Blueprint for Community Ownership, Empowerment & Prosperity in the Chesapeake Foodshed

Fall 2020
COEP Supporters

Advisory Group Members

The COEP Advisory Group, composed of food equity leaders and funders from throughout the Chesapeake region, developed the approach, secured funding, and played a major role in the action team selection process. The Advisory Group additionally supported and advised the action team throughout the process. The action team extends their gratitude for their support, advisement, and leadership in this process!

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Photo Courtesy CATA.
COEP Letter to Reader

We bring you greetings from the magic land of COEP. This imaginary land is the result of six months of action team selection, 18 months of freedom dreaming, gathering, critique, deep listening, active deliberation, consent building, 2 months of writing and designing and countless hours of life well lived to bring to you a list of six recommendations and actions. COEPlandia is not imaginary. It is an oasis that rises from the wastelands of capitalism, anti-blackness, and white supremacist paternalism when we align our ethos and praxis toward the principles of community, ownership, empowerment, prosperity (COEP) and all their juicy configurations.

COEP is the stimuli of the alchemy that changes the very nature of how resources are exchanged and extracted within communities and transitions before our very eyes into a system that moves resources to support the work of community action and community resilience (CACR). Outlined in her book Freedom Farmer, Dr. Monica White describes the way in which black agrarian communities resisted oppression by building liberated zones for themselves through collective activities of survival and resistance.

The stories outlined in Dr. White’s text range from Reconstruction Era to Civil Rights and beyond. Her text and others like it such as Dr. Jessica Gordon Nembhard’s Collective Courage, name that poor, black, indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) have long had the tools to solve their own problems (e.g. to resist capitalism and other systems of oppression). What have consistently been barriers to large scale success are access to financial resources and freedom from direct and indirect sabotage from agents of the state.

In this, we write this report to you, the decision makers of how money, resources, and press flows. In the following report, we present to you a roadmap of how to first assess the ways in which your personal and organizational culture supports or hinders the equitable distribution of assets and resources. We invite you to use this report to spark robust dialogue in your respective institutions and boardrooms. We invite you to analyze what discomfort you may feel as you absorb this report against the concepts of anti-blackness, anti-poor, white supremacy, and oligarchic capitalism. We invite you to feel. We invite you to first humanize yourself — remove the title of grantmaking machine and wear proudly your thinking feeling human cap. It is only here that we invite you to examine your beliefs about what is and isn’t possible.

We have done our best to present you with recommendations that are just beyond possibility. We have laid them out in bite-sized pieces—short, mid and long term strategies. The strategies can also be read as individual, organizational, and multi-organizational/partnership regional strategies. Whether you are alone at your organization and challenging the status quo or your entire organization is ready to shift culture, there are actions you can take today. Let this action plan of fortified recommendations be your guidebook and conversation starter for how to do the work in partnership with, and not a hindrance to, the groundworkers of our Chesapeake regional foodshed. Thank you for your commitment and willingness to do this work.

We turn now to our beloved community. Our sistren, brethren, and gender-nonconforming family with whom we share our vocation, our passion and belief that a just, equitable, and liberated [food] system is already here! We thank you first for your diligence in staying true to the work of building systems of nourishment. We thank you for growing food, acquiring land for collective wellbeing, preparing meals and distributing them within communities, demonstrating the possibility of democratic decision-making through consent at the local and hyper-local levels, challenging capitalist ideologies of resource management and doing so with love, vibrance, and spirit. We thank you for all the time you have

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1 Term coined by Dr. Monica White in her book Freedom Farmers (2018)
2 Coined by Lloyd Hogan and referenced in Ed Whitfield’s article “What must we do to be free? On the building of Liberated Zones”
3 Anti-blackness, read more: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/04/opinion/george-floyd-anti-blackness.html
4 Definition: anti-poor
invested over the past 18 months as we have engaged with you. You have shared your stories, opinions, recommendations and visions. It was this feedback coupled with the lived and learned experience of our group of 12 farmers, farm-workers, food-system strategists, immigrants, birthworkers, historians and afrofuturists that comprise the COEP Action Team that served as the raw material for these recommendations. A full list of this feedback can be found in the appendix of this document.

This report is yours. It is with deep hope and anticipation that we present it to you, our comrades. We hope you see yourselves and your needs in it. We hope you utilize the recommendations presented here to undergird your conversations with your bases and funders. Further, we encourage you to use it as a mirror to examine within yourself the ways in which systems of oppression have co-opted our imaginations. We encourage you to freedom dream with us. We stand in solidarity with you as you resist!

We close this letter to you our readers with an acknowledgement of the times we are in. When our group first convened in December 2018, we did so already exhausted by the paradigms we seek to shift through the publishing of this report. We initiated this process with a collective understanding that strengthening our local food system would give us another layer of protection from instances of disaster and disease. Building local self-reliance is at the core of these recommendations. We did not and could not have imagined the ways that just 13 months later this theory would be tested in the COVID-19 pandemic. What didn’t shock us was that black and brown communities were impacted disproportionately by the negative effects of the virus. BIPOC communities are filled with essential workers, many food workers, who have had the highest rates of exposure; have several of the “pre-existing conditions” that makes exposure to the virus potentially deadly; have inequitable access to the Internet and other forms of information exchange to stay up to date on health information; and have lower rates of health insurance. On top of the added challenge of COVID, BIPOC communities, especially black communities are overpoliced and more likely to be criminalized for their response to the pandemic and life in America than a white person. We could not have predicted that this would be the moment that the world would embrace the message of the Movement for Black Lives, but we are ecstatic that it is. We stand with and cheer on all of our freedom fighters who continue to openly resist, with their protest and pockets, the ideologies of oppression that consistently dehumanize black bodies, hearts, and minds.

We present these recommendations in the hopes that you understand how these two major historic events are intrinsically connected. Black, indigenous, and immigrant communities can no longer bear the weight of keeping us all fed, clothed, and served while simultaneously being murdered by food-related disease, lack of healthcare, poor municipal policies, and most publicly, the police. Further we can no longer live in those two realities and be robbed of the acknowledgement of our individual and collective agency to survive and thrive when all of the cards are stacked against us. This way is not sustainable. Our current operating systems must be updated.

The time to start was yesterday. Let the combustion of this time fire up the engines of change for all of us. This is our moment!
INTRO & BACKGROUND
member selection
structure & decision making
leadership map
relationship & trust approach
action team members
Introduction & Background

The Community Ownership, Empowerment, and Prosperity Action Team (COEP; Action Team) was formed through the Chesapeake Foodshed Network (CFN), which serves to catalyze connections and collaborations in support of a sustainable, resilient, inclusive, and equitable regional food system in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. An assessment of the region revealed that food system equity was a priority for stakeholders across the region. CFN worked with food equity leaders and funders from across the region to create the COEP Advisory Group (Advisory Group) who crafted the project’s scope, procured funding, and stewarded the co-chair and action team selection process. CFN has provided backbone support through this process while allowing those with lived and practiced experience to do the work that we knew we needed to do.

Action Team Member Selection

The 2 Co-chairs and the 10 Action Team members were selected through a Consent Decision-making process, introduced and taught to the COEP Advisory Group and Co-chairs by Circle Forward. Consent decision-making creates space and opportunity for all voices and perspectives to be heard and nurtured until a group decision is reached. Pivotal to the process is ensuring that everyone is within their ‘range of tolerance’ for any decision being made. Consent decision-making asks us to identify the risk that the group is not willing to take and to work within those parameters.

The COEP Advisory Group used consent decision-making and racial equity practices to select the Co-chairs. Once selected, the Co-chairs were trained in consent decision-making and worked with the Advisory Group to review all 46 of the action team member applications, interview each person, and go through a consent decision-making process to select the 10 action team members. While this took more time than most selection processes, which typically eliminate candidates before an interview, we deliberately chose to give each person an opportunity to be interviewed because people often represent themselves better through conversation than through written application.

Structure and Decision-Making

Our structure was developed by the action team during our first retreat in December 2018. We quickly understood our core values were based in shared leadership, self-determination, and liberated power, so we developed a work group structure to distribute the work and decision-making to the people who were developing the content for each phase of our work. As work groups developed content, it was brought to the full action team for review, refinement, and consent approval. New work groups were created and dissolved as the action team saw fit. This made the team nimble, agile, and adaptive to the needs of the group as they emerged.

Our decision-making process always included generous amounts of discussion and deliberation before decisions were made. Our inclusive process allowed for us to bring our unique perspectives, personalities, needs, and experiences to the group to be shared and stirred into new ideas that never could have been reached by one of us alone. This process grew our action team into a tight-knit group of food equity leaders who now see each other as comrades in this work, supporting each other, uplifting one another, and standing beside each other in this work and in life.
COEP Decision-Making Process and Structure

The action team developed an iterative feedback process to ensure that all voices in the action team were heard and that our work was distributed across the action team.
COEP Leadership

All locations and points depicted on the map are approximate.

CHESAPEAKE FOODSHED AREA
COEP ACTION TEAM MEMBER
COEP ADVISORY GROUP MEMBER
COEP FUNDER
We are not only productivity machines. None of us are worth only what we produce. The breadth and depth of what we bring to the table as whole people has informed this collective process—our laughter, our tears, our mothers and our mentors, the histories we’re part of, how we grow food, how we learn, and how we love. These dimensions are always impacting the ways we show up in space together, and the ways we envision the future that will make our peoples free.

Because of this shared understanding, building trusting relationships with one another was an intentional focus of ours as we began working together. Each of our convenings included dedicated space for us to deepen our relationships with each other, to check-in and witness ourselves in our success and struggles, and to reflect on our shared experiences across a region.

This trust has enabled us to have difficult conversations with one another, to disagree, to remain in meaningful collaboration with each other throughout a global pandemic and an uprising.

We were all selected to be part of this Action Team—but we didn’t know why or how our worldviews would fit together. Our relationships are how we learned about what each other’s perspectives are based on. Relationships are the bedrock of organizing. They are the foundation of this work.

At all of our in-person meetings and retreats, we made time for nourishing food and conversation with each other. (Nov2019)
Aleya Fraser (she/her) COEP Co-chair: is a pollinator, land steward and collective organizer. Her company ACRES Consulting stands for agroecology, culture and regenerative economies which are the intersections of her work. Her work supports land reclamation and food sovereignty throughout the Caribbean and United States.

Beth Schermerhorn (she/they) COEP Co-chair: is a racial equity consultant & facilitator, food equity planner, and community organizer with Cambium Collective. Based in Harrisonburg, VA, she brings the spirit of Southern queer relational organizing to disrupt systems of oppression and harm to ones of liberation and healing.

Asha Carter (she/her) is a facilitator, educator, community organizer, and environmental justice advocate. Her love of food and commitment to liberation were cultivated by her grandmother, a daughter of sharecroppers who was able to preserve and pass on her love of the land. Asha has expertise in organizational development, relational organizing, and uncovering where liberatory systems analysis meets praxis.

Eliza Spellman Taylor (she/her) lives in southwest Virginia where she co-operates a whole diet farm in the Sinking Creek Valley. As a farmer and acupuncturist caring for and healing with the land and all those who depend on it is of greatest importance. Eliza’s work with Agrarian Land Trust centers on supporting land-based livelihoods, healthy farms, de-commodifying land, and legal tools for equitable land access and shared stewardship.

Hannah Chatterjee (she/her) is a cook, cultural archivist, organizer, and food policy practitioner. She spent six years working for Philadelphia city government managing the Food Policy Advisory Council and moving the organization towards practicing racial equity. She lives in Philadelphia and spends her time cooking her family’s Bengali and Korean recipes to stay connected to her mixed heritage identity.

Julia Metzger-Traber (she/her) is a Jewish, German-American facilitator, somatic practitioner, performance artist, and mother. With her whole body-mind, heart, and imagination, she supports communities and organizations to speak truths, address racialized harms, uproot whiteness, vision and move toward healing and transformation. Julia lives at Potomac Vegetable Farms, in Hillsboro, Virginia, where she is co-creating a healing, land-based intentional community.
Kathia Ramirez (she/her) is very proud of her Zapotec Indigenous Roots from Oaxaca, Mexico, is part of the Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas (CATA) team as the Food Justice Coordinator. Kathia manages community gardens in 3 states, and represents the Farmworker voice in the US Food Sovereignty Alliance, The People’s Agroecology Process and formally in the Domestic Fair Trade Association.

Renard Turner (he/him) lives in central Virginia and co-owns, with his wife Chinette, Vanguard Ranch Ltd., a diversified organic and sustainable African American family farm well known for its meat goat herd. Renard is passionate about addressing inequalities caused by systemic racism related to land acquisition retention and use. Farming is an act of liberation and his full time vocation.

Sache Jones (she/her) Sache Jones is a organizer, grower, and educator. A Baltimore native, she is Co-Founder of Two Moons Food Group who equitably increases growers, food businesses, and marketplaces in Baltimore. She currently is the Director of Food Justice for No Boundaries Coalition, a resident-led organization in Central West Baltimore.

Sade Anderson, Ph.D (she/her) is a mother, birth worker, scholar, organizer, and racial equity consultant. Over the last 8 years Sade has connected with community through her research on food apartheid experienced by Black residents in Wards 7&8 of Washington, D.C. Sade is passionate about African Diasporic ancestral foodways and their survival. As a member of Black Dirt Farm Collective, Sade helps to promote Afroecology and reconnect Black communities to land, food, and healing.

Shantell Bingham (she/her) is the great grand-daughter to North Carolina tobacco sharecroppers. Based in Charlottesville, VA, she is the Program Director of the Charlottesville Food Justice Network. Passionate about advancing racial equity and justice within local food systems, Shantell collaboratively crafts effective program interventions and informs local policy to cultivate a healthy & just food system through her research, organizing, and policy work.

Terrance Sankar, Ph.D (he/him) is an independent engineer, inventor, scientist and small farmer at Four Mothers Farm. His background includes living his teenage years in the Wapisiana tribe where he became deeply connected to the earth and its cycles. Effective communication and a gift for teaching are also in his skill set. He is currently building a “smart” farm using emerging technologies while researching root-soil interface bioelectricity effects on soils, root depth, and crop yields.
Regional Narrative

planting & cultivating the seeds of oppression

watering the roots of historical racism in our modern-day food system
Regional Narrative

Building community ownership, empowerment, and prosperity in our Chesapeake regional food system has never come easy. In large part, progress has stalled or slowed down due to centuries old policies and practices that work to prop up corporations over community, or oppressive strategies over empowering practices. In the following passage, we put forth historical and present day events that have shaped the inequitable infrastructure of our regional foodshed. By shining a light on the dark spaces in our past and present, we provide context for reverse engineering structural inequities throughout the Chesapeake and a foundation for the COEP recommendations.

Disturbance: The Seeds of Oppression

Readying American soil for the legacy of oppression in our food system we see today meant developing a new system of devaluing our land, food, and the people who cultivate them both. To ready American soil for the legacy of oppression in our food system we see today, a system of devaluing our land, food, and people who cultivate both was developed. No less than ten years after the first twenty-one Africans arrived in 1619, Virginia statutes sought to draw racial divisions between laborers. These first laws enacted by the Colony of Virginia defined Africans and Indigenous people as property that could be taxed, and bondage as an inheritable trait.

“And also it is hereby enacted and declared, That baptism of slaves doth not exempt them from bondage; and that all children shall be bond or free, according to the condition of their mothers, and the particular direction of this act (XXX-VI).” -An act concerning Servants and Slaves-October 1705-CHAP. XLIX.

Many more laws would pass, intensifying the policy that came before and underwriting a society where Black and Indigenous people’s humanity was devalued for the sake of agricultural pursuits. America’s agricultural system, bound to racist practices to source labor uplifted capitalism’s most brutal philosophy for maximum profit. In the Chesapeake region, crops like tobacco, wheat and oats became known as “cash crops” and abusive practices to land and water became conventional.

Oppressive strategies targeting BIPOC community members are the foundation of our food system. The state of Virginia played a pivotal role in defining practice and policy across the Chesapeake Region and the nation. In 1662 the Commonwealth officially passed laws supporting Chattel Slavery, a policy dictating enslaved status as an inheritable trait. Within two years similar laws were passed in the colonies of Maryland,

1. It is thought fit that all those that work in the ground of what quality or condition soever, shall pay tithes to the ministers (October 1629-ACT IX). Although this law did not rule out the possibility that English women would work in the tobacco fields, it did begin the process of creating a distinction between the work that English and African women performed in the colony.] Source: Hening, ed., The Statutes at Large, vol. 1, p. 144. http://www.virtual-jamestown.org/laws1.html

2. December 1662-ACT XII. Negro womens’ children to serve according to the condition of the mother. The child of an enslaved mother was also a slave for life. The statute was a dramatic departure from the English tradition in which a child received his or her status from his or her father. Members of the General Assembly also hoped that an increased fine would discourage white men and women from having sexual partners who were African or of African descent. Source: Hening, ed., The Statutes at Large, vol. 2, p. 170.
New Jersey, New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts. Years to follow the region saw an increase of restrictions on enslaved Africans and Native peoples (the commonwealth passed more than 130 laws between 1629-1704).

For the next 150 years, the Slave Codes and accompanying colonial legislation would forever impact the development of the labor market within agriculture as well land ownership. Other acts that followed such as the Indian Removal Act, Black Codes, and Homestead Act, legalized the killing of Native Americans, restricted Black people’s right to own property, conduct business, buy and lease lands, while promoting White people’s rights to expand west and claim 160 acres of land.
Deepening the Roots of Historical Racism in our Modern-day Food System

Well into the 21st century, agricultural systemic actors including public and private funders, large farm corporations, and politicians supported new forms of historically oppressive strategies. These strategies have worked to uphold systems of underpaid labor as well as predominantly white-owned monopolies on farm land and agricultural production. Similar to the colonial era farms sourcing labor from Black and Brown hands, today 2.1 million immigrants work in jobs growing, harvesting, processing, and selling food in the US. This number accounts for 1 in 4 food chain workers, and yet equal rights and opportunities to live healthy, full lives do not exist for our food chain workers.

In 2020, this is most evidently true when we reflect on the poultry industry and treatment of food chain workers during a global pandemic. As meat plants remain open purportedly to serve America its protein, the lives of food chain workers are being sacrificed. COVID-19 cases have mounted across the country in meatpacking and processing plants, with over 30,000 individuals infected, many of whom are immigrants and people of color. Over 100 people have died. This disturbing reality is no surprise if viewed in the context of our food system as a whole. This situation demands that we look closely at the meaning of ‘essential’ as it applies to workers lives vs industry profits. This assessment is a necessity underpinning COEP work.

Like any thriving ecosystem, our food system has lost vital diversity in farm ownership and production, cultivation techniques, and sustainable indigenous philosophies, leaving us less resilient on one hand and increasing racial inequities in the other. In 1920, 1 in 7 farms were Black owned and operated. Today that number has declined to 1.3 percent of farms, in comparison to 98% of farms owned and operated by white Americans.

While oppressive strategies continue to work in our region, the culture and wisdom of honoring the land continues to live through people today. The following report uplifts strategies of people and organizations carrying on traditions honoring the land and cultivating liberation within our food system.
Black Codes and the start of ...

Forced Chinese farm labor and Japanese internment camps and ...

Coal mines and environmental harm ...

From chains to prison pipeline incarceration ...

Illustration shared by the Highlander Center’s Land Liberation Study, art by Ahdya Attea
WHAT'S OUT THERE ASSESSMENT

process
who's leading the work
what does this mean
COEP principles
what we are learning
What’s Out There

Introduction
To prepare the soil for our recommendations, we knew we needed to open our eyes and ears to what is already out there. Where are Community Ownership, Empowerment and Prosperity of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) communities showing up and thriving in our region? And where are they not? And why? We asked ourselves these questions through surveys and interviews of each of our team members. From awareness of our own work, our networks, broader movements, and some of our outreach, we compiled a report.

What we compiled is not a thorough and comprehensive assessment of COEP issues in the Chesapeake Foodshed, but it was informative and centered relationship-building. Members of the action team are not scientific assessors; rather we are leaders, community members, and food system change-makers who have experience, connections, and wisdom related to what is happening in our communities. This assessment is our attempt to share our collective knowledge and experience in a way that will help funders, decision-makers, and other readers be more aware of what is happening, who is doing COEP work, and some trends and themes we have uncovered.

We hope that this assessment continues to expand and grow, that people who share our values will take what we have done and add to it using their expertise and wisdom. We know that we have not captured everything that has happened or that is happening currently. And, we know that the themes and analysis that we have captured here hold true for many who live in food apartheid; for those who are working in their communities to feed people and build food-centered cultures; and for BIPOC farmers.

Process

1. COEP Action Team Member Wisdom: We surveyed and interviewed each other to deepen our understanding not only of who is doing COEP work, but what we each see as the opportunities and barriers to having more work in our foodshed that centers justice & sovereignty. We have continued to learn more about what other leaders are experiencing in their work during our presentations and dialogues at meetings, conferences, and through our stakeholder engagements.

2. Critical Policy Analysis: We created a policy analysis to share our perspective on the role of policy in COEP work. We are not policy experts, but we do know the impact that bad policies can have on our communities, and we know that no amount of “good” policies will necessarily change how much or how quickly we reach a just & sovereign foodshed.

3. Stakeholder Engagement: We participated in a number of meetings with funders and food justice and sovereignty leaders to learn, listen, and capture their longings, challenges, and perspective. In total, we connected with over 100 people throughout the region.
Who Is Leading The Work

Based on the 88 responses to the survey created and filled out by action team members, we now understand the following:

Legal Entities

38.6% of surveys completed were listed as non-profits
15.9% LLC
12.5% alliance or network
10.2% cooperatives/collectives and alliances

There were a large variety of other entities including community groups, government entities, and funders who were also identified:

Legal Entities Listed in the Survey:
Issues at the heart of COEP

Survey participants selected multiple agroeconomies for each entity that they shared through completing the survey.
What Does This Mean?

• Over half of COEP work is happening on and with farmers and food businesses.

• There is a need to better understand the types of education/health & nutrition education that are happening to identify educational gaps, areas of education that are overemphasized or not as needed (i.e. non-culturally relevant nutrition education).

• There is a gap in infrastructure that supports farmers getting their product to market (distribution). Funders and decision-makers need to spend time understanding what qualifies as distribution, such as unofficial and indirect sales, neighborhood distribution networks, and person-to-person scale distribution networks.

• There were not many surveys completed for policy/decision-making, food waste, research/academic, advocacy, funding, fishing or logging. These could be areas where more effort is needed, or are an indication that these areas are not high-priority areas for COEP work. It could also be an indication that COEP team members who completed the survey have little relationship to, experience in, or access to these areas.

COEP Principles & Practices

Survey responses demonstrated the top following COEP principles & practices being utilized by grassroots organizations. In the survey, there were an unlimited number that could be selected:

• Prioritizing those most directly affected by food system injustice (67%)
• Caring for land (56.8%)
• Sharing resources (55.7%)
• Economic viability (45.5%)
• Shared leadership (39.8%)
• Organizing political power & economic viability (35.2%)
• Solidarity economics & healing work (33%)

Agroeconomies

Entities included in the survey are working on the following aspects of the agroeconomy. In the survey, there were an unlimited number of options that could be selected for each entity:

• 61% farming/food businesses (54 responses)
• 49% Education
• 42% Land access/conservation
• 32% Nutrition/health education
• 31% Subsistence/non-economic (community gardens, etc.)
• 25% Economic Development
• 23% Non-profit (Note: 38.6% of surveys collected identified their legal entity as a non-profit, please see above)
• 22% Labor & farmworker
What We Are Learning

Which types of organizations typically do the least COEP work but have the largest budget? Why is this an issue in our region?

- Large non-profits with long track records and a lot of resources are more attractive to funders. A lot of money goes to salaries and inventing new programming instead of putting money directly towards community-owned solutions and programs that do a better job of community investment.

- Examples of these institutions are government and academic organizations like Cooperative Extension, research organizations like Union of Concerned Scientists, charity organizations like food banks.

What work do you see missing in the region? What do we need to see more of?

- Programs that invite youth into agriculture as a viable career choice.
- Purchasing farm acres at economies of scale to actually feed BIPOC communities.
- Ability to pass on land for generations.
- Achieving security of biological diversity in our food system.
- Stronger community organizing infrastructure.
- More investment in the most impacted frontline communities.
- More people to people land reparations.
- More organizations that can leverage funding to move land into BIPOC stewardship and invest in soil and the health of the land.
- People at mid-level positions at powerful organizations have stronger analyses and willingness to push than the executive leadership in the organization. Our work is constantly strained by that. Strategic work is needed and work to transition people out to transform power.
- Storytelling about funding, documentation, and marketing.
- Being able to show up as fully, unapologetic, black sovereignty organization. Addressing sovereignty and justice is a meaningful and spiritual response to historic injustice. Funders are not always unbiased in the way they interact with organizations.
- Organizations that espouse themselves as foundations and throw around the word equity need to do the work to understand what hindrances to equity there are, personal issues, etc.
- There is a need for more grassroots organizations and businesses (especially cooperative models) that are creating a culture of food justice and sovereignty wherever they live. We need more folks who are able to be paid salaries with benefits (and/or living wages) to do this work and build momentum.
- There is a need for more Black, Indigenous and Immigrant leadership.

What are identifiable barriers to COEP work being practiced and implemented?

- We take better care of our cars than our bodies. And are willing to sign a lease for a car for 6 years, but unwilling to sign up for a CSA for that long.
- Small farmers need more marketing help.
- Right now people are losing land every day. And are having a hard time transitioning out. We need more training for people to do work on the land. And funding for stop-gap work force!
- BIPOC are often not in leadership and doing so much of the work to push what they can inside their organizations. A lot of burn out and disillusionment and support could be offered here.
• Charity-based work.
• Community land ownership, there are very specific pathways to getting land but they all have to go through non-profits. Because of development pressure and gentrification, land that used to be valueless to commercial developers is now valuable and the community doesn’t have access to it.
• Organizations offer more services than capacity-building to farmworkers and Latinx communities.
• Most organizations have grants that tie to deliverables that sometimes take up much more time than doing the work that is needed.
• White people with economic privilege trying to solve problems for folks who are economically strapped without doing leadership development and making space for BIPOC leadership.

Critical Policy Analysis

Our action team created a critical policy analysis which delves into the complexities of policy work in a system that was designed to uphold white supremacy. Click here to access and read the full document.
Every facet of our food system has been built through exploitation and racial injustice. It is destroying our planet and our health as human beings. It is time to radically transform the way we conceive of our relationship to land, food, capital, and each other. It is time to invest in the regeneration of the land and the brilliance and sovereignty of Black, Indigenous and People of Color communities to lead the future.

These recommendations are meant to be a guide for funders and policy makers as well as an acknowledgement and inspiration for the individuals and organizations that embody COEP principles. We asked stakeholders in many different settings to dream big and vision what an equitable Chesapeake Region looks and feels like. We asked them what they needed to best serve their communities and what barriers they wanted to tear down. We ended up with a list of hundreds of brilliant action items (see Appendix for the full list) and organized those into 6 overarching recommendations.

We hope that you read these with an open, action oriented heart and mind. The overwhelming message is that frontline communities hold the solutions for a healthy and equitable food system that serves everyone equitably! Let us uplift and invest in land, healing, radical imagination, and cooperative leadership.
RECOMMENDATION #1

FIGHT MONOPOLIES AND ADDRESS INEQUITY IN THE FOOD SYSTEM

All stakeholders in food systems must acknowledge and address the global food system as inequitable and inefficient in order to catalyze change. They must study how this food system was built on exploitation of people and land coupled with deliberate policy choices that concentrate wealth and corporate power. Funders and non-profit organizations must work internally to debunk the myth of charity as a social safety net created to help those in need, to see the reality that charity is ill-gotten monies that create a system of dependency rather than empowerment for communities that are owed them.
Groundwork Strategies:

- Grant money without strings attached to farmers and food businesses.
- Extend grant terms to exceed 1 year.
- Make grants and technical assistance available to small businesses, business incubators and cooperatives, in addition to nonprofits. Soul Fire published a good article with many examples of how funders can make themselves more accessible. (https://www.soulfirefarm.org/2017/09/)
- Streamline applications and reporting in collaboration with other funders. (See COEP Process)
- Enact right to repair laws for farm equipment. (ISLR Anti Monopoly Report)
- Foster the expansion of independent and locally owned grocery stores.
- Share power in funding decision-making with the communities being funded.
- Honor diverse food narratives knowing that communities have the answers they need.
- Promote more Food System Equity and racial justice trainings at the foundation, nonprofit, and governmental levels. Here are a few organizations that we trust. There are even more out there.
- Encourage and incentivize public institutions to include mandatory teaching of racial justice, land justice, BIPOC history, and buyback programs to return land to tribal nations and indigenous groups (e.g. Truth and Healing Council in California).

Systems Transformation:

- Drawdown foundation endowments and invest in community-led wealth building primarily in African American and Indigenous communities to build prosperity and grow/sustain wealth.
- Limit state and local subsidies to the largest Agribusiness. (See ILSR report)
- Ban foreign speculators from buying up farmland. (ILSR)
- Planning and zoning departments must prioritize small scale agriculture so that farms have incentives to be in and near BIPOC communities.
- Strategic planning & revisioning in the non-profit sector to center grassroots community power and BIPOC leadership.
- Fund the leadership and professional development of African American, Indigenous, and Latino community members.
- Dismantle organizations that do not embody COEP principles to make space for African American, Indigenous, and Latino organizations that are meeting the community’s needs.
- Restructure the federal subsidy system to exclude large corporations and consolidations, and instead support agroecology, affordable land prices, diverse small farms, and opportunities for small and beginning farmers. (NSAC’s 2018 Farm Bill platform)
RECOMMENDATION #2

GIVE LAND BACK! LAND REPARATIONS TO INDIGENOUS AND BLACK COMMUNITIES

Our food system is built on settler-colonialism -- on stolen land, centuries of dispossession, and extraction from land and communities. Land must be returned to African American and Indigenous communities along with equitable resources and opportunity to maintain their stewardship.

Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust (NEFOCLT)

The Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust is a hybrid model land trust, bringing together a community land trust commons model for farmland preservation and a conservation land trust model to conserve and steward ecosystems with the goal of manifesting a community vision that uplifts regenerative global Indigenous, Black, and POC relationships with land, skills, and lifeways.

They are advancing permanent and secure land tenure through farmland acquisition and land access for farmers, as well as development of farmer training, resources, and community.
Groundwork Strategies:

- Acknowledge what was stolen from African American and Indigenous peoples, including life, land, and techniques for stewardship and growing.
- Create pathways toward land justice, such as:
  - Rematriation of land to sovereign Native tribes and nations (Eastern Woodlands Rematriation Collective);
  - Transference of land ownership to people of color (especially Black and Native folks) and within communities of color, which enables wealth acquisition and self-determination (Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust, Black Land and Power);
  - Equitable, affordable, long-term leases on de-commodified land (Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust, Agrarian Land Trust, School of Living).
- Launch an endowed fund to support land purchases for land reparations, rematriation, and enable long-term re-investment in the land and community (Southern Reparations Loan Fund, Black Land Power Financial Commons).
- Limit land consolidation by big corporations and investment funds, whether US-owned or owned by foreign conglomerates seeking farmland.
- Fundraise to remove land from the speculative market. Purchase permanently de-commodified land and put it in the hands of those whose land has been stolen or who otherwise would never be able to access land (SELC/Minnow, Agrarian Land Trust, NEFOC Land Trust).
- Support community land trusts to hold both farmland and affordable housing.
- Establish land banks at national and state levels to enable BIPOC farmland access at below market rates.
- Develop more land management, ownership, and/or stewardship tactics created and led by Indigenous and African American communities -- tactics that feed self-determining economies (Federation of Southern Cooperatives, SAAFON, New Communities, Inc., Acres of Ancestry/Black Agrarian Fund, National Black Food & Justice Alliance).

Systems Transformation:

- Require land grant universities to give land and financial capital back to those from whom it was stolen (https://www.landgrabu.org/).
- Require states to fully fund their 1890 (HBCU) and 1994 (Tribal) land grant universities as well as their 1862 institutions.
- Reduce complicity with land grabs, commodification of land and labor, and the global privatization of nature.
- Restructure subsidy and credit programs to prioritize small scale and BIPOC farmers.
- Move significant resources into legal and funding assistance for heirs property and Black farmland loss/reclamation (Land Loss Prevention Project, F.A.R.M.S.).
- Support corporate farming restrictions to enable affordable land (free the land!).
- Pass laws at both state and federal levels to prevent conglomerate control of farmland.
- Over next seven generations, enact land and financial reparations to African American and Indigenous people. Enable those farmers and land stewards who have been dispossessed of land and wealth to farm, steward land, and have livelihoods with land if that is their desire.
RECOMMENDATION #3

SECURE DIGNITY & FAIRNESS FOR FOOD CHAIN WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

All stakeholders in the food system will center the humanity of food and land workers and will value the sacredness of this work. They will study and uplift BIPOC cultural relationships to land stewardship and food preparation to balance the current, slavery-based, Eurocentric models.

Systems Transformation

- Reform labor policies for farmworkers, who are currently exempt from many of the worker protection laws in place. Farmworkers should be paid living wages, receive healthcare, live in suitable housing, and be included in all labor protection laws and policies without exception. (See Food Chain Workers Alliance and CATA).
- Reform immigration laws. Create pathways to legalization for all undocumented people, including pathways to citizenship for those that want it, ending all deportations, and permanently close all ICE detention centers until a comprehensive policy is in place.
- Land reparations and sustaining gifts to BIPOC-led projects, direct action, healing, such as land grants, legal and funding assistance to address heirs property and loss of Black farmland. (NEFOC)

El comité de apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas (CATA): The Farmworker Support Committee

Founded in 1979, CATA is non-profit organization focused on organizing and empowering the immigrant community as they fight for justice for themselves, their families, and their communities.

CATA works with the Latino immigrant community in New Jersey, Southeastern Pennsylvania, and along the Delmarva Peninsula in Maryland. They are a membership organization open to the Latino immigrant community. CATA’s work focuses on issues of workers’ rights and health and safety, immigration, and food justice. Every CATA member has a voice and a vote in the decision-making of the organization. (from CATA’s website. Photo courtesy CATA.)
RECOMMENDATION #4

CENTER RESILIENCY IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

All stakeholders in the food system must work together to increase the overall resiliency of the food system and local food supply chains to be responsive to hyper-local community needs due to changing climate and sociopolitical unrest.
Groundwork Strategies:

- Build localized food systems grounded in food sovereignty values and practices along with COEP principles (Black Yield Institute).
- Invest in forms of time banking and solidarity economies so that there is bounty in times of crisis, and all people are fed and supported through environmental, social, and economic times of hardship (M4BL Money Pot, Cooperatives, cooperative banks, mutual aide networks, New Economy Coalition for more kinds of examples).
- Invest in BIPOC small farming operations through loans, grants, markets, training, and other forms of support (Vanguard Ranch, Four Mothers Farm, Farm Alliance of Baltimore, Soil Generation, Sylvanaqua, Dreaming Out Loud, Soulfire Farm, Three Part Harmony Farm, Five Seeds Farm & Apiary, Purple Mountain Organics, Deep Roots Farm, Rise and Root Farm, Hattie Carthan Community Garden and Market).
- Support local markets and small farmers to increase their growing and distribution capacity, and secure markets for their produce. Support could include business and crop planning assistance.
- Follow Afroecological and regenerative land practices to grow food (see Recommendation 5).
- Strengthen ties between farmer and consumer by creating a system where communities support local farmers through their own labor and with their own money, rather than relying on corporate “middle-men” such as aggregators, distributors, and grocery stores (Good Food Purchasing Program).
- Create self-determined food system resiliency zones based on population, geography, and distance.
- Prioritize consumer understanding of the true cost of producing nutritious food over current messaging that emphasizes low cost.

- Create living seed hubs and reservoirs that are regionally specific and adapted to support resilience in the face of climate change.
- Secure land for communities displaced by climate change.

Systems Transformation:

- Take food off of the stock market so Wall Street cannot profit from hunger.
- Eliminate government subsidies, trade policies, and foreign policies that incentivize the overproduction of cash crops, and discourage growing produce for people (USDA Farm to Families Program).
- Disrupting dependence on food banks and diverting funding to small scale local farmers so that they can respond to food needs in their community.
Recommendation #5

Agroecology provides pathways for interdependent livelihoods, healing, and liberation for people and land

All stakeholders in the food system must center agroecological and regenerative values over extractive production, and work through cooperative models of wealth building and subsistence inside and outside of capitalism. Workers receive living wages and reparations.
Groundwork Strategies:

- Compensate farmers who build soil, nourish land, and are interconnected with community.
- Some examples of farms that are interconnected with communities and agroecology or afroecology in the Chesapeake region: Three Mothers Farm, Vanguard Ranch, Potomac Vegetable Farms, Black Dirt Farm Collective, Sankofa Community Farm, Singing Spring Farm, Sylvanaqua Farms, The Harriet Tubman Freedom Farm, Silver Run Forest Farm.
- Land trusts that provide equitable leases to farmers compensate farmers for agroecological practices (Agrarian Land Trust).
- Honor the original caretakers of the land with cultural respect easements (for those who don’t have a desire to farm) (Native Land Conservancy, NEFOC Land Trust).
- Support and fund the land base and infrastructure for African American and Indigenous refuges and retreat centers (NEFOC Land Trust, Soul Fire Farm).
- Pay Indigenous farmers for their insight into caretaking and managing land, especially the techniques that avert climate collapse.

Systems Transformation:

- Capital, legal, and financial resources are available to support cooperative economic models and development (Southern Reparations Loan Fund).
- Return land to a commons, and foster commons ethos, including interdependence and de-commodification of all life.
- Small farmers own the entire value of their labor, and do not need to earn their subsistence by working for others (La Via Campesina).
- Communities and funders invest in food systems infrastructure that is owned by African American and Indigenous BIPOC communities so they can build wealth and achieve food and land sovereignty in the diverse ways that manifests (Eastern Woodlands Rematriation Collective).

Vanguard Ranch (Louisa, VA)

Vanguard Ranch is an innovative livestock producer in the Chesapeake foodshed. They sell curried goat, goat kabobs and goat burgers to their larger community by traveling to festivals and fairs in their mobile kitchen, while also marketing to local food stores. They also grow a variety of vegetables which are sold locally. Renard Turner and his wife Chinette Turner are advocates and good examples of importance of having more than one income stream.
Recommendation #6

Honor that frontline communities know what they need for liberation

Foundations will give substantial money back to African American, Indigenous, and farm worker communities by sunsetting or releasing all of their funds. In the meantime they will end oppressive grant stipulations and they will value and take directives from Black and Indigenous leaders and communities to honor their analysis and honor that they know what they need.
Groundwork Strategies:

- Utilize advisory/oversight boards to determine best use of remaining funds for multisectoral, community led, collaborative projects.
- Fund projects in a way that organizations don’t have to keep asking for funding and are sufficiently resourced to be successful.
- Provide support in the form of accounting, fiscal sponsorship, technical assistance, professional development, and business planning.
- Honor diverse narratives and ways of being. It is ok to not understand and ask but you must respect and value that communities know what they need.

Systems Transformation:

- Foundations openly name and claim where their funds came from and the peoples who were unjustly impacted by those industries.
- Foundations work with African American, Indigenous, and farm worker communities to determine where foundation funding can be dispersed and proper methods for disbursement.
- Develop African American, Indigenous, and farm worker Advisory/Oversight Boards to lead foundations through sunsetting processes and ensure that funds are handled appropriately.
- See recommendation 1 for more resources and suggestions.

Soil Generation (Philadelphia, PA)

Soil Generation is a Black & Brown-led coalition of growers in Philadelphia working to ensure people of color regain community control of land and food, to secure access to the resources necessary to determine how the land is used, address community health concerns, grow food, and improve the environment. Soil Generation reaches these goals through relationship building, honoring culture, community education, organizing, activism, and advocacy: a People’s Agroecology.
When the World as We Knew It Ended

By Joy Harjo

We were dreaming on an occupied island at the farthest edge of a trembling nation when it went down.

Two towers rose up from the east island of commerce and touched the sky. Men walked on the moon. Oil was sucked dry by two brothers. Then it went down. Swallowed by a fire dragon, by oil and fear. Eaten whole.

It was coming.

We had been watching since the eve of the missionaries in their long and solemn clothes, to see what would happen.

We saw it from the kitchen window over the sink as we made coffee, cooked rice and potatoes, enough for an army. We saw it all, as we changed diapers and fed the babies. We saw it, through the branches of the knowledgeable tree through the snags of stars, through the sun and storms from our knees as we bathed and washed the floors.

The conference of the birds warned us, as they flew over destroyers in the harbor, parked there since the first takeover. It was by their song and talk we knew when to rise when to look out the window to the commotion going on—the magnetic field thrown off by grief.

We heard it.

The racket in every corner of the world. As the hunger for war rose up in those who would steal to be president to be king or emperor, to own the trees, stones, and everything else that moved about the earth, inside the earth and above it.

We knew it was coming, tasted the winds who gathered intelligence from each leaf and flower, from every mountain, sea and desert, from every prayer and song all over this tiny universe floating in the skies of infinite being.

And then it was over, this world we had grown to love for its sweet grasses, for the many-colored horses and fishes, for the shimmering possibilities while dreaming.

But then there were the seeds to plant and the babies who needed milk and comforting, and someone picked up a guitar from the rubble and began to sing about the light flutter the kick beneath the skin of the earth we felt there, beneath us a warm animal a song being born between the legs of her; a poem.

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Appendix, Resources, Credits & Thank You

**Action Team Affirmations**

We created these at the beginning of our work together to fortify, set our intentions, and uplift ourselves in this process.

**Full Recommendations List**

This is the full list of all of the recommendation suggestions that we received throughout the stakeholder engagement process.

**Aligned Organizations List**

We wanted to share a list of some of the organizations that we feel aligned with and want to uplift their work. Please learn their work and continue to research because there are so many amazing organizations, farms and businesses doing this work.

**Definitions**

These definitions guided our work together and created a shared language and understanding of how the Chesapeake foodshed functions currently, and what we are longing for it to become.

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**Credits & Thank You**

Front Cover Illustration and Recommendation Illustrations: Brittney Washington

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