

BUILDING THE CASE FOR  
**RACIAL EQUITY IN THE  
FOOD SYSTEM**



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# BUILDING THE CASE FOR RACIAL EQUITY IN THE FOOD SYSTEM

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## PART I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We all want a healthy food system where our children’s bellies are full, where we can access and afford fresh, nutrient-rich foods, and where people who work along the food chain from the field to the kitchen can live sustainable and healthy lives. We all want a food system that is fair, sustainable, and racially equitable and we see glimpses of this happening every day:

- Residents of Detroit are transforming vacant and blighted land into urban farms to grow fresh and healthy foods for their communities, building economic opportunities for those seeking work;
- Farmers, universities, hospitals, and healthy food advocates are working across states like North Carolina and regions like Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to build strong local-to-regional food hubs connecting consumers to farmers, keeping local farmers in business, and keeping kids healthy;
- Farmworkers from New Jersey to Florida are working together on a domestic fair trade certification program that guarantees safe and healthy working conditions and fair wages.

Unfortunately, these glimpses are overshadowed by our broken food system, in which many of us lose, particularly communities of color:

- Nearly 16 million children often go to bed hungry.<sup>1</sup> That’s one in six White children, one in four Latino children, and one in three Black children who experience what is known as “food insecurity;”<sup>2</sup>
- Over 30 million Americans live in places that lack access to healthy foods. This includes over 8% of rural families who live 10 miles or more from a grocery store – a concern highest among Native American populations in the West.<sup>3</sup> In urban areas, the disparity continues for low-income families, with low-income families of color much less likely to have access to healthy food;<sup>4</sup>
- One in six Americans work somewhere in the food system, from the farm to the kitchen. Far too many take home poverty-level wages, with women, Blacks, and Latinos most likely to earn minimum or sub-minimum wages, some as low as \$2.13 an hour.

This food system works for some, but fails too many of us. Yet, we already have a glimpse of the possibility of a just and healthy food system. To get there, we must use a critical race lens to diagnose what is wrong with our current system, assess entry points for change, and determine ways that we can work together to build a better system for all of us. This report shares an analysis of what it means to build a racially equitable food system – from field to farm to fork – and lays out steps toward achieving that goal. In this report, we:

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<sup>1</sup> Feeding America <http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-facts/child-hunger-facts.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Bell, Judith, et al. 2013. *Access to Healthy Food and Why it Matters*. PolicyLink and the Food Trust. [http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media\\_items/access-to-healthy-food.original.pdf](http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/access-to-healthy-food.original.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

**Describe how policies impact racial equity in the food system.** Through the stories of two children, Brenna and Johnny, this report walks us through the structural race analysis along the food chain, highlighting how key policies shape opportunities for children, farmers, and laborers. We share how:

- *Housing and school policies* impact children's opportunities to access healthy foods, especially urban children of color;
- *Land policies and institutional discrimination* have led to historically high rates of land loss for farmers, particularly Blacks and Native Americans, and people living in rural areas;
- *Farm Bill policies and vertical integration in the food industry* favor the production and distribution of unhealthy foods over healthy foods;
- *Social Security and wage policies* have set back advancement for laborers across the food chain, especially women, immigrants and people of color.

**Identify potential policy solutions and strategic opportunities to create a more racially equitable food system.** Building on our analysis, we identify policy and strategy entry points that can lead to a more sustainable and racially equitable food system from long-range efforts to immediate-term solutions. For example, we can:

- *Surface opportunities to craft broad, intersectional policy solutions.* The challenges we face are not singular and therefore require change on multiple levels across many different sectors. We must identify strategic entry points for multiple issues. Working simultaneously to address these is essential to longer term, transformational shifts;
- *Forge partnerships across urban and rural communities.* We must build power for more transformative change, such as leveraging government and institutional food purchasing practices to support production and distribution of healthy foods and to create new job opportunities for residents of these areas;
- *Support indigenous and community leadership through small business financing and community capacity building.* We must build on existing creative and innovative work happening in communities and ensure that work is sustained and led by those who are most impacted by our broken food system;
- *Advocate for labor rights and a more balanced ownership of the food system.* We must change wage policies to reflect true living costs, support community projects and participatory action research where the system fails to meet demand and need, and surface community land trust options;
- *Invest in immediate solutions in our communities, schools, and farms.* We must promote better land-use ordinances to support urban agriculture; improve access, affordability of, and transit to healthy foods; effectively implement the Affordable Care Act's community benefit requirement; increase reimbursement rates and provide better kitchen infrastructure to cook and process healthy foods on-site; and shift agricultural investments away from unhealthy foods to local farmers producing the healthy foods we need like fruits and vegetables.

Offer tools and resources to guide the creation of racially equitable solutions. Lastly, this report includes appendices to help readers apply the structural racial equity analysis to their own work.

## PART II: THE FOOD SYSTEM: RACE, POLICY, AND POWER

The food system is a complex set of relationships and structures that get our food from farm to fork. The diagram below shows the main components and how they connect; they are circular and linked, mutually reinforcing and impacting one another. What the diagram does not display are the underlying policies that govern and impact the food system, creating and sustaining the racial inequities we see today – this is known as structural racial inequity.

Figure 1: The Food System



### What is structural racial inequity?

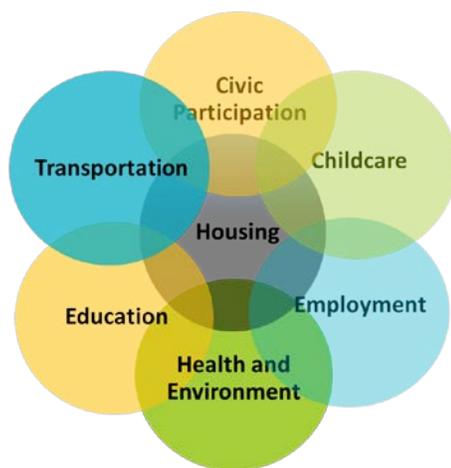
Often, when we think about racism, we focus on individual attitudes or behaviors, which is important. Sometimes, we look at how particular institutions treat people of different races differently, which is also important. But to truly understand the root causes of racial inequity and thereby produce solutions that work for everyone, we need to take a structural race approach. That means looking at the food system through the lens of policies, institutions, and people – together.

Figure 2 shows how institutions and structures shape the communities we live in from livable, affordable housing options to a clean and accessible environment with clean air. Policies drive how

these institutions and structures intersect to create economic and social opportunities, even on a local level, in communities. People of color have historically lived, and tend to still live, in the most under-resourced neighborhoods. This is called **structural racial inequity**. Structural racial inequity is the way our policies and institutions interact, often invisibly, to produce barriers to opportunity, leading to systemic racial disparities. While interpersonal racial discrimination is often intentional, with **structural racial inequity, intent to discriminate is not required**.

**Structural racial inequity is more often a cumulative result of how multiple institutions and policies intersect, rather than the result of an individual or organization's action.** And because of historic and present day policy decisions, people of color are, more often than not, positioned poorly in terms of the institutions and policies resulting in the deep racial disparities we see in every aspect of our society today.

*Figure 2: Structural Racial Inequity is Multi-institutional*



Communities of color tend to be situated near the most under-resourced and lowest performing schools, environmental hazards, furthest from jobs, with the least transportation options, and have the least access to healthy, affordable food. And while communities of color suffer the most from the way these institutions are arranged, it is important to understand that structural racial inequity harms everyone by shrinking the tax base, under-funding public services, creating social tension, and limiting economic growth. This report serves as a model for analyzing the food system through this structural race lens.

To better relate the structural analysis to our day-to-day lives, we'd like you to imagine two children: Brenna and Johnny.

### *Meet Brenna and Johnny*

A smart, curious 10-year-old girl of Black and Latina heritage, Brenna lives with her mom, dad, and two younger brothers in St. Louis, MO. Brenna has a passion for food and dreams of being a chef one day. She loves the idea of feeding people and often shares her meals with her brothers or her friends at school.

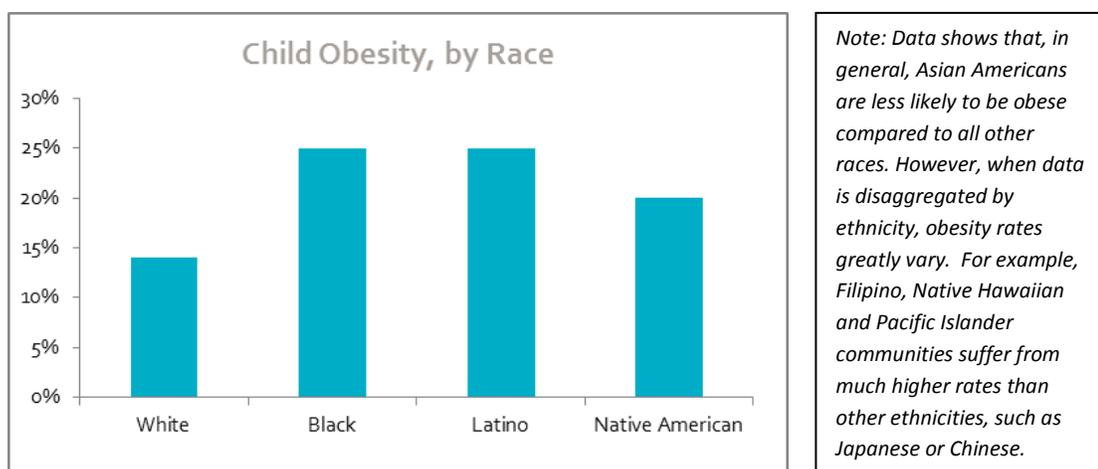
A bright and caring 12-year-old White boy, Johnny lives with his mom, dad, and older sister in rural upstate New York, about thirty minutes away from the closest town. Johnny enjoys exploring the fields

and playing with his family’s dog and feeding the pigs. He wants to be a veterinarian working with farm animals when he grows up.

Though Brenna and Johnny’s lives seem worlds apart, they have a lot more in common than we might think. Both suffer from environmental factors that hinder their wellbeing. Brenna lives near a coal burning power plant that pollutes the air she breathes, leading to her being diagnosed with asthma. Johnny has been exposed to pesticides that have seeped into the well water. Additionally, Brenna and Johnny sometimes go to bed hungry – shocking considering that Brenna lives in a major U.S. city and Johnny lives on a farm. Both their families lack the ability to access and afford enough healthy foods; often buying cheaper processed goods to make the budget stretch. Lack of healthy food is a major contributor to health-related issues for children, and Brenna and Johnny are no exception. Both have been diagnosed as overweight and at risk of obesity.

Sadly, Brenna and Johnny are just two among 16 million children that go to bed hungry and nearly 21 million children facing diet-related and health-related diseases. To make sense of it, we must understand how their lives are shaped by a complex set of past and current policies that affect how they access and afford food and how their families earn a living.

**Figure 3: Child Obesity, by Race**<sup>5</sup>



Source: Food Research and Action Center

This report will use the stories of Brenna and Johnny to apply a structural analysis to the food system. We will look at policies related to:

1. *Access and affordability:* What created the conditions that make healthy and affordable food unavailable in so many communities? Why are programs that help low-income communities afford food not enough?
2. *Production and distribution:* How has policy shaped agricultural land ownership, what farmers grow and how it gets to our table?
3. *Labor:* Why are food workers so poorly paid that many of them can’t afford to eat well?

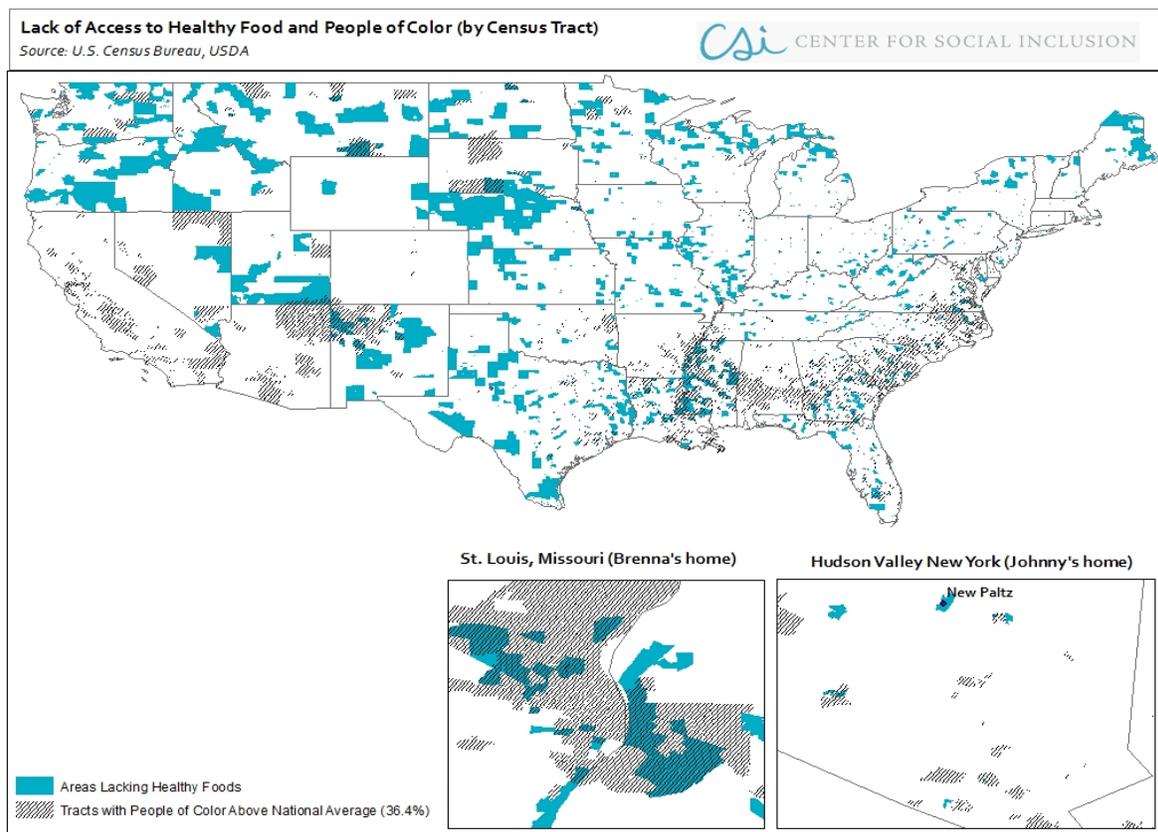
<sup>5</sup>Food Research and Action Center. "Why Low-Income and Food Insecure People are Vulnerable to Overweight and Obesity" <http://frac.org/initiatives/hunger-and-obesity/why-are-low-income-and-food-insecure-people-vulnerable-to-obesity/>

## PART III: ACCESS

### *Access to Good Food at Home*

Why do Brenna and Johnny go to bed hungry some nights? One reason is both families have trouble getting the healthy food they need because of where they live. They are among the 30 million, or 10% of Americans, who do not have easy access to a grocery store, but may be surrounded by an abundance of unhealthy and cheap, processed foods. Johnny is among the 8% of rural families that live 10 miles or more from a grocery store, a circumstance that especially affects Native American communities in the West. And Brenna is among the 92% of Black families that live in a census tract without a grocery store.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 4: Lack of Access to Healthy Foods and Race**



To really understand why these children lack access to good food we need to understand how policies shape where they live. Using our structural analysis, we know that a range of policies has an impact, but one of the most significant, which we will focus on here, is federal housing policy. Going back to the 1930s, we can see how federal policy has decimated inner-city neighborhoods, promoted suburbanization, and left families like Brenna's and Johnny's without the healthy food they need.

<sup>6</sup>Bell, Judith, et al. 2013. *Access to Healthy Food and why it Matters*. PolicyLink and the Food Trust. [http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media\\_items/access-to-healthy-food.original.pdf](http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/access-to-healthy-food.original.pdf)

In the aftermath of the Great Depression, the federal government created the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) to promote home ownership, a worthy goal that helped launch many Americans into the middle class, but people of color were largely left out. Between 1930 and 1950, three out of five homes purchased in the U.S. were financed by the FHA, yet only 2% of FHA loans were made to non-white buyers.<sup>7</sup> FHA policies favored suburbs over cities and White neighborhoods over diverse ones.

For example, in Brenna's hometown of St. Louis, the FHA gave economically stable, racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods low credit ratings, viewing them as inherently risky, while favoring more homogenous communities instead.<sup>8</sup> Thus, White people, who tended to have more access to credit, sold their properties, moving to communities that had more promising property values and better loan backing.

Soon, entire communities fled the cities, creating a booming suburban movement. FHA housing manuals explicitly advised homeowners and brokers buying and marketing suburbs to avoid letting people of color and rural people into the newly constructed neighborhoods, labeling "piggens and undesirable races as equally objectionable".<sup>9</sup> And with shifts of massive segments of society to suburbs, jobs and industries soon followed.<sup>10</sup>

We all may be familiar with the devastating story of segregation among cities and suburbs. But there are four critical ways this single policy has impacted Brenna and Johnny's story of food:

- Policies favoring the funding of roads and highways to get to these newly created suburbs drove disinvestment in public transit that formerly connected people to jobs and grocery stores;
- Relocation of homeowners resulted in a loss of an urban consumer base, ultimately driving out grocers and other retail operations and leading to a loss of community employment centers and less opportunities to access goods;
- Loss of local farmland due to the combination of sprawling suburban development and post-World War II job opportunities; and
- Loss of a strong property tax base leading to a decline in public school investment and quality school food programs.

Today, families like Brenna's and Johnny's suffer the effects. Brenna's neighborhood does not have reliable public transit and her family doesn't own a car, which makes travel to a grocery store or farmers market difficult and time consuming. They are not alone. As seen in figure 5, people of color have disproportionately low rates of car ownership.<sup>11</sup>

For its part, suburbanization hastened the loss of farmland. A quarter of farmland loss is due to residential and commercial urban sprawl (other factors include conversion to parks or families leaving the farms for jobs in the post-World War II market). Suburbanization impacted farmers like Johnny's family, who lived on the margins of urban America, as they were unable to compete over the increased value of land with meager crop prices. Thus, Johnny's family moved further from the city and further from a dedicated consumer base.

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<sup>7</sup> Seitles, Marc. 1996. "Perpetuation of Racial Residential Segregation." *Journal of Land Use and Environmental Law*

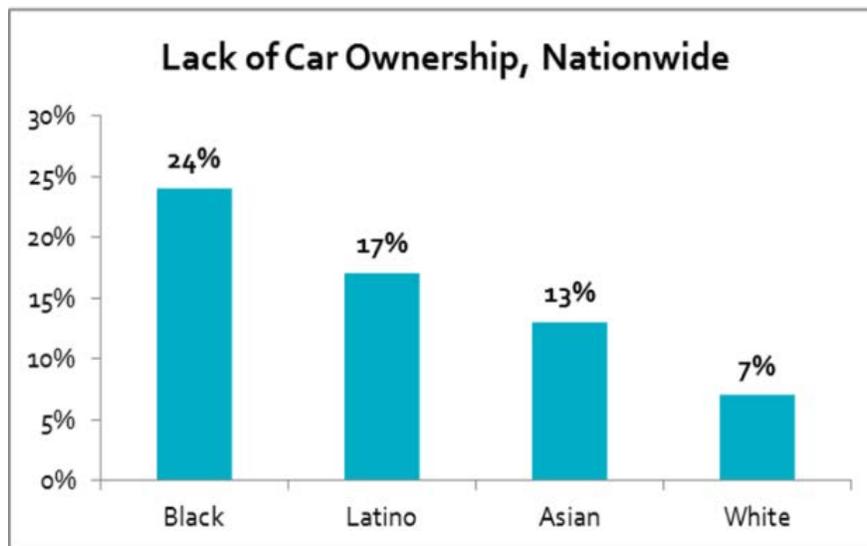
<sup>8</sup> Gordon, Colin. 2008. *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the American City*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>9</sup> Roediger, David. 2005. *Working Towards Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White* New York: Basic Books ,227, 229

<sup>10</sup> The Fair Housing Act sought to right these wrongs, but twenty years of housing discrimination decreased wealth creation.

<sup>11</sup> 2011 *American Community Service Survey*. United States Census Bureau.

Figure 5: Car Ownership, by Race



Source: 2011 American Community Service Survey

### Access to Good Food at School

Brenna and Johnny’s challenges to accessing healthy foods follow them to school. Both participate in the national free and reduced price lunch program, important for 31 million children of all races. Eligibility is based on family income and youth of color participate at substantially higher rates than Whites.<sup>12</sup>

Federal support for school nutrition is essential, but it doesn’t mean all school lunches are the same. Schools with limited budgets often can’t supplement the federal school lunch program’s average reimbursement rate, which is currently \$3.09 for each free lunch.<sup>13</sup> That’s not nearly enough to provide fresh, healthy or local foods. Secondly, this lack of funding makes it impossible for schools to implement strong procurement practices that prioritize sourcing of fresh, healthy, or local foods.

But reimbursement rates and limited funding are not the only problems. Nine of ten schools, including Brenna’s, do not have the necessary kitchen and processing facilities, training, and personnel to handle healthy and raw foods.<sup>14</sup> The reason so many schools lack the necessary infrastructure can be traced to federal policy.

In 1947, Congress eliminated funding of cafeteria equipment, which meant school districts could no longer seek federal dollars to improve their facilities. With the growing suburbanization of the 1950s and 1960s, property values in urban centers fell. Because most American schools rely on property taxes

<sup>12</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Minorities*  
[http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010015/indicator2\\_7.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010015/indicator2_7.asp)

<sup>14</sup> Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Pew Charitable Trust. 2013. *Serving Healthy School Meals*.  
[http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Kids\\_Safe\\_and\\_Healthful\\_Foods/KITS\\_Equipment\\_Report.pdf](http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Kids_Safe_and_Healthful_Foods/KITS_Equipment_Report.pdf)

for funding, school budgets in those areas shrank. The result was that cities with increasingly concentrated low-income communities of color lacked the resources to install adequate kitchens.

When Congress passed the first child nutrition bill in 1963, eligibility was contingent upon schools having proper kitchen facilities to receive agricultural and nutritional funding support for school lunches.<sup>15</sup> Given that Black schools more often lacked the necessary kitchen facilities to provide school lunches, Congress effectively prevented agricultural dollars from flowing into Black communities through food programs.<sup>16</sup> Poor White communities in areas like Appalachia and rural Mississippi were abandoned as well, given their inability to finance school kitchens.

Thus, the only options for lower-income schools became a “re-heat and eat program” where schools would microwave or heat frozen, processed foods, both out of convenience and to save money. Today, instead of getting fresh food for lunch, Brenna usually gets a reheated tray of processed food.

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<sup>15</sup> Research compilation by James Subhudi, MPA. “Lunch Bill Bias Clause Removal Hit” *The Baltimore African-American* (1893-1988); Jul 14, 1945

<sup>16</sup> Research compilation by James Subhudi, MPA. “U.S. ‘Fattens’ Jim Crow With Billions” *The Baltimore African-American* (1893-1988) Sep 23, 1961; pg. 9

## PART IV: PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

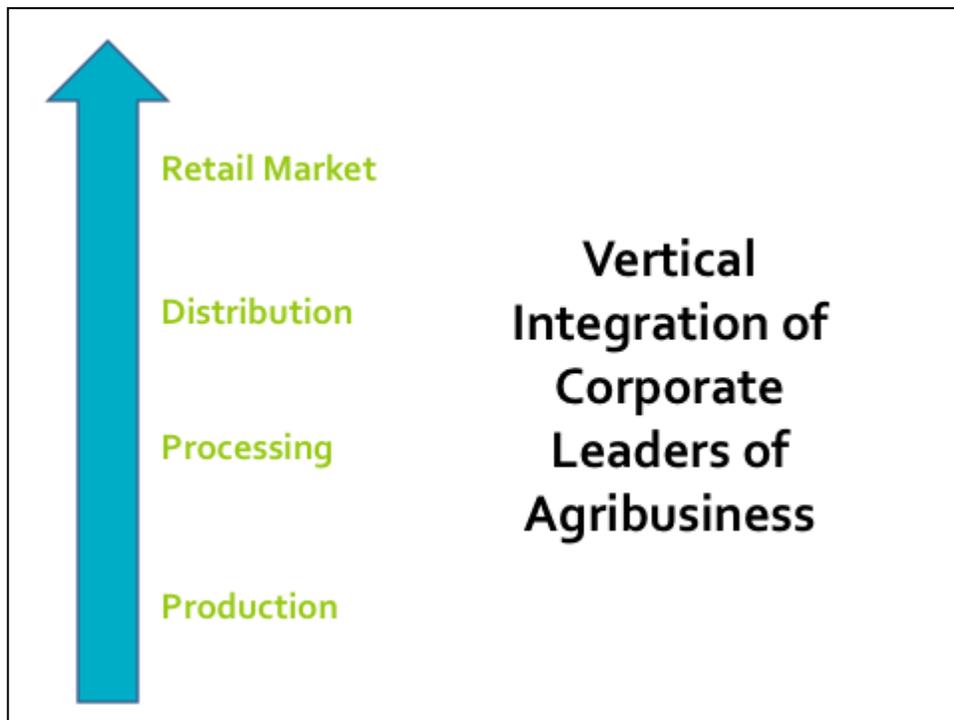
It is clear how housing policy and suburbanization impacted urban families like Brenna's. But what about rural families like Johnny's? Small farmers, like Johnny's family, have been forced by the great suburban boom to move farther away from the urban core. This leaves them far from grocery stores that sell the things they need but don't produce themselves. And it makes it harder for them to get their products to market.

Besides losing land to suburbanization and commercial interests, small farmers are being squeezed by big agri-businesses that buy up vast tracts of land and utilize a system of vertical integration to control the food industry, as illustrated in Figure 6.

Federal policy has a major role in deciding agriculture's winners and losers, and family farmers and farmers of color are systematically on the losing end. And it is important to note, as the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition points out, that farmers of color (particularly Latino and Hmong) have increased by 15% compared to a 5% decline in White farmers. With farmers of color growing more of our foods, it is even more critical that we address the structural challenges, past and present, that farmers of color face (*including issues like immigration reform, which this paper does not address in detail*).

In this section, we focus on how policy and structures within production and distribution produce inequity. We will address how inequity plays out in processing in Part V.

**Figure 6: Vertical Integration**



## Land Ownership

Farmers need land, and government policies going back to the early days of the nation have deeply influenced who owns it.

Native Americans have suffered systematic, massive land dispossession since the beginning of colonization, a process that was institutionalized by three horrendous policies. First, in 1823, the Supreme Court ruled that indigenous peoples could live on United States land but could not hold title since the United States' "right of discovery" trumped Native peoples' "right of occupancy."<sup>17</sup> By 1871, the federal government ended its practice of signing treaties with Native Americans. They adopted the *Indian Appropriation Act*, which no longer recognized Native Americans as independent nations, but as individuals – breaking up land often held in community. By 1887, the *General Allotment Act*, known as *the Dawes Act*, seized land and distributed it to individual Native Americans, promising citizenship so long as they accepted the government apportioned land. By 1932, Native Americans lost more than 100-million acres they held prior to the Dawes Act.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, Latino families lost their *ejidos*, or community-farms, as a result of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which annexed the Southwest United States and allowed American pioneers to lay claim to the land.

After years of slavery, Black Americans were able to own land through early post-Civil War policies throughout the South. Yet, the land accrual was temporary, as many Blacks faced land dispossession due to President Andrew Johnson's "states'-rights" based reconstruction policies, where Black farmers were stripped of land gained immediately after the Civil War and often forced to sign tenant contracts with White owners. This often resulted in unfair terms and agreements known as sharecropping. Others lost land due to imprisonment for dubious criminal claims, with many men forced into convict-leasing programs and families left struggling to maintain and keep any land they had.

However, the greatest amount of land loss for Black Americans is a result of the challenges of heirs' property.<sup>19</sup> "Heirs' property describes land that is held collectively by the surviving family members after the original landowner has died without a will or a probated, valid will. The land is distributed according to state 'laws of descent and distribution' with each heir having an equal share."<sup>20</sup> Over generations, as each heir passes, the number of heirs increase and land plots become smaller and smaller. Today, heirs' property holders often lack title or deed to the land and as a result lack eligibility for government assistance, such as state and federal housing land grants.<sup>21</sup>

Lastly, Black farmers, as well as all farmers of color, particularly women, tribal, and Latino ranchers, suffered from a long history of discrimination from USDA institutional practices and credit programs. These programs gave decision-making power to county-controlled bodies often comprised of all White landowners who intentionally discriminated against Black farmers, particularly in the South. As a result, Black families were either denied loans, given loans with very high interest rates or misled by false information about the application process. As a result of several lawsuits and claims, such as

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<sup>17</sup> See: *Johnson v McIntosh* <http://www.casebriefs.com/blog/law/property/property-law-keyed-to-cribbs/role-of-property-in-society/johnson-v-mcintosh/>

<sup>18</sup> National Congress of American Indians. 2013. *Ending the Legacy of Racism in Sports and the Era of Harmful Indian Mascots*

<sup>19</sup> For a more detailed assessment of heirs property, please see CSI Report *Regaining Ground*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Following Hurricane Katrina, for example, 25,000 families (of 185,000 eligible for assistance) were initially unable to access the federal government's rebuilding program due to heirs' property

*Pigford v Glickman* and the *Hispanic and Women Ranchers and Farmers Claims Process*, the USDA has begun to right the wrongs of the past; farmers of color are still reeling from the conditions created by years of discrimination.

The trend of land loss continues today – devastating families of all races. Between 1982 and 2012, over 72 million acres (7.3% of all agricultural land) was lost to commercialization, prospecting, and “development”. And while farmers of color have increased slightly over the last five years, during this entire time period, Black farmers lost more than 600,000 acres, about 20% of their land compared to 7.3% lost by farmers of other races.<sup>22</sup>

### *Resource Control and Ownership*

Corporate land ownership has challenged the economic viability and sustainability of small family farmers and farmers of color, especially as more farmers become contract-farmers and tenants on their land, no longer able to compete against agribusiness. But it is not the only challenge for our farmers. Farmers are also facing disruptive climate changes, from increased droughts to depleted soil composition. Typically, farmers know how to innovate around these challenges, yet they are losing their ability to determine how they will grow food in the future. Take seed ownership, for example. Today, ten major companies control over 73% of the seeds on the market - many of which are genetically modified or engineered - with the top six controlling nearly 60%.<sup>23</sup> The lack of diversity in the seed market not only limits farmers’ abilities to choose the types of seed, but also costs more money. For example, corn and soybean seed prices have risen over 135% and 108%, respectively, since 2001.<sup>24</sup> As farmers of color are more likely operating on smaller acreage and limited margins, the costs of seeds can be the difference between profitable harvests or indebted ones.

Historically, farmers of all races have chosen to save seeds for planting the next year’s harvest, rather than purchasing new breeds each year. Yet, farmers who purchase seeds on the market that are patently owned by major companies often face lawsuits for reusing seeds. The Center for Food Safety found that Monsanto pocketed over \$23 million dollars after suing over 410 farmers for patent infringement.<sup>25</sup> Given market dominance by major seed companies, farmers are not only forced to spend more money on seed purchases each year, but they also lose indigenous and traditional practices of sustainability.

### *Crop Subsidies and Production*

The precariousness of Johnny’s family’s farm and the flooding of Brenna’s community with processed and unhealthy foods are no accident. They are created by the combination of corporate control of land, a growing monopoly over resources, and by federal policies that favor large farmers and reward the production of unhealthy food. They are not designed with the small grower in mind, disproportionately affecting farmers of color who are primarily fruit and vegetable producers on small acreage.

For years, US agricultural policy has subsidized growers of commodity crops: corn, wheat, soy, sugar, cotton, and tobacco. The biggest commodity crops - corn, soy, and sugar - are the main ingredients in

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<sup>22</sup>Data compared land ownership, including part and full time owners in 2012. Slight uptick in Black owners in 2012, may be a result in more participation in Ag Census. Data found from the United States Department of Agriculture 2012 *Agricultural Census*

<sup>23</sup>Shands, Hope. *The Big Six: Profile of Corporate Power in Seeds, Agrochemical, and Biotech*.  
[http://www.seedsavers.org/site/pdf/HeritageFarmCompanion\\_BigSix.pdf](http://www.seedsavers.org/site/pdf/HeritageFarmCompanion_BigSix.pdf)

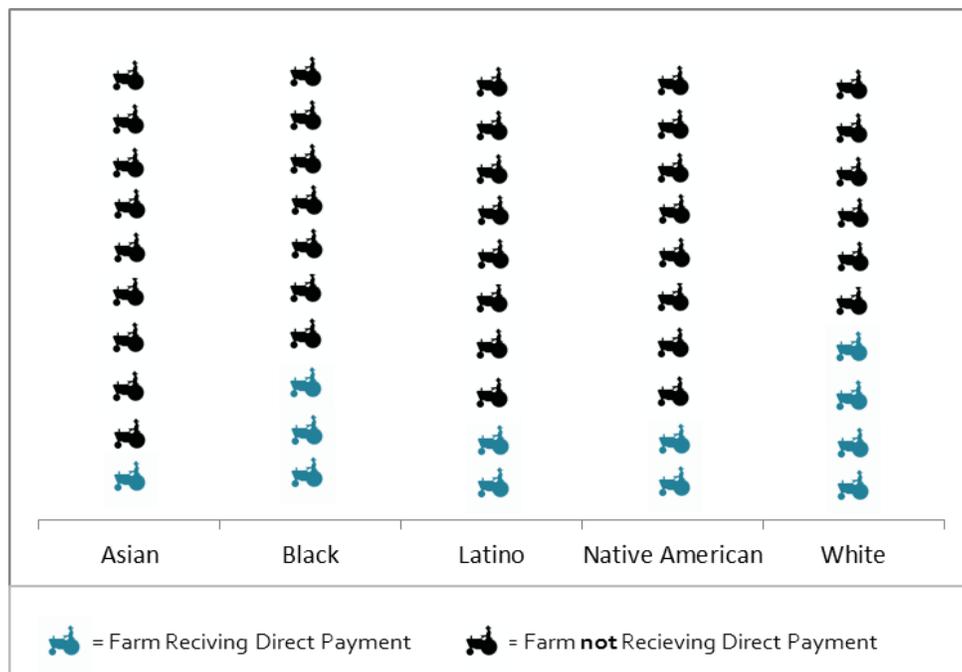
<sup>24</sup>Neuman, William. March 11, 2010. “Rapid Rise in Seed Prices Draws US Scrutiny” *The New York Times*.  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/12/business/12seed.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/12/business/12seed.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&)

<sup>25</sup>Center for Food Safety. 2013. *Seed Giants vs US Farmers*. [http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/files/seed-giants\\_final\\_04424.pdf](http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/files/seed-giants_final_04424.pdf)

the highly processed, unhealthy, and cheap foods that families like Brenna and Johnny purchase to stretch the budget. Yet, one cannot place the blame on family farmers who opt to grow commodity crops; it's a guaranteed payment and for many the only way to support their families. In fact, over the last five years, farmers received over \$5 billion dollars annually through direct payments of commodity crops, regardless of their yields. While the 2014 Farm Bill eliminated direct payments, commodity crops are still subsidized through a new insurance program.

Farmers like Johnny's dad, who do not contract with big agricultural corporations nor grow commodity crops, specialize in crops such as fruits and vegetables that are ineligible for government subsidies or insurance (except for small specialty crop grants), leaving them one disaster away from bankruptcy. This cuts across all races, but more farmers of color lack such support, as seen in Figure 7.

**Figure 7: Farms Receiving Commodity Direct Payments, by Race<sup>26</sup>**



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture's 2012 Agricultural Census

Farmers of color are more likely to grow healthy foods, particularly Asian, Hawaiian, and Latino farmers, yet farmers of color are also the smallest in number, only 4% of all farmers in the nation. Since these farmers face land foreclosure at higher rates and are not guaranteed subsidies or contracts as a commodity grower, these farmers require a dedicated consumer base to support their livelihood.

### Distribution

Reaching this dedicated consumer base requires a reliable and strong distribution channel. While access to the markets is increasingly difficult for consumers, distribution is just as much of a challenge for farmers. When big box stores like Wal-Mart expand, smaller businesses that would fill community needs are often pushed out of business, and smaller, locally owned distribution channels to the market place are lost. Big box stores are less likely to enact procurement policies that create a preference for

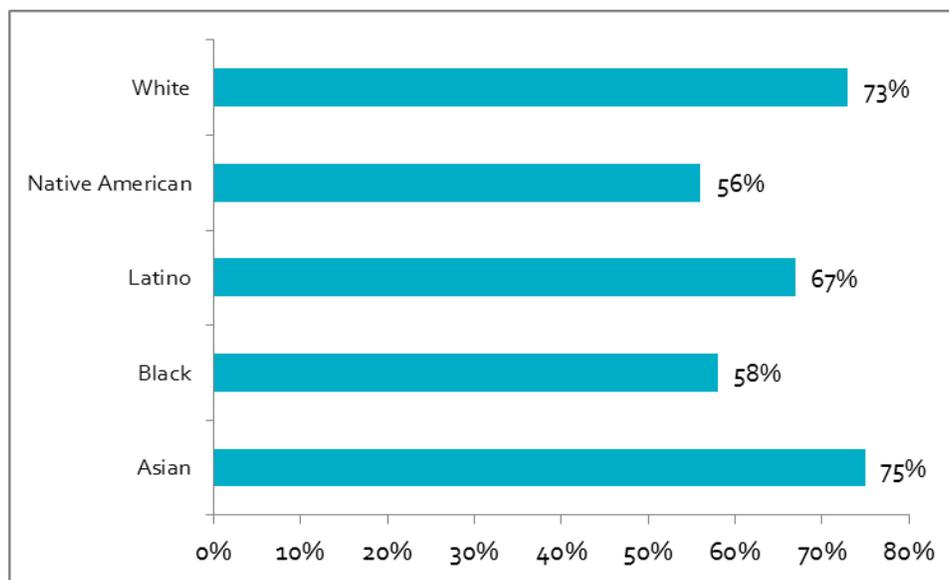
<sup>26</sup> Data calculated using the United States Department of Agriculture 2012 Agricultural Census

location, size, or type of farm and instead rely on an intricate 24-hour, large-scale system of trucking and refrigeration, working with farmers who can handle greater demand – most often large-scale, corporate farms.

This set-up works well with a farming industry that utilizes a vertical integration system. Just as big agribusiness owns much of the land and production, they often control how produced food is distributed. For example, ConAgra boasts that they are in 99% of homes and they tie this success to the fact that they can connect their farms to their processors and to their distribution centers. On the surface, this makes sense. It allows industry to control the quality of their goods, maintain efficiency, and reach a broad consumer market. The problem is that it squeezes out independent family farmers from the market. With such a highly efficient and streamlined system, agribusiness has the ability to set the market price, negotiate long-standing contracts, and ramp up delivery of products with relative ease.

With independent farmers shut out of such a mechanized system, they often need technology such as Broadband to market and sell their goods. Yet, Black, Latino and Native American farmers and farmers in rural areas are more likely to lack internet access, as shown in Figure 8. (Again, data on Asian farmers has not been disaggregated by ethnicity, which tends to skew the results)

**Figure 8: Farms with Access to the Internet, by Race<sup>27</sup>**



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture's 2012 Agricultural Census

Today, thanks to land loss, crop subsidies, and a vertically integrated system, agribusiness controls over 83% of all foods in the marketplace, dictating what is available in the market and making it increasingly difficult for small family farmers to compete.<sup>28</sup> Dependent on the markets that large corporations create, family farmers do not have many options for local and sub-regional markets to sell their produce. Soon, the choice for many farmers will become contracting with big agribusiness or finding a niche market in the local-regional food system. And the only way to help find this niche is to bridge

<sup>27</sup> Data calculated using the United States Department of Agriculture 2012 Agricultural Census

<sup>28</sup> United States Department of Agriculture 2011 Resource Management Survey

urban and rural communities together by creating a base of urban consumers who can afford to pay decent prices to support the livelihoods of rural farmers. For this to be a reality, we have to examine wages and labor standards.

## PART V: LABOR AND AFFORDABILITY

If we could wave a magic wand and fix the problems of access, production, and distribution of healthy food, we would get a long way! But even so, Brenna and Johnny still might not get the healthy food they need because their parents do not earn enough to put it on the table.

Better wages allow people to earn the money needed to pay for healthy food and nutrient-rich diets, the most efficient form of preventative healthcare, while supporting the rural farming economy.

While the question of low wages cuts across many industries, the Food Chain Workers Alliance reports that five of the eight lowest paying jobs are food system jobs<sup>29</sup>. These jobs cut across the entire food system from working in the fields, processing foods at a meat plant, or in retail. And these workers face a variety of unfair working conditions often exposing them to pesticides, abuse, harassment, discrimination, and wage theft. Take, for example, poultry processing plants where the majority of workers are Black, Latino, and Asian Pacific Islander who face a higher rate of worker injury rates compared to the industry average.<sup>30</sup>

While it is critical to address working conditions, this section focuses on two major policies that have limited economic opportunity for agricultural and food service workers: social security and minimum wage/piece-rate policies.

### *Social Security and Labor*

In 1935, in the wake of the Great Depression, Congress passed the Social Security Act to protect Americans by providing old age, survivors, and disability insurance. Though the law did not explicitly deny coverage to people of color, it excluded domestic and agricultural workers, which effectively meant 60% of the Black labor force was left out.<sup>31</sup> Once self-employed sharecroppers were added to the exempt list, nearly 75% of Black workers were not covered.<sup>32</sup>

Brenna's family felt the pain. Her great-grandfather was a sharecropper, and her great-grandmother a domestic worker so neither qualified for Social Security benefits. Johnny's family suffered, too. His great grandmother was an Irish immigrant domestic worker who prepared meals in New York City. She also failed to accrue any Social Security for the bulk of her working time and struggled to support herself in old age.

Only in 1950 were domestic workers added and in 1954 agricultural workers. This prevented the accumulation of nearly a generation of familial wealth. Social Security allowed for people to have a retirement income and live without the need to rely on others, yet Brenna and Johnny's grandparents did not have retirement income. Therefore, they relied on Brenna and Johnny's parents for support, limiting the families' ability to save any of their own income, if at all. This inability to save, combined

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<sup>29</sup> Food Chain Workers Alliance <http://www.uusc.org/sites/default/files/uusc-fieldtofork-fcwa-infocard.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Andrews, James. March 6, 2014. "Debate Grows Over Poultry Worker Safety under Proposed HIMP Regulations" *Food Safety News*. [http://www.foodsafetynews.com/2014/03/debate-grows-over-poultry-worker-safety-under-proposed-regulations/#\\_U5myxflVzY](http://www.foodsafetynews.com/2014/03/debate-grows-over-poultry-worker-safety-under-proposed-regulations/#_U5myxflVzY)

<sup>31</sup> Social Security Administration. "The Decision to Exclude Agricultural and Domestic Workers from the 1935 Social Security Act" <http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v70n4/v70n4p49.html>

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

with a lack of quality assets such as low housing values and no other retirement income, led to inadequate wealth accumulation to pass on to the next generation.

### *Minimum Wage/Piece Rate Wage and Labor*

Not only were farmworkers and food preparers, such as some domestic workers, left out of such a crucial wealth-building opportunity, these same workers now face devastatingly low wages or lack of consistent work. For example, Johnny's dad hires seasonal workers, who are often Latino, to help during planting and harvest. Though Johnny's dad may pay \$10/hour, that wage is not enough to earn a living, not to mention the lack of consistent labor options which forces these workers to patch together different low-wage jobs to survive. These workers are not alone. Johnny's father himself earns a meager living as a farmer (though, to his benefit, he is a landowner, an asset most farmworkers do not enjoy). His mom earns the tipped minimum wage of \$2.13/ hour at the town diner 20 miles away from their home. Brenna's mom and dad both earn the federal minimum wage as employees at a hotel restaurant and McDonalds, respectively.

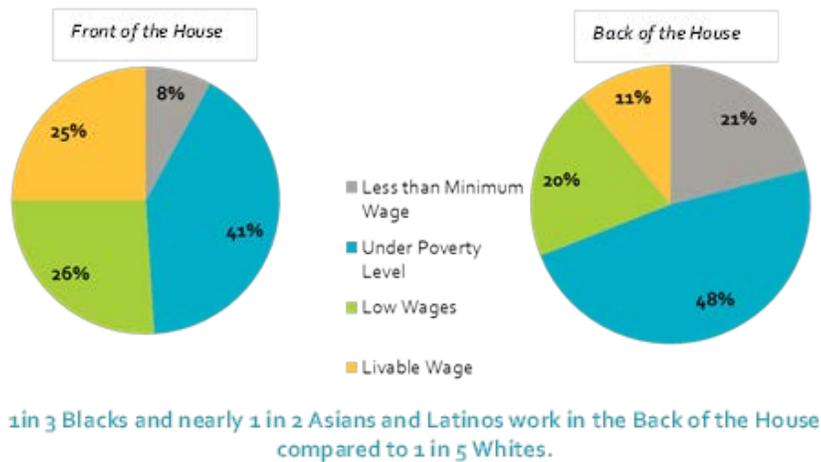
One in six people work in the food industry, which is notorious for low-wage jobs. In fact, 13% of Whites, 21% of Blacks, 24% of Latinos, and 38% of Asians working along the food chain earn sub-minimum wages, as shown in Figure 9.

These low wages also limit the ability of workers to pay for healthier produce sold by small farmers who rely on sales for their survival. And it's a real problem. Stronger minimum wage laws and better enforcement would change opportunity in the fastest growing industry in the US. Today, a restaurant industry worker earning the federal minimum wage at a fast food chain grosses just over \$12,500 a year. That is Brenna's dad's reality.

And a tipped worker earning the tipped minimum wage of \$2.13/hour would only gross over \$3,750 *before tips!* That is Johnny's mom's reality.

For both families, that is barely enough to survive. Nationally, these struggles are the reality for people across the country – urban and rural. But research by the Restaurant Opportunities Center, ROC-United, found people of color are most often impacted, as seen in the figure below, where nearly 70% of "Back of the House" workers (those working as barbacks, dishwashers, line chefs, etc.) earn below minimum wage.

Figure 9: Wages and Restaurant Workers<sup>33</sup>



Source: Restaurant Opportunities Center

What about farmworkers or fishermen who don't own their own lands for farming or boats for fishing? There are millions of farmworkers toiling in fields, from picking grapes off the vine in California to raising chickens in Arkansas to pulling shrimp out of the Gulf of Mexico. Often backbreaking and brutal work, Latino and Asian immigrants agree to low-wage jobs and poor working conditions, seeking a better life for their families. While Johnny's family pays farm laborers above the minimum wage, common for documented laborers, not all farm laborers face fair working conditions. And undocumented workers, largely in the shadows, earn less than minimum wage and are often passed over during natural disasters that impact their productivity. Two examples of this can be found in Florida Citrus laborers and Gulf Coast shrimpers:

- Farmworkers earning piece-rate, which is based on how much they can pick or fill a bucket, often end up earning less than the minimum wage. For example, Florida farmworkers earn 85 cents per 90 pound box of oranges. At eight boxes an hour, they produce 5,760 oranges or roughly \$6.80 an hour. While policy mandates that large-scale owners make up the difference, nearly one in three farmworkers work for a small farm or through a contractor, both of which are exempt from minimum wage laws.<sup>34</sup>
- Many Vietnamese immigrants lost their livelihoods after the 2010 BP oil spill. Despite having one-third of all shrimping licenses in the Gulf Coast, only 7% of Vietnamese fishermen were approached by BP for repayment.<sup>35</sup>

### Affording Good Food

Given the challenges of labor and low wages, it is not surprising that millions of Americans turn to food banks and other supports to buy food. As food prices continue to rise by 2–3% per year, wages have remained stagnant for the *past decade*.<sup>36</sup> Given their parents' extremely low wages and the increasing

<sup>33</sup> The Food Chain Workers Alliance. *The Hands that Feed Us Report*. <http://foodchainworkers.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Hands-That-Feed-Us-Report.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> National Farmworker Ministry. "Low Wages." <http://nfwm.org/education-center/farm-worker-issues/low-wages/>

<sup>35</sup> Sasser, Bill. 2010. "Vietnamese, Cambodian Fisherman Among Hardest Hit by BP Oil Spill" *Christian Science Monitor*. <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2010/0508/Vietnamese-Cambodian-fishermen-among-hardest-hit-by-BP-oil-spill>

<sup>36</sup> CSI Analysis of US Census Data from 2000 – 2010 and Consumer Price Index 2010 - 2013

price of food, both Brenna and Johnny's families qualify for the food assistance program, known as the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), to help make ends meet. And SNAP is not enough; as we mentioned earlier, both Brenna and Johnny go to bed hungry. Many times, both families rely on emergency food, provided generously through people's donations to a local food pantry, to get by.

SNAP only supports very low-income earners and the program has seen two rounds of cutbacks in 2013 and 2014. Nationally, 47 million people benefit from SNAP, with White households being the largest number of beneficiaries, but people of color being more likely to need food assistance.<sup>37</sup> This should come as no surprise. People of color are more likely to hold low-wage jobs and face higher unemployment rates. After the devastating Great Recession of 2009, there are still approximately three unemployed people for each available job,<sup>38</sup> with one in twenty Whites unemployed compared to one in eight Blacks and one in ten Latinos.

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<sup>37</sup> CSI Analysis of US Census Data. 2012 ACS 5 Year Estimates

<sup>38</sup> **Economic Policy Institute.** "Ratio of Job Seekers to Job Openings Slips Below 3-to-1 for First Time in Nearly Five Years, but Is Still as High as in Worst Month of Early 2000s Downturn"  
<http://www.epi.org/press/ratio-job-seekers-job-openings-slips-3-1/>

## PART VI: SOLUTIONS TO A MORE RACIALLY EQUITABLE FOOD SYSTEM

We are facing quite a challenge. But we are certainly equipped to solve it. Communities across the country have given us glimpses of what is possible. We need policies and strategies to support this innovation, from long-term solutions and movement building to immediate-term policy solutions and changes.

➤ **We must build alliances beyond the food system with partners and advocates across a variety of issue areas to make impact.**

The structural race lens provides us with a way to look at how policies and institutions interact to create opportunities or barriers for communities, particularly communities of color. It also helps us identify how our problems intersect with others - like how Brenna's lack of access to food is tied to housing policy that shapes where she lives. The challenges we face are large, but they are not challenges in isolation. And when we work across issue areas, we can achieve a nation that creates opportunities for healthy children and healthy families.

Therefore, we need to identify how the challenges to achieving healthy and sustainable communities in the food system, such as lack of access to land and resources or the rising inequity in our economy, are linked across issue areas from climate change to immigration reform. For example, advocates seeking to support Brenna's access to healthy food policy should be aligned and engaged with environmental advocates seeking policies and regulations to improve the quality of the polluted air that Brenna must breathe. Advocates should invest in keeping fruits and vegetable growers like Johnny's dad in operation, but they must also engage immigration reform advocates to ensure that workers are brought out of the shadows, treated fairly, and paid living wages. This would lead to better food production, worker retention, and even an increased consumer base who can afford healthy foods.

➤ **We must build urban-rural strategies to transform the food system.**

Brenna and Johnny live in different areas, one rural and one urban, but face similar challenges. We need a unified urban and rural strategy and narrative to advance equity and bring about a more just society and economy. We continue to face barriers in building this and suffer while remaining in opposition. A significant reason for this is race. Race historically was used as a wedge to divide rural White farmers and Black farmers in the days of the populist movement. And race continues to be used as a wedge that results in low-income, White rural constituencies voting against their own best interest because of a fear that urban communities of color will be the sole beneficiaries of programs like SNAP.

Simultaneously, urban communities often dismiss farm programs as being for rural communities only. Yet, these struggles are rooted in something deeper than racial bias. They are compounded by years of institutional and governmental policies that drive opportunities, perceptions, and outcomes. While this will take a much deeper effort, one short-term way to begin repairing the urban-rural relationship is through procurement policies.

Purchasing power is one way to promote urban and rural connections. Purchasing power also keeps local production within an urban or rural community and may positively impact how workers are treated. We can use procurement to change how the food system functions by leveraging urban institutions such as universities or hospitals to commit to buying foods grown from regional farms in rural communities. And we can do this in a more equitable and sustainable way. For example, procurement policies, with the intention of building local and regional food hubs that connect urban and rural communities together, should prioritize:

- **Geographic preference** to support local farmers in the area rather than a large-scale farmer;
- **Fair labor practices** from the farm to the processing plant. This includes living wages, fair working conditions, and prioritized participatory decision-making practices;
- **Community of color owned-businesses** to support farmers of color or value-added producers that are people of color, who are often shut out or overlooked when it comes to contracting opportunities;
- **Food businesses that support local leadership** to ensure there is a pipeline of community leaders being supported in the work, building jobs and a strong economy;
- **Better environmental practices** such as the elimination of pesticide use to protect workers, consumers, and the planet.

➤ **Support indigenous, community leadership through labor rights and re-balancing ownership of the food system.**

Johnny and Brenna's parents do not make enough to keep their families fed. No parent should have to worry about being able to feed their child, yet our system forces parents to worry every day. Therefore, we need to rethink our food-labor relationship.

- **Increase wages.** We need better wage policies not only for farmers and restaurant workers, but all low-income workers. We should not only advocate for an increase in wages, but also a regionalized living wage system that takes into account the actual costs of living in various parts of the country. Food and housing costs in New York City are different than in Omaha, Nebraska or Houston, Texas. We should be able to measure cost of living, poverty levels, and the price of food to set a minimum *living* wage so that no matter what job one has, one is able to feed themselves and their family. For farmworkers, increasing pay would have a significant impact with little cost to consumers. According to the USDA, to meet three servings of fruits and vegetables, households could spend just \$1 a day.<sup>39</sup> Yet, if farm wages increased by 40%, the cost to the average household would be only about \$15 a year (or an extra 24 cents a day).<sup>40</sup>
- **Rebalance ownership of food system.** With 83% of the food system owned by major corporations, we have an imbalance that makes it difficult for small innovators to participate and for food workers to organize and demand better wages or conditions. Research shows that when big box stores enter a market they push out small local businesses that sustain and generate wealth within a community.<sup>41</sup> Three local jobs are destroyed for every two jobs created by a big box store.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, we need to support local, state, and federal policies that provide financing, technical assistance, and planning grants to support worker cooperatives and community-based processing, distribution, and retail operations.
- **Supporting community-owned land opportunities.** The loss of land for rural farmers and urban residents threaten the viability of a community's economic wellbeing and development. We need policies that support community ownership of the land, such as land banks or community land trusts. Land banks have the potential to provide public accountability for how municipal-owned land is utilized and can be a mechanism for economic development through food innovation. Another possibility is the creation of community land trusts to support

<sup>39</sup> "USDA Economic Research Service. 2011. *How Much do Fruits and Vegetables Cost?*" <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/133287/eib71.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Martin, Phillip. *New York Times Op-ed* "Calculating the Costs and Benefits" <http://nyti.ms/3klnamk>

<sup>41</sup> Neumark, David et. al. "The Effects of Wal-Mart on Local Labor Markets." Accessed: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w11782>

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

property owners, such as heirs' property owners, in keeping their land for conservation, agricultural, or other economic interests. Community land trusts, such as the Black Family Land Trust, offer an excellent model for families looking to preserve their land and utilize it as an asset for economic development and equity.

➤ **We must invest in immediate-term, place-based opportunities.**

Given the impact that place has on the opportunities of millions of people, like Brenna and Johnny, we must invest in place-based solutions that support community innovation and a community's ability to create healthy food systems. Some programs are already in place with the most recent Farm Bill and should be continuously supported and expanded, such as the Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) and Community Food Securing Grant Program. But we also need to invest in the decision-making power and infrastructure of communities to ensure that everyday people can determine how and where they get their healthy food and have easy access to the vital programs that make good food more affordable and healthy. For example:

- **Create policies to support community garden efforts by allowing residents to use public, or vacant and abandoned land for the production of local food.** While urban agriculture will not solve the problems of Brenna's community, it can certainly be a start while also creating opportunity for economic development and healthy foods. We need strong and transparent land ordinances that not only allow residents to use land for agriculture, but also provide the necessary legal supports that allow communities to use and work the land, even when threatened by commercial interest. A good example of this work can be found through the leadership of the Detroit Food Policy Council led by folks at the Detroit Black Food Security Network and Keep Growing Detroit. The Detroit Food Policy Council proposed and pushed through local policy changes that allow residents to grow on the land and generate produce as an economic means of survival, while giving the legal framework to back up this work.
- **Create policies that provide technical support and public financing to seed community or cooperatively owned and operated food enterprises.** Communities have solutions to the problems, yet face challenges in implementation from the lack of access to land and resources to the lack of technical assistance. For example, Cooperative Energy, Recycling & Organics (CERO) in Boston, a multi-racial and immigrant led worker-owned cooperative, seeks to address the problems of unemployment and environmental incineration through a recycling and composting business. Yet, the lack of policies supporting cooperatives and limited public funding makes projects like CERO difficult to start up. Local governments should provide funding and resources to support grassroots leaders who are seeking to start worker-owned cooperatives or community-owned food enterprises that will spur economic development, create jobs, build wealth, and provide healthy alternatives to our current system.
- **Invest in local innovation and good transit systems to connect people to SNAP Incentive Programs.** The Food Insecurity and Nutrition Incentive program expands the purchasing power of SNAP dollars for the purchase of local and healthy foods. This program could turn \$1 of SNAP benefits into \$1.50 or \$2.00 if used to buy fruits and vegetables. The Fair Food Network has pioneered the double-up SNAP bucks program in Detroit, while New York City sponsors a healthy bucks program. These programs have been crucial in making healthy food more affordable for low-income residents, while ensuring that local farmers receive a fair price for their produce. Yet, to be successful, these programs must be accessible. Not everyone can

access the farmers market or grocery store. We must invest in good public transit that makes these areas more readily accessible while also bringing healthy foods into communities.

- **Use the Affordable Care Act's Community Benefit Requirement to invest in local and healthy foods.** The ACA's Community Benefit Requirement creates two opportunities to advance a more racially equitable and sustainable food system. First, the requirement necessitates that a nonprofit hospital must perform a Community Health Needs Assessment every three years. For example, in Oakland, the HOPE Collaborative is advocating that these health needs assessments include a mapping of healthy food access in communities to identify where investments should be made. Second, to maintain nonprofit status, hospitals must donate 5% to community health projects, based on the results of the health needs assessment and through charity care to those without insurance. With more people receiving coverage, estimates suggest that the Affordable Care Act will save over \$13 billion in charity care. Food advocates can demand that this money be used to support healthy communities through the investment of local, healthy food businesses and programs within the area.
- **Invest in new technologies that can diversify the local economy and connect consumers and producers, while also building community.** We should invest in building out the "last mile" of Broadband for urban and rural communities to ensure economic development occurs for everyone, from farmers reaching the marketplace to the innovators of new food businesses. Furthermore, USDA and DOE should prioritize grants and loans to support the capacity of renewable energy development on farms and in urban communities to help diversify the economy and decrease the need for fossil fuel energy that is leading to poorer environmental conditions.

➤ **We must invest in our schools' ability to provide healthy foods.**

As we learned in Brenna's story, she not only struggled to access good food at home, but also at school. We need to ensure that our schools – often the main source of breakfast and lunch for our children – are able to provide healthy foods. Two ways to do this are to:

- **Invest more in school food reimbursements.** Three dollars is not enough to pay for a healthy meal. If we want our children to eat healthy foods, we must be willing to pay farmers a fair price so they can stay in business and provide good wages and safe working conditions. We should be investing more money into our school programs so these vital institutions can pay for the healthy foods that our children deserve.
- **Invest in kitchen infrastructure.** Even if every school could get all the healthy and fresh food it needs, we learned in Brenna's story that most schools are not equipped to prepare healthy, balanced meals. We must invest in our school's kitchen infrastructure and personnel so they can better process, prepare and cook the food they feed our children.

➤ **We must support the production of healthy food over processed foods.**

One way to make it easier for Johnny and Brenna to afford food is to stop subsidizing cheap, processed foods, more accurately representing their real costs, thus tipping the balance towards healthier foods such as fruits and vegetables. While the current Farm Bill still favors and prioritizes commodity crops through the insurance program, there are programs that help support fruits and vegetable growers such as the Special Crop Block Grants, which support farming populations more likely to grow healthy

foods such as beginning farmers and farmers of color. We must continue to defend these programs while advocating for ending unnecessary subsidies for unhealthy foods.

## PART VII: CONCLUSION

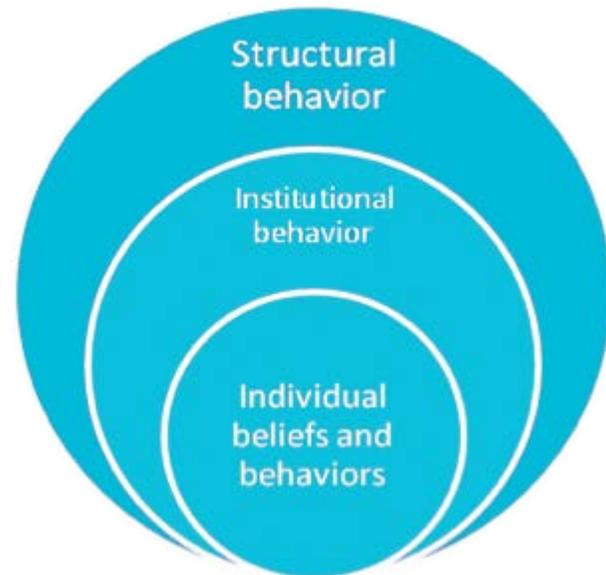
We all want Brenna's and Johnny's futures to be bright, full of health, opportunity, and wellbeing. And we all know that food is a critical determinant for the future of all of our kids. But right now too many children go to bed hungry or can only afford unhealthy, processed foods because the production and distribution of healthy and local foods are limited.

Yet this report shows that these problems of hunger and a lack of healthy foods are not insurmountable. In fact, we can trace the roots of these challenges to the policies and institutions that create opportunities for some, and barriers for many. With this knowledge, we can better identify the solutions that we need to build a healthier community and stronger food system. We can look to the glowing models of success and learn about which policies are needed to help scale out the impact.

Together, we can invest in public transit, school kitchens, and SNAP programs to support access to healthy foods; we can address land policies to ensure that communities have an opportunity to be owners of the agricultural system in both urban and rural areas; we can change federal farm policies to support the growth of healthy foods and connect small farmers to the marketplace; and together we can fight for living wages that provide real opportunity for all of us to not only afford foods, but also provide for our families.

## APPENDIX I: HOW TO IDENTIFY STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS

When asked to identify problems, we usually first see the obstacles directly in front of us – often someone’s behavior or belief systems (e.g., a discriminatory boss, bad teachers). Sometimes we see a particular institution or policy that stands in our way. These obstacles are real, but to develop racial equity strategies we need to go further. The structural race lens asks us to look at systems and structures – the range of institutions, policies and actors that are part of the problems and the solutions. This helps us find strategic entry points to create transformation that is racially equitable.



The Center for Social Inclusion has developed a series of questions to help find strategic entry points or to review strategies already underway.

### ASKING STRUCTURAL QUESTIONS TO IDENTIFY STRUCTURAL ENTRY POINTS

Address these questions in the following general order (*with food system examples*):

- What problem are we trying to solve? (*e.g., Lack of access to healthy foods, more funding for farmers of color, fair wages for food system workers.*)
- Who is most marginalized by the problem and where are they, if geography is relevant? Note: Pay attention to race, gender and class. (*e.g., Urban communities of color are more likely to lack access to healthy foods.*)
- Who is doing well despite the problem, if anyone, and where are they? Note: Pay attention to race, gender and class. (*e.g., Wealthy White suburban communities can pay for farmers markets and have abundant grocery stores offering healthy foods.*)
- Name at least three (and no more than six) institutions impacting the problem we are trying to solve. Note: These institutions may be impacting the problem by doing something wrong, doing something right, doing nothing or some combination of all three. (*e.g., Large companies like Monsanto, public schools, USDA, restaurant industry*)
- Name at least three policies that are impacting the problem (if not obvious or redundant from the institutions named). (*e.g., Farm bill, immigration, minimum wage*)

- Which of the institutions and policies impact the **root causes** of the problem (*e.g., Low wages do not allow for low-income individuals to afford healthy foods; farm bill policies are not sufficient to invest in infrastructure needed to provide healthy foods to communities lacking access.*)
- What do we know about the history of the problem that must be addressed to solve it? Note: Context matters. (*e.g., January farm bill extension renewed commodity payments that both political parties agreed should be cut; this creates an opportunity.*)
- What are the possible starting points? Which institution or policy seems more likely to have a big impact on the root cause of the problem we are trying to solve? (*e.g., USDA, farm bill, local food, restaurant industry*)
- Would addressing it successfully create a positive and helpful reaction in any of the other institutions we identified as important?
- Would addressing it make sense to those impacted?
- Would it engage new and different allies?
- Does it take advantage of the current political climate?
- Is there some capacity (resources and interest) among us to work on it?

## APPENDIX II: HOW TO IDENTIFY IMPACTS TOWARD RACIAL EQUITY

Thinking about how to transform structural racial inequity in the food system may seem overwhelming. But if we understand some definitions and use some simple tools we can find solutions that are indeed transformative.

"Structural" means that we have to take into consideration shifts in several institutions, policies and practices at once. "Racial Equity" means we also need to understand that we are not all affected by American structures in the same ways. Achieving racial equity means everyone, no matter their race, can meet their basic needs and have meaningful opportunities to thrive.

If we transform structural racial inequity in the food system, we would stop seeing whole groups of people, identifiable by race, doing poorly, while other groups, identifiable by race, do much better. For example, Latino and Black communities are **two to four times more likely** than Whites to lack access to healthy foods.<sup>43</sup> Structural transformation would close this gap and give everyone, including communities of color, greater access.

To achieve structural transformation, we should start with a vision of what the world – or our community – will look like if we are successful. The "we" will not be "you" acting alone because structural change that produces racial equity requires many actors and lots of different types of work. Using the Center for Social Inclusion's "How to Identify Structural Problems" tool, you can begin to map out the structure(s) that need to shift and how and where your organization might start.

This tool, "How to Identify Impacts toward Racial Equity," is designed to help you envision what an equitable food system would look like and then to measure whether you are moving in the right direction. Based on survey responses, conversations, and practices of Kellogg grantees, CSI offers a set of "Impacts" to consider as a starting point. Once we know where we are trying to go and our starting point for getting there, we can also figure out how to assess how well we are doing.

The work is long-term and will have twists and turns as we make progress and have setbacks and the world around us changes in unexpected ways. All that is normal. But by assessing our impact and seeing how we are moving toward or away from our long-term vision, we can make the strategic changes we need to succeed.

The final part of this tool, "Guiding Questions for Racial Impact Analysis," builds on the suggested impacts and offers an approach to measure how you're doing. Assessing our impacts requires us to think in terms of both outcomes and processes. Assessing outcomes asks us to look at whether or not our intended impacts will lead to a more inclusive, equitable, and fair society. Assessing process requires us to look at how we are getting there: whether or not we are working towards our goals in ways that are inclusive and equitable to all involved. Remember that how we try to get where we are going affects whether we get there.

We hope this tool helps you develop your vision, strategies, and measures of success as we move forward together to transform structural racial inequity into structural fairness and inclusion.

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<sup>43</sup> PolicyLink and The Food Trust. *The Grocery Gap*. [http://www.policylink.org/site/c.lkIXLbMNjRE/b.5860321/k.A5BD/The\\_Grocery\\_Gap.htm#](http://www.policylink.org/site/c.lkIXLbMNjRE/b.5860321/k.A5BD/The_Grocery_Gap.htm#)

## IMPACTING THE FOOD SYSTEM:

### WHAT WOULD MAKE IT MORE SUSTAINABLE, EQUITABLE, AND RACIALLY INCLUSIVE?

- Impact 1:* All people, including people of color, have access to healthy food that they can afford through local/regional food hubs.
- Impact 2:* All farmers, including farmers of color, are able to own farms that are economically and environmentally sustainable.
- Impact 3:* All communities, including communities of color, have viable opportunities to own retail, wholesale, packaging, processing, and distribution businesses in or related to the food system.
- Impact 4:* Food system workers, including workers of color, earn a fair and living wage and can afford healthy foods.
- Impact 5:* Public and private Institutions, like schools, the military, hospitals, etc., are supporting local producers and distributors to provide healthy food to low-income communities and communities of color.
- Impact 6:* Public and private institutions are allies in support of food policy reforms that will lead to a more socially and racially equitable food system.
- Impact 7:* Food production and distribution businesses serving communities of color have adopted "social returns" as metrics for their success (*such as increased consumption of healthy foods and reinvesting profits made in the communities in which they work*).
- Impact 8:* All communities, including communities of color, are positioned as planners, innovators, and decision-makers in creating opportunities for healthy neighborhoods.
- Impact 9:* Innovators, including those of color, are supported by policies and practices to bring their projects/businesses to scale. (*Note: scale means that they are big enough and well networked enough to help shift the food system to be more sustainable, equitable, and racially inclusive.*)
- Impact 10:* People of color have the civic engagement power to change food and farm policy.
- Impact 11:* Meaningful multi-racial and intersectional alliances are developed to advance racial and social equity in food policy formulation and implementation

### GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR RACIAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

- Does the policy we advocate lead to greater production, distribution, and/or access to healthy, economical and sustainably produced food in communities of color?
- If we win the policy we seek, will it create lasting change in how the food system affects communities of color or will the system remain the same? *(Systems change would mean that the food system works differently than it does now, with the right incentives, disincentives, relationships, and decisions so we do not have to continue to fight the same problems as before.)*
- Are communities of color and grassroots communities going to be better able to shape and drive food and farm policy at the local, regional and national levels as a result of our strategies and relationships? Are we seeing measurable increases in participation by people of color?
- Are decisions around land use and the built environment, such as the use of vacant lots for community gardens or decrease in diesel truck transportation, creating healthier outcomes, particularly for communities of color facing environmental injustice?
- Are land use planning and food policy processes going to be more transparent, inclusive and accountable to communities of color as a result of our strategies and relationships? Are there measurable outcomes that demonstrate this is happening?
- Do people of color have a greater opportunity to remain or become small or medium-sized family farmers producing healthy food? Are there, in fact, more people of color-owned farms producing healthy food and are they sustainable economically and environmentally?
- Do communities of color have greater and more meaningful opportunities to be owners across the food system? Are we seeing an increase in the number of owners of color?
- Do communities of color have greater and more meaningful opportunities to build wealth through the food system? Are we seeing more measurable wealth in communities of color?
- Do communities of color have more stable, safe, and sustaining jobs in the food system? Is this true regardless of immigration status? Have we increased wages for low-paying jobs in the food system that are disproportionately held by people of color?
- Do public and private institutions or systems not directly related to the food system (like schools and prisons) buy locally and provide healthy, economically, and environmentally sustainable food? Has this produced a measurable impact on the access to healthy food for people of color?
- Are public and private institutions allies and advocates of policies for food equity as a result of their engagement with community leaders and participation in regional food hub procurement practices?

- Are sustainability and racial equity principles informing our strategies and relationships?
- Do our strategies and relationships (including alliances, coalitions, and partnerships) adequately represent those who we need to be working with to change the food system to be racially equitable? Are our current strategies and relationships multi-racial or cross-sectoral?
- What relevant challenges or problems will not be solved based on our current strategies and relationships? Do our strategies account for that? (e.g., next steps; other allies are working on it.)
- Are there any positive or negative unintended consequences as a result of our work to change the food system? Among people of color? Marginalized communities? White communities?

## APPENDIX III: LIST OF ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

The following is a list of organizations working to implement racial equity in the food system or are aligned and advocates of more equitable and sustainable policies. This list is not comprehensive, but reflective of organizations that CSI has engaged with and/or learned deeply from.

### **American Friends Service Committee**

<http://www.afsc.org/office/albuquerque-nm>  
Albuquerque, NM

### **Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs - Children in the Field Campaign**

<http://afop.org/>  
Washington, DC

### **Black Family Land Trust**

[www.bflt.org](http://www.bflt.org)  
Durham, NC

### **Black Urban Growers and Farmers**

<http://www.blackfarmersconf.org/>  
Bronx, NY

### **Boston Food and Fitness Collaborative**

<http://www.bcff-online.org/>  
Boston, MA

### **Brandworkers International**

[www.brandworkers.org](http://www.brandworkers.org)  
New York, NY

### **CATA: El Comité de Apoyo a Los Trabajadores Agrícolas- The Farmworker Support Committee**

<http://www.cata-farmworkers.org/>  
Glassboro, NJ

### **Center for Environmental Farming Systems**

<http://www.cefs.ncsu.edu/>  
Raleigh, NC

### **Center for New Communities**

Albany, GA

### **Coastal Communities Collaborative**

Houma, LA

### **Common Market**

<http://commonmarketphila.org/>  
Philadelphia, PA

### **Community Food and Justice Coalition**

<http://cafoodjustice.org/>  
Washington, DC

### **Detroit Black Food Security Coalition Network**

<http://detroitblackfoodsecurity.org/>  
Detroit, MI

### **Eastern Michigan Environmental Action Coalition**

[www.emecac.org](http://www.emecac.org)  
Detroit, MI

### **FEEST: Food Empowerment Education Sustainability Team**

<http://feestseattle.org/>  
Seattle, WA

### **Farmworker Association of Florida**

<http://www.floridafarmworkers.org/>  
Apopka, FL

### **FOCUS**

<http://www.schoolfoodfocus.org/>  
New York, NY

### **Food Chain Workers Alliance**

<http://foodchainworkers.org/>  
Los Angeles, CA

### **Grassroots International**

<http://www.grassrootsonline.org/>  
Boston, MA

**Hmong National Development Center**  
<http://www.hndinc.org/>  
Washington, DC

**HOPE Collaborative**  
<http://www.hopecollaborative.net>  
Oakland, CA

**Jesse Smith Noyes Foundation**  
[www.noyes.org](http://www.noyes.org)  
New York, NY

**Land Loss Prevention**  
<http://www.landloss.org/>  
Durham, NC

**Mississippi Roadmap to Health Equity**  
<http://mississippiroadmap.org/>  
Jackson, MS

**Movement Strategy Center**  
<http://movementstrategy.org/>  
Oakland, CA

**National Family Farms Coalition**  
<http://nffc.net/>  
Washington, DC

**National Farm to School**  
<http://www.farmtoschool.org/>  
Washington, DC

**National Sustainable Agricultural Coalition**  
<http://sustainableagriculture.net/>  
Washington, DC

**New York Food and Fitness Partnership**  
<http://www.restorationplaza.org/nycfood>  
Brooklyn, NY

**North Carolina A&T Sustainable  
Agriculture and Cooperative Extension  
Program**  
<http://www.ncat.edu/>  
Greensboro, NC

**PCUN: Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del  
Noroeste**  
<http://www.pcun.org/>  
Woodburn, OR

**PolicyLink**  
<http://www.policylink.org/>  
Oakland, CA

**Praxis Project**  
<http://www.thepraxisproject.org/>  
Washington, DC

**Restaurant Opportunity Center United**  
<http://www.roc-united.org>  
New York, NY

**Real Food Challenge**  
<http://www.realfoodchallenge.org/>  
National

**Rural Coalition**  
<http://www.ruralco.org>  
Washington, DC

**Southwest Workers Union**  
<http://www.swunion.org/>  
San Antonio, TX

**theMove**  
<http://getoutma.org/>  
Boston, MA

**The Renaissance Project**  
<http://therenaissanceproject.la/>  
New Orleans, LA

**Union of Concerned Scientist: Food and  
Agriculture**  
[http://www.ucsusa.org/food and agriculture](http://www.ucsusa.org/food_and_agriculture)  
Washington, DC

**Urban Tilth**  
<http://www.urbantilth.org/>  
Oakland, CA



*The Center for Social Inclusion works to unite public policy research and grassroots advocacy to transform structural inequity and exclusion into structural fairness and inclusion. We work with community groups and national organizations to develop policy ideas, foster effective leadership, and develop communications tools for an opportunity-rich world in which we all will thrive.*

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(212) 248-2785*

[www.centerforsocialinclusion.org](http://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org)

[www.facebook.com/centerforsocialinclusion.org](https://www.facebook.com/centerforsocialinclusion.org)

[www.twitter.com/theCSI](https://www.twitter.com/theCSI)