



Equity & Justice Statement

For inclusion within the organizational bylaws, revised April 2021

We at SOFSA believe in food sovereignty. We want to live in a world where every person has access to healthy food that they love, made without the exploitation of animals, ecosystems, or other people, and available without disproportionate expense or sacrifice. We believe that every person should have the knowledge necessary to acquire or produce food that's right for them, and support for when they are unable to feed themselves. We believe every person should have these things regardless of their race, ethnicity, age, gender identity, sexuality, ability, religious affiliation, political affiliation, citizenship status, or economic status.

But the barriers standing between us and this vision are high, and their foundations are systemic. In Onondaga County, New Americans from agrarian backgrounds struggle to purchase the land they need to farm, partly due to policies that prioritize the desires of developers over the needs of individuals. Farmers who have land already are weighed down by massive debt burdens, the costs of keeping up in a highly regulated industry crowded by agribusinesses and factory farms.

Within the Syracuse city limits, many neighborhoods suffer under man-made famines. Their access to fresh food is artificially constrained by the city's deficient public transit system, as well as the proliferation of corner stores and fast-food restaurants, which are being built in place of grocery stores. At the same time, foodservice and eldercare workers, much like farm laborers, receive little pay or benefits for backbreaking work—because of owners' cost-cutting, but more precisely because fair wages are great expenses when margins are thin. Workers bear the consequences of a food system that values cheap commodities more than the work it takes to produce them.

The people who feel these systemic failures most acutely belong to the same groups that have been marginalized by our dominant systems throughout history: Black people, indigenous people, and other people of color, immigrants and the undocumented, women and people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, the economically disadvantaged, the disabled, and our elders. These groups of people typically lack the capital and/or political power necessary to guarantee their needs, and often can't afford to risk losing their jobs by advocating for them. They're also the most likely to live in under-resourced communities, disconnected from the personal and professional networks that could help them leave. Throughout history, their bodies were exploited and their homelands torn away from them; now, despite some gains and their best efforts, they still struggle to make a good life for themselves. They still struggle to eat.

There can be no sovereignty without first enacting justice. For SOFSA to be able to meaningfully improve the food system in Onondaga County, we have to dissolve the structures that allow business interests, political priorities, and outdated cultural beliefs to continue exploiting the land and people in our service area. In particular, we mean our hills, valleys, rivers, lakes, and forests, and the Onondaga people who have stewarded them for millenia. We mean Black people, New Americans, and other people of color, and all other historically marginalized groups.

While we work to revolutionize policies and change attitudes in the long- and medium-term, we must also work alongside our vulnerable neighbors in the now, to guarantee them the autonomy and food security they have been sorely missing. This means reserving places for them at our leadership table and seeking to fill them, but it also means diverting resources away from ourselves, and directly to organizations in our community led by marginalized people, whenever possible.



To help keep up SOFSA's commitment to these efforts, we will maintain a Council of paid Community Liaisons, each a member of a historically marginalized group in our service area. Among that Council's powers will be the ability to recommend new members to the Advisory Board in the interest of maintaining and/or expanding geographic, economic, demographic, and professional diversity in its composition.

Regardless of that composition, SOFSA's Advisory Board will keep itself educated on issues of social justice, and updated on related best practices. SOFSA's Equity, Inclusion, and Accountability Committee will take on a similar responsibility, while also certifying that the goals and values laid out in this document are always at the heart of our policies and practices.

The EIA Committee will also maintain social groups for self-identified members of different historically marginalized groups, where these SOFSA members can socialize with others who share their experiences. In addition to helping build the personal and professional networks that folks from these backgrounds often lack, and preparing them for deeper participation in the organization, these social groups will ensure that there is always space for joy and healing in our food justice work.

This statement was last amended on April 13th, 2021 by SOFSA's Equity, Inclusion, and Accountability Committee, which was, at that time, made up of individuals self-identifying as: Black, Onondaga, South Asian, East Asian, immigrants, transgender/nonbinary, elders, and economically disadvantaged.

We acknowledge that we represent only a fraction of the diversity of people we will consider in our work. We will strive to expand the range of experiences represented on our Committee and acknowledge that there will always be improvements to be made.

SOFSA is committed to continually reflecting on our position and actions so as to never lose sight of the breadth of the human experience. We also understand this document to be iterative, and as a Committee, will review it regularly to ensure its alignment with best practices in food sovereignty and social justice work, and its continued allegiance to the needs of the people of Onondaga County.