



TEAM PROFILE

OKC Food Hub

Based in Oklahoma City, OK on the traditional lands of the Choctaw, Creek, Seminole, Cherokee, and Chickasaw tribes who were forcibly moved to this area between 1830 and 1843. Oklahoma is home to 39 Indian tribes, making it one of the states with the highest concentration of Native American populations in the United States.



F2FA PROGRAM QUICK FACTS

► **F2FA PROGRAM REACH:**

OKC Food Hub operates within a 100 mile radius of Oklahoma City. The food hub currently works with 23 producers and has the potential to purchase from another 49 who have expressed interest. To date, 25 sites have placed an order through the OKC Food Hub, including 2 tribes, the regional food bank, 9 grocery/farmers market stores, 3 restaurants, and 9 schools. Between October 2022 and October 2023, OKC Food Hub reached about a million individuals with farm fresh food.

► **FUNDING SOURCES:**

- USDA Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP)
- USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) Program
- Private foundations

*Organization has been in operation since 2022
F2FA programs have been in operation since 2022*

► **WEBSITE:**
okcfoodhub.org

ABOUT OKC FOOD HUB

The mission of the OKC Food Hub is to build a better food system in the Oklahoma City metro area and throughout the state by increasing market access and providing support services to a racially diverse group of small to midsize farmers and increasing access for food bank clients and schools to nutritious foods. OKC Food Hub is a fresh produce delivery non-profit building a collaborative, relationship-based network that aggregates food from local producers and redistributes it to food box programs, institutions, restaurants, retailers through convenient weekly online ordering.

Founded by Jenna Moore and Thanh Tran to fill the need they identified in local wholesale purchasing and distribution in central Oklahoma, the two translated their passion for local food systems into the values that underpin

the purpose and work of the OKC Food Hub. In their own words, the values-based practices at the heart of the organization include:

Farmers Come First: Without farmers there is no food. We strive to offer farmer support services, purchasing power, and advocacy to build community around farming.

Relationships Over Profit. We work with producers, purchasers and support organizations to meet people where they are at, moving forward at the speed of trust.

Invest in Community: We collaborate to build a better food system by working together, promoting each other, and sharing resources. We aim to be a tide that lifts all boats.

Diversity = Resilience: Different perspectives and ways of doing things make us stronger and better equipped to deal with changes which inevitably occur. We actively seek to build diversity into every level of our organization from producers to staff to the communities we serve.

Transparency: We know every farmer personally and visit every farm regularly to make sure our community knows exactly where each product came from and how it was grown.

Respect for Environment: We are always seeking to improve our relationship with the earth as we work towards more regenerative growing practices, compostable/reusable packaging, alternative energy sources, conservation practices and locally sourced farm inputs.

ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION FOR LOCAL FARMERS IS KEY

The OKC Food Hub's current suppliers are all local fruit and vegetable producers, many of whom serve on their board of directors. The majority of these producers use sustainable production practices. Many are beginning or Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) farmers, and more than one third of OKC Food Hub's total gross sales last year were from food produced by BIPOC farmers.

Small to midsize fruit and vegetable growers in Oklahoma - despite their proximity to urban centers - are not readily visible in a system that prioritizes support services for commodity crop production. As a result, they lack access to technical assistance, capital investment, and credit that's essential for building a viable farm business. Coupled with the lack of a viable marketplace for local foods, they struggle to make a living by farming

WHO'S AT THE F2FA TABLE?

OKC Food Hub engages historically disinvested or excluded communities by ensuring representation and involvement from these communities in every level of the organization, from staff to board members to producers and purchasers. OKC Food Hub believes that "as we are *serv*ing these communities, we also need to *be* these communities."

alone. Leveraging resources for producers so they can grow their farms is a major hurdle that the OKC Hub—with its staff of two—is trying to overcome. They're working to educate key stakeholders about this critical and underserved farm sector and its benefits to improving community health, regenerating soils, and rebuilding a local food and farm economy.

With their values-based practices as inspiration, OKC Food Hub is calling on traditional farm support entities such as Oklahoma State University Extension (OSU), the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and other institutions to collaboratively support long-term, sustainable and data driven solutions in local food system development. Educating buyers and eaters and investing in the creation of a network of food systems support organizations is also important to advancing a new narrative that values the social, environmental and economic benefits of a local food system.





BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN OKLAHOMA FARMERS AND COMMUNITY

The OKC Food Hub prioritizes selling food they've procured to food assistance organizations that are either distributing food for free or offering produce at a reduced rate in communities where fresh food access is low. The primary buyers of aggregated food from the OKC Food Hub are the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma and the public school district. OKC is supplying the majority of the local produce sourced by the food bank. In addition, the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, also using LFPA funds, source nearly 100% of their fresh produce purchases from OKC Food Hub which they distribute through community food boxes for tribal members.

OKC is also developing partnerships to sell local produce to individual schools that are working to source produce for school cafeterias using Local Food for School Procurement Program (LFS) funds. One recipient of food procured through the OKC Food Hub and then distributed through the Food Bank had this to say: "The quality of these items is some of the best products I have ever cooked with. It surpasses what is often available in many grocery stores. I never fully understood how the Food Bank was able to provide me with such quality products and do it consistently without a fee. I am so grateful for this partnership; I certainly wouldn't be able to do what I do without it. As a cook, I would choose locally grown

“I've started recognizing how important it is to build relationships with potential buyers and talk about the marketplace we're trying to build. It spreads hope. The transactional pieces are wonderful and necessary, but it's the relationships that are built through communicating about what we're trying to do that gives people hope that there can be a better future.”

-THANH TRAN, CO-DIRECTOR, OKC FOOD HUB

produce every time. You can see, taste, and feel the difference. It has passed through fewer hands and there are fewer pesticides, and that makes a difference when you taste it. You can tell that the local farmers take pride in their work just by tasting it.”

ADDRESSING EQUITY BY ADDRESSING BARRIERS

Compared with other states, Oklahoma has one of the highest numbers of Black farmers and the largest amount of farmland owned by Black people. However, very few of Oklahoma's Black farmers are growing vegetables and fruits. While all small farmers in Oklahoma experience challenges to accessing technical assistance and infrastructure investment, farmers of color report facing higher hurdles.

Despite these dynamics, OKC Food Hub gets more applicants from non-BIPOC farmers than BIPOC farmers. The organization plans to continue centering equity by putting more time into addressing the barriers that farmers of color experience as they try to scale up to supply a wholesale market. They work closely with partner organizations situated in historically disinvested communities, such as Langston University and the Healthy Oklahomans Nutrition Alliance, among others. They support producers specifically from these communities through a peer-to-peer network, sharing information and resources, advocating for support, and increasing access to capital and markets. They also invest staff time directly in producers of color through on-farm support, grant writing, and crop and business planning. OKC Food Hub has assisted 5 producers of color to write grants for up to \$10,000 for farm infrastructure.

In just a few years since launch, the OKC Food Hub is already providing essential infrastructure that will enable the local food system in and around Oklahoma City to grow and thrive in years to come.

IN THEIR WORDS



KEY SUCCESSES

Purchased from 12 local farmers producing vegetables and fruit

330,000 pounds of food was procured and sold in 2023

Farmers indicated that their involvement improved their bottom line

Connected and learned from other F2FA programs around the country



KEY CHALLENGES

More supply than demand. We can't bring on more farmers until buyers are committed to purchasing or until we build a local food market.

Lack of a forum within state agencies administering LFPA to provide input and feedback from those implementing the program.

Tried and true strategies for working with F2FA institutional buyers and setting up contracts.

Successful strategies for scaling/growth for a food hub organization serving food access organizations (building capacity to meet purchasing demands, pricing, and distribution).

Capacity as a nonprofit for developing the market access while supporting farmer viability.

Capacity to engage in advocacy to increase awareness about and resources for local food systems development.



VALUES IN ACTION

Recognizing and addressing barriers that BIPOC small farmers uniquely or more frequently face

Ensuring that the organization's board and participating producers are composed of BIPOC farmers.



LESSONS LEARNED

Figure out your market first! Before you put a seed in the ground, figure out where the product is going to go. Identify the operations after and to match that situation. Build the relationships first.

Establish your standards and values and let them guide you.

Expect that you will have to pivot and change course.

Have at least two anchor producers and two anchor buyers. Get some numbers from those anchors and leverage that success to grow.

The Farm to Food Assistance Learning Lab was made possible through a 2021 USDA Local Foods Promotion Program (LFPP) grant, with supplemental support from The Rockefeller Foundation. This profile features one of ten participating teams who served as co-investigators in the Wallace Center's research on the field of Farm to Food Assistance.