

## USDA PRESENTATION AT JUNETEENTH

By

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Michigan Food and Farming Systems (MIFFS) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) presented at a June 20, 2015 Juneteenth Celebration at the Philip Gipson Farm. Elder Philip Gipson and his family have been hosting Juneteenth for the past 6 years and they are committed to continuing this celebration. Elder Philip Gipson stated: "Land ownership and liberation, sustainable agriculture, freedom and independence as well as liberation without sustainability and self-sufficiency is an illusion." Elder Philip Gipson.

The "general order" below states in summary what Juneteenth is all about.

General Granger and his Regiment brought the word of the Declaration of Independence to Texas two years after President Lincoln signed it in 1865. The Declaration of Independence was signed January 1, 1863. The General Order was as follows:

### General Order Number 3

"One of General Granger's first orders of business was to read to the people of Texas, **General Order Number 3** which began most significantly with:

*"The people of Texas are informed that in accordance with a Proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and free laborer."*

The **reactions to this profound news** ranged from pure **shock** to immediate **jubilation**. While many lingered to learn of this new employer to employee relationship, many left before these offers were completely off the lips of their former 'masters' - attesting to the varying conditions on the plantations and the realization of freedom. **Even with nowhere to go**, many felt that leaving the plantation would be their first grasp of freedom. North was a logical destination and for many it represented true freedom, while the **desire to reach family members in neighboring states** drove the some into Louisiana, Arkansas and Oklahoma. Settling into these new areas as free men and women brought on new realities and **the challenges of establishing a heretofore non-existent status for black people in America**. Recounting the memories of that great day in June of 1865 and its festivities would serve as motivation as well as a release from the growing pressures encountered in their new territory. The celebration of **June 19<sup>th</sup> was coined "Juneteenth"** and grew with more participation from descendants. **The Juneteenth celebration was a time for reassuring**

**each other, for praying and for gathering remaining family members.** Juneteenth continued to be highly revered in Texas decades later, with many former slaves and descendants making an **annual pilgrimage back to Galveston** on this date.” Credits for General Order Number go to:

[http://www.juneteenth.com/logo\\_hdr350.jpg](http://www.juneteenth.com/logo_hdr350.jpg)

The USDA workshop, conducted by Sandy Penn, Outreach Coordinator of NRCS-Michigan and Michelle Napier-Dunnings, Executive Director of MIFFS, focused on help available through USDA programs. Those who attended the workshop were “into the workshop” because the core message focused on sustainability, good agricultural practices (GAP), and both opportunities and challenges facing farmers. This message went hand-in-hand with the Juneteenth Celebration. Elder Phil Gipson indicates he and his family will continue the celebration because there are so many people who are not aware of its significance. There are also many people who are not aware of the help that they can get from the U. S. Department of Agriculture agencies. Farmers specifically can get conservation planning help from NRCS and financial help from the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA). Elder Gipson and his family, farming the 52 acre farm in Watervliet, Michigan for the past 17 years, have taken advantage of USDA programs. One of the first things that he requested was help from the USDA NRCS in the assistance of developing a conservation plan for his farm. He has applied practices such as rotational grazing for his sheep on his 10 acre pasture. He was also able to redo his roads on the farm and he says USDA supported some streambank protection. He is currently involved in doing timber stand improvement on the 25 acre woodlot on the farm. Phil also has 3 acres of blueberries and he says “I need no irrigation because the soils are right for growing blueberries. The Conservation Plan helped me prioritize what I needed to do on my farm in the early stages.



*Figure 1: Michelle Napier-Dunnings, Executive Director of MIFFS far right in background, facilitates a discussion of farmer challenges and opportunities with attendees at Juneteenth Celebration at the Philip Gipson on June 20, 2015. The official date for celebrating Juneteenth is June 19th.*

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