Transcripts from ***Looking Back & Moving Forward, Together***
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Afternoon Panel: Organizing to become the architects, rather than the objects, of policy

Mike Sayer: Good afternoon, Good afternoon. (Audience: Good afternoon.) Is everyone still awake? (Audience: Various yesses.) Round two! What we are going to do is have each of the panelists introduce themselves, and then we are going to pose three questions to the panelists and then each of them in turn is going to tackle those questions, and then we are going to throw it open to questions and answers with the audience and the panelists. So Leroy if you want to start?

Leroy Johnson: Good afternoon. See, see, that's what I am saying. That's what is wrong right now. Let me see, let me start. That is wrong. If it is a good afternoon, then it is a good afternoon. If it just afternoon, that is what you all just did. There is a difference between good and just there. Now, I know it is afternoon, but that is the way it works. So let me say it one more time, Good afternoon! (Audience: Louder. Good afternoon.) I know the difference between good and bad. I know the difference between after and noon.

My name is Leroy Johnson. I'm the Executive Director of Southern Echo. I am from a small rural black farming community in Holmes County called Treble Grove. You'd never find Treble Grove on a map because there is no map that goes that far back out in the country, right. And if you try to find it on a map, you will find it spelled Treadwell Grove, but my community could not get that d right and they love trouble. So like trouble and treble so it became Treble Grove. I'm from that rural black farming community called Treble Grove I'm just happy to be here, and I am happy to be on the panel with such an esteemed group of folks.

Shirley Sherrod: Good afternoon. Since July the 19th 2010, I always feel funny trying to introduce myself. And for those of you who don't remember what happened on July the 19th, 2010, I was actually asked to pull to the side of the road and submit my letter of resignation as USDA's Georgia's State Director for Rural Development. But I've been an activist, working in my communities since the summer of 1965, a long time, and I am working currently with two organizations, the Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education which started way back in 1961 as a project of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee led by the person who later became my husband, Charles Sherrod. (Clapping)

And New Communities, Incorporated that was started back in 1969 as the first community land trust in the U.S. (Clapping)

Shorlette Ammons: Ok, so, why am I here again? Good afternoon. Greetings from Mount Olive, North Carolina. It's where I grew up born and raised, pickle country. Actually, we tell folks we're from Mount Olive because we want to feel like we are from the big city, but we actually grew up in Beautancus, about 40 families, half of them my cousins at least. But my name is Shorlette Ammons. I currently work for North Carolina A&T State University, one of the land grants here in North Carolina. I'm based at the Center for Environmental Farming Systems as Community Food Systems Outreach Coordinator. The work I currently do is addressing structural racism in the food system. So, I have the opportunity to work with social justice activists, young people, students. We have apprentices on a 2,000-acre research facility back home in Goldsboro. But I'm born and raised as a farmworker in Eastern North Carolina. My goal of getting off the farm led me to the pickle plant so it made me realize that I need bigger goals in life. So I got my degree is actually in Library Science, so I am a librarian by trade. (Laughing) I know. We can talk about this over drinks later because it's way more complicated that I even I am describing it. But I am super, super honored to be sitting next to, among these beautiful people, people that I absolutely admire and I have so much respect and honor for their work.

Baldemar Velasquez: Thank you sister. I am Baldemar Velasquez with the Farm Labor Organizing Committee. I've been organizing migrant workers for 47 years. I did my first strike when I was 12 years old, got my whole family fired. That was my first example of learning to be an organizer. What to do and what not to do. So for 47 years, we've organized migrant workers and taken on some of the largest food companies in the world, starting with Campbell Soup, Heinz USA, Vlasic Pickle, Dean Foods, Aunt Jane, Green Bay Foods. We beat 'em all and then we took on the Mt. Olive Pickle Company down here in North Carolina, we beat them too. Now we're taking on the big tobacco, and we're faced with the same response at every previous campaign like, "Yeah right, good luck." Somehow, we're going to make it happen. I hope as we, as this panel goes along, would describe some of the issues, strategies, a way to look at the production of food and the role of the farm worker and the small family farmer.

Mike Sayer: So now each of the panelists, I'm going down the same order. They are going to have about 6 minutes to make their initial presentation. And Alicia is going to hold up a little sign when it is 3 minutes, then 1 minute and then when there's no minutes. I've got to count on you guys helping me out when it gets to no minutes, you know, so I don't have to be the bad guy. So here are the 3 questions:

1. How do we define and understand what power is?
2. What are the challenges we face to exercise power to achieve fairness and justice for the communities with which we work?

3. What strategies can we utilize to organize within our communities to become the architects rather than the objects of policy?

Leroy Johnson: Let me start by saying, my grandfather was a pretty good old Baptist minister. I grew up with him always saying, "Boy, tell the truth, boy tell the truth." My grandmother who I think was the wisest woman in the world, she would just say, "Just be careful who you tell it to." So I am going to tell you the truth, and I am going to be careful, and I hope you are the right folks I am telling it to.

Part of this question of how you define what power is, is a language question. Everybody has power. The question is, how do you exercise it? And the question is, "Can we exercise it together rather than as an individual?" So part of where our work was in our initial starting of Southern Echo, was to create inside the process a dictionary of language. I'm talking about Mississippi Delta language so we can be clear that what we were saying was on the same page, we actually were on the same page. We knew particularly exactly what we were saying to one another. And so, when we tried to talk about power, we came up with a definition that came out of discussions inside of 30 counties across the State of Mississippi. This definition we came up with was saying that power is the ability to make things happen or not happen. For we're clear, I got some power. Because there are some things I can stop from happening, and there are some things that I can make happen. So, this question of what it means to have collective power is an important process.

The reason I say that is, I was born into the movement. I was born into it. I didn't just happenstance in it, I was born into it. What do you mean by born into it? Well, I was born and then the next thing I really knew was my Dad was taking me to SNCC Meetings. And I was like, "What is this?" So I tell folks that I was a lap and pallet baby of the Civil Rights Movement. I went from lap to lap and then when I got too big to be on somebody's lap, they laid me down the on pallet. So part of this whole question of what I said was a question of the power of land, is that in Mississippi you couldn't even run for public office without being a landowner up until 1984. If you didn't have at least a piece of land, I ain't saying an acre or nothing, but I am going to tell you a piece of land. If you didn't have a piece of land, you could not run for public office in the state of Mississippi. So, for black folk and for white folk and for any folk, if you didn't have land, you could not run for public office. So this whole idea of a revolution about taxation without representation, well, we had taxation, we had representation, but if you did not have land, you had no say so. So, a vote-less people is a voiceless people. So part of our work was to help folks begin to understand the power they had in what they did or didn't do. When the Civil Rights workers came to the south and the sit-in movement, they sit down, and that was power. When they marched across the bridge in Selma, Alabama marching was power. When they sit inside of rooms and make decisions about policy, that's power. And the problem has been for poor folks, for oppressed folks,

for depressed folks, for folks who just are plain old wrinkled who had not been at the table, we have been objects of policies rather than architects of policy. If we really want power, if we really want to be able to wield power and wield power together, we have to sit down, talk about what it means to design policies that really build the power inside of community rather than build kingdoms for elected folk. That's our job. That is what we need to do. Thank you for the picture. (Audience clapping.)

Shirley Sherrod: You know, Leroy when you were talking, it made me think back to times when we've had some power, and we did not use it. Or, we used it for a while, and we let it go, and then we were right back where we started. You know, I love to read history. So I went back to Reverend Barber and sort of touched on it a little bit this morning a time after Reconstruction or when during Reconstruction when white farmers and black farmers work together. Well, it started because the prices for cotton was so low, debt was so high and white farmers saw an advantage in trying to form an alliance with black farmers who could vote at that time to fight the system. Now those who are in power really saw the threat that this brought on. Now white farmers could see where they needed to get with black farmers to try to bring the change that was necessary, but then the powers of bees saw such a threat with this, that it brought on legal segregation and took away all the rights of black people to vote and change life for black people totally with the Jim Crow laws and so forth. So what happened to that alliance?

That's one of the questions that I would like to ask, because it was a time when real change could have happened, and we let that power go. So, and then I want to talk about a time when we worked together. Some of you may remember the caravan that the Federation started back in, I can't remember, you all I am getting old now. So I can't remember the exact year. (Audience: 1992) 1992. I mean, how powerful that was? Stopping in every state capital all the way to D.C. and that led us to the Minority Farmer's Rights Act. So they threw the money out there. First it was not a lot, you know, it was authorized at 10 million, they would only appropriate 1 million some years, 3 million other years. Then others started seeing this little money, and kind of, it was really not everybody leading the effort to try to get more money appropriated, but then all of a sudden, it got to be 25 million. And then, everybody was jumping on it. But what happened to the power of the organizing that led us to the Minority Farmer's Rights? We seemed to think once we get it, we let it go. We don't stay on the job, and then we lose it. Like we have lost, like we are losing with the money that's appropriated. So everybody knows it not as a Minority Farmer's Rights Act, you know it as 2501. You don't even know the history, some people, of how it started. And then, I wanted to, I had a lot more to say, but I need to compress it because I really want us to get to the discussion. One of the biggest mistakes I think we make, we have the power, but we don't use it. I don't feel I need to go into you did a very good job of defining what power is.

I had some questions I wanted to ask. I also want to give you the answers. I think one of the biggest mistakes we make is that we concentrate so much on the national level that we miss organizing as we should on the local level. So, my first question is: Where do most Presidential candidates come from? And I'm going to answer that for you. They come mostly from Governors and Senators. Where do most governors and senators come from? They come mostly from Congressmen, state senators and rich businessmen. Where do most congressmen and state senators come from? They come mostly from statehouse or representatives of state offices and local politicians like mayors and county offices. Where do those people come from? From your community. In elections, you ignore for offices you don't bother to pay attention to. And they are voting on things you never hold them accountable for. So, you can see the work really should be as Reverend Barber said this morning, local, and let that move up. Not national moving down because we will never come together if we do it that way. (Applause)

Shorlette Ammons: I could just say ditto and keep it moving, but I will try to be a little more insightful than that. What is power? I mean, I came up here with a script because I had a chance to think about this overnight, but just being in this room, you know, it just made me rethink that question. And to me, power is the ability to actualize lessons from a struggle. I think this room is, there are so many examples of our potential to realize that power, because marginalize people in particular, we know all about struggle. We also know about resiliency. So how do we tap into that? How do we actualize that? How do we mobilize that? How do we build that collectivity so that we can actually, especially for our young people? I have the opportunity to work with a lot of younger people. So how can we demonstrate that so that power isn't this abstract, untouchable thing that they never get to access? So you know, I think about just to put this in a current context, we were talking about this at our table earlier, I think about the things that are happening in Ferguson and the over-policing of black and brown communities particularly right now. The huge resource gaps in rural communities where I come from, you know - just stack on stack on stack of just this lineage of oppressive activity that we are often the recipients of. So looking at the Ferguson situation now and looking at the abilities of young people, this power that they hold, they don't even realize. The power of media. Imagine if that dude who caught what was happening in Ferguson via their cell phone was not in that place at that time, ya know. The power of digital access and technology might still rural people on the ugly end of that stick. We're still way behind when it comes to digital access, but the power of young people to realize that and to actualize it. It's pretty phenomenal. The video capturing of what happened in New York with Eric Garner. So there's power in imagery, there's power in visualizing what is actually happening on the ground. I think maybe it was Dr. Barber that brought up Emmett Till, when his mother made that decision to post that image of him in his casket. Was it Ebony or Jet Magazine? And how that transformed the movement. You could see something very similar happening right now with young people and cell phone technology. I think part of our role as, I

don't want to be called an elder for another at least 20 to 30 years, but part of our role as older folks is to connect that current reality to a historical context, because I think if there is anything that is missing with encouraging young people to actualize their power it's that. It's nothing new. There is power in understanding your history. There is power in being able to put yourself in a larger picture. Put your current reality into a larger context. I am not my own person. I am Haddy Adelle Ammons. I am Mt. Olive, North Carolina. And that is so critical to me, because I know that I represent farmworkers that historically were black sharecroppers. I look and we work with people who are in our neighboring county in Dudley and in Lenoir County. Now we see mostly Latino women in the fields and the conditions have not changed one bit. So what if we separate ourselves from that reality? What if we say, oh now that's their fight? We are allowing our power, once again, to be dissolved by these imaginary wedges when our conditions and our plights are the exact same. So, I think there is power in collectivity, there is power in personal stories, there is interpersonal power when we are able to connect our stories to a larger picture. So I think I probably am wrapping up. I am good. (Applause)

Baldemar Velasquez: In context to our presence, I'll defer most of my minutes to the discussion, but I'll just say, in context to our being together here that power is the level of ability to participate in the community of decision making about issues that affect your life. (Applause)

Shorlette Ammons: As he drops he mike and walks off.

Mike Sayer: Now we have time to discuss this a little further? So you all discussed the concept of power. Give us some discussion about what you see are the challenges to exercising that power and strategies to overcome those challenges?

Leroy Johnson: It's hard sometimes being in a place where the people who help guard you when you were young. And I tell folks, I was young and foolish. I wasn't just young; I was young and foolish. Baldemar was one of those folks. I met Baldemar in the mid-80s, and he's been a dear friend and mentor ever since. And you never know what good that does as you grow until you get into those places where you need that other part of the process. So part of what I think, another one of those people are Dr. Sherrod. You know, I call it Doc because that is the other part of who she is. But these folks have helped me to learn some very valuable lessons. One of the things I think, a strategy that we have to have is how do we learn from what folks have already done? Winston Churchill said "The farther we can look back, the farther we can see or hear." So the question began for me is "What can I learn from the Civil Rights Movement?" What can I learn from the Land Retention Movement? What can I learn from the Cooperative Movement? What can I learn from those pieces of work and struggle that will help me be able to do a better job in developing a stronger, more collective community where I live and where I

work? So part of this is how do we do that? How do we build off of that process? How do we make sure that we're part of that process?

The other thing I want to say is, my granddaddy said, "He who has, is very good at telling who he got it from." What's wrong with us, and what does it mean? Those who are sitting at the policy table is very good at making us objects of their policy. How to make us move to this spot and jump to that spot; tell us what we can grow and when we can grow it and when we cannot grow it. They can tell us when we can turn our water on and when we can turn our water off; when we can wash our cars and when we can't wash our cars. Just think, if we were in the room making those ordinances and making those laws, would we do the same things to us? I dare say no, we would not. So as long as we stay objects of policy, we're going to always have them doing to us rather than allowing us to develop policies that strengthen us, build us and makes us strong. The only way for us to do that, the only way for us to do that is to come together. Rural communities, folks think folks from rural communities is the slowest folk in the world, we country bumpkins; we don't know nothing we are slow, we got drawls, we have some of everything there is to have. But I dare to say, some of the most brilliant people in the world come from rural communities, and they got trapped somewhere else. (Applause) They got trapped somewhere else. I finish this by saying, the African proverb, "When spider webs unite, you can tie and hold the king of the beast." How many wonderful strong spider webs are right there sitting in those chairs? If we came together and locked arms and locked thoughts and locked ways, we can hold the king of the beast and develop our own policies that make us strong. (Applause)

Shirley Sherrod: You know, one thing we kind of know but we don't practice is unity, working together. One of the good things that happened way back at the beginning of Farm Aid, was the Farmers and Ranchers Congress. I'll never forget that. That was in 1986. That's when we came together from around the country to develop a way to have one message, one language even though you were farmers or ranchers, we came up with one message. Now what happened, we didn't have another farmers and ranchers conference, but we moved out together. But somehow, and you heard Reverend Barber say this morning, they read everything about us; they study us. And I keep going back to that congressman that came from Georgia, Newt Gingrich. He was a great historian. He knew what happened coming out after Reconstruction and the efforts that they made. And I think he was determined that they would get it right this time so your Tea Party and all of that stuff that developed from since then happened. But we don't stay on the job. We don't figure out how to keep working together. We haven't done that. Carolyn, I think maybe we need another Farmers and Ranchers Congress, something that's going to keep us. We'll come here. My greatest fear about today, and I think I said it on just about every call, that we'll come here and say we had a good time; we had a great meeting, and we'll leave here and not figure out how we can

continue to work together. That is how they win, and that's how we lose. So figuring out as small farmers, as farmers, as some of the backbone of this country, how we can, you know, not let this day be lost, not let the efforts before now be lost and figure out working together. You know, you have black farmers, you have Hispanic farmers, you have Asian farmers, you have Hmong farmers, you have all of the different groups. We have to figure it out y'all, or we'll be here, no, we won't be here. Shorlette will be here in years to come trying to figure out how did we get it wrong, what can we do. (Applause)

Shorlette Ammons: I'll be here if you ask me to be, Ms. Shirley, but I don't want to be. Strategies. One thing I think about, and I think the time is ripe that you are all here in North Carolina with the Moral Monday movements getting national attention. I don't know what people might sleep on is that that did not happen overnight. That was a long-term build of unlikely bedfellows. So I think that what would benefit us as a food and farming movement is to really think strategically about unlikely partnerships and unlikely coalitions. Really thinking about why land loss is not, why don't we invite the criminal justice movement when we talk about land loss to be part of this conversation? Why isn't the killing of black and brown people in the streets, why is that not a reproductive justice issue? Why are we not partnering our farmworkers and our farm laborers with our criminal justice and reproductive justice movements? So I think we just really have to flip this whole paradigm upside down and think about things in a totally different box or just dismantle the whole box. We just have to do things completely differently.

Also really thinking about how we can get young people engaged. I'm not as young as I used to be. So especially coming from a small rural community, whenever I left the farm, my parents, my mamma had 12 brothers and sisters, and none of them encouraged me to come back to the farm. They thought that I had made it because I was no longer on the farm. So really rethinking how we communicate the legacy of farm and food work to our young people, so that it could be something that they are drawn to as opposed to pushed away from so they have that long-term investment to come home. I think that's really critical. So we have to really make sure they feel like they have a place. So I think there are some opportunities for intergenerational movement building as well. I think I can yield to Baldemar because FLOC is like the granddaddy of strategy. They have such very concrete strategies that work. I've seen it happen over and over again in our neck of the woods.

Baldemar Velasquez: First of all, I'm honored to be in the presence of so many elders, Civil Rights leaders that we go back to the sixties: Ben Burkett, Ray Page, all of these names I'm not mentioning and who inspired me to organize farmworkers. It was the winter of 66 and 67 that I volunteered my Christmas vacation to work for SNCC and CORE up in Cleveland, Ohio in the Huff ghetto 2 months before it went up in flames with the riots in East LA and across the country. And it was a

single breakfast morning with a blind African-American and his family, whom I was living with in one of the tenement houses where we exchanged a story that he challenged me to come back to the migrant camps and organize my own people, that the Civil Rights Movement needed that. So I thank them all for it. Someday I'll recount that story that we exchanged as my famous rat story.

We organized the largest strike in the history of the Midwest when 2,000 of us tomato pickers walked out of the farms contracted with the Campbell Soup company. In undergraduate school, I was going to be an engineer, but I switched over to social sciences after seeing my grandparents mistreated in the college I went to in South Texas in the Rio Grande Valley where I was born and raised. From the time I was 6 years old working with my parents in the fields all over the country, the racism was so bad in South Texas that I couldn't keep on my track to become an engineer. But God had a plan. He wanted me to have a good foundation in math, because later on I would need that math to negotiate with the tomato companies and to undo their structured schemes to keep us exploited and marginalized in the bottom of their so called supply chains. So FLOC pioneered the first supply chain struggles in the country that are now being copied by other people, which is great. Duplicate it. Because one of the single most problems we're having in small producers, small farmers and farmworkers is the question of global supply chains by major manufacturers and major retailers like the big box stores, Walmarts and Costcos, who are gobbling up much of the production and guiding it and dictating terms of how those crops are to be grown, and therefore, dictating the terms to the people on the bottom. Now out of this, we dealt with two seemingly contradictory issues about farmworkers and small farmers. How do we reconcile that it is some of those small farmers that are exploiting the farmworkers? Number two, that the issue of the farm bill. Most farmworkers in North Carolina are undocumented. We have anywhere from 100,000 to 140,000 agricultural workers in North Carolina; 90% of them are undocumented from Central America and Mexico. And that farm bill is driving a lot of Mexican farmers out of business because of our trade deal with Mexico. Because American farmers compete with Mexican farmers. If American farmers are subsidized and Mexican farmers are not, who is going to win the market? So when you glutted the corn market in Mexico, many corn farmers lost their living, over 3 million Mexican farmers lost their livelihood because they couldn't compete with subsidized North American corn.

But how do we reconcile those seeming contradictions? The resolution is the fact that these major manufacturers and suppliers and their supply chains and corporate global food companies, what they do is they marginalize people in the bottom of their production chain. If they marginalize the farmer, the farmworkers will be further marginalized. We shouldn't be at each other's throats; we're in the same class. If we're the same class, we need to negotiate up the food chain and say, "You guys got to redo the structures of your supply chain so that we can have justice on the bottom." (Applause) So we have to

develop a strategy to bring those people on the bottom together. This is what we did, pioneered in the 80's with Campbell Soup. Nobody said it could be done, everybody said it was crazy, because Campbell Soup would never negotiate an agreement with people who are not their employees. That, meaning the small family farmer and the farmworkers. In 1986, Campbells did exactly that. After an 8-year strike and 7-year boycott of Campbell Soup, they hunkered down and signed an agreement. We changed the structure, we increased the prices for the farmers; we got justice for the farmers and even more justice for the farmworkers. That's what we have duplicated with Vlasic Pickle, with Heinz USA with Dean Foods, and we did it with Mt. Olive here in North Carolina, and by God, if we have anything to do with it, we are going to do it with the major tobacco companies in this state to bring equity to those farmers and farm workers on the bottom of the supply chain. (Applause)

Lastly, before we go to the last question, let me set the stage for that last question. In reference to going back to the Civil Rights Movement, it was 1968, when I got a telegram at the college that I was in in Ohio from Dr. Martin Luther King inviting me to join 29 other Latino and Indian leaders to come to Atlanta to help plan the Poor People's Campaign. So the professors they collected some money so I could get a plane ticket to go down. In that conversation, what I was led to get inspired to in that meeting, one set of words from Dr. King. After an afternoon session, going into the evening with Andy Young, the question arose at how do we as poor people who have nothing, how can we compel the world's largest corporations, the richest people on the globe, how can we compel them to sit down and negotiate with us about our lives? Decisions they make and impact our lives. And I'll never forget Dr. King's words. People quote him in all kinds "I have a dream." To me, the single most important words he ever spoke, he said at that time, "~~when you compel~~, When you impede the rich man's ability to make money, anything is negotiable." (Applause)

Mike Sayer: Now we're going to open it up for questions and comments. We need to keep them short so we give everybody a change to participate.

Bryn Bird: Hi. When we were talking about building power, one of the things that we've seen in Ohio and other places is the redistricting of our Congress and of our representatives. Right now rural communities only represent 15% of the population, farmers are only representing 2% of the population and now we're going in and having these discussions and in our district alone, you know, he's now representing 98% urban, only 2% rural and our voice is getting just completely drained out and our needs in the community. So, I agree when you were talking about building different alliances and how do we engage the urban communities and those who are not directly with their hands in the dirt to understand the needs of rural communities, because 15% of the population and dwindling, it's really hard to feel that power.

Leroy Johnson: One of the things that I want folks to understand: I ain't scared. Part of, I think, all of our work is how do we begin to figure out the dialogues to help folks define the interconnectedness to what is wrong. What is wrong is always wrong. And those of us who say that we don't want to do wrong, we want to do right, and most folks say that, they don't mean it, but they say it. So I think we have to start holding folks to this question of what is right, what is fair, what is just. What is right, what is fair; what is just? We are going to have to start those dialogues. The moment we started having those dialogues in Mississippi where white conservatives, and we found that the place where we could have that conversation with white conservatives were not with white men, but with white women. White women who had children with disabilities were the first place we started that conversation. Because they understood what it meant for a society to fail them. And the moment we could connect that we both, black children with special needs and white children with special needs and none of those children with special needs are getting the services that they deserve, we began to have a dialogue about that. And building a process out of this allowed us to have an unusual alliance. And so when we tried to have a meeting with the governor about these issues, he said, "No." But when those same white women asked the governor for a decision to have a meeting with him, he said, "Yes." Guess who they brought along for dinner? I mean for lunch? So we were the guests for lunch. You know what I am saying? So when we walked in he said, "I said No." And they said, well, we said, "Yes." And you invited us. So if you invited us, that means that you invited them.

Part of that was this whole dialogue of finding where there was an intersection between what we were looking for and what they were looking for and finding those places where those unusual alliances, those folks that you usually don't talk to, finding a place where you can have that conversation. That's the most important thing there is. Part of our problem with one another is that we are scared to talk to one another about things that we disagree about. We just don't want to talk about things we disagree about. The answer is, if you don't talk about those things, how are you ever going to get it right? How are you ever going to get it right? So, I'm saying to you is the way to build on unusual alliances, the way to build that process is to go about it that way. The other part of this, which is strictly political, you need to get engaged with redistricting. You need to get engaged with redistricting. You need to get engaged with how to cut those lines to develop districts that are 90% urban and 10% rural. Right? And you begin to cut those districts in ways that gives you a bigger chunk of the process. If you're not going to get engaged in that, you're going to consistently get turned around in the other part of the process. I will say, because of the poor frog that won't praise his own pawn, Echo does some of the best redistricting training in the world, not just in the United States.

Bob Zellner: I'm Bob Zellner and I work with SNCC, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and I work with Reverend Barber here in North Carolina.

Shorlette: I know who you are.

Bob Zellner: Back in the 60's when it became necessary for many people who had worked in SNCC, those of us were white were sent, like Baldemar was sent to work with Latino farm workers, we were sent to work in the white community. And one of the things that we had to face was "red baiting." I remember we were organizing pulp woodcutters and catfish producers in the catfish plants and the poultry workers. The Mississippi papers kept saying that the organizers from GROW, Grassroots Organizing Work, which we also called Get Rid of Wallace, we were all communists. So one night on the picket line in Masonite in Laurel, some of the woodcutters who were white, big, burly white guys said, "We want to talk about this communism thing, Zellner, come with us". So they walked down behind the plant where a Wack'nhut guard had been killed the week before, and they said, "They call us communists for working with you." I said, "Well, what do you think about that?" They said, "We looked it up, and we are. As far as we can tell, we are because it says everybody share and share alike." Well one of the things that they had broken through was our political language in this country is that we don't want to talk about socialism, we don't want to talk about communism, and we think that it's perfectly all right to consider President Obama and Hillary Clinton to be leftists or socialists. Europeans will laugh at us. But what we have to do, I think, in this new movement is we have to develop a new conversation and say that the political spectrum has been skewed so far to the right, that we have to be bold in our new unity together. Because the thing that they have used, the right wing has used all along is get poor white people and working class white people to vote against their own economic interest and it's happened so much that they're now learning and they are going to come together. So it is happening all over the country, and we need to be bold about that. (Applause)

Scott Marlow: I have a question for the panel. If you can talk about what are the challenges for the food movement is that we've had a certain level of success. For a long time the cry was, "how do we get a seat at the table?" Well now you have a seat at the table. The question for the panel is, What is the danger of partial success and how do you deal with that when you get some level of access, some level of power, but not enough to make real substantive change?

Shorlette Ammons: Well, I don't think the danger necessarily is in the perception of success. I think it's in being satisfied. It goes back to, you know, I read this New York Times article about comrades in Pink Hill that are teenagers that are working in the fields right now. So, how can I be satisfied with my seat at the table knowing that there are young people still out in the fields experiencing the same

conditions that I grew up in 30 years ago? So, to me, I don't necessarily acclaim any kind of level of success, but my question is around the level of how satisfied are we, knowing that this shared fate is continuing? We can change the fate though, you know, is what inspires me. And the difference I have to say, and this may be on another note, but the difference I have to say in where those, I think it was a 13-year-old girl that was working in the fields that they interviewed and a 16-year-old girl who were sisters. They have this level of information and access to information that we did not have. We had no clue. We knew that working in tobacco fields was not fun. We knew the labor was, you know, we didn't want to be out there for a multitude of reasons. We knew there was some kind of economic justice issue that we could not quite put our finger on because we were like, we were working in this white farmer's field, he would pay us, we would go to his store to get our check cashed, he would charge us a check cashing fee, and then we would buy peanuts and Pepsi's from his…I mean we were giving this dude his money right back. So we were like, oh, somewhat ain't right about this. So we recognized that it was an economic justice issue, but we did not, at the time we had no idea about the health implications. So to see these young people talking about working in the back of the fields from the vantage of a health perspective, really makes me recognize the importance of access to information and intellectual freedom as a librarian. So I think there is something to be said there. And I will pass it down.

Shirley Sherrod: I just want to say we allow success to divide us. You know, it is like, you get there, and then you suddenly forget all that you did and all that you knew trying to get there, and now you've gotten to a different status and almost looking down on those who haven't made it. So we allow that success to, you have organizations here in this room, you know, we haven't figured out how to have that success, share it, build on it, to keep doing more. I just have to say this. Grant money with foundations, even though USDA. There are some who get it; some don't. You've attained a bit of success and you forget about all of the others and the movement that we are all a part of. We forget movement building, I guess. That success helps us to think that the fight is over.

Baldemar Velasquez: I'd like to further define that quote, partial success. What a lot of people call success is not success. It's being bought off by the system. (Applause) The issue here is that even when you are negotiating agreements like we have, you don't get everything the first time. But one of the things you do get are cornerstone pieces to an agreement that you impact a structure to change the fundamental and equities in that system. To me, that is the threshold. Anything after that, you know, you add on as you go along. Let me give you an example in our fight with the tobacco companies here. We know we got their attention when they started throwing money around. The first thing they did was start recruiting Latino agencies to work collaboratively to do something for those poor Mexican farm workers. So they gave this group Telemond a fairly funded farm worker agency that runs gazillions of dollars'

worth of programs for migrant workers. I'll tell you one thing about these programs for migrant workers, those are not subsidies to the migrant workers. Those are subsidies to the agricultural industry who marginalizes people that they qualify for food stamps, they qualify for migrant clinics. All the tobacco companies love that because they are maintaining these people's subsistence so they can keep exploiting their cheap labor. That's the real design. We have to break that design and give empowerment to the farmworkers so they can earn a fair day's pay for a fair day of work, and they can feed, educate and clothe their own families. (Applause) To me, that's the threshold. All that other stuff is low hanging fruit that people are selling their souls to the devil because they are making money off of farmworker's poverty. Going back to Bob, thinking about, they are going to call you all kinds of names, communists, whatever like that, throw it back to them. Say, "well the first communists are in Congress over there they have universal healthcare, they've got subsidized this and subsidized that, they have a pension subsidized." If that's not socialism I don't know what it is. So let's throw it back to them. Call an ace an ace and a spade a spade. Finally, this whole thing about partial victories, uh uh. You got to go to the mat for the structured inequities and when you impact that, then you can just continue to add on. It ain't going to happen unless we have a self-determination and you build institution among the poor so they can speak for themselves and then the advocates who can go and retire. (Applause)

Richard Koritz: Brothers and sisters, my name is Richard Koritz. I am pleased to be here representing the American Postal Worker's Union and Mark Diamondstein, President - a new kind of labor leader still in an old kind of labor leader environment, so it's a real challenge. But Mark is the man, the brother, to rise to the occasion. I have a few thoughts that I'd like to share and get comments on, if appropriate. Number one is that, and Brother Sherrod and I were speaking at an earlier break about the fact that politics and economics are often presented as two separate entities. And in fact, if we listen to the news, we know that they present them that way as if never the twain shall meet. When, in fact, the politics are owned by the $1/10^{th}$ of 1% and they're getting their money's worth really well. So in the Civil Rights Movement period, and I was also involved though not at the high level of some of the other brothers and sisters here. It seemed to me that one of the biggest weaknesses in that movement, with all of the tremendous strengths in the period especially from 1960 to 1967 or 8, was that the whole question of land was not presented in its proper place of importance. How do we have freedom if we don't have any territory in which to have that freedom? And so, I think that one of the reasons that the movement was able to be, I am talking now about the black liberation movement, was able to be turned around over a period of time was because of the fact that the land question was not given that prominence. Someone mentioned earlier, I think it was sister Sherrod, that it was black farmers who bailed out the folks who were arrested in Selma. And just one indication of how central, even despite the small percentage of the population, how central the land question was to the Afro-American liberation struggle at the time.

The second thing I wanted to mention is the Pigford II settlement. And I'm not sure if I got the answer today, but I think I heard that it still hasn't been paid, if I'm correct about that. The second, Pigford II, I don't think has been paid yet. But at any rate, in July of 2010 when Sister Sherrod was dumped by Obama's Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack, and then she was brought back and offered a job and so on and so forth. At that time, the Senate, right around that same time, the Senate decided that they were not going to pay Pigford II yet even though it had already been acknowledged and won, that it was a just claim and a just settlement from their point of view. Almost on the same day, maybe it was even he same day, as the announcement that the Senate was not going to pay Pigford II was the announcement that Kenneth Feinberg was not going to charge the big financial institutions on Wall Street. He was going to forgive $1.6 billion, if I remember correctly, and I think the Pigford II settlement was $1.2 billion, so even more money was going to be forgiven by Feinberg to Wall Street financial interests. Obviously, the reason the Senate said they couldn't pay the black farmers in Pigford II was because they did not have the money. So you see, this was, what a slap in the face that was. This, to me, is the definition of power or who had the power and also who didn't have the power at that point.

The last thing I want to mention because I'm here under the auspices of the American Postal Workers Union is that the post office is a cornerstone of rural America. The American Postal Workers Union represents postal clerks and maintenance folks and truck drivers throughout the country. I've also spent some years in the Letter Carriers Union. My wife was a rural letter carrier. So, when you look at the post office, this is one institution that farmers and other rural folk can use and need to defend that public postal service at a time where privatization of schools and privatization of prisons and privatization of you name it, is running rampant. I think that's one example of how we can help to be not the objects, but the architects of our future is by making alliances with forces like the postal unions that are at the very heart of the struggle to save the public postal service. Thank you. (Applause)

Daniel Teague: Well, he mentioned some of the stuff that I wanted to say about the discrepancy of the banks on Wall Street and the farmers. I'm glad he threw that piece in about Pigford. But, in listening to all this today, I took a few notes. We said organize, we said resource gathering, we said a seat at the table, we said something about the data collecting process, and establish yields. Ok. When it comes to, let's say this thing about establishing yield, if you're a farmer and you know anything about cost of production, you always know there are always pockets in the county that don't get those established yields and sometimes those yields are better than those bad years where rain did not come to those parts of the county, especially in the Delta. But the thing is, that's part of that systematic, structured approach to infringe upon or press that small farmer or that family farmer. My thing is, how do we educate family farmers in a room? How do we get them to organize and get them to gain that knowledge of, because a lot

of our problem folks is because that guy that has that contract with the poultry guy, with the guy that buys the tomatoes, with the soybean, the corn, the cotton guy, is his contract. I know three brothers in Scott County, Mississippi. They're poultry farmers. When they went to make the loan at the bank even though they have three different parcels of land, they gave them one tractor. Each one of them got four houses. It makes no sense. Okay. But the thing is, they thought they were getting a good deal. Until 19 years later, they all wondered how I'm going to keep going. The thing is, as advocates and folks out there talking to them, somehow we got to get that educational piece in there. My thing is to the panel or anybody in the room, how do we stop or how do we educate those farmers, how do we stop denying the knowledge of if we have it to the farmer to stop the systematic approach or structure - oppression, I call it - to that family farmer. When we answer that, I think we'll all do a better job. Because our piece here, is real good. But until we can connect to that individual on the ground that's working seven days a week, we aren't doing much. (Applause)

Mike Sayer: Thank you for that. Any last comments from the panel? We have to wrap this up.

Shirley Sherrod: We have to go home and organize, organize, organize. I think Reverend Barber made the point so plainly this morning. We have to do, see, its, its, how is it, anyway, what I am trying to say is it's nice to get involved in the national. You can go to meetings and feel you have gone back and you've been a part of something. But the real work is at the local level. Remember what I said earlier: it's those of us, we fail to deal with the local and then we elect these people and they go up the ladder, and then they forget about what was happening back home. We don't hold 'em accountable. The farmers are willing to be educated on the issues, but it's going to take pulling them together. Now that's one of the tactics that I used early on. When I first started working with the Federation, I found that famers pulling them together in a county, and getting them to talk to each other. A lot of times the meeting would end, and they'd stay outside the church, which is usually where we met, talking for a long time because they didn't come together in that way. And then I found, okay, if you are bringing them together in each county, why not get them to come together across county lines? And then you are amazed at what happens there. Then I used to get them to get together and go way over there to Epes, Alabama to the Federation's training center where they had a chance to interact with farmers from other states. We cannot forget the work that we have to do in our own community with farmers. And they are open to learning more. They find that they really are open to losing that independence. They think they're independent, but they're not. And we just have to help them to see that so that they learn to work together.

Baldemar Velasquez: One of the things that we do, when we do a campaign, we do a serious power analysis of the industry. Who is it that we are taking on? When we flushed out Reynold's America who they really were, who their subsidiaries were, who their banks are, who are their board of directors

and how are all those corporations interrelated? Who is their distributor? McLean Distributer is part of the Warren Buffett subsidiaries. The three major chain stores in that distribution are Kangaroo, Seven Eleven and the WaWa chain stores in the Northeast accounts for one-third of their consolidated revenue. Now, as we unfold this fight against these tobacco companies, we're laying the groundwork for a national boycott of these retailers. They're going to squeal at Reynolds America every bit as much as British American tobacco that owns 42% of Reynolds. So we went to Europe and did a campaign of British American tobacco, that's why we have these members of British Parliament to come and visit the tobacco fields. This summer, they're going to issue a report out of Parliament next month. And then they're going to have hearings around this, and they are going to get the British-American Tobacco because the British are concerned about their past history of colonialism, and you've got one of their companies doing human rights abuses in the farmlands of North Carolina. This is what they saw. So we take it to them and make life uncomfortable for them where they lose sleep at night. At some point, they'll want to make us go away. They ain't going to go away without a fundamental agreement guaranteeing freedom of association, collective bargaining and negotiating the cornerstones or the pricing in the industry. How do we educate the farmers, the white farmers? Look, white farmers got the same problems, they're talking about everybody's sustainability and about survival. We give them the economic plan like we did with those Campbell Soup farmers. The guys that used to greet me in their labor camps with shot guns and dogs and arresting me, I lost track of 30 something times, they're the same farmers who later, when we negotiated with Campbell Soup, increased their price per ton from $34 a ton to $72 a ton. To them, that was putting something on the table that they could work with to give workers double our wages and improve wages and living conditions. And we isolated them economically and got healthcare covered by Campbell Soup to all the tomato workers so that it didn't have to come out of the farmer's pocket. So when you have a good power analysis of who you're going to attack and what you're going to ask for, it has to include the people on the bottom of that supply chain. We're doing the same thing with tobacco down here. Now that's not going to be flushed out until we get those companies to start talking seriously about pricing of tobacco. Because in the bottom line, that is what is going to cure the marginalization of the people on the bottom. But we have to make them listen. We ain't their employees, giving that excuse the same thing that Campbell Soup and Vlasic and Mt. Olive did for years, but the education of the public, the galvanizing of the public.

So are you all ready to maybe do a boycott of retailers, are you ready to boycott? We're asking you to do nothing. That's powerful. They use nothing again. We have no money, no power, no nothing, well so what, nothing means we have nothing to lose. So we ask you to do nothing. When you go past that Kangaroo Store, we haven't called a boycott yet, but it may be coming depending upon what the farmworkers decide, but we're going to ask you to do nothing. Just go by that store and go buy something

else. Well, they're going to scream at Reynold's Tobacco or they are going to say, you've got to settle because we don't want to be boycotted. That's the power of us farmworkers not being under the National Labor Relations Act. They excluded us years ago because they did not want farmworkers to have the equal rights as white counterparts back in the 1930's when most farmworkers were black. Then white racist Southern legislators who wanted to support Roosevelt and the NLRA, they said, well, we'll support it if you exclude black people because we don't want the farmworkers to have the same power as white people. Well, now it is coming back to haunt them because we can do secondary boycotts which are outlined by the NLRA. So we can boycott to our hearts' content, and they can't do nothing about it.

Mike Sayer: Now, keep in mind this very question you asked is going to be the subject matter of our work session after the break, okay? So let's give the panel the hand it deserves. (Applause) We are going to take a 15-minute break. There is a snack in the back to take advantage of, and then we are going to come back and have small group work at our tables on this very question