



*California's Emerging
Food Systems Leaders*



We dedicate this publication to the 20 individuals featured in these pages, and to the many other changemakers in California, across the country, and around the world, who strive to transform food and agriculture systems in order to bring about greater equity, justice, sustainability, and health for all.

Acknowledgments

We thank the BFI-selected review committee members—who are leaders in food and agriculture fields from diverse organizations—for their insights in the early stage of profile selections for this project: Amrith Gunasekara, Judy Hatcher, Aydin Nazmi, Esperanza Pallana, Jaspal Sandhu, and Mario Sifuentez. We also thank production partner Celery Design and copy editor Timothy Lesle.

This project was funded by a grant from the California Endowment, a foundation promoting improvements in the health status of all Californians. We are very grateful for the Endowment's support and partnership.

Finally, we thank the changemakers featured in this publication for taking the time to talk with us about their work, activism, and leadership roles in their communities and beyond.

INTRODUCTION

Hungry for Change is a project of the University of California's Berkeley Food Institute (BFI).

BFI aims to catalyze change in food systems through innovative interdisciplinary research, education, policy initiatives, and community engagement to ensure that everyone has access to healthy, affordable food that is produced equitably and sustainably.

With our mission in mind, BFI's project on food systems changemakers recognizes an emerging cadre of innovators in farming, advocacy, business, education, and other endeavors.

The Candidates

Hundreds of budding champions for change are transforming how we produce, access, and eat food. Their tools include creative outreach programs, alternative business models, and outside-the-box innovation.

What motivates changemakers? What challenges do they face? How do they measure success?

BFI highlights 20 up-and-coming food systems leaders having an impact on their communities and beyond. We identified candidates through wide outreach and made selections in consultation with an external review committee. These changemakers represent a range of geographic regions, areas of reform, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

These advocates seek to bring about transformation in food systems in the face of structural and societal obstacles, including socioeconomic injustice, racism, and environmental concerns. The leaders profiled here are singled out for their achievements in cultivating greater equity, health, and sustainability. All call California home; some are making change at the local level, while others work across the state, nation, or even globally.

Shared Stories of Challenge and Resilience

These food movement advocates demonstrate perseverance and dedication, often in the face of significant obstacles. Those barriers may include economic hardship, racism, sexism, resistance to change, and a lack of access to resources. Despite these hurdles, each exhibits resilience, determination, and an indomitable spirit as they keep fighting the good food fight in their own ways.

They appreciate that their accomplishments and opportunities have been shaped by the visionaries who blazed a trail before them and fellow advocates who work alongside them.

And they embody a spirit of optimism and hope while working to dismantle inequality and injustice. They keep focused on the human and environmental elements central to their missions. Their common core values include combining the wisdom of elders with modern innovation, social justice, earth stewardship, fair wages, and inclusion and representation of all members of society, not just at the table but in leadership and decision-making positions.

As pathfinders in their respective fields, they appreciate that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the inequalities of the global, national, and local food systems. And they understand that political and policy change is crucial to systemic change. Their collective sense of purpose and service is rooted in transforming the lives of every individual marginalized in any way in society and separated from opportunity, no matter their identity.

These leaders recognize that progress takes time. They seize every opportunity to expand their reach by working in new ways, approaching potential constituents, finding funding, partnering with collaborators, and mentoring the next crop of food systems leaders.

Learn more about these champions for change in the following pages. And remember these names: You're sure to hear more about them in the future.

L. Ann Thrupp

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BERKELEY FOOD INSTITUTE



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Sammy Gensaw III

Fighting to Save the Salmon

Co-founder, Ancestral Guard

WORKS: Klamath | LIVES: Crescent City

FIELDS: Fishing, Advocacy

Sammy Gensaw III grew up on the Yurok Indian Reservation and spent his childhood fishing on the Klamath River in Requa, Del Norte County, in far Northern California. Like his father, grandfather, and great grandfather before him, Gensaw, a member of the Yurok tribe, expected to make his living as a fisherman. But in recent years, salmon supplies have been so depleted that he has had to find other ways to put food on the table. To help preserve his indigenous culture, Gensaw founded Ancestral Guard to teach youth—both native and non-native—about the traditional foodways of his tribe.



“It’s a slow genocide,” says Gensaw. “That’s how important salmon is here.”

Before he could even walk, Sammy Gensaw III was in a boat fishing with his family on the Klamath River, the lifeblood of his ancestors for centuries. Gensaw grew up on the mouth of the mighty Klamath, a remote land of salmon runs, misty mountains, and coastal redwoods near the Oregon border.

Fishing for salmon is in his blood, part of his DNA, he says. It is important for cultural, spiritual, health, and economic reasons. “I have been fishing my whole life,” says Gensaw, 24. “It’s not just a financial hardship that I am the first generation in my family who can’t make their living as a fisherman. It causes me physical and spiritual pain.”

In recent years, the river’s yearly migration of salmon from the Pacific Ocean has dwindled significantly, the result of decades of drought, disease, and habitat destruction. The Yurok maintain that the bulk of the blame for the salmon scarcity belongs to seven upstream hydroelectric dams that have prevented the fish from entering their preferred spawning grounds for more than a hundred years. After years of protest, debate, and negotiations, four dams are slated for demolition by 2020. That’s a big victory for Gensaw and his fellow tribe members, and one of the largest

river restoration projects in United States history. Gensaw hopes that within three to five years of the dam removal the salmon will return in significant numbers.

Every year, the Yurok tribe works with government agencies to estimate the fall salmon run and decide how many salmon can be caught. So few Chinook were expected to return to spawn in 2017 that commercial fishing was shut down by the California Fish and Game Commission to protect the fish. The Yurok, with a population around 6,000, were allowed to catch just 650 salmon as part of a subsistence allocation, even though salmon has long been a source of nourishment and commerce for the community. “The salmon scarcity shook people up. It woke them up. It’s had a really detrimental impact on our community,” says Gensaw, who relocated from the reservation to Crescent City in summer 2017 and has earned money tending plants at a legal, organic cannabis farm, the Humboldt Seed Company. Many out-of-work fishermen, he says, have found temporary employment doing similar work. He also works as a cultural consultant.

Every August, the tribe has a celebration to acknowledge the river’s bounty and cultural traditions. But at the 55th annual Yurok Tribe Salmon Festival in 2017, organizers had to buy salmon from



Alaska because of the fish scarcity at home. The year before, no salmon was served; instead attendees ate from food trucks.

As its way of life and livelihood has been decimated, the reservation has seen an increase in poverty, joblessness, addiction, lawlessness, and suicides. “It’s a slow genocide,” says Gensaw. “That’s how important salmon is here.”

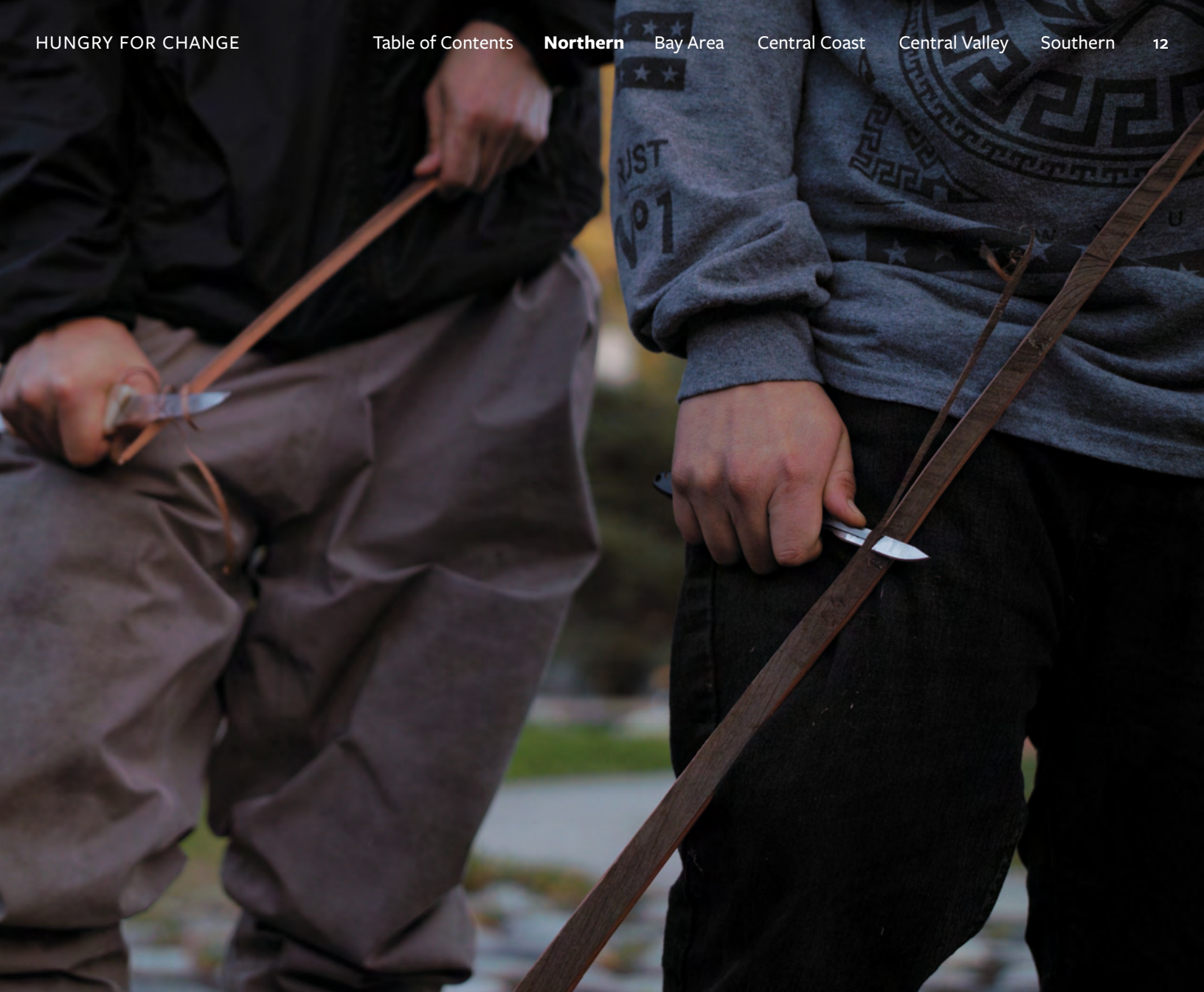
Since he was 14, Gensaw has been active in protest efforts to remove the dams from the Klamath. He was a student community organizer for Un-dam the Klamath. Gensaw held bake sales and car washes to raise funds to travel to Omaha in 2009 to disrupt meetings at Berkshire Hathaway, the company led by billionaire Warren Buffett that is the parent of dam owner PacifiCorp, a private utility.

He said that trip, in which he worked to educate shareholders about the damage the dams were doing, changed his life. “I realized this is something I have to do in order for my people and the salmon to survive. This touched something deep within me and I decided to dedicate my life to teaching indigenous people the proper way to fish,” says Gensaw, who has travelled to Malaysia and Brazil to confer with other indigenous leaders about protecting culturally significant rivers that have been affected by damming.


“I realized this is something I have to do in order for my people and the salmon to survive. This touched something deep within me and I decided to dedicate my life to teaching indigenous people the proper way to fish.”

The Yurok are California’s largest Native American tribe. The tribal name means “downriver” in the native Yurok language. For hundreds of years, the Yurok sustained their communities by catching Chinook and coho salmon, steelhead trout, green sturgeon, candlefish, and eel-like Pacific lamprey. Historically, the Yurok traded with other tribes, traveling up and down the river in giant redwood canoes to sell their fish.

When the Gold Rush hit, the Native American community was decimated by crime, violence, and disease at the hands of miners, soldiers, and criminals. The community is no stranger



“This is part of the restorative revolution. We’re trying to bring back balance to our land, our river, and our people.”



to battling for its rights: it has since endured the forced removal of Indian children to boarding schools, as well as a violent dispute in the late 1970s over a salmon fishing ban that pitted local Indians against federal agents.

Still the Yurok’s ability to fish kept them rooted to the area. By the 1970s, the dams built hundreds of miles upstream began to take a toll on the river. The spring salmon run, traditionally the biggest of the year, dropped dramatically. Toxic algae blooms became commonplace. Indians began to depend on government food subsidies, and that’s when diabetes, heart disease, and obesity hit their communities hard.

Fighting for traditional foodways isn’t just a cultural and spiritual practice, says Gensaw, it’s about the health of a community. Most reservations are located in rural areas where access to nutritious food from grocery stores is limited. And Native Americans have poorer health outcomes across a broad range of medical conditions compared with the general population.

He co-founded [Ancestral Guard](#) to keep indigenous traditions alive. Under the umbrella of the non-profit [Nature Rights Council](#), Ancestral Guard has been active for more than six years. The organization, which obtained non-profit status in 2017, teaches children how to catch and smoke salmon with traditional Yurok methods by using gillnets and cooking salmon on redwood skewers over a wood fire.

Gensaw, who aspires to public office, hopes to make sustainable fishing a commonplace skill by the time the dams come down in 2020. “This is part of the restorative revolution. We’re trying to bring back balance to our land, our river, and our people,” says Gensaw, who is also active in what might be the region’s next big battle: a proposed natural gas pipeline that could contaminate the water. “This is about protecting our community, building resistance, and maintaining our identity. It’s about our very survival as a people. Once the salmon are gone, it’s the first sign of the end of the world, that’s our prophecy. I have to do this work.”

Kristyn Leach

Farming Honors The Past and Considers The Future

Founder, Namu Farm

WORKS: Sunol / Winters | LIVES: Oakland

FIELD: Farming

Kristyn Leach runs the organic Namu Farm in partnership with the restaurant Namu Gaji in San Francisco, owned by three brothers with a Korean background. Since 2012, Leach has grown vegetables and herbs, particularly heirloom Korean produce, for the neighborhood bistro. An avid seed saver, Leach practices traditional peasant farming methods popular in her birthplace. She began Namu Farm at the Sunol AgPark, home to small-scale farmers growing crops on the urban fringe. In 2018, Leach moved her operation to Winters. She is a member of the Asian American Farmers Alliance and active in community efforts to empower farmers of color.



“Seeds hold a lot for people beyond just sustenance.”

Perilla proved Kristyn Leach’s gateway plant to discovering her roots. And cultivating Korean produce led her to create community with other farmers of color.

Leach first encountered the leafy Korean herb—similar to the Japanese shiso—in a community garden tended by Korean women in the Pacific Northwest. Born in Daegu, South Korea, in 1982, Leach was adopted as an infant by Irish-Catholic New Yorkers. Leach didn’t grow up eating perilla, but she was raised around community gardens in Long Island, in a working-class family who instilled in her the importance of growing food and serving others.

After stints managing a lettuce farm and working as a cook in a fine dining restaurant in the Bay Area, Leach co-founded Namu Farm after an introduction to chef Dennis Lee through a mutual chef friend. In Lee and his brothers, who own Namu Gaji and fronted the money for the farm, she found kindred spirits who understand the value and history behind her growing philosophy. This is a manual labor of love: No fossil fuels are used on the farm. There’s no tilling (disturbing the soil through mechanical plowing), no tractors. It’s all hand tools. It’s not an easy way to farm but it speaks to Leach: a

practice honoring her Korean ancestors that might also help preserve the land for future generations of farmers.

For six years, Namu Farm subleased a plot at Sunol AgPark. For just over 10 years, that farmland was managed by SAGE ([Sustainable Agriculture Education](#)), a Berkeley-based nonprofit, on publicly funded land owned by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission.

Leach tends the land in a natural way. She adds beneficial microorganisms to the soil by incorporating fungus from nearby woods. Cover crops are allowed to decompose on their own timeline. The farm welcomes weeds and wildlife: Namu is a habitat for birds and the odd volunteer plant. The focus: Cultivating the healthiest, self-regulating, self-reliant soil in order to grow the most nutritious and tastiest vegetables and herbs possible.

Her farm produce includes Korean melons, kabocha squash, okra, eggplant, gochu peppers, several varieties of chili peppers, yard-long green beans, Korean black soybeans, and an array of Korean herbs, including perilla. The farm grows about 50 different crops and harvests around 7,000 pounds a



“The challenges that Asian farmers—or any farmers of color—face include smaller margins in the marketplace because a lot of the crops are viewed as specialty and it’s hard to reach a wider audience.”

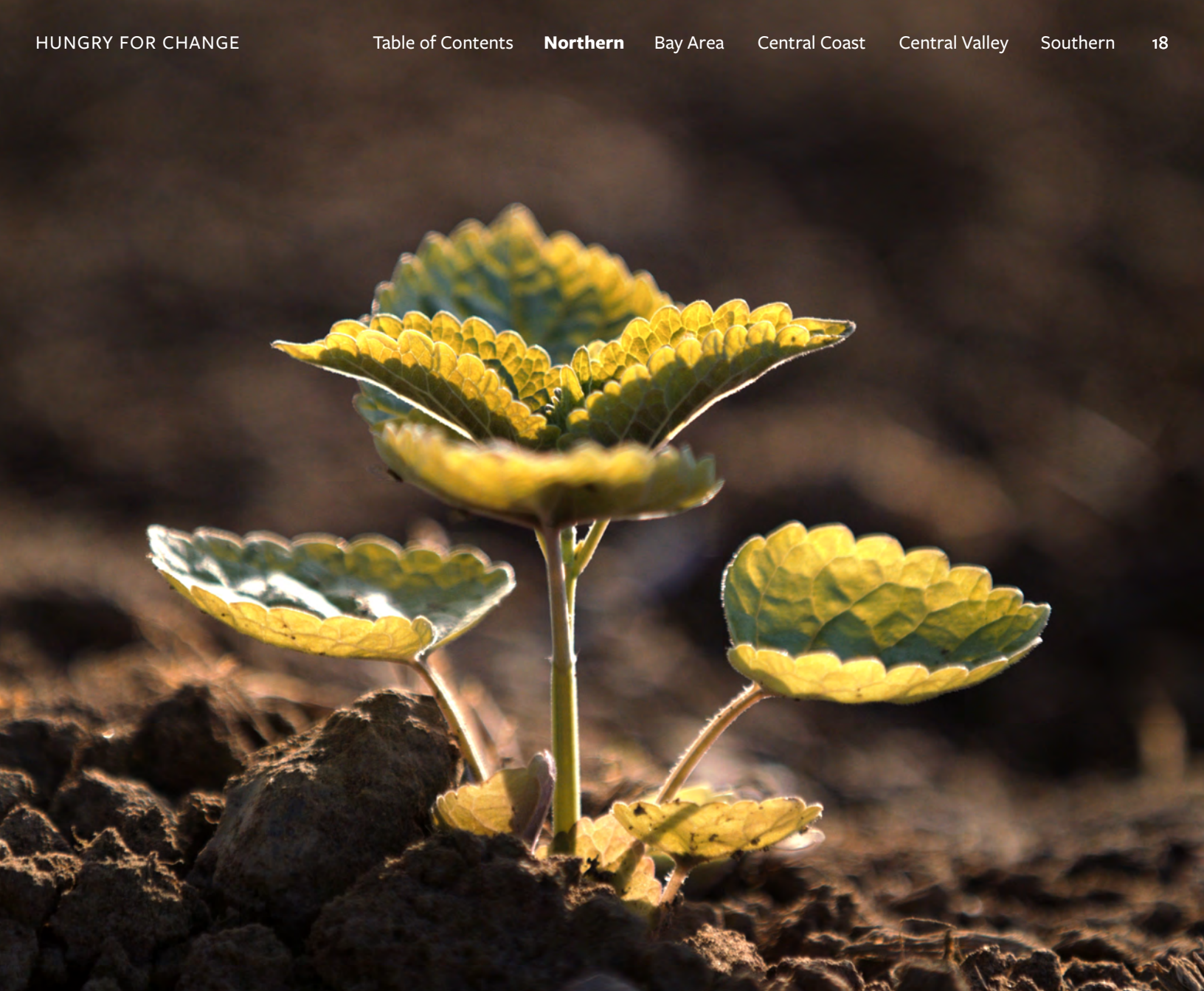
year. Leach sometimes has excess bounty that she shares for free, via a farm stand, with local Korean and women’s community organizations that help those in need.

The farmer-restaurateur relationship has provided Leach, 35, with a steady income stream while also giving her creative latitude to experiment with raising rare and heritage plants. It’s also allowed her to grow in homage to the collectivized natural


farm practices found in Korea, where land stewardship, soil sustainability, and plant preservation is honored and synthetic inputs and hazardous pesticides eschewed.

For Leach, reverence for seeds is key. She saves seeds and has inherited heirloom varieties from diverse sources, including Oakland-based [Kitazawa Seed Company](#), the oldest seed business in the United States specializing in Asian vegetables and the largest distributor of Asian seeds outside of Asia. Leach grows seeds for the company, as part of a project called Second Generation Seeds. “Seeds hold a lot for people beyond just sustenance,” she says. When seeds are co-opted and patented by global companies who haven’t played a role in stewarding them for centuries, says Leach, it raises concerns about imperialist motives, historic erasure, and purely transactional farming practices.

Leach is active in the Asian American Farmers Alliance to explore, among other matters, the challenge of protecting seeds, their stories, and histories. “We have to try and leverage the community we have to increase access to seeds for people who want them and provide the support and technical assistance so that people of color can grow those things,” she says.



“There’s a lot of fetishizing of things that are considered new and exotic. There has to be some way for something to have mass appeal and not disregard the fact that it existed before white people found it.”



Seed sovereignty—saving and nurturing seeds from diverse sources—is a major concern in the food movement at a time when just a few global corporations claim ownership of most of the world’s seeds, says Leach. “The challenges that Asian farmers—or any farmers of color—face include smaller margins in the marketplace because a lot of the crops are viewed as specialty and it’s hard to reach a wider audience.”

Small-scale farmers of color also face structural barriers, such as access to land, capital, and technical assistance, as well as language hurdles and cultural appropriation, says Leach. “There’s a lot of fetishizing of things that are considered new and exotic,” she says. “There has to be some way for something to have mass appeal and not disregard the fact that it existed before white people found it.”

To help build community, in 2017 Leach ran a project on the farm called nonghwal, in collaboration with organizer Yong Chan Miller. Every two weeks or so, a group of Korean-American volunteers convened at the farm to help pick crops and learn about sustainable farming. Short for nongchon bongsa hwaldong, or volunteer work, nonghwal Namu-style combined contemporary California farm justice concerns with age-old Korean cultivation practices and social movement history.

She is particularly pleased with her efforts to adapt plants and establish systems to deal with climate change. “A lot of other farmers are curious about our vegetable production methods in light of climate change, which will disproportionately impact communities of color and poor people in rural and urban areas around the globe,” she says. “There’s an urgency here.”

Leach would like to move toward independence and develop a separate entity that distributes produce to different outlets, in addition to her seed production and restaurant crops. She’s working with the non-profit Kitchen Table Advisors to develop a plan for her next stage. Leach’s 2018 relocation to Winters is in part based on a desire for long-term land tenure and a chance to grow her business beyond what’s needed for the restaurant.

“I’ve been very lucky. I have a substantive relationship with my restaurateur partners that goes beyond growing food for a restaurant. We’ve been able to adapt the farm to different weather scenarios, making it more resilient,” she says. “And I think the farm has functioned as a hub for the community. All of that is really gratifying and feels really hopeful.”

Mai Nguyen

Farming for Everyone

Founder, Asian American Farmers Alliance | *Co-founder, California Grain Campaign*

California Organizer, National Young Farmers Coalition


WORKS: Statewide | FARMS: Sonoma County | LIVES: San Diego

FIELDS: Farming, Business, Advocacy

Mai Nguyen grows heirloom grains on leased land in Sonoma County. She travels across the Golden State in her job for the National Young Farmers Coalition, where she consults with fledgling farmers on political advocacy and policy matters. The daughter of Vietnamese refugees, she grew up in San Diego, where she has worked on refugee resettlement projects, including school gardens, a farm incubator program, and a food pantry. A University of California, Berkeley, graduate, she is involved in social justice efforts on behalf of farmers of color, including supporting the Farmer Equity Act of 2017.



“From land to loans, knowledge dissemination to seed restoration, racial discrimination isn’t just in history books—it permeates the everyday lives of farmers of color.”



In her seven years of farming, Mai Nguyen has encountered both sexism and racism in the fields. She’s been challenged by male farm equipment sellers on whether or not she knows how to turn on a tractor, she’s also had trash dumped on her property in an area where Confederate flags are a common sight. And she’s endured people yelling racial epithets at her, threatening violence, or telling her to “go home.” Racism isn’t unique to cities; in the country—even in bucolic settings—it’s also a problem and prevents young people of color from farming altogether, says Nguyen, who farmed in Mendocino County for several years and relocated, in part, because of the prejudice she encountered there.

So Nguyen knows firsthand the obstacles female and minority farmers face—especially in today’s political climate. She actively works on ways to reduce such barriers, including new legislation that may bring recourse to farmers like her who are federally classified as “socially disadvantaged.” That includes growers who have been subject to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice. The Farmer Equity Act of 2017 requires California officials to address challenges that farmers of color face by making access to government resources more equitable.

In concrete terms, it means creating a department-level staff position to help these farmers navigate the largely white, male agricultural world. “From land to loans, knowledge dissemination to seed restoration, racial discrimination isn’t just in history books—it permeates the everyday lives of farmers of color,” says Nguyen. “This act is a step toward farmers of color having a voice in state policy-making so that we can advocate for our needs and access resources to meet them.”

Farmers like Nguyen want to see more equitable access to land, state funding, and technical assistance. Buying or leasing property is tougher for an Asian female farmer than her white male counterparts, says Nguyen. Ditto getting access to equipment. “People just don’t take me seriously,” says the 33-year-old Nguyen. “They question my experience, knowledge, and ability.”

Given how isolated—but also antagonized—Nguyen has felt as a female farmer of color, she decided to reach out to other growers to create community, pool resources, and discuss common practices like sourcing seeds, cultivation techniques, and selling strategies. What started as one contact with a Korean-American female farmer grew into a network that



shares knowledge, stories, and solidarity. The group, the Asian American Farmers Alliance, brainstorms marketing opportunities, collaborates on consumer education, discusses policy, and shares best practices.

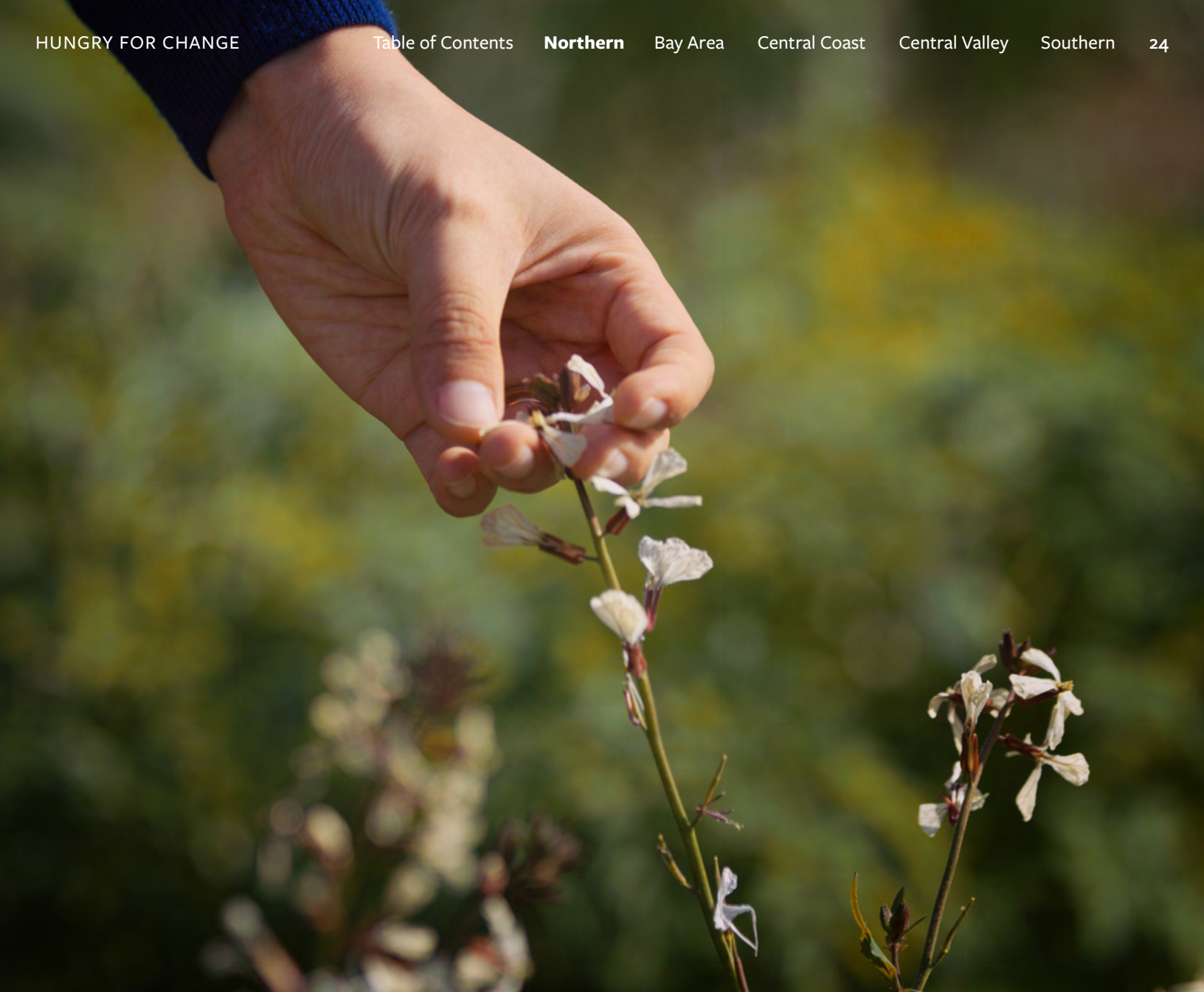
Strength in numbers is reinforced in Nguyen's current and former day jobs. Through January 2018, she worked for the California Center for Cooperative Development, where she witnessed the collective power that comes with sharing tasks and responsibilities with a group of worker-owners, many of them with a food or farm orientation. Now with the National Young Farmers Coalition, she describes a pressing need for political action to ensure successful pathways to farming for the next generation—and she's intent on organizing growers and developing leadership skills within its ranks to make that happen.

Nguyen is also active on the food side in her advocacy work with the California Grain Campaign. This group of farmers, millers, and bakers wants bakers who sell at farmers markets across the state to use locally grown grain flour in 20 percent of their baked goods by 2020. "Farmers markets play an important role in educating food producers and consumers about the wide range of wholesome grains grown in this state,"


"Farmers markets play an important role in educating food producers and consumers about the wide range of wholesome grains grown in this state."

says Nguyen, who is on a mission to expose eaters to the wide diversity of flavors and nutrition found in whole grains. To date, six market managers in the Los Angeles area have signed on in support.

Nguyen has produced two catalogs for the campaign, championing California grain growers and highlighting heirloom varieties, such as Sonora wheat, spelt, purple prairie barley, red fife, emmer, and durum farro. The publications, she says, are modeled more on fashion look-books than seed catalogs. She wants to get producers and consumers jazzed about hearty grains.



“The farmers invested in bringing back heritage and specialty grains operate on a small scale, making them the most vulnerable businesses in agriculture.”



Advocacy is important, but farming is what feeds Nguyen. She grows grains, currently heritage wheat and quinoa, using environmentally regenerative methods including no-till (tilling disrupts the soil through mechanical plowing), and dry-farming techniques. “When I first started farming I sought out heritage wheats like Sonora because they are so well suited for the conditions where I grow,” says Nguyen. “The genetic diversity of heritage/heirloom wheats means they can adapt to varying conditions, including drought.”

Such varieties, says Nguyen, can be tough to source via commercial seed stock companies. That’s where saving seeds is vital to maintaining diverse grain crops. “The farmers invested in bringing back heritage and specialty grains operate on a small scale, making them the most vulnerable businesses in agriculture,” says Nguyen, whose farming plans on one plot were set back by the devastating Wine Country fires of 2017. “Yet, small farms are essential to all of us. They nurture unconventional crops and help diversify our food base.”

As a child, Nguyen’s maternal grandmother taught her how to grow plants and save seeds. “She would tell me when the weeds would grow what it would mean about the soil. She helped me understand the role of all plants, not just the ones

you purposely cultivate.” Growing food and cooking at home was an economic necessity. “Everyone says food is medicine. But we didn’t have health insurance,” she says. “Eating well was always a focus in my family.”

Her whole grain farming philosophy is not just about culture, history, and sustainability. It’s about taste too. “For thousands of years there were all these different types of delicious-tasting grains but now there’s just mostly white, bland, no-flavor flour in the grocery store.”

As a child of Vietnamese refugees, Nguyen says it’s no coincidence that she became a sustainable farmer. Sharing traditions like growing and cooking food is a way of keeping a culture alive in a new place, even when one’s home has been destroyed and one’s country lost. “For me, farming is a way to keep in contact with the present while honoring the past.”

Humanizing all aspects of the food system—which has been dictated by Big Ag and Big Food—is key to making it fair, accessible, equitable, and environmentally sustainable, says Nguyen. “I don’t want people to see me as just a producer of a product. I’m not a factory. I’m a person who has developed knowledge and skills. That’s not something that is easily replaceable.”

Bay Area

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Leah Atwood

Networking for Change, One Farmer at a Time

Director of Programs and Partnerships, Multinational Exchange for Sustainable Agriculture (MESA)

Board Member, Planting Justice | Co-founder, Wild and Radish

WORKS: Berkeley | **LIVES:** El Sobrante

FIELDS: Farming, Advocacy

When not at her day job, Leah Atwood can be found at home milking goats, tending bees, and picking produce on a 13-acre urban farm and developing eco-village she's helping to create in El Sobrante. As the director of programs and partnerships at MESA, Atwood champions strengthening traditional agricultural practices, honoring farmer-to-farmer peer exchanges, and supports collaborative efforts that sustain small farmers across the globe. A graduate of UC Berkeley, she has lived in South and Central America as well as Southeast Asia working on social, environmental, and food justice projects.



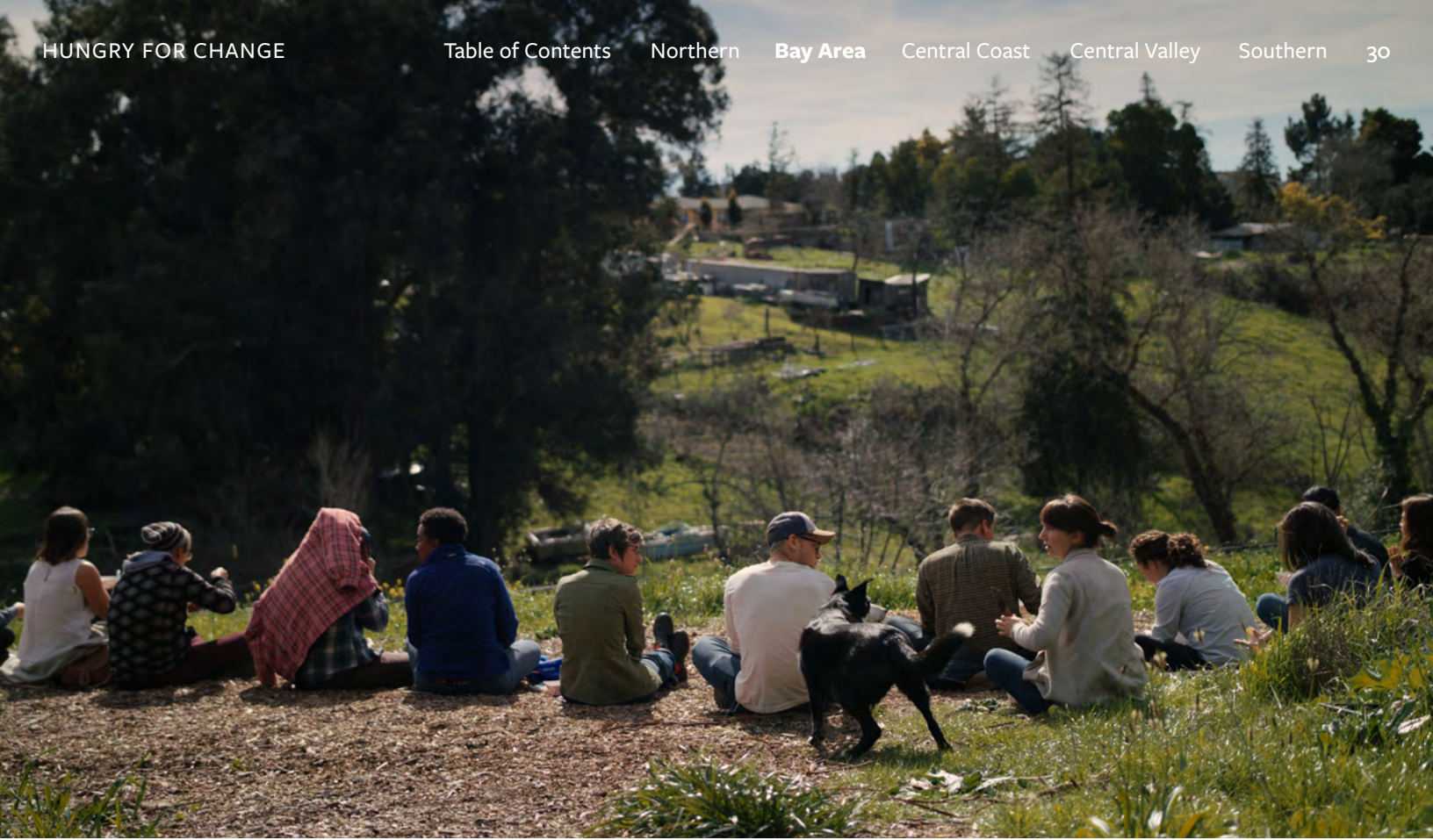
“The concept of community-supported agriculture isn’t new. This takes that model a step further: a community-supported community.”

The Multinational Exchange for Sustainable Agriculture (MESA) is a modern day, ag-centric matchmaking service. It pairs up sustainable farming leaders around the world and offers training and cross-cultural collaborations to bolster local food systems. The non-profit has worked with more than 1,500 farmers and activists worldwide, and helped incubate around 150 small-scale farms and food justice projects in Peru, Ecuador, Mexico, Nepal, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Armenia, Kenya, Ghana, United States, and elsewhere. “At its core, MESA is a network of primarily farmers, but also activists, researchers, food artisans, and agropreneurs,” says Leah Atwood, 36, who has worked for the organization since 2005. “We cultivate changemakers who are dedicated to reviving community food systems all over the world by linking ancestral knowledge and modern innovation rooted in earth stewardship, fair economies, and multicultural alliances.”

The program marries hands-on technical experience and online theoretical education with peer-to-peer mentorship. MESA is a State Department sponsor organization, meaning farmers from outside the US can apply for educational

exchange visas to come to the US to participate in MESA programs. These grassroots global growers share personal experiences, study organic and biodynamic farming methods, and learn how to market produce and organize politically. MESA partners with community organizations, NGOs, and other non-profits in a model designed to address challenges and develop solutions. “This is a horizontal learning and sharing exchange with MESA offering educational resources and academic research to small-scale farmers involved in seed-saving projects, diversified crop farming, animal livestock, and other agricultural practices,” says Atwood.

Atwood grew up on a homestead in the redwoods of Freshwater, in Northern California’s Humboldt County. She was raised by a single mom who worked two jobs; money was tight. Still, her frugal mother saved enough to enable an adventurous young Atwood to take a trip to Ecuador in high school. She learned to speak Spanish during a college year spent working on a small farm in Costa Rica. While traveling, the budding activist began to understand the impact of multinational corporations on local economies—in Ecuador a



“Food, land, and markets can be controlled by these immense corporations that have no real connection to the lives or the earth they’re impacting.”

fast-food giant replaced farmland—and Atwood realized the need for global grassroots organizing to protect small-scale agriculture. “Food, land, and markets can be controlled by these immense corporations that have no real connection to the lives or the earth they’re impacting,” says Atwood.


Now Atwood is part of a social experiment of her own: she’s teamed up with like-minded food-justice advocates to plan a communal eco-village a mere twenty minutes from downtown Oakland. On land in the small municipality of

El Sobrante, the founders of the limited liability corporation Wild and Radish are growing a cooperative, sustainable farming community on the urban fringe. Currently they’ve built two homes on the property; the plan is to build about six more, all of them rentals, in an effort to make joining the community affordable. “A lot of traditional co-housing communities do great sharing resources but don’t do a great job on accessibility for low-income folks or diversity,” says Atwood. “We want to address that.”

Wild and Radish has 19 investors and leases land (for a nominal dollar a year) to two non-profit partners: MESA and Oakland-based Planting Justice, which builds and maintains urban gardens and trains the formerly incarcerated and urban youth in sustainable agricultural practices. The long-term goal: to offer a scalable, replicable eco-village model for land conservation, agricultural production, and affordable housing, a place where people with shared values and philosophies can live and farm together. “The concept of community-supported agriculture isn’t new,” says Atwood. “This takes that model a step further: a community-supported community.”



“If we want to rebuild our food system in a resilient way, we need to look at how a lot of food can be produced in a densely-populated area to feed a large group of people.”



The Planting Justice farm is primarily an orchard with 50 to 60 different kinds of trees. The MESA farm saves seeds and grows annuals and perennials with a focus on medicinals and crop experimentation and preservation. MESA farm crops have included moringa, heirloom corn, amaranth, squash, and beans. Row crops on the half-acre plot feed residents; any surplus is sold to a local natural grocer. There's also a micro-dairy with six goats that produce milk and cheese. “If we want to rebuild our food system in a resilient way, we need to look at how a lot of food can be produced in a densely-populated area to feed a large group of people,” says Atwood, whose personal and professional lives are deeply entwined. She divides her time between the farm and MESA HQ.

MESA's online content—a pilot project five years in the making—is built with millennials and non-academics in mind: Its multimedia offerings include webinars, podcasts, and infographics. There are more visuals and, Atwood notes, less jargon than conventional courses; each subject is broken down into accessible lessons based on distinct single-topic modules. In keeping with the network's philosophy of accessibility, the curriculum is available online to anyone for free.

For a sliding-scale fee of between \$150 and \$350, students can enroll in one of MESA's four certificate programs, the benefits

of which include instructor evaluation on assignments and grades. Currently, about 1,000 people are enrolled in certificate courses. The non-profit, with an annual budget of around \$420,000, generates 50 percent of its income from its own revenue-making programs and the other 50 percent from grants, foundation support, and individual donations.

In addition to global outreach, MESA keeps a local focus through its Bay Area Farmer Training, an intensive training program in conjunction with Planting Justice. The three-month course, geared toward female farmers, the formerly incarcerated, immigrants, and refugees, looks at all the barriers that these underserved groups face in the area and discusses strategies to overcome them. Participants are also matched one-on-one with mentor farm leaders in the region. And there's an apprenticeship program in which budding farmers are placed with established farms, these newbie food producers learning the lay of the land from seasoned growers.

Many people in the world are dealing with so many structural barriers and oppression built into the food system that it's a daily struggle just to get food on the table, Atwood says. “The problems in our agricultural systems are complex. And there's no one size fits all solution. That's why we favor a multipronged approach.”

Ruben Canedo

Beyond the Campus Food Pantry

Director, Strategic Equity Initiatives, Division of Equity and Inclusion
UC Berkeley's Centers for Educational Equity and Excellence

WORKS: Berkeley | LIVES: Hayward

FIELD: Food Security

Ruben Canedo is an advocate for meeting the basic needs of all college students. Canedo, who works at his alma mater and is the first in his family to complete a four-year college education in the US, chairs UC Berkeley's Basic Needs Committee and co-chairs UC's Basic Needs Committee, a system-wide effort across all 10 UC campuses. Canedo was named one of the "30 Under 30" by the Global Food Initiative in 2016. His focus is access, education, outreach, programs, and policies that go beyond providing an emergency food pantry on every campus.



“What we’ve been able to do here is 100 percent a testament to the village approach.”

Born in the United States, Ruben Canedo spent his childhood straddling the border communities of Coachella and the Imperial Valley in the US and Mexicali in Mexico. Canedo grew up in a mixed-immigration-status household that stressed the importance of sharing scarce resources.

“My parents raised me to never assume that people have their basic needs met,” says Canedo, now 29. “Many of my paternal grandmother’s clients were from undocumented backgrounds, barely surviving on the checks from working in the date fields. Her golden rule: If you come to my restaurant, you will get fed.” His Dad helped his martial arts students fundraise for travel and donated classes. His mom volunteered at schools and shelters. “That was the environment I grew up in. It was always about giving back.”

So it was second nature for Canedo, when he arrived as a freshman at the University of California, Berkeley, campus on a full ride, to share what he had. For his student friends, that often meant food. Canedo saw that many students were skipping meals in order to survive in one of the most expensive college towns in the country.

In 2013, Canedo began working at UC Berkeley’s Centers for Educational Equity and Excellence. “I was asked to identify the biggest challenge that students and staff have the least education, training, and resources to handle. Basic needs—including affordable housing and food access—topped the list,” he says. Canedo wasn’t surprised. “For many students, family finances don’t just improve because they go to college.”

A 2016 University of California survey (the latest available) found that 44 percent of its undergraduate students and 26 percent of graduate students reported experiencing food insecurity. Nearly one-third of those in need reported difficulty studying due to hunger. In December 2017, the GFI released a report, “Food and Housing Security at the University of California,” detailing the scope of the problem and efforts to address it.

“Students have been struggling for a long time. We just never embraced it as our responsibility,” says Canedo. “The university had all of these anti-poverty and anti-hunger effort but they were all outward facing, serving the local community. None of them served students.”

The UC Berkeley Food Pantry, launched in 2014, is the most visible response to the hunger crisis on Canedo’s campus. The pantry allows students to take five nonperishable food items twice a month in addition to fresh produce. It provides immediate emergency assistance to food-insecure students.

Before they had data, Canedo had students speak out. “I would show up with students at meetings so they could tell their stories,” says Canedo. “It’s very hard for an administrator—who could say this is not a priority—to tell that to a student who hasn’t eaten in the last three days or a student who could only afford to eat once a day for four years.”

The pantry, open to all students on the honor system regardless of financial status, stocks fresh produce from the Alameda County Community Food Bank, Student Organic

Gardening Association, and the Berkeley Student Food Collective, the campus's non-profit cooperative grocery store. A campus nutritionist weighs in on nonperishables such as canned pasta sauce and boxed cereals, and Cal Dining sources from a national distributor of natural and organic foods.

"You don't want to address food insecurity and cause public health challenges by not providing nutritious foods," says Canedo. "Otherwise, you're just feeding them here and then you're sending them to the emergency room."

In the 2016–2017 academic year, the pantry clocked just over 10,000 individual visits. But it's only one part of addressing the food security of college students. "The pantry is an emergency relief effort to keep students in crisis from starving," says Canedo. "That's not the end game. We're trying to solve ongoing hunger and malnourishment by creating an institutional model."

Canedo's work centers on increasing the graduation and representation of historically underrepresented students, including first-generation students, low-income students, parents, veterans, and older individuals. Many of these students struggle financially. For some, paying rent takes precedence over buying groceries.

What's needed, Canedo says, is a three-pronged approach beyond emergency assistance. Students need early education to learn about managing college finances before they even enter a dorm room. "Students are taught how to apply for college but nobody walks them through a financial aid package or how to make a budget," he says. "That needs to happen in high school."

Students must also develop food skills in college. Workshops on buying groceries, how to keep a food budget, and how to prepare and cook nutritious, affordable meals, should be available to all students, says Canedo. And students need to learn how to maximize the resources available, including applying for CalFresh, the statewide Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as food stamps. Navigating the government assistance paperwork can be challenging, so offering clinics on applying can help.

The campus-wide goal is to have all these pieces in place by 2020. Canedo wants to see a basic needs center on every UC campus that houses all services, trainings, information, and emergency support systems in one location. UC Irvine and UC San Diego have done so; UC Berkeley is expected to be next. UC Davis and UC Santa Cruz have confirmed they will follow suit in the 2018–2019 academic year, according to Canedo.

"The pantry is an emergency relief effort to keep students in crisis from starving," says Canedo. "That's not the end game. We're trying to solve ongoing hunger and malnourishment by creating an institutional model."

As campuses struggle to contain costs, finding sustainable funding is a major challenge, along with finding space and funds for staff. But in Canedo's mind, it's about prioritizing problems and redistributing resources. "We cannot continue to believe that funding prisons and investing in prisoners is a better strategy than funding higher public education and college students," he says.

A movement that began as a campus effort is now UC-wide. The UCs have in turn joined forces with California State University and California Community Colleges. Canedo speaks with colleges across the country on the subject. "What we've been able to do here is 100 percent a testament to the village approach," he says. A one-college-student strategy is powerful from a policy and political point of view.

What drives Canedo? "This shouldn't be happening to any human being. There is more food than hungry people. This is not a resource issue. This is a moral, ethical, and political issue."

Adrionna Fike

A Community Grocery Store Feeds Its People

Co-owner, Mandela Grocery Cooperative

WORKS: Oakland | LIVES: Berkeley

FIELDS: Food Access, Business

Adrionna Fike is a worker-owner at the cooperative Mandela Grocery Cooperative in West Oakland. Fike was drawn to the community-oriented co-op—which is owned and operated by young black people—when she relocated to Oakland in 2008. Raised in an athletic family in Los Angeles, Fike, who played basketball for Columbia University while attending Barnard College, grew up eating processed food before health challenges forced her to reconsider her diet. The grocery sells organic and conventional produce from small local farms, dairy and meat from nearby ranches, and wholesome packaged foods. The grocery store is slated to move to a larger location in 2018.



“The co-op is the face of the community, the guardian of food security here.”

Adrionna Fike had always dreamed of owning a neighborhood store selling good food that resonated with the community and held a particular concern for African American life. She imagined a store where African Americans felt welcome, that paid homage to historic black culture, and served as a place of nourishment in mind, body, spirit, and soul. She found such a home in West Oakland at the Mandela Grocery Cooperative, which opened its doors in June 2009 under the Mandela Foods Cooperative banner, with the goal of providing access to affordable, healthy, and culturally relevant foods. “From the day I set foot inside the store I knew I wanted to be a part of it,” says Fike, who came on board in 2012. The cooperative model, with its team approach and esprit de corps, appeals to Fike, who describes her workplace as a joyous environment where she can be herself. In turn, being of service to others feeds Fike. “I like serving people, that’s my calling and my reward, I receive so much back from our customers.”

West Oakland has long been overlooked by supermarket chains. Instead, corner liquor stores have proliferated. Such stores typically offer mass-market products of questionable

nutritional value, the kind of food that is detrimental to health and contributes to high rates of heart disease, obesity, and diabetes among African Americans.

A full-service grocery store has long been high on the wish list of residents of this community, which struggled for decades with high crime, pollution, and underemployment. West Oakland is considered a food desert by the US Department of Agriculture. The term refers to impoverished neighborhoods devoid of stores or markets selling fresh fruits and vegetables and other nutritious food. A historically vibrant enclave for African American artists, the area is experiencing a regeneration fueled by gentrification pressures from the San Francisco Bay Area’s technology boom. There’s also a resurgence of black culture in the area, from African American chefs and food producers to muralists, sculptors, and other creative makers—many of whom shop at the store, Fike adds. “The co-op is the face of the community, the guardian of food security here. It’s important to put resources into the places where people live,” says Fike.

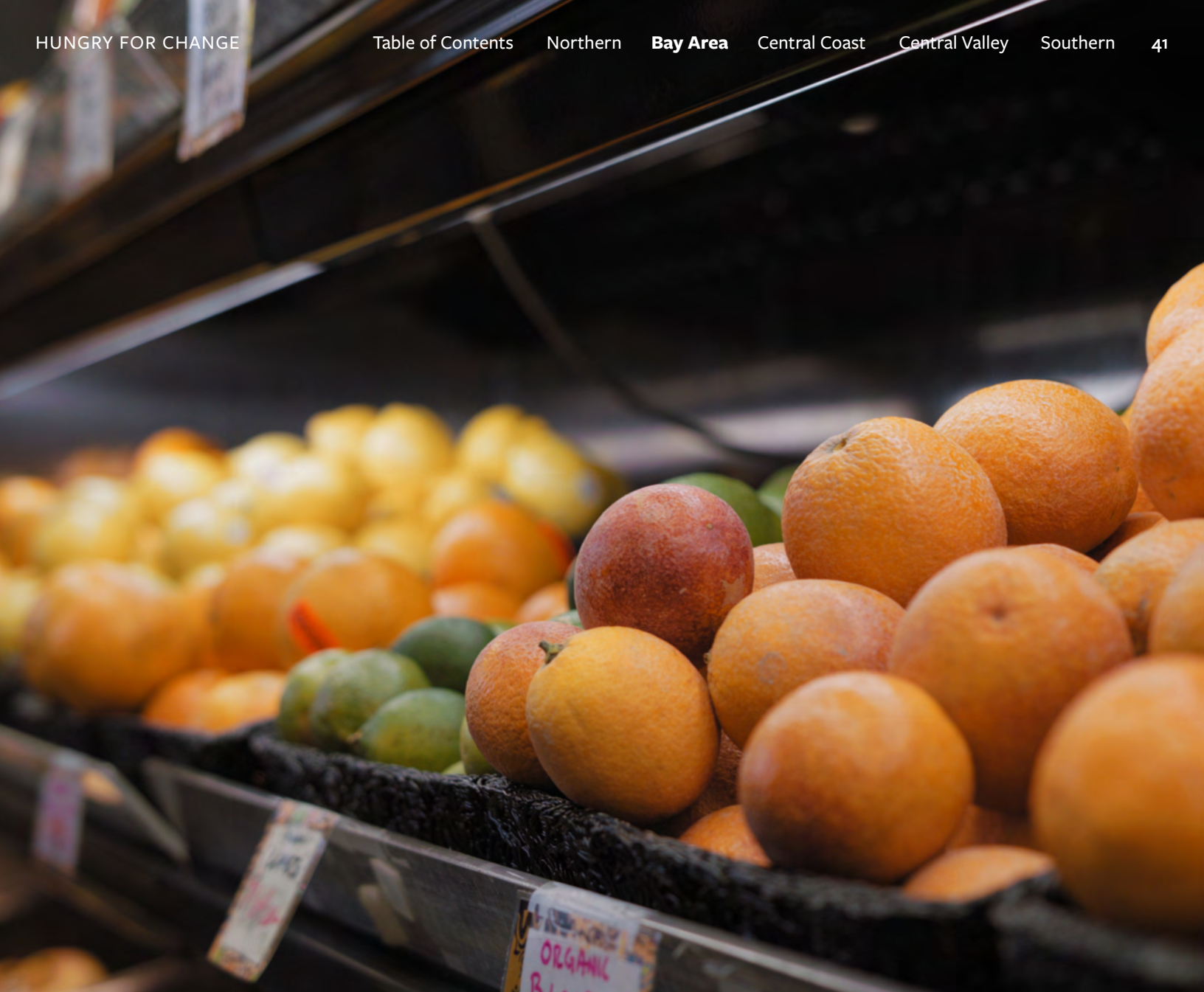


Mandela MarketPlace, a nonprofit with a decade-old program that, among other efforts, delivers fresh fruits and vegetables to corner stores, was instrumental in opening the co-op. But in Spring 2018, the grocery store became independent of that organization, says Fike. Now, the co-op is attempting to expand by raising \$1 million through a crowdfunding effort and a proposal for soda tax funds from the city of Oakland. It's a pivotal time in the co-op's history.


In 2017, the grocery business landed a lease on an 11,000-square-foot prime corner spot next door to its current digs. The co-op originally wanted to occupy the space but lost out years earlier to a national chain store. The co-op's first location is just 2,500-square-feet, and some of that space houses a separate café. For years, the store—with its local produce and perishables, bulk-bin offerings, and dry goods—had to compete for customers with a 99 Cents Only Store next door (that store, which closed in early 2017, offered conventional packaged foods and produce at a deep discount).

“This is a sustainable model. When you operate ethically with integrity, honesty, and transparency, people respond to that and are inspired by that.”

After the co-op opened in the midst of a nationwide recession it struggled early on. But sales grew modestly each year. Its customers reflect today's West Oakland: a diverse group of local resident, including people of color and low-income residents, commuters (it's opposite a BART stop), and a new wave of workers from San Francisco. Some are priced out of the city, some prefer the culture of West Oakland over the current climate in San Francisco, and some are well-compensated tech employees. The co-op also cultivates a



“We’re creating community and culture ... It is at the heart of what it means to be human.”



strong youth culture among worker-owners and customers alike. The mix has helped keep the co-op’s doors open during tough times while also staying true to its mission.

But this isn’t a generic grocery store, nor is it some hippie counterculture co-op. It’s a modern market, with murals of African Americans on its window and a playlist that reflects the staff’s tastes. “We’ve succeeded because we’ve created a comfortable vibe,” says Fike, 35, of the team, which currently consists of three other co-owners and a half-dozen candidates on track to become co-owners. “It reflects the foodways, art, and style of African American culture and the people who work in the store are personable and genuine. Customers like the staff, the energy, the music.” All this helps make the co-op a destination, which is key since consumers can otherwise buy everything they need without ever leaving the house. “Everything about my workplace is gratifying—on both sides of the counter,” says Fike. “There’s respect from my co-workers and from the customers for what we’re doing here. We’re creating community and culture and, as a former anthropology student, that’s what’s most interesting to me. It is at the heart of what it means to be human.”

The co-op measures success in many ways. Getting produce to the people is at its core: From 2013 to 2016, the store distributed more than 700,000 pounds of fresh produce, 46 percent of it from family farms within 200 miles of Oakland, helping keep small farmers on the land by boosting their income. The co-op has circulated more than \$7 million within the local community.

The store looks for ways to make eating well more affordable. It features innovative programing such as Fresh Creds, a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or “food stamps”) match incentive. The co-op fulfills a federal grant secured by Mandela MarketPlace that entitles any shopper who spends money on fresh produce, frozen fruits and vegetables, or canned fruits and vegetable without added sugar to a 50 percent discount on those items. It’s been a hit with customers.

The cooperative also offers an owner like Fike the chance to be part of a business based on equality and inclusion in pay, profit-sharing, and a voice at the table. “This is a sustainable model,” says Fike. “When you operate ethically with integrity, honesty, and transparency, people respond to that and are inspired by that.”

Saqib Keval

The Revolution in Recipes

Co-founder, People's Kitchen Collective

WORKS: Oakland / Mexico City | LIVES: Oakland / Mexico City

FIELDS: Culinary, Advocacy

Saqib Keval is a co-founder of Oakland-based People's Kitchen Collective (PKC), a for-profit, worker-owned collective. Launched in 2007, Keval envisioned a community-oriented gathering geared toward people of color and operating at the intersection of art, food, and activism. PKC has held large-scale dinners, free breakfasts, and museum installations offering food for thought in Oakland, San Francisco, and Washington, DC. Keval, who has a culinary background, divides his time between the Bay Area and Mexico City, where he co-runs Masala y Maíz, the kind of community-oriented restaurant he has long sought to open in Oakland.



“You see all of society’s ills and all of its systems of oppression playing out in restaurants.”



At its core, People’s Kitchen Collective (PKC) is a community-oriented organization in which food serves as a catalyst for discussion, education, and action around politics, cultural heritage, and social justice. It’s also a chance to cook communally and eat well among like-minded people.

For years, the People’s Kitchen has hosted volunteer-driven, pay-what-you-can meals for 100+ guests, mostly people of color. They’ve been held in Oakland and elsewhere at pop-up events in parks, restaurants, and art spaces to raise funds for local organizations. The dinners blend delicious dishes with music, art, poetry, activism, and good times.

Eating together, says PKC co-founder Saqib Keval, 30, is itself an act of resistance, a way to connect with people around culture and tradition. Keval’s family has roots in Kenya and northwest India. He grew up in a household that revered cooking for a large number of people by feel, rather than written recipes and standard cup measurements. The meals featured recipes passed down by his grandmother and other elders. “My introduction to food justice and food politics was

through cooking with my grandmother, it just wasn’t called that,” he says. “We didn’t refer to it as decolonization, it was just: ‘you need to know how to cook this Indian food that has survived 200 years living in East Africa.’”

Keval was raised in Sacramento and attended Humboldt State University in Arcata. He spent time during college in Aix-en-Provence in the south of France, where he gained hands-on culinary training in professional kitchens. That experience proved pivotal. “I’ve worked in a lot of fine dining restaurants. I want People’s Kitchen to be an alternative restaurant model that’s horizontal and community based, not abusive like [some] of the kitchens I’ve worked in, which are often hierarchical, super paternalistic, and racist,” he says.

For years, Keval has pursued his personal passion project while paying the bills working in Bay Area restaurants. “You see all of society’s ills and all of its systems of oppression playing out in restaurants,” he says. “There’s the split [in compensation/treatment] of the front of house and back of house. There’s the pricing of the food and whether or not it’s accessible. There’s the system of labor: the darkest skinned people in the



very back of the restaurant get paid the least. Those inequities are the driving force for me wanting to believe that through food, art, and activism, we can create something better.”

Keval ran PKC solo for several years with help from a large group of volunteers. Now, Keval works together with longtime volunteers Jocelyn Jackson, a lawyer, singer, and caterer who runs her own food business JUSTUS Kitchen, and Sita Kuratomi Bhaumik, an artist, educator, and cook. Wearing multiple hats come with the food justice territory.

These days, Keval divides his time between Masala y Maíz, a culinary project in Mexico City, and the collective in Oakland. “I have been trying to open a community restaurant in Oakland for the past five years,” says Keval, who has been close to signing a deal on several occasions. “Unfortunately, given the current state of the restaurant industry here, the cost of commercial rent, and cost of living, I can’t continue trying [in Oakland] right now,” he says. “My goal is to build a community restaurant model in Mexico City that can be replicated in Oakland. There is a lot happening there that I hope to learn from and bring back to the Bay. This will always be home for me.”

“Even though there is so much good work happening here, everyone is struggling—food justice groups and restaurants. It doesn’t allow for a lot of innovative thinking around different models for a restaurant business. You don’t have the privilege of time.”

The food movement in the Bay Area faces many challenges, says Keval, often linked to finances. “Even though there is so much good work happening here, everyone is struggling—food justice groups and restaurants,” he says. “It doesn’t allow for a lot of innovative thinking around different models for a restaurant business. You don’t have the privilege of time.”



“We’re using food as a tool for organizing, storytelling, and breaking down complex issues in an experiential, immersive environment.”



Instead, Keval was approached to open a community-run restaurant while traveling in Mexico City with Mexican chef Norma Listman, his partner in life and work. The architects on the project specifically sought the pair out because of the way they fuse food, art, research, and politics. “All the things that have made those Oakland restaurant landlords and investors I spent years negotiating with nervous,” he says. In Mexico, on a shoestring budget, he is experimenting with ideas like a chefs-in-residence program in a space that champions art, advocacy, and an equitable work environment. “I need to know that a restaurant like this can exist. I need to see it in action.” Ironically, Keval says even though he’s slammed with a restaurant opening, he has more time to work on the People’s Kitchen Collective from afar because he’s not hustling three restaurant jobs and consulting gigs to pay Bay Area rent.

Still, since he decamped for Mexico City, he’s observed shifts in the Bay Area culinary culture that appear promising. The exposure of rampant sexual harassment in a local restaurant empire, as elsewhere around the country, signals that such abusers are no longer protected by privilege, he says. And he’s keeping an eye on partnerships between relatively new

restaurant chefs of color and seasoned veterans. “These are signs of hope that real change may be coming to the kitchen cultures of the Bay Area,” he says. “The economics of running a restaurant here remain difficult and I don’t see that changing anytime soon.”

How does Keval measure success for the People’s Kitchen? “If the volunteers working on the dinner feel like they had a hand in something important, that’s one measure. If people like the food, if the artists feel engaged, if everyone learns something and understands the narrative coming out of the kitchen and the politics strung through the different courses, that’s another. We’re using food as a tool for organizing, storytelling, and breaking down complex issues in an experiential, immersive environment.”

For Keval, eating together is a political act, the way to feed a revolution, a counter to the problems inherent in the food systems status quo.

The collective’s food rebel mantra is, after all, “fill the stomach, feed the mind, nourish the soul, fuel a movement.”

Shakirah Simley

Fueling the Resistance

Co-Founder, Nourish|Resist

Acting Executive Director, Southeast Community Center, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission

WORKS: San Francisco | LIVES: San Francisco

FIELDS: Advocacy, Education, Media

Longtime activist Shakirah Simley writes about food, race, and culture. Her work has appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Huffington Post*, *Civil Eats*, and *Feed the Resistance*, a book anthology of essays and recipes published in 2017. Following the 2016 presidential election, she co-founded Nourish|Resist, a political organizing collective of multiracial food workers. Simley is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania; as a Fulbright scholar she attended the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Italy, where she received a master's in Food Culture and Communication. In 2017, she was selected as an inaugural Stone Barns Center For Food & Agriculture Exchange Fellow in New York.



“The majority of the people who feed us are black and brown people who don’t receive fair wages and don’t have access to health care or decent food.”

In San Francisco, Shakirah Simley’s path to mixing food with social justice started with her Slow Jam business, which she developed while part of the [La Cocina](#) incubator program. The non-profit mentors women of color and immigrants launching food enterprises.

Simley, 33, is the eldest of five children who grew up in Harlem, where access to the abundant fresh food she found in Northern California was scarce. Simley saw so much surplus fruit when she arrived in San Francisco that she felt compelled to preserve it. “From a food justice and food access perspective, food waste is a shame, so I wanted to turn that excess into value-added products,” she says. “Preserving is a practical, necessary skill with a long history. It’s a way to connect communities to the land and to each other, across race or class lines.”

Simley, who started as a canner-in-residence, went on to serve as the community director for San Francisco’s [Bi-Rite Market](#) and its family of businesses. She also served as an instructor teaching cooking classes at [18 Reasons](#), the educational arm of Bi-Rite.

In 2017, she accepted a position as a community relations manager at the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. In her new job she is managing a community center and working to build a new one in the historically underserved Bayview neighborhood in San Francisco. In her position—something of a departure from her previous paid employment—she handles issues of environmental justice, economic development, equity, neighborhood revitalization, sustainability, climate change readiness, and, yes, food.

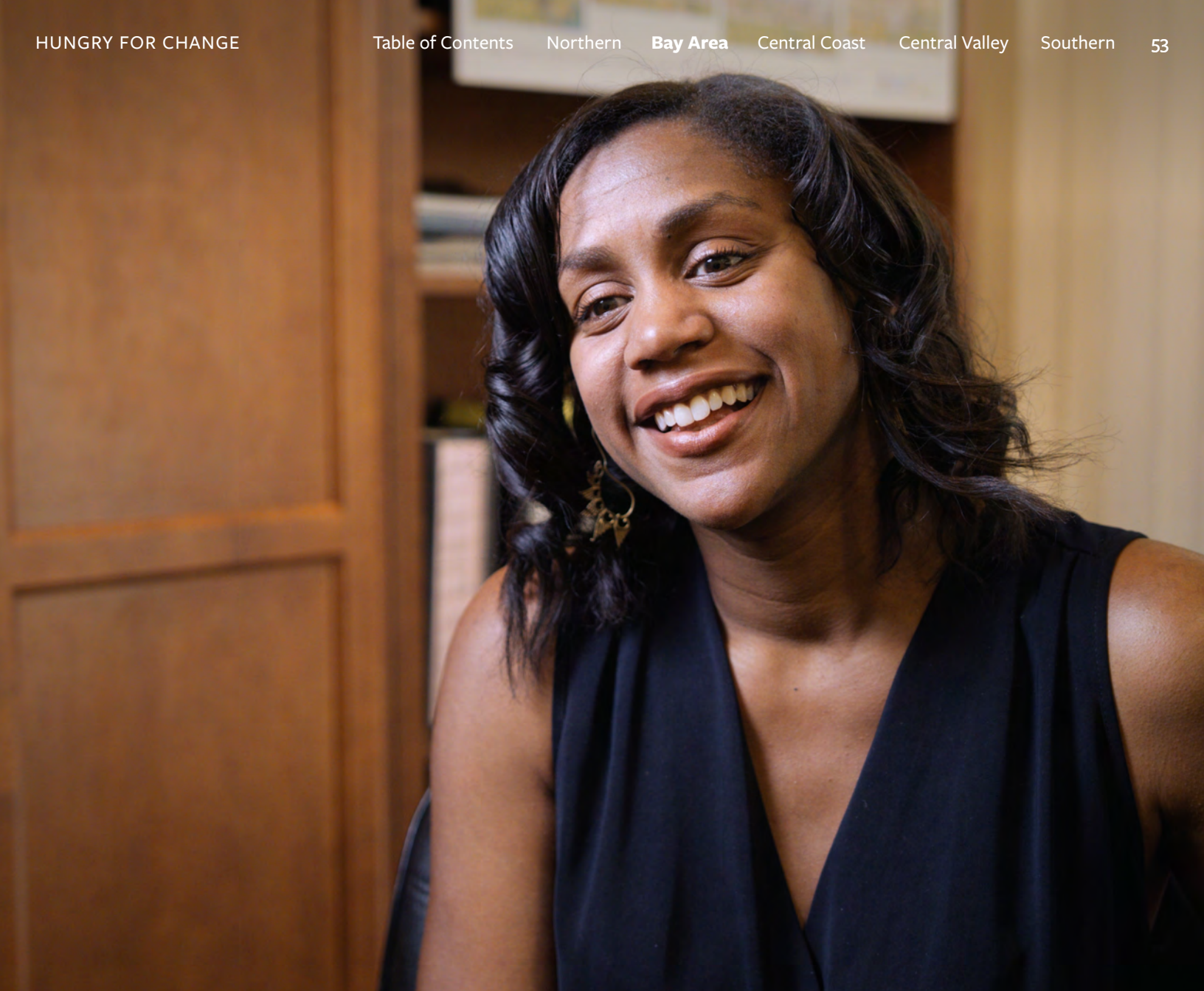
“I needed to find a way to support myself as a single woman of color from a working-class background who wants to live in San Francisco,” says Simley, the daughter of a social worker and granddaughter of a Black Panther. “I also wanted to use my skill set to work on a different scale, where you can impact a whole city or region. And I was looking for a pathway towards political leadership,” she says. “I’m trying to set myself up in San Francisco for a commission appointment or a run for elected office. It’s going to take a while, so I need to understand how the local government systems work. The city is a machine.”




In addition to her day job, Simley speaks, writes, and advocates on food justice matters. She is on the advisory board of Equity at the Table (EATT), founded in 2018. Nourish|Resist is a tool for political action using food as a lens. Its slogan: “Hate won’t feed us.” The group uses its talents—from baking to organizing—to educate people about how to counter the current administration’s policies and to prepare people for acts of disobedience. At An UnPresidentialMeal, the collective’s first event, Nourish|Resist hosted a dinner for Mission High School students, staff, and community the night before the inauguration. The evening served as an opportunity to protest the president, express frustration and fear, and gather with like-minded people around a table. The organization followed that event with a meet up on Valentine’s Day that included chocolate and writing supplies for voters to send “love letters to legislators.” The write-in yielded hundreds of colorful and pointed postcards for local politicians and was designed to help people give voice to their activism. In February 2018, Nourish|Resist hosted a Reclaiming Refuge MLK Sanctuary Day in collaboration with women of color chefs Reem Assil, Fernay McPherson, and Preeti Mistry.

“It took hundreds of years to create these problems in our food systems and communities, it’s going to take a lot of time to undo them.”

Simley has lived, worked, and organized in San Francisco for 10 years. In 2017, she took a six-month self-care sabbatical because, she says, she was burned out. “This work is hard. I had the privilege of taking a mental health break, which carries a stigma,” says Simley, who serves on the executive board of directors for the San Francisco-based educational organization CUESA (Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture.) “Especially among black women, we don’t get to take a break. We don’t get permission to do that.”



*“The fight in front of us is old.
But our eyes are fresh.
And wide open. Food is my lens,
but people are my focus.”*



She encourages other advocates to look after themselves in the face of great urgency. “You have more time than you think. It took hundreds of years to create these problems in our food systems and communities, it’s going to take a lot of time to undo them,” she says. “Technology gives us a skewed sense of time, but changing hearts, attitudes, and systems of oppression—that takes a lot of time.”

The small, slow food movement has a lot to learn from Big Fast Food, says Simley, in terms of working across all sectors of the economy to bring about change. “We need all kinds of people working on issues around land, access, capital, agriculture, water, housing, finances,” she says. “These are all food issues.”

Her focus remains on the most vulnerable among us. “The majority of the people who feed us are black and brown people who don’t receive fair wages and don’t have access to health care or decent food,” she says. “We need to have a broad-based understanding of all the different points in the food chain to develop a coordinated, cohesive response to cultivate change.”

People of color in food are especially burdened, says Simley. They are expected to grow the food and serve the food. As chefs, they’re also expected to be as eloquent about the roots and recipes of their specific food culture, as they are about grossly appropriative and derivative versions of their food and culture. At the same time, she says, people of color are often expected to call out all the wrongs in the food systems, many of which stem from interpersonal and structural racism that limits their full potential within kitchens, dining rooms, fields, or editing rooms. “In the face of all this, we persist,” she says.

For Simley, doing this work isn’t really a choice. “Apathy is a luxury I’ve never had in life in terms of supporting myself, my family, my community, and the next generation,” she says. “We can’t get siloed. We can’t simply work for change in the food movement. People like me need to run for office. The fight in front of us is old. But our eyes are fresh. And wide open. Food is my lens, but people are my focus. I’m shifting gears towards politics, but will never lose my grounding in this community.”

Central Coast

SANTA CRUZ

Farming for a Stable Future

Anthony Reyes

56

Anthony Reyes

Farming for a Stable Future

Farm Manager, Homeless Garden Project

WORKS: Santa Cruz | LIVES: Santa Cruz

FIELDS: Farming, Social Justice, Food Access

Anthony Reyes found his calling working at the intersection of farming and social justice with organizations such as the Tilth Alliance in Seattle, the youth education program Common Threads Farm in Bellingham, and now with the Homeless Garden Project in Santa Cruz. Reyes credits his college days at the University of California, Santa Cruz, for his passion for sustainable agriculture with a food justice focus. Reyes, a biracial millennial with Mexican-American roots, always wanted to return to the area, a hub for farming with a mission. In 2017, he returned to the community where he first learned to grow food and view agricultural systems through a justice lens.



“The farm itself is such a place of radical inclusivity. Everyone is embraced and welcomed.”



In his first year at the Homeless Garden Project, Anthony Reyes says he was asked about every stereotype imaginable when working with this marginalized population. Chief among them: Do homeless people really work? There’s a lot of stigma associated with this population, he says. “For the record, the crews here are some of the most hardworking people I’ve ever met,” says Reyes of the participants in the non-profit’s year-long employment-training program at Natural Bridges Farm. The project serves people in Santa Cruz County who are homeless or formerly homeless, who have experienced barriers to employment, and who want to maintain a stable productive place in society. “The crew tackles every task seriously with passion and heart.”

Reyes spends his days on the farm bouncing between different posts—whether the field, greenhouse, farm stand, or kitchen—helping crews with their tasks on the 3.5-acre farm, which grows row crops and flowers. He’s also in charge of the organization’s three-pronged Community Supported Agriculture program. CSAs, an alternative marketing model that features a direct relationship between farmer and consumer, accounts for about 10 percent of the 25-year-old institution’s income.

The program includes a traditional CSA, a U-pick version, and a scholarship fund, where people can donate to a CSA program for 10 local organizations serving the needy. Flowers go to a local hospice program and the program includes a value-added enterprise making and selling jams, dried herbs, and floral wreaths, which are sold at their downtown store, in a new shop in nearby Capitola, and online.

Relationships are central to Reyes’s job, he says, and inform every aspect of work on the farm, which is slated to expand to a nine-acre permanent site expected to be fully operational in 2020. The 28-year-old strives to treat each crew member with care, compassion, and respect. He says he learns as much from his 17-member crew as they learn from him. “Every single day they inspire me. The farm itself is such a place of radical inclusivity. Everyone is embraced and welcomed,” he says. “And that is reflected in the pride people take in the work and the collaboration on the farm. It’s really a beautiful thing to witness on a day-to-day basis.”



Reyes has farming in his blood: Wisconsin dairy farmers make up his mother's side of the family. His father is of Mexican heritage and his paternal grandfather ran a "mow and blow" business in Los Angeles. The smell of grass and a four-stroke engine is embedded in childhood memories, he says, and he looked up to his grandfather, a gentle soul. In college, Reyes says his studies helped him begin to see agriculture and outside work through a social justice lens. A key mentor on campus: a UC Santa Cruz lead groundskeeper whom he worked with, Jose Sanchez.

His "juiciest" days, Reyes says, are whenever he can get his hands in the earth. "I make some of the deepest connections with our crew members simply working alongside them," he says. "Working the soil creates a safe space for people to be seen and heard for who they are."

Reyes has seen first-hand what a difference growing food can make in someone's life. "There's something very restorative and transformative about planting a seed and watering it and watching it grow into a flourishing plant that can provide


"There's something very restorative and transformative about planting a seed and watering it and watching it grow into a flourishing plant that can provide sustenance."

sustenance," he says. "From a little speck in your hand to the harvest for your lunch: That has a calming, therapeutic effect."

Crew members see the fruits of their labor and the value that it brings. "There are very real, tangible benefits at the end of the day, whether someone has spent it building a bed, weeding, or picking. You can see the difference you've made," says Reyes. "There's ownership and a sense of accomplishment."



“Every single person on the crew has personal challenges they’re trying to work through. We very much meet people where they are.”



As Reyes points out, homelessness and joblessness go hand in hand. Lack of job skills, a spotty work history, an absent social support network, and low self-esteem can all make the transition out of homelessness more difficult. The Homeless Garden Project’s program is designed to address these concerns, in addition to the challenges that come with substance abuse, mental health issues, physical or developmental disability, and the unique problems faced by veterans—all obstacles that disproportionately impact the homeless community.

Housing is one of the most immediate problems. Some of the Homeless Garden Project’s clientele live in shelters, while others camp outside or in cars, or reside in tenuous subsidized housing situations. A team of social work interns help garden crew members find stable employment and housing. The interns also help the crew find resources to address other obstacles like transportation, substance abuse, and mental health problems.

“Every single person on the crew has personal challenges they’re trying to work through. We very much meet people where they are,” says Reyes. In a region known for exorbitant rents and real estate, Reyes is well aware that many residents of the greater community—including some farm project volunteers—are just a paycheck or two away from homelessness themselves.

Measuring success comes in multiple ways. More than 90 percent of participants in the program find stable housing and employment at the end of their garden project tenure. There’s also the less quantifiable personal growth that Reyes observes in his crews over time: “I watch people try new things and come out of their shell.”

His own on-the-job goals? “I remind myself constantly to show up, and what it means to be present. I’ve learned so much about myself in this line of work,” he says. “It’s also given me more confidence and allowed me to be okay with, and find strength in, vulnerability. It’s not just me. Every single person who steps onto the farm is changed by it.”

Central Valley

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Chanowk Yisrael

Changing the 'Hood for Good

Co-owner, Yisrael Family Farm

WORKS: Sacramento | LIVES: Sacramento

FIELDS: Farming, Food Security

Chanowk Yisrael, along with his wife Judith Yisrael, turned his Sacramento backyard into a thriving urban produce plot in response to family health concerns. Fast forward 10 years, and Yisrael Family Farm now flourishes as a community-oriented business. Yisrael left a longtime IT job to tend his farm, build backyard produce gardens for others, and deliver agricultural education to youth and adults throughout the city's underserved areas. Yisrael has served twice as Slow Food Sacramento's farm representative at the nonprofit's global conference in Italy, known as Terra Madre.



“Urban farming isn’t just for food production. It’s a powerful weapon to build community.”

Chanowk Yisrael and his family live in the heart of a city food desert. His community lacks access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food sources within a one-mile radius of home. Their Sacramento neighborhood, South Oak Park, is a historically working-class area now battling food insecurity, poverty, and gentrification.

It’s a familiar story in impoverished communities, particularly communities of color. But Yisrael and his wife, who are both African American, decided to turn that narrative on its head.

Over the course of a decade, these modern day urban homesteaders have converted their yard into a half-acre farm complete with chicken coop, an orchard of 40 trees producing fruit such as oranges, plums, and goji berries, and a produce plot boasting row crops like Ethiopian kale, Swiss chard, and collard greens. This self-taught farm family also composts, cultivates seeds, tends a beehive, and makes jams, soaps, salves, and tinctures from farm-sourced ingredients.

In 2008, the farm began as an exercise in improving the family’s own eating habits. Both of Yisrael’s parents are cancer survivors. The recession hit hard, and he wanted to

be able to feed his family—including nine children—well. He was drawn to a plant-based diet, but he figured eating well would be expensive. So he decided to learn to grow his own. “I wanted to take full control of my food,” says Yisrael, who eventually quit his corporate job to farm full time. Today, the Yisraels source up to 60 percent of their diet from home. The Yisrael Family Farm, formally founded in 2011, expanded to serve other Sacramento residents living with food insecurity. “Urban farming isn’t just for food production,” Yisrael says. “It’s a powerful weapon to build community.”

In 2015, the [Sacramento Urban Agriculture Coalition](#), which the Yisraels co-founded, helped pass a city ordinance allowing farmers with less than one acre to set up temporary stands to sell their produce. “This was the first time I’d ever done anything politically active,” Yisrael says. “I learned if you really want to get things done you have to step outside of your comfort zone. We wanted to make sure that farmers’ voices were heard. We didn’t want these ordinances passed without the people who do the actual work at the table”. A countywide ordinance followed, allowing the Yisraels, who lives outside the city limits, to sell jams, eggs, and fresh produce to their neighbors.



“This is a homegrown revolution. I started by wanting to feed my family and then I wanted to take it to the community,” says Yisrael. It’s also a mid-life career shift for the 43-year-old, who spent more than 20 years as a self-taught computer programmer in the IT department of a telecommunications company.

The family now supports itself through farm enterprises. “We’re able to keep the lights on,” says Yisrael, who still has three children at home. “One of the things I’ve learned is how much money it doesn’t take to grow food and how many classes you don’t need to take to start a farm. Nothing takes the place of working the land and learning from other farmers.”

Both Chanowk and Judith grew up in households where fried food and canned goods were the norm. For Chanowk Yisrael, teaching his children to grow their own food and cook from scratch was an important life skill.

And he wanted to share this knowledge beyond the family to help others—particularly people of color—who are struggling to eat nutritious food. “Usually when you have urban farms you mostly have people from outside the community coming into a community. They’re usually not brown. And it usually

“This is a homegrown revolution. I started by wanting to feed my family and then I wanted to take it to the community.”

doesn’t work,” he says. “I mean it works from the aspect of growing food and the business side of selling it, but really having a deep connection with the community, that’s an onion that’s hard to crack,” he says.

“We have those community connections—I grew up here—and we’re urban farmers too. So that’s a good match and puts us in a position to be successful, not only growing and selling food but developing trust with people so we can show them something different. And they’re open to it.”

Yisrael has run culinary concerts at elementary schools, where students engaged in music also drink green smoothies.



“You can’t have a conversation about global food systems without talking about racism.”

He’s built garden beds for budding urban growers, taught classes to children and adults, held harvest events, hosted farm-to-fork dinners, and otherwise spread the gospel of healthy food in his ‘hood.

He’s hit bumps along the way. Some question whether he’s really a farmer: “When I say I have a half acre, people say, ‘Oh you’ve just got a hobby garden,’ because I don’t have 10, 20, or 50 acres.” He begs to differ.

There are deeply held cultural assumptions and stereotypes to dispel. Yisrael says he encounters resistance among first-generation Latino parents who want to see their children go to college not farm fields. He also hears from fellow African Americans, young and old, that farm work is what slaves do. “Those are roadblocks,” he says, “but I tell them: Everybody has got to eat and if you’re growing food you are in a better position than most people.”

“I also tell people that agriculture is a multibillion dollar industry in California and most of that money is not being made by people of color. If we opt out of doing this work, who does that benefit at the end of the day?”

That’s not all: “When food doesn’t have value, we cheapen it and cheap food needs cheap workers, which means cheap lives,” he says. “We’ve lost the value of what food really is. It’s just something we buy to sustain ourselves, but it’s actually the seed to culture—and that’s ultimately going to bring us out of the dark age that we’re in with the food system.”

He’s not shy about bringing up structural inequities in the food movement, either. “You can’t have a conversation about global food systems without talking about racism,” he says. “People of color have been cut out of a lot of things, including land ownership. Sometimes those conversations are uncomfortable but we need to have them.”

Estella Cisneros

Protecting Farmworkers' Rights

Directing Attorney, California Rural Legal Assistance

WORKS: Fresno | LIVES: Fresno

FIELD: Workplace Law

The daughter of Mexican farmworkers who immigrated to the United States, Estella Cisneros grew up in Merced County in the heart of the state's agricultural region. Cisneros attended Stanford University and Yale Law School before returning home to the Central Valley after stints in Sacramento, San Francisco, and New York. In her role as directing attorney at the non-profit California Rural Legal Assistance in Fresno, she provides legal counsel for mostly immigrant farmworkers. She was singled out by Forbes in its 2012 "30 Under 30" law and policy list.



“Who else is going to help make the Central Valley a better place for people than someone who grew up there?”

Estella Cisneros knows what a privilege it is to study at Stanford and Yale. It was total culture shock for this small-town girl, the daughter of farmworkers from the Central Valley town of Planada, and the first in her family to go to college. “Stanford was really my first time out of the Central Valley,” says Cisneros, 33, the directing attorney at [California Rural Legal Assistance’s](#) Fresno office. “And for the first time in my life I saw stark disparities in income levels, quality of life, and other inequities. It took leaving the Central Valley for me to be able to look back and see there are a lot of things wrong with the Central Valley.”

Cisneros offers an overview: The largest agricultural powerhouse in California, the Central Valley struggles with environmental problems, including increasingly polluted air, soil, and water, due largely to corporate agricultural entities. It’s also home to some of the most exploited workers in the state, some documented, some not, many of whom face wage theft, unsafe work conditions, and sexual harassment on the job.

Cisneros was determined to come back to use her education to help her community. “I think people who leave and come back have a unique perspective on the Central Valley,” she says. “I felt called to return to contribute because a lot of people don’t. I’d come home from college to see people who didn’t have enough money to eat. Because it was home, it was personal. Who else is going to help make the Central Valley a better place for people than someone who grew up there?”

Cisneros says many Americans—even those who live in the farm country, drive Highway 99, and see fields to the horizon—don’t realize where their food comes from or the labor required to get it to a grocery store. That’s not her experience. Her parents are field workers: Cisneros’s dad picks mostly table grapes, her mom mainly harvests sweet potatoes. They’ve also worked on peach and cherry farms. Her father’s father picked crops in the United States as a *bracero*, part of a controversial program that allowed seasonal farmworkers to live temporarily in the US from 1942 to 1964. As a teenager, Cisneros herself earned money in the summers picking peaches, figs, and blueberries. “I did it for a very short period of time. I didn’t have the patience for it,” she says. “It’s really hard work.”

Cisneros thought she’d be an immigration attorney but found the cases too emotionally taxing. Employment law proved a good fit. “The low prices that we pay for food, especially produce, in America, has to do with how prevailing wage theft is in the agricultural industry,” she says of a business ingrained with what she calls “the historical vestiges of racism that dates back to slavery.” “We want all the benefits of low-paid workers. Yet we don’t want to deal with this population of working poor.”

In the Fresno office of CRLA, this 50-year-old statewide organization represents agricultural workers in dairy, farm, produce-packing, and nursery jobs. Much of Cisneros’s work revolves around wage issues (theft, minimum wage violations, discrimination, retaliation); she also takes on cases involving

worker health and safety concerns (sanitation, heat protection, water breaks) and sexual harassment claims. But it's wage theft cases that represent the bulk of Cisneros' business. "Wage theft is such a prevailing crime in low-paid work in California—and agriculture is particularly bad," says Cisneros, whose clientele includes only documented workers, in accordance with funding laws that CRLA, a federally-funded non-profit, must abide by. "I think employers and farm labor contractors think they can get away with cheating these workers out of what they're owed." The same holds true, she adds, for rampant sexual harassment against mostly female farm labor.

For undocumented farmworkers—which may account for 75 percent or more of agricultural workers, Cisneros's hands are tied. Her parents, both documented immigrants, have frequently seen these most vulnerable field workers exploited. "We would love to represent as many people as possible. The regulations are what they are for political reasons; it's a very sensitive topic," she says. "That's what it's been for a couple of decades."

Still, she's had many significant victories among the hundreds of documented farmworkers she has represented. "There is something incredibly powerful about having people who are traditionally underrepresented or disadvantaged have an attorney represent them in court or in administrative hearings," says Cisneros. "We win most of the cases we take. California law is pretty good for agricultural workers and there are a couple of good hammers here that apply to all workers."

A good day for Cisneros? When she wins a claim putting money rightfully where it belongs in a worker's pocket. Her biggest individual judgment: \$30,000 in owed wages; the employer is on a payment plan to pay it back. "That was a really good day," says Cisneros. Any settlement goes entirely to the client; CRLA does not charge legal fees. "On the individual level, even \$3,000 in owed wages is enough to buy a car and that can make a total difference in someone's life. This is not chump change for our clients."

Another good day? When Cisneros is able to force compliance with workplace health and safety rules such as water, shade, and a restroom, basic services that many non-ag employees take for granted. "We're just trying to make sure that workers

are protected and get what the law says they're entitled to, what any other person would want if they put in a hard day's work," she says.

She understands that legal compensation has its limits. "There is so much more that people want and need than what the law can give them. Most of the time legal remedies revolve around money, reinstatement, or training for the workforce," she says. "If you've been sexually assaulted at work, you most likely don't want to go back there. It's traumatic. At the end of the day you're left with the reality that your suffering is worth a certain amount of money, that's it. That's how civil cases work."

"There's a whole group of people who pick our produce and process our food who have to go on food stamps or go to food pantries to support their own families and that makes no sense to me."

This attorney also finds herself frequently explaining to clients the difference between the law and justice. "Something might be unfair—such as a mean boss—but it's not unlawful," says Cisneros. "It may still be abusive and a worker may suffer but being a jerk isn't against the law."

Nonetheless, Cisneros is driven by a strong moral compass. "Agriculture is a multibillion dollar biz in California. So how is it that some people aren't even earning minimum wage as farmworkers?" she says. "That continues to confound me and it fuels me to do the work I do because everybody eats food and everybody needs food. There's a whole group of people who pick our produce and process our food who have to go on food stamps or go to food pantries to support their own families and that makes no sense to me."

Janaki Jagannath

Justice For All

Former Coordinator, Community Alliance for Agroecology


WORKS: Central Valley | LIVES: Davis

FIELDS: Farmworker Advocacy, Policy, Environmental Justice

In her three-and-a-half years working in the Central Valley, Janaki Jagannath focused on agriculture-related policy matters for the non-profit organizations Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment and California Rural Legal Assistance. A graduate of the University of California, Davis, Jagannath returned in 2017 to work towards an environmental law degree. She grew up in San Diego, and spent summers there farming alongside third-generation Japanese growers and recent Oaxacan immigrants. An Indian American, this farmworker advocate and environmental justice organizer is active in policy efforts on behalf of farmers of color.



“Farmworkers are not just the backbone of our food system, they’re the backbone of our entire economy.”



Perhaps not surprising for someone whose given name—Janaki—is the Hindu goddess of agriculture, Janaki Jagannath felt a calling to work the soil and advocate on behalf of farmworkers in California’s Central Valley.

While at [California Rural Legal Assistance](#) in Fresno, she lobbied for access to clean water, air, and soil, and fielded concerns about pesticide exposure, wage theft, and sexual harassment for a mostly Latino, low-income clientele. “I learned quickly that farmworker legal advocacy is not only critical to advancing social justice but it’s critical to advancing agriculture in general,” Jagannath says. “Farmworkers are not just the backbone of our food system, they’re the backbone of our entire economy.”

At the [Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment](#) (CRPE), she served as the coordinator for the [Community Alliance for Agroecology](#). Agroecology, she explains, is a farming practice that balances and respects all the participants in an agricultural production system and is built from traditional knowledge that links environmental, economic, and human health, while protecting natural resources for both people and the planet.

The alliance, made up of six environmental justice nonprofits—CRPE, [Californians for Pesticide Reform](#), [Community Water](#)

[Center](#), [Cultiva la Salud](#), [El Quinto Sol de America](#), and the [Leadership Counsel for Justice & Accountability](#)—wants to improve agricultural and natural resource policies for all residents in the Central Valley, the biggest agricultural powerhouse in the United States. “Despite its role in the region, the San Joaquin Valley has been subject to agricultural, environmental, and land-use policy that has burdened the community with some of the worst health and social outcomes in the nation,” says Jagannath. The area has an immigrant labor force working on large-scale corporate farms and ranches producing commodity crops.

Jagannath’s focus at the alliance: Advocating on behalf of small-scale farmers and farmworkers of color, whose different experiences “are often glossed over in public policy,” says the 28-year-old. “There are so many different kinds of farmworkers and different work situations—whether you’re a vineyard worker, a strawberry and lettuce picker at a large ag operation, or an employee at a high-end, slow food farm.”

The environmental and slow food movements have been dominated by urban, mostly white, well-off populations, she says. Food justice advocacy is important, says Jagannath, because it’s an attempt to address inequities in the food and farming system that has historically taken advantage of



people of color. “A lot of residents living in rural communities don’t have access to the fresh produce that they pick in the fields,” she says.

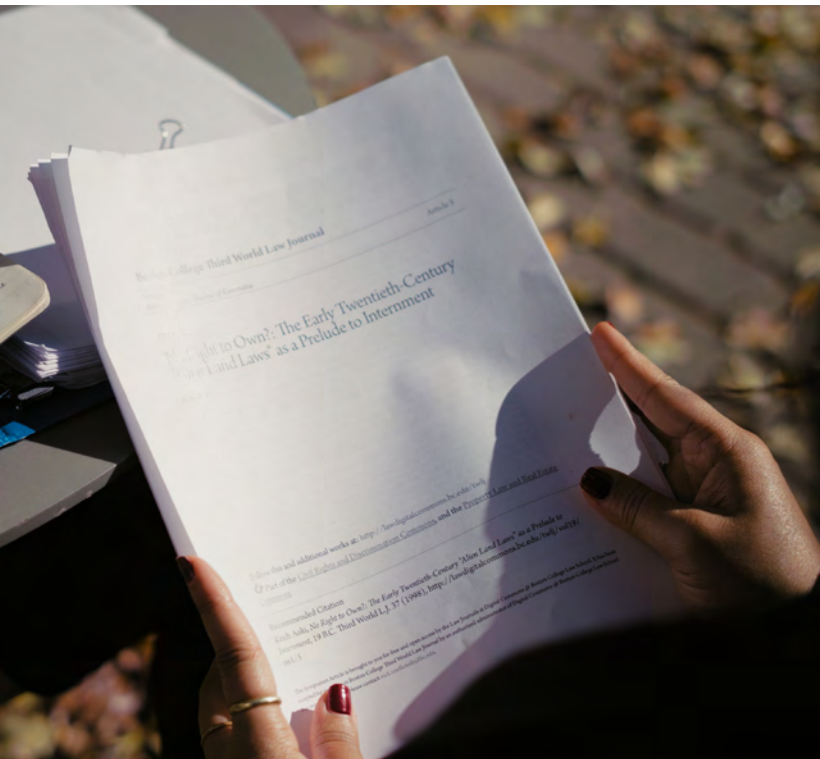
During her two years with the alliance, she helped work on the passage of the Farmer Equity Act of 2017, which amends the California Food and Agriculture Code to include a more diverse set of farmers who have been federally classified as “socially disadvantaged” in the allocation of government resources. “It’s time for the California Department of Agriculture to direct funding to the next generation of farmers—many of them from immigrant or refugee backgrounds—to allow these thought leaders and pioneers to succeed,” says Jagannath.

Jagannath is the child of immigrants from South India, who originally settled in Mobile, Alabama, where she was born. Her father worked in paper mills in the rural South. After her parents’ divorce, her mom moved to San Diego to raise her two children. That’s where Jagannath’s love of the land blossomed.

While an undergraduate at the University of California, Davis (where she is now studying environmental law with a focus on agriculture and land use), Jagannath spent summers working at Chino Nojo, a fruit and vegetable farm in Rancho Sante Fe, in northern San Diego County. The farm’s upscale clientele includes culinary celebrities Alice Waters and Wolfgang Puck.

“It’s time for the California Department of Agriculture to direct funding to the next generation of farmers—many of them from immigrant or refugee backgrounds—to allow these thought leaders and pioneers to succeed.”

Jagannath enjoyed harvesting vegetables and fruits—the mixed row crop farm is known for its extensive selection of microgreens—and working at the farm stand. The third-generation Japanese-American-owned family farm—nojo is Japanese for farm—is a model farm business in Jagannath’s mind. She ticks off reasons why: The Chino family value farming as an occupation; workers receive long-term, stable employment; there is a reverence for the land and tradition; a commitment to teach, share, and innovate; and a dedication to growing good food.



“To me, the health and vitality of soil microbial communities has everything to do with the vitality of the communities who walk around on top of it.”



As an undergraduate, Jagannath found the language for her interest in environmental justice. She worked with the faculty at Davis to build a Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems degree, which dovetails with her own interests. “Davis is a federally-funded, land-grant agricultural school that has been historically funded by agribusiness and focused toward industrial agriculture,” she says. “This sustainable agriculture degree, has been a long time coming.”

Jagannath combines field experience and farming practice with policy and advocacy. She earned a certificate in ecological horticulture from UC Santa Cruz’s Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems. “That’s where I challenged my own assumptions about what it means to be a farmer,” she says. “It was my gateway from the farm into the agricultural policy and food justice world.”

Why law school? “It definitely got to a point in my policy and advocacy work that I realized it was great to have lawyers as a resource, but I wanted to have those skills. I want to be that person at the policy drafting table,” says Jagannath.

Jagannath is also an unabashed soil nerd. She thinks the EPA should have a Department of Soil. And soil may well be where she spends her working hours, after law school. “I see myself advocating at that intersection of soil health and human health. It’s also tied very deeply to climate change, and that’s a very new, emergent area of law—climate change law—that I want to explore.” It just makes sense to her. “When it comes to soil—the thing we spend our entire lives walking around on—we seem not to care about it as much as air or water. To me, the health and vitality of soil microbial communities has everything to do with the vitality of the communities who walk around on top of it.”

And she expects that her work will take her back to rural agricultural communities. Rural work is challenging: It can be isolating, even intimidating for a young woman of color advocating radical ideas in a socially conservative region. But in the Central Valley the need is great, Jagannath says, and there’s a sense of urgency to represent low-income people of color during a time of stark anti-immigrant rhetoric.

Nikiko Masumoto

Art, Activism & Agriculture

Farmer, Masumoto Family Farm

WORKS: Del Rey | LIVES: Del Rey

FIELDS: Farming, Activism, Art


Nikiko Masumoto is a fourth-generation farmer in the Central Valley town of Del Rey. The daughter of acclaimed Japanese American writer and seasoned organic peach farmer Mas Masumoto, she has apprenticed with her father full-time for seven years.

The transitioning of the farm from dad to daughter is the subject of a 2015 PBS documentary “Changing Season” and a book of the same name. A University of California, Berkeley, graduate, Nikiko’s storytelling and performance work frequently documents valley life, in particular the internment of her farming family during World War II.

She has never missed a harvest.



“All of the people who deeply care about our food systems need to come to places like the valley.”



For Nikiko Masumoto, self-described feminist farmer and agrarian artist, there is no separation between agriculture, creativity, and community. They're related and inform each other. For instance, her storytelling performance pieces weave together the Central Valley, farm life, and her family history.

When Masumoto left home for college, she had no intention of coming back to continue the family legacy. The Masumoto Family Farm is known for its sustainable, slow food practices and sought-after heirloom peaches (Suncrest and Elberta, among other varieties), along with nectarines and raisin grapes. The family farms on 80 acres in Del Rey, about 20 minutes south of Fresno.

But a guest lecturer in an undergraduate environmental class at the University of California, Berkeley, set her soul ablaze. In that classroom discussion, Masumoto says she grasped for the first time the destruction pesticides have wrought on ecosystems, soil, water, plants, and people. All of a sudden, Masumoto says, the place she grew up in looked really different from a global, environmental, political, and social justice perspective. It took courage, she realized, to farm the way her family had for generations.

“The most radical thing I could do was come home,” says the 32-year-old, who, following graduate school, has worked fulltime since 2011 alongside her father, who has farmed for more than four decades. “Radical means of and from the roots.” That phrase is tattooed on her foot. She also sports a peach stamp on her ankle and a spray of peach blossoms on her shoulder.

Working with a parent is not without its difficulties. “I think I’ve learned how to take things in and ask questions and offer things back and still be respectful of the experience my father has, which I think is an art in and of itself,” says Masumoto. “I feel very respected by my dad. There’s a kind of rigor to the Masumoto process. The vision is the easy part, but how to match resources to needs, how to adapt in the face of climate change, how to communicate—those are all real challenges.”

Her jiichan (grandfather) is never far from mind. “He returned to the Central Valley after surviving American concentration camps, one of the 120,000 Japanese-Americans from the West Coast who were imprisoned during World War II without due process and denied the rights they held as citizens, including land ownership,” she says. “Just three years after being released, he had the courage to buy 40 acres and decided to raise a family in the place he was ripped away from,” says Masumoto, who lives in her grandparents’ former home with



her fiancée. “He had such resilience and tenacity to overcome the racism he endured; he reclaimed a place of belonging in American soil, and he grew the sweetest peaches for everyone to enjoy. His legacy inspires me every day.”

“He loved the labor, he loved to sweat. I think he found refuge in peaches,” she adds. “How could I not want to be part of that?”

As a politically progressive, educated, mixed-race, female, queer, small-scale organic family farmer, Masumoto encounters plenty of doubters in the Central Valley, which she says is dominated by large conventional farms run mostly by conservative white men. “We’re in this political moment of reckoning. And I think the valley is one of those places that’s emblematic of the country,” says Masumoto. “What happens here, the direction the valley goes, is symbolic of how the rest of the country goes.”

Running for public office is a no-brainer for this peach grower. “I have to run. If women don’t run we’re never going to have even close to equal representation, same thing for people of color, same thing for queer people.”

She remains hopeful that change is possible. “So many of the inequalities that persist here are maintained not by consciously nefarious people but by well-intentioned people who aren’t awake,” she says. “When these people are your


Running for public office is a no-brainer for this peach grower. “If women don’t run we’re never going to have even close to equal representation, same thing for people of color, same thing for queer people.”

neighbors, you have to think about ways of building power differently. I look for a leverage point. Sometimes the road to change isn’t about open conflict.”

Farming multigenerationally, she says, demands that you take the long view. “That doesn’t always mean to be patient, but it does mean thinking not just about the urgent need or desire for a near win but what comes after that,” she says. “I struggle with that because there are so many things I want to change in the world right now.” Chief among them: Giving voice and power to people who work in the fields, and preserving and healing the earth for all its inhabitants.



“So many of the inequalities that persist here are maintained not by consciously nefarious people but by well-intentioned people who aren’t awake.”



The Masumoto Family Farm has experimented with different models to educate the peach-loving public about what it takes to grow fragile, flavorful varieties. These include its 14-year-old Adopt a Tree Program, which brings hundreds to the farm during peak stone fruit harvest time; the O, U Fab Program (Organic, Ugly & Fabulous), which matches juicy imperfect fruit with willing mouths; and the 2017 pilot campaign Eat Small Fruit, a partnership with Real Food, Real Stories, tasked with finding homes for tiny Gold Dust peaches. “We’re the outliers in the valley. We live our values and are defiant in the face of false narratives like ‘you have to get big to survive’ or ‘you have to spray,’” she says.

Masumoto wants to expand the experiential part of the farm. “There’s something transformative about this place; it’s a gift and I want to share that with people. Figuring out how to do that isn’t always easy. The human experience is both wonderful and messy,” says this farmer, who acknowledges how fortunate she is to be a relatively new, young farmer working a property that is owned outright.

The act of physical labor informs her creative process. “When you’re on the tractor, walking, picking, there’s this porousness of your mind that is super juicy,” says Masumoto, whose creative endeavors including the Yonsei Memory Project, The

Valley Storytellers Project, and the one-woman show “What We Could Carry,” an excerpt of which she performed at the White House in 2016. “It was heart-wrenching and beautiful. I got to be the living incarnation of my grandparents, at the center of power that caused so much pain and suffering. Let’s not forget it was an Executive Order that allowed for the imprisonment of my family.”

She takes comfort in something she learned from her paternal grandparents: “What we need, we already have. I have the stories and the inheritance in my body [from people] who were not broken by the most oppressive of circumstances,” says Masumoto, who still wears her baachan’s (grandmother’s) old work pants. “We’ve got a long haul. I don’t want to do the easy thing.”

There’s more. “All of the people who deeply care about our food systems need to come to places like the valley,” she says. “If some of the progressive-left food activists could come into conversation with some of the people who are actually feeding the vast majority of Americans—we aren’t, we’re too small—and see there are shared values there beneath the conservatism, then we might make some headway on the structural inequalities that make farming so difficult.”

Sarah Ramirez

Food System Change Not Charity

Former Executive Director, FoodLink Tulare County

Co-founder, Be Healthy Tulare

WORKS: Lost Hills & Delano (Kern County) | LIVES: Pixley (Tulare County)

FIELDS: Food Access, Education, Food Waste

The daughter of agricultural workers from the Central Valley, Sarah Ramirez spent four years as the executive director of FoodLink Tulare County, a food bank and anti-hunger non-profit in an impoverished community in California's agricultural salad bowl. An epidemiologist by training, Ramirez earned an undergraduate degree from the University of California, Davis, an MPH from Columbia University, and a PhD from Stanford, where she studied medical anthropology and the history of public health. In partnership with her husband, she began an all-volunteer produce gleaning program, Be Healthy Tulare, out of their mobile home, to ensure produce that would otherwise go to waste found its way to people in need.



The unfortunate irony that many in California's farming heartland, the Central Valley, are food insecure, hungry, and dealing with chronic illness, is not lost on Sarah Ramirez. It's long been her mission to make a difference in this area. It's been the focus of her academic research. It's where she's chosen to work; in May 2018 she accepted a position at The Wonderful Company to work on health and wellness concerns in Kern County, one of the poorest counties in California. Formerly an epidemiologist for Tulare County, from 2014 until March 2018 she served as the executive director of the food bank FoodLink Tulare County, located in Exeter, about an hour southeast of Fresno.

“My family worked in the fields, in agriculture and irrigation, and I witnessed seeing the people I loved and cared about dying of preventable diseases,” says Ramirez, whose mother is from Mexico and father is from Texas. “That stays with you.”

It's also deeply personal. Her family has struggled with health problems that she says were preventable and rooted in place. Her paternal grandmother believes she went blind due to chemical sprays in the fields. An uncle died from diabetes, but not before enduring dialysis, blindness, and amputation. Her father has struggled with both diabetes and heart disease since his 30s. “My family worked in the fields, in agriculture and irrigation, and I witnessed seeing the people I loved and cared about dying of preventable diseases,” says Ramirez, whose mother is from Mexico and father is from Texas. “That stays with you.”

She vowed to be a doctor. But after working in a free clinic in Sacramento during her undergraduate years she saw similar kinds of health problems in people who were getting medical care. She realized that her community's problems went beyond access to care. That's when she decided to focus her academic research on environmental, cultural, and structural issues around food access and health.

“This is one of the most impoverished counties in California, yet it's so rich in agriculture like dairy, citrus, and nuts,” says Ramirez, 44. “It's such a stark contrast. I wanted to help here because there is so much need.”

In 2012, she co-founded Be Healthy Tulare. The grassroots group collects excess or imperfect produce from backyard gardens and local farms that would otherwise go to waste and distributes it to the hungry via the food bank. The organization is named for the county where her hometown, Pixley, is located. Two to three times a month, depending on the season and bounty, volunteers harvest fruit and vegetable crops. For Ramirez, this was a no-brainer. She'd see fruit trees all around her weighed down with produce that was ripe for the picking. She and her husband also started a community food garden, cooking classes, and fitness classes for residents.

Hunger is an issue in her community, where four out of 10 residents are considered food insecure. Obesity is a problem, too. Many low-income residents lack a local full-service grocery store—and lack transportation to seek out fresh produce for their families. At the food bank, Ramirez conducted cooking classes to help educate residents about simple, healthful eating. Hers is a multi-pronged approach to wellness that's dispensed with kindness, compassion, respect, and love.

As a food bank director, she says she had to debunk myths about such services—for starters, that her clients are fat and lazy. Not so. Or that all the funding for the program comes from the government. Also incorrect. She wore many hats, including the job of raising the bulk of the funds for the food bank's budget. The food bank distributes 7.2 million pounds of food and serves around 305,000 people annually.

“We need creativity in this world; we shouldn’t get pigeonholed into doing things one way.”



In her hunger relief work, Ramirez wants to instill hope and dignity among her clientele. Seeking their input is crucial to success, she says. “You really need people to get down in the trenches and engage with community members,” she says. She also believes that food banks need to do much more than dole out canned goods. She’d like nothing more than to put food banks out of business. “We need food system change, not charity,” says Ramirez. “We’ll always need some kind of food bank service for emergency situations—job loss, recession. But food banks aren’t the answer to what ails us. We need more equitable access and education for low-income residents.”

She’s not looking for a savior. She has faith that her community has the internal resources and inner resilience to heal itself. “With a different approach, we can make our communities healthier,” she says. For instance, she thinks community co-op models and social enterprise businesses could help. What if residents were able to process a lot of that surplus fruit and create products for the greater community? What if residents were trained in batch cooking to feed hungry field workers a nutritious meal during peak harvest season when they’re working long hours and pressed for time to cook?

Ramirez bucked conventional thinking in her approach to food banking and intervention innovation. Since 75 percent of the children in her community are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, she looked for ways to improve nutrition at local schools—including partnering with community sponsors to create school “farmers markets,” a summer meal program; and “smart packs” of healthy lunches, breakfasts, and snacks

during the school year—which she says is in keeping with a food bank’s mandate to serve the poorest among us.

Like many in the non-profit sector, Ramirez found herself juggling limited resources, whether financial, staffing, or infrastructure. Among other things, she would like to see academics prioritize health disparity research in the Central Valley, which has proved more challenging than she anticipated. “So much health equity and disparity research is focused around the Bay Area, since a lot of the universities are there. But given the conditions in the Central Valley, there’s a great need to do that kind of work here.”

Ramirez thought that she might serve as a bridge to partner with academic institutions, bringing the skill set and brain trust of a university to her community—that hasn’t materialized either, despite her efforts. “The closest four-year college to here is an hour away,” she notes. “It’s challenging to get the kind of resources to do that kind of analysis here.”

In her food bank days, she found obstacles at every turn. But Ramirez also finds joy in teaching cooking classes in both English and Spanish—whether a vegan tailgate table or a Friday taco potluck—sharing skills for cooking on a budget with flair, fun, and flavor.

And she remains hopeful that systemic change is possible. “We need creativity in this world; we shouldn’t get pigeonholed into doing things one way. Sometimes in this line of work I have to bite my tongue. We need to look for broad support for food access programming. There is so much need.”

James Harris

Food Not Bombs

Loan Advisor, Farm Service Agency (FSA), US Department of Agriculture (USDA)

WORKS: Fresno | LIVES: Fresno

FIELDS: Farming, Finance

James Harris's eclectic path to the role of USDA Farm Service Agency financial advisor comes in handy on the job. The University of California, Santa Cruz, farm and garden alum, former organic farmer, African American Army veteran, and single father who hails from the South finds all his personal and professional experiences help him connect with Central Valley producers who are trying to secure loans. Many of Harris's clients are desperately trying to hold onto or start a farm business. Harris understands the healing power of growing food and the financial realities of making a go of it in agriculture.



“I’m a brother, I speak their language, that definitely helps in this work.”



As a loan officer for the [USDA Farm Service Agency](#) in Fresno, James Harris counsels newbie and seasoned farmers as they struggle to produce food and manage their finances.

Harris is no stranger to adversity. He hails from a small town in North Carolina, where, he says, there wasn’t much to do. “I had three options: get fat, sell drugs, or make a lot of babies, and I decided I wasn’t going to do any of those things,” says the 36-year-old, who was raised by a single mom and his maternal grandparents. “I decided to do something different.” So, he joined the Army.

The structure, physicality, and discipline proved a good fit, at first. Harris served 10 years, including two tours of duty in Iraq, where he was shot at in the field and suffered concussions caused by blasts from IEDs, also known as improvised explosive devices. In 2012, he left the military—as a single dad, he was honorably discharged on parenting grounds—after he became angry and frustrated over what he felt was the misuse of soldiers like himself, charged with protecting American oil interests in Iraq.

The transition to civilian life proved rough. Harris battled anger issues, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. He sought help from doctors and therapists at the Department of Veterans Affairs in Oahu, while earning an undergraduate degree at Pacific University.

He volunteered with the disabled elderly and witnessed the joy they found in spending time in a garden. Outdoor therapy, he thought, might help him too.

He learned about [The Mission Continues](#), a nonprofit that helps vets adjust to civilian life, and through that program he spent six-months apprenticing at Mohala Farms, a six-acre, organic farm and non-profit on Oahu’s North Shore. “I loved it. I was outside, driving a tractor, helping to grow fruits and vegetables, it was the best therapy for me,” he says. While there, he learned that one of his former army colleagues, battling depression and a drinking problem, committed suicide. “I didn’t see that coming,” says Harris, who realized that taking care of his mental health was a top priority to transitioning beyond the military.

He continued to volunteer and work on farms. “I loved putting seeds in the ground, seeing them come up, and selling produce at the market,” Harris says. “The physical therapy—it just made me much happier,” he says. “I felt like I really accomplished something at the end of the day, something positive,” he says.

With the goal of owning a farm, Harris was hungry to learn more about the business side of growing food. After connecting with the nonprofit [Farmer Veteran Coalition](#) (FVC), Harris found out about the [Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems](#) ecological horticultural apprenticeship program at UC Santa Cruz, where he spent six months learning about farming.

“My vision was to run my own farm. But I didn’t have the capital. I didn’t know how to finance it. At UCSC I really dug in deep on the financials: on crop yields and produce prices, how that all worked,” says Harris, who tends a thriving backyard garden in Fresno, where he grows kale, collards, chard and other vegetables. “I don’t think that dream has ever gone away, I’m just taking a different approach now.”

An FVC success story, Harris shared his experiences at its annual conference, where he met Oscar Gonzales, who was then the California executive director of the Farm Service Agency. Gonzales, who was moved by Harris’s courage, resilience, and perseverance, encouraged him to apply for a job with the agency. Harris jumped at the opportunity to help others find their footing in farming. In 2015, after he was offered the position, he promptly moved to Fresno.

The FSA helps growers on the edge secure low-interest farm loans, grants, disaster relief assistance, and credit counseling. The agency serves as a last line of defense before bankruptcy for farmers who have exhausted all other credit options or who can’t get a loan from a commercial bank.

Given his farming experience in both California and Hawaii, Harris knows firsthand the particular challenges farmers face, especially those running small- to medium-sized operations. “I see the numbers; I see how hard it is to make it pencil out,” he says.

He also understands that the financial side doesn’t always come easily to farmers, who are concerned about crop yield ratios, weather extremes, fixing equipment, and day-to-day operations.

Expenses, payroll, and tax review are probably the last thing on a farmer’s mind, says Harris, but it’s as important or maybe even more so than buying seeds and tending crops. Farming may be a way of life, but it’s also a business, says Harris, who has a personal and professional interest in reaching out to farmers of color, including other African American growers, many of whom aren’t aware that they may qualify for a farm loan. “I’m a brother, I speak their language, that definitely helps in this work,” he says.

Harris’s clientele is made up of mostly men, who grow everything from almonds and table grapes to sugar cane and mizuna. Harris helps them build projections, write credit presentations, and handle security inspections. He also offers counseling advice when clients can’t make payments. “Nobody in farming really tells you that they get loans. They don’t want you to know. When people tell their farm story they don’t really mention it,” says Harris, who wants to help people qualify for whatever financial assistance they’re eligible for.

He’s also a pragmatist. “Lenders don’t care about your social mission. If a farm doesn’t have the potential to make money, they don’t care,” says Harris, referring to the fact that some growers focus on organic practices or food justice philosophies. “I’m honest with farmers: They think it’s a selling point, and I thought it was too, but the biggest thing is: Are you making any money? Can you pay back the loan?” Harris says that organic vegetables are his jam but 90 percent of the clients he works with are conventional farmers. He understands why. “I can’t afford to only buy organic, even though I appreciate and understand the thinking behind it,” he says. “The farmers are just trying to make a living.”

“I want to help these farmers make their dreams come true. I have a purpose and I’m here to serve.”

Why Fresno? “This is where ag is happening. Urban farms are great, I get it. But this is where the land is, this is where the industry is,” says Harris, who attends Fresno State, where he’s working towards an MBA.

“I like getting a plan together based on the numbers to see what I can do to make this pencil out for my clients,” he says. “I want to help these farmers make their dreams come true. I have a purpose and I’m here to serve.”

Southern California

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Sophia Cheng

Repping Restaurant Workers

Senior Organizer, Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA)

WORKS: Los Angeles | LIVES: Los Angeles

FIELD: Labor

For five years, Sophia Cheng served as a community organizer for Restaurant Opportunities Center of Los Angeles (ROC-LA), a chapter of the national non-profit, community-oriented organization dedicated to improving wages and working conditions for restaurant industry employees, many of them low-income workers of color and immigrants. In 2018, Cheng began working for Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA), which serves the needs of mostly Korean and Latino immigrant workers. Both organizations have successfully advocated for a \$15 minimum wage, paid sick days, and anti-wage-theft ordinances. A graduate of Pomona College, Cheng earned her M.A in Asian American Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she currently lectures.



KIWA
WORKERS FOR JUSTICE

“Find your ‘partners in crime’—the organizers, worker leaders, and other people who cheer you on.”

Sophia Cheng, 34, is the daughter of immigrants from Guangzhou, China, who worked mostly in construction. “The biggest impact my parents had on me was to instill a strong sense of fairness, justice, and right and wrong,” says Cheng. “There’s a stereotype that immigrant parents push their children to be very practical as a matter of survival and necessity, and don’t encourage dreaming. That is not my experience. I never saw blue-collar jobs as inherently ‘less than,’” she says. “My respect for hard work definitely stems from seeing my parents do ‘real things’ and also be smart, philosophical, whole people.”

Cheng has worked as a community organizer for a decade. In that role, Cheng has witnessed the evolution of restaurant employees—who work in every sector from fast food to full service, mom-and-pop shops to fine-dining digs—who typically come to her with a specific, individual problem such as wage theft. “They have a chance to analyze their individual problem in a broader context, plug into campaigns, recruit and develop their co-workers, and become leaders to transform the conditions that caused their initial problem,” she says. “I always say that through my job, I get to see the best in people.”

Cheng was recruited by ROC for street outreach to restaurant workers. She learned from Asian American activist mentors that the privileges and social advantages she enjoyed as a second-generation Chinese-American were the result of social movements and community organizing. “I was interested in organizing from the start because conditions in restaurants mirror and influence standards across the growing service sector,” she says. “Also, the racial, gender, language, and age diversity in the restaurant industry provides an opportunity to bring together people who may work next to each other every day, but don’t have a chance to connect personally outside of work.”

Cheng points to community organizing wins such as a 2016 anti-wage-theft ordinance in Los Angeles, the result of a seven-year campaign, as an example of the power of collective action. The law quickly became a regional template, she says, leading to similar legislation in Pasadena, Santa Monica, and unincorporated LA County. “This was an important win for restaurant workers, who identified early on that wage theft, in the form of denied meal and rest breaks, unpaid overtime, and off-the-clock work, is a huge problem in the industry.”

Labor battles aren’t easy: Progress can be slow and there are frequently significant setbacks along the way. Cheng takes it all in stride.



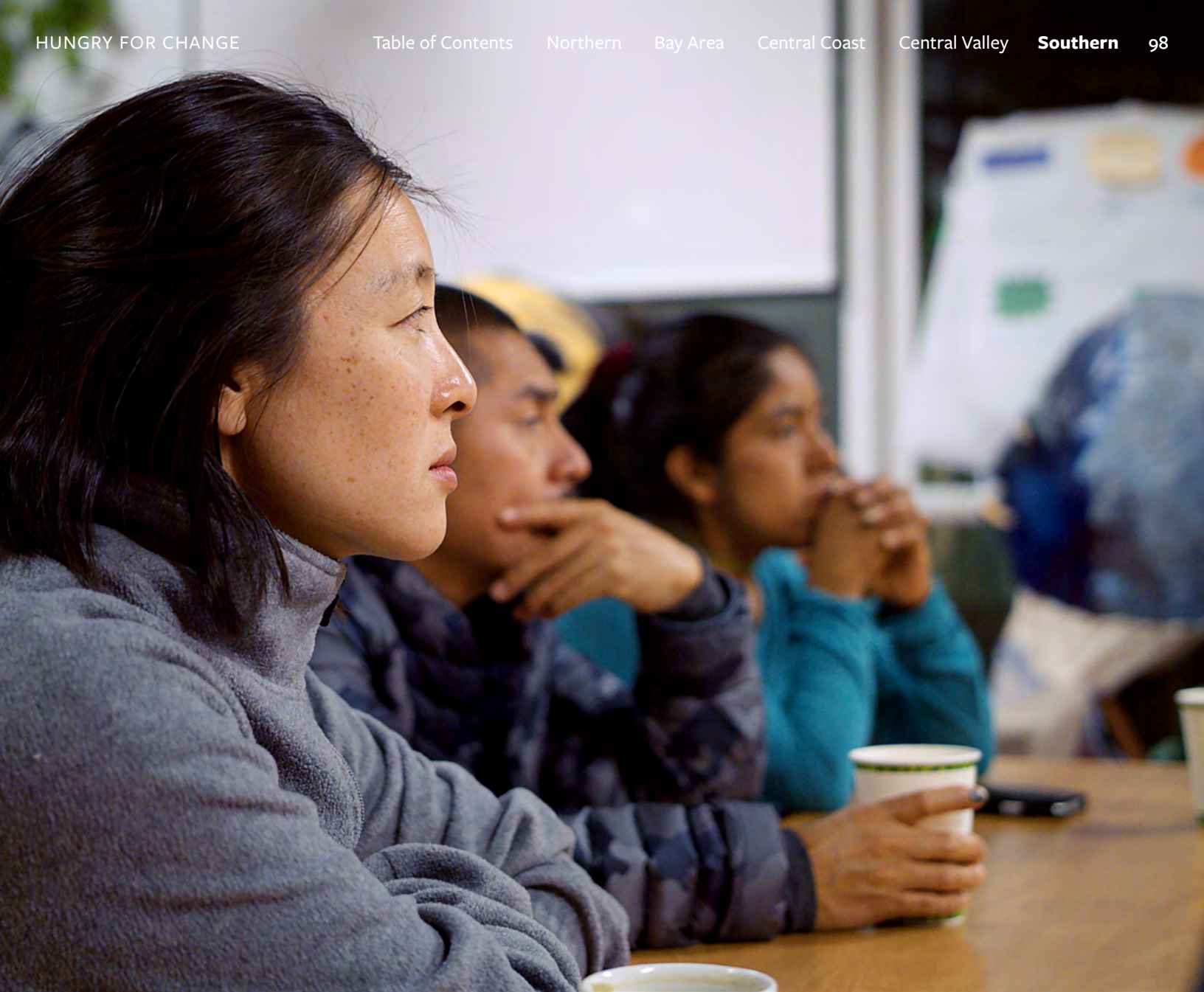
“I remind myself that I’m in this for the long run, and for my own mental and emotional health, I need to distinguish between what I can and cannot control.”

“I remind myself that I’m in this for the long run, and for my own mental and emotional health, I need to distinguish between what I can and cannot control,” says Cheng, who, as a graduate student, also served as a researcher for the [Food Chain Workers Alliance](#), a national coalition of worker-based organizations across many sectors of the food system, including agriculture, processing, sales, and serving.

Educating employees about their rights—and the agencies they can contact when workplace violations occur—is all in a day’s work for Cheng. Over the course of her career, the Angeleno has gotten savvy about how to set herself, and those she represents, up for success. Teaming up with like-minded people and organizations is critical. Case in point: the players

behind the “[Fight for 15](#)” campaign, a national worker-based effort that includes fast food employees credited with pushing lawmakers into adopting higher minimums. California leads the way on minimum wage hikes: The grassroots initiative successfully lobbied for a \$15 minimum by 2020 in Los Angeles. In 2016, Governor Jerry Brown signed a bill for \$15 by 2022 across the state. “Find your ‘partners in crime’ – the organizers, worker leaders, and other people who cheer you on,” says Cheng, who also serves as a lecturer at UCLA in Asian American Studies. “We are outspent by the corporate restaurant lobby and the obstacles can feel overwhelming, but to succeed we have to support each other and celebrate the small victories.”

Cheng joined the [Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance](#) in February 2018 and continues to focus on restaurant and market workers. The local nonprofit, says the Koreatown resident, is at the forefront of building strong ties between labor unions, worker centers, and other community-based organizations and addresses needs beyond traditional workplace concerns, including housing and transportation for low-income workers. The mother of young children, Cheng is currently working part-time; 60-hour workweeks as an organizer don’t mesh well with family life, hence the shift in her workplace and schedule.




¡El pueblo, unido,
jamás será vencido!

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HAHNA DEN MINJOONG E
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United will



*“Being on the margins
gives me a unique vantage point.
Sometimes you can see more
from the outside.”*



As an Asian American woman, Cheng says she often feels invisible in a male-dominated society that sees racial and ethnic concerns in black-and-white terms. But she's turned that reality into a positive. “Being on the margins gives me a unique vantage point,” she says. “Sometimes you can see more from the outside.”

Cheng's advocacy has extended to sexual harassment in the restaurant industry. In 2014, ROC released a [report](#) on the pervasive problem. The group analyzed Equal Employment Opportunity Commission claims and found that women restaurant workers file claims at a rate five times higher than the general female workforce. ROC's “Not on the Menu” campaign rallies around the country, including in LA, predate the current, widespread national discussion of the issue.

Four out of five female restaurant workers have experienced some form of sexual harassment from their customers, according to the ROC report. And two out of three experienced sexual harassment from management on a monthly basis.

The emergence of high-profile sexual harassment cases across the country has helped highlight the seriousness of an issue that is a widespread and longstanding problem in the service sector, says Cheng, “There's a greater understanding that these practices are unacceptable and workers should be treated with respect and dignity.”

“Harassment is baked into the culture of many workplaces from the start,” says Cheng, who adds that women, trans, and gender-nonconforming workers face greater barriers to employment, promotion, and safe workplace environments than men. “In a tipping culture, especially in states where tipped workers earn only the \$2.13 an hour federal minimum wage, some employees feel that putting up with harassment from customers because their income depends on tips is just part and parcel of the job.” Such behavior, says Cheng, should never be allowed to “normalize” in a work environment. (California is one of only seven states that pay tipped workers their state's minimum wage instead of the \$2.13 federal minimum.)

This community organizer's biggest lesson from her years of representing restaurant workers: “Every single person is valuable, needed, and can contribute something.”

Breanna Hawkins

Digesting Data, Transforming Lives

Policy Director, Los Angeles Food Policy Council (LAFPC)


WORKS: Los Angeles | LIVES: Los Angeles

FIELD: Policy

A native Angeleno, Breanna Hawkins works at the intersection of health policy, social justice advocacy, and food security in her role as policy director at the Los Angeles Food Policy Council. She coordinates working groups, supports strategic campaigns, and leads research initiatives, including the non-profit LAFPC's Food System Dashboard, a collection of more than 260 indicators measuring health, sustainability, affordability, and fairness in Los Angeles's regional food system. She is a PhD candidate at her alma mater, the University of Southern California, with a focus on urban food movements through an equity lens.



“It’s critical to build trust, nurture relationships, and improve communications. Not everyone is equipped to do that, especially when things are heated.”



Breanna Hawkins hasn’t always considered herself a food person. An unabashed number-crunching policy wonk, Hawkins has always been passionate about the built environment, urban planning, public policy, and the roles they play in quality of life. But in her position as a food systems policy analyst for Community Health Councils (CHC), she began to see how food matters intersect with quality of life concerns, including health, land use, economic development, and economic opportunity. In her seven-year tenure at the policy and advocacy organization, which strives to eliminate disparities in health access for LA’s low-income residents and communities of color, she worked on strategies to attract grocery stores to underserved South LA, and on initiatives to increase the quality and distribution of farmers markets throughout the city.

“I really want to effect transformative change in the lives of those most impacted by systemic oppression, disparity, and inequity: people of color, people burdened with poverty, and people without access to opportunity,” says the 28-year old, who has also worked on global public health initiatives geared towards increasing health resources for disenfranchised communities in Central America, India, and West Africa.

In 2011 she left CHC to tackle a PhD in urban planning. Hawkins knows just how important data-driven research is in her line of work and wants to help fill in the gaps on the statistical front. “One challenge in policy advocacy is the data isn’t always there to support the health, economic, and food planning pieces,” she says. But she also missed on-the-ground advocacy, so she reached out to the Los Angeles Food Policy Council, a move that led to her current job. The council is made up of a small staff and a diverse network of 40 food-systems-stakeholder board members, who collaborate with around 300 organizations and 1,000 people eager to implement systemic change.

“I like to see the tangible impacts of my work,” she says. “It’s so easy to get caught up in theory.” A self-described natural diplomat, Hawkins enjoys being a liaison between community members and decision makers. “It’s one thing to have them in a room talking to each other. It doesn’t mean they’re listening to each other,” she says. “I feel like a mediator sometimes, providing dual translation and playing a bridging role. It’s critical to build trust, nurture relationships, and improve communications. Not everyone is equipped to do that, especially when things are heated.”



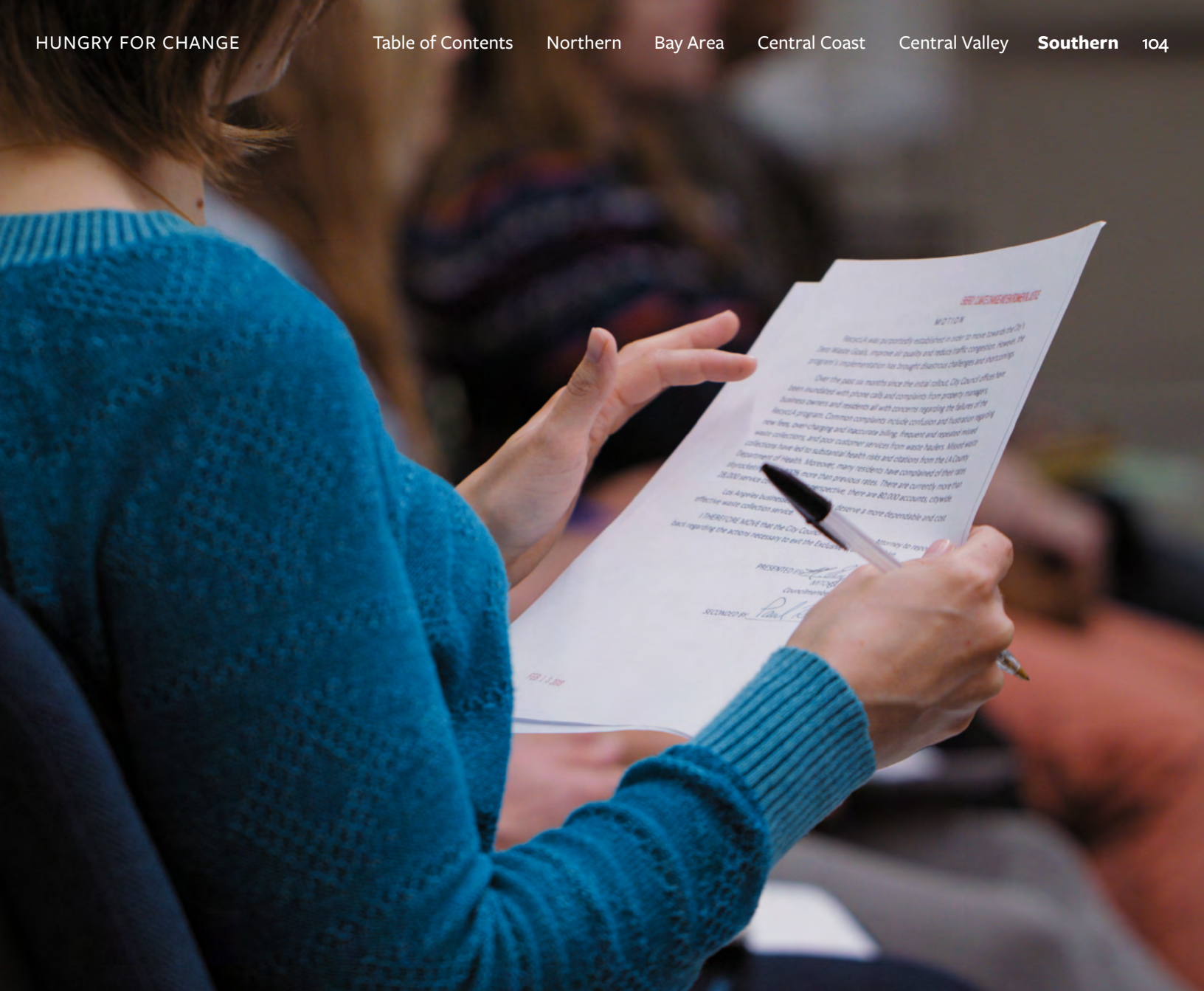
Hawkins hails from a food-related family background. She is the great-granddaughter of Southern sharecroppers, and the granddaughter of the first African American grocery store chain manager in Los Angeles. At one time, her father had a food truck business in LA. She has experienced first-hand the health benefits of food policy changes: She used to regularly buy soda at school before it was banned. A family history of cancer has seen her extended clan transition to what she calls a “healthier, cleaner, organic diet that trickled down to me.”

Leveling the playing field, so everyone has access to the same choices to make healthy decisions for their lives, is the crux of the LAFPC’s mission. Victories during Hawkins’s time there include the passage of urban agriculture incentive zones, in which owners of vacant or unimproved property receive tax benefits when they partner with local growers who convert the land for agricultural purposes. Other wins: A campaign to require all of Los Angeles’s more than 55 farmers markets to accept CalFresh Electronic Benefit Transfer cards, formerly known informally as food stamps. And the introduction of


“I like to see the tangible impacts of my work,” she says. “It’s so easy to get caught up in theory.”

the RecycLA program. This commercial and multi-family residential waste initiative offers food businesses the option to donate edible surplus food to hunger relief organizations. The Food Policy Council helped create partnerships between waste haulers and food recovery organizations and produced a guide called “Reducing Food Waste: Recovering Untapped Resources In Our Food System.”

Policy work is not without hurdles, including keeping stakeholders engaged for the slow pace of government regulation, which can take years to create change. “We make sure to celebrate the small gains as well as the big wins to help with morale and motivation and to keep people engaged,” she says.



“People think behavioral change is simply about individual choice. People don’t recognize why behaviors are the way they are and the historical and systemic factors that have contributed to them.”



“With the urban agriculture incentive zones, we started in 2012 with a statewide initiative, and continually worked to get it adopted, first in Los Angeles County, and finally in the city of LA. in 2017. Some coalition members said they never wanted to hear the phrase urban agriculture incentive zones again.”

Policy implementation may seem dull and tedious to some, but there’s comfort and commonality in food policy work, says Hawkins. Everybody eats so everyone can relate, whether they live in upscale Brentwood or downmarket Skid Row.

And food touches most aspects of urban life. “Even if you don’t think you’re working on food issues, you probably are,” says Hawkins. “If you’re working on homelessness, you’re touching on food. If you’re talking about housing security you’re talking about food security. If you’re involved in

transport issues, you’re engaged in food.” Given such overlap, Hawkins would welcome the creation of a more holistic approach to food work by bringing together all stakeholders.

Hawkins is all about dispelling common misperceptions in food systems work. “One of the things I always hear is that we need to teach people to eat an orange versus a bag of chips,” she says. “People think behavioral change is simply about individual choice. People don’t recognize why behaviors are the way they are and the historical and systemic factors that have contributed to them.” In impoverished neighborhoods peppered with liquor stores and fast food restaurants, lack of access to healthy food is a major barrier to change. “Addressing broader systemic problems can help to lead to change on an individual level,” Hawkins says, “but starting at the individual level is really victim blaming.”

Aviva Paley

Cooking Up Second Chances

Senior Director and Founding Team Member, Kitchens for Good


WORKS: San Diego | LIVES: San Diego

FIELDS: Cooking, Education, Advocacy, Social Entrepreneurship

Aviva Paley's path to food justice work began with an internship at Urban Adamah, the faith-based farm in Berkeley, where she was steeped in farming, food access, and food policy concepts through a Jewish service lens. Paley has worked in hunger relief, both in her hometown of Baltimore, and in San Diego, as a food justice fellow at the Leichtag Foundation. In 2014, she joined with founder Chuck Samuelson to launch the social enterprise organization Kitchens for Good, whose mission includes culinary job training for the chronically unemployed and transforming surplus food into meals for people in need. Paley is one of the University of California Global Food Initiative's "30 Under 30."



*“If you feed someone one day
they’re still hungry the next day.
That’s not a solution for empowering
people to get out of poverty.”*



Social entrepreneur Aviva Paley says she’s doing her dream job—something she expected to land in her 40s—not in her 20s. Paley, now 27, oversees job training, hunger relief, and food rescue programs for [Kitchens for Good](#), a 75-employee, \$2.6 million social enterprise catering company founded in 2015. She’s also tasked with the organization’s marketing and half its fundraising efforts.

A graduate of the Maryland Institute College of Art, Paley pivoted into hunger relief work, first at the [Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future](#) in Baltimore, and then in San Diego in 2013 while working for the [Leichtag Foundation](#), a Jewish philanthropic organization.

She wanted to do more. “I became increasingly frustrated with the hunger relief world of constant handouts. We were just slapping a Band-Aid on much deeper issues around poverty and economic opportunity,” says Paley. “If you feed someone one day they’re still hungry the next day. That’s not a solution for empowering people to get out of poverty.”

Paley began researching what a social enterprise kitchen might look like, including model programs around the country, such as [L.A. Kitchen](#), [FareStart](#) in Seattle, and [Rubicon Bakers](#)

in Richmond, California. She began working on a feasibility report to see what it would take to start something similar in San Diego.

As luck would have it, veteran chef and restaurateur [Chuck Samuelson](#) had recently founded Kitchens for Good. Samuelson was interested in turning food waste into meals for the hungry. Paley was down for that; she was also adamant that the program would include a culinary job-training component for at-risk individuals. The two teamed up in 2014 and were later joined by third partner [Jennifer Gilmore](#), a longtime food bank director.

They found a commercial kitchen with a faltering catering business in a high-crime, low-employment part of town. Kitchens for Good quickly jumped from a staff of three to 36 and they launched culinary training, hunger relief, and food rescue programs in January 2016. Kitchens for Good offers a tuition-free, intensive culinary training that primarily serves youth aging out of foster care, formerly incarcerated individuals, and homeless people. It provides on-the-job training through Kitchens for Good’s catering arm. It’s a 20-month commitment: clients spend three months in the program at Kitchens for Good and transition to fulfill the bulk of their culinary apprenticeship in industry placements.



“We teach our students everything from knife skills to life skills—everything it takes not just to get a job but to keep a job,” says Paley. The program trains 100 students a year. The main criteria for acceptance: a passion for cooking. The program graduates about 80 percent of each class, and of its graduates there is a 90 percent employment rate in restaurants and hotels.

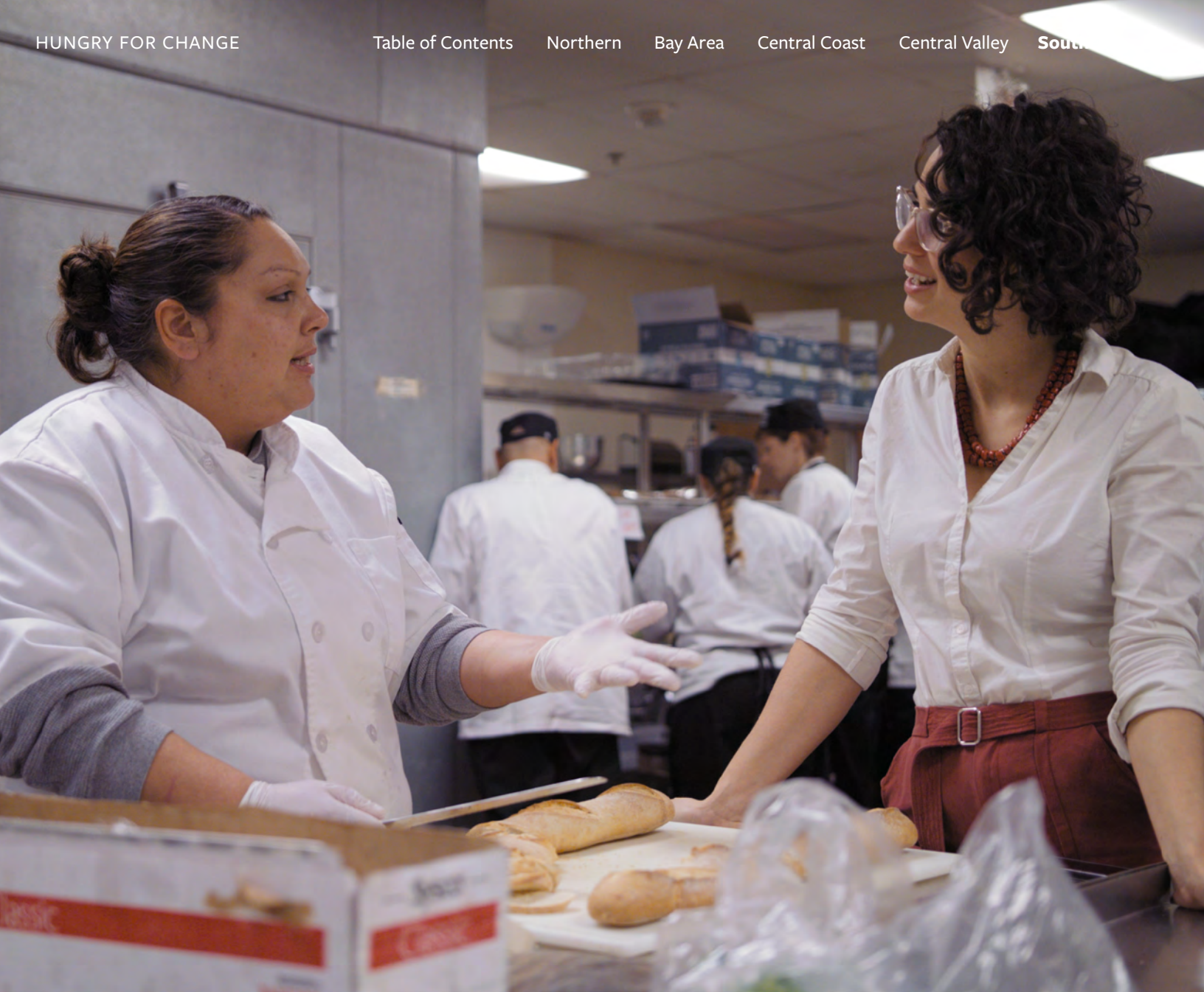
Kitchens for Good’s catering arm, which generates about 60 percent of the organization’s operating budget, caters roughly 550 events a year, from 2,000-person city galas to 10-board-member lunch meetings. Culinary students spend five to 10 hours a week in paid employment working on the catering side. “We realized pretty quickly that our students learn so much from being in an actual kitchen versus only having classroom instruction,” Paley says. “There’s no substitute for real world experience and expectations.”

Paley acknowledges that running both a business and a non-profit is challenging. “It’s more expensive to run the business the way we do,” she explains. “We hire students that may not be as seasoned and productive as a fully-trained cook. We source locally. We pay a livable wage. The things that match our values can make it hard to turn a profit. But within two years we began breaking even on our catering side.”


“We teach our students everything from knife skills to life skills—everything it takes not just to get a job but to keep a job.”

They also learned to measure success in a holistic way. She thought she and her colleagues would mostly measure success in terms of revenue and covering costs. “But we also measure success by how many of our clients find jobs, how many positions we create, the wages that we offer students,” she says. “That’s what we’re about.”

Institutional culture is key to success, too. It emphasizes building relationships on a foundation of respect and trust. “We tell our students from the day they walk in our doors that we don’t care about their pasts. They are no longer felons, foster kids, or homeless people in our eyes. They’re cooks. For a lot of these individuals, who have been in institutions for years, it’s the first time they’ve been treated this way,” she says. But that doesn’t mean they go easy on them. “We keep the bar high and they rise up to meet us.”



“Our program is proof that people can start a second chapter where they’re productive members of society.”



Not everyone makes it. Some students aren’t able to remain sober or deal with health challenges, including mental health issues. “We try to connect people with local resources and keep an open-door policy. We have had students go off their meds or break their sobriety, and we’ve had to let them go,” says Paley. “But we let them know what they need to do to be welcomed back into the program. That’s happened. We’ve had people drop out, get their stuff together, re-enroll, and graduate.”

It’s all working, overall. Kitchens for Good has a relatively low recidivism rate, for example, with just six percent of students relapsing and returning to prison.

Paley, the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, credits family and faith for her passion for social enterprise. Her father is a businessman who grew up in Israel, her mother has had a long career in non-profit philanthropy helping immigrants and refugees. Paley is the recipient of an [ROI Fellowship](#), for which she traveled to Jerusalem in 2016 for a summit with other young Jewish innovators from around the globe, and a 2017 [Ariane de Rothschild Fellowship](#), for her outside-the-box, impact-driven, cross-cultural leadership.

“Our program is proof that people can start a second chapter where they’re productive members of society,” she says. “But the quality has to be there. Consumers won’t just choose you because of your social mission.”

That mission goes beyond job training. Kitchens for Good, which is looking for a second site, is growing its hunger relief program. The organization provides 50,000 meals a year for at-risk youth, homebound seniors, and the homeless. A recent foundation grant will help the organization expand a US Department of Agriculture program by providing 500 to 700 school meals a day to eligible students.

With increased production comes a need for increased food rescue. Currently, Kitchens for Good rescues around 60,000 pounds a year of surplus or imperfect produce sourced from two farmers markets. With more than 40 markets in the area, Paley says the program is just skimming the surface.

“Social enterprise is our future,” she says. “The non-profit model is inherently broken. There aren’t enough charitable dollars to tackle the scope of the social issues that we’re facing. We need to create sustainable organizations where we can control our growth, capital, and resources, and invest in our social programs or reinvest it in jobs. Hunger is an employment and wage problem.”

Nare Park

Remaking Urban Immigrant Communities

Outreach Specialist, [API Forward Movement](#)

Former Program Associate, [Los Angeles Food Policy Council](#)

WORKS: Los Angeles | LIVES: Los Angeles

FIELDS: Social Justice, Food Access

For five years, Nare Park worked for the [Healthy Neighborhood Market Network](#), hosted by the [Los Angeles Food Policy Council](#). The fresh, nutritious food program is designed to unite communities and build the leadership role of immigrant store owners in low-income areas. Park supported store owners to develop food action plans, access resources, and broker local partnerships. In 2016, the Korean-American Park, a University of California, Los Angeles, graduate, was recognized as a [Global Food Initiative “30 Under 30”](#) for her efforts. In January 2018, Park, who identifies as gender non-binary, began working with [API Forward Movement](#), a nonprofit that addresses the health needs of Asian and Pacific Islanders.



“I support community-serving immigrant small business owners to step into leadership roles within the neighborhoods they serve.”

In her role at both the [API Forward Movement](#) and the Healthy Neighborhood Market Network, Nare Park is all about building relationships and ensuring cultural relevancy, language accessibility, and cross-cultural connection in underserved, largely immigrant LA neighborhoods.

For instance, at the [Healthy Neighborhood Market Network](#) (HNMN), a project of the non-profit Los Angeles Food Policy Council, Park helped owners transform dingy, convenience-filled corner stores into healthy neighborhood hubs. These neighborhood market owners now operate as successful and sustainable healthy food retailers in communities referred to as food deserts or food swamps, where liquor and fast-food stores flourish and nutritious food is scarce. The residents of such impoverished areas, often people of color, are more likely to experience obesity and other diet-related chronic health conditions.

Through training and technical assistance courtesy of HNMN, these mostly family-run shops add more fresh fruits and vegetables to their shelves and find creative ways to market this merchandise to increase sales. Sometimes all it takes is improved refrigeration units, better lighting, updated signage, or more attractive staging to get customers to pay attention to the produce, says Park.

For five years, Park worked with store owners on their visions for healthier businesses, be it a modest market makeover or a complete store overhaul. When Park began working at LAFPC in 2012, the program's clients were mostly Korean-speaking store owners in South Central LA. Some had seen their stores destroyed or seriously damaged during the 1992 civil unrest in the city, which magnified already existing racial tensions in the area.

“Resistance to change can come from feeling resentful or scapegoated, an expectation from community residents that store owners should do better,” Park says. “Sometimes all it takes is speaking with respect and gratitude and showing how even a small investment can make things better.”

A Korean speaker, Park worked hard to develop relationships with store owners built on mutual trust and a spirit of collaboration. “These relationships are more than store transformations for improved food retail environments,” Park says. “I support community-serving immigrant small business owners to step into leadership roles within the neighborhoods they serve, and for Korean, black, and brown store owners and customers alike to understand their fates are linked together. This work goes beyond the transactional, even as we recognize that businesses want to make a profit.”

Park helped more than 30 stores with sourcing equipment and store infrastructure, hosting events and cooking demos, improving interior design and external façades, locating farmers and vendors, researching products, and navigating the permitting process—all the minutiae of store operations—including the additional paperwork that accompanies selling perishables. “It was a learn-on-the-job kind of experience,” says Park, 30. “Every day was different. Every store owner and every store is different. It kept me on my toes.” Obstacles standing in the way of success include access to capital, sourcing infrastructure, and cultural and language barriers.

Now, Park is using her skill set and community connections in her role as part of the Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) team at API Forward Movement. Her job includes community outreach, translation services, developing curriculum, and co-facilitating culturally rooted cooking and gardening workshops. “This kind of hands-on, grassroots, culturally responsive work really resonates with me,” Park says. “And it’s vital if we want to bring about systemic change in our food systems.”

“This work goes beyond delivering fresh fruit and vegetables. It’s about community healing and rebuilding neighborhoods in a positive direction together with the help of partners,” says Park. “It’s also about creating conditions for a life of dignity.”

Park was raised in the San Gabriel Valley by immigrant parents: a seamstress mother and pastor father, who presided over a small, conservative Christian church congregation, which was the focus of family life. The youngest of five and the only child not born in Korea, Park identifies as gender nonconforming. Park was eager to move to the city and joined the collective Soobak, an anti-racist and anti-imperialist political and social movement with Korean roots.

In 2016, Park transitioned from the biblical name Esther to the Korean name Nare, which means “to take wing.” “This gesture of shedding my name is so I can be seen, heard, and whole,” Park says. “It is rooted in strength, resilience, and a progressive value system. So many food spaces are affluent, privileged, and white. There’s a certain measure of safety and uplift knowing it’s okay to be radical.”

“This kind of hands-on, grassroots, culturally responsive work really resonates with me. And it’s vital if we want to bring about systemic change in our food systems.”

As Park was about to move away to college, Park’s mom took over a sister’s backyard, which was both prolific and wild. “She gained new life and purpose in interacting with plants and soil and growing food, in a spiritual way. That left a strong impression on me,” says Park.

A trip to Korea in the fall of 2017 via the [Korean Education Exposure Program](#) also had a profound impact on Park and the direction she wants to take in future food systems work. “I want to put my body where my values are, close to land sovereignty work,” Park says. “At the systems level, when you talk about food equity, you’re also talking about transforming a landscape.”

Rachel Sumekh

On a Mission to Swipe Out Student Hunger

Co-founder and Executive Director, Swipe Out Hunger

WORKS: Los Angeles | LIVES: Los Angeles

FIELDS: Food Access, Social Entrepreneurship

The seeds for Swipe Out Hunger were sown at the University of California, Los Angeles, in 2009 while Rachel Sumekh was a student. Now a nationwide non-profit organization, Swipe Out Hunger allows college students to donate excess meal plan points to fellow students in need. The program, adopted by more than 40 colleges across the country, has served more than 1.4 million meals to hungry students. Swipe Out Hunger was recognized as a College Campus Champion of Change by the Obama Administration in 2012. And in 2016 Sumekh, who calls herself “a proud Persian Jew,” was chosen as one of the University of California Global Food Initiative’s “30 Under 30”.



“Access to food shouldn’t stand in the way of any student and a diploma.”

The daughter of Iranian immigrants, Rachel Sumekh recalls receiving free lunch at elementary school. She had a sense that her parents were struggling to make ends meet but she never worried about where her next meal was coming from. “I grew up in a community where no one ever went without. There was always enough food at every dinner table to feed extras,” says Sumekh, who was raised in the largely white Woodland Hills area in the San Fernando Valley. “That’s how the Persian Jewish community operates. We look after our own. For me, helping others doesn’t end there. I want to feed anyone who is hungry.”

So when she and her fellow student friends at the University of California, Los Angeles, had extra money on their campus meal plans at the end of a quarter, they didn’t want those swipes—unused meal credits on pre-paid student debit cards—to go to waste. A friend suggested the group get sandwiches in to-go containers and hand them out to the homeless in Westwood, the upscale neighborhood where the UCLA campus is located. Sumekh was all in. They distributed 300 boxes.

That first informal step eventually morphed into the university-endorsed Swipe Out Hunger. “We soon realized that we had the responsibility and resources to feed our hungry students on campus first,” Sumekh says of the program’s evolution.

Initially the campus administration wasn’t on board with this transfer of dining hall dollars, Sumekh recalls. Food service programs typically use that surplus meal plan money to help fund campus dining—but they came around.

A trip to the Obama White House proved pivotal. “We got two weeks’ notice to come. We fundraised to get our entire team there. That’s when I realized what we’d grown on campus was bigger than UCLA, bigger than any of us,” she says. “It changed our narrative: We were no longer the kids saying ‘fuck you’ to the college administration and breaking the rules. We were innovators and leaders, questioning the status quo. Anyone who wanted to cancel our program had nothing to say anymore.”

Now, students’ excess swipes can be converted into meal vouchers for other students, or used to purchase food at the UCLA [Food Closet](#). “Many immigrant students, low-



income students, students formerly in foster care, have to hustle to survive at college,” says Sumekh, 26. “We expect them to persevere in some of the most expensive locations in the country with high tuition costs. Food is the first thing that gets cut.”

Sumekh has testified at the state legislature in support of government funding for such initiatives. “I believe that through university partnerships and policy change we can end student hunger and ensure that every student has access to food,” say Sumekh. In 2017, Governor Jerry Brown approved \$7.5 million for hunger-free programming on California public college campuses. “Access to food shouldn’t stand in the way of any student and a diploma. We know food insecure students are 52 percent more likely to skip class due to hunger than their friends who have enough to eat on campus,” she says. “We can fix this.”

Over the years, Sumekh has gotten more comfortable articulating her organization’s mission and goals. “I’ve given myself permission to have a vision and be bold. As a young

“I’m not afraid to get up on a stage and say that our universities shouldn’t use surplus food dollars as a revenue source. I’m not afraid because I believe in the power of students to pressure university administrations to force change.”

woman of Middle Eastern background who grew up speaking Farsi at home, I was raised in a traditional community where there’s a lot of pressure to be submissive and nice,” says the social entrepreneur whose keychain sports the mantra: “Fucking shit up, thoughtfully.”

SWIPE OUT HUNGER



“For four years we did this work and almost exclusively fielded interest only from students. In 2017, half of our inbound calls came from university administrators looking for solutions to campus hunger. How hopeful is that?”



“But I’m not afraid to get up on a stage and say that our universities shouldn’t use surplus food dollars as a revenue source. I’m not afraid because I believe in the power of students to pressure university administrations to force change.”

Even the multibillion-dollar multinational food corporations that provide campus dining around the country have come calling, soliciting Sumekh’s input. Reauthorizing dining dollars to food pantries or meal voucher programs can be a fiscal and legal challenge, especially with colleges that have set long-term contracts with food service companies. Swipe Out Hunger works with administrators to negotiate the value of every unused meal.

Prior to taking the reins at Swipe Out Hunger, Sumekh moved to Chicago for a year to participate in an AmeriCorps community service program. Through the Jewish social change and leadership organization Avodah, Sumekh worked as a case manager for homeless people. “That year instilled in me deep empathy, humility, and the importance of being a good listener,” she says. By September 2013, she was back in LA to launch an office for Swipe Out Hunger as the first staff person for the organization.

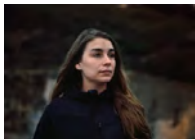
Swipe Out Hunger has transferred almost \$500,000 from what would have been unused meals to help feed students and local communities in need across the country in just the 2016–2017 school year alone. There is never enough funding or people to do all the work. With a budget of around \$240,000 and a staff of three, the organization is stretched to keep up with requests for technical assistance. In late 2017, the non-profit received a funding boost with a [WeWork Creator Award](#) of \$180,000. (Sumekh, who travels a lot in her job, works out of a WeWork communal work space in downtown LA.)

The campus-wide movement keeps growing at both public and private universities and colleges. Some students have even held hunger strikes to force their administrations to adopt Swipe Out Hunger. There are signs that more officials are coming around. “For four years we did this work and almost exclusively fielded interest only from students,” says Sumekh. “In 2017, half of our inbound calls came from university administrators looking for solutions to campus hunger. How hopeful is that?”

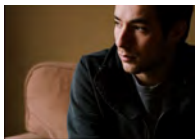
PROJECT TEAM



Sarah Henry is a freelance writer based in Berkeley who frequently covers food matters. Henry's stories have appeared in *The Washington Post*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *San Francisco* and online at *The Atlantic*, NPR's *The Salt*, and *Civil Eats*. She is a regular contributor to three Edible Communities' publications. Henry is also the author of *Farmsteads of the California Coast* (Yellow Pear Press, 2016) and the co-author of *The Juhu Beach Club Cookbook: Indian Spice, Oakland Soul*. (Running Press, 2017).



Maya Pisciotto is an editor, filmmaker, vocalist, and musician. She caught the story bug as a child listening to her father's stories around the campfire and hasn't been able to shake it since. Maya grew up in the Bay Area and learned about "making things" from her mother, an artist and painter. She co-founded The Understory to tell artful stories that ignite empathy, build community, and propel change.



Fabián Aguirre is a Mexican documentary cinematographer interested in filmmaking as an instrument for social and environmental impact. He is inspired by the story of life on Earth and by our relationship to the creatures with which we share it, as we have over millennia. He is co-founder of The Understory, a motion picture company based near the redwoods of Northern California.

The Berkeley Food Institute team members involved in the project include **L. Ann Thrupp, Louisa Brown, Nina Ichikawa, Edmond Allmond, Rosalie Z. Fanshel, and Amy Regan.**

You can also find *Hungry for Change* online at food.berkeley.edu/resources/changemakers/.





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