Don’t like what you are Harvesting?
Plant a different seed.

[See pages 4 and 5 for full story]
Most heirs’ property in the Lowcountry is land that was either purchased by or deeded to African Americans after emancipation. Much of this land has been passed down through the generations without the benefit of a will so that the land is owned in common by all of the heirs - whether they live on the land, help pay the taxes or have never set foot on the land.

This unstable form of ownership puts heirs’ property at high risk for loss because any heir can sell his/her percentage of ownership to another who can force a sale of the entire property.

**Planting the Right Seeds**

If you don’t like the harvest, plant a different seed! As we leave the time of Thanksgiving and harvest behind us and look ahead to Christmas and a New Year, it’s always a moment of contemplation for me, both personally and professionally. If you don’t like the results that you have achieved, then you must reflect on the kinds of seeds you have planted.

In January the Center turns 16 years old. Thanks to a great deal of hard work and quality seeds sowed by many, we continue to enjoy an increasing and bountiful harvest. Maya Angelou once said, “Pursue the things you love doing, and then do them so well that people can’t take their eyes off you”. It’s humbling to see the work of the Center move forward. I thank you for your trust and support over the years in continuing to empower underserved landowners with the necessary tools and resources.

When you think of a harvest, it helps to remember what land meant to our ancestors. They scraped and saved their money to buy the land because they believed it was the economic means to freedom. Not only is your family land a valuable legacy left to you, but it is also valuable to your community. If your land is lost, the community will suffer. If enough family land is lost, the fabric of diverse and culturally rich communities is torn apart. Plant the right seeds.

What an incredible evening at our 45th Annual Commitment to Justice award reception on September 7th, honoring Reverend Nelson B. Rivers, III, a lifelong servant in the fight for justice. It was a phenomenal program at the Francis Marion Hotel with our emcee, Raphael James from Live 5, a passionate keynote address by U.S. Congressman and House Majority Whip, the Honorable James E. Clyburn, a video tribute from around the country, and stirring remarks from our honoree himself, Reverend Nelson B. Rivers, III. Dr. Jennie L. Stephens announced during the program that the Commitment to Justice Award will now be named in memory of Daniel Hope Watson. Hope was a dynamic attorney, colleague, and friend of the Center who left a lasting mark. Unfortunately, she left us way too early and passed away last summer.

Thanks to the 2022 Commitment to Justice Friends and Supporters:

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Planting the Right Seeds and Making Family Land a Living Legacy

“A lot of people have misconceptions about heirs’ property,” said Ms. Jaquelyn Fields. “They feel if you pay the taxes, you own the property. That was one of the things I first learned in that first workshop I went to, it’s not the case.”

Jaquelyn Fields is a long-time teacher and is a property owner in Jasper County. Her great-great grandfather was enslaved for 22 years and the land he purchased after emancipation now belongs to Ms. Fields and her family. “The land means everything to me because it’s a legacy, to know my great-great grandfather owned it... it’s property that I want to stay forever in the family. I’ve asked my children not to sell it and to pass it on to my two granddaughters.”

Last month Ms. Fields hosted a video crew from WestRock, one of the Center’s supporters, and was proud to show them a collection of documents and deeds tracing her family legacy. “I do a lot of research with genealogy and it’s real interesting. You can’t manufacture land. With that being in the family four generations and now on to the fifth and sixth, the land has special meaning.”

She plans on keeping her land in her family and making sure it’s put to good use. The Center’s Field Operations Manager, David Bourgeois, is helping her do just that by making her land a financial asset rather than a liability. “David is a good person. I trust him. I can bounce my ideas off of him.”

Jaquelyn Fields shares her family legacy.

Landowner Jaquelyn Fields and Center Field Operations Manager, David Bourgeois walk her forested land.
7th Annual Landowner Symposium and WCA Graduation

What tremendous back-to-back events held October 7th and 8th at The Opportunity Center! First, our Woodland Community Advocates™ Graduation Ceremony was held Friday and included 12 new graduates of this unique landowner program. They include Pleshette Grant, Alicia Rahiem-Kennedy, Sunita Kumar, Cynthia Mitchell, Donna Brown Newton, Teniqua Pope, Jacque Tatum, Brenda Wagner, Carla Williams, Thomas Williams, Elliott Willingham and Marie Wray. This makes a total of 86 individuals who have become WCA’s in our community!

Then on Saturday morning it was our 7th Annual South Carolina Rural & Limited Resource Landowner Symposium showcasing our new home here at The Opportunity Center! It was standing room only as well as a robust virtual audience who enjoyed this special, free event for all landowners. The conference included educational and networking opportunities to learn more about land ownership, agricultural and forestry management, and technical and financial assistance from experts and partner representatives.

Unique Lowcountry Outing & Feast

An incredible time was had by all at our 7th annual “Unique Lowcountry Outing & Feast”. There were good friends, great music, and fantastic food! What a beautiful day for such a special event at McLeod Plantation on James Island! Thanks to our good friends from John Deere for joining us and announcing our partnership in the LEAP Coalition. LEAP stands for Legislation, Education, Advocacy and Production Systems. It’s a coalition John Deere created in the summer of 2010 that focuses on improving the livelihood of Black farmers and addressing the long-running issue of heirs’ property. It includes Deere along with the National Black Growers Council and the Thurgood Marshall College Fund.

2021 Unique Lowcountry Outing & Feast Event Sponsors


2022 Unique Lowcountry Outing & Feast Event Sponsors

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THANK YOU! YOUR GIVING MATTERS...in every way that you do it!

Please consider making a monthly gift. For us...it feels like a pat on the back every time it appears!

The following donors made gifts to the Center between September 1, 2021 and August 31, 2022.

If we have left anyone out, please let us know and accept our sincere apologies.

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National Exposure

On October 20th, Al Roker Entertainment made a presentation at Advertising Week in New York City. Their topic was how corporations are communicating their values through brand storytelling. They showcased a project that John Deere is backing, a new documentary called, “Gaining Ground: The Fight for Black Land,” created in collaboration with Al Roker Entertainment. The documentary will address the disproportionate economic issues Black American farmers have faced for generations, including heirs’ property rights. The documentary will debut next year, and the Center worked on the project with producer Eternal Folk.

2022 PALMETTO GIVING DAY

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National Stage

The Center for Heirs’ Property Preservation™ CEO, Dr. Jennie L. Stephens, addressed the national convention of the Society of American Foresters held in Baltimore, Maryland this past September. Dr. Stephens talked about building bridges to link our practice and profession to new groups of landowners and to meet them in their unique contexts. We loved the illustration of her talk, ‘Creating Trusting Partnerships’, in this photo. Special thanks to artist Sue Fody for her amazing work. Center Forester Kenneth Dunn also participated in the conference.