



CENTERING COMMUNITY IN PUBLIC HEALTH

From Food Justice to Liberation: Building Community Power through Community Gardens & Urban Farms



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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this brief is to present the findings of a series of learning circles (LC) designed to understand how urban farms and community gardens stewarded by Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) power-building and base-building organizations help raise community consciousness about healthy food systems, create opportunities for resident leadership and skill development, promote local economic development, and provide healthy alternatives to the typical commodified foods that are available in marginalized communities. Additional insights from LC participants on how climate change, local, state, and federal policy all impact the way we interact with food are provided. Finally, we highlight recommendations for how communities, institutional allies, and philanthropy can support community gardens and urban farms stewarded by community organizations that impact our food systems and, by extension, the broader ecosystem of health, equity and racial justice.

To increase our collective understanding, Praxis convened 18 BIPOC-led base-building and power-building organizations from across the United States that steward community gardens or urban farms for three virtual learning circles in early 2022. The goal of the Learning Circles was to better understand the functions of these spaces, how they contribute to building community power, to describe a community-centered vision for the future of equitable and just food systems, and how this critical work to build power while feeding our communities can be better supported.

Food systems are an essential component of community health. The state of a local food system contributes to a community's wellbeing, the local economy, and

opportunities that extend beyond growing, harvesting and distributing food including garden and farm produce, harvesting, nutritious quality, cultural roots, and access and affordability. In a just and equitable society, all communities - regardless of race, class, income, gender, ability, or geography - have access to healthy, affordable food that reflects their culture(s), respects the environment, prioritizes the communities' needs, and provides opportunities for wellness and economic stability. However, many families residing in marginalized communities that have suffered from disinvestment in infrastructure experience food insecurity or disruption of nutritious food intake because of a lack of resources, access, resulting in what is known as food apartheid.¹

FOOD APARTHEID

Food apartheid stems from political and economic decisions rooted in structural racism, which have inequitably led to long-term disinvestment in primarily low-income communities and communities of color. The solution to an environment of food apartheid is much more than opening a full-service grocery store, but rather one that includes broader measures focused on equity including economic development leading to living wage employment, supports for small business enterprises led by residents from the community, and the development of community resources that help residents to better understand their nutrition needs and the links between preventable chronic disease and processed foods and sugary drinks.

¹ Brones, A. (2018, May 7). "Karen Washington: It's Not a Food Desert,

Community gardens and urban farms have a long history, dating back to 3,500 BC when farmers developed gardens in increasingly growing urban areas to ensure access to fresh produce.² Over time, the presence of community-led urban farms began to represent social change in the communities they served, designed to combat various forms of social injustices and systemic

oppression.³ In addition to providing communities with nourishment in often historically under-invested communities experiencing food apartheid, community gardens and urban farms function as a tool to foster relationships, create economic opportunity, advocate for social justice, and build community power.

It's Food Apartheid." Guernica. Accessed at <https://www.guernicamag.com/karen-washington-its-not-a-food-desert-its-food-apartheid/>

2 Green, J. (2012, May 9). "Urban Agriculture Isn't New". The Dirt: Uniting the Built and Natural Environments. American Society of Landscape Architects. Accessed at <https://dirt.asla.org/2012/05/09/urban-agriculture-isnt-new/>

3 Smithsonian Gardens: Community of Gardens. (N.D.) "Grown from the Past: A Short History of Community Gardening in the United States." Accessed at <https://communityofgardens.si.edu/exhibits/show/historycommunitygardens/intro>

SIPP Culture Community Garden



PROCESS

In February and March 2022, with the support of Center for Science in the Public Interest, Praxis hosted three virtual learning circles with members from 18 BIPOC power-building and base-building community organizations that steward a community garden or urban farm in cities, towns or within Native Nations. Participants from across the country shared stories about their farms and gardens, the practices and policies that influence their work, and visions for food systems rooted in the traditions, history, and culture of community residents. LC participants discussed the role of community gardens and urban farms in building power and shaping policy.

Discussions also centered on:



Working on a generational shift of how we interact with our food systems: Participants discussed the importance of changing how our communities access food, bypassing oppressive structures that perpetuate health inequities, and centering on food justice. Participants shared stories of their communities' histories and relationships with food.



Reworking and reimagining our food systems as we know them: Participants discussed what it would look like to always have access to foods that nourish us, align with our cultures, and that are suitable for the environment.



Growing intergenerational relationships: Participants emphasized the importance of gardens being a space for multiple generations to connect and share knowledge.



Identifying challenges within community gardens and farms in urban and rural spaces: Participants discussed common barriers confronting urban farms and identified policy and practice solutions that would support community gardens and urban farms.



Building sustainable economies within the food system: Through a conversation guided by the Sustainable Economies Law Center (SELC), participants discussed models of land ownership and land protection. SELC shared resources and tools to support the growth of food systems and land stewardship that matches the traits of the community, with the ultimate goal of distributing wealth and power.



Engaging in communal dreaming:⁴ Participants participated in a futuring exercise and shared what their gardens and farms look like, feel like, and smell like when they are fully resourced.

DEFINITIONS

Urban Farms: “Urban agriculture generally refers to the cultivation, processing and distribution of agricultural products in urban and suburban settings, including things like vertical production, warehouse farms, community gardens, rooftop farms, hydroponic, aeroponic, and aquaponic facilities, and other innovations. Urban farmers and gardeners work among diverse populations to expand access to nutritious foods, foster community engagement, provide jobs, educate communities about farming, and expand green spaces.”- [USDA](#)

Community Gardens: “Community gardens are plots of land, usually in urban areas, that are rented by individuals or groups for private gardens or are for the benefit of the people caring for the garden. [Dig into these resources](#) to learn about healthy, local food.” - [USDA](#)

⁴ Communal dreaming is a term coined by Annika Izora (@annika.izora). “Communal Dreaming is a method of imagining new spaces to create, tend to love, and expand beyond the imagination of white supremacy” Learn more: <https://annikahansteenizora.substack.com/p/communal-dreaming>

LEARNING CIRCLE REFLECTIONS

“Having autonomous spaces to just exist as BIPOC is huge. It also goes against a capitalistic system that requires we always produce or “do” something to deserve to exist in a particular space.”

- LC Participant

► **What is the role of community gardens/urban farms in raising community consciousness, building power, and shaping policy?**

Organizers are rebuilding connections within the community, practicing and revitalizing traditions passed down for generations, and working to rebuild sustainable food distribution practices.

Participants were invited to reflect on what community gardens and urban farms mean to them. Organizers working directly in the community gardening and urban farming space shared the following definitions:

Community Gardens and Urban Farms:

- Are gathering and organizing spaces.
- Create hubs of freedom dreaming - they allow for people to come to the land and open up to possibilities in addition to policy.
- Change power dynamics.
- Show other ways of living, organizing, building new spaces (ex. cooperatives).
- Offer a community response to food insecurity, showing people how to grow, eat, sell healthy food.
- Build connection to ancestral knowledge and practices and encourage language revitalization.
- Give a space to develop and maintain leadership opportunities for youth and also for community members.

“In light of climate change and growing rates of food-related diseases, cities are looking at the need to support community gardens/urban farms. Healthier food, locally grown, in-city apiary, etc.”

- LC Participant

► **Greatest Challenges Facing Community Gardens and Urban Farms**

Participants shared some of the biggest challenges to land stewardship through community gardens and urban farms, and policies that reinforce these barriers. Through the facilitated learning circle process, participants’ insights were gathered in breakout groups using Jamboard, summarized by participants through a report-out, and categorized by the Praxis team into the following themes:

- [Access to Land](#)
- [Opportunity for Generational Planning](#)
- [Staff Capacity](#)
- [Capitalism](#)
- [Racism and Environmental Racism](#)
- [Infrastructure](#)
- [General Anti-LGBTQ Policies](#)

Access to Land

- **Development:** Real estate developers often come into the community to acquire land, extract natural resources, or implement unaffordable housing plans, disrupting community gardens and causing harm.

“New York City is driven by the real estate industry, it is difficult to acquire land and space...Even when you do have a community garden, developers have the power.”

-LC Participant

- **Access:** In many areas, there is lack of access to land and water, particularly in urban environments. Native Nations also have different policies that may make access to land easier or more difficult, depending on the tribe.
- **Ownership:** Many rural lands are held by the federal government, prohibiting farmers from owning their land. Additionally, many smaller farmers lease their land; if the owners sell it, the farmers lose their farm.
- **Gentrification and Displacement:** Organizing to build community gardens often increases local property values, often leading to the gentrification and displacement of the residents that organized and stewarded the community space.
- **Redlining:** The nation's history of redlining and present-day gentrification directly poses barriers regarding access to land, capital, and resources for communities of color today. Cities often focus on welcoming higher-earning residents, and not prioritizing the community members already present.
- **Native Land Trusts:** There is not enough public knowledge about land trusts and the history of land trusts and Native Nations. Additional information about the resources available to farmers from Native Nations who farm on trust lands would be helpful in increasing access to land.
- **Zoning:** Local zoning laws tend to prioritize housing and developers over community gardens, urban farms, and local food production.

“In Seattle, there used to be several hundred local backyard farms and people that knew how to do this work; they are gone now due to gentrification; the culture that has left the community & is slowly coming back.”

- LC Participant

FEE TO TRUST (FTT)

Fee to Trust (FTT) land acquisitions, also called “land into trust,” transfer a land title to the United States of America to be held in trust for the benefit of an individual Indian or Tribe.

Opportunity for Generational Planning

- **Multigenerational History:** The undoing of oppression that has kept Black, queer, and trans folks separate from the land is generations deep and requires multigenerational strategies to repair history. As such, reparations for the Black community need to be long-term.
- **Multigenerational Future:** People are continually asked to respond rather than engage in long-term building; we have the opportunity to shift the framework to visioning and dreaming as a multigenerational process.
- **Passing Down Land:** There is a need to eliminate the barriers to transferring privately-owned land from one generation to the next and build up knowledge around the legal processes for transferring land between individuals or entities. This also applies to giving land back to Native Nations.

Staff Capacity

- **Long-Term Investment:** As with many non-profit or community-led organizations, gardens experience turnover and other retention challenges, particularly in under-resourced BIPOC communities. Building out the long-term foundation of an organization is critical for co-creating a vision for health, equity, and racial justice.

“There are some projects where people can rely on volunteers, but a lot of communities of color and communities with low income need fair wages and training”

- LC Participant

- **Shared Leadership:** There is a need for more shared leadership; oftentimes the work can be dependent on one key person, limiting the long-term sustainability of an organization. Investing in shared leadership and deepening the capacity for decentralized and shared work rooted in powerbuilding community organizations supports the sustainability of community gardens and urban farms and their respective community organizing.
- **Relationship-Building:** The work of community gardens and urban farms is emotional, particularly impacting BIPOC, queer and trans folks. It is necessary to honor the emotional aspect of this work and foster relationship-building.

Commodified Food Systems Shaped by Capitalism

- **Food Industry:** The current capitalist food system and commercial food industry drive community organizers and gardeners' to envision and implement the solutions they would like to see in their own communities.
- **Land Theft:** From our nation's history rooted in the theft of land from Indigenous communities to the commodified profit-seeking production of our food system and removal of ancestral knowledge, the legacy of capitalism embedded in the history of what is known as the United States* has harmed cultural practices of community gardening.
- **Exhaustion:** A powerful sense of exhaustion impacts communities from many different angles; from families having to work several jobs to make ends meet and not have the time to invest in eating healthy, to organizations navigating top-down structures and requirements impacting their work, there is a collective sense of fatigue.
- **Wage Theft:** Many workers still experience harmful employers that do not pay minimum wage, appropriately distribute tips, allow sick leave, or provide adequate benefits. "Cheap food" comes at a cost for workers, so there is a need for greater worker protections and enforcement of existing laws.

Racism and Environmental Racism

- **Internalized and External Racism:** BIPOC communities and organizers continuously experience the harms and legacy of racism, from challenges to buying land as a BIPOC gardener, to accessing organizational funding or loans.

"As a result of environmental racism, the additional cost for remediating lands is high."

- LC Participant

- **Environmental Racism:** Many working-class communities of color currently live in the legacy of historical and present-day planning policies that put the burden of toxins in their community, harming their health and the health of their families for generations to come.
- **Polluting Industries:** Past concentrations of polluting industries in red-lined communities have left an environment of contamination communities are still dealing with today.
- **Predatory Lending Practices:** Predatory lending practices have made communities facing oppression—and in particular, Black, queer and trans* folks - who can purchase homes are afraid to do so.

* We use the term in what is known as the United States in recognition that Native Nations have and continue to be sovereign Nations. Native Nations have their own names for recognizing the land that is known widely as the United States

Infrastructure

- **Basic needs:** To do the work, especially in produce distribution, it's challenging to come across the basic items needed to store items or disperse them.
- **Fundraising:** Organizers continuously need to spend time raising money and resources to support their collective vision rather than doing the critical work they aim to do.

General Anti-LGBTQ Policies

- Anti-LGBTQ policies affecting healthcare, marriage, and other foundational human rights in the Southern United States have created a hostile environment for queer and trans folks to thrive, resulting in many only being able to focus on basic survival needs. As a result, this prohibits queer and trans communities from being able to directly and indirectly access capital, invest in developing community gardens or urban farm infrastructure, and participate in community gardening.

► Practices and Policies that Impact Community Gardens and Urban Farms

Community gardens and urban farms are impacted by local, state, federal, and Native Nations policies, including those that govern access to land, water, zoning and land use restrictions, garden structures, gardening activities, and the sale and distribution of garden produce.⁶

Local and State Policies	Federal	Native Nations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide land, water access, funding, in-kind supplies, technical assistance, and educational workshops• Pass local resolutions in support of community gardening• Incorporate support for community gardens into local planning documents• Ensure zoning ordinances allow gardening activities and garden structures⁶	<p>Several federal agencies such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), offer funding for community garden and urban farm activities. Federal legislation can also support community garden and farm activities.⁷</p>	<p>Native Nations have a formal nation-to-nation relationship with the US government. These tribal governments are legally defined as “federally recognized tribes.”⁸ Native Nations and their members have exercised sovereign authority in many ways to encourage sustainable farming practices, protect land and water resources, and support access to traditional foods and plants, which in turn impacts community gardens located within Native Nations.⁶</p>

Participants were invited to reflect on the roles that local, state, federal, and Native Nations policies and practices play in their work with community gardens and urban farms.

Participants then shared and discussed the specific local, regional and national policies and practices that either support or cause harm within the food system.

⁶ Public Health Law Center, (2017, October). “Community Gardening: Policy Reference Guide.” Accessed at <https://publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/Community-Gardening-Guide-2017.pdf>

⁷ Public Health Law Center, (2017, October).

⁸ National Congress of American Indians, (N.D). “Tribal Governance”. Accessed at <https://www.ncai.org/policy-issues/tribal-governance>



Hummingbird Farm

1.) Policies that ease pathways for food to get to institutions (schools, clinics, etc.):

- Food services that could allow for community health clinics to potentially source from local growers (food is medicine philosophy)
- Practices that get food to our schools and institutions

“[Policies] that support farmers markets, affordable housing, and community gardens can create sustainable ways for communities to build resources and close the racial wealth gap.”

-LC participant

2.) Policies that support redirecting resources towards food systems:

- Policies that add farmers’ markets, affordable housing, and gardens
- Policies that create more sustainable ways for people to build resources & close the racial wealth gap
- Using soda tax revenue to support community gardening/urban farming

3.) Policies that invest in the sustainability of the land:

- Policies that encourage community-level change, such as requiring individuals and businesses to recycle organic waste and reduce land waste
- Programs that include funds & support to equitably remediate land
- Working on creating Climate Justice Policies that invest in urban farms and gardens as solutions to Climate Change
- Ordinances to grow food on excess land
- Economic development in the community

RECOMMENDATIONS & REFLECTIONS

For Funders and Institutional Allies

Recommendations

- 1.) Connect with intention:** Funders can begin by connecting with organizers to identify ways to support powerbuilding through community gardens and urban farms. A first step to help with developing intentionality is becoming familiar with how the stewards of these community resources describe their work and why they do it. The 10 sessions of Season 3 InPraxis podcast can be a precursor to deeper engagement.
- 2.) Support community garden and urban farm infrastructure:** Long-term investment in the infrastructure and foundation of community gardens and urban farms serves as an investment in community health. This can take place through longer-term funding opportunities for farms and also ensuring that garden/farm infrastructure development is part of every support package.
- 3.) Identify policies and practices that have caused harm or pose an opportunity to shift food systems to be rooted in the community:** We can support an environment that nourishes and cultivates community gardens and community power by advancing equitable policies and dismantling harmful policies.
- 4.) Create opportunities for rest and connection between communities:** To honor the emotional work that BIPOC-led community gardens and urban farms pour into their efforts and their community, prioritize resourcing, rest and relationships as much as the food that is grown.

Reflection Questions

- How can your organization support powerbuilding through community gardens and urban farms?
- What are your organization's current practices in supporting food justice work? How can you integrate feedback from stewards of urban farms and community gardens about what is working well in these practices, what could be improved, and what success looks like?
- How does support of more equitable food systems fit into your funding/advocacy ecosystem?
- Does your support for equity in food systems incorporate building community power and infrastructure?

For Community

Reflection Questions

- What are ways you hope for your garden or farm to grow? What are practices and policies that would be supportive of that growth?
- How can we support a generational shift in the ways we (re)connect with gardens and farms in our communities?
- How can we advocate for accessibility within community gardens and urban farms?



Hip Hop is Green

CLOSING WITH LOVE AND HOPE

LC Participants shared what they love about their gardens and farms and some of their biggest hopes:

- ♥ I love the community that comes together around Queen Park Learning Garden (QPLG) in Inglewood, CA. When folks get into the space, it just feels like family. You see people meeting their neighbors, learning from each other, and just finding joy and peace together.
- ♥ Our favorite part of our garden is seeing the reaction from the community to see all these veggies growing and sharing our delicious tomatoes and carrots.
- ♥ I love the way our farm brings the community together and we can learn from each other and mama earth. I love how our farm connects us to our ancestors, traditions and practices that connect us all as land-based peoples.
- ♥ Seeing the youth discover the love for planting food.
- ♥ Hoping we can grow our farm to grow more food, medicine and community. Gardening creates a beautiful, grounded space to organize, share stories, and heal together.
- ♥ One of our biggest hopes is that we impact how our community eats and hopefully inspire, train and support people who want to grow gardens.



Queen Park Learning Garden (QPLG)

Thank you to all the organizations that participated in this Learning Circle!

- Acorn Center for Restoration and Freedom
- Acta Non Verba: Youth Urban Farm Project
- Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement
- Chilis on Wheels
- Chinese Progressive Association 華人進步會
- Coffee Pot Farms
- Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative
- Hip Hop is Green
- Hummingbird Farm. - PODER
- Interim CDA
- Ironbound CC
- La Plazita Institute
- Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO)
- Liberation Farm/ Black VegFest
- The Mississippi Center for Cultural Production
- Nollie Jenkins Family Center
- Pueblo Resurgents
- Social Justice Learning Institute (SJLI)
- Sustainable Economies Law Center (SELC)



Little Village Environmental Justice Organization

Community Gardens & Farms in Practice

LVEJO is a 20+ year community organization located in the Little Village neighborhood of Chicago. Our mission is to organize with our community towards environmental justice in Little Village and achieve the self-determination of immigrant, low-income, and working-class families. We do this organizing to hold local polluting industries accountable while imagining sustainable and healthy realities via a Just Transition framework. Our vision is to build a sustainable community that promotes the healthy development of youth and families, provides economic justice, and practices participatory democracy and self-determination.

We currently steward two agricultural spaces in Little Village; the Semillas de Justicia Community Garden and La Villita Community Farm. Semillas de Justicia is a 9-year-old, and still growing community garden with 100 garden beds where over 30+ immigrant families grow their own food. Semillas de Justicia offers its space to the community, whether it be for get togethers, workshops, meetings, programming with families (such as art), and supporting our gardeners projects they might have in mind.

This helps us create a space of trust, companionship, and a healthy work environment where we practice a new work system always open to change and new ideas. While keeping intact the root environmental justice / food justice principles of what our work actually means as we are there daily.

We like to think of the garden as a green safe space where one comes to recharge, get away for a while, and reorganize within themselves. While also having our support as organizers / land workers. That way they can care for themselves as they continue to organize and work towards climate justice in their own way, while also sharing their ideas and projects others might have in common within this same space.

La Villita Community Farm is a recently activated agricultural space located within a public park (La Villita Park) with the goal of practicing production farming and developing curriculum for an “Escuelita Agricola” (informal agricultural school), as a farm school for children. Our goal is to combine small-scale Indigenous

farming practices, livestock care, and community healing into a space where community members can expand their knowledge of land reclamation and stewardship. The farm and park are located in a former superfund site where, after 15 years of community organizing, it has been remediated and converted into a public

Farm. Food. Familias Mutual-Aid Meals and Grocery Distribution(FFF) is a project co-led by Getting Grown Collective and the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization with support from 4 community chefs to prepare and deliver meals to families in Little Village, Englewood, South Chicago and other neighborhoods on the southside of Chicago. FFF started with 50 weekly meals on May 6th, 2020 and has been consistently serving 350 meals weekly to this day. FFF also distributes 200 produce boxes weekly to families in these same communities.

FFF services some of the most affected communities by lack of access to food, increased loss of work, systematic disenfranchisement, strained access to

healthcare, an overload of local food pantries, COVID-19 and other food & environmental- related health issues. These communities also have a high number of folks working as essential workers. FFF aims to provide community members with weekly nutritional and culturally significant meals and produce as an offering of nourishment and mutual care

In the learning circle, we came together to further understand the role that sustainable and community-led agricultural spaces have in our collective liberation as people of color. Stewarding natural spaces gives us an opportunity to restore and/or support the continuation of natural ecosystems in relation to, not exclusion of, humans and specifically racialized communities. We realized that growing spaces can be catalysts for other organizing sectors as they not only offer a physical space, but also an integrated “natural systems” framework where we learn that we are all intrinsically connected and our liberation is bound to one another, to non-human relatives, and natural spaces.

Pueblo Resurgents

Community Gardens & Farms in Practice

Pueblo Resurgents is a land-based organization centered in Isleta Pueblo of New Mexico and focused on reclaiming D'ai kinship and knowledge systems. We exercise sovereignty through food-growing practices, community-based research, and culturally reflective pedagogy. We mobilize our initiatives through a systems approach that reimagines our land-based economies in a 21st century.

The Cultivat(Ed) Cooperative is a food sovereignty subsidy of Pueblo Resurgents and has a mission of increasing access to healthy local food options and to local food economies. The Cultivat(Ed) Apprenticeship, Isleta Pueblo Farmers' Market, Radicle Food Distribution, and Community Mutual Aid CSA comprise our programs. Working in an intergenerational framework, we envision food sovereignty to be a future where our children can fluidly move across the land.

We work closely with tribal assets within the Pueblo of Isleta (POI), including the Isleta Headstart, the Elderly Center and Assisted Living, Isleta Health Center, and Tribal Leadership. We leverage these relationships to create community-based assessments that include food sovereignty assessment, diet and health, and Pueblo governance. The data generated from these assessments provides a unique and in-depth look into the needs of the community while simultaneously helping to create tailor made programs that ensure programmatic success.

All of our programs meet three focus areas: Emotional Intelligence and Leadership, Pueblo Knowledge and Kinship, and Systems-based Solutions. This framework highlights the innate agency that we possess as Indigenous peoples to understand our political landscape and to create from this place of knowing and kinship. Furthermore, this framework allows us the flexibility to develop matrices that are reflective of our ancestral ways of moving on the land, outside of capitalism, heteropatriarchy, colonialism, and on-going forms of violence.

The Cultivat(Ed) Cooperative focuses on leadership development via our apprenticeship and organic food production. We have established a network of Pueblo Farmers to support our food distribution efforts. Our food distribution efforts are grant funded, which allows us to support living wages for farmers by purchasing

food at retail prices. We leverage our food production networks to support leadership skill development while also meeting the needs of Tribal Assets.



Access to food and to growing food is an essential need and inherent right of our sovereignty as Indigenous Peoples. With much of our food systems having had to endure hundreds of years of colonial occupation, ecological manipulation, a changing social environment, and political discord, our community faces unprecedented levels of risk and vulnerability related to food security. Consequently, the systems that have largely replaced many of our own political institutions that governed food production pose more challenges than they do answers. Namely, centering transactional exchanges as fundamental to how we relate to one another and to our land. This poses unnatural challenges to how people access healthy food options and food systems.

While tribal assets are a foundational aspect to a thriving food economy, organizational capacity prohibits sustainable development of such networks. And while many tribal employees, directors, and program administrators would like to purchase food from our own producers, very little are familiar with the food growing practices and reinforce unnatural standards that mean very little to food access, but often directly impacts the livelihood of our own farmers. With such discrepancies, it has been essential for farmers to also inform planning, strategy and implementation of food-based solutions within our community.



Our program coordinators possess first-hand experience and skills related to food growing and distribution, an essential skill in relation to the administrative tasks of implementing food distributions, CSA's, surveys & assessments, info-sessions, workshops, and cooking demonstrations. By supporting the food growers themselves to not only be involved in the planning, but to administer these programs, highlights the capacity of food growers and organizations to deliver quality programming. Through our own capacity, our Program Coordinator supports a necessary Tribal Asset need of

coordinating our community's farmers' market and food distribution for the Isleta Headstart.

The Cultivat(Ed) Apprenticeship subscribes to the idea that systems change requires both Professional AND Personal Development, necessary when navigating colonial landscapes while reconnecting to our ancestral lands. This is accomplished by providing Technical Skill development, Emotional Intelligence & Leadership development, and Indigenous land-based education. With the average income of less than \$10,000 annually for farm workers on small-scale organic farms, it is no surprise that many people do not see farming and food production as a viable career, let alone a lifelong pursuit that can lead to meaningful relationships. The apprenticeship supports community members who have an interest in growing food, while gaining essential skills needed for cultural reclamation.

Furthermore, while navigating compromised ecologies and food systems, Indigenous food growers are expected to participate in a lucrative system driven by white supremacy that often does not reflect their community needs, with less access to essential skillsets, capital, monetary wealth, and resources. In a highly competitive business sector, our community farmers are expected to compete against one another. Our apprenticeship seeks to make land, water, equipment, skill share, capital and networks accessible in order to support what is often seen as a high risk business. Additionally, while none of our apprentices are considered full-time, we believe that an equitable wage is necessary, and why we pay our apprentices \$20/hour. One mantra we believe is that if our farmers can spend less time 'working' then they can also invest in family, community, and land-based relationships. We feel that supporting our food growers requires us to support their social responsibility and purpose as Pueblo (D'ai) people.

While we are focused on providing direct services to community members in Isleta Pueblo, our network of food producers includes other Indigenous food producers. Having access to resources for our food distribution provides security for our programs as well as our farmers.

Food Distribution: The Radicle Food Distribution is a no-cost food program that is grant funded, which is aimed at supporting the most vulnerable in our community: Children and Elderly. This year, we are coordinating a food distribution with the Isleta Headstart & Childcare Center which will impact 135 students and their

households. The bi-weekly food share will consist of approximately 7 items, and is aimed at supporting the cognitive development during an essential period of growth and development for children.

The Isleta Pueblo Farmers' Market is coordinated in-relation with the Isleta Elderly Center, which is aimed at both supporting food producers, artists, food preparers, and tribal programs, as well as supporting access to healthy food options for elderly. Based on a Farmers' Market Survey that we launched in 2021, we identified barriers that prohibit community food growers and community members from participating, while identifying what will support their participation in a community market. Some barriers include limited equipment (chairs, tables, canopies), food handlers permits, unaffordable foods and SNAP/EBT access, and familiarity with fresh produce. The market is the first phase of supporting education, kinship, and awareness around what a thriving food economy can look like.

Land Transfers: As a small organization that is a fiscal sponsor pursuing our own non-profit incorporation that is in the process of receiving a donation of land in the city of Albuquerque, the resources provided by the Sustainable Economies Law Center have been extremely helpful.

Being a fiscally sponsored organization, we've recognized the need to have a third party represent our interests to ensure that all parties involved (including the landowner and our fiscal sponsor) are all protected and that we can focus on our work. The Sustainable Economies Law Center has provided us with helpful information related to our situation. As 'Land-Back' initiatives become more common in New Mexico, the need for resources and professional support will be needed to support Indigenous organizations.

Checking in with other projects around the nation has been rewarding, in that every project is unique and has gone about the promotion of land stewardship and



cultural reclamation in different ways. We feel that this portion has been helpful to understand what makes our programming unique in order to focus on those aspects to continue to make them successful. I feel that having a basic understanding of the systemic factors that have created both the discord and the need to reclaim culture and food economies brings focus that does not reinforce or center capitalist interests.



The Praxis Project is a values-driven, national nonprofit organization that seeks to improve justice and equity through partnerships to build community power. Praxis believes strongly that organized communities are critical partners in the struggle to create just and equitable communities.

Our mission is to build healthy communities by transforming the power relationships and structures that affect our lives and communities.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR WORK

Visit our website, www.thepraxisproject.org, to learn more about our initiatives and explore our multimedia resources.



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