

Ralph Paige, Champion of Black Farmers, Dies at 74

By Daniel E. Slotnik

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Ralph Paige, a nationally prominent advocate for black farmers who fought to save their land and to win them financial compensation for what they contended were years of government discrimination, died on June 28 in Atlanta. He was 74.

The cause was congestive heart failure, said Cornelius Blanding, executive director of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, an advocacy organization for African-American farmers that grew out of the civil rights movement and that Mr. Paige led for 30 years, beginning in 1985.

In that leadership role he helped organize black farmers and others in the Southeast into economic cooperatives, educated them on how best to retain their land and became their spokesman.

The life of a family farmer is never easy: Financial insecurity is the norm, smaller farms have to compete with deep-pocketed agribusiness giants, and months of toil can be wiped away by a crop blight or a freak weather event.

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