ANNUAL REPORT 2014
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Our Mission

Youth Building Power Through Food

“FOOD, WHAT?!” is a youth empowerment and food justice organization using food, through sustainable agriculture and health, as the vehicle for growing strong, healthy, and inspired teens. We partner with low-income and struggling youth to grow, cook, eat, and distribute healthy, sustainably raised food and address food justice issues in our community.

Youth from Watsonville to Santa Cruz join the FoodWhat Crew through Spring Internships, Summer Jobs, Fall Business Management positions, and leading big community events on the farm. We create a safe space where youth engage in leadership development, personal growth, and job training. At FoodWhat, we inspire personal transformation by supporting teens in finding their voices and developing lasting confidence in themselves.
Maria

“I learned how to cook, how to do a professional interview, how to work in a group, and I also learned new experiences from new people. Now I eat more healthy and have more skills and abilities that I can put into practice with different people. Everything I learned is useful in my personal life.”
A Note from the Director

Friends, Supporters, Partners...FoodWhat Family -

Happy 2015! This January, unbelievably, marks the beginning of our ninth year. Like the youth we work with, we’ve experimented over the years, tasted success, and are now preparing for another fabulous season. The farm has matured and we have developed solid cropping systems, well-established soil fertility, and robust production. After 8 years, we know our strengths and we feel the energy that comes with being on the cusp of our next stage of development. Poised for change and growth, we pause to offer appreciation to each of you reading this for your role in our journey—and to each young person, their family, and our many communities who have guided these efforts.

I had a recent conversation with an old friend of FoodWhat who asked if our definition of “empowerment” has changed much over the past number of years. My response came quickly: “not a bit.” As an organization we don’t have one crisp definition of what empowerment will look like for any given youth. There is no doubt that we notice patterns in FoodWhat youth development, and we are proud of the consistently high employment, high rates of graduation and significant diet and health improvements of FoodWhat youth. Instead of expecting a particular outcome for a particular teen, though, we create a safe space, offer a bountiful, relevant kit of tools and experiences, and engage together in meaningful work, meeting each young person exactly where they are.

What do youth say they get out of this mix? This report is chock-full of their voices. You’ll see that they talk to us about many ways they are taking charge of their futures. Some youth step into their power as community leaders, some dig deep into the job training and successfully get the job they were looking for, some use the community of supportive youth and adults that we co-create to process and heal from significant traumas. Some youth learn communication skills to work things out with a parent, while others decide to commit to finish high school or go on to higher education. Some decide to go into rehab; others get politically active and work towards real equity in the food system. Still others find a career path in agriculture or the culinary arts. This list could be as long as FoodWhat’s roster--each individual’s journey is their own.

In 2015, FoodWhat is dedicated to continuing to listen to young people. We are dedicated to exploring the pathways they they feel can resolve the personal or societal issues that they want to address. We are dedicated to evolving our programs and our structure as an organization to best support young people in building their power. And we get to do this work through a delicious medium—food! Aren’t we lucky?

Hope to see you on the farm or over a meal sometime soon,

Doron Comerchero
Founder & Director
Meet the FoodWhat Staff

Abby Bell (left in hat): Farm and Program Manager. With FoodWhat since its inception in 2007, Abby manages all things related to food, farming and programs.

Roanna Cooper (right): FoodCorps Service Member. Roanna is serving her second FoodCorps term with FW in 2014-15 and brings energy, focus and an extensive social work background to our programs.

Leo Grandison (right in hat): Summer Program Co-Manager. Leo brought extensive youth development experience, deepening the summer program for FoodWhat youth.

Doron Comerchero (left): Director. Eight years and going strong, Doron leads the organization with heart, laughter and intention.

Morten Kromman Nielson (left): Researcher. Morten is a Danish Anthropology PhD candidate who is in a 3-year research partnership with FW, which will be a potential model for the Danish educational system.

Ildi Carlisle-Cummins (left): Interim Associate Director. Ildi is a long-time friend of FW and joined the team in 2014 to manage development and operations.
Meet the Junior Staff and Interns

Sarah, Junior Staff Member

Estephanie, Junior Staff Member

Jaime, Junior Staff Member

Thairie, Junior Staff Member

Abrianna Hall
(right)
UCSC Documentation Intern

Taylor Davis
(left)
UCSC Program Intern

Melissa Eap
(right)
UCSC Documentation Intern

Elizabeth Sims
(left)
UCSC Documentation Intern

Asa Comerchero
(above)
Sweet new addition to the FoodWhat family this year--Doron’s son!
“I learned what it takes to be a good and strong leader as a Junior Staff. I’ve learned how to communicate better with others when giving directions and teaching how to accomplish specific tasks on the farm. I am now more caring and understanding towards others. I feel I’ve matured more and developed better professional skills.”
Spring Program

FoodWhat had another successful spring season in 2014 and, as always, we hit the ground running as soon as our cover crops were ready to be turned in. This year, FoodWhat welcomed 48 youth from the urban, suburban, and rural areas of Santa Cruz County into the Spring Internship where they spent three hours per week for 10 weeks in our program. Each week, the youth spent one hour farming, one hour cooking and eating a farm-fresh, healthy meal, and one hour developing strong leadership skills. When they complete the internship, youth receive a $175 stipend, 2 school credits, an opportunity to apply for the FoodWhat Summer Job Training Program and a meaningful place in the FoodWhat Family.

48 Teens Successfully Completed the 10-week FoodWhat Spring Internship!

The Spring Internship is the entry point into the FoodWhat graduated leadership structure that builds youth skills as they progress from Spring Intern to Summer Job-Training Employee to Fall Business Manager.

In addition to the 2014 Spring Internship, we kept busy with:

-Dig Day, our annual alumni event, which welcomed back FoodWhat youth from each of the 7 previous years. We had a fabulous day digging and prepping the farm, playing games and sharing a meal.

-2014 Strawberry Blast, which brought over 200 students from across Santa Cruz County to the FoodWhat Farm in May for the unique opportunity to trace a strawberry from field to plate to learn about our local food system and dive into activities about personal health.

-FoodSpeaks radio show, which Doron co-hosts. This year his stellar line-up of guests included Kendra Baker, co-owner of Penny Ice Creamery and Assembly, as well as FoodWhat alum Vicky Pozos-Bernal who spoke about farmworker justice.
Spring 2014 Successes

Jobs, Jobs and More Jobs!

This was a banner year for FoodWhat youth who found jobs in the community. As part of our NowWhat effort, FoodWhat staff integrated additional job training workshops (on interviewing, resume writing, communication, etc.) and dedicated one-on-one time with youth who asked for additional job support. This stepped-up emphasis on job training directly resulted in FW youth gaining the skills they needed to find (and retain) employment.

Scholarships and Awards!

When graduation time rolled around at Costanoa High School this year, FoodWhatters were beaming with pride. The keynote speaker, all 3 recipients of the “Excellence in Leadership Award” and 6 out of 7 scholarship recipients were current or past FoodWhat youth!

Finishing Strong!

Many youth shared in our final Spring “check-out” of 2014 that their personal triumph was completing something fully -- showing up every week for 10 weeks and pushing past all the challenges or obstacles to be present. As Pedro put it, “I think my triumph is going through the trials and tribulations of coming here and working hard and breaking a sweat; but it was a good sweat and I enjoyed every single second of it.”
The Summer Job Training Program is our flagship program. It creates a safe space for youth to bolster job skills, engage in relevant and meaningful food justice activities--and step into their full power. This year’s crew was especially dynamic, taking good care of one another and working together effectively as a team. This year, we spent two days each week at the FoodWhat Farm in Santa Cruz, one day in the community doing Blasts (school garden restoration) and one day busting it at Live Earth Farm, our partner site in Watsonville. This year 42% of the youth we served live in Watsonville.

18 Youth Successfully Completed the 2014 Summer Job Program!

Youth often report significant transformation throughout the summer program and this year was no exception. The 4 Junior Staff who rejoined the FoodWhat crew for a second year honed their mentorship skills and taught the crew everything from how to plant and harvest produce to how to give each other straight, honest feedback. In all that we did, healthy, inspiring food and personal growth were at the center.

New program elements this year included:

- **FoodWhat Farm Stand at Dominican Hospital.** FoodWhat held our weekly farm stand at Dominican Hospital this summer, where we provided community members with over 500 pounds of produce and provided youth with a real customer service training opportunity.
- **Collaboration with UCSC Farm & Garden Apprentices and Research Staff.** This year, FoodWhat youth worked closely with staff conducting research in the UCSC farm fields as well as UCSC Farm apprentices, gaining additional time with adult role models and exploring agricultural career paths.
- **College Student Panel.** FoodWhat invited students of color from UCSC along with FoodWhat alumni now attending Cabrillo College to answer questions about enrolling in and attending college, while providing support and inspiration to FoodWhat youth to consider post-secondary education.
“At FoodWhat I accomplished arriving on the job on time and how to be professional during work. I learned how to eat healthier, how to do a resume and how to be during an interview. I learned more about the injustice in the world and how to change it. I have been more cautious about what I eat. I feel more in touch with nature. I have grown as a farmer and as a human being by learning my rights and the rights of others.”
Summer 2014 Successes

Youth take home 1500 pounds of produce!
Each year the FoodWhat summer youth grow and harvest CSA shares to bring home. The family CSA increases access to, and consumption of fresh produce for these low-income families. Youth often teach their parents how to incorporate more fresh produce into cultural dishes or meals, which can ensure their family’s ongoing use of produce and change purchasing habits.

Focus on Food Justice!
Responding to youth requests for deeper exploration within FoodWhat about structural racism and oppression in the food system, Leo piloted new workshops that examined these topics, including one that connected the youth’s ancestral histories to diet. FoodWhat is continually examining our staffing, programming and structure in relation to issues of race, class, power and privilege in order to walk our talk as an empowerment and justice program.

End of Summer Celebration!
This year’s final dinner for the summer program was especially memorable. The meal was spectacular--the youth made veggie lasagna, salad, green beans and cobbler--and we hosted about 75 youth family members and FoodWhat friends. FoodWhat staff gave appreciations that highlighted the strengths of each youth and, in a sweet moment typical of our 2014 crew, one of the youth publically thanked his mom for her support of his participation in the Summer Job Program.
“This summer pushed us as Jr. Staff to raise our level of maturity. I learned not only to be a leader, but also how to take a step back and let others have the light shine on them. I feel like now I can do anything. My level of confidence has really grown.”
The Fall Business Management Program is exactly what it sounds like-- FW youth put all of their new farming, food production, job, and leadership skills to work managing 4 businesses, coordinating our large Harvest Festival and revamping 15 local school gardens through our Blast Program. Fall is the last step in our graduated leadership model and the youth excelled this year!

FLOWER BUSINESS
Maria and Aakash ran the flower business, coming to the farm twice a week to harvest flowers and arrange bouquets for local businesses. They managed all aspects of the business, became familiar with the proper handling of each type of flower and mastered the challenging art of bouquet making. They successfully earned their fall salary through sales.

HARVEST CREW
Ziah, Pedro, Miguel, Lucas, Cesar and Uriel managed the harvest and post-harvest handling of all produce. Each Tuesday they came to the farm to harvest, clean and pack the vibrant crops they had been growing all season, taking the fall harvest to the FoodWhat Farm Stand at Gault Elementary School. Over the course of the fall they harvested over 1400 lbs of produce that they sold at affordable prices. These youth also managed the farm this fall, weeding, planting, irrigating, cover cropping, and preparing the farm for winter.

FARM STAND
Pedro and Ziah managed the Gault Farm Stand, learning all the skills it takes to operate that kind of business: display, sales, accounting, customer service, and responsibility. The farm stand provides fresh, affordable, organic produce to many low-income families at Gault Elementary. When it came to carrots or pineapple guavas, many of the Gault students themselves were our best customers!
HARVEST FESTIVAL
Maria and Uriel were this year’s Harvest Festival Event Managers. They did a stellar job planning and preparing every last detail for what was an incredibly successful event. They learned about event planning as a career, exploring the salaries and tasks related to that profession. Then they designed the program for the event, tackled all the outreach to schools and event station leaders, wrote the press releases, secured all the materials needed, finalized and distributed the student assignment to participating schools, and led the entire set up and clean up.

This year’s Harvest Festival was the best yet with over 250 county-wide students attending, and held in conjunction with National Food Day. There were dynamic new stations such as a farmworker appreciation activity that resulted in scores of “thank you” letters delivered to farmworkers in Watsonville, as well as the addition of a photo booth for youth to share their thoughts about food, farmers, and justice.

BLAST CREW
Each Friday, Axel, Alistar, Ryan, Alora and Uriel went to work in various school gardens. They tackled big garden maintenance and infrastructure projects to enable each school to use the garden for their educational goals in the new school year. The transformation of these gardens as a result of the Blasts was very striking, and the teachers and administrators expressed much gratitude to our youth crew for their hard work.

CULINARY CREW
Maria and Miguel ran all things culinary this fall. They cooked dinners for the rest of the FoodWhat Fall Crew, lunches for Life Lab workshop participants, assisted local chefs in preparing the meal for the FoodWhat Benefit Dinner, canned salsa for future use in FoodWhat programs, and ran a bike-powered smoothie station at the CASFS Harvest Festival. For our final crew dinner at the end of the fall, Maria and Miguel made an absolutely delicious dinner of squash enchiladas, beans and cabbage salad. Total artistry!
In 2014, FoodWhat youth had opportunities to travel near and far to connect with other youth engaged in similar work. Youth and staff attended 5 conferences and youth-led gatherings, sharing FoodWhat’s efforts and gaining inspiration. This is a critical part of our local work because it offers our crew a personal identity within the larger food justice movement.

**Youth Day at Pie Ranch.**
After 7 years of hosting this youth food justice summit, which gathers regional youth engaged in food system and equity work, we passed the torch this year to Pie Ranch, a kindred program in Pescadero. This summer, we joined 125 other youth from across the Bay Area at Pie Ranch to build community, engage in deeply personal conversations, and exchange tools to build our knowledge about food and farming.

**Rooted in Community Leadership Summit (New Mexico) and Strategic Planning Session (Boston).** Rooted in Community (RIC) cultivates transformational leadership through a national network focused on youth power, food sovereignty, and justice. This past summer Leo (FW Staff) and Esmerelda, Miguel, Maria G. and Cesar traveled to New Mexico to dive into advanced leadership training in how to create real food systems change. FW alum Vicky Pozos-Bernal and FW Director Doron participated in the RIC strategic planning sessions in Boston this past fall to help guide and support the future of this work.

**Bioneers Conference (San Rafael).** A large crew of 10 youth joined FW Staff members Abby and Roanna this year at the Bioneers Conference, where they participated in workshops led by key, national environmental and social justice leaders and in the “Just Us for Food Justice” youth-led pre-conference. This year’s experience was powerful for FW youth, many of whom told us they left the conference with new energy, purpose and drive.

**Brower Youth Awards (San Francisco).** In October, FW youth traveled to the city to hear from the 6 inspiring young people awarded for their environmental activism. Our crew left inspired to examine the ways that they are each making significant change in our community.
“I feel ready to go and fight the battle at hand. It won’t be easy or short, but I will make change. It’s not for me or my friends, it’s for those who come after me.”
Winter, 2014: There was more!

Community Education Program

For years, participating local high school teachers have asked us to bring FoodWhat to additional students beyond the youth in our core programs. Our Strawberry Blast and Harvest Festival events are one way we respond to this request, and in 2013 we rolled out our Community Education Program, which was another successful way to expand our reach. This year, two current youth, Uriel and Miguel, teamed up with FoodWhat alum Vicky, to deliver a three-part, peer-to-peer education series. Each youth took one workshop, learned it inside and out, and then led 8 classes at Pajaro Valley High School, Watsonville Community School, for one of our partner organizations, Jovenes Sanos, and at the YES School in Santa Cruz.

Miguel was first up with the “What You Think, What You Drink: Youth Dollar Power” workshop, exploring the effects of sugar in popular youth beverages and closing with a strong message about the power of youth dollars. Uriel followed with “Food as Activism,” sharing stories from national and international leaders using food for change in their movement and inviting students to think of their own capacity to be agents of change in their communities. Vicky closed out with a FoodWhat classic, “Trace Your Taco,” getting students thinking and talking about a range of food system issues from labor practices and food miles to global warming and genetic engineering. Not only did students learn this rich content, but they were also inspired by the FW crew--youth just like them standing in the front of the room who were articulate, passionate, and in clear positions of leadership.
“I have accomplished gaining leadership skills. I have learned a lot about organic farming such as setting water lines and to plant and harvest at the right time. I have changed my eating habits by eating more organic produce and healthy meals. I have also changed my way of thinking about the food system. I have grown by taking everything that FoodWhat has provided me through the summer and adopting that to my life to make a change for myself and others.”
FoodWhat measures our impact each year with various tools including evaluation surveys, youth personal reflections and staff observations. In 2014, we were honored to be joined by Morten Kromman Nielsen, a Danish PhD candidate and researcher, who conducted in-depth interviews with spring, summer and fall youth. We look forward to sharing his findings as they are published.

In 2014, youth reported the following significant impacts on their lives:

91% of youth say they feel more empowered as a result of FoodWhat!

86% of youth say they like healthy food more as a result of FoodWhat!

82% of youth say they are more comfortable in a job interview as a result of FoodWhat!

67% of alumni say that FoodWhat played a *pivotal* role in helping them to finish high school!
“I have had to take on a lot of responsibility this summer that I feel I have taken on well. I am more comfortable being on my own than I was a few months ago. I am more healthy than I was, and I feel much stronger that I used to be. I'm 18 and after this experience of hard work, I feel like a young adult. I am going to go to college and I feel that I can get a real job and hold it and I can move out eventually. I am more of an adult.”
FoodWhat had a strong fiscal year in 2014. As you can see from the income pie chart below, we have succeeded in creating a diversified funding stream that includes a significant number of individual donations. We have been working toward this funding spread since day one, with a clear understanding of the importance of this diversity for our long-term sustainability. Additionally, we have secured funds that span multiple years that will help us to start 2015 from a place of strength and confidence. We are on a growth trajectory and plan to increase the FoodWhat budget from our 2014 level of $300,000.

**Building Reserves.** Since its inception in 2007, FoodWhat has successfully met our budget goals without fail. As we move into 2015 and strategize about our growing organization, we are working on building a 3-6 month operational reserve for even greater financial sustainability and security. Because of a successful 2014 fundraising season, we are on our way to achieving this goal!
2015 promises to be an exciting year of organizational growth for FoodWhat!

We have 2 major organizational development projects planned:

**Building an Outdoor FoodWhat Gathering Space.** This is the year we will be fundraising to support the construction of a gathering space to be built at the top of the FoodWhat farm site. We imagine a design for a circular wooden platform, moveable benches and an open-sided tent. This will provide a dedicated, protected space where FW youth can gather for workshops, dive into projects, and circle up for straight talk sessions.

**Growing Our Team.** As FoodWhat continues to respond to articulated youth needs and feedback—and as the volume and depth of FW's programming increases-- we’re gearing up to add a new staff member to our team. We envision adding a dedicated Program Manager with strong youth development experience and a passion for social justice who will continue to evolve and innovate our current programs. 2015 will be the key year to do the additional fundraising to allow us to hire for this position in the near future. We are incredibly excited for this staff expansion and can already see the enormous return for the organization and particularly for the youth who we will serve in the coming years.
Thank You

You Make This Possible.

Every year, we witness profound transformation among FoodWhat youth and we are continually humbled that we get to work with these powerful young people as they own their potential, impact their families, and build a stronger community. To do this work, FoodWhat is grateful for the support of our families, donors, friends and community. We are sustained by your efforts, both personally and organizationally, and want to express our sincere appreciation for your partnership in serving youth and our community.
"Food, What?!" is fiscally sponsored by Life Lab, a 501(c)3 nonprofit.