"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 resilient 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 Project Management positions, Winter Community Education 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.
A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Friends,
It is with incredible pleasure that I share with you this special 10th anniversary end-of-year report. FoodWhat launched in 2007 serving 5 youth and holding one “major” event for 25 youth...fast forward a decade later, FoodWhat has become an incredibly impactful countywide community resource having served hundreds of youth in core programs and now reaching over 1000 youth each year. What we have been able to do together gives me great pride and hope. You have played a significant role in growing and nourishing FoodWhat as we have created safe space for youth to take on their own meaningful personal and professional growth. Whether you have been with FoodWhat since day one, have grown with us over the years, or you just recently became part of our FoodWhat Family, your commitment has been and continues to be invaluable to me and to our organization.

These pages reflect ten years of FoodWhat youth through photos and quotes highlighting alumni and where they are today. As you will see, their words speak to the transformative power of their experience at FoodWhat. Their stories point to how they used their time at FoodWhat to make significant changes, push through struggles toward healing, and pull down obstacles to living the healthy and confident lives in which they are now centered. This work is not magic, but it is magical.

Last year at our Fall Benefit, I had a funny moment. FoodWhat staff and alumni youth were all circled up to check in, play some games before the event started, and make a plan for everyone’s roles. At one point I realized that some of the FoodWhat alumni “youth” were now as old as, or older, than some of our newest staff. And even moreso, wonderfully, some of our newest staff, like Deonte and Uriel, were youth in our programs over the past decade. This staffing demographic is a measure of profound success —the fact that FoodWhat is now established enough as an entity that FW alumni are coming back into the program as staff with all their experience, relevance, and leadership for the youth they will now be serving. FoodWhat unflinchingly continues to be a safe space for Santa Cruz County youth—crucial, now more than ever. We will continue to use all the resources, gifts, privileges earned and unearned, and heart that we collectively share in our staff and from our enormous constellation of partners and supporters, to create opportunities for youth to step into their power and live the lives they want to live. We will continue to invite them into deep conversation and to listen actively when they speak.

Thank you for being one of the many incredible people in our FoodWhat Family who shares your resources, your heart, your encouragement, and your belief in equity and justice that has moved FoodWhat from a spark of an idea, into the grounded and effective organization we have become. With gratitude and in celebration,

Doron Comerchero—Founder and Executive Director

“FOOD, WHAT?!" STAFF & INTERNS

Abby Bell
Farm and Culinary Manager (left)
Co-leading FoodWhat since its inception in 2007, Abby manages all things related to food and farm programming.

Nathan Beserra
FoodCorps Service Member
The older brother of a FoodWhat graduate, Nathan brings his passion and expertise in horticulture to the farm.

Doron Comerchero
Executive Director
Doron continues to believe he has the best job in the world while leading the organization with heart, laughter, and intention.

Deonte McClure
Culinary Programs Coordinator
Having first-hand experience as a FoodWhat youth back in 2012, Deonte brings relevance and culinary passion into his work, inspiring current youth.

Irene O’Connell
Programs Manager
Irene is an experienced mentor, educator, and advocate for youth who manages FW’s core youth programs.

David Robles
Programs Coordinator
David knows the potential that youth have to change their communities and engages his knowledge of the major role food can play in youth empowerment.

Anna Schlotz Koski
Development Director (right)
Anna brings together foundation, corporate, government, and individual partners to ensure strong financial support for FW’s programs.

Shin Light
Junior Staff Member

Manuel Moya
Junior Staff Member

Aaliyah Wilson
Junior Staff Member

Olvaerr Apodaca
Junior Staff Member

Nelly Alonso
UCSC Development Intern

Eric Medina
UCSC Farm Intern

Mai Dao
UCSC Farm Intern

Yanet Ibarra
UCSC Farm and Development Intern

Nicole Santiago
UCSC Development and Program Intern

Deanne Lui
UCSC Development and Program Intern

Doron Comerchero
—Founder and Executive Director
SPRING INTERNSHIP

FoodWhat (FW) had another slammin’ Spring Season in 2016. For 11 weeks, teens spent one hour with their hands in the soil farming organically, one hour cooking and eating a farm-fresh, healthy meal and one hour in workshops on nutrition, food systems, leadership development, job skills, and mindfulness. When youth completed the internship, they received a $175 stipend, 2 school credits, the opportunity to apply for the FoodWhat Summer Job Training Program, and a meaningful place in the FoodWhat Family.

44 Teens Successfully Completed the 11-Week FoodWhat Spring Internship!

Highlights from the season:
• Youth reported significant growth in this first step of FoodWhat’s graduated leadership model: 88% improved their leadership skills. 98% learned how to farm or farm better than before. 89% improved skills to get and keep jobs. And 77% said that after FW they believe they have the power to make positive changes for themselves, their families, and communities!
• For the first time, we had full equity in holding two days a week of programming at the FoodWhat Farm in Santa Cruz and two days at our partner site Discovery at Live Earth Farm in Watsonville. We created more Spring Internship positions for Watsonville teens - including new positions for Watsonville High students! - and created more opportunity for South County youth.
• The Strawberry Blast event brought 200 students from across Santa Cruz County to the FoodWhat Farm in May to learn about food justice, health, and sustainability through games, activity booths, and of course tasty organic strawberries!

Irene O’Connell // Programs Manager
We were thrilled to hire Irene as our new Programs Manager in March! We created this position in 2016. Originally from Los Angeles, Irene came to Santa Cruz to study Public Art and Latin American & Latino Studies at UCSC. Irene joined FW with experience in community organizing around youth violence prevention. She has previously served the community in mentorship roles in local high schools and in the Santa Cruz Juvenile Detention Center, working with Barrios Unidos, the Resource Center for Nonviolence, the Beach Flats Community, and the Watsonville Brown Berets. Irene is especially passionate about the intersections where youth expression and creativity can meet empowerment for lasting, impactful change in youth lives and in their communities.

The Summer Job Training Program is our most intensive core program. Youth speak of the safe space and sense of family created. They report participating in meaningful work, acquiring a whole suite of job skills to succeed in the workplace, and significant personal transformation. In 2016 we spent two days a week on the FoodWhat Farm in Santa Cruz, one day running affordable farm stands and renovating school gardens in South County, and one day busting it at our partner site in Watsonville, Live Earth Farm. The 4 Junior Staff who rejoined the FoodWhat Crew for their second year sharpened their mentoring skills and led the crew in everything from planting and harvesting to giving clear, honest feedback through weekly Straight Talk sessions. In all that we did, healthy, inspiring food and community were at the center.

18 Youth Successfully Completed the 2016 Summer Job Training Program!

Highlights from the season:
• FoodWhat held two weekly affordable farm stands at Radcliff Elementary in Watsonville and at Gault Elementary in Santa Cruz. We provided community members with fresh, organic produce, and youth gained valuable customer service skills and pride from giving back to their community. Summer youth took home 1550 pounds of vibrant, nutritious food in a free weekly CSA share that they grew and harvested. 76% of youth reported that they eat more fruits and vegetables after FW, and 88% told us that they are eating less fast food and junk food. The family CSA increased access to, and consumption of, fresh produce for low-income families. About two-thirds of the FoodWhat Crew told us their parents/guardians cooked with more fruits and vegetables at home by the end of the Summer program.
• Throughout the season, FoodWhat youth built strong connections with each other and our broader community. The Crew revitalized school gardens in Watsonville, cooked with the Teen Kitchen Project, learned about entrepreneurship with FW Board Member Cesario Ruiz at the Kitchen Incubator Project and produced “Youth Power Kraut” with Watsonville-based business Farmhouse Culture. Irene and 4 youth traveled to the Rooted in Community National Youth Summit in Olympia, Washington, met teens from similar organizations from all over the country, and cultivated their power as part of a national youth justice movement. Thanks to CASFS Apprentices and staff, Live Earth Farm staff, and awesome guest chef and workshop presenters, youth gained job opportunities, were exposed to career and college paths they may not have considered, and grew their support systems with inspiring, positive adult role models.
• Youth reported major personal and professional growth through their experiences in the Summer Program: 92% of Summer youth shared that they care more about the environment and their communities after FW, and 82% believe they can make an impact on the local food system through their purchasing power. 88% of Summer youth said they had improved their communication skills. 100% of youth reported they increased their professionalism on the job!
FALL PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The Fall Project Management Program is the third step in our graduated leadership model. Youth who have completed the Summer Job have the opportunity to apply for positions running the many farm businesses and community projects that FW operates through September and October. This is the time for youth to apply all the job skills, confidence, and leadership they’ve acquired over the previous two seasons of programming into real-world responsibility.

Ty, Fatima, and Essy ran the Fall flower business, coming to the farm twice a week to harvest flowers, arrange bouquets, manage accounting, and deliver flowers to local businesses. Essy was this year’s Harvest Festival Event Manager and organized a successful event that, despite being rescheduled due to rain, brought 175 teens to the farm! The stellar Fall Chef team of Fatima, Jorge, Ja’Chea and Ricky ran all things culinary including cooking for our Fall Benefit Dinner and for the FoodWhat Crew. Mikey and Ty ran the affordable farm stand at Gault Elementary. Eli, Tristan, Mikey, Ty and Elijah managed the harvest and post-harvest handling of all of our crops at our Santa Cruz site, harvested produce for the Gault farm stand and prepared the farm for winter. Ricky, Ferny, Manny and Maria worked in partnership with Discovery at Live Earth Farm as harvest managers for our Watsonville low-income farm stand, and Giovana and Manny ran this weekly farm stand at Radcliff Elementary School in Watsonville. Each week Ja’Chea, Eli, Tyrek, Tristan, Elijah, and Jorge went to different school or community gardens to overhaul these spaces taking on major maintenance and infrastructure projects at 8 different gardens.

After years of requests from youth to be able to work more hours in multiple Fall Jobs, we created 27 Fall positions total and youth employment hours doubled from 2015! This was a big step for Fall Project Managers to be able to earn significantly more income (at $10.50/hour) while they continued growing their job skills, resiliency, and confidence.

Abby Bell // Farm and Culinary Manager

At the end of 2016, Abby Bell made a transition out of her longstanding role at FoodWhat and moved up to San Francisco to start her next chapter in life. Abby was an absolutely incredible partner, co-pilot, youth mentor, farmer, big-hearted justice advocate, and friend to all of us and the youth we serve. As a perfect wrap up of her strong 10 years of service, Abby was recognized with a Community Hero Award by the United Way of Santa Cruz County in Fall 2016. There really aren’t words to express how important and wonderful a person Abby is and has been in the growth of this organization, and to each young person she has inspired, from planting a seedling with her, making a meal with her, or the million other little moments that have populated her time here since we began. When you ask FoodWhat youth to describe Abby, they speak of her warmth, her kindness, her compassion, her presence, her strength as a role model, her consistency in supporting them to reach their personal and professional goals, and the central role she’s played in their transformation. Thank you Abby...
“When I came to FoodWhat I was an angry person and always on guard. I was completely closed down and didn’t talk to anybody and couldn’t open up to anyone. Coming to FoodWhat gave me something to do and there was always something on the farm to keep me going. FoodWhat changed me a lot. It calmed me down. And that doesn’t happen easily. I could come up to the farm and be myself. It was an outlet for my personality to come out. And I loved being outside. One of the main things is it helped me graduate high school. I probably wouldn’t have graduated without FoodWhat.”

- Devin, 2008 Crew

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Right now, I am going to Cabrillo College where my major is accounting. I am most proud of my daughter (7 years old), going back to college and having 3 years clean.

“I’m working for the American Conservation Experience doing trail maintenance and construction. I’m most proud of the fact that I’m doing what I love and teaching people how to build trails.”

- Jo, 2007 Crew

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?
“FoodWhat made me feel like I mattered and that my opinion made a difference. After FoodWhat, I felt more motivated to become a leader in my community, to take part in our tribal government, and help coexist rather than complain about the problem. FoodWhat gave me a chance to be a leader. Now, I believe that no matter what, I can make a difference, even just by asking one question. FoodWhat granted me a sense of brotherhood and belonging. I learned to watch and learn from others. The best part of FoodWhat is that everyone has a chance to be a better human being.”

- Celestino, 2009 Crew

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

I am working at First Alarm and plan to attend Cabrillo College to study Anthropology. I am most proud that I’m part of my tribe and taking responsibility for the well-being of my clan.

“FoodWhat changed my life! It not only helped me feel more comfortable as a person but helped my entire family through the food I brought home every week. FoodWhat taught me about family. My self-esteem was greatly affected by FoodWhat by teaching me so many amazing skills and helping me heal my body. After FoodWhat I was much more happy with myself and life. By teaching me how to cultivate the land, it helped me cultivate myself. Most important thing I learned, that true happiness comes in the form of cooperation, love and outside experiences.”

- Jazz, 2010 Crew

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

I’m attending Cabrillo College, majoring in Environmental Management and Protection. I am most proud of my work with the Cabrillo Sustainability Club and hosting our Earth Week event.
“At FoodWhat I developed a strong work ethic and learned how to be a great team worker. I became more positive, open minded and caring of others. Doron and Abby really inspired me by always asking and being curious about my future plans outside the program and also taught me about the FAFSA for college. FoodWhat helped me out with jobs or obtaining them, by learning very important job and leadership skills that helped me improve or reach tons of potential I didn’t believe I could reach.”

- Thairie, 2011 Crew

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Attending Cabrillo College majoring in Communication Studies, and working at the Santa Cruz Farmers’ Markets. I’m most proud of graduating high school, having a roof over my head, and knowing that my family is proud of me.

“I learned a lot about food justice which pushed me to talk more about farm workers, especially coming from a farm worker family. I went to regional and national youth summits and FoodWhat also connected me to an internship with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida. The community was tired of being taken advantage of and living in poverty and they all stood up together. They threw fear out the window and created a coalition that accomplished so much because they organized together. I realized I could do this in my own community and didn’t need to go far away. All these experiences gave me a passion to do farm labor organizing to support farm workers and this set me on my career path.”

- Vicky, 2012 Crew

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

I recently graduated from the University of California Santa Cruz with a Bachelor’s Degree in Community Studies and am applying for jobs in labor and organizing.
“Working at FoodWhat my communications skills and my confidence went up which I didn’t have at the beginning. I started eating healthy. FoodWhat taught me how to cook and prepare new foods to taste good that weren’t in my Mexican diet before. That’s made me want to eat healthier. My grandparents were farmers in Mexico. My parents are farmers here. When I came to FoodWhat I knew I wanted to be a farmer and have my own place and business one day. I know it’s a hard job, but it’s really rewarding. At the end of the day, you feel good for what you’ve done. FoodWhat opened the door for me to meet new people and organic farmers and that led to me getting the job at Dirty Girl.”

- Jose, 2013 Crew

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

I am the Assistant Farm Manager at an organic farm, Dirty Girl Produce. I’m most proud of myself, in coming from my background of immigrant farmers, of having the job that I have right now—I’m happy and proud of what I do.

“FoodWhat made me a new person and gave me a lot of confidence. In high school FoodWhat motivated me to be on time and helped me to follow my passion for cooking. It just motivated me to go and do bigger things in my life. They taught me the ropes in and out of what a job is really like and prepared me for it. I am a lot more confident now. I started to think that I am really able to do anything. FoodWhat made me believe in myself.”

- Deonte, 2012 Crew

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

After working at a local catering company, I came back to work for FoodWhat for Summer 2016 as the Culinary Programs Coordinator leading the new crew of youth in the kitchen each day, learning how to cook fresh, healthy, tasty food.
"I have learned ways to grow vegetables and I learned ways to express myself. I have learned time management. I learned to self motivate. I've learned people can be caring and loving. I smile more often, that's a change. I don't isolate myself at home. I socialize more. I have more sense of awareness. I don't take the negative and put it in myself. I've grown from a seed to a curvy sunflower."

- Miguel, 2014 Crew

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

I am attending Cabrillo College and majoring in Theater Arts. What I am most proud of in my life is being the individual and open person I am now.

"I've accomplished my position in this grand job, working at FoodWhat. Food is a link to keep us organically healthy mind, body and spirit! I also learned that people need people. I've changed by I make my decisions and I'm not responsible for someone else’s unhappiness. I've grown by taking steps into making myself happy and healthier for myself. Those steps are hard but very real and this is my lifetime."

- Bree, 2015 Crew

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Right now I’m attending Cabrillo College majoring in Sociology. I’m most proud of taking charge of my life, really making it my own vision.
FoodWhat measures program impact each year with various tools including evaluation surveys, youth-composed narratives and personal reflections, and staff observations. With the guidance of a Danish PhD candidate Morten Kromman Nielsen, in his 3rd year of a 3-year longitudinal study of FoodWhat, we better analyzed the data collected, and refined tools to make them more engaging and empowering for the youth themselves.

At our annual Alumni gathering, Dig Day, we heard from youth stretching all the way back to 2007 about how their time at FoodWhat has continued to influence their lives in positive ways:

- 79% of alumni reported that FoodWhat played a pivotal role in helping them to graduate high school
- 88% of alumni surveyed are currently in college or applying to college
- 96% of alumni told us that FW job training provided them with skills to get and succeed in jobs
- 96% reported that FW played a significant role in preparing them to live a productive life!

400+ youth served in core Spring Internship, Summer Job Training, and Fall Project Management programs

2 program sites based on farms in Santa Cruz and Watsonville

12 high schools served countywide

4000 additional teens and community members reached through family produce share, affordable farm stands, youth-led events on the farm, peer-to-peer education, and outreach at community events

20,250 pounds of produce FoodWhat youth helped to grow and distribute

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From 2007 - 2016, FoodWhat has provided over 61,400 hours of dynamic, life-changing programming for Santa Cruz County teens!

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FoodWhat is poised for exciting growth and continued impact in our second decade serving Santa Cruz County youth. As of January 1, 2017 FoodWhat is officially an independent nonprofit (you’ll see our new tax ID number on your donation receipts).

This opens up a world of opportunities. This year we’ll conduct a robust strategic planning process and further engage youth and community members to determine FoodWhat’s goals and trajectory for the next 3-5 years.

We are deeply committed to sustaining FoodWhat as a resource that struggling teens can depend on, and looking forward to:

- Serving **650+** more youth in core programs in next 10 years
- Reaching **11,000+** more teens and community members through peer education, food justice and community service projects
- Creating new Spring Internship positions, and Summer and Fall Jobs to serve more teens each year
- Growing the FoodWhat team to expand and deepen our work with youth
- Cultivating additional land to produce more healthy, nourishing food
- Scores of youth throughout Santa Cruz County transforming themselves and our community!

Looking Forward

FoodWhat had a strong 2016 fiscal year, continuing our 9-year track record of meeting and exceeding our fundraising goals. We are grateful to have the support of a diverse array of foundation, corporate, and government partners and many generous individual donors. The Annual Benefit Dinner continues to increase in size each year and raised $50,000 from attendees, triggering $50,000 in matching gifts and sponsorships! We put exceptional effort into fundraising in 2016 to meet the increased expenses and staffing needs of expanded programming in South County, to increase youth salaries, replace multi-year grants coming to an end, further diversify our funding streams, and to prepare for the new costs of independent nonprofit operations. As we’ve now successfully launched as an independent entity, FoodWhat’s budget has increased from $451,000 in 2016 to $528,000 in 2017 which will sustain our expanded programming at the highest levels of quality while deepening our impact even further.

Financial Report

FoodWhat’s primary funding sources in 2016 were:

- **Foundation Grants** — 32%
- **Donor-Advised Grants** — 28%
- **Individual Donations** — 18%
- **Government Grants & Contracts** — 14%
- **Corporate Grants & Donations** — 14%
- **In-Kind Donations** — 2%
- **Earned Income** (Produce Sales, Workshops, Catering) — 1%

Our largest single project was Program — 42%.

- **Program** — 42%
- **Fundraising** — 17%
- **Youth Salaries & Stipends** — 14%
- **Administration** — 10%
- **Fiscal Sponsor Fee** — 8%
- **Office** — 7%
- **Events** — 2%
SUPPORTERS

We’re deeply grateful to the many generous donors, sponsors and community partners who fuel FoodWhat programs!

Our partners, CASFS at UCSC and Discovery at Live Earth Farm, generously provide field space, greenhouse space, and technical expertise as a part of their long-standing commitment to our empowerment and agricultural programming.

Special thanks to Life Lab for 10 years of support and partnership.

Additional Local Business and Corporate Sponsors

Adventure Out
Ainsley Miller Jewelry
AlphaGraphics
Amling Designs
Ate3One Food Truck
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Bantam Pizza
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Youth Power Champions

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The Dean Witter Foundation
The Hastings/Quillin Fund at Silicon Valley Community Foundation
The Joseph & Vera Long Foundation
UNFI Foundation
University of California Global Food Initiative
University of California Higher Education Challenge Grant

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Alison & Brandon Nizewicz **
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FoodWhat Advocates

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Angela & Kurt Meeker
Bruce & Kris Neustadter **
California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)
Cynthia Druley & Famy Diener
Dan & Jill Dion
Dana & Michelle Massie
Eileen & Neil Brown **
George Brown & Julie Dryden-Brown
Ginny Solari Mazy
Gus & Wilma Gold **
Howard Heeveyer & Cynthia Chase * **
James LoPrete and the Frank & Gertrude Dunlap Fund
Jeff Blair **
Joan & Michael Yogg
Joe & Beverlie Terra

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Gail Goodman
Gail Levine *
Gary & Jane Bell **
Harry & Sherry Comerchero
Iveta Brigis & John Smart
K&CS Brothers Fund at Community Foundation

Santa Cruz County
McCue Family Fund at Community Foundation Santa Cruz County
Myra & Drew Goodman
Nina & Sibley Simon **
Paul Koch
Ralph Alpert and the Spring Fund at Community Foundation Santa Cruz County
Sarika, Aaron, Anika, & Izzy Singh-Bell
Sheldon Logan & Trissia Brown *
Shmuel Thaler & Kathy Cytron
Sunshine Gibbs
Thom Nelson & Jennifer Lommen

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Judy Jones **
Laura Marcus & Johan Rubens
Leslie Conner & Ian McRae
Linda & Dwayne Downing
Lysa Tabachnick & David LeVan
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Martina & Will O’Sullivan **
Mary Gaukel Forster & Les Forster
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Miriam & Ira Flatow
Monica Martinez & Jen Mikkelson **
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Sandy Lansdale **
Simone Spencer & Daniel Auer
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$250 - $499

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Daniel & Sarah Press
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Ellen Busman
Ellen Timberlake & Angelica Glass
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up to $249

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* Rainbow Chard Rockstars, who make monthly contributions that help us plan for the year and sustain our programs!
** Table Captains and volunteers, who made our 10th Anniversary Benefit Dinner and special events such a success!
THANK YOU!

As the stories on these pages tell, 2016 was a very special year as we marked our 10th anniversary. And this narrative would not be complete if it didn’t acknowledge the backbone of support that we receive from our FoodWhat Family. Whether as a donor, friend, volunteer, partner, or whatever role you see yourself in, we appreciate you. You fuel us personally and organizationally to do this important work in service of youth as they own their potential, generate power, and build a stronger community.

YOU MAKE THIS POSSIBLE!

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