



**FOOD SYSTEMS  
LEADERSHIP NETWORK**

**2022**

# IMPACT REPORT



An initiative of the  
**Wallace Center**  
AT WINROCK INTERNATIONAL





## 2022 REFLECTIONS FROM THE FSLN BACKBONE TEAM

What a year! For leaders in pursuit of food systems transformation, 2022 was extraordinary - with unprecedented levels of attention and investment in our collective work - and we are feeling a renewed sense of optimism for the future of food systems.

As the Food Systems Leadership Network (FSLN) Backbone team, we believe in the power of the collective for driving systems change. We share a deep desire to revolutionize the food system, and a firm belief - a fire in our bellies - that this transformation is not only possible, but it is actively underway.

We have a unique vantage point as a national network backbone team. Through our daily interactions with network members across the country, we can see how food systems leaders are experimenting, learning, and collaborating to create vibrant food systems centered on principles of justice, equity, and sustainability. We see connections and collaborations, individual and collective growth, and food systems leaders' ingenuity and grit woven throughout. We see food systems leadership and systems change in action.

“

*The FSLN has changed the trajectory of my career. Through my participation in the network, I have begun to see the challenges we face through a more systemic lens, and have radically adapted my work accordingly. I have connected with some of my dearest friends and favorite collaborators through this network. As much as I have put into participating in the FSLN, I have gotten so much in return.”*

- 2022 Member Survey Respondent

Since 2018, the FLSN has been supporting and amplifying this transformation. By bringing food systems leaders together, the FSLN harnesses the relentless energy of the collective to catalyze innovation and disrupt the status quo. While we are up against some powerful forces and deeply entrenched systems of inequity and injustice, we are united in our vision of creating alternative pathways to nourish ourselves and our communities. Together, we are charting a course for future generations to not only survive but to thrive on this precious planet we call home.

We hope this FSLN 2022 Impact Report brings you the same sense of optimism and enthusiasm that we have when we think about the future of local and regional food systems in the US. Thank you to all who have helped shape this beloved community - we look forward to co-creating the future with you!

### » The FSLN Backbone Team

Andrew Carberry

Ellen Brown

Molly

Amelia Kozak

Elizabeth Atwell

Susan Lippford Shoff



# ABOUT THE FOOD SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP NETWORK

Launched in 2018, the [Food Systems Leadership Network](#) invests in grassroots leaders and amplifies innovative ideas to accelerate community-led, equity centered solutions that are vital for food systems transformation.

The FSLN represents a diverse cross-section of 3,000 community leaders who are united in their commitment to overcoming food systems challenges within the United States.

***FSLN Impact Goal: By 2025, 5,000 food systems leaders will have more resources, relationships, and power to realize equitable food systems that generate good food, health, and opportunity for all.***

To achieve this, the FSLN equips practitioners with tools, skills, and relationships for creating food systems grounded in equity, justice, and sustainability.

**Specifically, the FSLN offers capacity-building opportunities that:**

*Foster relationships among food systems leaders*

*Strengthen systems leadership capacity*

*Inspire action and collaboration across communities*

*Advance racial equity individually and systemically*

*Strengthen backbone resources*



## FSLN CULTURAL AGREEMENTS

The FSLN Cultural Agreements guide how we - as individuals and as a network - show up in network spaces, activities, and programming. The agreements were co-created by network members during the 2022 FSLN Vision and Strategy Gathering and confirmed by the network via the Annual Member Survey.

- » Honor and celebrate our collective wisdom - together, we know a lot!
- » Give grace to one another and approach conflict with curiosity.
- » Challenge assumptions, respect our differences, and speak from our own experience.
- » Honor confidentiality - lessons leave, stories stay.
- » Meet each other where we are. Showing up is enough, and listening is participating.
- » Be mindful of our individual power, privilege, and how much space we are taking up.
- » Take responsibility for impact, regardless of intent.
- » Take care of our own physical, mental, and emotional needs.

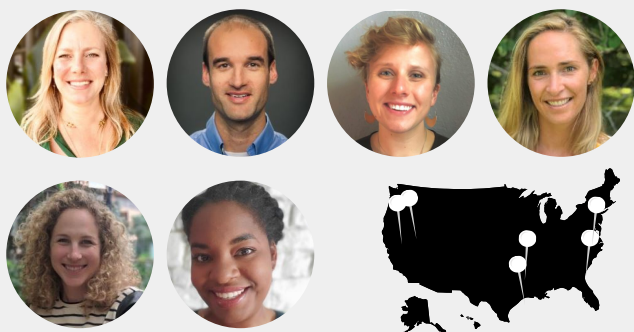


# ABOUT THE FOOD SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP NETWORK

## » Meet the Team

The FSLN is facilitated by a backbone team of Wallace Center staff who implement programming, conduct field research, lead network outreach and engagement efforts, and develop resources for the network.

Through surveys, evaluative feedback, and conversations with network members and partners, the team ensures that FSLN's strategy and programs are grounded in the needs, challenges, and aspirations of its members.



## » Meet the Members

The FSLN connects and supports grassroots and community leaders from across the country to build equitable and just food systems.

Get to know some of these incredible changemakers by exploring their features in the [Willful Wildflowers publication](#) and the [FSLN welcome video](#) created at the 2022 FSLN Vision and Strategy Gathering in Canby, OR.



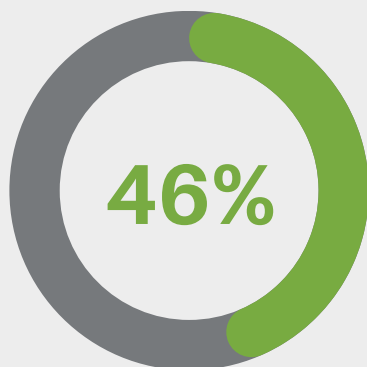


# FSLN 2022: BY THE NUMBERS

This year marked the FSLN's fifth year of delivering innovative programming that strengthened the leadership and technical skills of 2,734 food systems champions in urban, rural, and Tribal communities.



**15+**  
*webinars and  
trainings*



*growth in individual  
membership to  
1,688 leaders*



**49%**  
*of speakers, mentors, and  
advisors identify as BIPOC*



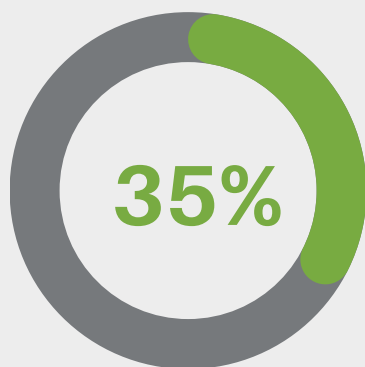
**224**  
*hours of 1:1 mentorship  
provided to members*



**35+**  
*Community of Practice  
convenings*



**1,761**  
*webinar  
attendees*



*growth in organizational  
membership*



**2,693**  
*FSLN newsletter  
monthly subscribers*



# FSLN 2022: IMPACT

## » Strengthened systems leadership

97%

learned something new that is meaningful to their work

89%

sharpened skills relevant to their work

“

*This network is a place I can go to learn and empower myself to make more and deeper connections.”*

“

*The collective liberation and change we are seeking in the food system is modeled by the processes of communication, collaboration, and co-facilitation modeled in the FSLN spaces.”*

## » Fostered relationships

98%

felt more confident in their capacity as a food systems leader

91%

formed new relationships

25

members featured in [\*Willful Wildflowers: Journeys and Dreams from Food Systems Leaders\*](#)

## » Inspired action and collaboration

83%

planned to make changes to their work based on FSLN participation

10

members supported to attend Congressional meetings in DC

“

*FSLN has been instrumental in helping me launch a food hub that contributes to my regional economy.”*

»

## Strengthened backbone resources

47

FSLN members involved in design and delivery of network services

5

members participate as FSLN Network Weavers

## » Advanced racial equity

62%

of FSLN participants identified as Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color

7

members co-create a Network Equity Audit Prototype

“

*The FSLN has been an anchor and relationship builder. Rarely have I come across an organization that has incrementally and intentionally worked towards equity as a goal in its theory of change and practice.”*





# 2022 PROGRAM SPOTLIGHTS

## » Institutional Investment Accelerator

“

*Participating in the Accelerator deepened my awareness of the crucial necessity of collaboration and partnership. Food system issues are too big and the need is too great for any go-it-alone superstars to be able to transform everything.”*

*– 2022 Accelerator Participant*



The 16-month Institutional Investment Accelerator program provided six teams with technical assistance, coaching, and financial resources to support their efforts to leverage institutional investment for systems change.

Community leaders received training to hone their strategies for shifting institutional investment and prioritizing community engagement and racial equity in process and outcomes. Teams developed new partnerships and approaches to build a pathway for anchor institutions to purchase from local BIPOC farms and cooperatives.

As a result of participation, teams have garnered new funding, seeded new collaborations, and now have a network of peers to explore ideas and exchange strategies. To date, teams have raised close to \$10 MILLION to advance their work!

### » Team Leads:

**Megan Govindan**  
West Virginia University  
Morgantown, WV

**Aaron Vargas**  
Ecotrust  
Portland, OR

**Dakarai Howard**  
Chicago Food Policy  
Action Council  
Chicago, IL

**Rev. Heber Brown III**  
Black Church Food  
Security Network  
Baltimore, MD

**Emily English**  
University of Arkansas  
Fayetteville, AR

**Roberto Meza**  
East Denver Food Hub  
Denver, CO



100%

increased engagement between farmers, food businesses, and institutions

67%

reported increased investment from institutions into local food supply chains

100%

felt more equipped to advance equity and antiracism in their work

**FOOD SYSTEMS  
LEADERSHIP NETWORK**



# 2022 PROGRAM SPOTLIGHTS

## » Food Systems Leadership Retreat

“

*This brilliantly facilitated week of connecting and learning gave me the hope, courage, and inspiration I have been craving to re-engage my work with loving and fierce energy. ”*

– 2022 Retreat Participant

Facilitated by previous retreat participants Lindsey Lunsford, Rachael Reichenbach, and Natlee McGruder Kyle, the 2022 Virtual Food Systems Leadership Retreat provided 24 grassroots leaders with space to reflect on their food systems journeys and gain tools, language, and skills for facilitating collective leadership to build food systems centered on equity and justice.

**100%** feel more equipped to advance equity

**9.5** hours of training

**90%** feel more confident in their capacity as a food systems leader



Natlee, Lindsey, and Rachael blanketed the virtual retreat with empathy, liberation, and joy.

## » Communities of Practice (CoP)

Each month, the FSLN facilitates CoPs for groups of members to deepen their knowledge around a specific topic. CoPs are a space for developing peer connections and exchanging strategies and ideas that enhance our individual and collective work.



» **Value Chain Coordination**  
445 participants

» **Network Stewards**  
206 participants

» **Farm 2 Food Assistance**  
350 participants

» **Food Safety and Quality**  
171 participants

“

*Through the collaborative learning that I've been able to participate in at different FSLN spaces, I have gained deep inspiration for how we might address some of the challenges that we are undergoing as an organization. We have embedded tools, processes, and systems that are directly inspired by what we have learned.”*

– Avalon Gupta VerWiebe, Syracuse Onondaga Food Systems Alliance



# 2022 PROGRAM SPOTLIGHTS

## » Community Food Systems Mentorship Program

Twenty-eight members were connected with food systems experts for eight hours of one-to-one mentorship to build relationships and gain valuable support for navigating leadership challenges and advancing equitable food systems.

**100%** learned something new meaningful to their work

**87%** will make changes to their work or take action

**93%** feel enabled to advance work through relationships developed



“The [Mentorship Program] allowed me to think more strategically about my work to make my organization thrive, and the team that I work with also thrive.”

– Nezahualcoyotl Xiuhtecutli, Farmworker Association of Florida

## » Value Chain Coordination (VCC) Training

In partnership with trainers Sarah Rocker and Elliott Smith, the FSLN piloted its first multi-part VCC training for 44 practitioners. Participants learned new ways of thinking and talking about VCC, critical tools for organizing, prioritizing, and evaluating their VCC activities, and a network of peers to troubleshoot and exchange ideas.



**89%** sharpened skills relevant to their work

**94%** learned something new that is meaningful to their work

**100%** formed new relationships

“The VCC training was really validating. This course will help me and my colleagues create a strong strategy for our value chain coordination work by using a shared language, working from a shared set of concepts, and having a more holistic set of approaches to employ.”

– Kayla Koether, Practical Farmers of Iowa





## 2022 PROGRAM SPOTLIGHTS

### » FSLN Vision and Strategy Gathering

For the first time in five years, 75 network members came together in person for several days of relationship building, sensemaking, and dreaming about the future of the FSLN.

Through fireside conversations, facilitated work sessions, and panel discussions led by network members--and one solid dance party (also led by network members)--we developed a comprehensive set of FSLN priorities and activities to guide the FSLN in the coming years.

**100%** formed new relationships and strengthened existing ones

**93%** feel more confident in their capacity as a food systems leader

**73%** sharpened skills relevant to their work



“

*The Food Systems Leadership Network Gathering has changed the way I am positioned to do this work. I am forever changed. This event and its deeply intentional nature has set me on a path of pursuit. I am chasing our collective vision with my whole heart!"*

*– Visakha Turner, West Virginia University*





## 2022 PROGRAMMING

In addition to the programs spotlighted above, the FSLN offers dynamic opportunities for members to connect and learn from each other throughout the year. All webinars and resources are available to access at no cost on the FSLN's website.

### » January - April 2022

#### **Policy and Advocacy for Food Systems Change Webinar Series**

- Policy and Advocacy with Equity Advocates
- Farm Bill 101 with National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
- Panel Conversation with esteemed policy leaders and advocates

#### **Value Chain Coordination 5-Part Training**

#### **Community Food Systems Mentorship Program**

#### **Quality Management Systems Multi-Part training feat. Phil Britton**

### » May - August 2022

#### **FSLN Vision and Strategy Gathering**

#### **Making Grants Ours: Colonial Origins of Federal Grants and Strategies to Subvert Them with Daisa Enterprises**

#### **Lessons from the Institutional Investment Accelerator Webinar**

#### **Network Weaver Program Wraps Up**

#### **FSLN Activation Grant-funded Programming:**

- Collective Wayfinding: Stories from Growing a Justice Oriented Organization from the Start feat. Syracuse Onondaga Food Systems Alliance
- Collective Wayfinding: Reimagining a More Just Organization feat. San Diego Food System Alliance
- Donation Station Cultivation feat. Community Food Initiatives
- Cultural Exchange Across Foodways workshops feat. Slow Food USA
- Equity-Rooted Leadership Coaching Development feat. Resist Reimagine and Seeds of Change Consulting
- What's the Tea? Storytelling Collaboration feat. 2020-2021 Network Weavers

### » September - December 2022

#### **Virtual Food Systems Leadership Retreat**

#### **Food Banking 101 Webinar**

#### **USDA Regional Food Business Centers Informational Call with Kate Fitzgerald**

#### **Peer Coaching Workshop with Joseph McIntyre, 10 Circles Consulting**

#### **FSLN members participate in DC fly-in with National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition**



## LOOKING AHEAD: 2023-2025 FSLN PRIORITIES

Since 2020, the FSLN Backbone team has been engaging network members to guide network strategy. In 2022, network members co-created, refined, and confirmed the following FSLN Priorities:

➤ *Foster relationships among diverse food systems leaders that are rooted in trust, mutual support, and accountability.*

➤ *Facilitate the sharing of knowledge, resources, and innovations to amplify community-led solutions and expertise.*

➤ *Deliver opportunities for values-aligned professional development, capacity building and systems leadership development to nurture a diverse pipeline of talent.*

➤ *Facilitate collaboration and collaborative organizing among network members and partners, particularly around resource mobilization and federal policy and programming.*

➤ *Become a dynamic, intentional, and human-centered national network that practices its values in all aspects of network life including programs, policies, operations, and governance.*

“

*The FSLN has grown into a valuable resource for our work, allowing us to learn from, and share with, food system advocates all across the country who are working towards a similar vision.”*

*- 2022 Member Survey Respondent*

By collectively defining and solidifying the FSLN's priorities and activities, we have a renewed sense of clarity around our approach and an affirmation that we are on the right track.

Thank you to all who contributed to this collaborative strategic planning process!





## LOOKING AHEAD: 2023-2025 FSLN PRIORITIES

Last year was pivotal for the FSLN and we are excited to journey along the path set forward by network members in 2022. In the year ahead, we will continue to deliver innovative programming and invest in the ideas and people that make the future of food systems bright. We will keep offering central network services like the Mentorship Program, Activation Grants, and Communities of Practice while bringing new opportunities into the mix, including Racial Affinity Groups and the Farm to Food Assistance Learning Lab.

This year we will also be investing in the long-term viability of the FSLN. Since launch in 2018, we have been growing into a more resilient, member-driven, and equity-centered network. As we continue on this path, we will engage an FSLN Evolution Team to determine the best organizational model and governance structure that will enable the continued growth and impact of the FSLN.

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Every day, food systems leaders are faced with new challenges and opportunities. And every day, they respond with the creativity, ingenuity, and grit that creates the foundation for current and future generations to thrive.

It is our absolute pleasure and greatest honor to serve, support, and connect these food systems leaders through the Food Systems Leadership Network. We invite you to become part of this community as a member or supporter and join us as we create the future of food systems together.

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## ONWARD, FOOD SYSTEMS LEADERS!

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# FSLN CORE COLLABORATORS

The FSLN backbone team is incredibly lucky to work in partnership with countless individuals and organizations from communities across the country that give life to our programming and services. You all are critical pieces to the food systems puzzle - thank you for sharing your expertise and time with FSLN members and food systems leaders.

<b>Aaron Vargas</b> , Ecotrust	<b>Kelly Dundon</b> , University of Arkansas Medical Center
<b>A-dae Romero-Briones</b> , First Nations Development Institute	<b>LaShauna Austria</b> , Community Food Strategies
<b>Amber Hansen</b> , Health Care Without Harm	<b>Laura Brown</b> , Local Food Hub
<b>Amyrose Foll</b> , Virginia Free Farm	<b>Lavar Prather</b> , The Common Market
<b>Andy Fisher</b> , EcoFarm	<b>Leah Kabran Eden</b> , Equity Advocates
<b>Andy Ollove</b> , Fresh Approach	<b>Lindsey Lunsford</b> , Tuskegee University
<b>Angel Mendez</b> , Red Tomato	<b>Lorette Picciano</b> , Rural Coalition
<b>Arlo Bush</b> , Sustainable Food Center	<b>Lucia Sayre</b> , Healthcare Without Harm
<b>Audrey Long</b> , Grace Gardening	<b>Lydia Villanueva</b> , CASA Del Llano, Inc.
<b>Brenda Williams</b> , Communities Unlimited	<b>Malik Yakini</b> , Detroit Black Community Food Security Network
<b>Brennan Washington</b> , Southern SARE	<b>Mukui Maunakea-Forth</b> , MA'O Organic Farms
<b>Brigham Cook</b> , Arkansas Children's Northwest	<b>Melanie Moon</b> , Spitfire Strategies
<b>Cathy Day</b> , National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition	<b>Megan Govindan</b> , West Virginia University
<b>Christina Bronzing-Lazalde</b> , Real Food Media	<b>Megan Hermann</b> , Arkansas Children's Northwest
<b>Chrissie Bonner</b> , Illustrating Progress	<b>Miles Gordon</b> , Kitchen Table Consulting
<b>Cullen Naumoff</b> , Farm Fare	<b>Namita Montey</b> , Black Church Food Security Network
<b>Dakari Howard</b> , Chicago Food Policy Action Council	<b>Nancy Creamer</b> , NC State University
<b>Daniel Ross</b> , DAISA Enterprises	<b>Natilee McGruder Kyle</b> , Growing Green, LLC.
<b>Destiny Schlinker</b> , FoodCorps Arkansas	<b>Niaz Dorry</b> , N. American Marine Alliance & National Family Farm Coalition
<b>Diana Endicott</b> , The Food Conservatory	<b>Nikki Evansington</b> , Zenenvirotech
<b>Dionne Washington</b> , Arizona Food Bank Network	<b>Noah Thomas</b> , Lightcrest Photography
<b>Dwayne Wharton</b> , Just Strategies	<b>Nora Frank-Buckner</b> , Tahoma Peak Solutions
<b>Eddie Hill</b> , Black Food Sovereignty Coalition	<b>Pakou Hang</b> , Hmong American Partnership
<b>Elizabeth Young</b> , Elizabeth Young Consulting	<b>Patti Miller</b> , National Capital Investment Fund
<b>Elliot Smith</b> , Kitchen Sync Strategies	<b>Paula Daniels</b> , Center for Good Food Purchasing
<b>Emily English</b> , UAMS Northwest Regional Campus	<b>Peter Allison</b> , Farm to Institution New England
<b>Erin Parker</b> , Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative	<b>Phil Britton</b> , Fresh Systems, LLC
<b>Eva Agudelo</b> , Farm Fresh Rhode Island	<b>Rachael Reichenbach</b> , Resist Reimagine
<b>Eva Moss</b> , Farm Commons	<b>Rasheed Hislop</b> , Community Alliance with Family Farms
<b>Eowyn Corral</b> , Dakota Rural Action	<b>Reed Smith</b> , RAGS Ag Consulting, LLC
<b>Filberto Gomez</b> , Michigan Food and Farming Systems	<b>Rich Pirog</b> , MSU Center for Regional Food Systems
<b>Gabrielle Blavatsky</b> , Equity Advocates	<b>Rip Weaver</b> , University of Arkansas Extension Services
<b>Gracie Gonner</b> , The Family Center	<b>Roberto Meza</b> , East Denver Food Hub
<b>Haile Johnston</b> , The Common Market	<b>Ruby Ferguson</b> , City of Chicago Mayor's Office
<b>Heber Brown, III</b> , Black Church Food Security Network	<b>Sabrina Cerquera</b> , Ecotrust
<b>JaSon Auguste</b> , Frontline Farming	<b>Sarah Hackney</b> , National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
<b>Jodee Smith</b> , Indiana University	<b>Sarah Rocker</b> , Kitchen Sync Strategies
<b>Joseph McIntyre</b> , 10 Circles Consulting	<b>Savi Horne</b> , NC Assoc. of Black Lawyers, Land Loss Prevention Project
<b>Kacey Gantzer</b> , West Virginia Department of Ag	<b>Shanna Ratner</b> , Yellowwood Consulting
<b>Kana Miller</b> , Carolina Farm Stewardship Association	<b>Shannon Johnson</b> , Blue Garnet
<b>Karen Bassarab</b> , Food Policy Networks	<b>Shantae Jackson</b> , Mudbone Grown
<b>Karen Reynolds</b> , Arkansas Department of Agriculture	<b>Sha'Von Terrell</b> , Black Church Food Security Network
<b>Karen Spiller</b> , Food Solutions New England	<b>Shawn Petersen</b> , Association of Gleaning Organizations
<b>Karen Washington</b> , Rise and Root Farm	<b>S. Maham Rizvi</b> , DAISA Enterprises
<b>Kate Fitzgerald</b> , Fitzgerald-Canepa, LLC	<b>Tyler Rasor</b> , Ecotrust
<b>Katherine Un</b> , National Young Farmers Coalition	<b>Vero Vergara</b> , Groundwork Food Hub
<b>Kendal Chavez</b> , NM Governor's Office	<b>Weslynn Ashton</b> , Illinois Institute of Technology

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[WWW.FOODSYSTEMSLEADERSHIPNETWORK.ORG](http://WWW.FOODSYSTEMSLEADERSHIPNETWORK.ORG)