teacher for a while, you know, I mean, that’s where you kind of put your identifying characteristics into it’s in, you know, I don’t know, it’s just, it was strange.” —VETERAN</p>
Trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical and emotional • Military and non-military 	<p>“ I think it’s absolutely an awesome avenue to heal trauma, you know, I, I would say that that’s why I’m drawn. That’s one of the reasons why I’m drawn to farming is because I, I see some pretty bad stuff at work, you know, in terms of, in terms of people really sick on the verge of dying, you know, gunshot wounds, amputations, you know, diabetic emergencies, heart attacks, strokes, all these things. And it adds, it adds up over time. And I, that’s why I’m so drawn to getting out in the earth when I’m not at work is because it heals me, it rejuvenates me.” —VETERAN</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of needs in the trauma space 	<p>“ I think that healing trauma through means of ag[riculture] is valid. But I also think that there is a difference between receiving counseling and receiving professional training. And I think that the programs that aim to combine the two are very well meaning. Unfortunately, they’re often run by people who didn’t actually know how to make a profit at farming. And so it was easier for them to become a nonprofit that provided counseling services to other vets than it was for them to provide actual training to vets on how to survive in agriculture . . . ” —VETERAN</p>

personal (and communal) commitments rather than only as entrepreneurs.

Similar to our understanding of the diversity of motivations for engaging in agriculture, we also found there was a great deal of diversity in programmatic priorities among the women and technical service providers we interviewed. Many were interested in a diverse array of topics, while others had specific interests. Topics such as business planning, marketing, accessing and navigating resources/programs, climate and regenerative agriculture/soil, and equipment maintenance and use were mentioned most often. Respondents were open to both virtual and in-person experiences. More hands-on workshops for learning farming skills could be done in-person, while classroom topics like farm business planning or marketing might lend themselves well to a virtual format.⁷



There was also diversity with regard to agricultural experience—ranging from beginners to those who felt they were well-positioned to mentor others—although our sample seemed to suggest a great deal of need among new and beginning veteran women farmers in the region who are eager for more resources. These findings suggest there is a diversity of technical assistance needs for veteran women who are both actively farming and those who aspire to farm.

The second core theme in this headline had to do with the notion of identity. For some of the veteran women and service providers we spoke to, it became clear that veteran women may not hold their veteran identity as closely as they might other identities (e.g., race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, expertise, parenting status, etc.). One TA provider involved in the project suggested that some veteran women may not hold as tightly to that status for fear of what it might signify to others (good or bad associations with veterans or military service).

Both veterans and TA providers indicated that women may be hesitant to emphasize that identity due to the trauma they associate with their time in the military. This experience of trauma connects to our final theme associated with this headline, which is that many women have experienced physical, emotional, and/or sexual violence in active duty and beyond. This trauma informs how they move about the world, how they see themselves, and how they view their military experience(s) and military institutions. Many of our interviewees suggested that, while our programming may not be directly focused on therapeutic interventions, any program engaging with veteran women be trauma-informed and provide adequate support for the complexity of the veteran women experience, while being careful not to overstate aims in terms of offering healing and rehabilitation services.

⁷ Review this SARE resource on how to develop programming for women in the virtual space: sare.org/news/reaching-women-in-agriculture-a-guide-to-virtual-engagement.

Intersectional and layered barriers exist for veteran women in agriculture.

Our interviews explored some of the challenges (and opportunities) that veteran women face in agriculture (Table 3). Many of the challenges that both veterans and TA providers raised are untethered from demographics (e.g., veteran status or gender) but do tend to impact farmers and new and beginning farmers, in particular.

Others relate to the fact that veteran women are a diverse group with regard to their experiences in the military and beyond. Thus, the barriers they face are unique to their particular experiences within the military and can be associated with other identities.

TABLE 3. SYNTHESIS DATA SUPPORTING THE HEADLINE “INTERSECTIONAL AND LAYERED BARRIERS EXIST FOR VETERAN WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE”

THEME	CORE SENTIMENTS	DESCRIPTIVE QUOTE
Barriers untethered from demographics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finances and accessing usable land Climate crises being two emergent themes that affect many farmers 	<p>“ In this day and age, it’s completely financially impossible to be able to pay for a \$2 million piece of property as a farmer. There’s a complete disconnect.” —VETERAN</p>
Barriers for women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Misogyny/male-dominated spaces Male-built machinery/tools Balancing role as caregivers 	<p>“ When men do things in certain ways women might not necessarily have the same upper body strength. For example, a lot of female farmers didn’t know how to set up the PTO is on their own vehicle because they’ve never been taught and setting up the PTO on a tractor requires a certain amount of physical strength, or leverage.” —VETERAN</p>
Barriers for People of Color	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systemic racism blocks access to financial supports and employment opportunities Microaggressions Lack of representation 	<p>“ It’s not like the USDA office is like, oh, we hate people of color, we’re not going to freakin recognize you. But that continuing attitude of “you don’t belong here.” It doesn’t have to be conscious to come into play and so I know I harp on the recognition of people of color in agriculture aspect a lot and I do because it’s so ignored.” —VETERAN</p>
Barriers for veterans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessing veteran-specific resources can be a headache 	<p>“ There’s a ton of resources out there for veterans, particularly disabled veterans.... But I also know that information like that is not always readily available to veterans.... When you’re dealing with the VA, it’s like you kind of have to search and find and fight for something, which is discouraging in and of itself.... So then there’s times where I will just completely divert even using a veteran resource.... I don’t want to say it’s not worth the headache, but it sometimes becomes not worth all the work.” —VETERAN</p>

Most commonly, the universal barriers raised in the interviews had to do with financial aspects of owning/managing and surviving a farm business, and for many, the issue of accessing affordable land was key. This issue of land accessibility is fairly universal among new and beginning farmers and illustrates just how critical land access and

land tenure are for the success of farmers more generally.⁸ Another often-noted barrier had to do more broadly with the climate crisis and concerns with increased weather variability and extremes. In the Pacific Northwest, this often takes the form of drought, concerns with water availability, and impacts from fire/smoke.⁹

8. See more information on land access challenges from the National Young Farmers Coalition: youngfarmers.org/landaccess.

9. See more about regional climate impacts in the Northwest Chapter of the Fourth National Climate Assessment: nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/24.

Women veterans also discussed barriers they experienced as women, which included the challenge with male-dominated spaces (in both agriculture and in the military) and the challenge of finding machinery and tools that fit a female body. Women also mentioned their roles as caregivers, often as mothers, and the burden that this places on them as they navigate career, caregiving, and familial roles. These themes are not unique to veteran women but affect all women in agriculture to a greater or lesser extent.

Veteran women with underrepresented racial and ethnic identities also mentioned the fact that they face barriers associated with those identities, often tied to systemic racism in U.S. institutions (e.g., heading into a USDA Farm Service Agency office to apply for a farm loan). Finally, those interviewees of color mentioned that they often don't find providers



or peers, particularly outside the military, who look like them or share their experiences. Microaggressions against veteran women farmers of color in rural, predominantly white communities, were also discussed.

The final theme associated with this headline has to do with the fact that for the interviewees, we also found there are specific barriers for veterans and veteran women. Largely, this has to do with accessing resources and navigating complex bureaucracies. For some, the “headache” associated with navigating veteran-specific resources can feel like more trouble than it is worth. For those women who have experienced military sexual trauma, they may also feel a sense of institutional betrayal at the hands of veteran-serving institutions that they feel did not protect them from trauma or associated aftermath.

Outreach to veterans and carefully curated spaces for education and networking are important.

Respondents offered a variety of input on the type of program they want and the challenges we might confront in our efforts to conduct outreach and engage with veteran women. In particular, technical assistance providers reflected on the challenges and opportunities of conducting outreach with veteran women in the Pacific Northwest. Based on these conversations, we anticipate that outreach will be a challenge for several reasons. First, veteran women are a small part of the total population, and those interested in agriculture are an even smaller portion of the population. Second, finding veteran women who want to work in this space will be difficult, coupled with the fact that not all veteran women identify heavily with their veteran status and thus may not see themselves in a veteran-focused outreach effort. Finally, the experience with institutional betrayal among women who have experienced military sexual trauma or other

harms by veteran-serving institutions means they may not feel safe or inspired to navigate those institutions to access support for their farm/business. Even for those who may not have had negative experiences, many cite the bureaucratic red tape in U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and other government programs to be a disincentive for participation.

Despite these challenges, there appeared to be consensus and enthusiasm regarding the importance of reaching veteran women, particularly through the relational approach that Women for the Land brings. There was a certain level of enthusiasm and excitement about this work even when confronted with the challenges. To this end, we highlight two major themes associated with the need to create carefully curated spaces that appeal to veteran women (*Table 4*).

TABLE 4: SYNTHESIS DATA SUPPORTING THE HEADLINE “OUTREACH TO VETERANS AND CAREFULLY CURATED SPACES FOR EDUCATION AND NETWORKING ARE IMPORTANT”

THEME	CORE SENTIMENTS	DESCRIPTIVE QUOTE
Women-centered spaces are critical	Mixed responses, some folks really value veteran-only spaces, not everyone	“ I think it’s absolutely important to have women veteran-only spaces So I have found that on the veteran side of the house, it’s really important to have those women veteran-centric systems in place just for the camaraderie, just for that communication, the ability to dialogue, and understand each other, I think that’s first and foremost. And then extend it to other opportunities.” — VETERAN AND VET TA
	Most see the value of women-only spaces	“ I think a veteran-only [space] would be very limiting for women. I think a lot of that is because I know that as women when we band together we are much stronger and smarter and I definitely think we’re superior in a lot of ways. So I wouldn’t want to limit it to just veterans. I think that I could gain a lot of knowledge and resources from an established woman that’s already farming that did not serve.” — VETERAN
Foster community connections and resource sharing	Mentoring and networking are big needs	“ There is a great need to have a space that you continually come back to, and having a space where maybe it doesn’t have to be an event, but you could just drop in . . . going back to the resource center, just like veteran students could just come and hang out on our couches And that was really important for people to have a space they felt like they belonged in and then bringing it to veterans, farmers, that’s even a smaller portion of the population and being able to have speed sharing events . . . like at the end of the season having a Harvest Dinner where you come together and you share your bounty and having those . . . safe circles, where it’s just women, it’s just women farmers. I think that would be really valuable to have in the area.” — VETERAN
	Curated resources for identities and varied needs	“ There’s a lot of information. It would be great if it was streamlined in a way of, this is step one, this is step two, this is step three. It’s kind of like that but . . . then a lot of programs offer a lot of the same thing, but . . . this is basically tailored for me, a woman, a veteran, a woman of color, all of those things” — VETERAN

The first theme is the need to focus on and create women-centered spaces. This is particularly important for interviewees who largely emphasized the need for *women-only* spaces in contrast with varying perspectives on whether *veteran women-only* spaces were necessary. We did hear some divergent preferences in this regard. There does appear to be evidence of two relationships: 1) those with a stronger veteran identity or combat experience are more interested in veteran-only spaces, and 2) women desiring a safe learning environment, either free of misogyny or (military) sexual trauma triggers, want women-only spaces. Some interviewees felt strongly that women-only and veteran women-only spaces were needed, although some were open to mixed groups with regard to veteran status and/or gender.

Individual sentiments associated with this seem to connect, at least in part, to their experience within the military (e.g., those who have experienced combat were more interested in veteran-only spaces). Largely, there was more agreement on the need for women-only spaces versus women veteran-only spaces, with many expressing the fact that a veteran-only space in agriculture might be too limiting. Still, others reflected on just how important that shared experience of being a veteran was. Creating opportunities for women-only AND veteran women-only spaces seems important in conducting outreach and creating these spaces for education.

The final theme is about the need for building trust and fostering a connected network. We found



that among those people we talked to, creating opportunities to connect to one another and find mentors/mentees/collaborators, with a particular focus on addressing the unique and intersectional needs of veteran women, was a high priority. This desire for more network connections was a strong theme. Many gave examples of organically building their own networks to get more support from other veterans and other women farmers, but most expressed a desire for more connection.

Interviewees expressed a desire to develop support for veterans in both navigating and curating resources to meet their unique needs/interests/identities. Based on our interviews, there was no existing set of resources identified that focused explicitly on veteran women in agriculture and their particular set of needs. Across the board, interviewees were hungry for that kind of resource and excited about the potential for building capacity for that within the region.

Recommendations

The findings from this study highlight a diverse set of needs, challenges, and opportunities to better serve veteran women who are engaging with agricultural pursuits. Our findings highlight a number of tangible recommendations that could support programming, outreach, and engagement with veteran women. These recommendations were informed by our regional research in the Pacific Northwest, and yet they are likely universal. Employing new ways of working with this audience may enable our community of practice to more meaningfully meet the needs of veteran women in agriculture. We have laid out the following 11 recommendations, grounded in findings outlined in the sections above:

1. **Be explicit** about what the program is offering—content and process-wise—so veteran women will be motivated to engage, know what they are signing up for, and have meaningful experiences that are a good fit.
2. **Provide a mix** of hands-on training on the technical aspects of farming/agriculture with virtual and/or classroom content focused on the business side of the profession.
3. Veteran women living with **significant trauma and/or disabilities** will need tailored programs that address trauma specifically designed for their recovery. While not being designed exclusively for trauma, these spaces for veteran women should be **trauma informed**, with facilitators ready to deal proactively with trauma that might emerge within the context of the group.
4. **Securing financing and obtaining usable land** are significant barriers across subgroups, so programming to support these aspects of farming, with emphasis on resources specifically for veterans, would likely be useful to beginning farmers.



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5. Veteran women farmers who identify as **People of Color are interested in programs and providers who match their lived experiences.** Consider offering an affinity group and/or networking opportunities for POC or for other essential identities that are important.
6. Agricultural service provider organizations, particularly those seeking to engage with women, veterans, and others who are historically underserved, **should invest in recruiting, training, and retaining staff who share these identities.** For all staff, cultural competency training should be available/required for those working with these audiences.
7. Support **veteran farmers in navigating systems** to enable their success. Consider developing a buddy system to help people apply for loans or attend workshops in spaces that are unfamiliar or for those with which they had bad experiences with in the past. TA providers should **become more familiar with existing resources** to enable them to more successfully support veteran women in navigating existing resources.
8. Veteran women interested in agriculture are hard to find, which means we need to **get creative with outreach strategies and approaches.** Consider the challenge of finding veteran women in traditional veteran spaces and look to do outreach in places that activate the diversity of identities that veteran women have.
9. Don't assume that all veteran women will feel welcome or safe at events specifically marketed for veterans. Consider **activating the intersectional identities among potential participants** through a diversified approach to outreach messaging.
10. Veteran-facing resources and networks already exist to support veterans in agriculture, therefore **emphasizing and building on existing and trusted networks** will be important. Develop resources that connect to, augment, and reinforce some of the existing networks (eg., Farmer Veteran Coalition state chapters) and resources (e.g., state-level Department of Veteran Affairs) that are already doing the work of connecting veterans with relevant resources.
11. Design outreach and programming that is **iterative and responsive to the needs of veteran women.** "Be willing to build the plane as you fly it," in order to be more responsive to the needs of the veteran women who show up to programming.

Final Reflections

Women are growing in prominence in agriculture, and we know they are critical to the success of meeting agriculture's lofty goals of feeding people, sustaining rural and urban communities, and stewarding agricultural lands. We know farmers are part of the solution to many crises, from tackling food insecurity to sequestering carbon to mitigating climate change. Veteran women bring a unique skill set and, for many, a direct need for healing and connection to the field of agriculture. Many public and private institutions may not have served this audience adequately in the past. It is our hope that this report will enable the community of practice engaged with this audience to better serve veteran women in agriculture, both here in the Pacific Northwest and beyond.

This study would not have been possible without time and input from the 23 resource providers and veterans who joined the interviews. Additional input was gathered from AFT's Veteran Woman for the Land Advisory Committee and other regional partners. We appreciate the time and

input from these partners in developing a resource that we hope helps the broader community of practice in meeting the needs of veteran women in agriculture.

As with any needs assessment, we realize that it is always desirable to have more data and input from a larger sample of the population of interest. Given that we know veteran women have a diverse set of experiences, needs, identities, and challenges, we could always benefit from more conversations. However, we were limited by both time and budget from carrying out additional interviews. We hope this report acts as a launchpad for more work and research in this space. It is clear not enough is known about veteran women who are interested in or actively farming. Building more research that would guide our programming with this audience seems important and clearly work that is incomplete. This report has served a very clear purpose in informing our regional programming with veteran women in agriculture, and yet we hope that the research will inform other work with veteran women across the country.



A NOTE ABOUT OUR METHODS

All interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom and transcribed using [Otter.ai](#) software. Once transcribed, our research team developed a deductive codebook based on the lines of questioning in the interviews. In total, the codebook included 26 different codes for veteran women and 27 codes for technical assistance (TA) providers. All coding was completed in Dedoose software. Two members of the Insight for Action consultant team supporting the project independently coded veteran and TA provider interviews and then engaged in inter-rater reliability sessions. Once they reached 80% congruence, the remaining interviews were coded independently. Text units assigned to each code were then exported into Excel files and analyzed for salient themes.

Partners



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Contact Information

For more information about the programmatic work being done, please contact **Chantel Welch**, Pacific Northwest Project Manager, at cwelch@farmland.org or (360) 726-2676. Check our project website for updates: farmland.org/project/veteran-women-for-the-land-ranchers-farmers-pacific-northwest or more information about our Women for the Land program, head to: farmland.org/women.

A NOTE ABOUT PHOTOS

The majority of photos shared in this document are taken from Women for the Land events and Learning Circles. Some were professionally taken (thank you to Rebecca Drobis, LLC; Shawn Linehan; and Flickr) while some were taken by our team at events. We cannot presume that anyone in the photos necessarily identifies as a veteran or as a woman but we feel these images evoke the community we are working with and represent the kinds of outreach and events we host here at AFT.



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