



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

helping people help the land

African American Farmers of California

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— Ken Grimes,
NRCS Special Emphasis
Program Manager

Will Robinson grows raisin grapes on 80 acres of land near Fresno, Calif.

His farm originally belonged to his late wife’s parents, who purchased it in the 1920s to grow cotton.

During the last five years, Robinson has implemented a variety of conservation practices such as drip irrigation, pest management, crop fertility amendment and crop rotation.



Will Robinson (left) and Ken Grimes teach a student how to measure sugar content in grapes.

Today, Robinson is among the one percent of California’s African American population involved in farming. Most of these farmers own their land, but studies show that many of them do not have a family member who is interested in continuing the family farm.

To dispel the myth that farming is tedious work and not profitable, Robinson helped start an organization called the African American Farmers of California (AAFC).

“One of the organization’s objectives is to ensure that future generations of African Americans continue in the farming profession,” said **Ken Grimes**, a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) soil conservationist and the NRCS African American special emphasis program manager.

One of its many programs is called Each One Teach One, where participants bring a family member to a 16-acre demonstration farm created by Robinson to learn about farming. Members also use the demonstration farm to study resource management and how to diversify their crops.

The farm consists of demonstration plots where members grow their own crops such as okra, black eye peas, beans, peanuts and corn. Participants learn from each other by comparing management practices, monitoring nutrients and pests and testing soils. The project also includes components on marketing and teaching school children about agriculture.

Robinson sells the crops grown at the demonstration farm at farmers markets in Los Angeles, Oakland and Fresno, with proceeds being reinvested into the project. He is moving toward a total organic farm operation, which he believes will make his products even more marketable.



AAFC members (top) celebrate the opening of their demonstration project with a ribbon cutting ceremony. Robinson (second from left, below) points out crops being studied at the site.

