

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

**Gregory Witscher**

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**Interview conducted by Katelyn Reuther**

Gregory Witscher is the co-founder and co-owner of Understory Farm in Bridport, Vermont.

This was a remote interview conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Gregory Witscher joined the interview from Bridport, Vermont, and Katie Reuther joined from Chittenden, Vermont.

## **Interview Log**

- 00:00:00      Introductions
- 00:00:38      Gregory says his family's culture around food was American. It was fast food, frozen food, and an all-American processed food diet. His close family ate frozen and fast food, but every Sunday, they would eat pretty traditional Japanese food at his grandmother's house. It was two different worlds.
- 00:01:44      It felt very normal for Gregory to have such different food worlds. At home, they ate one thing, and at grandma's, they always ate a different thing. It didn't feel strange until friends would go with them to his grandma's house and question what they were eating. Gregory is thankful that his daughter's favorite food is sushi and Japanese food. For her last birthday, she wanted to go to a Japanese restaurant. It feels amazing that that has trickled down into her life.
- 00:03:17      Gregory always loved eating musubi balls. He loves all food. His grandma would make them, and his mom still makes them now. Eating musubi balls when he was younger, and even today, is something special.
- 00:04:01      Gregory doesn't think any part of that culture around food impacted his decision to go into food and farming.
- 00:04:31      Gregory started to get into farming because he loves working outside, and he loves to work hard. His first exposure to farming was living in northern Arizona working on vegetable farms. He fell in love with it. It was less about the food they were growing and more about the work and the love of the work. It has evolved a

lot, but when he got started, it was because he loved to work and has an attraction to the pain and struggle of it all. It makes him feel alive.

- 00:05:53 At eighteen or nineteen, Gregory hitchhiked to Arizona to see if going to college was something he wanted to explore. When he got out there and saw what the tuition was and how much it cost, it seemed unattainable. He ended up doing construction and carpentry work and started learning that trade. He also met some farmers and started working and volunteering at farms and fell in love with it.
- 00:06:54 Gregory first started working on a vegetable farm. He would ride his bike there and work for the day in trade for vegetables and cash. It was at that time he met his soon-to-be wife. She was also working on farms and going to school. Together, they moved out to a beef ranch and small dairy. While living and working there, they started their first agricultural venture growing salad greens for the farmers market. It snowballed from there. That's also when they decided they wanted to live somewhere with more water and more resources. After finding jobs in Massachusetts, they loaded up their truck and moved across the country.
- 00:08:20 At that age, Gregory says he didn't know anything. He was so brash and impulsive. He was twenty-one when they had their daughter, started their own farm business, and moved across the country. At that time, he was just excited about farming and maybe a little too romantic about it. He and his wife, Jessie, had a dream of starting their own farm one day. They didn't really know what that would look like, but they knew they needed to gain a lot of skills and earn some capital. Although he had a vision that they would have their own farm, it's very different than the farm they have today.
- 00:09:37 When Gregory thought of farming, he envisioned feeding people. At that time, he thought that growing food and feeding people was a noble thing to do. He had a broad vision of being able to produce food that sustained people and thought that it was a worthwhile way to make a living, to live a life, and to be happy. It's obviously not that simple. He says it was romantic, but it got him to where he is today. It seems worth it.
- 00:10:48 Gregory had very limited experience with gardening and agriculture growing up. They lived in a city with a small yard, and he would work in the gardens at home and help his dad with the lawn and shrubs.
- 00:11:28 Gregory says his initial farming experience in northern Arizona was a full, complete experience. He lacked so much experience going in. It was everything from learning how to push a wheelbarrow to using basic gardening tools to pulling weeds.

00:12:44 One of Gregory's biggest takeaways from his time in Arizona was that having natural resources is key. When they started their salad business, they struggled with having enough water. They immediately realized that farming takes a lot of water and natural resources that they didn't have. That stimulated their thought process about moving to a climate with more natural resources.

Gregory also says farming is hard work, and it's endless. It's every day, seven days a week. That's nobody's fault but their own. It's a choice, and it still is every day.

00:14:04 When Gregory was working on farms in Arizona, he wasn't thinking about his Asian American identity at all. When he grew up in southern California and lived in northern Arizona, there was enough of a diverse population of different races that he felt very much at home. Even in northern Arizona, there was a large Hispanic population, and it was a college town, so there were a lot of different races. His race didn't occur to him as much as it does living in New England.

00:15:03 Gregory describes his farming journey after moving to the East Coast. In hindsight, he says they had a really hard time. They moved to Massachusetts on a whim after getting jobs on a diversified livestock farm. At that time, their daughter was two. They lived in a garage apartment and milked cows. He and his wife both worked on this farm and at the same time tried to be parents and good partners. It was hard. They continued to do that for a number of years. When they moved to Vermont, they lived on another farm doing the same thing.

They lived in trailer houses, milked cows, and worked all the time. They worked themselves to the bone for other people and struggled to maintain a healthy relationship as a couple and as parents. There were times when it was enjoyable and beautiful, but in reflecting on that experience, it was challenging to be a farm worker with a young child and a transient family. They worked in Massachusetts and then moved to Vermont and worked on several different farms before finding a piece of land they could lease in Sudbury, Vermont.

00:17:20 Gregory says a lot of stupidity and blind ambition kept him going through those challenging times. There was also the idea that it would get easier. He thought that the next year would be easier, or that they would move to a farm where they would make more money or have more opportunities. If they had their own farm, it would be easier. Once they had their own farm, he thought if they could build capital, own their own equipment, and not have debt or as much overhead, it would be easier. It was this idea that if they kept pushing through those hard times, it would get easier, and they would be more comfortable and have more time, money, and resources. That is a bit of an illusion and self-deception.

He and Jessie are both really driven, hard-working people. Getting beat up, knocked down, and learning how to be humble has enabled them to get to where they are now and slow down.

00:19:27 Gregory says they looked for farm jobs on farm job websites like Good Food Jobs and used resources like ATTRA (Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas). Gregory's specific interest in draft horses brought them to Vermont. The dairy and livestock farm they found used draft horses, and he really wanted to learn that skill. Their individual interests, his personal interest, and trying to find better living and learning situations and decent pay drove their search.

00:20:53 At that time, they were both envisioning having a diversified farm. Gregory and Jessie both love cows. If they thought they could've made a living milking cows, they might have gone that route. They ended up continuing to milk cows, because they thought they might start a dairy and maybe do more livestock. They ended up doing that when they started Understory Farm.

00:21:39 Gregory talks about what attracted him to working with draft horses. First, it was the ecological aspect of not having to use fossil fuels. He had this idea that they would be able to utilize horse power in exchange for the amount of fossil fuels it takes to run a farm. Gregory also finds a lot of joy working with horses. Working with horses has changed his approach to living in a lot of ways. It taught him a lot of patience, among other things. It's enjoyable and slows him down. They don't have draft horses anymore, but at the time, it taught him a lot. It added an aspect of playfulness and enjoyment to doing the work.

00:23:16 When they first moved to Vermont, they were working on farms before connecting with an old-timer who had a second- or third-generation family farm in Sudbury. They met him through a draft horse event where he was demonstrating making hay with draft horses. He mentioned that he was looking for some young farmers to rent out some of his land. It seemed like a decent situation at the time, so Gregory, Jessie, and their daughter ended up moving there and living in a very crude hunting camp with no running water or electricity.

They started plowing up fields and growing vegetables. They opened a farmstand and started raising chickens, pigs, and beef. They decided to start the farm and throw out a broad net to see what the need was and what would sell. At the same time, they continued to work on a neighboring farm milking cows. Jessie was also working at the school to supplement their income.

00:25:18 Besides the farmstand, they also started doing the local farmers market in Middlebury, Vermont. They were selling produce wherever anyone would buy it.

- 00:25:55 Gregory and Jessie started their farm in Sudbury in 2012.
- 00:26:15 The whole time they were there, they used draft horses to farm. The owner of the farm they were leasing had grown up with draft horses and started training them as part of his career. He had a bunch of draft horses he wasn't using, so part of the arrangement was that Gregory and Jessie would have access to several teams of horses for their own use. Having access to those teams and to some equipment really helped incubate their farm. They carried on using draft horses for their entire time in Sudbury.
- 00:27:22 Gregory learned a lot from the farm owner and using his horses, but the year before, he also worked for Brad Johnson who has a commercial horse logging business in Northfield, Vermont. Gregory spent a year working with Brad, which is where he gained the majority of his experience and training. It was like jumping into a fire. It's such a hard and intense way to use draft horses. Gregory was able to learn a lot really quickly in that kind of situation.
- 00:28:31 Gregory says one of the biggest benefits of farming with draft horses is the joy piece. Because they're light on the soil, it's unlikely to have compaction. On a small acreage, it can be pretty efficient. It also helped them get recognized. Everyone would know them as the farm that used draft horses, so it created some kind of marketing appeal at the time.
- Gregory lists some of the drawbacks of using draft horses. It was slower, and it took a lot of patience. It was also harder on his body. It's hard to lift a harness every day and harness up horses. He was trimming their feet, too, which is a lot of hard physical work. After doing that kind of work for years, he feels the repercussions on his body.
- 00:30:32 In terms of production knowledge, most of Gregory's knowledge came from working on other farms. Fortunately, a place like Vermont has many resources for farmers. There's a vegetable and berry listserv that UVM (University of Vermont) Extension puts on. It's an amazing resource for troubleshooting disease and growing problems and production issues. The state of Vermont also provides many workshops.
- A big part of their business and farm was influenced by going through the Farm Viability Program, which is available to just about any farm if you make above a certain income. Gregory and Jessie did it for two years collecting records and looking at the profitability of different aspects of their business. Going through that process helped them build a better understanding of production and running a business.

00:32:04 Gregory talks about the capital they used to start their farm in Sudbury. They slowly built capital by working. It felt like it took them a long time to build a farm business, because they were always working other jobs. A couple of different opportunities to get loans also really helped. In particular, a loan from the Vermont Farm Fund, which gives out low-interest loans to beginning farmers, really helped. Eventually, being able to have enough equipment and enough of a business plan to get a loan through the Farm Service Agency was huge, too.

00:33:27 Gregory talks about the evolution of their farm in Sudbury and how they transitioned to where they are now. When they moved to Sudbury, they started off by growing vegetables, beef, pork, and chickens. Every year, they would eliminate whatever enterprise wasn't selling well enough or wasn't profitable. They did that for a number of years and ended up growing primarily vegetables, cut flowers, and pork. For a number of years, their pork enterprise was the biggest grossing enterprise they had.

When they started farming in Sudbury, both Gregory and Jessie got jobs working for Diane St. Clair in Orwell, Vermont. Gregory would milk the cows and Jessie would help with processing and making butter. They got the idea to raise pigs and feed the skim milk from the butter business to their pigs. Because Diane was tied into the restaurant world in California and New York City, Gregory and Jessie were connected with Dan Barber, a high-end chef in New York City. He became interested in their pork and the story of their pork. The idea was to re-use farm waste products to create new farm products that were more sustainable. They were feeding the skim milk to the pigs, raising them on pasture, processing them, and driving them down to New York City where Dan would serve them in his fancy restaurants.

It was the pork enterprise that really helped them build capital to move forward. They were able to buy a truck and some equipment and were making pretty decent money. The profit margins were really good, but with the restaurant world, they learned that ideas and fads change. The whole idea of raising milk-fed pork from Diane St. Clair's butter business outlived its lifespan as an interesting product, and they started buying less and less pigs. At the same time, Gregory and Jessie were going through the Farm Viability Program. Without that market, their pork enterprise wasn't profitable enough to justify continuing.

Simultaneously, they were looking at their flower enterprise. It wasn't a huge part of their business or income, but the net profits looked pretty good. For years, Jessie kept bugging Gregory to grow more flowers. Gregory says he was so driven to be a food-growing farmer, he brushed it off. He thought there was a way a farmer had to be. A farmer had to be growing food and feeding people. He was hyper-focused on that identity, and it was like he was wearing blinders. Once he

saw the numbers, it made a lot of sense. They decided to drop the pork enterprise, liquidate, sell everything they had related to the pork, and dive headlong into growing cut flowers.

They continued to grow cut flowers for farmers markets and grocery stores. They were doing weddings and events at that time, too. Little by little, they grew less and less vegetables and more and more flowers. They kept narrowing down their markets to do more wholesale cut flowers. For Gregory, the main objective and reason for focusing on the cut flower business was to try to make more time for his family. He felt like he had squandered a lot of years working hard all the time, hyper-focused on being a farmer, and thinking that the next day, the next week, or the next year would be easier and he'd have more time. Really, he just needed to make time. The cut flowers seem like a way for them to make a living, to build a business, and to be farmers while at the same time, spending time as a family and trying to take care of themselves.

00:39:24 They began focusing specifically on cut flowers in 2016 or 2017.

00:39:54 Gregory and Jessie were able to purchase a farm for the first time in their lives last winter (2020). They purchased a farm in Bridport, Vermont, through the Vermont Land Trust, which made it affordable for them by selling the development rights. At the end of the day, the farm is only worth its agricultural value. It's affordable for farmers to purchase, because they can't ever sell it for its development rights.

They moved there last fall and spent all winter and spring moving. With COVID happening and deciding to buy the farm, everything felt very precarious. However, it seemed like an opportunity they couldn't pass up. They looked at this farm when it first came up for sale through the Vermont Land Trust two or three years ago. When Gregory and Jessie looked at the business plan, how much the farmer was making, and how he was utilizing the land, they quickly realized they couldn't afford the asking price. Growing grain there wasn't a profitable enough business. They thought someone with more capital who wanted to grow grain would come along, buy it, and make it work. The person who bought it wasn't able to make a go of it, and it came up as a quick sale last fall at a much lower price. They crunched the numbers, wrote a good business plan, and offered what they could realistically afford.

Since last winter, Gregory and Jessie got all of their greenhouses moved and their fields plowed and planted. A big challenge for them this spring has been maintaining markets and keeping people happy. It's been a struggle, because they've had a lot of gaps due to missed plantings.

00:43:44 They have about eight acres in production. It's a mix of cut flowers in the fields and greenhouses and what's in cover crop for future plantings. The farm itself is about seventy-two acres. Their business plan going in was to use some of the better soils to grow flowers and to rent out the back forty acres or so to a neighboring organic dairy farm until they can get themselves established and get back up to speed.

00:44:39 Gregory discusses the benefits and challenges of growing cut flowers in Vermont. One major benefit is that the cut flower market is huge in Vermont. It's a hidden gem of a market. Many weddings and events happen in the state, and the majority of cut flowers are imported from Canada, Holland, California, and South America. If they could produce a high-quality enough product, then the premiums are very good. The markets have a potential and are really good.

The drawbacks are that cut flowers are just really hard to grow. It's not like growing vegetables or raising grass-fed beef. It's a very intensive type of agriculture to be in. Each crop needs to be maintained in a specific way and often needs to be fertigated a lot and trellised. When you're growing cut flowers, you're planting everything individually, and you're cutting each stem individually. It's a lot of hours and human labor involved. It's also a highly perishable type of business to be in. Timing and infrastructure, like walk-in coolers and a good processing space, are crucial.

00:46:16 In 2021, they have about four and a half full-time people working on the farm, including Gregory and Jessie. This year, Gregory's mom is on their crew, which has been great. She has done almost all of the seeding this year, and she does almost all of the bouquet making for grocery stores. Gregory says she's Employee of the Year.

00:47:25 Gregory describes some important aspects of their farm and business. He continues to want to grow things organically. They're not certified organic anymore, because it's tricky to be certified organic with cut flowers. The industry is so huge that ninety-five percent of the available seed for starting your cut flowers is not available organically. Although their farm is not certified organic, they implement organic practices. Gregory is into cover cropping, and he loves to grow a lot of cover crops and build soil. Having pollinators is great. Their whole pitch is that although they're not feeding people food, they're feeding many pollinators. That feels like a good thing.

Every year, they're also trying to pay their employees better. It feels good to be able to pay someone a wage that feels like they can live on it. Gregory and Jessie worked so many jobs for nothing, and it's important that they not only pay their employees well, but also treat them well. It's also important in their farm culture at Understory Farm that they communicate a lot. Eventually, they want to fix up the housing they have on the farm and make it available for a family to rent or for farm workers. They'd also like to have H-2A workers there.

00:49:49 It has been a steep learning curve learning how to grow cut flowers. When they first started growing them, they would grow them like vegetables. They would seed them in trays, transplant them, weed, fertilize, cut, and sell. Every unique variety has a lot of very specific needs in order to produce a high-quality cut flower. Both Jessie and Gregory have gone to regional and national workshops and events to learn more about the trade. With grants through the state, they were able to pay mentors from around the country to have phone and FaceTime interviews to talk about specific crop growing needs. It's been a lot harder to find resources in their state, because there aren't a lot of cut flower growers there. They've had to reach out to those outside of their state and their region to find that knowledge base.

00:51:33 Gregory says there are certain flowers he loves more because they are productive, easy to harvest, and beautiful. For him, there aren't any particular flowers with nostalgic value.

00:52:25 Now, their sales outlets are broken up into quarters. They do wholesale, have a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), sell at grocery stores, and do weddings. They've been phasing out doing their own weddings and events for a little while now, but they're still doing them. When someone calls wanting wedding flowers and they don't have any requirements, it's hard to pass up. During COVID, they started a CSA because all of their wholesale markets disappeared. They scrambled to find a way to sell all of their flowers, and the CSA was very successful.

00:53:47 Gregory says they get a lot of good feedback and a lot of smiles in response to their flowers. It brings a lot of joy to people. He never would have thought that cut flowers would bring so much joy to people, but they do. There is a lot of positive feedback and kind comments. Hearing how much joy their flowers bring people is what keeps Gregory and Jessie going.

It's a mix of emotions, because more and more, they get opportunities to do sympathy flowers. There are a lot of funerals and a lot of death. When people come to get flowers after the death of a relative, all of their emotions are on their sleeve. For Gregory and Jessie, it feels good to connect with people when they're feeling grief and feeling deep emotions. It creates an authentic interaction with customers and as humans, and it feels genuine and rich.

Occasionally, they also get really bad feedback. Those are hard moments when someone is really disappointed in their flowers. It's a hard thing to hear, but Gregory and Jessie have both gotten really good at apologizing and trying to make that right. As a farmer and a business owner, one of the greatest skills is knowing how to apologize and how to fix things when they go wrong. Things do go wrong, and something always happens. Knowing how to do a good apology is really important.

00:56:32 Gregory talks about how being in Vermont has impacted his experiences and informed his perspectives as an Asian American farmer. He says he never really realized his race until he moved to Vermont. He had always lived in very diverse places, and he always felt included. When he moved to Vermont, it was the first time he started to notice that he was being excluded or being treated or talked to differently. It was astonishing to him. He was really surprised and had to go through an identity crisis as an adult, which was both hard and fulfilling. Through moving to Vermont, Gregory was able to experience racist comments and to try to figure out who he was, how he identified, and how he embraced or was ashamed of being Japanese. Moving to Vermont was a mixed bag.

00:58:30 Gregory says he's still reckoning with his identity. He has done a lot of therapy, which has been very helpful. It has been a really life-changing thing for him to have someone to talk to and be vulnerable with. There have been a lot of tears and a lot of shame, pain, and acceptance.

00:59:29 Gregory talks about how that shift in perspective has changed how he sees himself and the ways in which his identity and work intersect. It has mainly changed his self-confidence and comfort in his own skin. For a long time, he was so ashamed of his Japanese identity that he always wanted to identify with the white part of himself. He wanted to try to make himself and whatever he did less Japanese. He didn't want to associate with that part of himself and that culture. That shame seeped into so much of his life. It impacted how he felt about himself and then reverberated out to the people around him. It also intersected with being a farmer and wanting to be in a trade that is majority white.

Gregory looked hard at that shame and hurt and began accepting those parts of himself and his heritage. He and his mother always had a contentious relationship. It wasn't until Gregory realized that he was taking out his shame of being Japanese on his mom that he was able to realize he could love and embrace her. It has changed everything in how he interacts with the world and with his mom. It has been transformational in that respect.

1:02:25 Gregory talks about how his racial identity interacts with community. Embracing his Japanese identity has allowed him to embrace the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) community. A year or two before, Gregory would've been totally unwilling to embrace that part of the community and accept that he is part of it and has things to share and to learn within it. He has been trying to reach out and connect more with that part of the community instead of just the very homogenous, rural dairy farm community in Vermont.

In a negative way, he has lost a bit of tolerance for listening to the white Vermonter story all the time. For a long time, he felt obliged to hear about the origins of generational farms. His tolerance level for that is lower now. He's not as interested in hearing those stories as he is in listening to the stories of those who aren't white and have had totally different experiences.

1:04:43 First and foremost, Gregory is new to the BIPOC community. He says it's challenging to understand where everyone is at and what they're doing. It feels good to know that there are community members out there who are not white and who are having different experiences, whether that's racism, trouble getting financing, or just starting a farm as a BIPOC person. Recognizing that that's there has brought Gregory comfort, even though it has been challenging to connect and be involved with the community at the same time as running a farm business and trying to be a good dad and partner.

- 1:06:21 Gregory would have to dig really deep to find a time when his race, ethnicity, or mixed identity was advantageous. In this particular community, he doesn't necessarily see it that way.
- 1:07:17 After many seasons of farming, Gregory's biggest takeaway is that farming isn't worth it. Running your own farm business and your own farm isn't worth not spending time with your children or your partner, not taking care of your body, or not loving the people around you. For a long time, Gregory thought that being a farmer was the end-all be-all goal and the thing to live for.
- At this point in his career and his life, his body hurts all the time. He's mending his personal relationships and trying to take care of himself emotionally and physically. The farm comes after all that stuff now. Even though there are always a thousand things to do every day and he can work from sun up to sun down every single second, it's just not worth it. For Gregory, if he can't have a farm business that's profitable and makes time for him to do the things he loves and be with the people he loves, then it's not worth it. The moment he stops loving what he does and stops spending time with the people he loves, it's probably time to stop farming and do something else.
- 1:09:43 Gregory talks about how he envisions the farm looking into the future. In terms of what they're producing and the business itself, they're planting more and more perennials and are producing things that can be harvested year-round. As they continue the business, they are learning more about what the market in the region looks like and how to fill the gaps that exist. Around the holidays, there's a lot of importation of greenery and berries. Extending their season and producing more perennials is becoming and will continue to become a bigger part of their business.
- Gregory envisions growing more cut flowers, simplifying their business, building good soil, and having employees that can stick around longer. Because of the nature of this type of work, they've always had employees that work for a season and leave. They'd love to have people who could come back year-to-year. Hopefully, Gregory's parents will also live on the farm as they get older, and they can be part of the farm and the business.
- 1:11:46 Gregory's family loves that he went into farming. Everyone except his grandma was skeptical at the beginning. Because his grandma always wanted to go back to the farm, she was excited that someone in her family was farming. His parents were surprised, but also very supportive. The more they've helped on the farm, the more they've grown to love it.

1:12:57 The pandemic has impacted Gregory and Jessie's farm a great deal, because it affected the wedding industry and the flower market. In terms of racial justice, George Floyd, and anti-Asian sentiment, Gregory thinks that it has created a lot of space to have harder conversations. For him personally, it has allowed him to be more introspective and to explore his own racial identity, how he interacts with other races, what he thinks racism is, what racism looks like to him, and how it looks different to everyone. He has been able to have a lot of great conversations with people, especially his partner.

The past year has been hard in many ways, but it has also allowed for many meaningful, heartfelt conversations that continue to happen. With the pandemic and all of the anti-Asian sentiment, Gregory has been hiding out and spending more time on the farm. He has been using that as an excuse not to have to deal with all of the hard things, which isn't a very noble thing to do, but it's also been a way for him to take care of himself.

1:15:49 Gregory talks about what changes he would like to see take place on a broader scale across the food system. He just had a conversation with Vermont's Secretary of Agriculture about what young farmers want to see changing in Vermont agriculture and the food system. Gregory spent a lot of time thinking about that, and there's so much to be said about climate change resiliency, food system infrastructure, and much more, but at the end of the day, there needs to be more representation in the agricultural sector in Vermont. Among the panelists who spoke with the Secretary or even a lot of the organization and state leaders, there's not a lot of representation.

If there's simply more representation from the BIPOC community in leadership roles so that young farmers or existing farmers can see people who look like them, it would create a more comfortable atmosphere for these farmers to establish their businesses, get more loans, or grow their business. The environments can feel stifling and not inclusive. Seeing people who look like them would make others feel more comfortable starting farms and continuing to grow farms in Vermont. That would go a long way in growing Vermont's agriculture sector in general, as well as its food sector. The demographics of our country are changing, and Vermont is not always going to be so white. If the state of Vermont and the agricultural sector accepted that, embraced that, and even invited that, it would make a big difference in the state.

1:19:34 Gregory gives advice to other BIPOC who are trying to get into farming. He says it's helpful to find a mentor, which ties back to making sure there is more representation in leadership roles in places like Vermont. Folks would feel more comfortable finding a mentor they can identify with, and those mentors can identify more with the BIPOC experience. In addition to finding a mentor, Gregory says starting small is also important. When you try to do more than you can actually accomplish, a lot of challenges emerge. Lastly, in a place like Vermont, utilize the resources the state has to offer. The state has a lot of resources available, and it just requires energy to dig into them and make sure they're available to everyone.

1:21:54 When talking specifically about being Asian American and being an Asian American farmer, Gregory has had to grow through doing things like this, having conversations, and being public-facing. That has been a big challenge for him, because in the Asian culture of his grandparents and then his mother, they wanted to hide and not be seen. It was a big part of the culture of their family, so it has been a struggle to do things like this interview and to speak up, have these conversations, and be seen. Much of that came from his grandmother not wanting her children to be seen as Japanese post-World War II.

That sentiment trickled down to Gregory and his siblings. They didn't want to have a presence, to stand out, or to make a statement. They were told to be quiet and that if they were seen or put themselves out there, they'd get hurt. It has taken a lot of work for Gregory to step out of that and work through those types of traumas. It's been really healthy for him to be able to do that.

1:24:23 End of interview