



YOUNG FARMERS 2020 ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT



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GRATITUDE

The National Young Farmers Coalition's staff, chapters, and farmer members live and work on the ancestral, contemporary, and unceded territory of Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island, encompassing what is now known as the United States. For staff, these lands include those of the Abenaki, Anishinaabeg (Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples), Arapaho, Chahta Okla (Choctaw), Cheyenne, Chitimacha, Chumash, Erie, Haudenosaunee, Houma, Manahoac, Methow, Mohawk, Mohican, Monacan, Munsee Lenape, Muskogee, Nacotchtank (Anacostan), Oneida, Osage, Pequawket, Piscataway, Pueblo, Shawnee, Sioux, Tewa, Ute, Wappinger, and Wyachtonok. We acknowledge and honor the land and those who have stewarded it for centuries before colonization. We commit to forming deeper partnerships to address past and ongoing land-based injustices against Indigenous peoples through our work.

The work presented in this report took place over the past 18 months, which is not a comprehensive summary of our racial equity efforts to date. Former staff, namely Michelle L. Hughes, Sara Black, Kate Greenberg, and Mai Nguyen, along with former Board President Tess Brown-Lavoie, built the foundation from which the progress featured in this report has been established. We pay homage to those who chose to be change-makers at our organization without the support we have for this transformation today. We are grateful to our Co-Executive Directors, and staff at all levels of the organization for supporting our movement towards anti-racism.

As a coalition, we feel gratitude to farmers and partner organization leadership in our network who identify as Black, Indigneous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and have raised concerns of injustice over the past decade. We thank those who remain involved with the Coalition, even when our journey makes it hard for you. You have manifested innovative change both within the Coalition, and in the agriculture community as a whole. We are grateful to be in community with you.

We would like to thank farmers Qadir Anderson, Rafael Aponte, Moretta Brown, Chris Bueno, Rosie Fitz, Monica Ponce, and Maurice Small, and our partner organization representatives—Karen Washington, Lorette Picciano, Ricardo Salvador, Eugene Pickett, Viviana Gentry Fernandez-Pellon, James and Joyce Skeet, Fatuma Emmad, Jason Auguste, Pomaj Chakmam Yajalaji, Luis Larin, Anthony Chang, Kassandra Hishida, Raqueeb Bay, Sona Desai, Nina Ichikawa, and Stephanie Morningstar—who contributed their time and perspective to this report through interviews and text review.

We appreciate you.

This acknowledgment was informed by the Native Land Map (<https://native-land.ca>), along with additional research and personal conversation. Please reach out to us with any corrections or comments.

FROM OUR BOARD

THE YOUNG FARMERS BOARD:

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On behalf of the board of directors of the National Young Farmers Coalition (Young Farmers), we would like to introduce ourselves, our perspective on equity and organizational change within the Coalition, and the role that we envision the board playing in this work. We want to begin by stating that the board is fully and explicitly committed to the racial equity transformation at Young Farmers, as well as the centering of racial equity in the policy platform work of the organization. While this work has great urgency, both in terms of reducing immediate harm within the organization and in the work of the Coalition, we acknowledge and know that the work of true transformation is ongoing, and requires deep and sustained engagement.

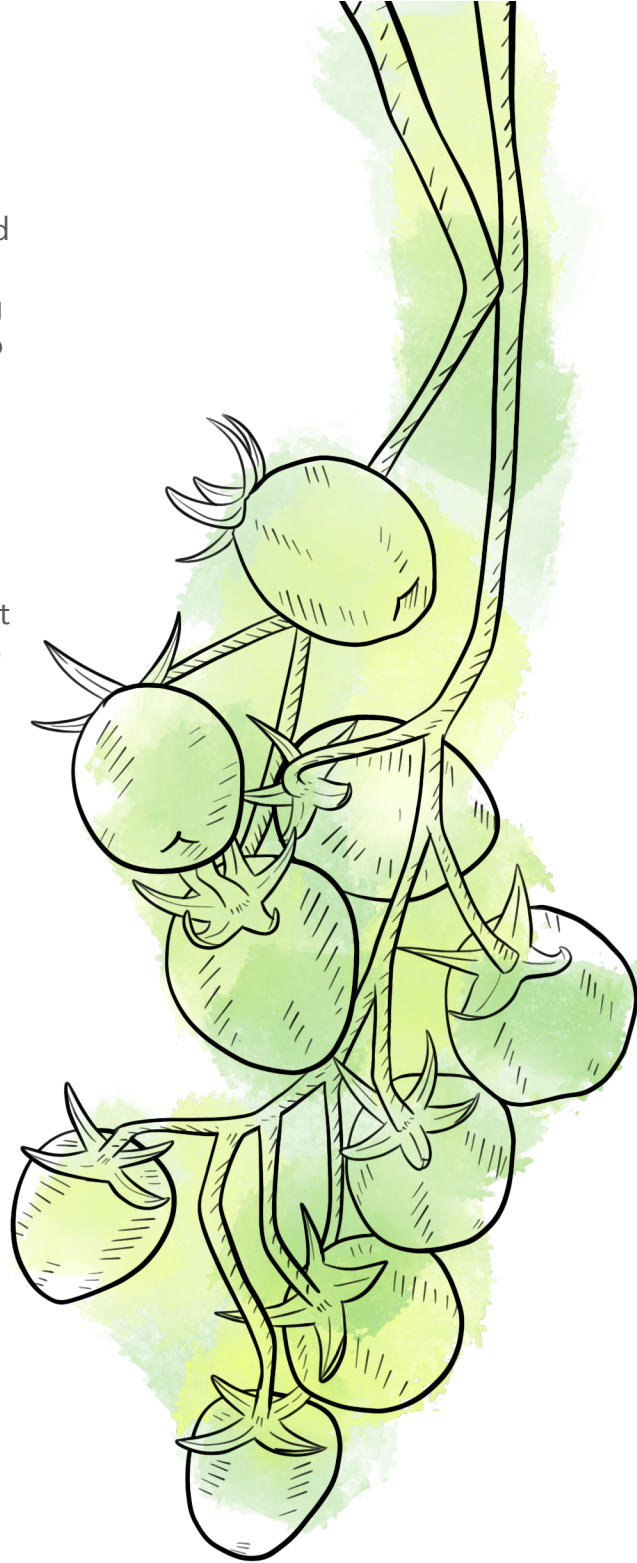
The board of directors has undergone a substantial transition in 2020, with new faces accounting for half of our incoming membership. We are a diverse group, composed mostly of farmers spanning across the U.S. representing different fields of farming, with the majority of board members identifying as BIPOC. As a new board, we look forward to collectively executing shared visions. Please learn more about us [here](#).

In our commitment to supporting this work, we recognize that the board has an important responsibility and role in this collective work of transformation. We acknowledge the board as a place to challenge and shift the balance of traditional power structures and patterns. Though we are still optimizing the processes of our work, it is our priority to support BIPOC staff and members to reclaim their agency and power at the Coalition. We see the board as a place to support change to create a more equitable coalition. With the tremendous resource of this accountability report, and the depth of process and experience it represents, we are committed to using it as a compass to reference, reflect on our work, and anticipate the potential impact of our decision-making.

The role of the board in supporting the Coalition's commitment to equity is crucial if we are to grow forward in developing a sustainable model and a work plan for becoming a more transformative and anti-oppressive organization. Young Farmers has followed through on developing a board that

welcomes BIPOC farmers to access a more influential role within the Coalition's leadership. We also established an agreement on how we will responsibly communicate with each other to increase the value of board participation and enable the respectful expression of our diverse perspectives for consideration. This approach to providing access to political power for BIPOC people is the first step toward ensuring that this organization is held accountable to the needs of farmers and communities of color.

We hope to understand the current barriers to structural change in our efforts to become a more transformative coalition, so we may identify and dismantle paradigms that perpetuate inequities for BIPOC members. As we develop our strategic plan this year, we aim to institutionalize anti-racism and anti-oppression through annual accountability reports and specific programming that addresses and uproots racism and oppression within food and farming systems. As a board, we will challenge ourselves to reimagine what a transformative board acts like through the diversity we have.



REFLECTIONS FROM OUR CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

This accountability report is, of course, an account. An account of our collective effort and individual contributions measured along the necessity of growing the anti-racist farm future that is long-needed. As co-executive directors, we recognize our singular privilege to manifest this vision into the goals and actions of an organization, as well as our singular responsibility for the impact of our organization's work regardless of our intentions, and the duty to channel the expectations of the members in our coalition. As we survey 2020, we reflect on an agricultural system that perpetuated inequity and an organization whose contributions were something, but not enough.

As co-executive directors we responded to grassroots energy for racial equity transformation with an urgency that failed to bring everyone along. We operationalized our intentions with a flurry of staff directives and new guidelines and requirements. We acted as gatekeepers to organizational sources of power—funding, budgeting, and strategy—while asking our staff to take more “ownership” of the work. Simultaneously, our cautiousness led to a focus on the “internal” work before fully manifesting this work in our programming. In a year of global pandemic and racial uprisings, we did not give our staff the space to be creative leaders in the fight for racial equity or the time to slow down and focus on relationships. Our approach sometimes confused intensity for intentionality.

But accountability is not simply detailing mistakes. Articulating what we consider achievements announces our values and presents space for new discussion. This year brought progress. Our board of directors reconstituted to become a majority BIPOC farmer space. Our equity and organizational change director, Michelle A.T. Hughes, elevated our organization's racial equity analysis and created a standard to uphold. Our federal policy team facilitated the Coalition's first democratic and racial equity-centered farmer policy setting process. We centered the voices of young BIPOC farmers in the press and advocacy work for COVID relief, and began working in solidarity with farm worker partners to push for labor protections for essential farm workers. Our land team confronted the white supremacy inherent in land ownership and reoriented our narrative towards land justice. Our state teams shifted their focus to prioritize coalition building with those most marginalized from policy processes, and to center racial equity in our policy development work. Our National Leadership Convergence was planned for and by BIPOC farmers, creating space for learning and camaraderie that uplifted BIPOC farmer voices. Our Young Farmer Grants contributed 80% of funds to support BIPOC farmers. Many of our predominantly white chapters worked through our Racial Equity Toolkit and acknowledged their privilege and responsibility to organize for racial justice.

We are grateful for the courage of our BIPOC staff and community to request this work and hold us to a high standard, and to our white staff and community to confront their gaps and to learn and change.

As a two-person leadership team, we acknowledge that we embody our roles with different positionalities.

Martin - I joined the Coalition in 2018, and my time here is characterized as a responsibility to manage sometimes competing priorities of organizational maintenance and organizational change. As deputy director, I was hired to construct the scaffolding for a growing organization and immediately tasked with supporting our founding executive director's decision to exit. Less than a year later, I was asked to steady the organization during a six-month executive search as interim director. In my third role in as many years, I am now responsible for leading this coalition into its next phase as co-executive director. That responsibility is again characterized by facilitating necessary changes and making transition decisions, informed by our network, on what to preserve, what to discard, and what to evolve as we advance a new vision for agriculture.

I engage with this work fully aware that my efforts in advancing this evolution and resolving intrinsic tensions in our organization are incomplete. My identity as a Latino immigrant informs my belief that my work is insufficient when it does not offer an internationalist perspective on food justice and equality. I am accountable to my family and my Uruguayan community, both "away" and "back home," and acknowledge that our organizational approach to equity reflects a growing investigation of privilege but hasn't fully grappled with the privilege conferred by conducting this work within the United States. I hold that tension and am accountable for the ways our racial equity analysis has yet to grasp international implications or de-center the U.S. perspective. And as a matter of personal accountability, I have often failed to acknowledge the extent to which my positionality within this organization, and this ecosystem of work, enables me to enjoy a level of "elitism." Internalized perspectives on work ethic and merit still find their expression in my leadership. It's my work to undo notions that confer and assign privilege. And it is our work to challenge more forcefully the various ways we enjoy privilege, conform to class-based and U.S.-centric elitism, and narrow racial equity to be defined as a limited redistribution of power and wealth instead of a global effort for justice and equal opportunity.

Sophie – As a white leader, I am responsible for the ways our white staff and farmers have missed the mark. Our BIPOC colleagues and farmers deserve to belong to a coalition that does not compromise on racial equity, that is bold in the pursuit of justice, and fully celebrates their contributions and leadership. Young Farmers wasn't designed to serve BIPOC farmers, and we have a lot of work to do to earn the trust of those long left out of our coalition. We earn this trust not through our commitments, but through our actions to align our work with the priorities of those most marginalized from our current agriculture system.

As someone who joined the Coalition in its infancy, back in 2012, I am fully complicit in the marginalization of farmers of color in our work. I also have the privilege of helping to lead the change. For me, so much of doing the work of racial equity is unlearning my beliefs, behaviors, and being open and affirming of critique and new ideas. 2020 tested me as a leader. I often questioned my continued role with the organization. I have not answered this



question, but I am learning that white leaders can not back away from this work because it is outside of our lived experience and comfort zone. Our movement requires white people to show up fully to the work of racial equity and take courageous and bold action. To defer to BIPOC leaders, but not to wait for instructions. I have a lot more work to do to dismantle white supremacy in my leadership and model for our white staff and farmers how to be an accomplice in this work. But I am proud of our coalition's willingness and ability to change.

Together, we look to 2021 knowing that we've not done enough but also affirming that not enough is the least that we can do.

Our strategic plan, to be released in June, will formalize our identity as an organization striving to be anti-racist. The process, led by our stellar consultants Richael Faithful and Julia Metzger-Traber, is participatory and rooted in racial equity. The result will be a rewriting of our mission, vision, and guiding principles and a reframing of our theory of change, political orientation, and organizing models to align with our commitment to racial equity.

In 2021, we will act on our learnings and focus on:

- Providing staff real space to build relationships and show creativity;
- Creating a work culture that celebrates the contributions of our staff;
- Holding our programs and projects to our high standards and leaving behind work that is no longer serving our goals;
- Advancing our racial equity analysis as a coalition by pursuing more conversations and initiatives on intersectionality, class oppression, and solidarity; and
- Taking more risks to challenge oppression in the systems of power in which we operate, from the halls of Congress to the board tables of our foundation and corporate partners, and shift more resources to our BIPOC-led partners.

We are a learning organization and expect to learn things the hard way. But we acknowledge where we are, what we've achieved, and are energized by the fact that we can do better.



INTRODUCTION:

THE PURPOSE OF THE ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

We created this report to serve three purposes: 1) acknowledge historical inequities in the agriculture system, 2) provide a public chronicle of the first year of our racial equity transformation process, and 3) describe our process, such that another organization could gain valuable insights for their own course of action towards racial equity transformation.

For those interested in replicating this work, the author of this report began her research by conducting an extensive literature review of reports, articles, podcasts, and documentaries published by organizations undergoing a similar transformation. Our data collection consisted of twenty-seven interviews with staff, farmers, and partner organizations. Interview results were analyzed using a deductive approach to thematic analysis. Sections based on the results of these interviews were reviewed by the respective group of contributors.

The text begins with a recognition of historical patterns reflected by the Young Farmers staff and board. The “Racial Equity Transformation” section of this report encompasses our three-part cyclical approach to becoming an organization that centers racial justice: 1) developing a shared understanding, 2) designing with intention, and 3) ensuring accountability.

The “Shared Understanding” section of the report recounts learnings from our caucusing work and summarizes the communications we’ve shared with the public related to our stance on various issues’ intersection with racial equity. The next section on “Intentional Program Design” details a racial equity impact assessment conducted throughout 2020, provides examples of program areas that have undergone a redesign over the past year, and outlines a few key improvements made internally through our Human Resources & Operations Audit.

Finally, the “Accountability Mechanisms” section presents two methods by which we measure accountability at Young Farmers. The remaining sections, “Inside Young Farmers” and “Accountability,” share the results of interviews with our BIPOC staff, farmers and BIPOC-led organizations respectively. The report ends with a look into the Coalition’s future, and the theme for the Young Farmers 2021 Accountability Report.



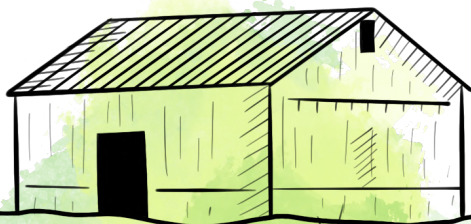
BREAKING PATTERNS

The Young Farmers board and staff, would like to begin by acknowledging the BIPOC voices that have waited to be heard throughout the Coalition's history. We acknowledge our privilege and reputation and moving forward, seek to be actors to advance racial justice for our board members, staff, farmers, partner organizations, members, and any others in our coalition by:

- Acknowledging that our agriculture system perpetuates structural racism because of its roots in stolen land, lives, and labor of people of color;
- Inviting you and members of your greater community into spaces that are built for and by people with similar experiences, that provide the support you need from our organization;
- Divesting from tenets of white supremacy culture, including but not limited to perfectionism, defensiveness, power hoarding, and shying away from conflict;
- Uplifting BIPOC voices in spaces in which you are not present; seizing opportunities to ensure you are seen, heard, and represented adequately; and
- Addressing acts of oppression at the Coalition and recognizing how these individual acts contribute to the marginalization of underprivileged and intersectional groups.

Our hope is that this accountability report will serve as a chronicle of our dynamic process to invest wholly in manifesting an anti-racist future. However, it is not comprehensive or sufficient in describing how we hold ourselves accountable, and does not comprise our entire approach to accountability. Rather, it provides a transparent look at one organization's path to equity via organizational change. Today, we are building a new culture at Young Farmers.

We are bold. We are intentional. We are responsible. We are accountable.



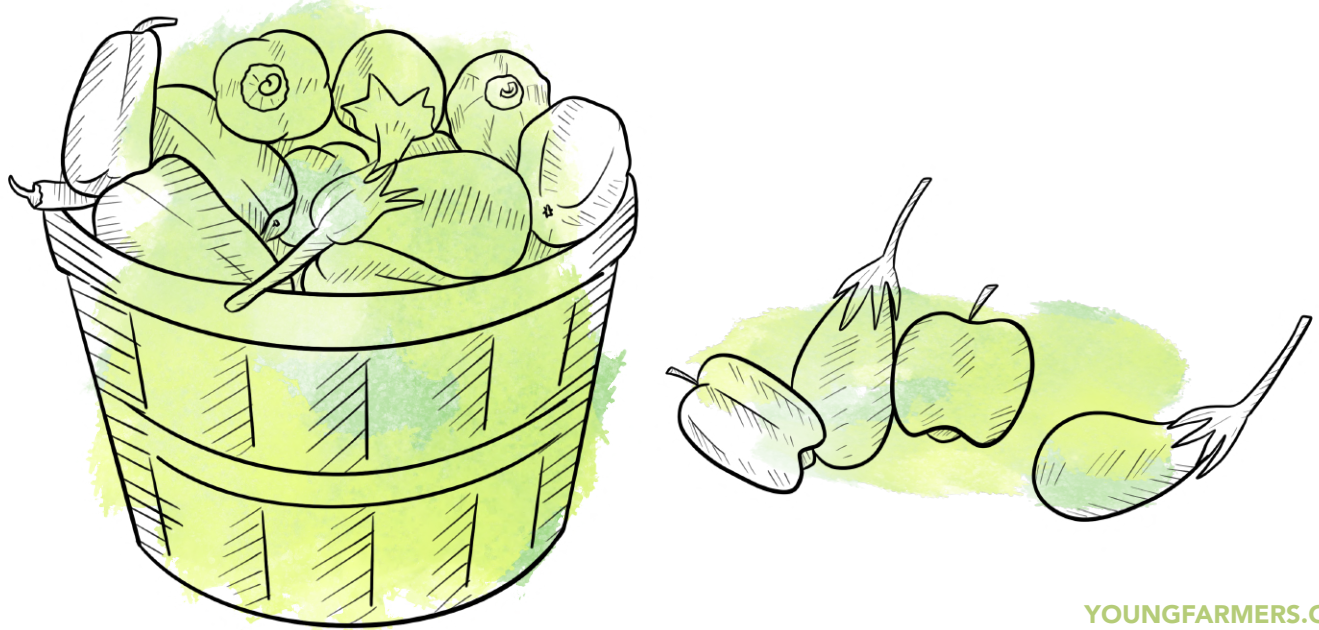
RACIAL EQUITY TRANSFORMATION

At Young Farmers, we use the phrase “racial equity transformation” to describe both the process we are undertaking to become an equitable, anti-racist organization, as well as the actual objectives and actions that contribute to that approach. Our transformation in process includes a three-part approach: (1) develop a shared understanding (2) design programs, practices, and processes at our organization with intention, and (3) ensure accountability to those we wish to serve.

LESSONS WE'RE LEARNING

While it is described as an outcome here, the wisdom of those that came before us emphasizes that racial equity is not merely an outcome, but a process. The Center for Social Inclusion puts it succinctly: "As an outcome, we achieve racial equity when race no longer determines one's socioeconomic outcomes; when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter where they live. As a process, we apply racial equity when those most impacted by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives."

<https://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org/our-work/what-is-racial-equity/>



SHARED UNDERSTANDING

Some might say we started our racial equity transformation when we published our first racial equity statement in 2016, some would name a time when BIPOC staff raised a collective set of objectives to white staff in September 2019, and others would call the appointment of our equity and organizational change director at the end of 2019 the beginning. While we made many attempts, our evolution couldn't officially begin until we agreed as a collective that the work was happening, and that it needed to happen now. At the start of 2020, the co-executive directors began setting new performance standards. We quickly realized we couldn't hold staff accountable to these new standards until we formally documented our starting place.

Over the past five years, it has become evident that our coalition was craving a framework to connect isolated equity efforts from farmer members and individual staff, particularly BIPOC farmers and staff. We needed to name, enforce, reinforce, and institutionalize our collective alignment. We had to demonstrate that allocating energy to liberating the agriculture system was no longer voluntary or tangential to our organization's efforts—it is core to our mission, a requirement of every staff member on our team, and now a key component of performance evaluations. We started by articulating why the National Young Farmers Coalition, a farm organization focused on supporting the next generation of farmers, is maturing as an organization to better serve our diverse farming communities. We drafted guidance for internal alignment, created racial affinity caucus spaces, called on external experts for support, and published our articulations.

RACIAL AFFINITY CAUCUSING

We employed caucusing as a tool to deepen and coordinate our differing definitions of phrases like white supremacy culture, structural racism, racial equity/justice, anti-racism, and liberation beginning in 2019, but the Coalition's insufficient momentum and continuity over the past five years made this tactic relatively unsuccessful. Initially, the Coalition's co-executive directors did not support the caucus spaces, which negatively impacted BIPOC staff and precipitated the subsequent re-design of the caucus structure.

Our BIPOC-identifying staff began caucusing in mid-2019. After a few months of convening, the group developed objectives for white staff that were presented in the fall of that year. In response, white staff formed their own caucus space to hold one other accountable to meeting the objectives. Although staff members of the white caucus had a clear goal—to meet our objectives—they were still missing essential resources that could bring those objectives to fruition. Creating caucus spaces alone was not enough; those spaces also needed leadership, facilitation, and structure. Despite the lack of leadership, white staff carried on meeting in the caucus space, and produced inconsistent results until we named the purpose of the space, enforced expectations of the space, and institutionalized caucusing within our organization.

Consequently, objectives crafted by our BIPOC staff remained unmet, and our intention to create a shared understanding stood idle as we started 2020 together. Instead, the white staff caucus created a bureaucratic organizational work plan that lacked accountability for individualized transformation. When the blueprint was shared with full staff at the start of 2020, the misuse of the caucus space was identified. The Co-EDs instructed the white caucus to pause convening to address these concerns by taking time to re-evaluate the space.

LESSONS WE'RE LEARNING

In antiracism organizing, racial identity caucuses are a tool for BIPOC people and white people to confront the effects of internalized racist oppression and internalized racist superiority, respectively. The word "caucus" comes from an Algonquian word *caucausu* meaning counselor. A caucus is a space for a group of people who share a certain mindset or similar concerns (in this case a similar racial identity) to gather to share counsel together before coming back together for collective work.

During this pause, the point of contention for many of our challenges were illuminated. Staff brought volume to underlying confusion about the purpose of caucusing, what was considered appropriate caucus space content, who to turn to as leaders in these spaces, and if and when the caucus spaces should gather together as one. Actively listening to these concerns brought attention to the gaps in our approach, and created capacity for improvement.

BIPOC staff suggested white staff create individual work plans that outlined how they would meet each of the objectives. The work plans were reviewed by BIPOC staff and revised by white staff based on their feedback. Our full staff came together in a regathering cross-caucus space in May 2020, following the Co-ED's release of written guidance for the caucus spaces that included the appointment of the much-needed Caucus Leadership Committee.

In 2020, the Caucus Leadership Committee was composed of four members of our staff that provided representation across caucuses: Bilal Sarwari, Michelle A.T. Hughes, Faith Shaeffer, and Karen Gardner. The Committee was responsible for guiding our internal caucusing efforts, which included overseeing the curriculum, logistics, and execution of the spaces. The BIPOC caucus space is usually dedicated to exploring timely topics for the group. Past examples include internalized racism, mutual accountability, and liberation. The white caucus space utilized the Racial Equity Toolkit's study group resources as pre-work for their meetings. Staff members spent a portion of the time discussing readings from our Racial Equity Toolkit and the rest in pre-assigned working groups. White caucus committee representatives, Faith and Karen, dedicate additional weekly time to revisit their overarching strategy.



EXTERNAL SUPPORT: CONSULTANTS, TRAINERS, AND OTHER EXPERTS

For Young Farmers, learning has sometimes meant identifying areas of our organization that lack expertise and acting to improve them. During those times, we called on external leaders to provide anti-racism trainings to our Coalition staff and farmer members. We're thankful to these change-makers for their contributions to building our shared understanding, including consultants Elizabeth O'Gilvie and Tory Field, who provided racial equity training to our New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island chapters in addition to our full staff. We're also grateful to our ongoing partners at the Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance (AORTA) Collective, including Dana Pedersen and Anisha Desai. And thanks to Soul Fire Farm's Uprooting Racism Training and Soil Generation facilitators for providing training to many of our staff, chapters, and farmer members.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

In the past, Young Farmers has tended to operate in a silo and to view our work as separate from that of our peers. While we have long-standing relationships with many of our partners, albeit majority white organizations, we didn't recognize our privilege and therefore which role we should play in the ecosystem of farm organizations. As a well-resourced coalition in terms of finances, staff, and power, we are invited to many conversations by our white colleagues and lawmakers, while our less privileged partner organizations are ignored. Because of this reality, we have a responsibility to show up for them and farmers in our network who are similarly marginalized, and to provide an example of how to move with intention and accountability to our majority white associates. We are responsible for offering the shared understanding we've developed with the broader agriculture community, and challenging each of its stakeholders to adopt a similar course of action.

To help encourage our chapters to partake in anti-racism training, we developed a Racial Equity Toolkit, written and edited by Michelle L. Hughes, Tess Brown-Lavoie, Michelle A. T. Hughes, Leah Penniman, Martin Lemos, Caitlin Arnold Stephano, Sophie Ackoff, Holly Rippon-Butler, in addition to several chapter leaders. Since its publication, thousands of individuals have downloaded it and several chapters and majority white organization partners have benefitted from its resources, particularly "Part 2: Consciousness-Raising Tools and Anti-Racist Organizing." Past publications that have served a similar purpose include our original Racial Equity Statement, "Ending Violence Against People of Color in Food and Farming," our Statement on Immigration Enforcement, our Letter to our Members and Supporters after Charlottesville, Michelle L. Hughes' opinion piece on Dismantling the Bootstrap Myth, our statement on Farm Workers and COVID-19, our Young Farmers for Black Lives statement, and our statement in solidarity with Asian American farmers and communities.

INTENTIONAL PROGRAM DESIGN

Designing our programmatic work with intention is the sister to developing a shared understanding. In other words, our work will not be successful if we attempt one without the other, as they rely on one another heavily for effectiveness. Fittingly, this process has not been a linear one for us. While it would be ideal to move uninterrupted through the various steps of our transformation, this process often has its own timeline. As mentioned earlier, striving to be an organization that seeks to dismantle the impact of centuries of disenfranchisement is not an output, it's a continuing journey. It requires readiness to learn a variety of new concepts whose impacts won't match your good intentions until you've attempted a solution several times, and often from differing angles. You must be open to learning and relearning concepts you thought you understood before you try again. You must be patient, intentional, and growth-minded. Redesigning our programs in 2020 taught us to increase our learning proficiency quickly, meaning we are equipped to continuously refine our work as our farmers' needs evolve, whether due to the ongoing pandemic, or a new social climate.

RACIAL EQUITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

In 2020, we conducted a racial equity impact assessment of our programmatic work in order to measure progress on our equity efforts in the longer-term. In an attempt to observe the current performance of our programs, we adapted an internal assessment from tools provided by Race Forward and the Center for Social Inclusion. We designed this impact assessment to (1) examine each of our programs' impact on our BIPOC Coalition members, (2) identify areas of our work that might be resulting in disparate impacts on BIPOC Coalition members, and (3) formulate redesign efforts to address those shortcomings.

Our impact assessment consisted of ten one-on-one 90-minute interviews between program directors and our equity and organizational change director, Michelle A.T. Hughes. As noted above, the questions required them to reflect on their program's stakeholders, whether or not they were prioritizing stakeholders most affected by their programmatic work, to consider any adverse impacts their work might be having on these groups, and what they could do to change any negative impacts moving forward.

Program directors were also asked about any additional support they might need from organizational leadership to properly implement these new approaches. The results of these assessments were compiled in a report, which included overall recommendations for the organization, and one page summaries of each program's interview.

Recommended next steps for the organization included upgrading our data collection and analysis systems, involving BIPOC Coalition members in our strategic planning processes, and strengthening our racial affinity caucusing efforts by providing more structure and synchronicity between individual transformation and programmatic work. Program summaries highlighted where we were beginning to redesign with intention, as well as areas for improvement. The report was shared with the co-executive directors exclusively. Similarly, direct interview notes were shared solely with the staff member interviewed. All interview summaries were approved by staff for accuracy.

Our assessment findings were synthesized to create a cohesive rubric that provided a structure by which we assigned levels 1-4 (1 being the lowest, 4 being the highest) to each program, based on their interview results and follow-up conversations with our equity and organizational change director. The rubric identifies benchmarks for each level based on key anti-racist principles: racial equity analysis, partnership development, and accountability. At the time, 35 percent of our programs were operating at a level 1, 45 percent at a level 2 and 20 percent at a level 3. We set level 3 as the organization standard for 2020, which expects the program to (1) harmonize a sophisticated understanding of racial equity throughout, (2) require only thought partnership on high-level strategizing, (3) develop relationships of trust with BIPOC-led organizations, (4) identify and track key performance indicators, and (5) employ accountability measures. Our Equity and Organizational Change Director, who met with each of our program directors monthly, dedicated subsequent meetings from April through September 2020 to assisting with the development and implementation of work plans for each individual team member.

We operationalized the rubric through our annual performance evaluations, which assessed each individual staff member's progress on their identified contributions to advancing their program to a level 3. A follow-up racial equity impact assessment provided space for staff to self-evaluate their annual progress. Seventy-five percent of our programs identified reaching their level 3 goals in December 2020. Given this progress, we are comfortable committing to our programs operating at level 4 by the end of 2021.

REDESIGNED PROGRAMMING EXAMPLES



Photo Credit: Erin McCarley

National Leadership Convergence by Faith Shaeffer and Caitlin Arnold Stephano

Our **National Leadership Convergence** is our coalition's keystone annual event. Each year we gather farmers and ranchers from our chapters and extended network to learn critical advocacy and organizing skills, share best practices with the wider coalition, and build community within the young farmer movement. Over four days each November, Convergence hosts a multitude of workshops, panels, listening sessions, and social events for our farmer leaders. While we made several efforts to include racial equity components in Convergence programming since the events' inception in 2015—such as adding racial affinity caucusing and anti-racism workshops, applying a racial equity rubric to workshop design in 2019, offering scholarship opportunities for BIPOC farmers, and planning keynotes and panels featuring BIPOC farmer leaders—the 2020 Convergence staff planning team felt we had not done enough to center racial equity, or the incredible BIPOC farmer leaders within our coalition.

In 2020, we moved to create a Convergence designed by and for our BIPOC farmer leaders. We started by calling BIPOC farmers who had attended previous Convergence events and asking for their recommendations and vision for the upcoming event. From this outreach we determined we would maintain a multiracial space, but still place the primary focus and goal of the planning around centering BIPOC leaders. In doing so, we formed a paid committee of five farmer leaders from within our network—Qadir Anderson, Queen Frye, Tré Smith, Michelle Week, and Laura Xiao—to lead the vision for the event. As part one of a two-year theme of “Achieving Equity Through Agriculture,” Convergence 2020 focused on building a shared language and understanding of U.S. agriculture, particularly focused on the systemic racism that pervades this country's history, and continues to impact us today. In an effort to uplift the voices speaking this truth, nearly all of the speakers and panelists featured at the event were BIPOC farmers from our direct and extended networks. Convergence 2020 was a majority BIPOC space, maintained through invitation guidelines for our chapters, farmers, partner organizations, and funders. Chapters with primarily white membership were only permitted to send two representatives out of five total spots.

Overall, the feedback we received from attendees was positive. The majority of attendees reported feeling comfortable as a participant in the space, that they did not perceive any behavior as negative treatment during the event, and that the topics covered were relevant to their culture and community. Many, both newcomers and returning attendees, were pleased with the shift in programming and the sense of community that existed despite

the virtual setting. However, we missed the mark on items highlighted during evaluations: inclusion of more Latinx and immigrant farmers and conversations held around colorism in latinidad, conversations about anti-Blackness, and the offering of more challenging, action-oriented sessions. We also received feedback to form intentional spaces and applicable content for those who hold intersecting marginalized identities.

In addition to programming, there were some gaps in the redesign of the event as well. As organizers, we must be more proactive about mitigating the ways colorism and anti-Blackness play out in the spaces we're creating to talk about race. We could have done more to ensure our speakers were representative of the many different identities that exist within the Black community. For example, featuring an alternative to the mainstream image of light skinned, straight, Black farmers as the most prominent voices in agriculture, and ensuring our speakers' racial equity analysis is aligned with the community of the gathering before inviting them to speak. We also need to be careful about the overuse of the term "BIPOC," and promote the use of more specified language to describe communities. Finally, we should have created more intersectional spaces for affinity groups that do not encourage attendees to choose between their racial, sexual, and gender identities during event activities.

This year's Convergence will continue our theme of "Achieving Equity Through Agriculture," with the goal of farmer participants bringing the shared understanding founded at Convergence 2020 back to their communities through skills learned at Convergence 2021.

Young Farmers 2020 Racial Equity Toolkit

The concept for the Racial Equity Toolkit was the result of conversations with our majority white chapter members, in which they requested resources and guidance on how to initiate conversations and organize efforts around dismantling white supremacy and advancing racial justice in their chapters and broader communities. By this time, underprivileged farmers and other members of the Coalition brought to our attention a perception that our organization as a whole, as well as many of our white chapter members, had treated them disparagingly. In response, many of our white chapter members sought to become a part of the internal shared understanding we were developing at the Coalition, in hopes of figuring out ways to reckon with the perception of their peers, mend those broken relationships, and prevent future negative impact. Former staff member Michelle L. Hughes, former Board President Tess Brown-Lavoie, and graduate student Sara Black created the first draft of the Toolkit in 2018, in order to

provide some of the resources white Coalition members needed to become more responsible allies, accomplices, and eventually actors in the advancement of racial justice in agriculture.

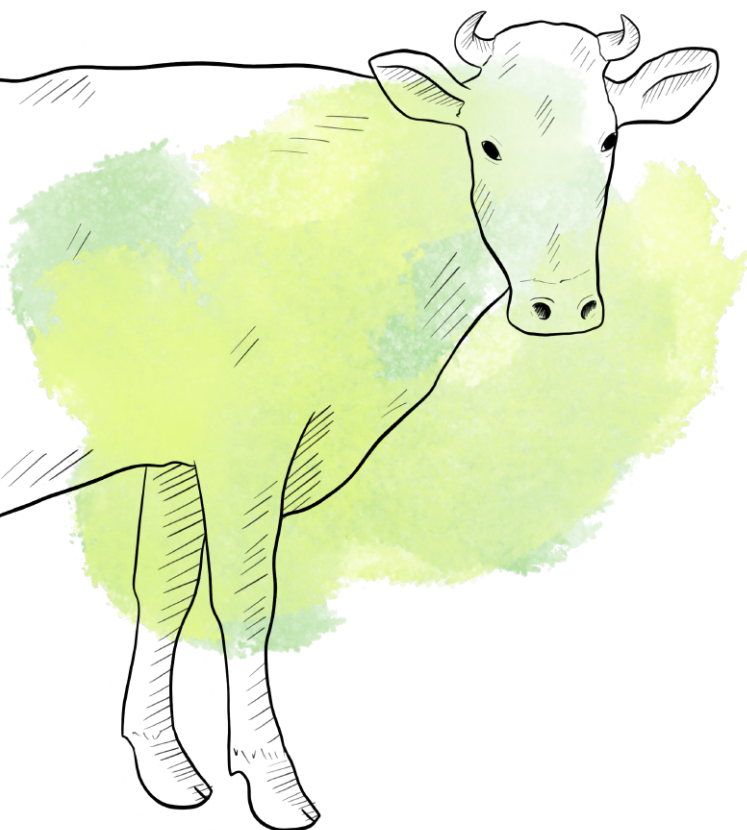
Following a strong start, a significant amount of time passed before we were able to make progress on the Toolkit, resulting in delayed prioritization of funding, capacity, and expertise necessary for publication. It wasn't until August 2019, after we were awarded a Northeast SARE grant to complete the Toolkit, that Michelle L. and Tess were able to begin again. The first draft of the Toolkit was presented for feedback at our 2019 Convergence. The final Toolkit was not published until June 1st, 2020, alongside the Coalition's Young Farmers for Black Lives statement responding to the police murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and others. While the Toolkit has been widely recognized as a source of building the analysis of many of our white farmers and majority white partner organizations' staff and followers, it is important to acknowledge that the final Toolkit was shared with the public two years after it was initially drafted, and edits were still being made through May 2020. As we plan to publish revised and updated versions of the Toolkit in the future, we will ensure we have the adequate resources necessary to produce our intended results in a more timely fashion.



Many of our chapters began using the Toolkit at monthly chapter meetings, forming equity committees, and facilitating discussion groups around racism and other forms of social injustice. Our staff have been providing one-on-one support to chapters in their anti-racism organizing work, and are helping our chapters serve as change-making organizations as well. Because we have seen such impactful results of the Toolkit, we may produce additional resources for our white farmers and majority white partner organizations that demonstrate the intentionality and accountability we expect of our fellow leaders in the sector.

Young Farmers Federal Policy Setting Process **by Vanessa Garcia Polanco**

In prior years, our organization created our federal policy platform and accompanying campaigns through national surveying of young farmers and gathering of informal feedback from our members and chapters. While this approach incorporated feedback from farmers, it did not directly involve them in the policy process and was not sufficiently inclusive of BIPOC voices. In 2018, in order to more directly engage our farmer members, we began developing a process to ensure young farmers, especially BIPOC farmers, have a formal voice in setting our federal policy platform and that our platform reflects the on-the-ground needs of our farmer-members. The Young Farmers' federal policy setting process, launched at Convergence 2019, was developed by a democratically elected Ad Hoc committee of our members.



The new federal policy setting process created the Young Farmers Policy Committee, made up of fifteen dues-paying representatives: ten regional members—one general seat each for the Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Northwest and Southwest and one BIPOC seat for each region—and one representative from each of Young Farmers new affinity groups—Women, Veterans, LGBTQ+, BIPOC, and At-Large—and one non-voting board liaison. The Committee is responsible for facilitating annual policy calls, providing guidance on the design and feasibility of the biennial National Policy Survey, which allows our full membership to provide input on potential policy proposals, and the subsequent development of the platform based on the results of the policy meetings and survey. The Committee also leads the presentation of the final platform biennially and conducts annual listening sessions at the National Leadership Convergence in November. The Policy Committee convenes quarterly, and our federal policy staff also hold office hours and one-one check-ins for regional BIPOC members of the Policy Committee and BIPOC Affinity Group members to ensure accountability, facilitate policy engagement opportunities, and share updates directly.

In 2020, Young Farmers staff and the Policy Committee worked together to analyze the results of the first policy survey and policy meetings, assemble the new federal policy platform using an equity-centered rubric, and present it at Convergence 2020 accompanied by a vote from Coalition membership. In our first year of implementation, we have identified a shortcoming in the process: our membership structure and makeup. Our majority white members are the farmers who have access to the policy survey and voting rights on the final platform. Although affinity group members have the opportunity to weigh in on policy calls, we must take steps to diversify our membership and make the structure a more equitable one. However, despite its challenges, we consider the federal policy setting process one of the most successful in comprehensively centering racial equity in our work, and are grateful to our Ad Hoc Committee, Policy Committee, and members who founded and continue to shape this important process.

Through the policy-setting process, the Coalition is instituting democratic and equitable representation of our BIPOC, young farmer network. In addition to this new process, Young Farmers is still deeply committed to data-driven policy crafting. We will continue our national young farmer surveying efforts in order to provide the policy committee, our staff, and ultimately our country's decision-makers, a strong evidence base for agricultural policy discussions, with a specific focus on underprivileged farmers moving forward.



Photo Credit: Stella Kalinina

Land Policy Report by Holly-Rippon Butler

Our Land Policy Report states: “As a coalition of farmers, land is at the heart of our work. Finding secure access to land is the number one barrier preventing a generation of growers from entering the field. Land is also at the root of racial equity, food sovereignty, economic prosperity, public health, and the climate crisis. As we address these issues, land must be part of the conversation. [And] when we talk about land, we must acknowledge its deep connection to policy and power.” But this wasn’t always the approach our land program and staff took to making farmland more accessible to young farmers.

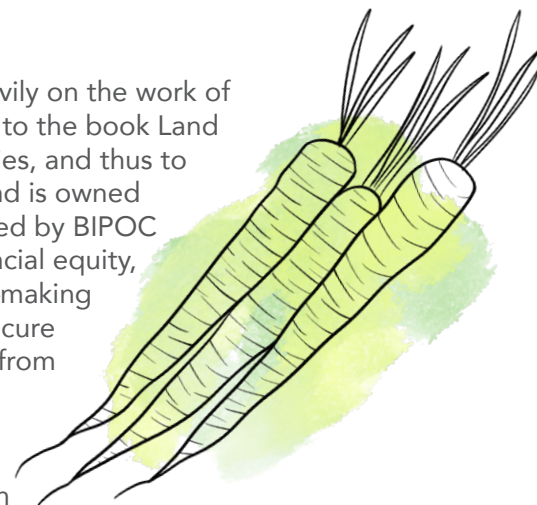
In the past, including the earlier stages of forming the land report, we did not specifically center the experiences of, or design our work for, BIPOC farmers, the original land stewards in this country. As we made changes to expand the inclusion of their voices in our work, they provided some of the most transformative content for both this project and for how we think about our land access work at Young Farmers.

In 2019, we received funding from Clif Bar to research and publish a land policy report that would raise awareness about the challenges that young farmers face related to land access, and highlight key policy changes to address these issues. Neither our proposal to Clif Bar nor our initial discussions around the report centered racial equity as a focus of the project, even though our land and policy staff were having concurrent conversations about the deep injustices woven into land use in the United States, potential policies or actions which can result in perpetuating these injustices, and strategies to shift our land-related work towards dismantling oppression. Because we did not fully connect those conversations and the design of the report, we conducted stakeholder interviews, reviewed existing research, collected policy proposals, and compiled our report materials over the course of 2019 and 2020, that resulted in a report that included, but did not center BIPOC voices.

Four key efforts were made to intentionally lift up BIPOC through the land policy report project: (1) conducting stakeholder interviews with BIPOC individuals; (2) highlighting the critical importance of centering equity in how we think about land; (3) sharing policy proposals put forward by BIPOC-led and -serving organizations; and (4) making a commitment to ensure 50% of the farmers in our Land Access Ambassador program, which featured nine farmers from around the country, were BIPOC-identifying.

However, we continued to witness the consequences of our lack of intentionality from the start. For many of the stakeholder interviews, we relied on existing connections or suggestions provided by other interviewees, which resulted in a majority of white contributors. Our staff suggested contacts to interview, and BIPOC staff graciously helped provide connections to members of their communities, but we failed to conduct interviews with many of those people. Internal project timelines, lack of pre-existing relationships, and extensive workload on the part of the partner organizations contributed to this missed opportunity.

Despite these oversights, the report narrative eventually evolved—relying heavily on the work of authors such as Leah Penniman, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, and the contributors to the book *Land Justice*—to highlight the issues that matter most to farmers in their communities, and thus to land access in general, including inequities in land ownership (98% of farmland is owned by white individuals) and the role of policy in land loss and discrimination faced by BIPOC farmers. The report also emphasizes land as central to addressing issues of racial equity, food sovereignty, economic prosperity, public health, and the climate crisis—making the case that we must use public policy to urgently create more equitable, secure access to land for growers and to reframe how land is treated to move away from a commodity and towards a community resource.



Overall, this project was immensely important to the ongoing process of centering equity in our land work. As we move forward with building coalition and supporting our farmer network to enact the policy changes laid out in the report, we are reflecting on the ways in which we are not yet meaningfully engaged in returning wealth and power to those who have been discriminated against and experienced land dispossession, and we are not yet creating meaningful relationships with organizations leading on equitable policy proposals and Indigenous partners to facilitate the rematriation of land through our work. We hope that the land report is a starting place of inquiry and partnership building that strengthens our ability to dismantle racism in relation to land.

Colorado Young Farmer Water Fellowship by Erin Foster West

Young farmers and ranchers are underrepresented in Colorado’s water policy decision-making bodies, such as Basin Roundtables, water conservancy districts, agricultural advocacy groups, local water districts, and conservation districts. Similarly, BIPOC farmers and ranchers are underrepresented and face additional challenges to accessing structures of power. As a result, the next generation of Colorado’s producers are denied critical opportunities to help shape the implementation of Colorado’s water plan and their farming conditions, and the State of Colorado is making water resource decisions without the benefit of the knowledge of young producers. The decisions made today will impact the state’s agricultural community for decades. The Colorado Young Farmer Water Fellowship was designed to provide opportunities for young producers to take a more active role in water planning conversations. By providing them with knowledge and resources to educate their local peers around water issues, the Fellowship would lead to more young farmers and ranchers deeply engaging in the water supply planning process.

The Young Farmer Water Fellowship provided a \$2,500 stipend to participants to cover the cost of their time spent in the program, host a water training, and run for a water board. The stipend was offered to cover time away from their farms, ranches, or off-farm jobs, and to cover the labor necessary to fulfill the program deliverables. The stipend was also key to ensuring that BIPOC farmers and ranchers would be able to participate. However, we have learned through this process that a stipend is only one factor in participation of these farmers and ranchers, as only two of our ten Fellows identified as farmers of color. Creating inclusive,



equitable spaces and key partnerships are also necessary to build the trust needed to recruit these farmers and ranchers for our leadership opportunities. Unfortunately, this first year of the Fellowship showed us that we have not sufficiently built relationships in Colorado with BIPOC agriculture communities to ensure our intention produces our intended impact, which was to have producers from those communities in at least 50% of our Fellowship slots.

We plan to continue the Fellowship in 2021, and have since grown our relationships in Colorado. We will continue to ensure upcoming programs and projects like the water fellowship are built ready to receive BIPOC producers and tackle the issues that affect them most. Diversity, equity, and inclusion were major themes of programming for the 2020 Fellowship, but it is not enough to educate white farmers on how to advance racial equity in leadership positions. We know that without adequate representation in the program's participants, we will be replicating existing systems of power. We must ensure young BIPOC producers are included in the seats and holding that power themselves.

HUMAN RESOURCES AND OPERATIONS AUDIT

The aim for both our programmatic and operational racial equity assessments is to strategically advance racial equity within our organization and in our programmatic work. Accordingly, we conducted an assessment of our internal systems referred to as our Human Resources and Operations (HR & Ops) Audit. Before factoring equity considerations into our internal processes, we were not only discouraging talented BIPOC from joining our staff, we were also perpetuating the creation of a mainstream culture at the organization that was uncomfortable for many of our staff. The Co-EDs tasked former operations manager, Maddie Morley, and equity and organizational change director, Michelle A.T. Hughes, with conducting this assessment in 2020.

Our HR & Ops Audit covered five areas: recruitment, hiring, and onboarding; compensation and benefits; employee relations; recordkeeping and compliance; and health and safety. We created a spreadsheet that included a detailed checklist of processes within those five areas for evaluation (adapted from tools of Expert Human Resources, Factorial HR, and Think HR). The spreadsheet also includes existing organization policy documents for each checklist item, as well as an outline of our current practices. We audited our current practices in consideration of the following three areas:



EQUITY

Do our HR/Ops policies and procedures align with our commitment to racial equity?



EFFICIENCY

Can we streamline our HR/Ops policies and procedures to make them easier for staff to access, use, and understand?



COMPLIANCE

Are our HR/Ops policies and documents legally compliant with state and federal law?

We then identified best practices for each process and scored our current practices against our findings. For items in need of improvement, we listed recommended changes. Because this ongoing project is cumbersome and we have limited staff capacity, we had to prioritize processes that were both high-impact and time sensitive. The three projects that met this criteria were our performance evaluation system, our compensation guidelines, and our hiring, onboarding, and offboarding protocols. The approval process for pieces like these (that have a significant impact on our staff) consisted of two reviews by the Co-EDs, two subsequent reviews by all staff, and final approval from the Co-EDs. Approval processes for items with less impact (i.e. job posting templates, intern offer letters, onboarding checklists, etc.) were reviewed and approved by the Co-EDs as needed.

LESSONS WE'RE LEARNING

The HR & Ops Audit is the part of our racial equity transformation that catches the eye of most organizations and their leadership. One thing we never fail to mention in conversation with them is how expensive this project is in terms of staff time, and how it's almost impossible to fund internal organizational change work. Organizations we speak with about the project are increasingly becoming more able to finance this work through funding, and foundations have begun considering this line item in our proposals, but that wasn't the reality in 2019. We had to push forward with this project without external support, and rely solely on internal investments to make it happen.

LESSONS WE'RE LEARNING

Creating equitable processes for our hiring, onboarding, and offboarding systems means we attract talented candidates of color. In these moments, we have to be honest with those candidates when they ask questions about the climate on staff once an offer letter has been extended. We are honest with them about our progress, and sometimes find that we don't meet their standards. We have not lost any candidates to this challenge, but it has taught us the value of transparency and the importance of honesty with candidates about how they will fit in at Young Farmers.

Performance Evaluations

Since conducting the audit, we have revamped our performance evaluation system to include specific questions about individual contributions to building an anti-racist coalition. As outlined above, our Racial Equity Impact Assessment allowed us to formulate expectations for each staff member. We also updated the structure of our performance evaluations to include a "360 review" component adapted from The Management Center. In the past, we expected direct reports to articulate concerns about their manager directly to their manager, despite the power dynamic that exists between a report and their supervisor, and the lack of accountability in that approach. The addition of 360 reviews allows reports to express anonymous feedback for their manager, and ensures that the feedback reaches, and is subsequently upheld by, their manager's supervisor.

Compensation Guidelines

Our co-executive directors established compensation guidelines in 2019 that provided transparency for staff on our payscale decisions at each level of the organization. They included the values that comprise our compensation philosophy, factors that identify staff levels (i.e. associate, manager, director, program director, executive), how experience at the organization and elsewhere contribute to compensation decisions, designated salary ranges for each level, and a location-based compensation adjustment system. This provided clarity for staff, especially on their career mobility at the organization, and reinforced that all staff are considered equal, regardless of race, gender, or sexual identity, and other protected characteristics.

To further our objective of providing pay transparency for all of our employees, we included in the compensation guidelines an update to shift the development of salary negotiation skills to job responsibility negotiation. We have set pay bands such that the negotiation is less about salary figures and more about receiving adequate compensation for the role staff play and responsibilities they hold within the organization. In other words, we are encouraging staff negotiation in a much more transparent context and in a place where staff and management share equal information.

Even with these significant changes, we realize this work is not enough. We will continue to work towards a more equitable compensation structure as we revamp the Compensation Guidelines annually.

Hiring, Onboarding, Offboarding

Through the HR & Ops Audit, the hiring portion of our Hiring, Onboarding, Offboarding Manual was updated to include guidance on designing accessible job descriptions and postings. These materials uplift the experiences of underprivileged candidates in the qualifications section and our equal opportunity employer statement. We amended our outreach strategy by encouraging staff to post opportunities on equity conscious platforms, in order to create a less homogenous applicant pool. Additionally, we require an intentional analysis of the applicant pool—we do not begin the hiring processes if the applicant pool is not inclusive of candidates across lines of difference, as it signifies a flaw in our outreach efforts. We consider alternative forms of professional and educational experience, and we employ a criteria-based rubric (another tool from The Management Center) as an attempt to eliminate bias. Decisions about which candidates advance to the next round include, but do not rely solely on, the hiring manager's opinion—decisions are made by consensus of the hiring team.

ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

Building an anti-racist organization entails operationalizing accountability and tracking equity conscious metrics in order to measure long-term impact. Examining the results of these processes will determine whether we are realizing our intention to advance racial justice. Created through our human resources and operations audit, two tools we're working to institutionalize to uphold our accountability standards are our services agreement, and our metrics tracking systems.

SERVICES AGREEMENT

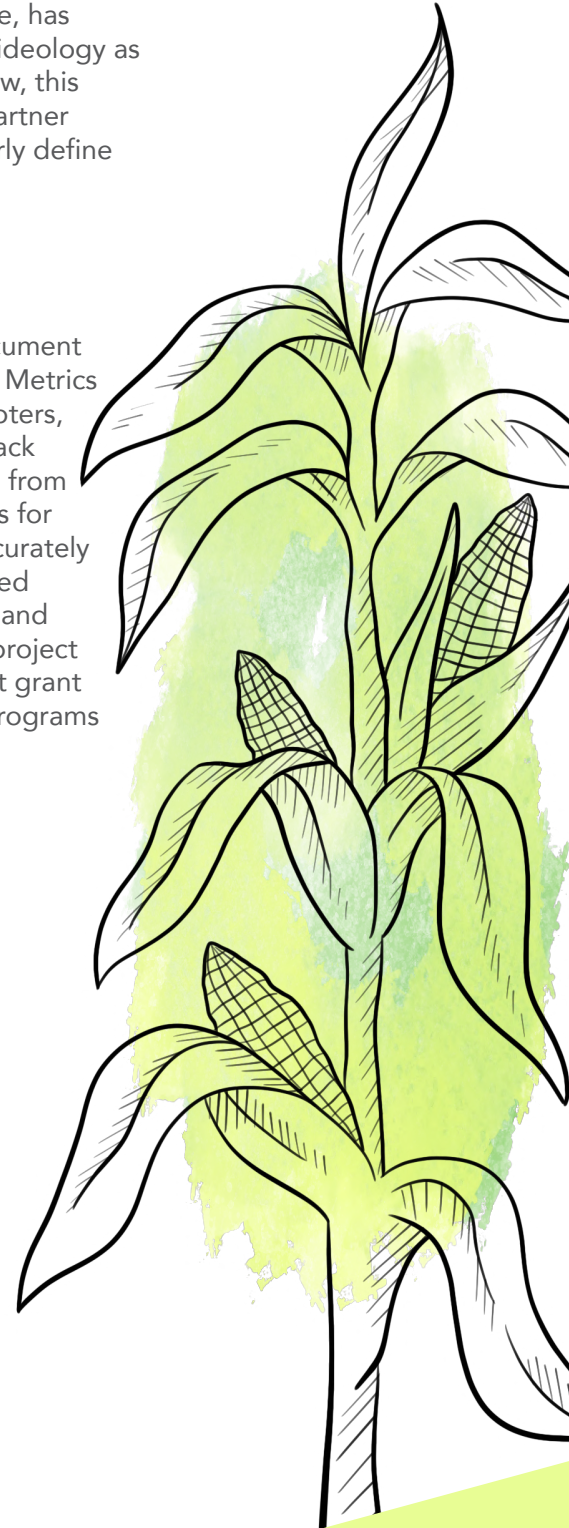
While it has not been historic practice at Young Farmers to compensate partner organizations for their contributions to our work, we must be more mindful moving forward. Starting this year, we employ a services agreement that formally outlines scope of work and amount of payment, and an addendum for contracts with BIPOC-led organizations that outlines our qualitative commitments. These promises are currently outlined as follows:

1. Work against the tenets of white supremacy (including but not limited to perfectionism, a sense of urgency, defensiveness, individualism, and fear of conflict) in our work with your organization.
2. Familiarize ourselves with the culture of your organization, focus on building an authentic and comprehensive relationship based on trust, listening, and avoiding tokenization of your organization's members.
3. Involve your organization at all stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation of the proposed activities of our partnership, up to and including strategic planning of our programming for the coming years, and the publication of our annual Accountability Report.
4. Defer to the expertise of your organization in all stages of decision-making that includes but is not limited to advancing racial equity, and serving the needs of BIPOC communities by prioritizing your mission and the work of your organization.
5. Consistently check-in, solicit feedback, and show up for your organization. Feedback will be received without defensiveness, or urgency to find a quick solution, but our follow up actions will be prompt and appropriate.
6. Take steps to better ensure we are fostering a supportive environment for your organization in which your membership feels heard, respected, and adequately represented.
7. Adequately compensate your organization's staff and members for the totality of their time spent working with our organization.
8. Offer available resources to your organization, including but not limited to, access to funders, press opportunities, and policy makers, with or without our presence in the space.

While it runs the risk of operationalizing a process that would otherwise be organic, this addendum to our services agreement is a mechanism created for the current moment. The recent growth in our capacity to adjust to uncertain times, whether due to experiencing an ongoing pandemic or unpredictable shifts in our social climate, has taught us to create solutions that can be changed quickly if necessary. As our ideology as an organization matures, our internal processes will evolve accordingly. For now, this document creates a designated space for us to outline our commitments to partner organizations, and provides a formal way for our partner organizations to clearly define their expectations of our organization.

METRICS TRACKING SYSTEM

Throughout 2020 we tracked our organization-wide metrics in a collective document that required reporting from each individual staff member on a monthly basis. Metrics tracked included items such as meetings with elected officials, number of chapters, and press hits. As we move to a project-based organization in 2021, we will track our metrics based on the goals of individual projects and feedback we receive from stakeholders involved in programming. Because most, if not all, of our projects for this year are designed with equity at the forefront, we will be able to more accurately track our impact based on the outcome of key performance indicators identified during the project planning process along with feedback from BIPOC farmers and BIPOC-led organizations. Further, we have the ability to evaluate at both the project and organization levels, allowing us to efficiently narrow our scope for relevant grant and accountability reporting. We plan to use these metrics to identify which programs meet our Level 4 goals by the end of 2021.



INSIDE YOUNG FARMERS: REFLECTIONS FROM OUR BIPOC STAFF

There is a harmful experience shared by BIPOC staff at our organization: disillusionment. And we are working to change that. As a community, we did not feel seen, heard, and respected at our organization. Targeted staff surveys and follow-up interviews conducted in late 2020 raised those feelings anew and clarified a larger issue: our organization was not being intentional about communicating where we are on our racial equity transformation in the recruitment of BIPOC staff. Instead, our organization focuses on our long-term vision for the Coalition. This creates a false sense of hope and belonging for new staff that fades over time.

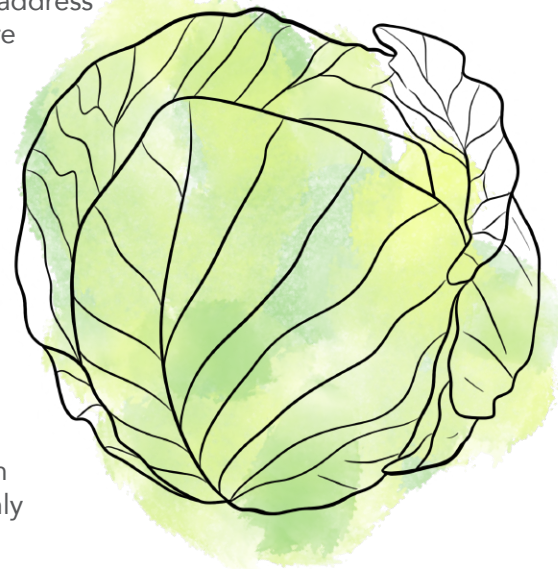
The result of moving unintentionally has a high price. Imagine a colleague of yours arriving at an organization that seems to genuinely care about dismantling white supremacy culture, creating alternative power structures, and naming injustice and oppression. They are excited about the prospect of working for and with people who “get it.” They arrive welcomed by pleasant interactions and gratitude for early contributions. They are magnetized to a space in agriculture that makes them feel represented. But as time passes, they start to notice things that make them question their fellow staff. They notice some of their colleagues, and maybe even their manager, pushing equity considerations to the backburner to make room for “efficiency.” They find themselves contributing more thoughtful ideas than their peers. And when they confront their colleagues about these issues, it is met with defensiveness and deflection. Suddenly the conversation is centered around the emotions of the other staff member, in place of them listening and taking the feedback constructively. This is what’s been reported by BIPOC staff at Young Farmers.

Simultaneously, the added value BIPOC staff bring to the organization through simply being a person from the communities this organization wishes to serve, is often underappreciated and unnoticed. We create an attractive space for farmers and potential staff of color at the Coalition, we strengthen the analysis of our white colleagues by sharing our lived experience, and we perform a large amount of emotional labor to keep the work moving forward. Meanwhile, our white colleagues are promoted, invited to speak at events and to the press and compelling funders because their proposals demonstrate an intention towards racial equity.

These are serious problems for our organization, and we need to implement deliberate improvements to address them. In a year of a pandemic, worsening climate change, and continued racial unrest, we perpetually disappoint the people most affected by these crises and who most need our leadership right now. Instead of providing support, our organizational culture asks more of BIPOC staff as they watch their communities struggle to adjust to the new normal. Young Farmers has major organizational issues that need to be addressed by senior staff and the Co-EDs.

While we don’t have a silver bullet to solve these issues, we can begin by promoting BIPOC staff to positions with high-level decision-making power. We can also address the yearning evidenced through our surveys and follow-up interviews for more awareness, creativity, and proactivity from white staff at the individual and organizational level. In terms of awareness and proactivity, white staff at our organization need to be held more accountable when they do not take on responsibilities necessary for success. For example, being more proactive in articulating and implementing ideas for change, instead of waiting on leadership. And more generally, the organization needs to prioritize our strategic planning process to definitively determine the Coalition’s role in ensuring an equitable future for agriculture.

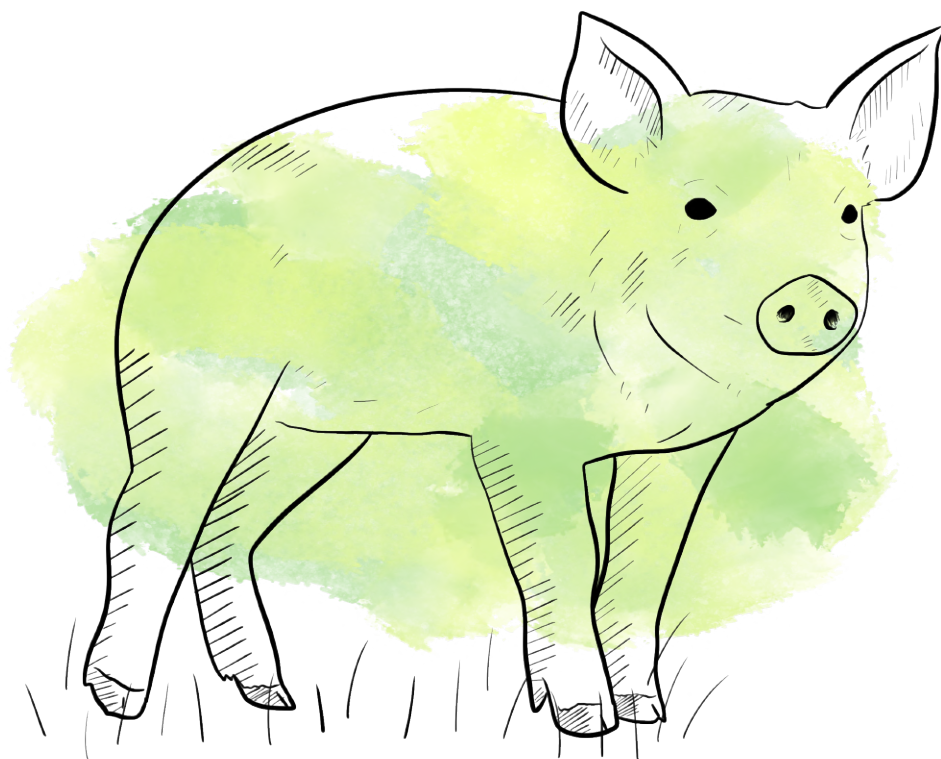
Finally, these expectations should be required of white staff, and the consequences of underperforming must be clear. In order for white people to be more than allies in the achievement of racial equity and rather, become actors in it, they will have to level up. It is our responsibility as an organization to ensure everyone we employ understands, and upholds that fact. That is only the beginning of our approach to accountability within Young Farmers.



ACCOUNTABILITY

At Young Farmers, accountability is the thread woven through our work. It allows us to create a feedback loop between our development of a shared understanding, designing with intention, and ultimately our impact. In addition to our accountability mechanisms, we solicit feedback from BIPOC farmers, organizers, and leaders in our extended network. In order to incorporate that feedback, we must revisit our learnings from the development of our shared understanding, and redesign program work to ensure that our impact is aligned with our intention. Ultimately, these efforts ensure that we are likely to be given feedback again, and the cycle repeats itself indefinitely. Coupled with our services agreement and metrics tracking system, feedback from those we are in close relationship with provides a comprehensive system that we can check and balance both quantitatively and qualitatively.

In 2020, we held our first annual semi-structured interview process with seven BIPOC farmers and fifteen BIPOC-led partner organizations. Our interview questions attempted to identify: (1) progress on our goal to build more authentic and accountable relationships, (2) perspectives on our organization's racial equity efforts, and (3) ways we can better serve BIPOC farmers and greater communities. We will continue these interviews in 2021, alongside conversations taking place through our strategic planning process. We are confident that coupling these annual opportunities for direct feedback with regular efforts to enhance our awareness, critical thinking, and listening skills for the remainder of the year will hold us more accountable, and continue to foster long-lasting, authentic relationships with our community.



FARMER INTERVIEWS

Qaadir Anderson

Sankofa Village Community Garden, *Pittsburgh, PA*

Rafael Aponte

Rocky Acres Community Farm, *Freeville, NY*

Moretta Browne

Berkeley Basket CSA, *Berkeley, CA*

Chris Bueno

La Cosecha Farm, *Edinburg, TX*

Rosie Fitz

Logan Square Farmers Market, *Chicago, IL*

Monica Ponce

Love is Love Farm, *Decatur, GA*

Maurice Small

Small Farmz, *Atlanta, GA*

Our farmers are the heart of our network. They are the reason this coalition exists. Unfortunately, the farmers we interviewed did not express feeling valued in that way consistently. To this group of farmers, it feels like we seek them out, support and show up for them, make a number of promises that we sometimes keep, and then invite them into a Young Farmers space that is usually underprepared to receive them. In other words, they feel we provide them with a half-baked Young Farmers experience.

Our organizing efforts usually begin with meeting young farmers around the country. While it is not our intention to tokenize BIPOC farmers, a number of those interviewed feel like they were selected to serve as part of a Young Farmers chapter, fly-in, or Convergence just because of their identity. This group of farmers—even those who mentioned feeling like a diversity recruit—still say Young Farmers staff support and show up for them, especially when it comes to policy. They reflected feeling invigorated by the opportunity to participate in policy reform and the action we take on policy advocacy that impacts their communities. One farmer mentioned being re-engaged with the Coalition when they started noticing we were proposing equity-conscious policy. Additionally, several farmers mentioned feeling comfortable joining the Coalition because the Young Farmers staff person they knew was a member of their racial/ethnic community.

The next steps in our organizing efforts usually bring farmers deeper into our work. For example, we might meet a farmer, attend an event or a conversation they recommend, and then offer ways we can help them lead in their communities and at the national level. Many of the farmers interviewed become more involved with the Coalition at this stage despite their hesitance, usually because of our eagerness to connect and promises made.

Most of the farmers interviewed reflected feeling confident that their concerns or ideas about a policy reform or organizing effort would be heard, but felt less confident that any action would be taken once they had voiced their input. A few of the frequently mentioned topics included cooperative farming, urban agriculture, and immigration and labor policy. One farmer even mentioned providing criticism about being ignored, which to their knowledge has not been addressed. They mentioned staying despite this reality because they will be included in wins for young farmers generally, even if no recognition or action is taken on behalf of their experience specifically.

Overall, this disappointing reality was expected by the farmers interviewed. One expressed excusing our behavior because we are such a large organization that has to cater to our majority, which they identified as white farmers. Another farmer mentioned that they do not believe individual staff, who they trust to bring their experiences to the forefront, will be taken seriously by leadership until we properly implement change at the organizational level.

At this point, BIPOC farmers will attend an event like a fly-in, lobby day, or Convergence with the Coalition. In some cases, they have spent a significant amount of time with us, whether through chapter participation, or another Young Farmers event. In other cases this might be the first time they are hearing from us. Many of the farmers interviewed relayed coming to a Young Farmers space despite their reservations and often leaning on the support of the one Young Farmers staff member that they trust (often with similar lived experience) to help them feel more comfortable. There were a few farmers who mentioned these spaces as some of the most open and receptive they have experienced at a farm organization. Convergence was especially noted as a space where farmers saw the commitment to their experiences and identities coming through.

Many farmers had critical feedback about the Young Farmers spaces they occupied as well. One farmer reflected on their experience working on immigration policy as the only time the topic was brought up on Coalition-wide calls and at Convergence. Another reflected on the lack of collaboration between young farmers at our events and the focus on individuality despite our statement that there is power in coming together. Another farmer reflected that many of our chapter leaders come to Convergence seemingly never having interacted with a BIPOC farmer before. One interviewee recalled that at Convergence in 2018, all of the Black farmers present formed a bond around their communal struggle being at the event. One farmer attempted to leave the event early because of an incident with one of our white staff members. These Black farmers missed out on critical information because they spent the time caring for one another. Overall, these farmers recognize and believe we are working to advance racial justice through our work, but that we are not fully centering it yet. While that is their ultimate expectation, they've continued to be a part of the Coalition in a time when we do not meet their expectations.

Among the interview responses were also suggestions on how to better serve BIPOC farmers generally. The farmers interviewed urged us to further integrate their needs by including them in strategic planning processes, and continuing to offer compensated opportunities for involvement and leadership at the Coalition. However, they recommended these opportunities be more connected across the organization, and less compartmentalized. They also recommended we offer more opportunities for collaboration when possible, and for the Coalition to start tackling issues mentioned above that impact them directly, including cooperative farming, urban agriculture, and immigration and labor policy. Interviewees also encouraged us to produce a Spanish version of every resource we create. Additionally, the farmers interviewed unanimously asked for more equity-centered policy proposals in this ripe time for change.



We recognize the opportunity to receive feedback from farmers in our network is a gift. We recognize that their willingness to provide critical feedback, in addition to offering specific suggestions on how to improve, is another gift. We also recognize that the experiences these farmers reflected during their interviews highlights the inconsistencies in our relationships.

We recognize that these farmers took a leap of faith connecting with us despite feeling that we have disappointed them in the past, whether through broken promises or underprepared spaces. That we have perpetuated a subpar standard for these farmers, their communities, and their experiences. That we've forced them to settle for less. And that in order to remain a part of our network, they had to find reasons to justify some of our actions.

We are both humbled by and grateful for the space to engage in such generous conversation with these farmers. We leave these interviews with a number of gaps to reflect on, including (1) how we can better recognize and value other marginalized identities and experiences in our work, (2) steps needed to ensure individual staff and the organization are accountable to our promises, and (3) immediate changes we can make to our actions based on the suggestions. Our BIPOC farmers want to see less promises and more action, and we will be accountable to this demand by revisiting our shared understanding and redesigning processes infinitely.

PEOPLE

Karen Washington: Co-Founder, Black Urban Growers

Lorette Picciano: Executive Director, Rural Coalition

Ricardo Salvador: Director and Senior Scientist, Food & Environment, Union of Concerned Scientists

Eugene Pickett: Owner Operator, Black Farmers and Ranchers New Mexico

Viviana Gentry Fernandez-Pellon: Programs Director, Advocates for Urban Agriculture

James and Joyce Skeet: Founders, Covenant Pathways

Fatuma Emmad and JaSon Auguste:
Co-Founder/Executive Director and Co-Founding
Member/Director of Farming, Frontline Farming

Pomaj Chakmam Yajalaji: Steering Committee, Three Rivers Agricultural Land Initiative

Luis Larin: Statewide Coordinator, Driving PA Forward

Anthony Chang: Executive Director, Kitchen Table Advisors

Kassandra Hishida: Coordinator, Community Alliance for Agroecology

Requeeb Bay: Executive Director, Gardeners and Farmers of Pittsburgh Co-Op

Sona Desai: Associate Director, San Diego Food System Alliance

Nina Ichikawa: Executive Director, Berkeley Food Institute

Stephanie Morningstar: Co-Director, Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust

Young Farmers' efforts to build and maintain organizational partnerships is another demonstration of our commitment to accountability. We prioritize building relationships with BIPOC-led organizations because of their expertise, and because we see our role as one that serves in solidarity to that expertise. We believe that being in community and promoting multicultural indivisibility is necessary to realizing our collective vision for the future of agriculture, and we do our best to embody that in our approach.

Last year, we began conducting interviews with each of the frontlines organizations we work with to hear their perspective on our approach. Many of the organizational representatives interviewed have been working at the nexus of racial justice and agriculture for longer than our organization has existed, and relayed that when we were founded in 2010 as another majority white farm organization, they weren't surprised. They also reflected that when it became clear that we were undergoing an anti-racist transformation, they felt our reputation needed to change significantly.

Nearly every organizational representative connected with Young Farmers since our founding in 2010 believes that we made the mistake of not including BIPOC and other underprivileged voices in our early conversations and decision-making. Many believe we are still paying for this decision today. One representative reflected on this in their interview, stating that the racial overtone in the agriculture world allowed white people to exist in a bubble where they could lead on agriculture, and consider BIPOC farmers as an afterthought. They feel Young Farmers took advantage of that reality, and that the organization benefited only young, white farmers. A few interviewees mentioned being included on policy proposals because diverse stakeholders were a precursor to success, being met with a sense of urgency from our staff, and often feeling like the nature of their partnership with Young Farmers was purely transactional.



Photo Credit: Linda Storm

Several representatives also reflected on how new leadership has allowed us to better collaborate with them and their network. They recalled being denied access to information and documents that are now shared with them without hesitation. They mentioned working on policy reform efforts together that will only tangentially help young farmers, but will greatly serve their constituents. They have noticed an increase in support from the organization, whether by way of our participation in their events, serving on local policy councils together, or opening doors for them in state capitols and Washington D.C.

Some of the representatives also mentioned that spending time with Young Farmers staff, outside of on outcomes and deliverables, greatly contributed to their relationships with the organization. Nearly every interviewee expressed their organization's emphasis and value on building relationships and community. They reflected that it is the times they recall talking with staff about their greater community, and the state of the agriculture system as a whole, that really matter to them. A number of white staff who both farm and stand in solidarity with our organization partners' missions outside of work were mentioned as people with whom these organizations feel they have strong relationships.

Despite this overall positive feedback, none of these representatives reported that they trust us wholeheartedly. One of the reasons mentioned is timing; this year has been one that has paved the way for performative, surface-level activism, and they are unsure who to trust. A number of representatives expressed difficulty filtering out which majority white organizations are making statements and commitments to gain short-term social capital, and which are invested for the long-term.

Another reason mentioned as part of both the interviewees positive and critical feedback is new leadership. Partner organization staff acknowledged noticing that we are taking a bolder, more direct stance on racial equity, but they aren't convinced it will last. Many of them expressed feeling this commitment to social justice is implemented in theory more than in practice. And finally, another reason that came up repeatedly is our branding.

Several representatives mentioned our online presence, and who we partner with more generally, does not speak to them and their work. We don't look like a space for them, their members, or the farmers in their network.

Our partner organization representatives gave us feedback on how we could strengthen our relationship, and if done consistently, could make us more trustworthy in the long-term. Firstly, partners are interested in collaborating more in general, but specifically on equity-centered policy proposals, joint political power building opportunities for BIPOC farmers, and advocating together in state capitals and in Washington D.C. Many suggested using our privilege and resources to open legislative office doors for them and then yield our time. The same representatives want us to encourage other majority white organizations to distribute what power they can to them as well.

Outside of policy advocacy, they mentioned applying for funding together, amplifying the work of their organization and membership, and participating in virtual events in the coming year. A number of representatives asked for greater organizing efforts in their network to identify potential Young Farmers members. And nearly every representative mentioned an interest in taking part in our strategic planning process in 2021. Unanimously, our partner organization staff asked us for more proximity. Every representative stated that they would like to become more familiar with the Young Farmers staff and our Co-EDs. One representative mentioned being critical and mindful about which organizations they work with, and they would like us to honor being one of the few majority white organizations in their network by slowing down and taking the time to become more familiar with each other.

We must again recognize the unparalleled benefit of feedback and recommendations from our partner organizations. We have not yet mastered balancing the urgency of this work, and not approaching this work with urgency. We don't spend enough time building authentic, transparent, accountable, and long-lasting relationships with our partners. We appreciate their time and energy spent participating in these conversations. In our next steps, we will continue to reflect on necessary changes and revisit our shared understanding and program design until we can truly serve our partner organizations and their networks.



Photo Credit: Ethan Harrison

LOOKING AHEAD

The purpose of this report is not to provide a solution for the negative effects of centuries of inequity, or to suggest to kindred organizations that building an anti-racist organization is an easy task. We're offering an insider perspective on advancing racial equity through organizational change at a mid-sized non-profit organization, along with sharing victories and setbacks.

Our transformation requires a deep examination of our mission, vision, and guiding principles, and answers to strategic questions that will guide our work ahead.

Our strategic planning consultants, Richael Faithful and Julia Metzger-Traber, are leading this process with racial justice at its center. In January 2021, we formed a Strategic Planning Committee of staff, farmers, and board members to facilitate dialogue about priority strategic questions to inform the strategic plan. Currently, there are opportunities for farmers to engage in strategic planning, and the co-executive directors are in conversation with partner organizations about the future of Young Farmers. The result will be a dynamic, inspiring, and accessible written document that we will use as an organizational guide for making value-aligned, racial justice-centered, strategic, and emergent decisions in the midst of uncertain and rapidly changing conditions. Our 2021 Accountability Report will provide an update on the strategic planning (then implementation) process, and the impact the plan's implementation has had on our organization.

While we would like to avoid making a series of claims at the very end of this report, we can guarantee that our organization will continue to mature and transform as we forge ahead, making progress and mistakes along the way. We have gained an incredible amount of knowledge and skills in this foundational year that will be impactful on our long-term evolution. This is not merely a response to a moment in time for us; it is a culture of change that we have committed to adopting as individuals and a collective. We will continue to creatively marry equity, compliance, and efficiency until we find the fit that works for us. We hope you will remain observant as equity becomes a more regular topic of conversation in agriculture, use whatever privilege you may have to help move anti-oppression efforts forward, and become an actor in the push for racial equity if not one already.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: MICHELLE A.T. HUGHES

Michelle (she/her) is a former large-scale hog farmer from New Haven, Connecticut with lived experience navigating systemic inequity and an educational background in food and agriculture policy. Before she became a full-time employee with Young Farmers as federal policy associate, Michelle worked as executive assistant to the Coalition's founder and former executive director, Lindsey Lusher Shute, after serving as a fellow on the grassroots team in the summer of 2017. At the time, Michelle was finishing up a graduate program at New York University's Department of Nutrition and Food Studies. Prior to her graduate studies, Michelle worked in swine reproduction at the University of Pennsylvania, with both nonprofit and food and agriculture start-ups in New York City and the Hudson Valley, and served on a program evaluation team for the New York City Mayor's Office of Food Policy.

At the Coalition, Michelle has been building the equity and organizational change team since January 2020. Over the course of a year fraught with uncertainty and the effects of compounding crises, Michelle's talent grew our transformation to institutionalize racial equity from its infancy. Today, Michelle works with our executive team as equity and organizational change director, as a leader of strategic planning, evaluation and accountability, and creating efficient, compliant, equity-conscious systems. Michelle's role will evolve as our organization's needs and approach to justice expand. As we discover creative approaches to anti-racism, Michelle will continue to meaningfully cultivate team members like our culture and operations manager, Stephanie Fenty, and our project management and impact coordinator, Carolina Mueller.

If you have feedback on this report, identified any wins or gaps in our work to advance racial justice, or would like to talk to Michelle about a racialized experience you had with the Coalition, please feel free to start a dialogue directly. Michelle also offers consultation on our racial equity transformation for organizations in the early phases of their transformation. Feel free to reach out to Michelle directly for more information and details on pricing. Email: hughes@youngfarmers.org.



GLOSSARY

Allies and Accomplices: “These terms point to a strategy of aligning one’s organizing efforts with marginalized communities in efforts initiated within the community itself, rather than acting on the organizer or activist’s assumptions about what the community wants or needs” (Racial Equity Toolkit).

Anti-racist: “The opposite of racist isn’t ‘not racist.’ It is ‘antiracist.’ What’s the difference? One endorses either the idea of racial hierarchy as a racist, or racial equality as an antiracist. One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies, as an antiracist. One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of ‘not racist.’” (Kendi, I. X. (2019). How to be an antiracist. New York: One World.)

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. We use this term to refer to Black and Brown people who do not identify as white. We realize this term is limited in its ability to describe the many cultures and ethnicities present within each facet of the BIPOC community, and attempt to use it sparingly. We also choose this acronym because it prioritizes Black and Indigenous peoples through its construct.

Intersectionality: “Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe the failures of mainstream feminism and movements for racial justice to address Black women’s experiences of overlapping racial and gender oppression. Intersectionality helps us understand how occupying various marginal identities can compound or complicate the oppressions and discrimination they experience, even as these identities are primarily a source of vitality and sense of richness” (Racial Equity Toolkit).

Internalized Racism: “Internalized racism is the situation that occurs in a racist system when a racial group oppressed by racism supports the supremacy and dominance of the dominating group by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures, and ideologies that undergird the dominating group’s power” (Racial Equity Tools).

Privilege: “A set of rights, favors, advantages, or immunity specially granted to one individual or group, and withheld from another. This includes access to systems and institutions sanctioned by the state, as a result of historical and legal processes that have afforded power and influence to one’s identity group. At times for those who hold it, this might feel less like additional perks and advantages and more like the absence of experience of disadvantage, discrimination, and violence” (Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance).

Power: “Power is unequally distributed globally and in U.S. society; some individuals or groups wield greater power than others, thereby allowing them greater access and control over resources. Wealth, whiteness, citizenship, patriarchy, heterosexism, and education are a few key social mechanisms through which power operates. Although power is often conceptualized as power over other individuals or groups, other variations are power with (used in the context of building collective strength) and power within (which references an individual’s internal strength). Learning to “see” and understand relations of power is vital to organizing for progressive social change” (Racial Equity Tools).

Racial Equity/Justice: “Racial equity is a set of social justice practices, rooted in a solid understanding and analysis of historical and present-day oppression, aiming towards a goal of fairness for all” (Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance).

Structural Racism: “A system of public policies, representations, institutional attitudes and practices, which reinforce and perpetuate racial inequity, exposing Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color disproportionately to various forms of disenfranchisement and violence” (Racial Equity Toolkit).

White Supremacy Culture: “An artificial, historically constructed culture which expresses, justifies, and binds together the United States white supremacy system. It is the glue that binds together white-controlled institutions into systems and white-controlled systems into the global white supremacy system” (Racial Equity Tools).