

SYRACUSE-ONONDAGA FOOD SYSTEMS ALLIANCE

IMPACT REPORT 2024





LEADERSHIP LETTER

Dear SOFSA Partners,

As we step into this new year together, we want to take a moment to reflect on the journey we've shared, the milestones we've achieved, and the exciting path ahead. This past year has been one of significant transitions for our team marked by change and a renewed focus on our shared mission. Through it all, your steadfast commitment to one another and to a food system that works for everyone has been both a guidestone and an inspiration.

Over the past year, we have been deeply engaged in crafting a strategic plan—a process that has called us to assess with clarity and hold true to equity and justice. This plan represents more than just a roadmap to an equitable food system; it is a reflection of our collective values and aspirations, shaped by your input and the work we've done together. Whether it was attending one of our Community Listening Sessions or committee meetings, or convening at our Annual Food Justice Gathering, your insights and actions made SOFSA what it is today.

This moment is also a significant turning point as we close out the first five years of "network building" and prepare to step boldly into a new phase of "movement building." This next chapter of our work will look and feel different in key ways, such as activating the Community Connector initiative to build our capacity for growth and accountability and creating a comprehensive and widely accessible communications plan to amplify our work.

The connections we have cultivated and deepened and the resilience we have shown as a network all set the stage for this transformation. Together, we have built a foundation of trust, mutual respect, and shared purpose that will carry us forward as we take on this new challenge. Throughout this past year, resilience has emerged as a powerful theme for our network. In the face of uncertainty and change, we have adapted, supported one another, and stayed grounded in our mission. Resilience is not just about enduring; it is about innovating and thriving together. Each of you brings unique strength and perspective to this work, and our collective efforts have created something truly remarkable.

As we embark on this new phase, we invite you to embrace the energy, the possibilities, and the momentum for what lies ahead. Get ready to move together—to act with courage as we create a more just and sustainable food future for all of us. We are so proud of all we've accomplished as a network of changemakers, and we can't wait to see what we will achieve in this next chapter.

With gratitude and anticipation,
Your SOFSA Leadership Team

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN 2024-29

2024 saw the conclusion of our strategic planning process, and the publishing of our Strategic Action Plan*. The strategic plan leads us into a new “movement building” phase, where we cultivate authentic community engagement, shared aspirations, and strategic learning, while maintaining a high-leverage systems focus, and creating powerful containers for change.

The plan also unveils a revised mission statement:

“SOFSA is a network of changemakers dedicated to reshaping our region's food system. Grounded in principles of transformative justice and reciprocity, we cultivate connection, collaboration, and coordination across sectors to mobilize our collective resources towards a more just and sustainable food future in Syracuse, Onondaga County, and Onondaga Nation.”

The plan outlines **four goals across** our areas of work, each with their own tactics and strategies to be implemented over the next five years:

Community values are centered in the development of just, equitable, local food systems

1

Commitment to just, equitable, local food systems is fostered through **community self-determination** and ownership.

2

Priority policies are developed with an **emphasis on equity and justice** that have sustainable short and long-term advocacy goals.

3

Power, wealth, and **resources are redistributed** to those who are disproportionately impacted by food system inequities.

4

*You can read the plan in full at www.bit.ly/SOFSAstrat2024

OUR NEXT CHAPTER

A few of the things we're excited about in this next chapter:

- Growing and refining the process for the Food Justice Fund
- Developing an incubator program to support projects in an ongoing way
- Developing a comprehensive, regional food systems plan
- Creating a People's Policy Platform and building our advocacy and campaigning muscle
- Optimizing our communications strategy & website
- And more!

Core Ongoing Activities



MEMBERSHIP AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS

As a network of changemakers, our strength lies in the individuals who come willing to share their skills, wisdom, and connection with one another. Anyone who eats, grows, or loves food in Syracuse, Onondaga County, and Onondaga Nation can join SOFSA. Our membership includes educators, organizers, government officials, medical and public health practitioners, business owners, food chain workers, consumers, and working professionals across different sectors.



"A big part of our role is in modeling as a community. In looking to each other as peers, and really modelling 'what if', 'where can we be going', and 'where can we collaborate'. That weaving has resulted in collective power."

– Rebecca Garofano, SCSD Dietician

In 2024, SOFSA hosted 78 events, attended by 572 people. These included:

- **3 Open Meetings**, highlighting knowledge from folks in school food administration, in the environmental conservation world, and working towards uplifting urban agriculture.
- **14 working group meetings** across our Urban Agriculture, Farm to School, Health Justice, and Policy and Planning working groups
- **10 Coffee Hours** at locally owned coffee shops, to create space for informal relationship-building
- **8 Affinity Group Events**, including 2 Pride and 6 BIPOC events.
- **8 Site Visits and learning opportunities** exploring topics like ServSafe certification, market vendor resources, farm to school, Native American history, urban agriculture, and civic education.

Our listserv really took off in 2024 — growing from 490 to 600 subscribers. Folks across all sectors shared volunteer opportunities, educational materials, resources, requests, job announcements, and advocacy opportunities. Regardless of whether everyone was in the same room, information was moving, and projects developing.

1241

Listserv and newsletter subscribers

2010

Followers on Instagram and Facebook

572

Participants in SOFSA-hosted events



Community Listening

SOFSA's Community Listening sessions ensure we have a pulse on the experiences of our stakeholders. They enable us to understand how to respond, advocate, and network to more appropriately align resources and campaigns to further a collective vision of food systems change that meets the needs of our communities.

In 2024, we held 4 community listening sessions. These led to concrete actions in support of the work organizations are doing, and revealed trends in needs across stakeholders:

FEB

LABOR AND SOFSA

- **Topics:** developing more partnerships in the labor organizing space and increasing labor advocacy capacity, career development for food system workers, meeting accessibility when convening to address labor issues.



JUN

ASHA LAAYA

- **Topics:** challenges in navigating certifications, transportation and language barriers, opportunities for more education around hunter-gathering.



JUL

SALT CITY HARVEST FARM

- **Topics:** Apprenticeship structure vis-a-vis Land Access Farmer Program, sustainability in the face of shifting climate, market opportunities and constraints with culturally appropriate crops, long-term land access, and resource sharing structures.



AUG

INTERFAITH COMMUNITY COOP

- **Topics:** Sustainability of operations reliant largely on volunteers, aging or inappropriate infrastructure to support and meet needs, need for wider networking to diversify food sources, need for advocacy to support nutrition programs.





Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance Food Justice Gathering

On Saturday, October 26th, 2024, SOFSA hosted our second annual Food Justice Gathering. Organized around the theme of “Cultivating Resilience,” the Gathering was inspired by the thoughtful organizing—both presently and historically—of communities working to meet their needs amid a changing landscape.

Keynote Cheyenne Sundance, co-founder of Sundance Commons, shared her experience as a Black, small-scale urban farmer in Canada working to shift power in the food system. She emphasized the need to build capacity within organizations and the importance of advocacy in meeting people’s food needs. After the keynote, attendees moved through sessions on labor justice, urban agriculture, Indigenous foodways, environmental justice, and more. During lunch, grantees from the Food Justice Fund shared about their projects, and the Onondaga Food Rescue Network led a demonstration on how they handle and re-distribute leftover food.

“Hearing about the work and challenges folks are undertaking in Urban Ag helped us all understand how interconnected our work is. I was initially scared to join a small discussion group, but the solidarity and connection I made there were powerful, and continue to shape my understanding of the importance and power of collaboration, investing in relationships, and community building.”

– James Ash Yarbrough, Community gardener & organizer

Our shared joys and sorrows at the current state of our food system were evident in the thoughtful discussions and participation during each session. Watching folks move through the space and connect with one another, we at SOFSA are more sure than ever of our collective resilience. Our combined skills, knowledge, experiences, and passion will drive our ability to remake our regional food system into one of abundance for all.



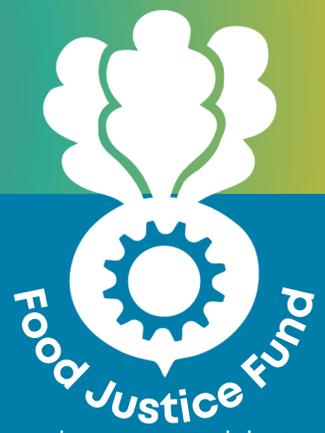
**ENVIRONMENTAL
RESILIENCE**

connecting the dots across climate, food, economic, and racial justice.

WHO ARE WE
FEEDING

WHO ARE
THEY HERE
FOR

Resilience and Reciprocity



The **Food Justice Fund** is one of the ways in which SOFSA enacts our commitment to redistributing resources throughout the community. It is an accessible and agile way for grassroots food justice projects to get the funding they need to be able to focus on solutions that drive change.

As a community grantmaking initiative, the Fund is built to be responsive and accountable to our community. The funding process is led by the **Food Justice Fund Leadership Council**, who decide how the process is structured. In 2024, there were two tracks to apply to: Track 1 for awards ranging from \$1,000-\$5,000 and Track 2 for awards under \$1,000. Once live, our staff provided application support at libraries across the city, to ensure accessibility for folks who've never applied to grants before. The Leadership Council awarded Track 2 grants directly and determined Track 1 finalists to advance to a public vote. Anyone in Syracuse, Onondaga County, and Onondaga Nation over the age of 14 could vote to select this year's grantees.

The final votes were cast and grants awarded at the **Gather and Grant Celebration**, a community event hosted at the Salt City Market Community Room. There, potential grantees and community members mingled with each other, shared about their projects, and enjoyed light bites and mocktails.

Big Impacts

One of the funded projects in 2024 was Haven Community Garden. In its first year, the garden *needed capital to support its gardeners in taking produce home, spending time in the garden, and participating in wellness workshops.*

"We were able to establish in our first year that we are a space where our guests are treated with dignity and respect in all aspects of their visit, from how their food is distributed to having a place to sit. These structures help strengthen the garden's rapport, and we believe this will lay the foundation to approachable and dignified food accessibility for the community." – Amy Tao, 2024 grantee

700
VOTED
\$22k
REGRANTED
7
GRANTEES



To learn more about the 2024 grantees and their projects, visit www.syrfoodalliance.org/fjf/

Working Groups

Working Groups are key organizing spaces within SOFSA where community members with aligning interests can come together to network and work towards common goals. Throughout 2024 we explored how to organize these groups. Through meaningful work and dialogue, we set the stage for bigger projects and more collective action to come.



Urban Agriculture

- Hired a new intern to lead coordination
- Brainstormed the creation of a tool-share program and an urban ag coordinator position in local government
- Organized the Syracuse Urban Garden Tour
- Held discussions about an agricultural commons, and met with the common councilor



Farm to School

- Published op-ed on childhood food insecurity
- Attended NY Farm to School Conference
- Attended Farm to School press event at SCSD Ed Smith K-8 School.
- Published the “Farm to School: Supply Chain Analysis of Producers” report with CCE Harvest NY and other partners.



Health Justice

- Collaborated extensively with the Kitchen Literacy Project to enhance our Food As Medicine work.
- Held ongoing discussions of the 1115 waiver
- Collaborative space between health care practitioners and community health workers



Onondaga Food Rescue Network

- Carried out 3 large gleanings
- Launched into its own independent initiative, now overseen by Elise Springuel and under the auspices of SOFSA
- Coordinated food recovery at the Food Justice Gathering
- Recovered over 6,100lbs. of food



Policy & Accountability

Building a thriving food system requires a multi-pronged approach. It is crucial to have programs that meet the needs of people here and now, while also advocating for policies that create a more supportive system where everyone can get their needs met in the future.

In 2024, SOFSA held 5 Policy & Planning Committee meetings. Beyond these, we:

- Held our first **Community-Candidate Forum on Hunger Housing & Health**, where 10 electoral candidates joined almost 100 community members to answer questions.
- Joined the Healthy School Meals for All NY Coalition in their **Advocacy Day** in Albany.
- Collaborated with School Food Committee to craft an **op-ed on child hunger** and its impacts.
- Collaborated with multiple partners to craft a prospectus outlining **aggregation and light processing opportunities** at the CNY Regional Market and contributed to multiple planning conversations for the market's next chapter.
- Worked with the Equity, Inclusion, and Accountability Committee to finalize our **2025 Policy Priorities**.



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 27 times! News coverage highlighted many of our collaborative accomplishments, including:

- Childhood food insecurity and its connection to housing and health
- Advocacy and engagement with Senator Gillibrand to tackle food deserts in Syracuse
- Food recovery efforts and their potential to feed families
- Supporting Syracuse University food service workers in their unionizing efforts
- The impact of Double Up Food Bucks in combating food insecurity
- The farm to table movement in Syracuse.

IN ORDER
TO GO FORWARD
WE HAVE TO
GO BACK

WE ARE CHANGING
THE SYSTEM THAT
WILL NECESSITATE
ADAPTATION



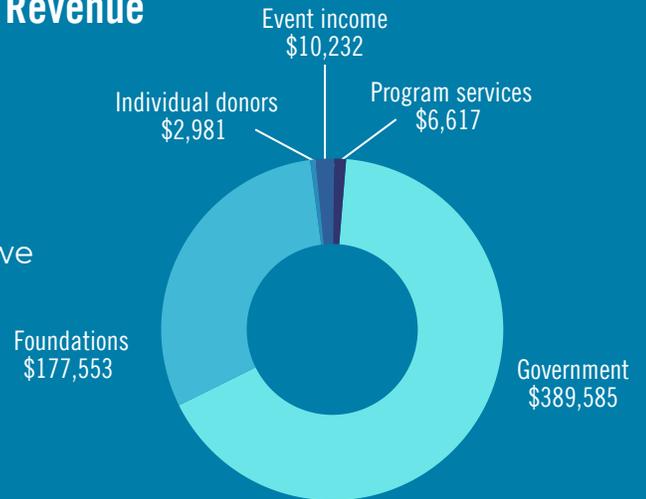
Aligning Resources & Capacity

At SOFSA, we believe in the abundance of our collective resources – money, food, wisdom, relationships, and more. When carefully stewarded and shared, these resources will sustain our movement for the long haul. Guided by principles of reciprocity and interdependence, we manage our finances with both care and courage, ensuring that every dollar entrusted to us strengthens our shared vision for a just food system. We uphold our commitment to transparency and accountability, demonstrating that financial sustainability and radical generosity can go hand in hand.

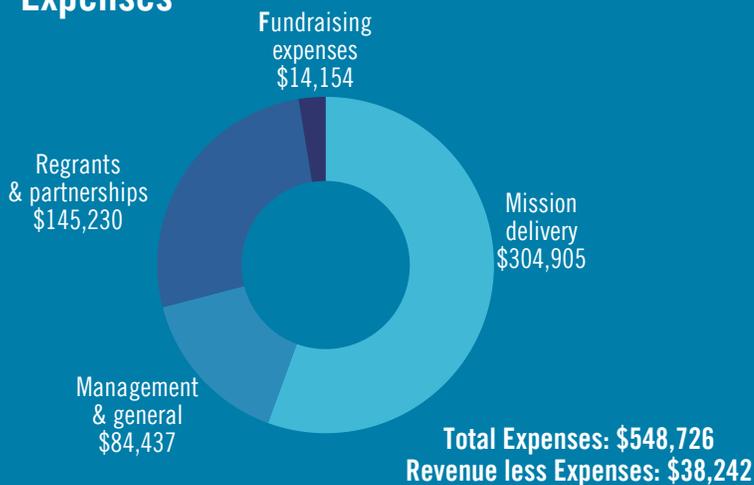
Financial Stewardship

In 2024, SOFSA's revenue totaled \$587k from various sources. Of this, we spent 74% internally and redistributed **26% through grantmaking and partnerships**. After five years of careful stewardship, we ended the year with just over \$100k in net assets, enough to sustain our work for about 5 months.

Revenue



Expenses



For the third consecutive year, we honored our commitment to share abundance with our partners by redistributing at least 15% of our revenue across the network.

Redistribution & Support

Beyond the 7 Food Justice Fund grantees, SOFSA supported 9 other organizations to secure funding of their own through grant support, funder matchmaking, connections, and more. These funds enabled partners to advance projects focused on urban agriculture, transportation, food access, culinary education, and more.

We also created a new intake form where partners can request fund-seeking support from SOFSA, enabling us to be responsive to community needs and ensuring high quality data tracking. Partners can visit <https://wkf.ms/4cBeUWY> any time to put in a support request.



Gratitude

Movements are built by the many, not the few. SOFSA's work is made possible by a broad community of supporters – those who invest resources, share knowledge, and show up with their hands and hearts to bring our shared vision to life. We honor our funders and donors alongside the organizers, growers, advocates, and neighbors who give their time and talents to this work, knowing that true transformation is only possible through collective care and commitment.

Food System Network Partners

As a network, we would not have achieved all that we have this year without our partners. We are beyond grateful to the nearly 600 individuals who joined us throughout the year, representing over 150 different institutions, businesses, and organizations that comprise our region's vibrant food system.

Philanthropic & Government Partners

Allyn Family Foundation

Better Food Policy Fund

CNY Community Foundation

Gifford Foundation

Mother Cabrini Health Foundation

NY Health Foundation

NYS Agriculture & Markets

Onondaga Co. Agriculture Council

U.S. Department of Agriculture

Individual & Community Supporters

Beyond larger institutional funders, our work is supported by our community. Last year, 36 people donated to sustain our work through our annual **Plant a Seed with SOFSA** campaign. We raised a total of \$3,525, which was then matched by the Onondaga County Agriculture Council. Of these funds, 25% were allocated to our civic engagement work and 75% to the Food Justice Fund, to be distributed in 2025 and beyond.



AlterNative Project

Amy Grover

Anju Gupta-Lavey

Anne Palmer

Bailey Cunha-Bustamante

Brandy Colebrook

Brittany Taylor

Caitlin Toomey

Christina Toomey

Elena Mangano

Elise Springuel

Fatcat Baking

Harvey's Garden

James Govette

Jennifer Van Wie

Jo-Anne Unruh

Judith Ross-Bernstein

Julie Gozan and Tom Keck

Kate LoSecco

Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern

Lianne Moccia

Lisa Saka

Mandala Gupta VerWiebe

Marilyn & Mitchel Ross

Marsha Weissman

Mary Carney

Maya Castro

Mindy Schorr & Henry Bromberg

Nisha Gupta

Penelope Pooler Eisenbies

Plum & Mule Community Market

Rebecca Garden

Rhonda Vesey

Richard Ver Wiebe Jr.

Robin Macaluso

Rose and Alberto Bianchetti

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 Board members, Community Connectors, 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
- Brittany Taylor
- Caitlin Toomey
- Camryn Corbett
- Charles Carrier
- Curtis Waterman
- David Knapp
- Elise Springuel
- Emilija Postolovska
- Ethan Tyo
- Jess Miller
- Jude May
- Laura Jayne
- Leah DeRosa
- Mable Wilson
- Maria Bianchetti
- Marguerite Leek
- Maura Ackerman
- Maya Castro
- Micah Orieta
- Renee Marcoux
- Rhonda Vesey
- Tim Bryant



The illustrations in this report were done by Jude May and Carrie Drake (www.notetorelect.com).

Julie Herman's photography is also featured throughout (www.julieherman.com)

Join the Network!

To keep up with our work, join our mailing list (<https://syfoodalliance.org/get-involved>) and follow us on social media @syfoodalliance.

Support our Work!



Together we can build a vibrant food system in Syracuse, Onondaga County, and Onondaga Nation. To support our work with a donation big or small, scan the QR code or visit: <https://bit.ly/support-sofsa>

