

# **Finding Roots: Asian American Farmers in Contemporary America**

**Mika Shibuya**

**April 11, 2021**

**Interview conducted by Katelyn Reuther**

Mika Shibuya is a co-owner and farmer at Rock Steady Farm in Millerton, New York.

This was a remote interview conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mika Shibuya joined the interview from Millerton, New York, and Katie Reuther joined from Boston, Massachusetts.

## **Interview Log**

00:00:00      Introductions

00:00:33      Mika grew up in Japan in a mixed race family. Her mom is a white American from Iowa and her dad is Japanese. They would have family dinners around the table, and her mom would make both Japanese and American food. Mika's grandparents lived in a small city a few hours away, and her family would go to visit them. She recalls her grandmother having a small patch of tomatoes between their house and the neighbor's house. They would go out and harvest the cherry tomatoes, and Mika distinctly remembers the specific smell of tomato plants that gets all over your hands. She is very fond of that smell, because it brings her back to those memories.

In her grandparents' front yard, there were deep cement tubs that you could fill with water. During the summer when they would visit, there would always be watermelon that had been bought for them to eat together. Mika and her brother were in charge of getting the watermelon in the water to stay cold. The water was ice cold, and they would be elbow-deep in it. That's a distinct memory Mika has of how they shared food with her grandparents and extended family on her father's side.

Because her Japanese language skills have always been limited, there was a language gap with her father's side of the family. She says she was able to connect with her grandparents as a kid over food. They would order food, and it would be delivered to their house in a heated container by a guy on a scooter. They would unpack and feast on stacks and stacks of food. That was always a fun part of visiting their family as a shy, awkward kid.

00:04:46 Mika didn't think about food as a way to connect with her grandparents growing up. She was pretty shy and introverted, so she would always be a little socially anxious. As she got older, she felt more and more self-conscious, but as a kid, that was always a fun thing they did together.

00:05:29 All of her life, Mika has loved eating. One of her teachers would always joke that every time she saw Mika, she was eating. Mika has always been a big eater, and the friends she gets along with the most like to eat. They bond with each other by going downtown and finding good, cheap places to eat. She didn't really have a relationship with farming growing up, because she was in an urban environment. They never had space to grow anything. That's also not something either of her parents had in their lives in a way that they would want to pass it on to her.

Mika always liked nature and the idea of having a green thumb. She remembers going on a school field trip to a farm where she dug up potatoes with the farmer. It was magical. She brought the potatoes home for dinner and was excited about the fact that she had harvested them herself. It's a very simple, basic experience, but she loved it.

00:07:29 Mika had that experience harvesting potatoes around second grade.

00:07:51 It wasn't until she was in college that she thought about farming. She used to go on day trips with her parents, and they would drive by farms. As an academically stressed high schooler, Mika thought the farm fields looked very relaxing. She says in reality, farming is very stressful.

Mika decided to study environmental studies in college, and she took a course called Food, Agriculture, and Development about the global food system and its issues. For one or two summers, she also WWOOFed (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms). It's an online database that connects people who want to work on farms with farm hosts. They typically exchange labor for room and board. It's hit or miss. Depending on what the set-up is, it can be kind of exploitative. That's how Mika got into farming. After graduating, she got her first job on a farm.

00:10:13 Both WWOOFing experiences were in the U.S. One was in New Jersey, and one was near Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. In Ithaca, Mika had a summer job on a small vegetable operation started by a young couple. She did a lot of independent work there.

The second WWOOFing experience she had was a little bit longer. It was the retirement project of an eccentric older woman that founded the Waldorf School across from the farm. Mika had a lot of independence there to learn. She was in charge of both milking the cow and of the cheese operation. She says it was cool

to have the opportunity to be in charge of something and teach herself how to do it. It felt very low-pressure, because it wasn't a production farm where there was an emphasis or need to make a profit.

00:12:14      Mika doesn't really remember how she chose those particular places to go WWOOFing, but says the locations were good. She was looking for farms near where she was, and those opportunities seemed appealing.

00:13:06      Going into those WWOOFing experiences, Mika was interested in farming as a career. It felt like an easy way for her to gain experience. Like with an unpaid internship, she could put it on her resume and learn things, too.

00:13:53      When Mika took that course in college about food, she was already interested in environmental studies, environmental justice, and social justice. Learning about the food system opened up farming as a way to bring those interests together. A lot of the things she was exposed to in that class through an academic lens, she has now experienced first-hand. Having been farming for a while, Mika now has a different perspective. Looking back on it, the things that come up for her now weren't at the top of her head in the class. It's hard to know how much she's imposing retrospectively, but some of the biggest issues were: the prevalence of farmer suicide; the debt cycle farmers fall into; and the way conventional farming has been exported globally at the expense of local people and local farmers.

That's something Mika thinks about a lot. As farmers, they all inherit that baggage and she wants to farm in a way that supports the health of farmers and farm workers. Food is an essential human need, but the people who grow food and work in other areas of the food service industry are severely undervalued, exploited, and expected to sacrifice their health. It's an illness of society that the people who grow food are doing so at the expense of their own health.

00:17:48      What made Mika want to start farming and why she wants to continue farming are different questions. She thinks back to the interview she had for her current job. Mika had an intense experience at the first for-profit production farm she worked at. That brought up a lot of questions for her around the sustainability of farm work; the bootstraps culture of overwork that exists on a lot of small farms; the way debt plays into that; and the way that can create toxic power dynamics. In many people's experiences, a lot of the harms of the conventional food system are reproduced on small farms.

Mika was telling that story in the interview as an explanation for why she wants to work at her current job at a queer cooperative farm. She remembers D, the person interviewing her, asked why, given all of those reasons farming is really

difficult, she would want to keep farming. She appreciates that they asked that question, because she learned what her answer was by giving it.

All of the experiences she had at that farm, which were very specific to certain things that happened on that farm, are also exacerbated by systemic things. The things that have been painful for Mika in her experience farming are also the reason to keep doing it. That's the repair. To Mika, farming is repair work. We need to repair our relationship with the land and the ways that we relate to the land and to labor in a very extractive way. Those are the ways to stay in it, because that illuminates the real work that needs to be done.

For Mika, the real work of farming isn't just growing food and feeding people, but having healthy relationships with her employers and co-workers and having them all be aware of not overworking themselves in service of farming in a capitalist food system. A lot of that also applies to work places that aren't farms. There are a lot of toxic work places out there in all industries, and a lot of it is really normalized. There's an expectation that this is what it is to be part of the labor force. Mika is trying to challenge that. She thinks those things tend to be more obvious in work that is very physical, or where burnout is mental, emotional, and also physical. The closer you work to raw resources, the more those things become apparent. However, it's relevant to anyone who has an employer.

00:23:17      Mika talks about her food and farming journey after college. The food course in college sparked her interest in farming, which led her to those two WWOOFing experiences. The second was immediately after graduating, and she was there for seven months. After that, she worked briefly as a cook at a farm and wilderness summer camp. From there, she got her first paid farming gig at the non-profit Veggielution Community Farm in San Jose, California.

Veggielution is a teaching farm, so they had programs, internships, and workshops that covered different aspects of farming. Mika worked there for three years managing their greenhouses. That's where she got her footing as a farmer. Working on a non-profit farm is a different experience than production farming. It was stressful at Veggielution, because the non-profit industrial complex also tends to overwork its employees in different ways. However, there was not the financial stress that she experienced at her first for-profit production farm.

After Veggielution, Mika started her first job on a production farm. The farmer took on a lot of debt up front to build infrastructure and set himself up for success, but that meant from the beginning, he owed a lot of money. Once Mika came on, it felt like there was an expansion mentality. To pay back those loans, the way to make the most money was to grow and sell as much food as possible to survive the week. Mika feels that the expansion happened before the capacity building. As a result, the farm owner was overworked, and they would typically work at least twelve hours a day. On big harvest days, they would work fourteen hours or more, from sunrise to sunset and often a few hours past sunset packing.

Early on, Mika felt very committed to the farm. She was all in, and in a way, she became addicted to the hustle of it. At the same time, she could see how this was going to lead to burnout for the farm owner. She was concerned about it as part of that work place's culture, and she wanted to bring it up as a point of concern. It's a hard thing to bring up and challenge, because there's a mentality that that's how it is and how it has to be. In some ways, there's truth to that. When you're a small farm competing with industrialized farms who are exploiting their farm workers in really intense ways, people expect cheap food. Food access is a really important thing, but so is farm owners making a profit and having financial stability and farm workers making a living wage and working reasonable hours. That's a conversation Mika wanted and tried to have, but it wasn't successful.

In response to the culture of that farm, Mika specifically wanted to come to a cooperative farm, a queer farm, and a farm that is run by women, non-binary people, and people of color. At the first production farm, it wasn't expected or welcomed to be talking about how systemic issues are impacting their experiences and the power dynamics in their work place. They were working within the system and trying to survive, but there was no room to question that or think about how to try and remake it in a more humane way.

At the farm Mika is on now, although they're a cooperative farm, they're still working within the larger system. They still have the same challenges, and Mika knew that coming in. However, in order to be able to see herself continuing to farm into the future, she wanted and needed a work place that not only allowed those conversations but welcomed, expected, and centered them as much as the work they do growing food.

00:34:34 Mika says her transition from the non-profit Veggielution to her first for-profit production farm was less intentional than her transition from the first production farm to her current farm. When she went into farming at Veggielution, Mika was trying to gain experience and liked that part of the farm's mission was food access and food justice. She didn't necessarily go there because she wanted to work at a non-profit.

Mika decided she wanted to make the transition to production farming, and despite it being pretty rocky, she's glad she did it. Non-profit farms and for-profit farms face different challenges, and even though her experience at the first production farm wasn't a positive one, it was very educational. She thinks non-profits can do a lot to challenge the food system, but if we're going to make real, lasting change, we need to change the food system in a way that actually makes farming as a business truly sustainable (environmentally, socially, mentally, and emotionally). That's not necessarily what she was thinking when she took the position at that production farm, but that's what came out of it.

00:37:20 Mika didn't have a community at the for-profit production farm in the same way she does at her current farm. That farm wasn't premised in the same way on shared values and shared politics as this one is. She was friends with her co-workers and was fond of both of her bosses. She really cared about them as people and when things hit the fan, she continued to care about them, but she couldn't support their actions. Once everything hit the fan in the way that it did, there was a lot of internal conflict. Depending on where each employee was on the hierarchy, they were having different experiences and views of what was happening.

Mika says race plays into that, too. She had two co-workers who were also people of color, and they worked with her through a lot of the more dramatic changes and power shifts that occurred. They shared more of Mika's experience of that farm and her politics, and they were able to talk about their views on what was happening. She generally found more solidarity with them than her white co-workers.

Mika and one of her co-workers both did farmers markets in the city on Sundays. They would drive up together, she would be dropped off at her farmers market, and then he would go on to his farmers market. On the one and a half to two hour drive to and from the farmers markets, they would talk about work and about the things happening there. On a weekly basis, they were able to have intense, honest conversations about the experience of working there.

Those are formative conversations, because Mika's co-worker talked a lot about cooperative farming and planted that idea in her head. As things were getting more challenging, it was part of her survival strategy to read, listen to, and pursue evidence of people doing things differently. With Abe and Hector, the other people of color on that farm, Mika could have those conversations and try to think outside of the food system as we know it. She credits where she is now today to those conversations with those people.

00:43:38 Mika talks about how her identity as an Asian American impacted her experiences on that farm. She doesn't think it's because she's Asian American per se, but she experienced being perceived as threatening when trying to make constructive critiques of things she saw happening. Those conversations were inherently risky to her because of the power dynamics. If she was a white person making those same criticisms, she probably would have been received in a similar way. Regardless of the specific racial dynamics of whoever is in that conversation, that's still a messed up work place culture.

That being said, that's also an experience of a lot of marginalized people trying to navigate and call out the ways in which they're experiencing oppression. As farm workers, Mika knows that they were all experiencing oppression in that work place. As it got increasingly worse, the farm owners were also experiencing oppression in the food system as small farmers. It wasn't accidental that the people of color sniffed out the messed up power dynamics sooner.

Mika tried to have conversations with a white co-worker about some of her concerns. He was often on the side of the farm owners and the managers. As things got worse and there was more division, he was more easily manipulated. His privilege as a white man worked against him, because he wasn't aware of how he was being oppressed and manipulated. In some ways, he was genuinely ignorant and cared about the farm and farm owners, but that's also not a pass. He shut Mika down when she tried to make critiques, and by not having the same awareness or being open to conversations about that, he was then protecting and perpetuating the oppressive power dynamics that were being set up by the farm owners. That's one way their experiences were very different, and race plays into that.

A lot of white men own and run farms, and they have a lot of people of color working for them who generally don't get a say in how the farm is operated. The farm owners are making money (or not) on the backs of their employees who are people of color. White people are responsible for being part of changing the food system, but they aren't and shouldn't be the leaders of that change. For the kind of change that Mika wants and needs to see in the food system, it can't be led by white men. In order to have people of color want to opt in to farming, it has to be different.

If the history of farming in the United States is white people exploiting people of color, then what's the appeal for people of color to start farming? There need to be more farms that are owned and run by people of color who are committed to doing justice work and reforming the food system. Being a person of color doesn't automatically mean that you're going to be a just employer. All of those things need to be happening at once.

00:52:38 At Veggielution, Mika was working with a lot of white people, but they had similar values and shared politics to some extent. There also wasn't the production pressure that creates power dynamics, which in turn brings the ways they have different experiences to light. It wasn't really until Mika was at the production farm that she was experiencing these things first-hand, and it felt like it was really in her face.

00:54:26 In her current situation, they are very much a mixed race farm. For Mika, that means they value, centralize, and invite conversations and self investigations about how these things show up on their farm and in their relationships with each other. That's part of the work they all do together. In order for Mika to feel safe as an Asian American farmer who has the values and experiences she has, it's important to have a work place culture where that's something they talk about. Also, when she or others do have concerns or critiques, she can trust them as a community to hold that and not immediately shut the conversation down.

Having had the experiences she's had, it's important for Mika to be somewhere she is thanked and celebrated for expressing her concerns, not shut down and perceived as a threat. Instead, she wants it to be perceived as a gift she's giving and as emotional labor she's doing to improve that work place and benefit others. It's important that they're making space in the work day for that emotional labor and that they're paying her for it. As a person of color, these are all important things for Mika to feel that it's a safe, welcoming place she wants to return to year after year and can invite new employees to with integrity.



00:58:33 Mika talks about what it's like to work on a cooperative farm and how it has influenced how she thinks about her work. Although it's a cooperative farm, she says in a lot of ways, that's more true in spirit than in reality. The only two members of the cooperative are also the founders of the business. In some ways, the rest of them are employees in a way that's similar to a more conventional work place. That being said, because they have the aspirations to be more truly cooperative as a structure, there is also the possibility for the rest of them to become worker-owners. Several people, including Mika, have been coming back year after year, so they are beginning that process this year. Hopefully, this will be the first cohort to make that transition.

In Mika's day-to-day experience, there's a lot of transparency around how decisions are made. The employees are consulted about a lot of things that they wouldn't necessarily be consulted about elsewhere. Of course, being consulted and having their ideas acted on are different things. It's imperfect, which is why it's important for them to be making that transition to hold themselves and each other accountable for the changes they want to make. Although it's not quite functioning as a cooperative, there's a culture there of a cooperative. It feels good that Maggie and D, the owners and operators of the farm, do sincerely welcome those conversations. Mika knows that the extent to which they're good employers is also because their employees are constantly pushing them to be better. They welcome that feedback, and they've learned a lot from their employees.

Becoming members gives workers even more leverage, and it puts Mika in a different position. Once she's on a different side of a power dynamic, how does she hold herself accountable to other people that are working with them? She says that's hopefully work she's already been doing in her first two years there.

1:04:11 Mika would like to stay at this farm longer term. She came wanting it to be a place she would want to stay into the future. She had a really good experience the first year, and she loves and cares for the people she works with and for. Things are hard sometimes, but it feels like there's space to navigate and work on the hard stuff. Conflict and hard conversations are welcome. It's a group of people she wants to commit to and work with in the long term. At the end of last year, it felt good for Mika to say yes to making the transition to becoming an owner, especially because she wasn't the only one saying yes. It would be very different if it was just her. It feels cool to make that transition with three of her co-workers. It's a three-year commitment to become a member of the cooperative.

1:06:44 One of the reasons Mika decided to work for a cooperative farm is because she doesn't want to start her own farm. She never had that desire. In the past, she wanted to be a solid, valued farm worker. She wanted to find the right farm and commit to being a reliable worker there. Mika doesn't think she's built for the kind of stress that owning a farm entails, and she doesn't think anyone is or should be built for it. It's not healthy for it to be just one person's job. It incentivizes that person to exploit others.

Mika doesn't want that kind of life. A cooperative farm feels a lot better for her, because she doesn't have to take that on. Hopefully as more people make that commitment, some of that stress becomes more evenly distributed. If they can all be carrying that, it's healthier emotionally for the people who are at the top, and the other workers can have agency within their work place. Mika's desire for a cooperative farm came from not wanting to be exploited again in the way that she was and wanting to work at a place where she can care for the people she's working for without it coming at her expense.

1:10:04 Mika talks more about how she sees and approaches her work now compared to when she first started farming. Now, she sees farming as a lot more political and explicitly political than she did when she started. She wants to do the work of farming as a relational and community-building endeavor and to farm in a way that facilitates healthy relationships and people meaningfully and deeply caring for each other and finding belonging.

In some ways, farming is an obvious way to do those things, because historically, people have farmed communally. There was a commons, not a competitive, profit-driven marketplace. In that way, it makes sense to look for that through farming, but in another way, those values are very foreign to what it means to run a business and have a bottom line. That's something they all navigate on a daily basis.

Mika sees her work as a farmer as repair work and healing work. She's trying to heal herself, her own relationship to farming, her relationship to her employees, our collective relationship to land, and relationships to race and interracial relationships. Because all of that is the history and damage we inherit, the work is to repair a lot of that. It has been a journey for Mika to realize that. She came into farming with certain values and politics, but it's really through the work of farming and experiences she's had that she now understands what it means to do that work.

1:14:37 Mika is still in the process of learning what it means to be someone with a mixed identity. She has baggage around that. When she was asked to do this interview, there was part of her that thought she wasn't Asian enough. It's something she's working on.

In her farming career, Mika hasn't really been in community with other Asian American farmers. She has tried to pursue it a little bit, but not aggressively. At the end of her first year at Rock Steady Farm, she found a farm in California she was interested in working on for the winter. The farm, Radical Family Farms, is run by a mixed race couple, and one of the partners is an Asian woman (Leslie Wiser). They grow a lot of Asian produce and sell to an Asian market. Mika wanted to be part of that community. She reached out to them, but winter is their off season, and they weren't looking to hire anyone. Mika thinks it's great they take that time to rest, because farmers don't rest enough. Because of the pandemic, she didn't end up going back to California this past winter, but she would like to find a way to build a relationship with them and have seasonal work on another farm for part of the winter.

It would be nice for Mika to have more of an Asian American farming community, because she doesn't have a lot of that in her life right now. There's a farm locally that is run by a Japanese woman Mika follows on Instagram, and she has thought about going to visit. Engaging with that community is something that feels good for Mika to lean into more going forward.

1:19:45 Mika talks about how the events of 2020 impacted her work and the ways in which her identity and work intersect. There's the pandemic, and then there's the Black Lives Matter movement, the racial justice protests, and the hate crimes against Asian Americans. The hate crimes against Asian Americans have been happening since before the pandemic, but the pandemic has increased them and also brought them more to the forefront. Those are all different things, but they're all very clearly related to each other.

When the recent attacks in Georgia happened, Mika was in Japan with her parents. CNN was on in the background, and she heard basic news coverage of what was happening. She had a physical reaction, but she also wanted to continue on with their night as normal. She didn't really engage with it until she came back to the U.S. and was in quarantine. Since she didn't want to listen to mainstream media coverage of it, she listened to one of her preferred news and politics podcasts. Mika says her reaction to the reporting on what happened was stronger than her reaction to what had actually happened.

She specifically points to the media and law enforcement officials saying it wasn't a hate crime, because the white guy who committed these acts said it wasn't. Mika has had conversations in her life with white men who think something isn't about race when it clearly is. What makes this guy who killed a bunch of people a reliable narrator?

She also mentions the narrative that he had a bad day, and he's a sex addict. Are we or are we not aware of the ways Asian women are sexualized by white men? To Mika, that's evidence there is a racial element to what happened. The reporting is tone deaf and gaslight-y, but it's also very familiar. When Black people, including Black children, are killed by the police, the media then conducts a character assassination of the victim. Even though there are racial differences in how those stories are told, it's still true that those stories are racialized in ways that benefit and protect the person who committed the act of violence. How many times do white men have a bad day, and people of color pay for it with their lives? That's how we talk about it, and it's hard to shift that narrative.

As an Asian American woman, Mika grew up in Japan at an international school where there were students from all over the world. When she came to college in the U.S., she immediately learned what it is to be a racialized person in the U.S. and how it's different than that experience in Japan. Part of the experience of being an Asian American woman in the U.S. is random white men coming up and telling Mika about how much they like Asian women, about their exploits with Asian women in Thailand, or that she's not Asian enough for them to be into her. Especially in urban environments, that's a reality of being an Asian American woman in the U.S.

Seeing what happened in Georgia and how the narrative around it is so blind to her daily experiences as an Asian American is brutal, but also not surprising. There always need to be more ongoing conversations. Mika says she is culpable in that, too. She's responsible for doing the work to stay informed and be engaged. It won't happen unless she does it.

1:30:22 Mika talks about what changes she would like to see take place on a broader scale across the food system. She wants to see more cooperative farms and more cooperation between farms. It's one thing to have a farm that is a co-op, and it's another thing to have an economy that is based more on cooperatives and resource and knowledge sharing between farms. Mika isn't sure what that looks like tangibly, but one thing COVID had the potential to do was produce more resilient local food systems. There was a little bit of that at the beginning when it became viscerally apparent that people needed food and a farmer to grow it and began signing up for CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture).

Mika would like to see more resources allocated to small farms. She thinks they aren't going to or can't wait for the government to do that for them. She also wants to see a food system that's more predicated on a commons and resource sharing than competition. She mentions reading an article that hit the nail on the head and brought up a lot of things that aren't talked about enough in the farming community or outside of it.

They used farmers markets as a case study, because farmers markets are infamously hard to make a profit off of unless you go to a huge market like Union Square in New York City. Time is spent harvesting the produce, transporting it to the farmers market, and setting up, only to make a few hundred dollars. The work hours needed to get to the market, staff it, and come back all must be compensated, too. A lot of farms do that and consumers like it, but it's not really financially sustainable. As farmers, you also have to pay in to be part of a farmers market.

Instead of that model, what if farmers pooled their resources and had a permanent building that's protected from the weather and is open competitive hours like a grocery store? Mika likes the idea of thinking outside the box in that kind of way about how we can work together instead of competing against each other. It's very difficult to survive as a small farm when the profit margins are what they are. Mika is interested in people who are finding those kinds of solutions.

2020 was a weird year for Mika. She responded to a lot of what was happening by isolating and not engaging as deeply with her work as a farmer in the ways she has in the past and the ways she has been talking about. She doesn't have her hand on that pulse as much right now, but she wants to put feelers out about how people are doing things. There's a project called Humble Hands Harvest, and it feels like they're trying to create something that looks more like a commons between farms. They were on Mika's radar last year, and she'd like to check out what they're doing. She also knows in the government's recent food bill, they were going to give money to Black farmers.

There isn't a way for it ever to be enough to make up for the history of slavery and all of the other ways in which Black farmers have had their land taken from them and been exploited. Mika wants to see more reparations and more resources being directed toward BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) farmers specifically, and small farmers in general, to make this more sustainable.

We all like organic food, but how much are we thinking about who grew that food and their quality of life? She wants there to be more of a conversation around farmers' quality of life and for there to be mental health services for farmers. Farmer suicide is a huge issue nationally and globally. The people who grow the food that's required for all of us to live are literally dying trying to do that. It says a lot about the food system and, as Mika has personally experienced, is really detrimental to both farm workers and farm owners. It needs to be something we're aware of and talk more about in the mainstream.

Part of having a CSA and trying to retain CSA members and keep them happy is education. There's a lot of education work that goes into the way they communicate with their CSA members. That's part of the work they do, and it's work that takes away from the work of being out in the field growing food. It's important to think about how they can be paid for the emotional and educational work they do, and how that work can be valued as much as the tangible stuff. It's all part of the cost of the food.

As much as things went wrong at her first production farm job and there were lines of communication that were completely closed, Mika heard through a co-worker that the farm owner mentioned he thought farming should be a public good. Mika was excited to hear that they were on the same page and wanted to talk to the farm owner about this politically radical idea. Everything that's happening on the farm, including hurting his employees and hurting himself by hurting his employees, is a case study for that fact. She wishes she was in the room to have that conversation with him.

Mika doesn't know what that would necessarily look like, but she thinks that's an intriguing idea. What if we funded farming like we funded other public goods? It is a public good. What if we valued it that way, and thus valued farmers and farm work in that way so it was less brutal? That conversation seems very far away, even for Mika. For someone who has been in this work and would love to see something like that happen, her imagination is very limited.

1:46:24 To other people of color who are trying to get into farming, Mika would say: know what you're getting into. Do your research on who you're working for. When you're in an interview, you're interviewing your employer. You should come into the interview with that attitude, and you should be asking them to demonstrate that they're worthy of having you on their team, that your labor is valuable, and that your emotional labor as a person of color is valuable. If you can't find an employer that will value it (and that is hard), you have to remind yourself of that every day. Find other people of color to be in community with.

1:49:11      End of interview