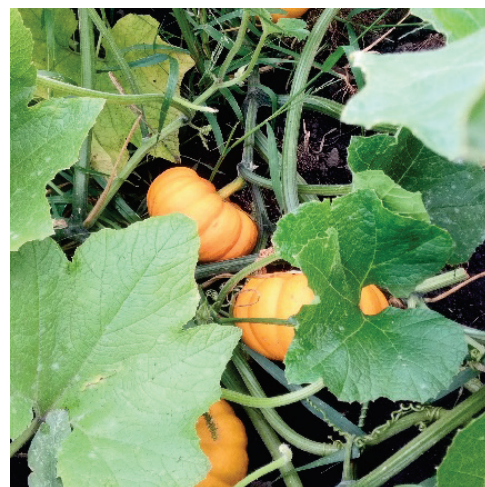
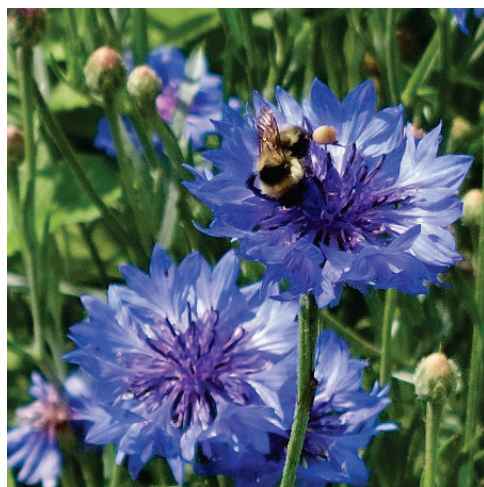


Center for Racial and Health Equity - Food Justice Initiative

Year 1 Evaluation Results

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J A N U A R Y 2 0 2 5



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Introduction



In 2023, the Center for Racial and Health Equity (Center) launched the Food Justice Funding Initiative. This multi-year funding initiative aims to advance food justice in Minnesota by ensuring community access to healthy, affordable, and culturally relevant foods without barriers. The Food Justice Initiative supports the advancement of food justice by supporting communities working to address the root causes of health inequities. Funded projects are implementing community-led strategies and are focused on bringing forward the voices and needs of those most impacted by food insecurity and racial and health inequities. A core value of this initiative is to support BIPOC leaders in changing the food systems here in Minnesota. This initiative funds 12 nonprofit organizations located across Minnesota for up to three years.

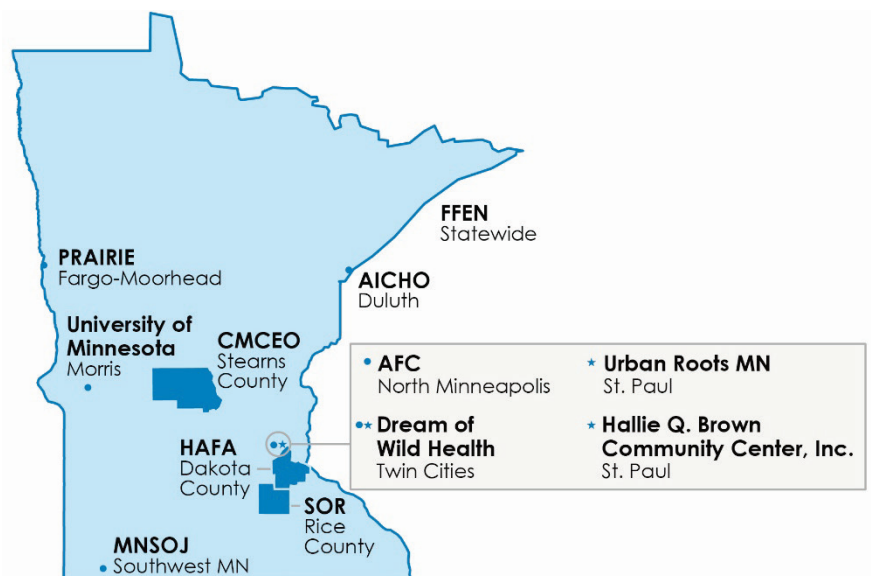
How the Center defines Food Justice

Food Justice means that everyone has access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods without barriers. Addressing the injustice in our current food system and advocating for environmental and workers' rights are also central to food justice.

Projects funded by the Food Justice Initiative

The 12 organizations represent a diverse group of projects and are located across Minnesota (6 in the Twin Cities Metro, 5 in Greater Minnesota and 1 statewide).

Funded projects cover a range of strategies to promote food justice, with most organizations addressing multiple issues related to food access: working with food shelves or food distribution to members of the community (5 projects); food sovereignty (2 projects); working with farms or in agricultural settings (3 projects); supporting the development of food justice leaders or youth (6 projects); community engagement around food programming (7 projects); and increasing access to traditional or cultural foods (5 projects).



**American Indian Community
Housing Organization (AICHO)
Duluth**

AICHO increases food sovereignty by supporting community to reclaim and honor culturally based food traditions through multi-generational opportunities to engage in traditional Indigenous food production and support policies for Indigenous food sovereignty.

**Appetite for Change (AFC)
North Minneapolis**

AFC connects hundreds of families in North Minneapolis with weekly deliveries of free healthy and nourishing meals.

**Central Minnesota Community
Empowerment Organization
(CMCEO)
Saint Cloud and Stearns County**

CMCEO engages the East African immigrant community to increase access to traditional foods and learn more about healthy food choices and importance of physical activity.

**Dream of Wild Health
Twin Cities**

Dream of Wild Health increases access to healthy Indigenous food through expanding their Indigenous Food Network (IFN). The IFN aims to bring Native-led organizations together to rebuild a sovereign food system for Indigenous communities.

**Foundation for Essential
Needs (FFEN)
Statewide**

FFEN's goal is to center shopper (food shelf client) priorities in the hunger relief sector by supporting food shelves in developing a culture that prioritizes community engagement.

**Hmong American Farmers
Association (HAFA)
Dakota County**

HAFA's Farm-to-Family Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program increases access to culturally appropriate produce grown by Hmong farmers to food-insecure individuals and women-owned in-home daycares that care for immigrant, refugee, and BIPOC children.

**Hallie Q. Brown
Community Center, Inc.
St. Paul**

Hallie Q. Brown increases access for BIPOC and/or low-income individuals and families to food that aligns with their needs through expanding their food shelf model that promotes shopper preferences and reduces barriers to receiving food.

**Minnesota Seeds
of Justice (MNSOJ)
Southwest Minnesota**

MNSOJ supports immigrant communities' access to culturally appropriate food by increasing local food distribution to BIPOC, immigrant, and migrant community members along with awareness and connection to food resources such as SNAP/ WIC and facilitating community conversations about food justice.

**Prairie Rose Ag. Institute
for Research, Innovation,
& Education (PRAIRIE)
Fargo-Moorhead**

PRAIRIE supports refugee and immigrant farmers through their New Roots Farm Incubator Cooperative by providing more technical support and 'wraparound services', along with promoting regional food procurement of healthy produce.

**Sharing Our Roots (SOR)
Rice County**

SOR Community Connectors increase immigrant access to land and healthy foods by providing farm space and training and support to families wanting to garden at home and in regional gardens.

**University of Minnesota – Morris
Morris**

UMN Morris Food Justice Initiative advances access to healthy and culturally appropriate food for BIPOC and low-income students and promote food sovereignty leaders through their food education programs and community partnerships.

**Urban Roots MN
St. Paul**

Urban Roots increases racial and health equity by engaging and empowering youth through their internship and youth development programs focused on skill development, making connections, building confidence and career readiness, all in the context of being in nature and growing healthy produce.



Progress measures

Wilder and Center staff collaborated to determine appropriate measures of progress for the initiative. Because the funded projects varied in terms of programming, a range of possible measures were offered to project teams. Teams could then identify the measures relevant to their work and submit this information using a web-based platform. The measures spanned five key topic areas:

- Traditional or culturally relevant food access
- Food distribution
- Food growing
- Policy change
- Stakeholder engagement

In addition to these topics, the form asked organizations to indicate any changes to their original goals, strategies, or budget, along with any additional funding secured. While these measures do not tell the whole story of the work done by projects, they can contribute to an overall understanding of the scale on which the work is implemented. Because each project engaged in some type of food distribution or growing (or, in some cases, both), these measures comprise some of the highlighted aggregate data.



- ✓ 530 growers
- ✓ 344,210 pounds of food grown
- ✓ 137 acres of growing space



- ✓ 13,185 households served
- ✓ 164,498 pounds of food distributed



- ✓ 102 new partners engaged
- ✓ 9,767 people involved in programs and events



- ✓ 9 governmental policies changed
- ✓ 16 organizational policies changed

Cultural foods

Half of the projects reported offering culturally relevant foods prior to their engagement with the Center. A few indicated that they started offering culturally relevant foods during the past year. Project teams also identified ways that they incorporated cultural foods into their program, which included:

- Distribution (8 projects)
- Growing and harvesting (7 projects)
- Incorporating culture or cultural foods in programming (6 projects)
- Cooking or preparing cultural foods (3 projects)

The types of foods described ranged widely, and many items had significance within certain cultures. For some, learning to grow these foods or having the space to do so provided a unique opportunity to enjoy familiar flavors.

amaranth beans bitter melon bread cabbage carrots chiles chinsaga cocoxochitl collard greens corn cucumber eggplant fish flowers garlic greens ground cherries herbs kale kohlrabi lettuce maple syrup maseca flour mulberries onions pak choi peas peppers potatoes raspberries root vegetables sesame seeds spinach squash strawberries sunchokes sweet potatoes swiss chard tomatillo tomatoes wild rice zucchini

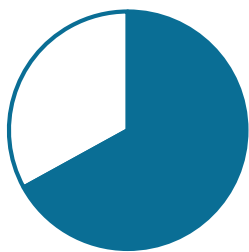
Food distribution

Of the projects that include an element of food distribution, many provide food at a food shelf (9 organizations) or directly to community members (8 organizations). Others said that this happened through food distribution events (7 organizations) or through work with community partners (4 organizations). For projects whose area of work included growing food, 5 organizations said that food was distributed through community gardens, and 4 organizations indicated activities that provided land access for community members to grow their own food.

Key impacts in Year 1

Organizations were asked to briefly describe key impacts of their work during the past year in their own words. Wilder reviewed these responses and grouped them into impact areas for the purposes of seeing the collective impact across all organizations' work. For many organizations, impacts related to community and relationships were a primary focus (8 projects). Others noted increased food access (6 projects) or organizational capacity (4 projects), and about half mentioned impacts connected to culture (e.g., providing culturally relevant foods or offering culturally specific education or programming).

Areas of impact described by project teams in progress sheets

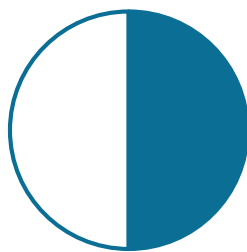


Building community, strengthening relationships

8 projects

The outcomes of building relationships with local Indigenous food producers strengthens the sense of community. Collaboration with local food producers also gives them opportunities to share their traditional ecological knowledge and cultural teachings with the youth and community.

- AICHO

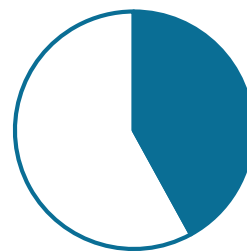


Increased access to food

6 projects

We've increased access to culturally relevant foods in our community for [immigrants, refugees, BIPOC youth and low-income community members].

- Seeds of Justice

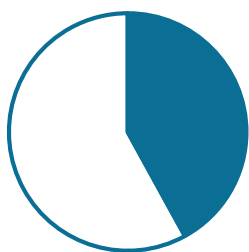


Focus on culture

5 projects

The community conversations emphasized the importance of having proper resources for the local Somali community to have access to fresh vegetables... and eventually process Halal meat locally.

- CMCEO

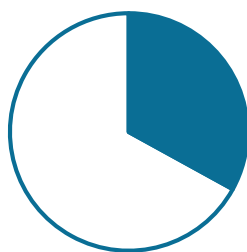


Food system / network collaboration

4 projects

During the funding period, we secured three new community partners to collaborate and further access to healthy, culturally appropriate produce.

- HAFA

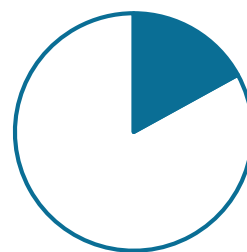


Increased organizational capacity

4 projects

Being able to hire a year round farm manager has been key to quality improvement for our training.

- PRAIRIE



Youth development

2 projects

Urban Roots hired 90 youth interns to serve in paid job training internships.

- Urban Roots

Policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes

The health of a community can be shaped by social norms, the physical landscape, availability of resources, and the economic vitality of neighborhoods. Policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes help to create sustainable conditions that allow people to make healthier choices.



Policies such as laws, ordinances, regulations, or rules influence the choices that people make in their daily lives

- **University of Minnesota Morris** aims to increase student access to Indigenous foods on campus and is working in partnership to make organizational changes to their policies to the food supply and options for students. In year 1, project staff worked with Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe to provide wild harvested bison and elk to students and Sodexo, college dining services. This increased the visibility of Indigenous food options for catering possibilities and included professional development for Sodexo to increase their cultural food knowledge and understanding.
- **Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA)** has been working with the Minnesota Department of Education to approve Hmong recipes to be a part of the Children and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), a federal meal reimbursement program for in-home daycare providers. Including these recipes will increase the opportunity for Hmong in-home daycare providers to participate in the CACFP program without the added administrative responsibilities of navigating the federal portal to insert various Hmong cultural ingredients (which are not currently included) to fulfill federal meal plan requirements.



Systems changes impact health behavior by shifting culture and norms and affect all elements of an organization, institution, or system

- **Dream of Wild Health's Indigenous Food Network (IFN)** is creating a food system focused on advancing Indigenous food sovereignty. In year 1, the IFN continued to build on their relationships with their partners and support their network through sharing funding resources for staffing, licensing, infrastructure, and community education efforts to collectively build a food system that increases accessibility and knowledge of healthy Indigenous foods, and economic opportunity for Indigenous food producers, chefs, and restaurant owners.
- **Foundation for Essential Needs (FFEN)** is changing the food distribution system by supporting food shelves in becoming more community centered. They aim to create a culture among food shelves that prioritizes shopper voice in their programs and food options. In year 1, they created a manual for food shelves on how to better engage community and supported 5 food shelves in piloting community engagement strategies. FFEN wrote case studies for other food shelves to learn from in the future.



Environmental changes are changes to the physical, economic, or social environment to increase opportunities for healthy behavior within a community

- **American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO)** is working towards Indigenous food sovereignty by changing the environment and increasing access to land for Indigenous communities. In year 1, AICHO activated a ¼ acre of new community growing space in Morgan Park for Indigenous growers.
- **Urban Roots** youth interns and culturally specific farmers grew over 15,000 pounds of produce in year 1 on their 1.5 acre farm space. They are changing the food access environment through food production and distribution opportunities all over the Twin Cities metro. Their presence at farmers markets and mobile markets is determined based on community need and youth feedback.



Evaluation activities

In Year 1, Wilder Research partnered with six of the funded organizations to complete custom evaluation activities at the organizations' direction. Wilder presented each funded organization with potential evaluation activity options and collaborated to complete an activity that was of interest to them. This was not a requirement of the funding and some organizations chose not to pursue an activity in Year 1. Below is a summary of the evaluation activities, findings, and how funded organizations used the information (if applicable).

- **AICHO:** Wilder worked with AICHO staff to schedule a discussion with youth involved in their gardening program. The goal of the discussion was to learn from youth firsthand about their experience and the potential impact of culturally specific education. Throughout the discussion, Wilder's graphic recorder sketched and painted visuals related to the stories told by youth. Some of the images highlighted in the visual include:
 - Fruits, vegetables, and herbs
 - Gardening activities
 - Canoeing
 - Cultural symbols
- **HAFa:** HAFa was interested in exploring some of their community partnerships, primarily partners (direct service nonprofits or child care providers) who receive HAFa CSA produce on a regular basis to use or disperse to their communities. The interviews explored how the partnership benefits partners and their respective communities, how the partnership contributes to food access and culturally relevant foods, and overall partner satisfaction. Wilder interviewed nine community partners over the phone or video. Partners spoke on how the partnership helps provide their communities with fresh local produce, culturally relevant foods, and addresses financial barriers to fresh produce for community members and for the nonprofits themselves. These benefits contribute to overall community food access, often with the partners acting as a local intermediary between HAFa and communities. Partners were overall satisfied and appreciative of their partnership with HAFa.
- **PRAIRIE:** PRAIRIE was interested in using the evaluation activity to talk about values, goals, successes, and opportunities for two of their programs: New Roots, which is an emerging farmer co-op for refugees in the Fargo-Moorhead area, and Youth Food & Ecology, which is a collection of partners that provides youth urban gardening opportunities. PRAIRIE and Wilder partnered to facilitate a conversation with each group and incorporated a graphic recorder to create a visual of the conversation.

- **Sharing Our Roots:** Sharing Our Roots (SOR) wanted to explore and communicate the impact of their Community Connector program. This program started in 2019, with the goal of further engaging local immigrant communities in food security and food sovereignty. Community Connectors work alongside these families and communities in gardening and farming opportunities. This evaluation activity was meant to explore how Community Connectors themselves value their work, the breadth of services they provide to community in practice, how SOR can best support their Community Connectors, and how SOR brings people together in general. To this end, Wilder staff conducted a focus group with 16 gardeners in Faribault and interviewed each of the four Community Connectors, then created a brief report with SOR branding so the organization can share information about Community Connectors with other stakeholders. Findings include:
 - Community Connectors and SOR promote food sovereignty by providing opportunities for community members to learn and develop gardening skills in order to grow their own produce.
 - The gardening program strengthens community relationships. The gardens offer a gathering place for cultural connections and intergenerational learning.
 - Working in the gardens provides peace and stress relief to families and Community Connectors.
 - Community Connectors bring in people who are interested in gardening with SOR.
 - Community Connectors help with more than gardening, including accessing community resources, providing transportation, and interpretation services.
- **University of Minnesota – Morris:** Morris was interested in learning what people learn or gain from their on-campus community events. In April, Morris planned two events with Chef Yia Vang (Union Hmong Kitchen): a cooking demonstration for a traditional Hmong dish, and a "Taste of Asia" banquet dinner. Wilder attended these events to do bead voting, which is a brief, participatory data collection method where participants are asked one question and "vote" by placing beads in jars labeled with response options. Findings showed that for the cooking demonstration, the most common #1 takeaway for attendees was learning something new about another culture, and for the Taste of Asia banquet dinner, the #1 takeaway was enjoying the meal and learning something new about culture.
- **Urban Roots:** To learn more about perspectives and experiences of youth in Urban Roots' Market Garden program, Wilder implemented a photovoice activity and discussion with youth who were engaged in the Market Garden program. This program employs youth interns who learn to plant, maintain, and harvest small-scale crop production within local urban gardens. Youth participants were invited to capture photos representative of their experience in the program with a particular emphasis on their views of community and belonging within their group and with Urban Roots. Wilder then facilitated a group discussion with youth about the photos and their internship experience. Key themes from the photos and discussion include:
 - Teamwork and community building. Youth felt strongly connected to one another and to Urban Roots, and described the moments that helped them feel a sense of community.
 - Experiencing personal growth and pushing the boundaries of their comfort zone. Youth built confidence through challenging experiences.
 - Developing skills and knowledge. Youth gained both job skills and gardening experience while learning about the local ecosystem.



Looking ahead

Intergenerational activities are central to **American Indian Community Housing Organization** work. Programs such as Indigenous food markets, film screenings, and tasting events offer community members of all ages a chance to engage in traditional food production and support Indigenous food sovereignty. In year 2, AICHO aims to expand these opportunities by sharing resources with similar organizations, strengthening relationships with Indigenous vendors and producers, and reviewing internal processes—such as reinstating their food license—to better support community events. One challenge, however, is a lack of funding (e.g., SHIP funding) to hire and retain full-time employees who could support this type of programming.

Creating an efficient and effective supply chain, connecting community members to healthy foods, and ensuring access to culturally appropriate foods have been key goals for **Central Minnesota Community Empowerment Organization**. However, these efforts have also presented challenges for the organization. Continuing in year 2, CMCEO will keep fostering relationships with community businesses, organizations, and residents to develop sustainable and culturally appropriate food systems. This includes initiatives such as establishing a community farm and supporting Somali grocers to address these goals and overcome related challenges.

Dream of Wild Health is looking to expand its work and deepen its reach within the community in year 2. To achieve this, Dream of Wild Health plans to increase staffing to support opportunities at its farm site and new office space. Additionally, they aim to grow their programming by creating a new commercial kitchen, expanding their emerging farmer incubator space, and pursuing other initiatives in collaboration with partners and families.

One of the challenges **Urban Roots** faced this past summer was related to climate change, including a very wet start to the growing season then drought at the end. Another challenge – and something Urban Roots is looking forward to addressing in year 2 – is providing more community garden space for better access to gardens for community members so they feel empowered to grow their own food in their own space.

Appendix

American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO) – Duluth

To enhance food sovereignty in the community, AICHO recently acquired 10 acres of land. Over the past year, AICHO has been building relationships with community members and neighboring organizations, collaborating with them to maintain community trails and establish new gardens on the land that emphasize traditional foods. The Giinawiind Youth Program strengthened their relationships with food producers and farmers markets, building youth skills. The outcomes of building relationships with local Indigenous food producers strengthens the youths' sense of community and gives them opportunities to share their traditional ecological knowledge and cultural teachings with other youth and the broader community.

Appetite for Change (AFC) - North Minneapolis

AFC has refocused their work back to four zip codes within their home community of North Minneapolis, allowing them to “dig deeper” within their home neighborhood. For example, while this geographic shift has reduced the number of meal boxes distributed, it has enabled AFC to concentrate on improving the relationships of food box recipients. This refocus, along with other community initiatives like workshops and community cookbooks has allowed AFC to “become a stronger space in the community as opposed to just happening to have a building in North Minneapolis.” In year 1, AFC served 150 households in North Minneapolis and distributed 15,000 pounds of food to the community.

Central Minnesota Community Empowerment Organization (CMCEO) - Saint Cloud and Stearns County

CMCEO has been fostering relationships with local Somali business owners and the broader community to better understand their needs and goals for creating a culturally appropriate and sustainable food system. Through facilitating community conversations, CMCEO has identified key gaps and challenges the community faces in sourcing, accessing, and distributing fresh, culturally appropriate food. This insight will enable CMCEO to more effectively serve and support businesses and the community in the future.

Dream of Wild Health - Twin Cities Metro

Over the past year, Dream of Wild Health has expanded its IFN efforts by focusing on youth engagement and outreach. Young people are participating in food demonstrations, workshops, and even summits at the Smithsonian Institute, where they learn about food sovereignty. The youth are then able to bring these experiences and knowledge back to share within their home communities. Additionally, youth are involved in farming and food production. Produce grown and delivered included potatoes, tomatoes, corn, peppers, squash, dry beans, amaranth, sweet potatoes, ground cherries, strawberries, mulberries, sunchokes, and Cocoxochitl. Dream of Wild Health increased biodiversity within their crop selection and varieties, trained new and returning staff, experimented with new regenerative farming techniques and initiated construction on an additional 20 acres of farmland.

Foundation for Essential Needs (FFEN) - Statewide

Over the past year, FFEN intentionally brought together a cross-sector group to form an advisory committee. This group has provided valuable expertise to help inform and guide FFEN's work. For FFEN, "being able to bring this group together was great [at] building those connections, [a]nd forming this basis of knowledge and having a group that can bring together these perspectives. That launched some of this work [we have been doing]." Additionally, FFEN partnered with food shelves to pilot impactful ways of including community voices in decision-making with food shelves. They also developed additional support tools within the Food Sourcing Analysis Reports to help food shelves make food sourcing decisions that prioritize the foods their shoppers need and want most.

Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA) - Dakota County

For HAFA, growing their partnerships has helped "elevate the importance of food and community connection, but also increased access to fresh and local food." These partnerships have helped to increase produce going directly to communities to enhance food access and has increased revenue-generating opportunities for local farmers. Continuing their work in year 1, HAFA supported 16 Hmong farming families who grew over 120 varieties of produce on the HAFA Farm that includes a variation of culturally appropriate produce and staples. HAFA distributed over 111,000 pounds of food to community partners, serving 1,935 households and helping to ensure increased access to healthy, culturally appropriate produce to low-income, food insecure refugee and BIPOC families.

Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, Inc. - St. Paul

Hallie Q. Brown (HQB) experienced major staffing changes in the past year, including a new executive director. A major success this year was hiring a part-time staff person to support their food shelf and the primary staff person leading the work. They've also seen an increased demand for their services and are partnering with other organizations to distribute food throughout the community. Looking ahead, the food shelf is interested in getting new equipment (freezers, durable bags, etc.) to help keep and distribute food.

Minnesota Seeds of Justice (MNSOJ) - Southwest Minnesota

In the last year MNSOJ was able to "assert [our] voice and have a role in implementing what's best for our community with food justice." MNSOJ increased the number of engaged community members in their Food Rescue programming, particularly among immigrants, refugees, BIPOC youth, and low-income community members. Through their Food Rescue program, they also increased access to culturally relevant foods for the community and focused on equity and food justice.

Prairie Rose Agricultural Institute for Research, Innovation, & Education (PRAIRIE) - Fargo-Moorhead

Over the last year, PRAIRIE has helped get farmers a drip line irrigation system. This allows farmers to water their crops more reliably with less intense labor and is overall better for water conservation practices. When speaking with New Roots farmers, they were very excited about this addition. Other key impacts include being able to purchase more food from farmers this year and donate to more organizations with hopes of expanding in 2025. The community garden also expanded to 40 plots (more than doubling the size of their space) and grew 4,000 pounds of food in year 1.

Sharing Our Roots (SOR) - Rice County

Over the past year, SOR worked with approximately 140 community members to teach them about gardening and help them produce their own food. A key to this success was having the funds to hire two new part-time community connectors, who played a crucial role in building relationships with these community members. One key impact of year 1 was that the retention of gardeners in the program was higher than 95%. SOR farmers also continued learning and applying the use of the organic method during the production of vegetables including tomato, tomatillo, chiles, zucchini, squash, corn, kale, eggplant, common beans, and chinsaga.

University of Minnesota Morris - Morris

Over the past year, the University of Minnesota Morris has engaged in conversations and educational efforts focused on food access and justice, while working to destigmatize food insecurity, including the use of food shelves by college students. One part of this work involves changing the narrative around food shelves, shifting from “here’s where you go if you don’t have money” to “here’s these cool things.” Another aspect of the work is taking a holistic approach to food justice and insecurity, considering not just economic factors but also cultural aspects. For example, providing culturally appropriate food that is accessible to students is an important part of both food security and food justice.

Urban Roots MN - St. Paul

With the help of community partners and youth interns, Urban Roots MN produced over 15 thousand pounds of produce on roughly 1.5 acres last year. Urban Roots hired 90 youth interns to serve in paid, job training internships, served 10,000 community members in food distribution and held or participated in 15+ community outreach events during this first year. Urban Roots also shifted their food distribution model to better connect communities to their produce by working directly with local organizations to purchase produce and distribute to their families and participants.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the organizations of the Food Justice Initiative for sharing their experiences implementing their work. Their dedication to their communities in working towards food justice is inspiring and it is an honor to be able to hear their stories and document the impacts of their work.

American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO)

Appetite for Change (AFC)

Central Minnesota Community Empowerment Organization (CMCEO)

Dream of Wild Health

Foundation for Essential Needs (FFEN)

Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA)

Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, Inc.

Minnesota Seeds of Justice (MNSOJ)

Prairie Rose Agricultural Institute for Research, Innovation, & Education (PRAIRIE)

Sharing Our Roots (SOR)

University of Minnesota – Morris

Urban Roots MN

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