



HIGHLIGHTS

December 5, 2016 * Tuskegee University *
Kellogg Conference Center * www.twitter.com/pawctu

Panel Addresses the Presidential Election's Effect on Agriculture



Theresa Cooper (right) of Iowa State University introduces Rep. Miller (left)

Representative Helen Miller (D-Fort Dodge) was an especially fitting choice to take part in the panel titled "Election Results: Implications for Rural & Urban Communities." With so many people concerned about possible challenges in store for minority and underserved agricultural workers during the next administration, Rep. Miller provided a blueprint for overcoming seemingly impossible political hurdles.

Originally from Newark, New Jersey, Miller faced quite a change of environment when she and her husband (now deceased) moved to Iowa about seventeen years ago, but she grew to love her adopted home state and eventually ran for office in 2002, although at the time even she wondered if she would be successful. "I'm African American; I'm a female and I've been here two years," she thought. "What are my chances of winning?"



Audience members at Monday's opening plenary session (part II)

Great, as it turned out. Miller won that election and many others after. She's now the Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee. (Not incidentally, she was also the first minority member of that committee.) Rep. Miller also serves as the Agriculture Committee Chair for the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) and is the founder of the Urban-Ag Academy.

She has been able to flourish in a district where the odds (and demographics) seemed to be against her, so she encouraged people to not fret about the possible fallout from this or any other election and declared that no matter the political climate it was still possible to be victorious in fighting for sound policy.



Panelist Jerry Pennick

“We have to build diverse coalitions across racial and state boundaries,” said Jerry Pennick, formerly of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund. African American agricultural workers, he said, can’t just hope for a seat at the table, so to speak. “We have to help set the table.”



Scott McCall of Alabama Ag Credit (left) with PAWC chair, Dr. Walter Hill (right)

The “Gangsta Gardener” Brings Powerful Message to the PAWC



Crowd awaits Finley’s presentation

Ron Finley became an international folk hero after defying local ordinances by planting a garden in the parkway in front of his South Central Los Angeles home. That was in 2010. In the years since, he’s been the subject of many a newspaper and magazine article, as well as documentaries such as *Can You Dig This*, and is also frequently invited to speak before large audiences who appreciate his rebelliousness and candor.



**Ron Finley
(Photo credit: Stephen Zeigler)**

In his speech on Monday, Finley pointed out that there was nothing extraordinary in what he did, and told the audience members they, too, can make a difference in their communities, their families, and their own lives. “If I can do what I’ve done—one person and it goes around the world—imagine if we all did that,” he said. “Imagine if we stopped talking about it, and start doing it.”

Finley placed a lot of emphasis on self-reliance in his talk. “We need to build our communities ourselves,” he said, as he urged the audience to stop expecting others to swoop in and save the day. “We are the superheroes that we’ve been waiting for. Own that.”