Dear BFI Community,

Since our founding in 2013, we have been fortunate to grow the Berkeley Food Institute in scale and impact. We have a network of 155 affiliated faculty and staff across campus. We have awarded the Graduate Certificate in Food Systems to more than 100 students, supported the development of the Berkeley Student Farms network of eight gardens on campus, and funded more than $600,000 in innovative food and farm system research grants.

At the heart of our work is policy-oriented research and education that provides the tools necessary for policymakers, community leaders, farmers, business leaders, and students to advance solutions to our most pressing food and farm system challenges.

Our work is rooted in the values of racial justice, climate resilience, democratic engagement and a strong sense of urgency. This is what drew me to join BFI and what compels us forward as we chart our path for the next five years of BFI.

BFI emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic with a sharper and keener focus on transformational change. Our research demonstrated that those on the frontlines of food systems work—farmworkers, grocery store workers, most often workers of color—were disproportionately and profoundly impacted by the global pandemic.

To address the pressing challenges facing our society we must go beyond zero-sum framings of food and farm systems solutions and embrace a racial justice framework as our theory of change. For example, as the state looks to improve technical assistance delivery for farmers of color to better support climate resilience, such efforts improve our overall understanding of how to advance climate solutions in agriculture.

As we contemplate the work ahead we know that the climate crisis requires solutions that not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions but also transform food systems to be more equitable, healthy, and resilient.

Our strategic approach brings together research, education, policy, and community engagement to affect change. Our work on Senate Bill 1000 demonstrates how through action-oriented research in partnership with communities we can help deliver concrete, measurable strategies to address environmental justice and food access in our communities.

On campus, we are excited to continue our unique agroecological and wellness approach to food security. Since the pandemic, BFI has worked with student gardeners to grow food on campus that is serving the Berkeley Basic Needs Center’s food pantry—all while supporting the next generation of food system leaders. With a new teaching kitchen on campus, we will expand our food security work by developing cooking workshops in partnership with the Rausser College of Natural Resources and Bay Area chefs.

Our sense of urgency has only grown since our founding. We are profoundly grateful for our strong partnerships on and off campus. In the coming year, there will be opportunities to be part of showcasing our work together. Please join us.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Merrill
BFI Executive Director
Urban Agroecology

This network of campus gardens helps to address food insecurity among students by providing over 50 percent of the produce distributed at the UC Berkeley Food Pantry. Through ab's efforts, BFI plays a key role in bringing together student gardeners and farmers through educational programming and on-farm projects in collaboration with Berkeley's Basic Needs Center, which runs the food pantry. Through this work, land like the Oxford Tract has become an invaluable space for experiential learning, research, and food security on campus.

[Urban] farms play an invaluable educational, cultural, and social role in addition to food production: they educate young people on how to grow food, they teach ecological stewardship principles, and they offer gathering places for community members and places to restore physical and mental health.”

—— “Urban Agroecology: An essential resource for times of crisis and beyond,” BFI Policy Brief

Rural Agroecology as Climate Resilience

In May 2022, BFI Co-Associate Faculty Director Tim Bowles worked with BFI’s founding Faculty Co-Director Alastair Iles and Berkeley postdoctoral fellow Joanna Ory to publish a BFI policy brief connecting soil health with water in California. While water availability and quality are among the state’s deepest challenges for agricultural productivity and environmental justice, proposed solutions have not incorporated the critical role of healthy soils. Their research in California’s Central Coast and Central Valley found that healthy soil practices like cover cropping, planting hedgerows, and reducing tillage can increase water filtration and reduce runoff — thus providing valuable on-farm benefits in the context of California’s intensifying droughts. The policy brief recommends soil health as an important strategy for both climate adaptation and mitigation.

This research, like much of the work from the Berkeley Agroecology Lab led by Bowles, demonstrates the role of agroecology in building up a more climate-resilient food system, through on-farm practices like diversifying farming systems with cover cropping as well as policy solutions that address land tenure and other barriers to such practices.

Agriculture as Essential City Infrastructure

We view agroecology as a necessary component of our cityscapes, in addition to the rural areas we typically associate with food production. Food-growing spaces are as essential as parks and museums for community health and wellbeing.

In March 2021, BFI co-organized the Agroecological City Conference to highlight solutions around land access and sovereignty in cities. This virtual conference with 1,070 attendees from around the world, was the culmination of a three-year research project, led by BFI Executive Committee member Jennifer Sowellwine, an Associate Cooperative Extension Specialist in the Department of Environmental Science, Policy, and Management, along with BFI faculty leadership and affiliates in partnership with local farms and community-based organizations. Funded in part by BFI and the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research, the research focused on policies to support urban agroecology in the East Bay. Through interviews with urban farmers, the research highlighted the possibilities of urban farms as not just food growing places but also spaces of healing and community resilience, particularly in the context of the pandemic. BFI published a policy brief that suggested creative solutions to integrating urban agriculture into city infrastructure. We took the lessons learned from our research and in 2022 supported a partnership with People’s Programs and student gardeners to grow food at the Oxford Tract farm on campus for a community food box program, serving West Oakland families.

Land-based Education and Research

In June 2023, with support from the Wellness Fund on campus, BFI hired ab banks as Agroecology and Wellness Coordinator to guide education efforts at the Oxford Tract and support the growing network of Berkeley Student Farms.

POLICY BRIEF

“Connecting Soil Health and Water in California”

DATE PUBLISHED

May 2022

AUTHORS

Joanna Ory, PhD

Timothy Bowles, PhD

Alastair Iles, PhD
Focus Area 2

Fair & Healthy Jobs

Supporting the Food Systems Workforce

Our work to ensure fair and healthy food systems jobs includes our Just and Equitable Tech in Agriculture program, begun in 2023. Ag technology development—from precision ag to improved farm equipment—can move at a rapid pace, often without considering the specific needs of small-scale and underserved farmers operating diversified cropping systems. With support from CS Fund, we have hosted roundtables, events, and field trips to gather researchers, students, engineers, and practitioners to discuss the challenges and opportunities of ag tech. Our Ag Tech program connects UC Berkeley students with food producers to encourage dialogue between aspiring tech developers and farmers to learn from each other about how to advance appropriate and just technology in agriculture.

In 2024, BFI Project Scientist Federico Castillo launched BFI’s first international program focused on fair and healthy jobs. The UC-Mexico Farm Labor Research Cluster aims to establish partnerships among UC and Mexican researchers to study farm labor issues with a binational approach. Led by Castillo and BFI Co-Associate Faculty Director Susana Matias, in collaboration with the Latinxs and the Environment Initiative and funded by UC Alianza MX, the research group met at La Casa de la Universidad de California in Mexico City in March 2024 to begin to draft a research and policy agenda on issues common to both California and Mexico related to farmworkers and food production. That research agenda will be guided by four working group themes: agricultural production, law and migration, health and community, and data and technology. The inaugural meeting was attended by researchers representing eight UC campuses and three universities in Mexico, as well as Mexican public agencies and nonprofits.

Building Pathways from Berkeley to Food Systems Careers

Through our Food Systems Career Development program, we aim to create pathways for UC Berkeley and community college students to access a variety of fair and healthy food and agriculture-related jobs. In the last few years, we have organized a series of career fairs and panels as well as resume and mock interview workshops. We have also organized student tours of farms and food distributors, and sponsored student attendance at food systems research and industry conferences.

Much of our career development work has been supported by the USDA Transition to Organic Partnership Program, a $100 million nationwide investment over five years to support existing and transitioning organic farmers. As part of a regional team led by California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), we received $325,000 to organize workforce development and education programs with a focus on career pathways for students interested in entering values-based supply chain management and technical assistance for producers. As part of this work, in the fall of 2024, BFI will sponsor a course with Will Rosenzweig of the Haas School of Business on Values-Based Supply Chains with a focus on the organic food industry.

I learned about the job of Technical Assistance. I had been thinking of what I want to do in the food systems industry but had no name for it. Attending the technical assistance part of the event gave me a word for this job that I want to explore!”

— Student evaluation response at our 2023 Career Fair

On February 9, 2024, BFI hosted “Cultivating Values-Based Relationships: Career Conversations with Food Systems Professionals,” a career fair at UC Berkeley that featured professionals working in values-based supply chains or technical assistance. The career fair was supported by the USDA Transition to Organic Partnership Program.

In collaboration with:

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
ALIANZA MX
LATINXs AND THE ENVIRONMENT

In collaboration with:

WEST/SOUTHWEST TRANSITION TO ORGANIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

On February 9, 2024, BFI hosted “Cultivating Values-Based Relationships: Career Conversations with Food Systems Professionals,” a career fair at UC Berkeley that featured professionals working in values-based supply chains or technical assistance. The career fair was supported by the USDA Transition to Organic Partnership Program. Photo by Estefany Gonzalez.
#### Advancing Food Justice Through City Planning

In May 2022, BFI Faculty Director Charisma Acey and Co-Associate Faculty Director Susana Matias launched a research project to evaluate the role of city land use planning in advancing equity-based food access programs. The research focuses on Senate Bill (SB) 1000: The Planning for Healthy Communities Act, a state law passed in 2016 that requires cities and counties with “disadvantaged communities,” as designated by the California Environmental Protection Agency, to incorporate environmental justice into their official General Plans. Since SB 1000 went into effect in 2018, at least 67 cities have implemented the law, with many more cities in progress.

Acey and Matias worked with Master of City Planning graduate student Katherine Fallon to create a database of updated General Plans, which provide a blueprint for a community’s development over time. The database tracks how food-related policies are incorporated when cities implement SB 1000, with a particular focus on equity. The research team also interviewed city officials, consultants, nonprofits, and residents of Richmond and Gilroy for community insights into the planning process. The BFI research report highlighted the importance of writing General Plan policies that specifically focused on the needs of environmental justice communities, emphasizing community engagement throughout the land use planning process, and creating better public accountability to monitor plan implementation.

Starting in the fall of 2023, the BFI team organized a SB 1000 Research Roadshow to take this research back to the communities where this law is being implemented and to discuss next steps for community mobilization for food justice. We held community meetings in Richmond and Gilroy, and Acey lectured at UC Center Sacramento. In preparation for these meetings, we published BFI’s first Spanish-language research report with support from UC Agriculture and Natural Resources. In the next steps for this research, Acey and Matias will continue to track SB 1000 implementation and its impact on community food security, health and nutrition outcomes, and environmental justice in farmworker communities.

**Authors**

Katherine Fallon, MCP

Charisma Acey, PhD

Susana Matias, PhD

**DATE PUBLISHED**

September 2023

**RESEARCH REPORT**

Planning for Food Justice: Advancing Equity in City and County General Plans Through California’s Senate Bill 1000

**Focus Area 3**

**Good Food Access**

The goal is to “reduce the unique or compounded health risks in disadvantaged communities by means that include, but are not limited to, the reduction of pollution exposure, including the improvement of air quality, and the promotion of public facilities, food access, safe and sanitary homes, and physical activity.”

— Senate Bill 1000: The Planning for Healthy Communities Act

**Assessing California’s Farm to School Efforts**

In 2020, the state of California launched the California Farm to School Incubator Grant Program to support nutrition education, sustainable food production and procurement, and a more equitable, climate-resilient food system. So far, the grant program has awarded nearly $100 million to local and regional farm to school projects.

BFI is a lead evaluation partner for the grant program, along with Co-Associate Faculty Director Tim Bowles. As part of the evaluation plan, we are assessing the progress of funded projects to identify successes and areas for improvement. In the first year of the evaluation, we found that the program has successfully reached small-scale, BIPOC producers and school districts located in populations vulnerable to climate change. BFI’s former Policy Director Sakeenah Shabazz organized visits with state legislators and their staff to share initial findings. The first published findings from the state-funded evaluation will be out this fall. BFI will help translate findings from the evaluation into policy recommendations for the future of the program as well as how farm-to-school investments affect climate and equity goals.

**On April 12, 2023, members of the California Farm to School Incubator Grant Program Evaluation team visited a school garden project at Betty Reid Soskin Middle School in El Sobrante, California. Photo by Austin Price.**

**On March 21, 2024, BFI teamed up with Gilroy community organization Nueva Vida to host a community meeting in the cafeteria of Gilroy High School. BFI Faculty Director Charisma Acey presented research on Senate Bill 1000 and led a discussion on advancing food justice through city planning. Photo by Austin Price.**

**On April 12, 2023, BFI teamed up with Gilroy community organization Nueva Vida to host a community meeting in the cafeteria of Gilroy High School. BFI Faculty Director Charisma Acey presented research on Senate Bill 1000 and led a discussion on advancing food justice through city planning.**
Focus Area 4

Racial Equity

Advancing Transformational Change

Since BFI’s founding in 2013, racial equity has been embedded in our efforts toward a food system built on agroecology, fair and healthy jobs, and good food access. But, in 2021, we added racial equity as its own BFI focus area to call it out as an explicit goal of our food systems vision rather than just a byproduct. This decision followed an internal assessment and strategic planning effort to examine how we can better advance equity within our institution and deepen our efforts to support transformational change in food and farm systems. We recognize that climate and food justice are unattainable without racial justice.

Since 2021, the racial equity focus area has influenced how we approach partnerships and organize our programs and events. BFI staff member Nathalie A. Muñoz was promoted to Community Engagement Program Manager and tasked with fostering relationships with community advocates, grassroots organizations, nonprofits, and other groups or individuals working directly with communities to transform food systems. We have also made efforts to make our events and campus garden programs more accessible and inclusive to students.

In October 2021, we hosted a virtual panel—with farmers, critical race scholars, and a civil rights lawyer—called Justice for Black Farmers to learn about the long saga of racism in American farming and recent policy efforts to address it. This conversation set the stage for our Farm Bill program led by former BFI Policy Director Sakeenah Shabazz, who worked with former BFI Executive Director Nina F. Ichikawa to facilitate the Farm Bill Seminar at UC Berkeley during the Spring 2023 semester and co-organize the Pointing the Farm Bill Toward Racial Justice Summit and Briefing in Washington, DC.

Equity in Education and Research

In 2022, BFI funded nearly $50,000 to support a pilot visiting scholars program organized by BFI Co-Associate Faculty Director Tim Bowles and former BFI Program Manager Rosalie Z. Fanshel in partnership with historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). During the summer of 2022, four undergraduate students from Tuskegee University and Spelman College worked with food systems related research labs in the Department of Environmental Science, Policy, and Management at UC Berkeley. Now called HBCU-Berkeley Environmental Scholars for Change, the program has continued in 2023 and 2024 with support from Berkeley’s Office of Graduate Diversity, Rausser College of Natural Resources donors, and Spelman College.

In 2022, BFI commissioned Aarij Bashir to draft a report based on research he conducted to earn his Master of Public Affairs at the Goldman School of Public Policy. Bashir’s research explores equity issues in the state of California’s Climate Smart Agriculture programs, especially when it comes to small-scale farmers and farmers of color. In particular, Bashir gathered perspectives from members of the Central Valley’s Punjabi farming community who have experienced language and technical assistance barriers when trying to participate in the state’s Healthy Soils Program. The resulting research report suggests strategies to address the program’s equity problem in future funding rounds.

From April 30 to May 2, 2023, BFI co-organized a Farm Bill summit and senate briefing in Washington, DC, with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund and American University. The Pointing the Farm Bill Toward Racial Justice Summit gathered farmers, policymakers, researchers, and students to discuss each title of the Farm Bill in the context of racial equity. We followed the summit with a public briefing in the Russell Senate Office Building on Capitol Hill. Photos by Austin Price.

RESEARCH REPORT
The California Healthy Soils Program: Perspectives from Punjabi Farmers
DATE PUBLISHED
October 2022
AUTHOR
Aarij Bashir, MPA
Who We Are

Faculty Leadership

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Faculty Director
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Associate Professor, Agroecology and Sustainable Agricultural Systems
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Department of Nutritional Sciences and Toxicology

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Francisco Benitez
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Steve Fukagawa
Farmer, Kingsburg, CA

Nina F. Ichikawa
Former Executive Director,
Berkeley Food Institute

Bruce Aidells
Founder, Aidells Sausage Company

Yolanda Burrell
Founder, Pollinate Farm & Garden

Clayton Chan
Chief Operating Officer,
San Francisco Soup Company

Bob Epstein
Co-Founder, Ez, Co-founder and former EVP,
Sylvaie, Chairman, NRDC Action Fund

Steve Fukagawa
Farmer, Kingsburg, CA

Nina F. Ichikawa
Former Executive Director,
Berkeley Food Institute

Dana Slatkin
Founder, Violet Los Angeles Bistro,
Cooking School & Shop

Aliza J. Sokolow
Food stylist and photographer; author, This Is What I Eat

Marion Standish
Former Vice President, Enterprise Programs,
California Endowment

L. Ann Thrupp
Founding Executive Director,
Berkeley Food Institute

Jen Upson
Garden and Nutrition Educator,
Woodside Elementary School
In 2013, a symposium at the Clark Kerr Conference Center at UC Berkeley gathered experts from different fields of food systems research. This symposium marked the launch of the Berkeley Food Institute, a growing network of researchers representing a whole systems approach to studying the environmental, social, political, and cultural impacts and solutions related to food and agriculture. Alastair Iles and Claire Kremen became BFI’s founding faculty directors, with L. Ann Thrupp as the first Executive Director and Nina Ichikawa as the first Policy Director and later Executive Director, to facilitate a list of a few dozen affiliated faculty and staff.

Since then, BFI’s one-person staff has grown to a team of nine, operating on a $1.5 million annual operating budget. Our campus community includes 155 affiliated faculty and staff representing departments across eight partner schools, 148 students have found opportunities as BFI student staff or fellows. We launched the Graduate Certificate in Food Systems for graduate students and helped develop curriculum for a Food Systems Minor for undergraduates. We have housed the Center for Diversified Farming Systems while supporting the launch of the Food Labor Research Center, the new UC-Mexico Farm Labor Research Cluster, and special projects like the UC Berkeley Foodscape Map.

Early on, we recognized the need to better connect food and farm systems research with policymakers in Sacramento and Washington. From the Farm Bill to California’s climate change efforts, BFI has advanced science-based policy research and education.

On September 7, 2023, we celebrated the 10-year anniversary of the Berkeley Food Institute with a special Community Showcase at the Oxford Tract, which hosted students representing some of the 26 active food-related student groups on campus. The Office of Assemblymember Buffy Wicks presented BFI with a Certificate of Recognition for 10 years of public service to improve California’s food system. Iles, Thrupp, founding donor Bob Epstein, and a few other founding BFI affiliates attended the showcase to reflect on these accomplishments as we look forward to the path ahead.

Here are a few more milestones from BFI’s first 10 years:

- 119 students have earned the Graduate Certificate in Food Systems
- 161 students have graduated with a Food Systems Minor
- We have published 12 policy briefs and 8 research reports that leverage rigorous scientific research to inform policy
- We have engaged with policymakers during the last 3 Farm Bills, organized 2 Farm Bill Summits, facilitated 8 research reports that leverage rigorous scientific research to inform policy
- We have awarded more than $600,000 in faculty seed grants
- 135 events
- 42 workshops or panels
- 13 career development events
- 5 conferences
- 8 research reports
- 181 students have graduated with a Food Systems Minor
- 119 students have earned the Graduate Certificate in Food Systems
- 155 affiliated faculty and staff representing departments across eight partner schools
- 148 students have found opportunities as BFI student staff or fellows
- Our one-person staff has grown to a team of nine, operating on a $1.5 million annual operating budget
- Our campus community includes 155 affiliated faculty and staff representing departments across eight partner schools
- 148 students have found opportunities as BFI student staff or fellows
- We launched the Graduate Certificate in Food Systems for graduate students and helped develop curriculum for a Food Systems Minor for undergraduates.

The following individuals and organizations have generously donated to BFI since July 1, 2021 (cumulative totals):

**Organizational Funders and Grantmakers**

- 11th Hour Project (Schmidt Family Foundation)
- Center for Planetary Health (UC Global Health Institute)
- CS Fund
- Driscoll Family Foundation
- Epstein/Roth Foundation
- Everyday Impact Consulting Partnership Award
- The Green Initiative Fund at UC Berkeley
- Hellman Foundation
- The Latins & the Environment Initiative
- Latinx Resource Center
- Patagonia
- State of California
- Stupski Foundation
- UC Agriculture and Natural Resources
- UC Alianza MX
- The UC Berkeley Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research
- The UC Berkeley Wellness Fund
- The UC Global Food Initiative Fellowship Program
- USDA Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative
- USDA Transition to Organic Partnership Program

**$2,500+**

- Tasha Ellison
- Claire Kremen & Charles Fineman
- Nora Norton & Darrel Hess
- Laurel & Gerald Prybylski

**$1,000+**

- Yolanda Burrell & Terence Parker
- Clayton Chan
- Maria Echaves & Christopher F. Edley
- Judith Tuller
- David & Linda Woo
- Anonymous

**< $1,000**

- Elaine Abdaye
- Charisma Acsey
- David Ackerly
- Wendy Adachi & Wayne Takata
- Kelley Austin
- Kathryn & Gregory Baldwin
- Pamela Belhorn
- Christine Blaine
- Timothy Bowles
- Melissa Bunnagradist
- Jennifer Burke
- Eve Cowen & Edward Heindl
- Elizabeth & Wayne Davies
- Poppy Davis
- Rachel Docter
- Ruth Fällenbaum & Zeese Papanikolas
<$1,000 (continued)

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Katharine Paolino
Damian Parr
Duc Bieu Pham

Elizabeth & Igor Pistelak
Nahid Rad
Lorraine & Michael Ritchie
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