

2024 Founder's Day Convocation Speaker Shirley Miller Sherrod



Ms. Shirley Miller Sherrod is a national civil rights figure, advocate, and global thought leader in agriculture policy and its impact on Black farmers and the Black community.

She currently sits on the Biden Administration's USDA Equity Commission, studying systemic racism within the Department.

A media contributor on race and agriculture, she serves as an important voice in protecting the interest of Black farmers, improving their access to capital and markets, and advocating for policy changes to stem the tide of Black land loss.

A daughter of the Jim Crow South, she came to her work honestly. At age 17, she witnessed an all-white grand jury refuse to indict a white farmer who took the life of her father in his own pasture in a dispute over livestock. After the murder, she vowed to commit her life in defending the rights of Blacks living in her native Baker County, Georgia.

That same year, Ms. Sherrod helped co-found the **Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education** with civil rights leader and late husband Rev. Charles Sherrod. Together, they fought to ensure equal access to the polls, to a quality education and to farm their own land.

In the face of Blacks losing jobs and homes because they registered to vote, Sherrod joined her husband and others in cofounding **New Communities Inc.** in 1969. She helped manage the near-

6000-acre farm in Lee County, Georgia that became the nation's first community land trust that served as a haven for activists to grow their food, own their home, on land collectively held.

Despite losing the property 15 years later, due to drought and discriminatory government loan practices, Sherrod remained undaunted.

She spent the next 25 years helping organize underserved farmers, including as Georgia State Field Director for the Federation of Southern Cooperatives.

In 2000, she and her late husband also joined a class-action lawsuit on behalf of Black farmers systematically discriminated against by the United States Department of Agriculture.

In 2009, the Obama White House nominated Sherrod to serve as the first Black Georgia Director of Rural Development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. She was forced to resign a year later after a Conservative blogger edited a speech to appear she was prejudiced against white farmers. After the deception unraveled, and despite apologies and another job offer from the Administration, Sherrod opted to return home to resume her work with underserved farmers.

In 2010, she and her husband learned that Black farmers reached an out of court settlement with USDA, clearing the way for the purchase of 1,635-acre tract near Albany to resume their work.

Today, **New Communities at Cypress Pond, or Resora**, as it's known, serves as headquarters to **The Sherrod Institute**, and its affiliates, **The Southwest Georgia Project, New Communities Land Trust**, and **The Charles Sherrod Community Development Corporation**. Other affiliates include **'The Table of Southwest Georgia'** and **WUTU 88.3 FM**. Together, with Sherrod serving at the helm, these divisions carry out the near-60-year-old mission to move Black farmers toward education, access, and economic independence.

Ms. Sherrod was educated at Fort Valley State University and Albany State University, where she earned her bachelor's degree. She holds a master's degree from Antioch University and is a 1993 Kellogg Fellow. Recently widowed, she is the mother of two adult children and five grandchildren.