

The Realities of Hunger in Our Rural, Agricultural, Urban and BIPOC Communities

White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health

Report and Recommendations of the Listening Sessions held by
Rural Coalition and our partners:
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas,
Slow Food USA,
Farm Action,
National Family Farm Coalition,
North American Marine Alliance,
Slow Fish North America,
One Fish Foundation,
HEAL Food Alliance,
World Farmers, Inc.,
Family Farm Defenders, and
Wallace Center

[Lea el informe completo en español](#)

A top-down view of a wooden basket filled with fresh, vibrant green vegetables. The basket contains several large-leafed greens, two cucumbers, and a bunch of small red radishes. The lighting is natural, highlighting the textures and colors of the produce.

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Introduction

The events of the last several years have unveiled the compelling need to heal the structural inequities in our foundation – most needed are those that are woven into the fabric of our food and agriculture systems, from the federal level to the fields. On June 30, 2022, the Rural Coalition, with our grassroots partners, held a listening session on hunger and nutrition realities with our community-based leaders and member organizations. Our partners include Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, Slow Food USA, Farm Action, National Family Farm Coalition, North American Marine Alliance, Slow Fish North America, One Fish Foundation, HEAL Food Alliance, World Farmers, Inc., Family Farm Defenders, and Wallace Center.

Over 160 people across the nation participated in the online listening session, which was opened with a message from Representative Jim McGovern. Together, we listened to and shared the realities of hunger and nutrition in our communities. We collectively discussed the ways these realities present opportunities to address our current and future hunger and nutrition needs, and to identify specific recommendations. Our Report illuminates the numerous testimonies from individuals and grassroots organizations coming together to bring light to the realities they face.

Community-based organizations and individuals on the frontlines of hunger shared their perspectives on the challenges their communities are facing due to food insecurity, and environmental issues. This report provides a point of reference on hunger realities. This process enabled us to shine a light on the critical intersections where access to food, nutrition, agricultural land, health, wealth, and well-being overlap. The hunger realities described by participants at the onset of the session elucidate holistic community-driven solutions, which present our nation’s most promising opportunities to address this long-standing problem.

The Covid-19 pandemic, coupled with the increasing economic and climate crises, added multi-layered challenges to the realities in our rural communities. These interlinked crises also surfaced the capacity of communities for collective problem solving to identify innovative ideas, collaborations, and solutions, often long-known to farmers, ranchers, farmworkers, and land-based communities. These community solutions are poised to be employed in times of future crisis, and are ready to be scaled up immediately for a resilient agricultural and rural future.

Part I. Hunger and Nutrition Realities

The diverse participants gathered in this process represent a broad range of communities across the United States. The testimonies they provided speak from personal experiences and firsthand accounts of hunger and nutritional deprivation, and the circumstances that contribute to them. The process we used to synthesize this report draws on the participatory research methodology that the multicultural communities of the Rural Coalition have built together over more than four decades to create, sustain, and disseminate collaborative social innovations. In this section, we present themes defining the realities of many, as illustrated in the testimonies offered by community leaders in the opening session.

Access to Sufficient, Nutritious, Culturally Appropriate Foods

Communities around the country face a variety of challenges when trying to feed themselves. In rural America in particular, residents, including farmworkers and members of limited resource households, are plagued by so-called “food deserts.” The places our communities live suffer from a combination of conditions, ranging from remoteness and distance to a grocery store to lack of access to personal or public transportation.

This is the case even with access to food, given the limited selections, and a lack of variety, quality, and healthy nutrition. As one advocate representing her native communities described it, “the food we can access is just filled with C.R.A.P., that is ‘Chemicals, Refined sugar and flour, Artificial stuff, and Preservatives’.”

For immigrants and refugees, in particular, the American food system makes it difficult to find fresh, nutritious foods that are familiar or “culturally relevant.” This means that without any education or instructions, food-insecure recipients of food distributions may be unable to prepare the food that is given to them. Further, food banks often distribute long-lasting, preserved foods, which are neither nutrient dense nor culturally relevant. Moreover, food distribution operations are often unable to completely meet the needs of their communities.



“There are still people in line, who do not receive food.”

Land Access and Reparations

Many communities facing hunger lack access to land that can be used to produce food.

Testimonies and stories shared in the session underscored the glaring injustice of the barriers to land access for farmworkers whose knowledge and labor is integral to and inextricable from food production for the nation. Members from Indigenous communities stressed that hunger is the direct result of compounding U.S. Government policies that disconnect people from the land, even when inhabiting their



ancestral homelands. Native American peoples, specifically, have been a primary target of environmental injustices since 1492. Assimilation and genocidal attacks on traditional food sources have made the fabric of tribal communities weak and vulnerable. In addition to federal policies, private land ownership and state level actions are dismantling the food systems that support many tribal communities. For Indigenous people, historic food networks are being disrupted by population growth or land access disputes.

Supporting Families in Need through School Feeding Programs

For many children, their main source of food is what the school provides. Such support for the *families* of those children is not in place. As [Medicaid and CHIP are in the process of unwinding and returning to regular operations after Covid-19](#), many school children will no longer be eligible for free and reduced lunch programs. Yet, the need still exists. If children are eligible for supports such as free and reduced school lunches and backpack programs, it is an indication that their families need support as well.

Knowledge Sharing and Education

There was great interest in knowledge sharing and education on food preparation, including safe food preparation. Throughout this listening session, many communities reported that knowledge of farming and growing practices has been lost in their communities. One community member from San Elizario, Texas, shared that when people are looking to grow their own food, they immediately set out to grow things



like strawberries that may not be appropriate for their location or are difficult to grow. Tribal leaders and representatives concurred that many Indigenous communities have lost knowledge of traditional foods and foodways, especially as their communities become more urbanized.

Improving Existing Federal and State Level Programs to Support Family and Community-Scale Farming, Ranching and Food Production

The Farm Bill plays heavily into the structures that can strengthen or weaken the food system as we see it today. The current realities around hunger and nutrition are incentivized by the Farm Bill, which encourages the development of unhealthy cycles and practices like monocropping.



Earlier in the year, food stamp allocations were increased, yet all the conjoined inflationary pressures followed. Hence, the increase in food stamp allocation doesn't translate to an increase in the amount of food that people can buy. People still lack the necessary resources, resulting in the same level of need.

Overall, while government programs are intended to assist those in need, many have reported that they experience extreme difficulty when trying to access these programs. Oftentimes, because of the difficulty of navigating the processes of government programs, many are unable to get the assistance they need.

Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability

The impact of drought on communities was a recurring theme, echoed by representatives across regions. San Elizario, TX, has been experiencing a drought crisis, and over the years local communities have lost traditional foods due to drought. Drought in Puerto Rico, for example, has significantly impacted water supplies, making agricultural production very difficult. Hot, dry weather has also fueled wildfires across the country. Leaders from the Southwestern United States reported how wildfires have uprooted communities, devastated culture, and destroyed their local food systems by delaying planting, and wiping out natural, ancestral resources. Producers described the contamination of the water and land caused by flooding, wildfires, and overproduction, while other community members reported on the impacts of climate change on their ability to produce in-home and community gardens. As the [EPA reported in 2021](#), [socially vulnerable](#) populations will be impacted disproportionately by climate change.

Farmworker Rights

Poor working conditions are taxing for farmworkers. Around the country, many workers board dilapidated buses before sunrise to travel long distances to work for hours on end, often bent over, planting and harvesting fruits and vegetables. While they work, workers often endure extended, daily exposure to high temperatures that routinely lead to heat stroke. Meanwhile,

workers risk being exposed to pesticides, with lax governmental oversight and inspections to assure existing regulations that protect workers are met, and to ensure that personal protective equipment is available.



In addition to working in these unfavorable conditions, farmworkers across the United States are underpaid and live in poverty. Farmworkers have been dramatically impacted by the rising costs of living and often do not have resources to provide sufficient food or housing for themselves and their families. Yet, despite these rising costs, wages remain the same. Many farmworkers struggle to feed themselves and their families while they provide food for our nation.

The seasonal nature of much agricultural work means that many workers have difficulty providing for themselves and their families in the off-season. Approximately half of farmworkers are undocumented and many are kept in poverty for fear of retaliation should they demand improved workplace conditions or organize a union to protect their rights.

Urban Agriculture

From those in urban communities across the country, testimonies raised how [food apartheid](#) hinders access to healthy, nutritious food and shines a bright light on “[how racist policies shaped these areas and led to limited access to healthy food.](#)”

Resilient, Inclusive Agricultural Economies

Climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic, conflict in Ukraine and other economic disruptors have been felt across our food systems, particularly in supply chains. Part of these food system sensitivities result from high dependency on corporate agricultural operations. Often, local producers are not utilized because they are not considered cost-effective. Many food buyers and distributors find it easier to get a contract with an outside source than the local farmers. This makes our food network more fragile, vulnerable, and harder to access for marginalized communities.

As it stands, there is a financial gap between what farmers need to earn and what low-income communities can pay. Demands from large metropolitan areas and (in San Francisco, for example, the wine) industry push out Indigenous and poorer community members.

Infrastructure

Food security cannot be achieved without appropriate infrastructure. Many communities are food insecure due to poor social and physical infrastructure. This includes public transportation, roads, safety mechanisms for pedestrians or bikes, systems to provide clean water and sanitation, as well as agricultural infrastructure to process, store and distribute food.

While physical infrastructure is unique to each region, our communities agree that specific resources such as access to affordable energy, gasoline, and transportation are also vital to their wellbeing. When people lack access to affordable transportation, they and their families are jeopardized. As gas prices rise, many families are carpooling to school or work and must make the hard decision of whether to spend on gas, food, or bills. Travel to distant markets in rural areas is more challenging than ever.



Social infrastructure, such as community programs, resources, and organizations that share critical information play a large factor in securing food, especially for vulnerable families. Communities and families across the country emphasize the importance of childcare networks and hubs of information on where to access baby formula, after school programs and more.

Public Health

Hunger and diet-related diseases are symptoms of systemic issues and structural failures. Food and health are interconnected, yet, in many of our communities, there is an excessive reliance on fast and ultra-processed food. However, as we know, a diet heavy on fast food is a predictor of preventable disease. It is imperative to find and implement solutions around this issue, as the generational cycle of eating unhealthy food will yield the same results across generations.

Commercial food industries consistently provide tribal communities with products of low nutritional value at astronomical prices. This makes healthy, traditional eating extremely difficult, resulting in outrageously high numbers of preventable, co-morbidity health issues in communities including diabetes, heart disease, obesity, respiratory and endocrine system disorders, cancer and a drastically shorter-than-average life span.

Food security on college campuses — both community colleges and universities — needs attention. Students face barriers to food access, healthy foods, healthcare, and housing. The issue of food access and affordability plagues families, as noted by many in the session, where many families run out of food and funds to secure food by the end of the month.

The Need for Community Based Solutions

The need to address hunger, nutrition, and poverty in all our communities is great, yet these issues often go unaddressed and unseen. Community based organizations (CBOs), tribal entities and community organizers best understand the challenges facing their communities and how to develop these critical solutions. However, these individuals and organizations are often excluded from the process, with Indigenous leaders noting that tribal communities are always left out of these critical conversations.



Part II. Testimonies From Communities

Farmworker Realities in Southern California, especially in the Coachella Valley - (*Alianza Nacional de Campesinas; Líderes Campesinas, Campesinos Unidos*)

Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, together with Líderes Campesinas and Campesinos Unidos, reports that farmworkers, who are essential contributors to our nation's food system, are among the most vulnerable and food insecure populations in the USA.

Alianza members reflected that farmworkers have “known that we are essential our entire lives but have never been treated that way.” These communities noted that the government often fails to recognize farmworkers' contributions, rights or needs. Although they were formally recognized as essential workers from the onset of the pandemic in 2020 and despite having been essential for generations, farmworkers suffer from severe poverty and lack of access to critical resources.

Due to the seasonal nature of agricultural work, many hourly workers find themselves unemployed during certain times of the year. In California, with an hourly wage of \$15, even when families can earn up to \$2,400 per month in production months, they do not have consistent work to cover rent and basic needs year-round. This reality drives workers' decisions to leave California to seek work elsewhere, but the available alternatives are not always better.

A former farmworker emphasized in the listening session how a typical wage for male farmworkers is \$17,000 per year and \$14,000 for women. This amounts to approximately \$2,500 per month if two household providers secure wages weekly. This wage may cover rent for a small apartment, costing an average of about \$1,600 to \$2,400 monthly. This wage simply cannot cover all their basic needs, including gas, water, food, electricity, clothing, childcare, and healthcare.

“How can we pay for the rest?” the workers noted.

Testimony from a worker in California illustrated the desperation of families across the country trying to feed and care for their children and aging parents. He broke down in tears and was unable to finish his story when asked how hunger and nutrition affected his family. He works all day to feed his family and pay the rising rent, he said. But he did not have what he needed to provide care for his father who is extremely ill and bed-ridden, unable to work or even leave the house. He lacks access or the ability to pay for the healthcare his father needs.

With ongoing, multiple crises, corporate food producers have demonstrated more concern about their crops than the well-being of their workers, who continue to work through the pandemic and

extreme weather conditions. It is critical to ensure workers access food throughout these crises, while they experience the difficulties of poverty as a result of low wages. One community leader reports that many children in California are only able to eat at school. Due to the extreme poverty in these communities, many children only have what the school provides and sometimes even that food is not adequate. Not only are farmworkers a critical link in our supply chain and food security, but they are individuals, families and communities who deserve dignified, and comfortable living conditions.

Many farmworkers do not have the means to transport themselves, leaving Alianza and other CBOs to find creative methods to meet them where they live or work. By rallying community organizers and local businesses, Alianza has supported the farmworkers of the Coachella Valley through donations, U-Hauling 24 pallets of fresh food and water directly to 1,600 families a month. Groups note that the valley is geographically large and there are many food deserts. Inadequate public transportation means many travel 20-25 miles to reach quality grocery stores.

In many areas of the Coachella Valley, farmworker employers and housing providers have designated labor camps and trailer parks to rent to workers. These employers and providers knowingly accept renters *without disclosing that the water provided contains arsenic and other chemicals*. The community in Coachella is pressuring the county to provide these renters with clean water, but the officials are not acting. The levels of arsenic make the water unsuitable for washing hands, drinking, bathing, or cooking, which is a major sanitation concern. Not having access to readily available, safe drinking water is adding strain to mothers who are struggling to find clean water to mix baby formula. Alianza Campesinas and Lideres Campesinas are pressuring the owners and contracted managers of these “labor camps” to provide potable water through weekly organized actions. There are very few avenues available for workers to access bottled water, fresh fruits and vegetables. Organizations, such as Alianza reach the community at food and water distribution events. This is yet another example of how California’s food production is exposed to vulnerabilities from mismanagement of water resources and drought.



From observation and conversations with leaders, it is apparent that their priorities are not adequately aligned with the needs of the communities. For example, local government representatives in one of the communities in the region had a meeting with the organizers from Lideres Campesinas and Alianza Campesinas, proudly telling them about new park facilities for exercise. The women responded that that was very nice and appreciated.

“But what about our water?” the women asked.

Urban and Tribal Community Realities

During this listening session, tribal community advocates stressed that hunger is the direct result of compounding U.S. Government policy that disconnects people from their land, whether we inhabit our ancestral homeland or another’s. Only together can we move into a future where the land provides for us in abundance. It’s up to us to make time every day to work together and think of future generations.

They continue to convey that as Indigenous people, *we are the land, and the land is us*. They are the original beings set upon this Turtle Island, now known as the American Continent, including the United States and Canada. Diverse tribal communities, including languages, ceremonies, and survival are deeply intertwined with the wellbeing of the homelands. Ensuring the stability, health, and original state of all these diverse ecosystems ensures the survival of our people and cultures.

Native American People have been a primary target of environmental injustices since 1492. Assimilation and genocidal attacks on traditional food sources have made the fabric of tribal communities weak, and vulnerable.

As sovereign nations, tribal communities seek to restore the ability to feed their people and reduce dependence on industrial, vertical food systems that continue to oppress people and communities. Commercial food industries provide tribal communities with extremely low nutritional quality products at astronomical prices far too often. This makes healthy eating extremely difficult, resulting in outrageously high numbers of preventable, co-morbidity health issues in communities including diabetes, heart disease, obesity, respiratory and endocrine system disorders, cancer and a drastically shorter than average life span.

Indigenous people’s access to their traditional food networks is being blocked due to urban growth and demand.

Urban and rural communities of all sizes, status and structures need immediate and continual access to land as well as financial and incentive support in managing and caring for the land in

the ways that will ensure the restoration of natural habitats for Indigenous plants, animals, medicines and microbes so that the land can continue to care for its people.

Hunger Realities for the Sherwood Valley Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians

“Not every Indigenous community in the country practices food traditions by agriculture. Tribes like the Sherwood Valley Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians are stewards and land managers that harvest and gather. Tribal ecology-based trade economies are still active and intact in California because Tribal people continue to be stewards to our places. Tribal communities are not included at the table for long-term resource management planning.”

The Sherwood Valley Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians have been here since time immemorial, yet they have been prohibited at the state level from using and being on land that was, and still is, theirs. Historic food webs that sustain their communities are being dismantled, which include everything from the coast to their current location, about 13 miles inland. Everybody wants to be in California. Ancient routes to and from the ocean are being blocked by private land ownership. There are instances of private landowners shooting at community members for “trespassing” on land that was historically part of their territory.

This colonial history also plays into marine management plans by defining what is edible and valuable, compounding hunger for Indigenous peoples. For instance, the native sea urchins that thrive in coastal areas in northern California have provided seasonal, native nutrition for generations, yet today they are alternately considered “invasive and undesirable” while also being sold as a gourmet food item in upscale grocery stores. Both of these actions make this food source inaccessible to Indigenous people. *“We’re priced out of our traditional, ecological foods.”*

These commercial food systems prohibit American Indian and Alaskan Native people from participating in and accessing traditional food webs, while simultaneously promoting the erosion of protective cultural factors.

“While we may be happy to have access to [commodity] food programs, the quality and type of food isn’t for us at the genetic and cellular levels. As the first member of an Indigenous family to be raised on a western diet, I realized that our bodies aren’t compatible with the available diet.”

Hunger Realities in Southern Florida - (Grupo Amor and Rural Co)

Community leaders stress that communities in Florida are experiencing dire conditions. Like farmworkers across the country, food security for workers in Florida is deeply tied to wages. Workers and their families have been greatly affected by the rising prices of food, gas, rent and other basics which have increased household costs and the cost of transportation to their work

and their children's schools. Despite the drastic increases in the cost of living, farmworker wages have remained the same low wage. Their work is deeply undervalued and unrecognized.

Numerous farmworkers express that they have “been hit economically, and we’re getting pressed from all sides.” Despite their contributions to national food security, they are kept in the shadows so that the issues impacting them remain unaddressed. “And as long as they don’t acknowledge that we exist in this country and contribute to taxes and contribute to everything, they just don’t do anything. And they tell us, ‘Tomorrow, we’ll get you out of the shadows.’ And they’re all empty promises which never come true.” Farmworkers are historically and presently being disenfranchised and kept in circumstances where they have little capacity to advocate for themselves, via lack of legal status and other means.

A small agricultural business owner also reports that she can no longer afford the costs of her business and her day to day living expenses. She asks “where are they putting us? The poor, the people in need? Sometimes we don’t even know how we’re going to pay for food, how we’re going to pay for rent and bills. And people live thinking about that. And we ask ourselves, ‘How far are they going to take this? Are they throwing us out on the streets?’ Because a time is going to come when we will not be able to afford rent; we won’t be able to buy what we need, our necessities to live.”

Especially as the summer heat intensifies, they are working in high temperatures but still receiving a minimum wage. “Thousands of families in the community of Homestead are impacted. There is no real support from the government for the farmers and farmworkers that feed this country. We need to work together and the government to listen to them, to help improve the situations for these communities.”

Ma-Chis Lower Creek Indian Tribe, Hunger Realities in Southeastern Alabama

We need greater access to traditional foods, fruits, and vegetables, and to educate young people on how to prepare this food. Native parents who have lived on commodity foods, separated from traditional food systems for so long, especially the young folks, need to learn how to prepare nutritious foods for their families. For some community members, young mothers specifically, their idea of a dinner is stopping at a McDonald’s drive through, and they give this food to their kids. They're not getting the proper nutrition, instead it's fast food and processed foods. This is an issue of food access and of economic availability. We need more traditional foods and the means to secure these foods.

The nearest grocery store from tribal land is often 15 miles or more away and fails to offer fresh, quality fruits and vegetables. Local populations experience diseases due to malnutrition and improper nutrition. Childhood obesity, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes in children are confronting us in ways that our communities have never faced before.

There used to be certain times of year when we didn't eat corn because that was time for our bodies to readjust fat for harvest. Proper nutrition is not derived from fast, processed food. Our bodies cannot digest fast foods for a healthy body. Also, many service providers of housing, health care, and food refuse to address the needs of members of this state-recognized Tribe. *This is what is all wrong with our food and healthcare system.*

Hunger Realities in Southeastern Alabama – (Cottage House, Inc.)

Cottage House, Inc. works hard to engage the local school children in their predominantly Black and Hispanic community in growing food both during the school year and in intensive summer activities. The parents of the school children work in local chicken houses and live in substandard housing. Grocery stores are miles away. Many lack transportation. Pay is low. One farm family that farms down the hill from a chicken house found two 12-foot-long snakes in their barn. The workers in the plant report contending with snakes in the workplace. Many families lack safe cooking facilities in their homes, including lack of refrigeration. Energy is very expensive. High food taxes impact food affordability as well.

Hunger Realities in Kansas – (Kansas Black Farmers Association (KBFA))



As an historic town founded by Black farmers in Kansas in 1878 that continues to produce food and sustain a legacy of BIPOC farming communities, each year we teach youth that you can be an urban farmer just as well as being a 4-H farmer. There is honor and respect in farming and feeding yourself.



We understand that we need to teach our youth how to feed themselves. We do this with several Nicodemus Educational Camps for ages 10-17, which historically have served nearly 100 youth per year. Programming focuses on different themes in gardening. Other themes include urban farming. Our partners include local Boys and Girls Clubs and KBFA sells t-shirts to make sure that no children pay to attend their camps. These camps are free for students to attend.

We've also identified food deserts as well as food swamps in our communities that provide food that is not compatible with us. Oxtails used to cost 19 cents per pound and now they're over \$3 per pound because they are considered a delicacy by others. We're working to expand sourcing from local farms. Common Ground Growers and Producers work with other farmers and

specialty crop growers and their motto is "Everyone is Fed." KBFA's motto is "feed yourself, feed others, and no one is hungry." High food taxes impact food availability as well.

Hunger Realities in New Mexico

In Northern New Mexico, communities are organizing to revive local food systems and local economies. One place they are starting is within the school food systems in New Mexico. They report three-fifths of schools have high tunnel greenhouses, and stress there is no excuse for school lunch programs to serve anything other than food that is fresh, organic, locally sourced, and made from scratch. Some schools have successfully implemented 100% free lunch programs that primarily serve Hispano and Native American Pueblo students. Partners described educational programming that teaches students how to grow their own food and how to eat locally sourced foods.

In New Mexico, 300,000 people are facing hunger. Of that, 105,000 are children, meaning one out of five children face hunger every day. Many communities can't participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program that supports free dinners, though partners are advocating to expand access to this program for all children in Northern New Mexico. There are many students in New Mexico who don't have food available at home and only eat what is provided through schools. All communities in this region are suffering from food insecurity.

New Mexico's communities suffer from economic seepage to other places. The state's agricultural economy generates billions of dollars but [95% of products leave the state](#). To combat this, community members urge the state government to improve local infrastructure, develop wash-pack facilities, and generate more local income that stays local, like grinding the wheat from local grain producers and making blue corn tortillas.

Community members also suggest organizing rancher cooperatives that work with schools to get local meat into local schools. The communities are finding opportunities but need state and federal support. New Mexico has food resources, but they are not going to its communities. Exacerbating this is the disconnect between environmentalists and the traditional methods of food sovereignty, as the number of traditional grazing permits is being reduced.

This year, 300,000 acres have been designated as federal disaster sites and more than 600,000 acres have burned as a result of recent wildfires, intensified by climate change. And yet, New Mexico has not even begun its official wildfire season. We're witnessing the destruction of the food system as these wildfires and evacuations have delayed the planting season. Moreover, there is widespread devastation of natural, ancestral resources.

The prevalence of gentrification, paired with wildfires, and the resulting loss of seed, hay, and livestock has undercut farmers and ranchers across New Mexico and devastated a whole culture.

Due to these losses of farm and ranch land and agricultural products leaving the community, these areas throughout the Southwestern United States are experiencing severe food shortages. In addition to advocating for removing food taxes, the voices who joined from New Mexico are focusing on local food processing and fair market value for meat and crops, which are essential for recovery from these wildfires. They emphasize that *we will work together to rebuild*, buy local and support traditional food systems.

Partners in New Mexico also emphasized the importance of multi-sector collaborations that increase food security for all residents, to connect with food systems across the state. In Santa Fe, residents are struggling from food deserts and a lack of adequate water. Food insecurity is an issue that unites rural and urban communities. Advocates are working hard at the state level, for example, through programs like the “Food, Farm and Hunger Initiative,” which successfully passed the state legislature through large scale community effort, including approximately \$25M for investment for food and agriculture. Of this, about \$14.2M was allocated towards essential staff positions for aging and human resources and \$10M was recommended for hunger relief and infrastructure improvements. A broad coalition of organizations is working together on this to designate the \$10M. This project connects food systems across New Mexico and parts of our communities based in Colorado.

The communities of New Mexico know they can support themselves to create a state level food system that works between their farmers, ranchers, distributors, processors, schools and more, but they require the resources for the tools and infrastructure needed to implement those systems. They emphasize that hunger and nutrition related diseases are symptoms of structural failures in our system.

Hunger Realities in Greene County and Western Alabama (*Alabama State Association of Cooperatives*)

The high food tax in Greene County (10%) exacerbates the hunger realities and crisis in our communities. While many people can grow gardens, because it is a rural county, they cannot grow enough of what they need. Hence, they rely heavily on food distribution sites for access to food, especially during the pandemic, where long lines encircle the area, especially when meat is included. Generally, in a small county, one would think there is enough food, however, in our counties that is not the case, and the food distribution sites never have enough food available for everyone.

Like others during the pandemic, our schools transitioned to virtual classrooms, which was difficult knowing the kids would not have the meals that were typically provided at school. Kids rely on those meals and it was important for them to have access to food, whether in school or not. To address this, schools were able to utilize school buses to deliver two meals to the home of every child enrolled in the system. It is important to highlight that the families of these children

also need food support. It's hard to build in our children the fact that they are worthy and valued when outside forces are sending a blatantly different message.

Working in our communities in earlier years, Mr. Ezra Cunningham, a civil rights leader, used to say you could learn about hunger by asking to look in a family's refrigerator. Many families are left with no food, especially towards the end of the month as funds are low. Many would be empty. High food taxes offset a low property tax, which we leave as another window on understanding how hunger persists. The high food tax reflects how policy makers view our worth and our value, which is awful and unconscionable. That is, if we want the food, we have to pay for the food.

Hunger Realities that Farmworker Communities Face

The following is additional input from the Listening Session held by Alianza Nacional de Campesinas on July 27, 2022 with participation from across the country including the states of California, Texas, Florida, Upstate New York, North Carolina, and Oregon.

What are the realities of hunger in your communities?

There is a lack of quality food available in many farmworker communities. The majority of the accessible food is generally of poorer quality and lacks the nutritional value that is important for overall health and well-being. Even when quality food is made available in farmworker communities, limited income and financial resources further complicate access because they limit the ability to afford it. High quality, nutritious food is very expensive. People within farmworker communities often have to choose between spending their money on food or other essential expenses like gas for their vehicles. These factors make quality food unaffordable for those with limited resources that are already spread too thin to accommodate various daily needs.

Even with an increase in wages, these challenges remain because the wage gains are offset by an increase in other prices, especially since Covid-19. With the increase in prices, community members are often forced to buy less food and spend only on what is absolutely necessary. As one participant stated, "With the increase in prices, now I have to buy less food. Buying groceries is expensive, you spend a lot of money, from \$200 to \$400", which is no small amount for people living on minimum wages with reduced or limited work hours and no overtime pay. Participants added that some have lost their jobs due to Covid-19, while others have had their hours significantly reduced, further adding to an already challenging situation.

In communities with a high undocumented migrant population, immigrants often face additional challenges accessing food, even where food banks, food pantries, and other food security organizations exist. Some food banks require documents for income verification, as well as a form of identification, which undocumented immigrants generally do not have. Community

members are often required to complete documents that ask a significant number of questions, which deters many immigrants due to a fear of deportation.

Federal policies pose additional barriers to food access for undocumented immigrants, including farmworkers. Many farmworkers do not have access to food stamps because they are immigrants and often only the youngest children in families will qualify for government aid. The situation has been getting worse as a result of the policies and practices implemented under the former administration (Trump). Community members noted that immigrants no longer take steps to apply for federal aid like they once did, out of fear of future ramifications. People worry that with future immigration reforms they will not be able to apply.

Additionally, a lack of culturally relevant, nutritious food and language barriers make it challenging for community members to go to many food banks and pantries in their communities. There are very few organizations that supply farmworker communities with fresh foods, like fruits and vegetables, instead providing mostly canned food.

Overall, there is a lack of healthy, nutrient dense food available in communities with high immigrant populations. Quality food is often located far from our communities and, because of the seasonal nature of agricultural work, there is often a lack of resources to afford it once the farming season is over. “There are very limited resources available for the farmworker community”, one participant shared. “I was only able to receive assistance because I began to work with organizations. I then was able to bring the resources they offer to my community”. The lack of quality food brings diseases and, due to the lack of access to medical services, community members are ill quite often. In the United States this is unacceptable. There should be no shortage of food.

What are the living conditions that people in your community experience?

Many individuals in these communities live in extreme poverty and many are out of work. There are people going into debt with credit cards or loans to offset the rising cost of living. The money they earn is the same money that gets spent on rent and food. Living and working conditions in many farmworker communities cause stress, anxiety, and depression. The condition of life for farmworkers and immigrants is to live day by day.

The cost of rent is often very high. Rent in farmworker communities was reported to range between \$1,500 and \$5,000, which puts an extreme burden on families. One participant noted that they work 10 hours per day at a wage of \$15 per hour, yet their rent is in the range of \$1,500 to \$2,000. In some cases rent accounts for up to 95% of farmworker income.

Because it is difficult to pay the rent, families will sometimes live together. Community members shared that in these situations with two or more families per house, individual rooms are frequently rented out. The number of people living together in these situations means that households often encounter challenges with finding enough space and time in the kitchen, making it difficult to coordinate cooking times. These living environments cause friction between roommates and housemates which can have a negative impact on families and can even lead to violence. Other families are forced to live outside in tents because of the limited hours they work and the resulting low wages. For those families who can afford to let their children go to school, they welcome the reopening of schools so their children can eat a little better.

Not only are farmworkers and other immigrants paying high costs for rent, but they are also living in houses with poor conditions. Houses are not well maintained, the houses are too hot, and there are issues with the quality of water available for use.

The money earned is also used for medical bills as farmworkers do not have health insurance. When people get sick without health insurance, they get into medical debt of \$15,000 to \$20,000. One participant experienced this personally when her husband got sick and had to pay a substantial amount of money. Sadly, some people who get sick are afraid of seeking medical help because they fear deportation.

Despite these challenging conditions, immigration status will sometimes prevent farmworkers and undocumented immigrants from applying for assistance through supports such as low income housing or rent assistance.

Do the people in your community have access to clean water in their homes?

In many farmworker communities there is no access to potable water. Communities report brown and yellow water running from their taps and water that produces foul smells like spoiled fish. Residents have developed skin conditions, experienced hair loss and contracted infections when they shower with regular water. Those that boil the water to purify it have noticed that it doesn't always help to do so.

Thus, many turn to alternative sources, buying bottled water and water jugs for all their daily needs. And yet there are still those who simply cannot afford to buy these alternatives. The high costs of bills and food often leaves individuals and families no choice but to use contaminated water sources for drinking, bathing, cooking and other purposes. They get sick, leading to further health complications and trips to the doctor.

Residents are not informed of issues with the water quality until the local government shares and publicizes it, which is generally not in a timely manner. Despite these conditions, any actions taken to address water quality tend to be community based.

“We really don't know if we are drinking quality water because the city sends out information on the quality of the water once a year”, reported one community member. “The language is difficult to understand. We use the water for cooking and I haven't really realized if it's good or not. I don't know where to ask for help in understanding the reports that they send.”

Do you have access to the food that you want to serve your family and can you afford it?

“Sometimes it is difficult to have family dinners due to lack of money,” reported one community member. There are many who experience this so they limit themselves from eating what they want because of how expensive food is. They buy only what they need to get through the week, always looking for the cheapest items, and will sometimes ration their food consumption. For many, bills take priority over food so they are paid first, with the remainder dictating how much will be spent on food.

Farmworkers and immigrants often rely on food banks, food pantries, and other food security organizations that provide inadequate food and service. Some reported being treated poorly at these organizations and that they have been disrespected. One individual mentioned that they will sometimes bring their stroller to the pantries but don't receive the same services and are given less food than those that drove there in cars. This is difficult to understand, as they have equal or in some cases greater need because they do not have a car.

Community members also shared their challenges with getting service at some food banks and pantries because they have to do so electronically. This significantly limits access and it takes a long time to talk to someone on the phone to try to get assistance. Community members reported a noticeable difference between the food provided to poorer and primarily immigrant communities and the food provided to more gentrified areas.

Finally, and equally important, the scarcity of baby food was highlighted as a major challenge, particularly during supply chain disruptions. The shortage of children's formula significantly impacts immigrant communities, where it is especially difficult to find food for their babies.

Do you or people in your community have space to plant, irrigate and grow food?

For many farmworkers there is no ability to plant, irrigate and grow their own food because they don't have access to land. Even if they have access to land, most farmworkers living in employer-provided housing are unclear what they can do on their property. Similarly, tenants

living in trailer parks have limited space to grow food and while vacant lots could fulfill this purpose, access is restricted. In some cases, landlords explicitly do not allow tenants to grow food on their property.

Sometimes tenants are allowed to grow plants on their balconies in pots. As some reported, “I don’t have space but I do have a pot”; “I have a balcony where I planted my tomatoes, pumpkin seeds”; and “we grow some plants on the balcony of our house in pots as there is not enough space to plant”. One person mentioned that there are very few pots allowed at their residence and they are only allowed five (5) little plants.

Another individual reported being able to plant and grow food because they are renting where there is space to plant their potatoes. However, while they currently have the space to do so, they are unsure if that will be an option if they have to move.

Do individuals in your community have homes with safe places to store, refrigerate, cook, and store food?

Those that do have access to food do not always have the ability to put it to use because they lack the space to store and/or refrigerate their food. Some reported that their housing accommodations simply do not provide adequate space to do so and those living in multi-family households have to take turns using the kitchen and refrigerator space.

How far must you travel to buy the food your family needs?

It is difficult for many individuals and families to get to food banks and pantries because of the lack of reliable transportation and the distance to these locations. One individual reported having to travel up to one (1) hour to get to large grocery stores to buy their food. This was echoed by many: “it takes 30-45 min to get to a store”; “I live in a rural area and we have to travel 25 to 30 minutes just to get to the store”; and “Sometimes about 20 minutes. When there are food drives at the Catholic church I have to walk 40 min, but I don’t go often because my children get tired because of the distance and the hot temperature outside”. One person reported living near many shops in their area but they didn’t have the money to buy food.

Linked [here](#) are video testimonies from the fields in California and Florida, collected by various partners.

Part III. Opportunities

After hearing testimonies, our organizations, with decades of experience in the food and farm system, together with our members and communities discussed the intersectional opportunities that arise from their communities’ realities, with recommendations to create systemic change.

The complex realities of hunger in our communities require comprehensive solutions and investments. As the White House builds out its action plan for addressing the hunger crisis and its effects, the administration should immediately enact [these interconnected policy interventions](#).

What do rural, tribal, and multicultural land-based communities do when faced with a crisis that compounds hunger?

Rural communities are actively creating solutions to address hunger, but often lack the necessary resources to sustain or fully implement successful interventions. The communities gathered for this session shared stories of *demonstrably successful approaches that may be easily overlooked when framed through a lens of need or deficiency*.

Research-centered, evidence-based approaches to developing solutions should elevate the lived experiences in community stories emphasizing community potential, innovation, and power. The themes organizing this next section connect realities to specific community-driven solutions seen as opportunities to empower communities and scale up. Foremost, participants expressed that a timely and much-needed opportunity for broader investment at the federal, state, regional and local levels exists in partnering with communities and community serving organizations. Where local infrastructure is already established for communities to feed themselves, supporting multi-sector partnerships can accelerate collaborative innovation and widespread adoption. This acceleration of innovation can be achieved in large part by prioritizing the involvement of community members and rural, tribal and BIPOC-led CBOs in formulating policy recommendations, as well as in decision-making and implementation. All levels of government should contribute funding and other



support to strengthen network-spanning relationships and cross-cutting solutions (including in the Farm Bill), but communities themselves should have the power to drive these changes.

Increasing Access to Culturally Appropriate, Nutritious Foods

“Food sovereignty should work from the microcosm of homes and schools to states and regions.” For many community members, the quality of their food needs to be improved, whether at the supermarket, at food distribution sites or in local schools. All must have access to food that is fresh and nutritious, yet adequate housing is also required for people to process,



prepare, and eat the food. A smaller group discussion during the session framed food and nutrition in the sense of spirituality and the cultural connections we have to food. One community organizer shared how partnering with local schools and other local institutions helped them tap into the food systems created and nurtured by immigrant communities. There must be expanded access to culturally appropriate foods that meet the varied needs and preferences of diverse communities across the country.

Expanding Community Education and Knowledge Sharing

Community education and knowledge sharing programs should promote an understanding of the nutritional, cultural, and economic benefits of local, traditional food systems, including how they are shaped by ecological conditions and the histories of agriculture.

Community leaders have witnessed the need for families to learn the skills of harvesting and planting. This means developing ecologically informed educational programs about what native foods grow well in their environment. Tribal leaders, in particular, emphasize that ancestral foods and traditional knowledge of food gathering, preparation and consumption must be included in these programs. With reservations, we should do more to teach community members how to use these foods after we’ve done the work of trying to improve them. With respect to food distribution programs, community members should have opportunities to learn how to use what they receive.



Education must be complemented by engagement in the community food system, with programming to encourage the building of local, sustainable networks. One participant described

a successful mentorship program that teaches community members to gather, process, cook, and eat their own food.

Programs must also be developed to include training and technical assistance for beginning farmers that provide them with living accommodations and other support. Mentorship programs can help new and beginning farmers learn a wide range of topics.

Communities also need space for community farms, with special emphasis on mentor farms that provide plots to families and communities who want to produce food for their families. The strongest models include Mentor Farms, such as Flats Mentor Farm, run by World Farmers, Inc.



in Lancaster, Massachusetts, which has over 300 families growing on 70 acres of land. Their model allows producers to get a valid multi-year lease for their small plot at a minimal cost, which allows them to get a farm and tract number and access USDA programs, including the EQIP program that funds high tunnels that allows them to extend their season. Shared land models build relationships that also expand market access for producers there.

Moving forward, it is critical to involve youth and future generations in the discussion. Schools must introduce programming about our food systems, capitalizing on youth creativity and their interest in food, education, and nutrition. Contributors to the discussion highlighted mentorship and the importance of building networks between youth and small farmers.

Addressing Land Access and Reparations

Actions by federal and state governments, private land ownership, population growth, and other disruptions continue to disconnect communities and tribal nations from their land and the food networks that support them.

An important thread throughout the session examined opportunities to both end as well as to repair the harms of long-term discrimination related to land. Healing and restoring trust in marginalized communities can and must meaningfully engage calls for land reparations and for the return of stolen land to tribal communities. Repurposing vacant lots prevalent in major American cities, where the concept of Food Apartheid describes how the racist and discriminatory structures define food access, is one such gesture taking shape with community partners in Pittsburgh.

Local, state, and federal governments need to do more to ensure that communities have access to land for food production. Part of this approach involves increasing access to farmland for beginning farmers and restricting the purchase of farmland by non-farmers. Land access challenges aren't restricted to rural communities. Urban farming and gardening need to become more accessible as well.



Land management and stewardship must be reformed. It is necessary to develop models for cooperative land ownership that are open to community investments and put a halt to the land grabs that continue across the country. Small farmers operating on leased land need more time and resources to build and grow their operations.

Supporting Children and Families in Need through School Feeding Programs

Additional support at the nexus of programs and partnerships can and must ensure that all school children have access to meals outside of school hours, including on the weekends. Promising solutions include the expansion of weekend backpack programs as well as of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) to include all children. For many children, the CACFP, paired with school meals, may be the only way for them to access three meals every day. Community members working on these issues have highlighted the fact that if school children are eligible for nutrition support, their families probably are as well. Nutrition program support for eligible children should be extended to their entire family.

Incentivizing Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability



Our agricultural and food system needs to work together and within environmental constraints. This challenges us to embrace the opportunities to grow food that is appropriate to local ecosystems and that replenishes the land. Protecting natural resources and local ecologies, we must invest in establishing a national public seed bank to protect our heirloom seeds. The [Native American Seeds Protection Act of 2019](#) offers guidance.

Our government needs to work with communities and CBOS to intervene to protect natural resources, land, water, and air from the companies who seek to seize ownership and profit for

their exclusive benefit. Conjoining strategies to promote soil health, minimize food waste, and prioritize access to water and water management for local community-based food production reveals myriad opportunities to connect the many strategies for resolving hunger.

Protecting and Respecting Workers Rights



Farmworkers in the United States deserve livable wages that allow them not only to provide the basics for survival but also a dignified livelihood based on their labor and contributions to the resiliency of our food system. Farmers and fishers should be able to feed themselves all year round, including the off-season. Solutions must boldly face meaningful immigration reform, tax reforms and the rights of workers that include the basics – workplace protections, adequate housing, food, and water. Solutions also include recognizing the important contributions of workers to the agriculture system and working with them to assure this system recognizes their skills and expertise by creating new pathways for them to gain access to land and to enter agriculture as farmers and ranchers.

Housing

In Coachella, California, and many other places where farmworkers live, we have housing and affordable rent issues. We must speak to communities and policymakers to increase the supply of low-income housing because it's getting very limited. Housing has to be made more accessible to low-income families. We need to find resources and speak with our representatives to make a program for low income housing for those who cannot afford high rents.

Promoting Urban Agriculture

Urban agriculture should be encouraged and supported in all our urban centers. Opportunities should be expanded for all forms of urban agriculture like community and home gardens, smaller urban farms (especially mentor farms), container and rooftop gardens and more. Community-centered approaches have proven to be especially effective in expanding access to urban agriculture.

In urban agriculture, soil testing to check for contaminants, and soil building activities including composting and using compost to improve soil are also critical integrated activities. Some communities also support projects that include aquaculture.

Investing for Resilient, Inclusive Agricultural Economies

Stimulating local economies and local producers begins with a move from cheap, pesticide-heavy food production to shoring up local farmers. Local solutions to hunger can be more resilient in the face of crisis.

Large farms create allocation issues. To carefully navigate a transition from industrial to local production, we can use existing infrastructure to bring local producers into the economy. We can keep investments local to circulate profits in rural communities and localized economies.

With ethical infrastructure in place to improve collaboration with farmers, we can redirect funds into regional food systems. In several states, we documented ideas and emerging projects to develop partnerships with farmers including farmer training programs and creating opportunities to move into farm ownership, such as Black Farmers Collectives.

To close the gap between producers and consumers, farmers must have fair prices and consumers must have healthy and affordable food. The transition requires an incremental transition from industrial food production to local production of food that is accessible to all.

There is concern that a radical change regarding incentives to crop producers can affect food access to disenfranchised communities. We must ensure that local farmers benefit from reaching their own communities. Subsidized Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) systems present an opportunity to explore this. The redistribution of commodity dollars is another. Managing and reinvesting food waste and organic waste also offer options for economic development.



Lastly, addressing the imbalances where Big Agriculture overshadows local, community-based food systems, communities saw promising solutions. These included more stable marketing with corporations. Procurement practices can establish criteria for how and where food comes from, not just based on price or what's cheapest. Enforcing antitrust laws and breaking down monopolies within animal agriculture could level the playing field and re-open a space for authentic partnerships across these scales of agriculture. Creating filters for substandard business practices can minimize conflict with big corporations or corporations. Prioritizing democratic, community-driven decision-making can offset corporate control.

Creating and Maintaining Infrastructure

Transportation is an issue in limited resource communities, whether it relates to accessing food or distributing it. Solutions that emerged from our community listening session identified

opportunities to use pre-existing infrastructure, bolster regional transportation systems, and increase local processing and distribution capacities.

One standout example in McDowell County, NC, described how a regional transport system, initially developed to get people to medical visits, was repurposed to deliver food. This example emphasizes the value of community stories, partnerships, and integrated solutions.



Advancing Public Health

Advocate for affordable healthcare coverage for everyone, including through full Medicaid expansion. Our session also signaled the huge, untapped opportunity for healthcare and health insurance companies to invest in regenerative agriculture.

Sparking Resilient and Hopeful Agricultural Futures Focused on Opportunities

Representatives sent to share realities and opportunities of hunger on behalf of their rural, urban, tribal and immigrant communities during this listening session expressed how solutions arising in crisis can open opportunities to deal not just with the symptoms of hunger, but also identify, address, and heal the root causes.

Those working with food banks said, “our job is not to feed everybody in the line, but to make the lines go away. How do we create systems to make the lines go away, not keep the lines moving?”

During this session spanning communities across the nation, contributors spoke poignantly about the realities of hunger in the places they live and work. They shared testimonies and stories that illustrate how the health of food systems is more than agricultural, relying on community-driven, community-based solutions that attend to the cultural, economic, political and even spiritual dimensions of our current challenges.

Establishing durable working partnerships with communities and community-based organizations is an opportunity to address the various root causes that lead to hunger and to rebuild the nation’s capacity to confront its realities and challenges in the future. As one community leader concluded, we need always to be transparent with one another. Our future depends on interdependence, the ability to share our solutions, and our readiness to act simultaneously on the political, economic, and social levels.

IV. Recommendations and Conclusion

The complexity of hunger in our communities requires a holistic and comprehensive approach. Investments to ensure the inclusion and empowerment of communities to develop and implement these changes is also essential. The demand for healthy, affordable food in many of our communities far exceeds the capacity for local supply, and families are enduring surmounting hardship atop of the economic and global climate crises and increasing disasters. The realities highlighted within this report illuminate our nation's opportunities to address the longstanding consequences of broken food and healthcare systems, inadequate investment in infrastructure including housing and community facilities, an extractive economy, the undervaluing of many of our communities' workers, and many other interconnected issues. Farmers, farmworkers, and community-based organizations continue to advance work addressing the effects of our broken systems despite these perpetuating hardships. Community-based solutions indicate how and where additional investment and multi-sector partnerships can deploy best practices and spark cooperative innovation.

As the White House examines the realities of hunger, nutrition, and health in building out a comprehensive action plan to end hunger by 2030, the administration should immediately enact the following interconnected, synergistic policy interventions:

- **Income:** Advocate for a federal living wage and restoration of the enhanced child tax credit.
- **Food assistance:** Remove barriers for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation based on immigration status, full-time higher education, prior criminal conviction, and work status; base SNAP benefits on the Low-Cost Food Plan.
- **Universal free school lunches:** Direct the USDA's national school lunch program to advocate for universal free school lunch in the child nutrition reauthorization; incentivize procurement of fresh, locally produced, minimally processed and culturally meaningful and healthful foods; increase good food education and school gardens support; support "scratch cooking" through cafeteria and kitchen equipment upgrades and staff training, and increase childrens' time to eat school meals, thereby reducing food plate waste.
- **End unfair food taxes:** Initiate federal attention and efforts to end the disproportionate impact of local and state taxes on groceries and prepared food on low-income communities.
- **Expand healthcare coverage:** Advocate for affordable healthcare coverage for everyone, including through full Medicaid expansion.
- **Affordable and safe housing:** Work with the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Agriculture's Rural Development agency to address

inequities in availability, affordability, and quality of rural housing, including farm labor housing, with the goal of assuring safe housing with safe water, cooking, refrigeration, and storage facilities in each home.

- **Safe drinking water:** Work with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to improve and enforce rights to clean drinking water for all with particular emphasis on rural America and farm worker communities.
- **Water and housing infrastructure:** Establish a process to immediately report, address, and mitigate reported public health hazards, including arsenic, lead, or other toxins in drinking water, focusing on manufactured/mobile homes and farm labor housing.
- **Immigrant farm labor protections:** Advocate for extension of fair labor standards to farmworkers, including living wage, the right to organize, overtime pay, sick leave, access to protective gear, protection from pesticide exposure, and protection from workplace violence; provide an optional path to citizenship for undocumented farmworkers and their families.
- **Farmer equity:** Assure fair prices and increase targeted assistance for small and mid-scale diversified farmers and ranchers, tribal communities, and fishers, including compensation for food provided directly to communities and families who need it; assure Debt Relief and Discrimination Assistance promised to producers in the Inflation Reduction Act is expeditiously implemented and provided.
- **Resilient and equitable rural economies:** Prioritize and incentivize governmental and institutional value-based procurement of locally sourced foods; prioritize and incentivize farm to school purchases of locally or regionally sourced foods; remove administrative barriers to local and regional meat processing; strengthen and enforce antitrust and anticompetition laws and prohibit further consolidation of agricultural processing, seed, equipment sectors; and ensure infrastructure investments are equitably distributed to the most underserved communities.
- **Farm and food network:** Provide structural assistance, grants, loans, and price support sufficient to maintain the food supply and support transportation, processing, distribution, and storage of goods with a focus on local food systems, regenerative production practices, and underserved communities.
- **Tribal Consultation:** Ensure Tribal consultation in policy and decision making throughout administrative agencies to support and protect access to ancestral agricultural land and sea resources and traditional foods and foodways and to honor obligations to sovereign tribal entities.

- **Farmworkers (landless farmers) to farmers:** Modify requirements in beginning farmer and rancher programs to specifically recognize the skills of farmworkers with respect to eligibility for these programs and provide additional USDA programs to assist farmworkers to transition to owners of farms and ranches.
- **Global climate crisis:** Continue to take and advocate for immediate actions to address the global climate crisis with a particular focus on BIPOC communities such as increased technical assistance and set asides for socially disadvantaged producers in conservation programs.
- **Environmental quality and soil health:** Direct the USDA to invest in and incentivize transition to regenerative and organic farming including through technical assistance, cost-sharing, and supporting community-based organizations doing this work. Incentivize and prioritize restoring and rebuilding soil health, including capacity to sequester carbon, hold water, and reduce nutrient runoff.
- **Pesticides:** Prioritize EPA review of pesticide safety (including the ongoing review of glyphosate) to reduce harmful impacts on farmworkers and their families, consumers of food, water quality, and soil health.
- **Rural development:** Provide financial assistance to develop retail access to nutritious, healthful foods in underserved communities; to increase infrastructure support and programs with higher cost share for underserved and persistently poor areas.
- **Immigration Reform:** Take all administrative and legislative measures possible to remove barriers to meeting the hunger, nutrition and health needs of immigrant and undocumented workers and their families.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide our input. We pledge to work with the White House and federal agencies to ensure the rapid implementation of these changes. We further recommend that policy makers identify areas that require statutory attention, particularly with respect to the upcoming 2023 Farm Bill.

V. Appendix - Additional Solutions and Recommendations:

Cross-cutting and Multi-government Solutions Based in Community Action:

Specific Opportunities to Amplify Best Practices, Innovate, Scale Up Solutions and Strengthen Multi-sector Partner Relationships.

Local Solutions at the Community Level

- Food Box programs
 - [Mississippi Association of Cooperatives](#) ran a successful food box program in 2020
 - During the peak of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, [World Farmers, Inc.](#) farmed all fresh produce and culturally relevant crops and fed over 400 families all season. In 2022, groups partnered with early learning centers in an attempt to systemize this approach by delivering food to these learning centers.
 - Neither World Farmers, Inc. or the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives were funded in the second round of the USDA Food Box Program. They were outcompeted on price when the large distributors got back into the market, despite the fact that they geared up quickly when they were needed in the community.
 - [Alianza Nacional de Campesinas](#) has partnered with a local farm, “[Growing the Table](#)”. Alianza receives food boxes and delivers them to different areas in their region.
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) providing shares for free and allowing purchases using EBT cards. CSA and Farm Share Programs to distribute food to the communities.
- [Farmers Fighting Hunger](#) - Shifting to local emergency food system models for hunger relief projects.
- Community cafes where people pay what they can to access a wide selection of fresh, healthy, high-quality food.
- Backpack Programs for school children to keep them fed outside of school hours.
- Local community restaurant partnerships with local food banks.
- Youth-centered farms and education:
 - [Grow Dat Youth Farm](#) - educational farm in New Orleans, Louisiana
 - [Kansas Black Farmers Association’s Nicodemus Educational Camps](#)
- Pittsburgh’s [Adopt a Lot Program](#) – 10 of the 17 acres are in food production businesses. Most of the vacant lots in Pittsburgh are in Food Apartheid areas.
- [Black Urban Gardeners of Pittsburgh](#): Operates two large sites that help engage children and the neighborhood community in urban agriculture.
- Cottage House, Inc. works with students at the local elementary school in rural Alabama on gardening at the school and on summer projects and activities at the Cottage House,

which also has a high tunnel. They also mentor high school students over the summers to produce and market their own food to save money for higher education. One young woman earned \$7,000 one summer.

- Cottage House Inc. also supported women veterans as they bought land and designed a small housing complex with room to grow food.

State Level Solutions

- [HIP program in MA](#). Solutions are at the intersection of the market and the farmer, not mass production.
- [Farm to food pantry initiative](#) (Washington State). This initiative provides funds from the state directly to food pantries so they can purchase directly from farms.
- [FarmsSHARE](#) in North Carolina.
- In Massachusetts, there is a program attached to SNAP benefits where families get an extra 40-80 dollars a month for a fresh produce benefit.

Improving Existing Federal and State Level Programs

- Expanding parameters, increasing allocations, and improving existing food programs such as...
 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Electronic Benefits Transfers (EBT): These programs should be economic drivers, not just a system that makes big grocery companies rich. Local food systems need investment. Adjustments should also account for inflation.
 - Double-Up Food Bucks. These programs should include shelf-stable products that are healthy and locally sourced to address the lack of salt, oil, or sugar. This will also provide support for Urban Agriculture.
- Develop similar policies to those implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic that really helped people (eg. keeping or revisiting waivers for child hunger).
- Increased Federal Funding Opportunities:
 - More government investment is needed in our communities.
 - Make the federal grant process more accessible.
 - More accessible grants at USDA that open up the field for small farming operations and community-based organizations. Grants should also limit access to unhealthy businesses and corporations.
 - Communities need flexible funding that doesn't create capacity restraints.
 - Unhealthy foods taxes could fund change.
- Procurement Reforms: Require federal and state institutions (e.g., hospitals and schools) to contract with local farmers, preferably mission-driven, BIPOC-led food hubs.
 - All government contracts should be given to regional food coops

- Farm Bill Discussions:
 - Support the inclusion of proposals from the Native Farm Bill Coalition in the Farm Bill.
 - Deconstruction of Title 1 in the Farm Bill, then redistributing that funding among local food systems
 - Removing acreage requirements of USDA grants, restructuring them to a cooperative community model.
 - Community food utility supporting regional value chains.
 - Lowering barriers for farmworkers who want to become farm owners. They need to be paid a fair wage and benefits. This initiative could be funded from Title 5.
 - Fund farm-direct relief efforts.
 - The Farm bill could fund local procurement programs over a longer time span to shift more purchasing power in the local direction. This could increase nutrition-dense food, build local food economies, and foster a movement toward food sovereignty.
- With respect to [food sovereignty](#)...
 - Some of the bureaucratic red tape that restricts food sovereignty must be lifted while ensuring ethical standards going forward.
 - Local ordinances and regulations need to be reformed to allow for more food production.

Additional Recommendations from Farmworker Communities

Things the White House, state governments and legislators, and local communities can do:

- Better connect farmworkers with local farmers, assist them with acquiring food
- Federal and state governments should create more affordable housing options
- Hunger is a public policy issue, they should make laws so that people are not so poor. We are always worried about rent. If we don't have money for rent, then we can't prioritize our health. We shouldn't have to worry so much. There are people who have many children. How are they going to go to the gym if we cannot afford it? Farmworker women can no longer pay for rent and we cannot give our children what they need.
- A federal law should be made for housing. Protect us with affordable housing and protect us from landlord abuses because there are many things that happen to people where landlords raise the price of rent. If we do not move to ask for something, nothing will be done.
- Keep pushing for immigration reform
 - Undocumented people should be able to claim unemployment benefits
 - Just like the migrant program, they created programs for families that had children two or three years old. These same programs should not check immigration status and the same can be done with food.

- I think that in NC, what produces the most money is agriculture. Without the workers, there will be no money. This is how we can demand an immigration reform, the problem is that we have not raised our voices enough. They know that agriculture is important to the entire state. We have things that we can demand because we have an economic presence.
- I think that immigration reform should be done; I walked in the fields and there was sadness there. People are afraid that immigration will be called. Immigration reform now because it will help.
- I am also for the immigration reform or, if not, simply give documents to those who have been here for over 20 years.
- Enact immigration reforms to help workers
- Guarantee that no food assistance program checks for immigration status
- The unemployment situation is also a problem. In California, inflation is horrible. The state of California needs new projects for affordable housing
- The government needs to better control inflation

Additional Solutions from Farmworker Communities

What opportunities do we have to change these realities?

- I think it should begin with our community and then at a larger scale. More than anything to educate, a colleague mentioned that we do not have information on how to prepare healthy and affordable meals. We should have educational workshops.
- Requiring that food banks provide healthy meals.
- Having contact with the ranchers and buying directly from them because it is cheaper for us.
- An opportunity with Alianza and Lideres to train the community and teach them what true nutrition is. So that we have the knowledge on how to prepare delicious food that is also healthy for our children. I participated a lot in Mexico giving talks about nutrition. Here we have problems with obesity because we don't know how to prepare meals. This is a very important opportunity for me.

What solutions or invocation can you imagine?

- I would imagine that the food would be cheaper. I imagine my garden and cooking healthier things. I can grow seedlings but not enough for my family.
- One of the things that many people said is that there is less work and I hope that a fair salary is offered, which will improve health. If you work so hard that you can't take the time to rest, it also causes stress. A fair salary will help health.

Who can or should do these things?

- I think that we ourselves can make the change and we should be listened to.
- We need to talk to the people who have the authority to make change. The community should voice their needs to them.
- Talk to the county board of directors, or city council. Know what they are planning.