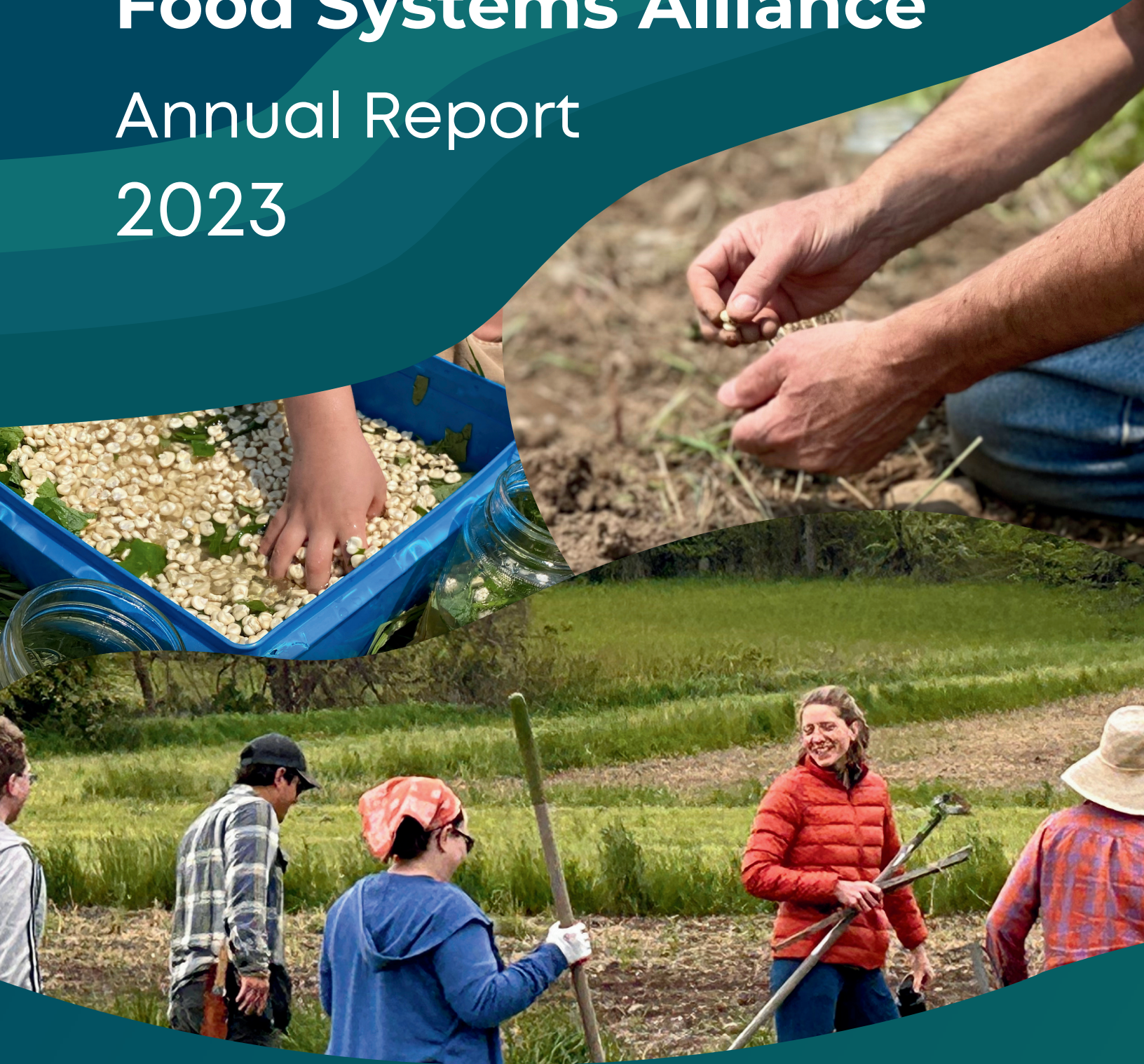


Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance

Annual Report 2023



is a fiscally sponsored program of Syracuse Grows

This year at SOFSA...

...was marked by significant growth driven by partner support and diverse initiatives. This report showcases key highlights including Civic Engagement 101; our 1st Annual Food Justice Gathering; volunteer days at Onondaga Nation Farm, Urban Delights, and Umoja SHA Community Garden; countywide Community Listening sessions; Onondaga Food Rescue Network gleanings; Coffee Hours; and more! Our network's resilience and drive are changing the regional food system for everyone.

Membership and Interconnectedness

Growth can occur in many different forms, but one of the best examples of our growth is in our membership. Anyone who eats, grows, or loves food in Syracuse, Onondaga County, and Onondaga Nation can join SOFSA. Some of the ways we measure this membership include our listserv and newsletter subscribers, social media followers, and participants in SOFSA-hosted events. Our network is powerful, resilient, and driven to make change for all people across our region's food system.

One of the primary components of SOFSA's mission is to strengthen networks, build relationships, and deepen community connections. Over the last year, we hosted and co-hosted over 100 different events, meetings, and advocacy opportunities, including:

- **3 Open Meetings** with 5 Featured Presenters who deepened our understanding of the local food system.
- **9 Coffee Hours** at locally-owned coffee shops to build connections and share ideas within our network.
- **4 Affinity Group Events** creating intentional spaces for marginalized folks, including 2 joint Pride/BIPOC @ SOFSA events and 2 more BIPOC @ SOFSA meetups.

542

Listserv and
newsletter
subscribers

680

Followers on
Instagram and
Facebook

435

Participants in
SOFSA-hosted
events



Community Listening

This year, SOFSA hosted and co-hosted 8 total Community Listening Sessions that provided valuable opportunities for community members across Syracuse and Onondaga County to share their experiences, struggles, and dreams of the food system. Their stories enabled us to respond to and advocate for community needs.

FEB

NOFA-NY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

- **Topics:** Climate change, solar development, small-scale farmer market access.
- **Actions:** Vendor fee trial at CNY Regional Market, statewide advocacy for farm-to-school programs, feasibility study for farm-to-school expansion.

MAY

SYRACUSE NORTHEAST COMMUNITY CENTER

- **Topics:** Desire for education in seed starting, gardening, composting, cooking.
- **Actions:** Connected SNCC with USDA, Cornell Extension for classes; OnFarm Fest participation; pantry support; influencing CCE niche growing programs.

BRADY MARKET

- **Topics:** Need for more diverse groceries and store amenities.
- **Actions:** Expanded food offerings and influenced market growth.

JUNE

FOOD ACCESS HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS NOW!

- **Topics:** Need for grocery store, expanded neighborhood services, and better transportation in Valley/Southside.
- **Actions:** Weekly farmers market, community events, healthcare resources, zoning code advocacy.

JULY

PARTNERS IN LEARNING

- **Topics:** Community learning, transportation for ESL participants to farmers markets.
- **Actions:** Bus to OnFarm Fest, development of kitchen literacy projects.

SEPT

TRANSPORTATION

- **Topics:** Need for accessible transportation to grocery stores.
- **Actions:** Feedback to Centro, shaping SOFSA's 2024 policy platform to include transportation action area.

NOV

CNY REGIONAL MARKET

- **Topics:** Market access and operation challenges for small-scale farmers.
- **Actions:** Resource sharing, accessibility improvements discussion.

DEC

MICRON TECHNOLOGY

- **Topics:** Food access, workforce development, protecting ancestral land.
- **Actions:** Community input to Micron's engagement committee, ongoing development talks.





SOFSA's 1st Food Justice Gathering



On October 28th, SOFSA hosted its inaugural Food Justice Gathering at Plymouth Congregational Church in downtown Syracuse. The event focused on the theme of the rich legacy of our region's land and peoples.

The day began with a moving opening ceremony led by Dr. Rev. Eric Jackson, SOFSA Director Maura Ackerman, and Deputy Mayor Sharon Owens. SOFSA Community Liaison and event co-organizer, Mable Wilson, delivered a touching musical rendition of "I Come To The Garden." Keynote speaker Karen Washington, an activist-farmer, shared profound insights on food justice – inspiring attendees and setting the day's tone.

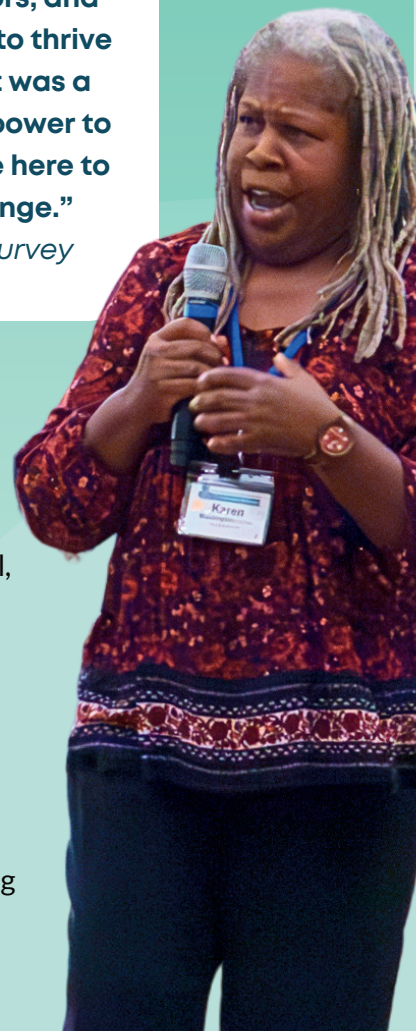


"I learned that we are a diverse and extremely skillful community of food system actors, and that we already have all the resources to thrive and build a more just world. The event was a beautiful reminder that sovereignty is power to the people, and that people have come here to voice their power for bottom-up change."

Shared anonymously in post-event survey

The Gathering covered diverse topics emphasizing knowledge sharing and building connection. Sessions focused on Syracuse's changing landscape, food system careers, and discussions on food and health, Indigenous food sovereignty, and urban agriculture. Overall, attendees left feeling invigorated and empowered to work collectively toward a thriving food system in our region.

The Food Justice Gathering embodied meaningful conversations, community building, and strategic collective action. SOFSA extends heartfelt gratitude to all participants, recognizing their important contributions to this transformative event.



Media

SOFSA's mission is to uplift our partners in the food system by highlighting stories of their work in our community. In the past year, SOFSA was featured in the media at least 20 times! News coverage highlighted many of our collaborative accomplishments, including:

- Advocacy to improve CNY Regional Market infrastructure
- Community-led efforts to improve food access through ReZone Syracuse
- Educating the community about the end of pandemic SNAP increases
- Restoring the mobile market at the Downtown Farmers Market and beyond
- Launching a new Double Up Food Bucks site, expanding access to healthy foods for SNAP recipients
- Supporting the Food Access Healthy Neighborhoods Now! Farmers Market
- Bridging the gap between rural and urban communities with Onondaga Farm Fest

In 2023, we published 31 Friday Features and Friday Inspirations on our social media to highlight the achievements of our staff, interns, Advisory Board members, Community Liaisons, and community partners.



OFRN
ONONDAGA FOOD RESCUE NETWORK

In partnership with Syracuse University's Center for Sustainable Community Solutions, we launched the Onondaga Food Rescue Network (OFRN) in 2023. Modeled after Seven Valleys Food Rescue's success in Cortland County, OFRN combats food waste and insecurity in Onondaga County by connecting stakeholders to redistribute surplus food.

In 2023, OFRN contacted 100 pantries, engaging deeply with 29. OFRN conducted 17 gleaning events, redistributing 3,400 pounds to 11 pantries. As interest grows, we anticipate further dialogue on volunteers and logistics in 2024.



Policy and Planning

The impact of organizing for policy change is clear. According to the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, each dollar invested in civic engagement and policy initiatives, returns an average of \$115 to the local community. That's why we advocate at the local, regional, state, and federal level to create policy change for a thriving food system.

In 2023, SOFSA held six Policy & Planning Committee meetings, engaging community members and elected officials. Working alongside the Equity, Inclusion, and Accountability Committee, they developed our inaugural Policy Platform to guide our advocacy efforts. Key achievements include:

- Promoting food access and urban agriculture provisions in Syracuse's ReZone ordinance.
- Advocating for Universal School Meals & expanding meal access for eight Onondaga County schools.
- Supporting infrastructure investments in the CNY Regional Market.
- Collaborating with the New York Farm Bureau on Healthy School Meals for All.
- Supporting Summer EBT benefits through a letter from No Kid Hungry New York.

SOFSA also hosted its first Civic Engagement 101 training, convened food policy councils from across New York State, and conducted our third annual candidate questionnaire on food policy issues. Responses from 15 candidates were distributed as voter guide at SOFSA's Food Justice Gathering, which aligned with the first day of early voting in the County.

Looking ahead:

Our 2024 Policy Platform builds on past successes, focusing on leading efforts with our partners to:

- Address root causes of hunger.
- Invest in food system infrastructure for regional economic development.
- Incorporate food access into transportation planning.

Additionally, we continue to support statewide efforts to:

- Ensure all students access free meals at school.
- Expand local procurement in schools, universities, hospitals, and institutions.
- Enhance nutrition assistance programs for food security.



Gratitude and Reciprocity

This year, SOFSA played a crucial role in securing over \$2.8 million in funding across our network, supporting partners' efforts to advance local agriculture, enhance food access, and promote food sovereignty. As part of our commitment to share abundance within our network, SOFSA's Fundraising Committee set a target for a minimum of 15% of all funds raised by SOFSA itself to directly benefit our network partners. Surpassing expectations, in 2023, we distributed **27% of the funds raised** to our community partners.

Plant a Seed for SOFSA

Our annual Plant a Seed for SOFSA fundraising campaign thrived, raising over \$4,000, which was generously matched by the Onondaga County Agriculture Council. Funds raised through the campaign, alongside a \$20,000 investment from the NY Health Foundation, will empower grassroots efforts to improve our region's food system through a new community-driven grantmaking initiative, the **Syracuse-Onondaga Food Justice Fund**. Over the course of this spring, the Fund's leadership council — comprised of community leaders representing diverse interests across the county — will meet to determine funding priorities, eligibility criteria, and selection processes. Join us in April to vote to award the funds to projects that will shape a more equitable future for our region's food system.

Partnerships

Our successes are a testament to the vision, passion, and contributions of our many partners.

Their crucial involvement is undeniable, and without their support, we would not have achieved all that we have this year.

Funders

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Onondaga Co. Agriculture Council
CNY Community Foundation
NY Health Foundation
Allyn Family Foundation
Mother Cabrini Health Foundation

Individual Donors

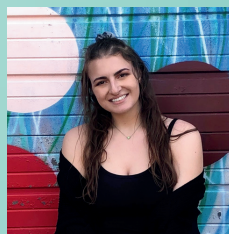
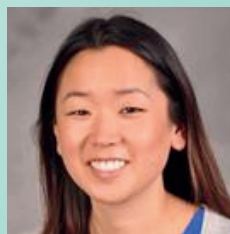
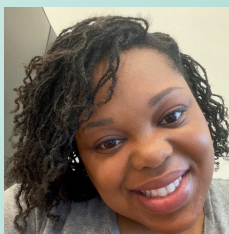
John Blackwell
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Mary Carney
Julia and Darren Carboni
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Mitchel & Marilyn Ross
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Christina Toomey
Caitlin Toomey
Carol VerWiebe
Richard Ver Wiebe Jr.
Angela Waters
Marsha Weissman

We also extend our appreciation to our fiscal sponsor, Syracuse Grows, whose support continues to be instrumental in our shared accomplishments. Their commitment has played a pivotal role in the success and growth of SOFSA since its inception.



Leadership Team

We especially want to thank our dedicated team of Advisory Board members, Community Liaisons, staff, and interns for lending their time, talents, and expertise to our work over the past year.



Adol Mayen
Alexander Warshal
Amy Grover
Avalon Gupta VerWiebe
Beth DuBois
Brandy Colebrook
Brittany Taylor
Caitlin Toomey
Camryn Corbett
Chloe Cabrera
Christina Hudson Kohler
Curtis Waterman
David Knapp
Ellen Pitstick
Emilija Postolovska
Estelí Jimenez-Soto
Ethan Tyo
Jeremy DeChario
Julia Carboni
Kayla Miller
Laura Jayne
Leah DeRosa
Mable Wilson
Manika Gautam
Maria Bianchetti
Marguerite Leek
Maura Ackerman
Rhonda Vesey
Sarah Rosenthal
Sophie May
Tim Bryant

Join Our Community!

To be a part of this collective journey, scan the QR code. Join our vibrant community, subscribe to our listserv, and follow us on social media. Let's continue to build a better food system, together.



<https://donorbox.org/support-sofsa>