Meet Fueled by Purpose Micro Grant Winner Naima Dhore, Founder of Naima’s Farm

By Stef Tschida

*In response to the global health crisis, My Founder Story is partnering with*[*BankCherokee*](https://bankcherokee.com/)*to launch Fueled by Purpose micro grants. Every week through June, we will award a $500 grant to a female-founded small business in need.*

When she was a little girl growing up in Somalia, Naima Dhore’s mother often sent her next door to trade the vegetables they’d grown in their garden for eggs from the neighbor’s chickens. Another neighbor further down the street would provide milk in exchange for produce, and so on. At an early age, Naima began to understand the power of food to connect people and meet their needs.

Years later, that appreciation for food inspired Naima and her husband to grow microgreens in the bathroom of their tiny apartment after immigrating to Minnesota due to the civil war in Somalia. They were surprised with their growing results despite the challenging conditions and began to wonder what they could grow in a better environment.

When not working at her full-time job or chasing after her two young sons, Naima started watching YouTube videos to learn more about growing produce. She was eventually inspired to transfer her microgreens from the bathroom to a community garden plot, where she started growing other vegetables.

Through her online research, Naima came across Big River Farms in Marine on St. Croix, which offers land access and education in organic agriculture for immigrants, refugees, people of color, and others who have historically faced discrimination in accessing farmland, markets, education and other farming support.

Big River Farms offers a Farmer Education Program that teaches participants how to produce food and run a successful business. Hearing about that program inspired Naima and her husband to start dreaming about what it could look like to transition from a love of gardening to farming as their profession. Though their lives were already full, they decided to “follow the love” and sign up for the program.

Five years later, Naima and her husband are graduates of the Farmer Education Program. They grow produce at Naima’s Farm, which sits on eight acres of land at Big River Farms, and they run a recently launched nonprofit called the Somali American Farmers Association, which supports immobile Somali elders by donating fresh, organic produce that a partner organization delivers to their door. After the death of George Floyd, Naima observed an influx in food donations to the black and brown community in Minneapolis, but the food was mostly unhealthy. She knew she could make a difference with her farm’s bounty.

Naima has developed a passion for exposing people to new produce. She’s introducing the Minnesota market to leafy greens native to Somalia, many similar to spinach or chard. And by sharing that familiar produce with Somali elders, Naima earns the right to introduce them to new vegetables like turnips and beets. She’s in conversation with the University of Minnesota about potential research on how to grow more native Somalian crops in Minnesota’s climate.

Later this year Naima will earn her master’s degree, which she’s tailored to focus on youth development in urban farming so she can help introduce a new generation to the joys of growing produce and feeding others. She’s also looking to purchase a larger piece of land within driving distance of the Twin Cities through the USDA Farm Service Agency, which offers a variety of loan programs to help farmers get their start. While Naima “never dreamed that an immigrant, black woman could own her own land,” she’s working hard to make it a reality so she can have an even bigger impact in her community.

Naima does all this while continuing to work at her full-time job. While she says her alarm goes off way too early most mornings so she can fit it all in, she’s driven by a vision for what Naima’s Farm can be: a place that brings people from different backgrounds together through food. In Naima’s experience, “We often don’t know enough about each other and that’s what separates us.” She looks forward to changing that, one vegetable at a time.

Naima will use her Fueled by Purpose grant to upgrade her website to facilitate online workshops and the CSA she plans to launch next spring.

To learn more about Naima’s business, visit [Naima’s Farm](https://naimasfarm.com/).

To learn more about and apply for a Fueled by Purpose micro grant, visit our [grants page](https://www.myfounderstory.com/grants/).

***About the author:*** Stef Tschida is a former corporate communicator and lifelong storyteller. Stef’s WHY became clear when she worked at her daily campus newspaper. She realized she didn’t want to ask tough questions as a reporter—she wanted to help organizations answer those tough questions. She’s been doing that work ever since.