

Finding Roots: Asian American Farmers in Contemporary America

Gabrielle Lee

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Interview conducted by Katelyn Reuther

Gaby Lee is the founder and owner of Lunaria Flower Farm in Pescadero, California.

This was a remote interview conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Gaby Lee joined the interview from Pescadero, California, and Katie Reuther joined from Boston, Massachusetts.

Interview Log

00:00:00 Introductions

00:00:31 Gaby's parents, both from Hong Kong, immigrated to Canada before making their way to the San Francisco Bay Area where Gaby grew up. Growing up, a lot of Gaby's life revolved around food. She was fortunate to be raised with a lot of Chinese food. Her dad is a great cook, and she also had a Chinese caretaker who cooked Chinese food for them. The caretaker would take Gaby with her to Chinatown to go grocery shopping. Gaby recalls watching her select different fruits, vegetables, and live fish, and says these experiences made a big impression.

Gaby didn't realize she missed Chinese food until she went to college. She remembers going to Chinese school on Saturday mornings in Oakland Chinatown and getting dim sum afterwards. She was sick of it at the time, but as soon as she went to school where there was very little Chinese food around, she missed the flavors.

Gaby was also raised around Chinese medicine. Although it wasn't a dominant part of her childhood, she was definitely exposed to it. She played soccer growing up, and she remembers her parents taking her to a Chinese medicine doctor after she sprained her ankle. He would mash a number of ingredients together to make a poultice for her ankle. Sometimes she would also be made to drink bitter teas. Now, Gaby wishes she knew what all of the plants were.

When she was in high school, Gaby's parents also became interested in *qi gong* and practiced energy healing. They didn't try to get her into it, but she was exposed to it. She had a basic understanding of *qi* and energy and how it moves

through our bodies. It took time to find her own way into it and incorporate it into her life philosophy and the way she interacts with the world.

00:05:27 Four or five years ago, Gaby started learning about herbalism. While working on farms, some of her colleagues had an interest in herbs, making their own medicine, and the practices of folk medicine. She started looking out for that information and learning more through friends. Gaby also began to explore basic ways to boost her immune system and improve her sleep.

Learning more about growing plants and being exposed to a lot of different kinds of plants on farms made her interested in their many different uses. She found it cool that people had been using plants for so long as natural remedies, and she liked the idea of not needing to be reliant on a more traditional medicinal system. Instead, she liked the idea of having relationships with plants over time and using them for more long-term health benefits.

As Gaby was learning about more western herbs, she began learning a little bit about Chinese herbs, too. She realized she didn't know anything about Chinese herbs or Chinese medicine. She slowly started to put the pieces together in terms of her exposure to Chinese herbs as a kid and wanting to learn more about an entire modality and philosophy she had no knowledge of. Because there is a lot of overlap, she started to make connections between herbs she learned about in a western context and how they are also used in Chinese medicine.

00:09:23 Gaby's interest in farming started when she was in college. Growing up, she was interested in cooking and food, and she cooked a lot from a young age. She went to college in Vermont, but she didn't really know anything about Vermont, or about farms. Even though she grew up in California, she was still very much a city kid. Despite having some knowledge about farms because of her exposure to farmers markets in California, she didn't really consider where or how food was actually grown.

Gaby slowly became interested in farming while attending school in Vermont. She had some friends who grew up in more rural areas, and they started telling her about how food is actually grown. She also had many opportunities to visit farms through her college's connections to Vermont's strong local food system.

In addition, a friend in college introduced Gaby to urban farming. She did her first farming internship at City Slicker Farms in West Oakland. That was the first time she learned how to start seeds and pick vegetables. It snowballed from there. She loved being outside, working with her hands, and seeing things grow from start to finish. She was amazed by the process of starting something from seed and watching it become food you can eat. She became consumed by that and wanted

to continue watching things grow and using her hands and body. Coming out of school, Gaby knew she didn't want to do an office job and that she wanted to work in the food system. She decided to try a full year of farming first, with the hope that it would give her perspective into what part of the food system she wanted to go into next.

Somehow, farming stuck. While part of her wanted to do urban city life, she loved being outside and all of the different aspects of farming. She did some vegetable farming, but also worked with animals before finding her way to flowers and herbs.

00:14:13 After graduating from college, Gaby worked at Pie Ranch, a nonprofit farm in Pescadero, California, that focuses on youth education and farmer training. She did their nine-month apprenticeship. They grew vegetables for a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), had animals (pigs, chickens, goats, cows), grew flowers, and did youth education. School groups would come and work in the field with them. They also had a farmstand and gained exposure to marketing and sales that way. It was a great experience, because it was a little bit of everything. She had the chance to try a lot of different things, which helped her see what area of farming she might want to go into.

One of her main takeaways is that although youth education is important, she's not the one to be educating. She learned so much about farming, and it was great to see a full season from start to finish.

00:16:05 From there, Gaby became a personal farmer for a family in Los Gatos. She went from being an apprentice doing her first year of farming to managing a small operation herself. They grew vegetables in raised beds and had goats and chickens. She processed the dairy into butter and cheese and helped with some of the fruit picking on the orchard.

That was a great way for her to start working on her own. She had a manager who helped out with a lot of things, but there was a lot of learning on the go, figuring things out, Googling, and trial and error. Because it was a smaller, private operation, she wasn't selling anything, which gave her a lot more room to experiment and make mistakes. This experience empowered her and allowed her to be more comfortable with trial and error. There are so many unknowns in everything you do in farming, and you have to have faith that things will work out. Even when things don't happen exactly the way you want, you have to go from there and adapt. That position was important for Gaby to become comfortable with the uncertainty.

00:18:21 Gaby wasn't planning on looking for that type of role. She was originally interested in the position they were offering as a weekend goat milker. After Pie Ranch, she thought she might want to transition into an office job and stop farming for a little bit. Although Gaby has always loved farming, she has never really been sure about doing it long term. It's not the most secure job to have, and you don't make a lot of money doing it.

When trying to figure out her next steps, she was looking for office jobs and found the weekend milking position. She thought it would be a great opportunity to have some farm time while still looking for more of an urban city job. When she went to the interview, they presented her with the full-time managerial position. It felt like an opportunity she didn't want to turn down, so she took it.

00:20:17 After those two years of farming, she left farming to work for an organic produce distributor as a produce buyer. That was her compromise. She was trying an office job in San Francisco, but it was still in the food system supporting and working with farmers. It was important for her to continue working with farmers and to support small, local agriculture, while also trying out a new set of skills in a new environment.

This job was a great experience, and it helped her with her own farm. She gained a greater understanding of the bigger logistical aspects of the food system, in terms of distribution and the relationships between growers, sellers, and buyers. However, office life and commuting didn't serve Gaby well, and after a year and a half of working in that office, she decided to go back to farming.

Working at the distributor made Gaby realize how hard it is for vegetable farmers to distinguish themselves. Seeing the business side of things, Gaby realized how much competition there was. Everyone was growing the same thing, which drops the prices. As a buyer, it was hard to choose who to buy from, because everything was of good quality.

She knew she didn't want to go back into vegetable farming after seeing the low margins. One thing she remembered and held on to from her time at Pie Ranch was that flowers have one of the highest profit margins of any crop. They're considered more of a luxury item, and there's a lot of potential for value-added products such as bouquets and arrangements. Gaby saw greater potential for it to be a profitable and viable business. She also wanted to grow something different and new. She had a lot of experience growing vegetables and working with animals, but she knew there was a lot to learn with flowers. She has always been attracted to the beauty and variety of flowers, and she had been doing some floral design on her own. She was able to work at a flower farm in the area for two seasons.

00:24:35 The farm Gaby was working at focused on growing flowers for weddings. Weddings are a big part of the flower industry, because it gives you a lot of potential for adding value. It's a full service, and designing and installing the flowers tends to be a way for flower farms to make more money. Gaby knew she wasn't interested in weddings, so she thought about how to grow flowers for a different purpose. She says weddings are a one-day event, and all of the work of growing and designing the flowers turns into a one-day experience for a limited number of people.

The other challenging part about growing fresh flowers is that the window for harvesting them is very limited. You want to harvest them at just the right time so that they will last longer for customers. Once you harvest them, they go straight into the cooler, and the window to sell them from there is also very narrow. To reduce that stress of having to sell in a time-sensitive way, Gaby thought about how to incorporate drying flowers and making wreaths into her business model. She was also thinking a lot about herbs and how they overlapped with flowers. She wanted to focus in on that as a way to take her skills as a flower farmer and apply them to growing herbs.

An opportunity came up for her to farm with some friends in Pescadero where she had farmed before. Pie Ranch started an incubator farmer program after coming into a plot of land. They were trying to create opportunities for new farmers, especially people of color and women, to access land and start a farm business under an incubator program with low overhead (low land rate and access to infrastructure and tractors).

Some of Gaby's friends from 2015 had started farming at this incubator farm already, and she had been in conversation with them for a while about how they could collaborate. The opportunity presented itself to start her own business and work with her friends at their already-established vegetable farm, Brisa De Año Ranch. It would be a collaboration where she could start her own farm but not be doing everything completely on her own. She was excited about the opportunity to collaborate, work with other people, and be back in the same area where she started farming.

Once she was clear about her idea and business model for the farm, she wanted to make sure she was choosing a niche market. She knew that dried flowers were becoming increasingly popular, and there would be a lot of interest. Gaby also spoke to her herbal medicine teacher about how interested people were in buying locally and sustainably grown herbs, and she knew that would be a good market, too. Everything came together with the opportunity for land, to work with her

friends and collaborate, and to grow for a specific market, leading Gaby to start her farm in 2020.

00:30:42 Gaby was nervous about the business side of things, because that was the part she had the least amount of experience with. In terms of actually farming and growing things, she had confidence she could do that. There were a few things she lined up in order to feel comfortable starting her own farm. The first was the collaboration with her friends at Brisa Ranch. Specifically, having their support around doing deliveries together was really helpful. It takes a lot of time to do deliveries, and in the middle of the season, the idea of spending any time away from your farm to do deliveries is very stressful. They also generously offered to share customers with her and give her access to some of their sales outlets, including their CSA (Community Supported Agriculture).

For a winter, Gaby also ended up working for another produce distributor as a buyer. Through that established relationship, she knew she could sell through that distributor as well. Once she secured a few sales outlets and felt confident she could sell what she was going to grow, she felt more confident starting the business.

00:33:22 Gaby describes the process of starting her own farming business. She says it has been challenging in many ways. Housing was a difficult part of her first year of farming. Having a farm and being a farmer is not just a job. Your entire lifestyle revolves around the farm. She didn't have farm housing until the beginning or middle of the summer (2020). Not having that stability was an ongoing challenge, and it affected the farm.

Setting up infrastructure was also difficult, because Gaby hadn't grown herbs before. She felt confident growing them because she decided only to grow herbs that are flowers, but harvesting flowers for medicinal use is very different than harvesting for cut flowers. For the post-harvest handling of the herbs, she learned as she went. She had to build a drying wrack for the herbs and learn about the intricacies of drying and storing them. She didn't have a lot of resources or mentors, because there aren't that many people growing Chinese herbs, or even herbs in general. Instead, Gaby had to try new things and reference books where she could.

Finding other sales outlets was also a challenge. Through the distributor she was working with, she had outlets for the cut flowers, but it was an ongoing process having to create her own networks of herbalists for selling the herbs. She had a few herbalist friends who supported her in the beginning and tried to help get the word out about her herbs. Lastly, Gaby found it challenging to manage the computer work while also managing the field work. She had never used

QuickBooks before, and she had to figure stuff like that out throughout the season.

00:37:22 Gaby has had a lot of support from friends she has worked with. She has been lucky to meet many amazing people. Some of the other apprentices at Pie Ranch have been huge sources of support for her, including the three people who work at Brisa Ranch. They're all incredibly helpful in a number of ways. Gaby's friend, Kellee Matsushita, is also an Asian American farmer and has a lot of flower experience. She is one of Gaby's go-to people to ask for help, from harvesting new types of flowers to designing bouquets. The owner of the flower farm Gaby worked on, Joanna Letz, taught Gaby a lot about growing flowers and managing a flower business. She also learned a lot about growing and using herbs through classes with Maya Blow at Soul Flower Farm in El Sobrante. Maya incorporates spirituality into the way she farms and works with plants, which was important for Gaby to think about putting the land first in everything she does.

00:40:05 When Gaby was getting more into farming, she worked with Kellee and knew of a few other farms with Asian American farmers. It wasn't until about two years ago that there became a group of Asian American farmers, and there was more representation. Gaby was very aware that there weren't very many Asian American farmers. It was obvious from the time she started farming that it is very white-dominated in terms of land and farm owners. In the last few years, Gaby started to feel like there were more Asian American people farming.

Since then, it's been a huge support to have other Asian American farmers. There are many challenges when you want to grow Asian crops, including limited access to resources. Having a network now that wasn't around when she first started farming has been really uplifting. Through Kellee, Gaby met Scott Chang-Fleeman, owner of Shao Shan Farm in Bolinas, and they started partnering together on a few things. Gaby put in some perennial herbs at his farm, including goji berries and chrysanthemum flowers for tea. It's important for them to be able to support each other, work together, and collaborate. Scott is growing vegetables but was interested in having herbs on his farm, and Gaby wanted to grow perennials but didn't have long-term land security where she's growing. Scott offered to let Gaby put in some plants that she knew could stay there long-term. Having those relationships now is super helpful and important.

00:43:15 Having people who knew about plants and varieties other than the typical western varieties was critical for Gaby. It opened up the possibility of growing Chinese vegetables, which wasn't something she had seen before. In anything you do, knowing that you have the support of like-minded people you really care about goes a long way in knowing that someone has your back. Being able to call a friend to ask for help when she is overloaded during harvest time is a huge thing.

Knowing that she's not alone and that people will help her when she needs it has been really important.

00:44:58 Gaby says there are a lot of different priorities when deciding what to grow on her farm. For the cut flowers, she considers what can grow on the land, in addition to the climate and needs of the soil. There's also the financial and economic side of things, in terms of thinking about what will actually make her money and what will keep her business afloat. Gaby has always been realistic about the financial sustainability of an operation. There's no point in starting a farm if you're going to be losing money the whole time. You're not doing a service to yourself, to the land, or to your customers.

Gaby has always thought long-term about financial stability, which is where the cut flowers come into play. They offer a higher profit margin, and relatively speaking, they're easier to harvest and sell because she has a secure sales outlet. That has been the most stable money maker for her. Dahlias are one of Gaby's favorite flowers, because there's a lot of variety in their form, shape, and color. She grew a lot of the dried flowers knowing that she would be making wreaths and dried arrangements. With dried flowers, she really likes textural elements, so she thinks about the colors and textures that she likes and that go well together.

In terms of the medicinal herbs, she focused on flowers that are herbs with medicinal properties. Lately, she has been thinking a lot about her community's health needs. Even before the pandemic, she was thinking a lot about our lungs, specifically in the context of wildfire season in California. With long periods of wildfire smoke in the state, Gaby thought about having herbs that support lung health and strength. She also thought about tea. Without any herbalist training herself, she knew she wasn't going to make medicine products that she would sell to people. She also knew that in addition to selling to herbalists, she wanted to sell to the general public. Because she felt that the easiest entryway into medicinal herbs is through tea, Gaby wanted herbs that were tasty for tea and could be used on their own without any processing.

Thinking about a tea that was suitable for the land and familiar to customers, she decided on chrysanthemum. Gaby grew up drinking chrysanthemum tea, and she loved it. There are a lot of questionable growing practices with Chinese herbs, especially those that come from China, so it was important for her to grow fresh, local, sustainably grown Chinese herbs. Finding what would grow well and what people would want to drink as tea were her main considerations for choosing herbs.

00:51:09 Acquiring the knowledge to grow these plants is one of the most challenging parts of growing Chinese herbs. There are very few people doing it domestically,

and from Gaby's experience, the knowledge is very consolidated among mostly white people.

One thing Gaby didn't know about medicinal herbs before, and has mostly encountered with Chinese herbs, is that the germplasm needs to be very specific if you're using them medicinally. You can't just grow any chrysanthemum. It has to be derived from an original source of chrysanthemum that has been identified as a medicinal plant.

Gaby didn't know that the germplasm was so important. When she first started seeking out some of these plants, there were very few places to get them, and the plants were extremely expensive. One chrysanthemum plant costs about fifteen dollars if you order it online, and she has two hundred plants right now.

There is a Chinese medicine network forming, and they're trying to encourage growers to produce more Chinese medicinal herbs organically and sustainably in the U.S. Gaby was connected with someone in that group who offered her a work exchange in return for access to some of the plants. For the chrysanthemum in particular, you divide the roots or take cuttings. They don't come from seeds, so you need to find someone who has the plant and replicate it off the original. She was lucky to get access to those plants. Otherwise, she would have to spend thousands of dollars getting them.

Figuring out where to access these plants has been an ongoing, uphill battle. It's a balance, because there are some places that will only buy your herbs if they have the original germplasm. In order for her to get that, she needs to buy extremely expensive seeds. She doesn't want to get trapped in that system of having to rely on seed companies to get those plants. People are trying to spread the knowledge, but she's very aware of the fact that it's a self-selecting group, and that in order to have access, it's still very expensive.

00:55:13 Gabby wants to sell to other Asian American herbalists, because there are few people working with herbs who are Asian American. She didn't have any knowledge of the field of acupuncture and Chinese medicine herbalists before starting the farm, and she quickly learned that very few acupuncturists in America are Asian American or of Asian descent. While looking for acupuncturists in the Bay Area through social media, she discovered that most of them were white.

With the uprisings around George Floyd's death and the ongoing anti-Asian sentiment around COVID, Gaby found that the overt racism in the field of acupuncture was becoming increasingly contentious. For example, there was a petition to remove the word "oriental" from a lot of acupuncture schools. Gaby couldn't believe that it hadn't been done sooner. It has been interesting for her to

get into. She is an Asian American growing herbs, but the field of people she wants to sell to are predominantly white. Seeking out other Asian Americans who work with herbs from an herbalist/acupuncturist perspective has been really important for Gaby.

- 00:57:34 Last year, Gaby ended up doing a lot of public pop-ups to sell the dried flowers, some fresh cut flowers, and herbs for tea. She primarily did marketing through Instagram, so that was how people were finding her. It was great to be able to connect with people that way and have some face-to-face interaction with her customers. In addition to selling tea packs that were packed for individual use, she also offered herbs in bulk.
- 00:58:23 Gaby has gotten to connect with a lot of Asian American people through her farm and products. She has received many messages from other Asian Americans who want to connect more with herbs and are looking for products like hers. It has been very validating and reaffirming for her to be able to provide a connection for others who want to work with herbs and have their own childhood memories of chrysanthemum tea. There are many people out there wanting that connection to their ancestral plants. That's one of Gaby's main reasons for wanting to continue growing Chinese herbs. She has a lot of younger customers around her age, and they are starting to discover dried flowers. For older generations, dried flowers became antiquated, tacky, and cheesy, but the younger generations are rediscovering them.
- 1:00:13 While there haven't been any particularly memorable interactions with customers, Gaby mentions the general sentiment of connection to memory around these herbs and the interest in wanting to learn more. She gets a lot of messages from people wanting to learn more from her about Chinese herbs. However, Gaby notes that she is also still learning and would like to learn more with her customers. It's exciting for her to know that there are other people who are interested. She has one customer who is a doula and is starting a collective around Asian American birth workers and doulas to provide resources for Asian mothers through their pregnancies and births. This is another example of how much herbs can support us through important life moments and transitions. Gaby has been learning more about how herbs can be used for infants and babies.
- 1:02:05 Gaby loves drinking the tea that she grows. It's incredible to be able to use something that she grows, even when it was vegetables. It feels nourishing to know that you know where the plants came from, and you feel one hundred percent confident in their quality. The first time she drank her chrysanthemum tea, she says she had never had such fresh tea before. There are many medicinal benefits of chrysanthemum, including for the eyes and detoxification of the liver.

Most days, she ends the day with a cup of tea. It feels incredible to drink tea made from flowers that she grew.

When Gaby is going through the motions of farming, she thinks a lot about all of the people who did it before her. As she's doing the motions, she can feel the other people for generations who also did those motions. The first few times Gaby harvested chrysanthemum, she could feel that people for generations before her had been picking it. Knowing that it was the same actions and that she could continue bringing that into the world was really significant for her.

1:04:16 Gaby thinks her parents were very confused for a long time about her decision to farm. It's not necessarily something that they identify with or fully understand. They both grew up in the city, and neither of them had relationships to farming or agriculture before. On her mom's side, Gaby's great-great-grandfather was a salt farmer, but there wasn't as much agriculture in more recent generations.

Despite their confusion about her decision, they're proud of how she has taken farming into her own hands and built something for herself. They're excited about Gaby growing Chinese herbs, because it gives them something else in common. She can talk to them about herbs that she's thinking of growing, and they have their own ideas and knowledge about what the herbs do. For Gaby, so much of what is cool about medicinal herbs and herbalism is that it's medicine and knowledge that has been passed down for generations, often through oral traditions.

There are a lot of folk stories around herbs, and Gaby enjoys being able to share that with her family. She can do online research about the herbs, but then her parents have their own version of how the herbs are used based on their experiences growing up. It's been cool to talk to them about it, but also to grow some of the herbs she grew up around, like goji berries. Growing up, they had broth soup after dinner, and she remembers squishing the seeds out of the goji berries in the soup. Being able to grow her own goji berries and share them with her parents is very significant.

1:06:49 Gaby's parents like the chrysanthemum tea. She recalls getting text messages from her mom about how her dad requested her tea when his throat was feeling scratchy. When she was growing vegetables, there were a lot of vegetables she would bring to her parents that they weren't very interested in. They didn't really want to eat kale or butternut squash, so it's cool to bring them things she knows they actually want.

1:07:50 All of Gaby's experiences have contributed in different ways. Leading up to starting her farm, she was dabbling in a lot of different things. At the end of every

season of farming, she wasn't sure if she wanted to keep going. Even though she thought about what she might want to do on her own farm, she wasn't building towards starting her own farm. When the opportunity did come for her to start the farm, she felt grateful that almost subconsciously, all of her experiences were able to meld together to support her in taking the next step toward her own farm.

Learning about the different types of farming (animals, vegetables, flowers) and working in an office all gave Gaby important knowledge and exposure. There wasn't necessarily one particular moment that led to her starting her own farm, but it was trusting that she was doing things that would eventually lead to her farm without knowing it. Part of what's so difficult about being on your own and starting your own farm and business is believing in yourself and trusting that you do know how to do it even though there are so many unknowns.

1:11:18 Gaby thought about her Asian American identity in farming from the beginning. Her parents encouraged her to think about growing Asian crops for the large population of Asian Americans in the San Francisco area. Because of this, she understood pretty early on that there was a huge demographic of people in that area willing to spend money on high-quality, organic, locally produced produce that isn't currently being grown. Since Gaby wasn't thinking about starting her own farm at the time, she didn't take the suggestion into serious consideration. Later, seeing how much competition there was for standard vegetables and knowing that she didn't want to participate in that moved Gaby in a different direction.

The last year of working with mostly white people growing Chinese herbs has definitely made Gaby realize how important it is for there to be more representation of Asian American farmers, especially ones growing Asian crops. There needs to be more Asian American farmers growing those herbs. It's not just about the plants and herbs themselves, but about the people and the connection to those plants. That's an important part of why Gaby is growing the herbs, and she doesn't think they can be separate. It was a valuable lesson for her to learn last year as she was working with these people and wanting to move ahead the agenda of getting more herbs grown domestically. Last year was a big push for her to identify more strongly as an Asian American grower and to recognize the importance of having other Asian American farmers.

1:15:27 Gaby says that being an Asian American farmer puts her at a disadvantage in some ways. First, she is a first-generation farmer, so she has no familial support around farming. There are other people whose families settled on land, have been farming for generations, and can offer support and training. Gaby's parents immigrated to the U.S., and she doesn't have a history of farming or any equipment and infrastructure that was handed down to her. For any first-

generation farmer, it's challenging to go up against people who have been farming forever. Being children of immigrants and not having any of that generational knowledge and wealth handed down is also difficult. Lastly, entering into any field that is so white-dominated is intimidating, and the support is not there in the same way that it exists for other farmers.

1:17:03 One of the biggest takeaways from Gaby's first year on her own farm was learning to let things go. At the beginning of the season, she was so focused on perfectionism and wanting to get the most out of every crop, she pushed herself really hard to harvest everything in order to maximize what she was getting out of the field. It was stressing her out more than anything else. Instead of harvesting and selling flowers that she could've moved right away, she spent time picking things and drying certain herbs that she wasn't selling. It took her a long time to realize that she needed to let go of the flowers that required a lot of time and weren't making her any money. She tried to focus on what she could get done in the moment and accept that she didn't need to maximize everything she was doing. Looking back, she says it was a very capitalist mindset. It was a big un-training process for her at the beginning of the season, but it ended up paying off a lot by the end of the season. She was able to prioritize and focus a lot more.

A wildfire hit Gaby's farm last August, which completely altered where she was going and what she was doing. She was really happy that she had already come to the realization of letting things go before the fire. Once it hit, there were many things out of her control, and she had no idea what to do.

1:20:07 Going forward, Gaby wants to be more organized with record keeping and tracking what she's doing. She tried to start doing that her first year, but after the fire, all of the record keeping and organizational stuff went out the window. That's a big focus for her in the upcoming season. This winter, she's trying to get ahead of it and have more things set up ahead of the growing season.

She also wants to grow more herbs in 2021, but it's a hard balance. The herbs are more time consuming for Gaby to grow and harvest, especially when she's drying them, and the price points are not nearly as high as they are for cut flowers. It's hard to balance wanting to grow more herbs with wanting to make sure she's economically viable. That's one area she's trying to tweak and work on this season.

1:22:07 On a broader scale across the food system, Gaby would like to see more farmers. She especially wants to see smaller farmers that are growing more diverse crops, including Asian crops, localizing in on their communities, and providing food to meet community needs. It's important for us to be supporting small farmers and taking away from the industrial food system. Growing food that is relevant to

people's cultures is also really important. There's a huge demand for it, and Gaby thinks it would be really beneficial to the food system.

1:22:37 Gaby advises other BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) who are trying to get into farming to find mentors that you want to learn from. Narrow in on what exactly you want to learn and grow. Because there are many different farms and things you can grow, it's helpful to find a speciality. The industrial food system has a pretty strong hold on growing mass-produced food, but what we really need is for people to grow more "specialty" things (foods that feel specialty to the widespread mass audience, but are very mainstream in certain cultural households).

Learning from other farmers and mentors is very beneficial, but there are a lot of people out there who have different styles of growing. Finding the right person for you is important. It's okay to take the time to learn. Gaby says she jumped into her farm very quickly because the opportunity came up, but there's still a lot she wishes she had learned beforehand. Now, she's learning it as she goes, and she's finding mentors who can help and support her. Having that support is really important.

1:25:57 End of interview