



Our Land Ethic

Grassland 2.0 envisions farming practices in the Midwest modeled after the highly productive perennial grasslands that once covered this region. To achieve this vision, it will be necessary to recognize and address injustices that precipitated the disappearance of these grasslands, and the legacies of inequalities that shape our landscapes today.

American wealth was founded in part on agriculture that combined land taken from Indigenous people and the labor of enslaved people to mine thousands of years of stored energy from grassland soils. This agriculture provided enormous but unequal economic gains and resulted in many vital, thriving institutions. But this legacy of injustice and oppression remains a part of our agricultural system, including our public universities.

Despite the efforts of Indigenous communities and people of color to farm and steward natural resources, racism and discrimination have hindered their opportunities. For millennia, Indigenous people skillfully managed landscapes to feed people, sustain communities, and care for the land, but they have been forced from nearly all of their lands during the previous two centuries. In the 1800s, people of color built farms and communities on lands throughout what was then the Northwest Territory, beginning to restore their health and build their wealth, but systematic marginalization and dispossession pushed them off the land. Many current farming enterprises of the Upper Mississippi River Basin depend on the labor of Latinx people who have little access to the wealth of these enterprises.

Today, people of all backgrounds are being pushed off the land by a system that rewards high-volume, hyper-efficient production resulting in industry-wide consolidation. This dynamic eliminates farms and further reduces the diversity of people and ideas at a time when innovative and creative approaches to farming are desperately needed. Rather than privileging profit over people, our society must valorize healthy people, communities, and ecosystems. We must create an agricultural system with a land ethic that intentionally restores and regenerates the health of the land while affording access to its wealth for farmers of all kinds, especially the dispossessed, oppressed, and marginalized.

Grassland 2.0 is committed to seeking ways to enact this land ethic. In our goals and processes, we strive to orient our work through an awareness of the injustices described above. We invite you to join us in this challenging and rewarding process as we strive for agricultural systems that are more just, equitable, diverse, and inclusive.