



FOOD FIRST

Amplifying Grassroots Voices in Food Justice

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This graphic novel was developed under contract by Arianna and Clayton Gilligan, in collaboration with Food First staff members Camila Alejandra Bernal Fontal, Simone McFarlane, Harold Tarver, and LMichael Green. Illustrations by Arianna Gilligan.

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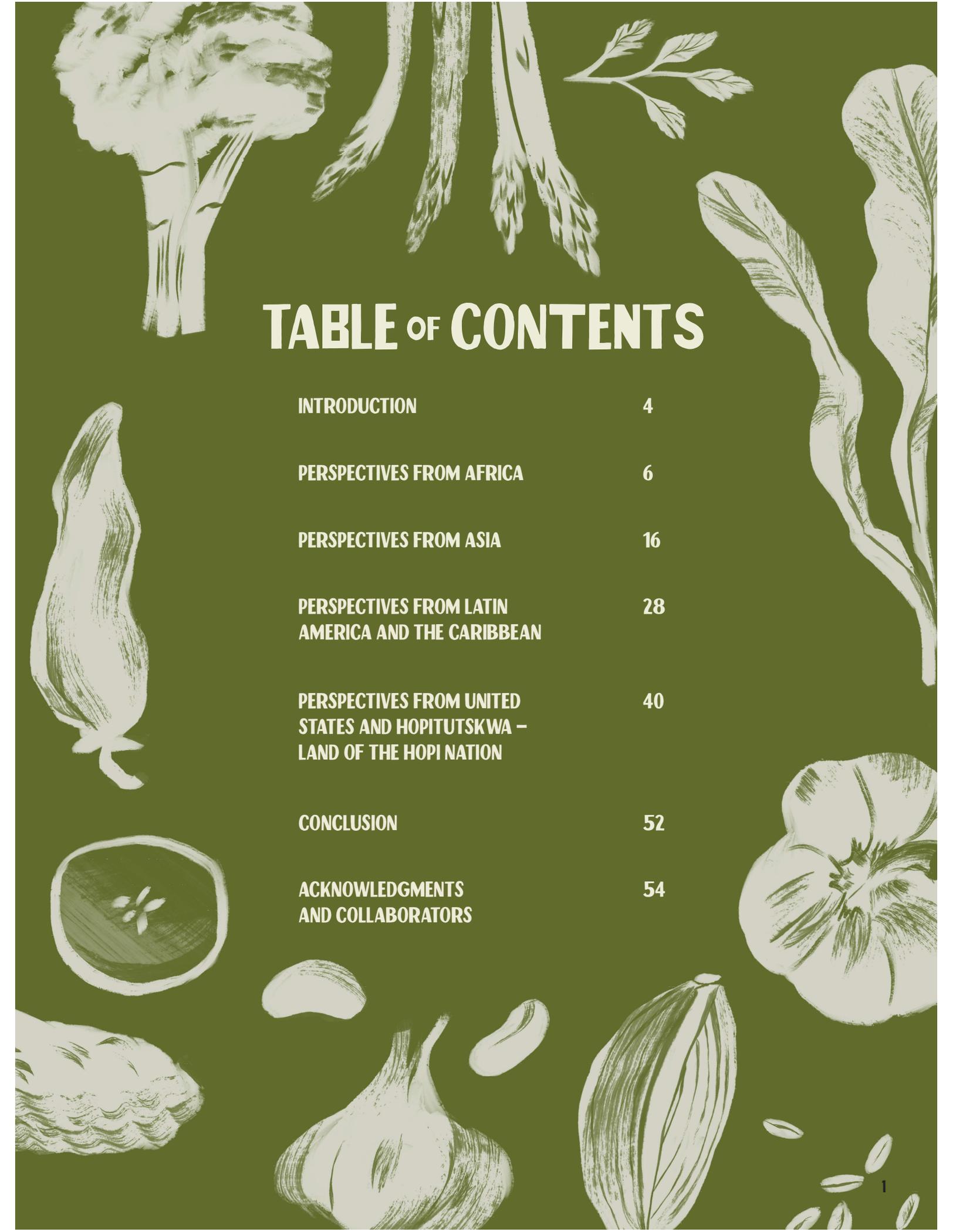


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**“ WE DO NOT INHERIT THE WORLD
FROM OUR ANCESTORS...**



**...WE BORROW IT
FROM OUR CHILDREN. ”**



Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to access healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and to define their own food and agriculture systems. It places the needs and rights of those who produce, distribute, and consume food at the center of food systems and policies, rather than prioritizing markets and corporations.

The global food system is confronting a range of longstanding challenges that threaten food sovereignty and have an especially severe impact on underserved and marginalized communities. Below are some of the main barriers that prevent communities worldwide from achieving food sovereignty.

1. INDUSTRIAL AGRICULTURE AND CORPORATE CONTROL

The dominance of industrial agriculture, rooted in the Green Revolution, has led to soil degradation, biodiversity loss, and the erosion of traditional farming practices. Corporate control over seeds, land, and food production limits local control and makes small-scale farmers increasingly dependent on synthetic inputs and external markets, rather than regenerative and local growing systems.

2. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Climate change is disrupting traditional farming cycles through extreme weather, droughts, and biodiversity loss, threatening the long-term sustainability of food production. These changes increase food insecurity, especially for vulnerable communities relying on local or subsistence agriculture.

3. LAND DISPOSSESSION AND INEQUITABLE LAND ACCESS

Historical and ongoing land grabs, often backed by state policies and corporate interests, have displaced Indigenous and rural communities. High land costs, gender discrimination, informal land titles, and land ownership systems based on inheritance make it difficult for new generations and those without family land to access farmland, perpetuating inequality and limiting food sovereignty.

4. EXTRACTIVE, EXPORT-ORIENTED ECONOMIES

In many fertile regions, food is produced primarily for export, leaving local populations dependent on imported goods and facing food insecurity. These economies undervalue labor and strip local communities of control over food pricing, access, and production.

5. INEQUITABLE POST-HARVEST ACCESS AND DISTRIBUTION

Limited infrastructure and the dominance of large corporations in food distribution make it difficult for many communities to access fresh, affordable food, especially in rural and low-income areas. Small farmers often struggle to find reliable venues to sell their products because most food supply chains are controlled by industrial farms and large agribusinesses, which reduces opportunities for smallholders to reach markets and consumers. These barriers not only limit food availability and affordability, but also reinforce existing inequalities in the food system. As a result, underserved communities and small producers remain at a disadvantage, with fewer choices and less economic opportunity.



**“IT’S SAD BECAUSE,
IN AFRICA, WE
HAVE NOT CONTRIBUTED TO
WHAT YOU’RE SEEING TODAY.
AS FAR AS THE
DAMAGE TO THE
ENVIRONMENT,
THIS HAS BEEN DONE FOR THE LAST FEW HUNDRED
YEARS BY COUNTRIES IN THE WEST,
SO-CALLED DEVELOPED
COUNTRIES. UNFORTUNATELY,
AFRICAN FARMERS
AND AFRICAN COMMUNITIES
ARE HAVING TO
PAY FOR IT.”**

- Edwin Baffour, Accra, GHANA



AFRICA



Agriculture employs over 40% of Kenya's population. In many ways, it is the backbone of this society. However, climate change, drought, and industrialization are making it harder for small farmers to grow enough to even feed their own families. Oftentimes, the soil in these regions is so nutrient-deficient that nothing will grow. And when something does sprout, there often isn't enough water to keep it growing until harvest. Three out of every four Kenyans are food insecure, meaning most children are unable to learn well in school due to the lack of nutrition.



The Maasai people are rich in culture and tradition. But as the world constantly changes around them, it has been challenging for the Maasai people to adapt to change while maintaining their traditions. Part of Cecilia Injoroge's work focuses on helping the Maasai people embrace and understand new farming and pasturing techniques so that, as drought continues to ravage their homes, they can feed their families.



**“FARMING
IS NOT JUST
FARMING.
IT’S AN ART.”**

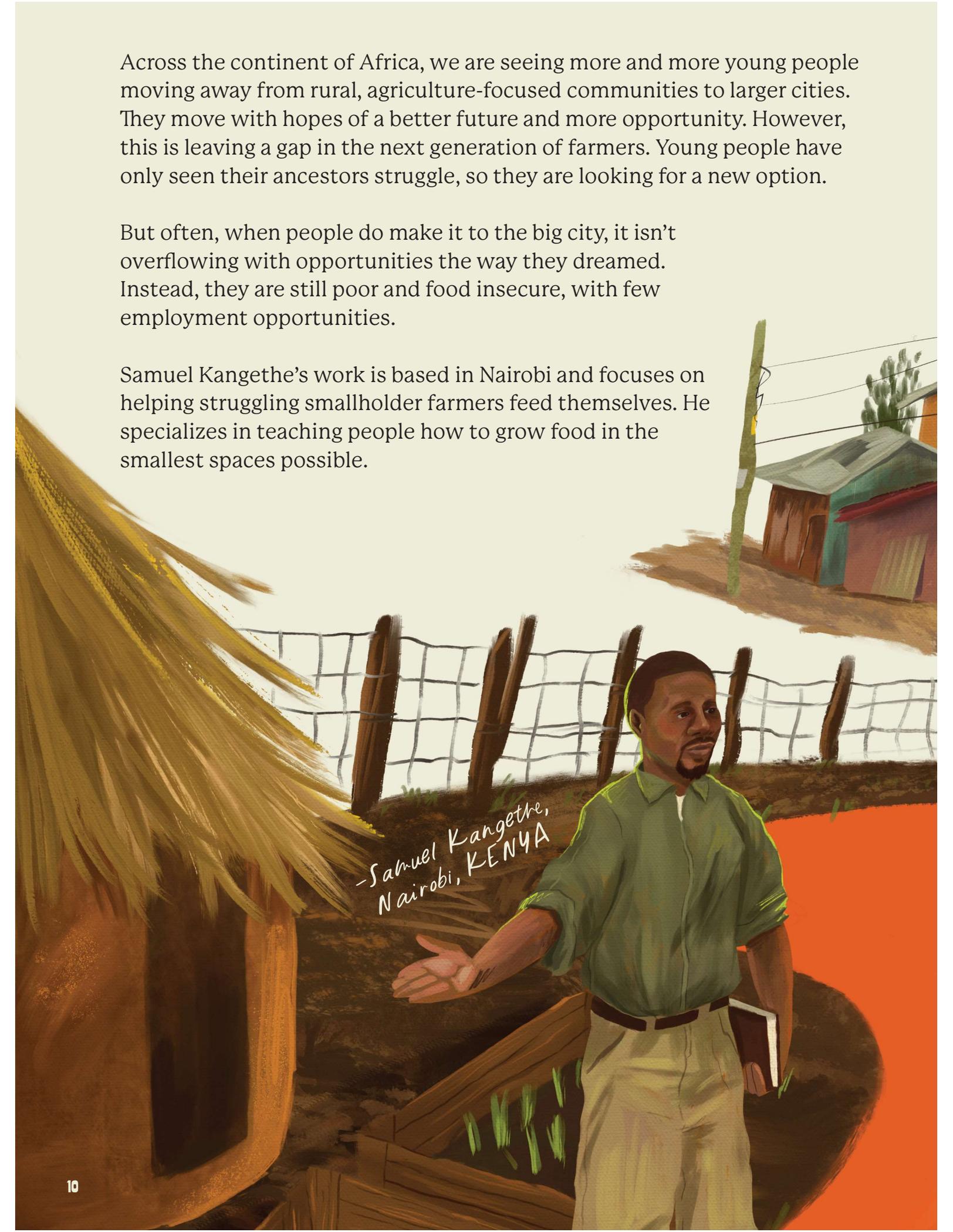
- Cecilia Injoroge, Nairobi, KENYA



Across the continent of Africa, we are seeing more and more young people moving away from rural, agriculture-focused communities to larger cities. They move with hopes of a better future and more opportunity. However, this is leaving a gap in the next generation of farmers. Young people have only seen their ancestors struggle, so they are looking for a new option.

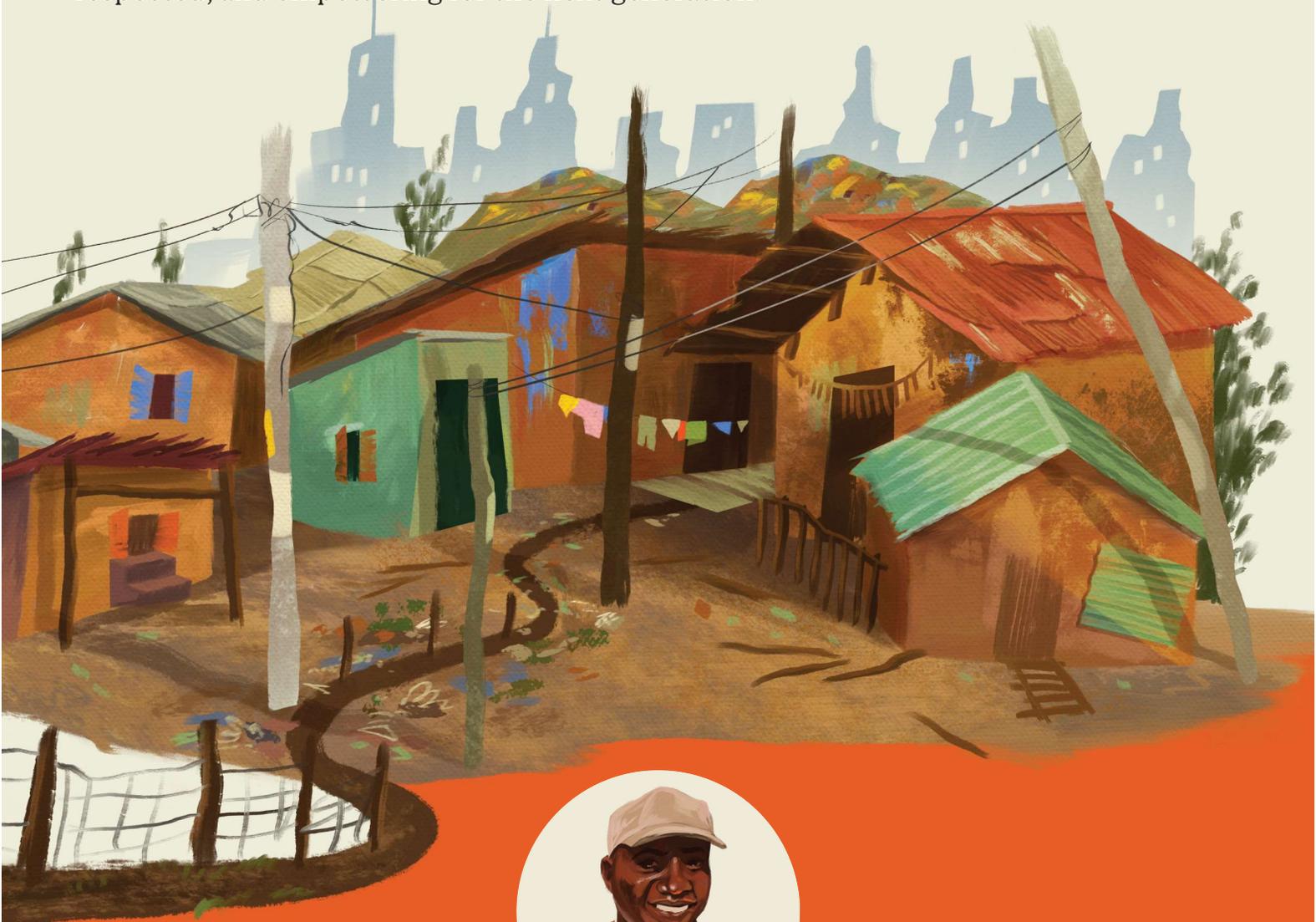
But often, when people do make it to the big city, it isn't overflowing with opportunities the way they dreamed. Instead, they are still poor and food insecure, with few employment opportunities.

Samuel Kangethe's work is based in Nairobi and focuses on helping struggling smallholder farmers feed themselves. He specializes in teaching people how to grow food in the smallest spaces possible.

An illustration of Samuel Kangethe, a man with a goatee, wearing a green short-sleeved shirt and light-colored trousers. He is standing in a rural setting, gesturing with his right hand towards a thatched-roof structure on the left. In the background, there is a fenced-in area with a wire fence supported by wooden posts, and a small building with a corrugated metal roof. The ground is a mix of brown earth and a bright orange area. The overall style is painterly and textured.

*- Samuel Kangethe,
Nairobi, KENYA*

Through his work with Food Sovereignty Ghana, Edwin educates farmers on the most sustainable farming methods. He also engages directly with youth through grassroots outreach, advocacy, and practical farming efforts, aiming to make farming more viable, respected, and empowering for the next generation.



“OUR GREATEST MISSION IS TO TRAIN FARMERS HOW TO USE THE LOCALLY AVAILABLE RECOURCES TO PRODUCE A BALANCE SO THAT WE CAN SOLVE THE ISSUE OF MALNUTRITION.”

– Fredrick Onyango, Siaya County, KENYA

In much of Africa, land ownership can be a major hurdle to even beginning the process of growing food, especially for women. In many countries, women are unable to own land. However, that is changing in Rwanda. Due to recent reforms, not only can women purchase land, but the government is encouraging women to start farms by giving them loans and equipment. The Rwandan government is seeing that by empowering women, they are lifting up the entire community.



*-Joseph Biziyaremye,
Kigali, RWANDA*

Joseph Biziyaremye works with over 5,000 small Rwandan farmers, helping them grow cash crops on their farms. He said that he knows when he employs a woman, the paycheck she receives will go toward helping her entire family.

Liliane is a Rwandan woman who supports her community. Her farming is changing the lives of not only her family but also the families around her. Even though she can make more money processing the peanuts she grows into paste or other products, Liliane makes sure to offer some products unprocessed. These sell at a lower price point, so she can be sure that some of the less fortunate families in her community can still afford to buy some for themselves.

*-Liliane Muhoza,
Kigali, RWANDA*



MLESH MLEGWAH



Mlesh grew up in coastal Kenya in a region known as Taita-Taveta County. This is a marginalized community where food and water are often luxuries. But it hasn't always been this way. This community was once thriving, with the local economy depending on agriculture and pasturing. But as the climate has changed, so has the fortune of this community.

In 1998, the El Niño rains drenched this land, causing flooding and erosion like they had never seen before. Farmlands were covered in sandy soil, goats began getting deathly ill due to the drastic change in weather, and people were displaced from their homes. Before long, what people had depended on for centuries to provide for their families was gone. The changing climate has continued to ravage this area, and now, drought makes it harder for this community to grow food and feed themselves.

“AS I GREW, I STARTED THINKING, ‘WHAT CAN I DO TO RESTORE LIFE BACK TO MY COMMUNITY?’ BECAUSE PEOPLE USED TO BE SELF- OR LIVELIHOOD- SECURE. NOW THEY HAVE LOST THEIR DIGNITY.”

Mlesh knew he could help restore some of the lost dignity of his people to people—the dignity of knowing they have what it takes to provide for themselves. Mlesh knew before he could resource his community, he would first need to resource himself. He studied new agricultural methods focused on maximizing yields in small areas and improving soil health and biodiversity. He even traveled to California for an internship to learn how to get the most out of the land he was working with.

When he returned, Mlesh started an organization called Garden of Hope. This organization focuses on teaching farmers dryland farming methods. They have a demonstration garden used for hosting training sessions and giving farmers the tools they need to tackle the challenges they are facing. He demonstrates which crops can survive in their climates, how to maximize yields, and methods for planting trees that can withstand the harsh realities of the drought-ridden land they inhabit.



“OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE IS TO SEE A COMMUNITY WITH SUSTAINABLY IMPROVED LIVELIHOODS AND EMPOWERED TO ADEQUATELY MANAGE THEIR RESOURCES.”

— Mlesh Mlegwah, Taita-Taveta County, KENYA



**“EVERY KILOGRAM
OF RICE THAT COMES
TO YOUR TABLE IS SO MUCH
EFFORT, SO MANY FAMILIES,
SO MANY HOURS OF LABOR.”**

*- Sreedevi Lakshmi Kutty,
Tamil Nadu, INDIA*



ASIA



In drought-prone Maharashtra, India, many tenant farmers pour their savings and labor into worn-out fields they do not own.

Imagine planting crops in a barren, nutrient-poor field. You spend time and money to nurture the soil back to health. After a year, you harvest for the first time, though it's not plentiful. You plant again and see improvement, harvesting nearly twice as much. The soil is healthier, and you know the third time will be the charm. You've given your blood, sweat, and tears to reach this moment. Year three, you can't believe it! The harvest is more than you could've ever dreamed. Life is good! But your lease is up, and the landlord has seen your success. He wants that success for himself. Time to start over.

For countless women farmers, that cycle never ends. Land is scarce, titles are

elusive, and tenancy laws rarely protect their sweat equity. Activist Seema Kulkarni works with more than 300 women across Maharashtra to break that pattern. By organizing collectives, negotiating long-term leases, and pushing local officials to record joint land titles, her network helps women secure the plots they farm, so the next bumper harvest stays in the hands that earned it.



“LAND OWNERSHIP DOESN'T ENSURE FOOD SECURITY BUT IT DOES ENSURE BARGAINING POWER.”

-Seema Kulkarni, Maharashtra, INDIA





-Ipsita Islam

Only 4% of rural Bangladesh's land is owned by women, and this land is under threat from private companies encroaching on traditionally women-controlled land, leading to eviction and displacement. The government's inaction worsens the situation. In Bangladesh, Ipsita Islam's organization, Badabon Sangho, is working to mobilize and organize these women, building their capacity. To date, her organization has mobilized more than 5,000 women and protected more than 70 of their members' land rights.

**“WE HAVE TO CONNECT
THE CONSUMER TO FOOD
AND THE REALITY OF
GROWING –
WE CAN’T JUST
BLAME THEM.”**

*- Sreedevi Lakshmi Kutty,
Tamil Nadu, INDIA*

Sreedevi has a mission to bring organic produce to consumers, while fighting for a fair price for the men and women growing pesticide and synthetic fertilizer free crops. She does this by building relationships with organic and regenerative farmers, giving them a fair price for the vegetables and heritage grains they grow, and educating the consumer on the benefits of these less common, more nutrient-dense traditional produce and grains, all grown without chemicals.



Dr. Oliver King, known as the Millet Man of India, is encouraging and teaching people to grow one very specific crop. Millet is a resilient, nutrient dense crop that he believes can change the trajectory of people’s lives. He is working with women in India to grow and sell millet, and restoring land to agricultural use.

- Dr. Oliver King, Chennai, INDIA

Kasama is the Filipino word for “together”. That is exactly what Vincent Garcia’s chocolate company ‘Kasama’ is doing. Kasama brings together Filipino farmers and Canadian consumers. The company gives farmers a consistent buyer and price for their cocoa beans while delivering the highest quality for the end consumer. Kasama has been internationally recognized as one of the best chocolates in the world while at the same time enabling the cocoa farmers to earn nearly 50% more than they would by just taking these beans to the market.



- Vincent Garcia, Philippines

Iona Santos Fresnoza's social enterprise, Kapé Philippine Coffee, supports indigenous and women farmers in the Philippines by providing sustainable income through direct coffee purchases. Direct sourcing can be up to 400 times more profitable than traditional market transactions. This approach supports land sovereignty for indigenous farmers, who view coffee farming as stewardship of their ancestral land, and helps lift communities out of poverty.





“WE ARE HELPING LOCAL FARMERS KEEP THE LAND PRODUCTIVE – NOT JUST ECONOMICALLY BUT CULTURALLY – AND KEEPING THOSE INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS ALIVE.”

- Iona Santos - Fresnoza
PHILIPPINES

Not only is this giving a profitable market to Filipino farmers growing coffee beans, but Iona sees impact for Filipinos on the other side of the globe as well. In Vancouver, where she sells coffee grown in the Philippines, she often hears from Filipino-Canadians that this coffee gives them a sense of belonging and a window into who they are. It truly is keeping Filipino culture alive and spreading it across the globe.



- Herman Kumara,
Negombo, SRI LANKA

“FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IS REALLY IMPORTANT. THAT IS OUR VISION. WE USE AGROECOLOGY AS THE MAIN TOOL TO GET THERE. THIS PROVIDES PEOPLE THE OPPORTUNITY TO GOVERN THEIR RESOURCES BY THEMSELVES, MANAGE RESOURCES BY THEMSELVES, AND DEVELOP AS THEY WANT. NOT TO BE GOVERNED BY CAPITALISTS’ INTERESTS.”



Fishing, a dangerous occupation, involves being at sea miles from shore, vulnerable to weather conditions. A Sri Lankan fisherman that used to rely on generations of experience, now faces challenges due to climate change.

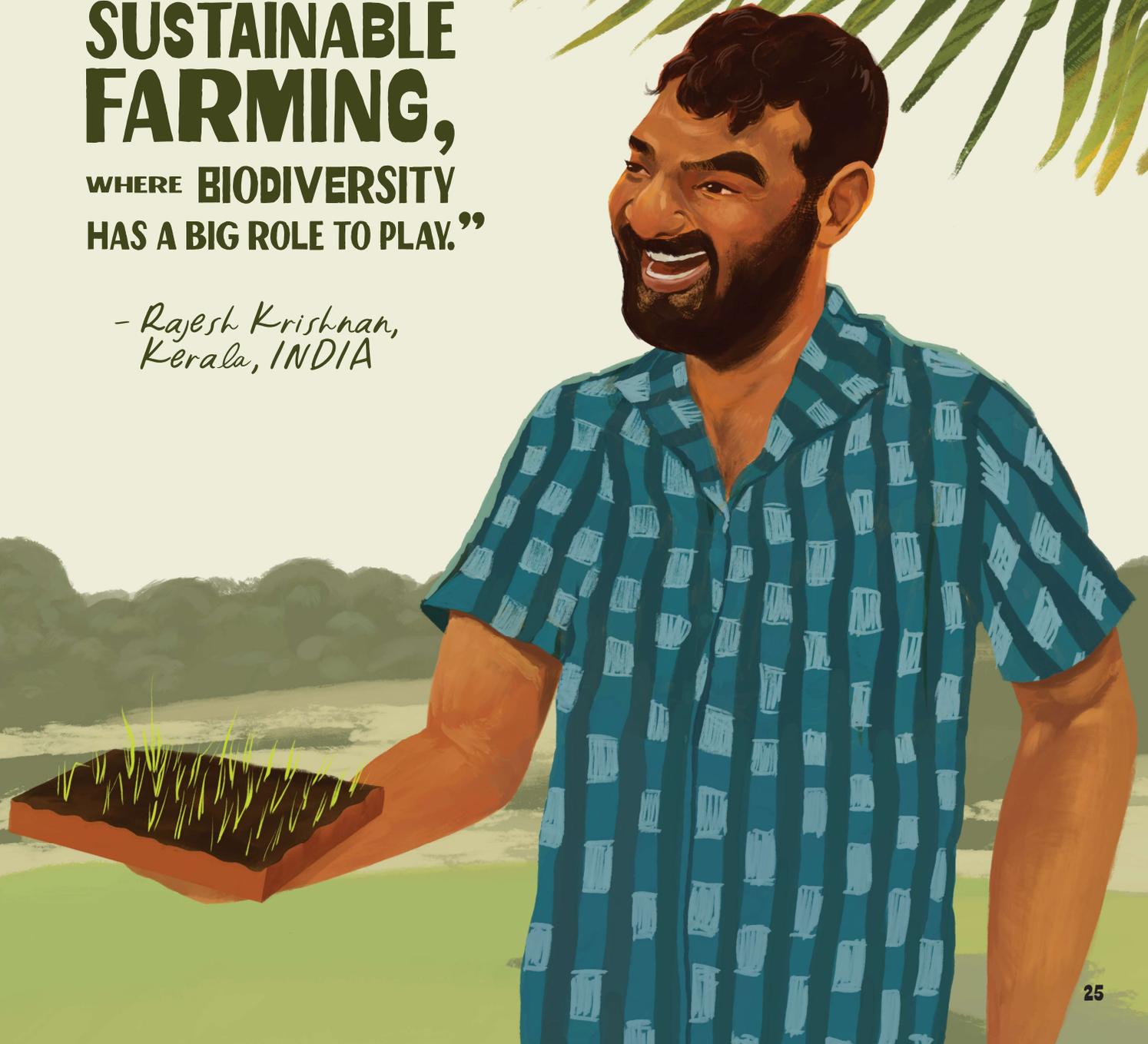
Global warming has significantly altered the tides and water temperatures, and oil pollution drives fish to deeper

waters. In Sri Lanka, where traditional fishing sustains entire communities, this change is destroying livelihoods. Herman is committed to protecting small-scale fishermen’s rights. He was an advocate for the Safety of Life at Sea agreement and helped institute the Small Scale-Fisheries Guidelines. He mobilizes like-minded individuals to raise awareness and fight for their rights.

In the last 12 years as a farmer and collective leader, Rajesh has helped build Thirunelly Agri Producer Company, a collective that promotes traditional paddy varieties in Kerala, India. Through fair price mechanisms and a seed to market support structure, as well as focus on climate resilient agriculture innovations, the collective has improved paddy cultivation using traditional paddy varieties and organic practices.

**“THERE NEEDS TO
BE A PARADIGM
SHIFT TOWARDS
SUSTAINABLE
FARMING,
WHERE BIODIVERSITY
HAS A BIG ROLE TO PLAY.”**

*- Rajesh Krishnan,
Kerala, INDIA*



PAVEL PARTHA



The year is 1920. You are in the rural jungles of Bangladesh. Here you meet a woman. She is a farmer. She shows you her flourishing fields of rice, the seed bank she cares for, and the variety of vegetables she is growing for her kids. She is proud of what she grows. She is proud that it feeds her family. She is proud of her contribution to her community. This woman is Pavel's grandmother, and today farmers in this region face a very different reality.

In Bangladesh, women like Pavel's grandmother, once guarded traditional

seeds, knowing their growth, pest repellent properties, and soil health cycles. This knowledge, passed down through generations, sustained the local economy and diverse food options. However, the government's push for hybrid seeds, combined with commercial agriculture, threatens these traditions. Farmers are encouraged to grow only one high-yield seed variety, reducing crop diversity and limiting community resilience and income. Increased yields can lead to surplus supply, which lowers market prices and ultimately reduces farmer earnings.

Pavel works in local communities to once again build local seed banks so that they keep the indigenous seeds and traditions alive. Agriculture is the most common occupation in rural Bangladesh, so keeping these practices alive is essential for communities to be able to feed themselves and flourish.

“THE FOOD SYSTEM IS NOW UNDER THE CONTROL OF NEO-LIBERAL COLONIZATION. IT IS NOT POSSIBLE FOR A MARGINAL FARMER TO PRODUCE FOOD IN A SUSTAINABLE, NATURAL WAY AND FULFILL THEIR MOBILE PHONE BILL, HEALTH-EDUCATION AND OTHER COSTS.”

- Pavel Partha, Lalmatia, Bangladesh

Pavel's impact has expanded beyond the rural areas. As more people are moving to mega-cities it is causing a major food shortage in some of the most populated areas.

Some of the rural farmers are beginning programs in urban areas to help equip others in the same way Pavel equipped them. They are setting up seed fairs, biodiversity exhibitions, and exchange programs. This is opening the door of agriculture to some of the most marginalized, such as those with disabilities, transgender people, and senior citizens.

Pavel believes everyone should be able to grow enough food for their families the same way his grandmother did. Hard working people shouldn't have to worry about paying their bills and feeding their kids. Pavel is working to resurrect these traditional indigenous practices in hopes that the next generation lives in a world that experiences food sovereignty the same way his grandmother did.



LATIN AMERICA & CARIBBEAN





“WE INHERIT SEEDS. WE INHERIT THEM FROM THE HANDS OF OUR ANCESTORS, FROM OUR ANCESTORS’ GARDENS, AND WE PASS THEM ON IN THE SAME WAY TO FUTURE GENERATIONS.”

– Valentina Vives, Curiñanco, Chile

“THE SYSTEM, INSTEAD OF OFFERING OPPORTUNITIES TO YOUNG PEOPLE, IS UPROOTING THEM FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE CULTURALLY.”

– Aldo González Rojas, Oaxaca, MEXICO



In many parts of the world, fewer young people are choosing careers in farming. Growing up with digital technology, they often see the long hours and hard physical work on a farm as less appealing. Cities, by contrast, seem to promise more jobs, higher pay, and a lively lifestyle. Yet once they arrive, the crowded urban reality can fall short of those hopes.

The allure of an “easier and better” life in the city often leads instead to a new form of poverty and hardship. To address this in Oaxaca, Mexico, Aldo González Rojas and his organization,

UNOSJO, have launched educational programs designed to give youth a compelling reason to not leave for the city. Aldo offers agroecological training through school gardening to reconnect youth with the land. He advocates for culturally rooted education that values Indigenous knowledge and integrates this into a curriculum that connects subjects like science and math to local agricultural practices. His vision is to empower communities by helping youth build the skills and confidence to reimagine life at home around family.

In Colombia, rural youth have shown a declining interest in agriculture, mirroring the loss of ancestral seed diversity across territories. However, Carol Rojas Vargas and her organization, Semilla Nativa Colombia, are working with rural communities to preserve the traditional seeds that are essential for strengthening agroecological production practices.

These seeds sustain collective labor and help shape the culture and identity of both youth and adults. To this end, the organization fosters the creation of community seed centers and seed schools grounded in political, productive, and cultural perspectives. They also use communication tools as a key means of political advocacy and territorial influence.



“TO STAY IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, WE NEED ACCESS TO LAND, SEEDS, AND POLITICAL GUARANTEES.”

- Carol Rojas Vargas, Boyacá, COLOMBIA

**“TECHNOLOGIES MAY BE
SUITABLE FOR LARGE-SCALE
AGRICULTURE,
BUT THEY ARE NEITHER APPROPRIATE
NOR PROFITABLE FOR SMALL
-SCALE FAMILY FARMING.”**

- Minerva Castro, Madre de Dios, PERU

Minerva Castro supports small-scale farmers in Peru’s jungle through Regenativa, her regenerative agriculture consultancy. Many small-scale farmers here face challenges, including the high costs of industrial farming methods, deforestation, and illegal mining. Minerva works closely with local communities, conservation NGOs, and government organizations to promote sustainable practices. This collaboration has resulted in programs that help mitigate deforestation, increase profitability for farmers, and protect wildlife. Minerva sees a bright future ahead for Peru, especially if younger generations embrace conservation and sustainable farming techniques.





In Chile, Semilla Austral operates as an organization that keeps traditional peasant seeds alive and in farmers' hands. Led by Valentina Vives, the network links 25 families who farm organically and follow agroecological practices. Together they raise a wide mix of Chilean crops—cereals, legumes, fruits, medicinal plants, and more—each variety rooted in local soils and stories. By multiplying these ancestral seeds, the cooperative protects biodiversity and preserves the cultural and territorial memory held within each seed.

**“THERE ARE STILL MANY PLANT SPECIES— NOT JUST VARIETIES —
THAT ARE LOST IN RURAL CHILE, ON THE VERGE OF DISAPPEARING.”**

— Valentina Vives, Curiñanco, Chile



Adán Romero is working on a way to educate and preserve traditional practices that can deliver knowledge on a totally different scale. *Secreto Ancestral* is a documentary series Adán helped to produce. The series explores the ancestral knowledge, food systems, and spiritual traditions of Indigenous communities across the Americas, with a central focus on the Mapuche-Pehuenche people of southern Chile and Argentina.

One thing the series highlights is the importance of the Araucaria tree and its piñón nut in sustaining food sovereignty, culture, and trade. The series documents how communities like the Pehuenche are adapting to climate change and modern challenges while preserving their identity. The series emphasizes Indigenous resistance to land loss, corporate exploitation, and cultural erasure. Created with full community participation, Secreto Ancestral serves as both a cultural archive and educational resource.



*- Adán Romero Cheuquepil,
Chilean Patagonia*



*- María Luisa Gonzales Vega
Santa Bárbara, HONDURAS*

Building on this celebration of ancestral knowledge, Maria Luisa embodies that spirit through her work in Honduras, where she focuses on empowering Indigenous women and youth. Through education and grassroots initiatives, she champions the preservation of traditional foodways and the Lenca language—both of which she sees as essential to cultural identity and the fight for food sovereignty.

“I’D LIKE TO SEE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES RECLAIM WHAT WAS LOST—TO RECONNECT WITH THEIR LANGUAGE, BECAUSE LANGUAGE EXPRESSES OUR THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS. IT’S NOT JUST ABOUT WORDS—IT’S ABOUT SPIRITUALITY.” *- María Luisa Gonzales Vega*

In Trinidad and Tobago, government programs can make or break a farm. When agencies deliver on time—leasing state land, offering small grants, and running free online courses—they cut start-up costs and keep established growers afloat. When paperwork drags or funds dry up, those same systems slow every step from planting to market.

Watermelon farmer Jabari Lander has seen the upside. He cultivates acreage first granted to his grandparents under

a state land-lease program. Working the plot with relatives and friends, Jabari now sells his melons wholesale, proof that well-targeted public support can help small farmers stay viable even as food prices climb.

“IF ALL OUR AUTHORITIES HELPED US, THE AGRICULTURAL SITUATION IN GUATEMALA WOULD BE VERY DIFFERENT.”

— Juan Maurizio Guaqui Cah, Santiago Zacatepeque, Guatemala





Unfortunately, Jabari's experience isn't universal. Juan lives in a rural region of Guatemala where agriculture dominates daily life. Farmers grow beans, lettuce, celery, and export crops such as Chinese cabbage and carrots, yet the community faces poor infrastructure, scant government support, and exploitation by middlemen and large exporters. Climate change has made matters worse, and the little aid that arrives is often politicized.

Despite these obstacles, Juan remains a fierce advocate for food sovereignty and sustainable development. He is forming a legal agricultural association so farmers can secure aid, participate

in development councils, and negotiate directly in export markets. Juan dreams of the day when Guatemala's farmers and government work hand in hand to build a stronger future together.

“OUR GOAL IS TO DEVELOP OUR FARMERS, HELP THEIR CHILDREN GO TO UNIVERSITY—WHETHER PUBLIC OR PRIVATE, IT DOESN'T MATTER — BUT GET THEM EDUCATION THROUGH AGRICULTURE.”

*— Juan Maurizio Guaqui Caho,
Santiago Sacatepéquez, GUATEMALA*

ANA MARÍA RAMÍREZ



“OUR COMMUNITY IS MADE UP OF ‘NEW RURALS’... PEOPLE LIKE ME WHO GREW UP IN THE CITY BUT HAVE RETURNED TO THE COUNTRYSIDE AND OUR ANCESTRAL LANDS.”

Raised in the city of Boyacá, Colombia, Ana María Ramírez returned to her ancestral land as part of the “new rural” movement—urban individuals re-establishing rural roots—to work alongside traditional farmers and rebuild sustainable, self-sufficient communities. What was once home to the Muisca people, is now a place deeply marked by colonization and ongoing environmental challenges.

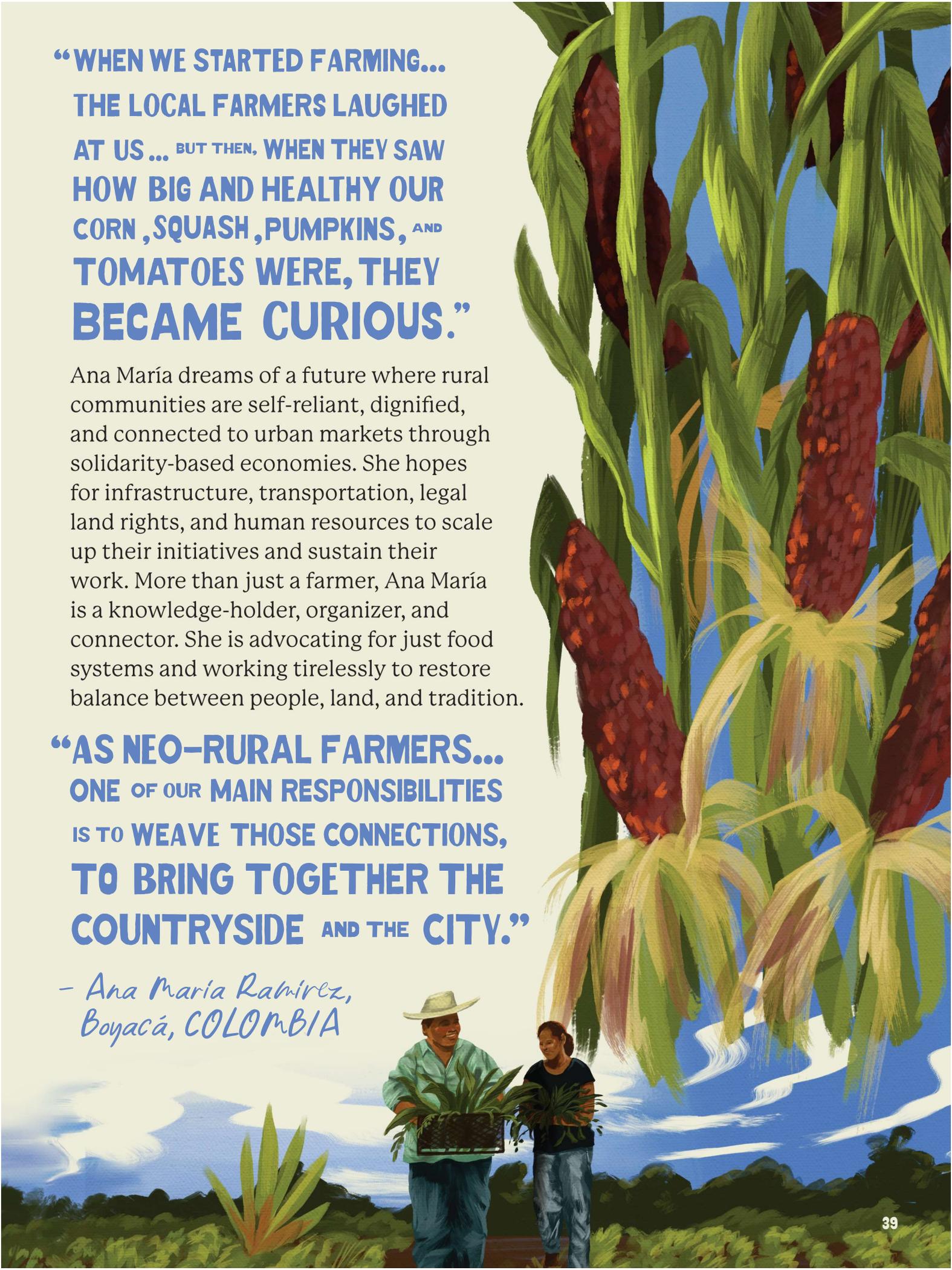
Ana María’s work is focused on sustainable agriculture, climate resilience, and community empowerment. She and her cooperative, CIAAS, engage in syntropic farming—a regenerative method that imitates natural forest succession, where plant species grow in dynamic, layered stages to restore soil health and biodiversity. They also practice agroforestry—an approach that integrates trees and crops on the same land—using native seeds and organic inputs to adapt to drought conditions. They have achieved great success in producing diverse crops including maize, squash, and golden berries.

**“WHEN WE STARTED FARMING...
THE LOCAL FARMERS LAUGHED
AT US ... BUT THEN, WHEN THEY SAW
HOW BIG AND HEALTHY OUR
CORN ,SQUASH ,PUMPKINS, AND
TOMATOES WERE, THEY
BECAME CURIOUS.”**

Ana María dreams of a future where rural communities are self-reliant, dignified, and connected to urban markets through solidarity-based economies. She hopes for infrastructure, transportation, legal land rights, and human resources to scale up their initiatives and sustain their work. More than just a farmer, Ana María is a knowledge-holder, organizer, and connector. She is advocating for just food systems and working tirelessly to restore balance between people, land, and tradition.

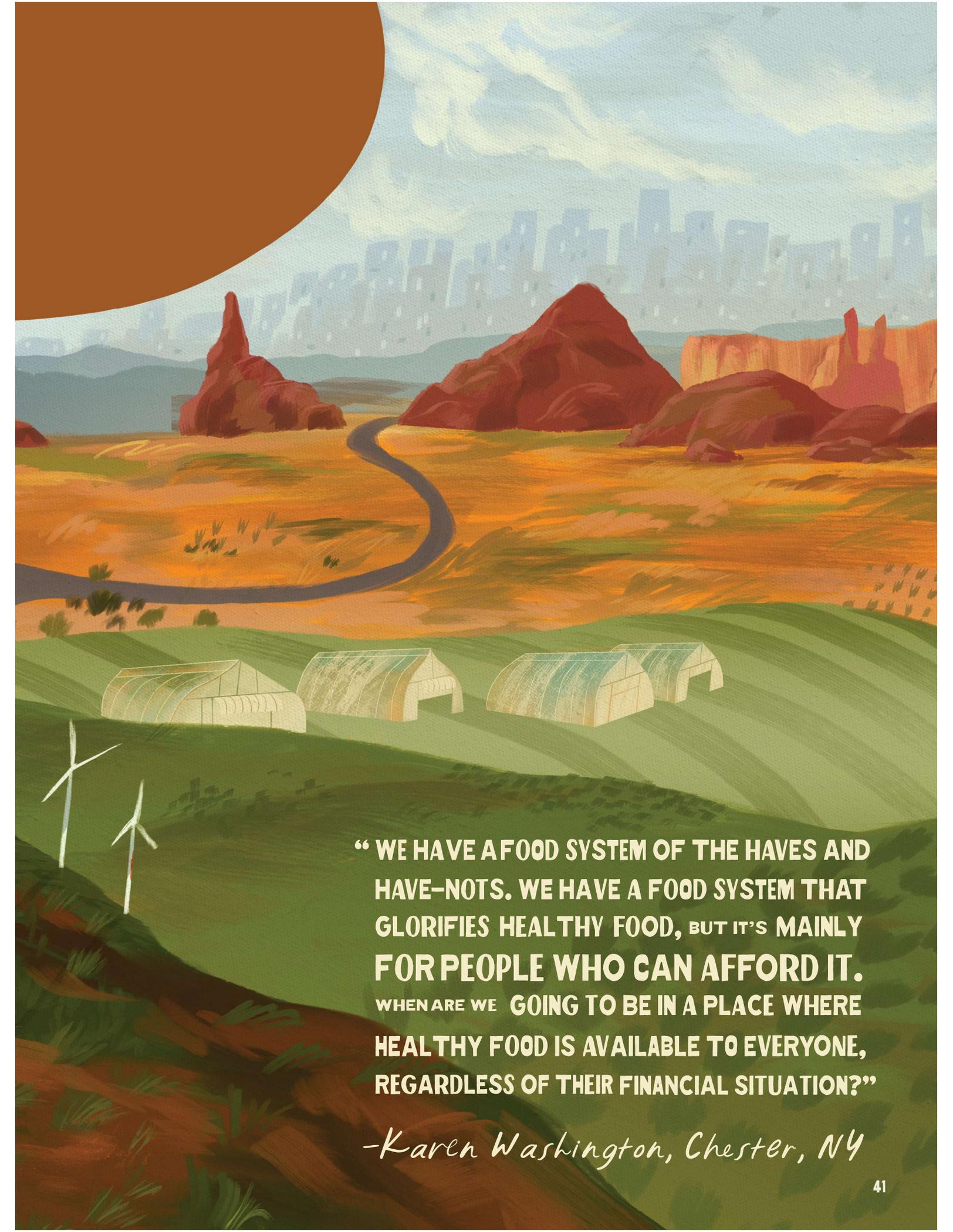
**“AS NEO-RURAL FARMERS...
ONE OF OUR MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES
IS TO WEAVE THOSE CONNECTIONS,
TO BRING TOGETHER THE
COUNTRYSIDE AND THE CITY.”**

*- Ana María Ramirez,
Boyacá, COLOMBIA*



UNITED STATES & HOPITUTSKWA (LAND OF THE HOPI NATION)





**“ WE HAVE A FOOD SYSTEM OF THE HAVES AND
HAVE-NOTS. WE HAVE A FOOD SYSTEM THAT
GLORIFIES HEALTHY FOOD, BUT IT’S MAINLY
FOR PEOPLE WHO CAN AFFORD IT.
WHEN ARE WE GOING TO BE IN A PLACE WHERE
HEALTHY FOOD IS AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE,
REGARDLESS OF THEIR FINANCIAL SITUATION?”**

-Karen Washington, Chester, NY

When the people growing the food... can't afford the food... something is backwards.

South Texas is an agricultural hub in the United States. Alexis Racelis is a local professor, and he calls it the citrus-growing capital of the U.S. Even with the miles and miles of orchards, almost all the fruit people eat here comes from California. Farmers can get better prices for their exports, even though it drives the price of local food even higher. This happens because far-away buyers are often willing to pay more than local markets, so farmers prioritize selling abroad, reducing the local supply and pushing domestic prices up.

Even though this land is perfect for growing with zero days below freezing and with good growing weather every day of the year it is an area with high levels of food insecurity, obesity, and diabetes. This is because the people who work on the farms here don't earn a living wage they don't earn enough to afford the food they grow.



*-Alexis Racelis,
South TX*



This is a common problem for farmers in the United States. Typically, a farmer only receives about 15 cents of every dollar spent in a grocery store. However, in a farmers' market, that looks more like 90–95 cents.



“WE ARE SUSTAINING THESE INNOVATORS, LEADERS, AND HOLDERS OF KNOWLEDGE.”

—Martin Bourque, Berkeley, CA

artin directs the Ecology Center, which operates the Berkeley Farmers' Markets. Staff are unionized and receive fair wages and benefits. Local farmers sell directly to shoppers, ensuring fair prices that reflect the true cost of growing organically and sustainably. These small, family-run farms steward the vision, seeds, and knowledge essential for a just and resilient food system. The Ecology Center also runs Market Match, a program that doubles federal food benefits at 300 markets statewide thereby expanding access to healthy food while sustaining farmers and advancing health equity.



“WE HAVE AN APOSTROPHE AFTER THE ‘S’ IN FARMERS’ MARKET.”



Geeta serves a diverse Atlanta community by offering nutrition classes, writing about diabetes and lifestyle changes, and participating in health fairs. She provides vegetarian meals to the homeless, promotes plant-based options, and leads workshops on children’s nutrition for youth leaders.



“A LOT OF THE REASON WE ARE IN THIS PREDICAMENT IS BECAUSE WE DON’T OWN LAND ANYMORE.”

– Kamal Bell, Cedar Grove, NC

Kamal Bell works to address food justice by growing and distributing healthy, culturally relevant food to underserved Black communities in North Carolina. Rooted in self-love and cultural identity, his mission ties food sovereignty to reclaiming African heritage and land stewardship.



“I AM WHAT I EAT, WHEN I DON’T EAT HEALTHY, I DON’T FEEL GOOD AND WHEN I DON’T FEEL GOOD, MY RELATIONSHIPS ARE IMPACTED.”

– Geeta Mehrotra, Atlanta, GA



“THERE’S SOMETHING IN OUR BLOOD THAT ACTIVATES WHEN WE TOUCH THE SOIL. FOR BLACK AND BROWN PEOPLE, TENDING TO LIFE IN THE GARDEN RECONNECTS US TO SOMETHING DEEP AND UNSHAKABLE —IT’S HEALING, IT’S LEGACY, IT’S POWER.”

*- Dishaun Harris
New Haven CT*

The people who call New Haven, Connecticut, home are very diverse. Dishaun Harris lives here and works primarily with the Black and Brown community, training them in agricultural best practices, installing home and community gardens, and growing local fresh produce for those who need it most.

They often find that the biggest obstacle to achieving food security is land ownership. Like many other cities, land use competition between housing, commercial, and urban farming poses a challenge in New Haven. Most of the work that Dishaun does is on donated land that churches and non-profit organizations allow him to use to grow gardens and educate the community.



**“BESIDES THE HAVES AND THE HAVE-NOTS, LET’S
MAKE SURE EVERYONE HAS SOMETHING.”**

-Dr. Michael Kotutwa Johnson, AZ



The Hopi Reservation, located within the boundaries of what is now northeastern Arizona—and entirely surrounded by the Navajo Nation—is the sovereign homeland of the Hopi people. It is home to over 8,000 people. The poverty rate is more than double the national average and the unemployment rate is nearly 80%. Most consider this place a food desert, with almost no access to healthy, fresh food.

Michael, a member of the Hopi Nation, serves his community through education and advocacy. He teaches the next generation about traditional Hopi dry farming, a method deeply rooted in their culture and adapted to the desert climate. He also works to assist tribal governments with accessing federal funding. Michael envisions a future where the Hopi people are healthy, food sovereign, and supported by the resources they have long been denied.

“THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT DEVELOPED THE RESERVATION AS ALMOST A CONCENTRATION CAMP FOR NATIVE PEOPLE TO GO... RESERVATIONS WERE CREATED FOR TRIBAL PEOPLE TO GO AND TO DIE.”

Lilian, a member of the Hopi Nation, is trying to change the reality for the people living on the Hopi reservation. She is trying to harness the assets they do have by tapping into generations of traditional knowledge. Hopi people know how to grow food in some of the harshest conditions—yet they lack many of the essential services and facilities needed to make the most of each harvest.

Lilian’s organization is building infrastructure that gives people the resources they need to turn the food they are growing into a future for their families. They have started a farmers market that is the first of its kind in the

community, letting farmers sell food directly to consumers. They are also renovating a run-down mechanics garage to create a regional food hub. This hub will offer cold storage for farmers, a community kitchen to prepare meals and prepare crops for the market, as well as a meeting place for collaboration among the farmers.

“EIGHTY PERCENT OF BIODIVERSITY IS FOUND ON TRIBAL LAND AND STEWARDED BY TRIBAL PEOPLE. IT’S REALLY IMPORTANT THAT THE WORLD REALIZES THAT INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ARE THE ORIGINAL STEWARDS AND CARETAKERS OF THE LAND.”

-Lilian Hill, Hopi Reservation, AZ



**“YOU KNOW, THERE’S A VERY STRONG
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INCOME AND THE
ABILITY TO ACCESS HIGH QUALITY,
NUTRIENT-DENSE FOOD.”**

—Malik Yakini, Detroit, MI



Detroit, Michigan was once a thriving, innovative, and prosperous city. It was the auto capital of the world! But as U.S. auto production declined, parts and assembly shifted to lower-wage international markets. The city of Detroit also declined. Detroit has been the poster child for post-industrial decline in the U.S. However, the Black community of Detroit has been a hub for community organizing. Organizations like the Detroit Black Community Food Sovereignty Network (DBCFSN), have been at the forefront of building Black-led food sovereignty throughout the city.

Malik is working to help Detroiters gain access to affordable, healthy food in their community. He knows that

simply lowering the price of food puts the burden on farmers. He believes that people need to earn a livable wage in order to pay a fair price for food. His commitment to fair employment and fair markets led to the opening of the Detroit People’s Food Co-op—a Black-led, community-owned grocery cooperative. The co-op’s purpose is to improve access to healthy food, provide nutrition education, create living-wage jobs for Detroit residents and establish a sustainable marketplace for local farmers to sell their produce.

**“WE HAVE FOOD, BUT IT’S UNHEALTHY
FOOD IN A MARGINALIZED SYSTEM.
AND THE HEALTHY FOOD IS EXPENSIVE.”**

—Karen Washington, Chester, NY

Fernando manages a program in San Jose, California that helps fifty families annually learn how to grow fruit and produce. Each family receives two plots, soil, seeds, drip irrigation, and training on how to sustain their gardens long after the farm mentorship program has ended.

“TO US, FOOD JUSTICE IS NOT JUST ABOUT MORE PANTRIES IN LOW-INCOME NEIGHBORHOODS OR GARDENS FOR EVERY SINGLE FAMILY IN AMERICA .NO, FOR US, FOOD JUSTICE IS: LET’S BRING EQUITY TO EVERY SINGLE STAGE OF THE FOOD SYSTEM.”

-Fernando Fernandez, San Jose, CA

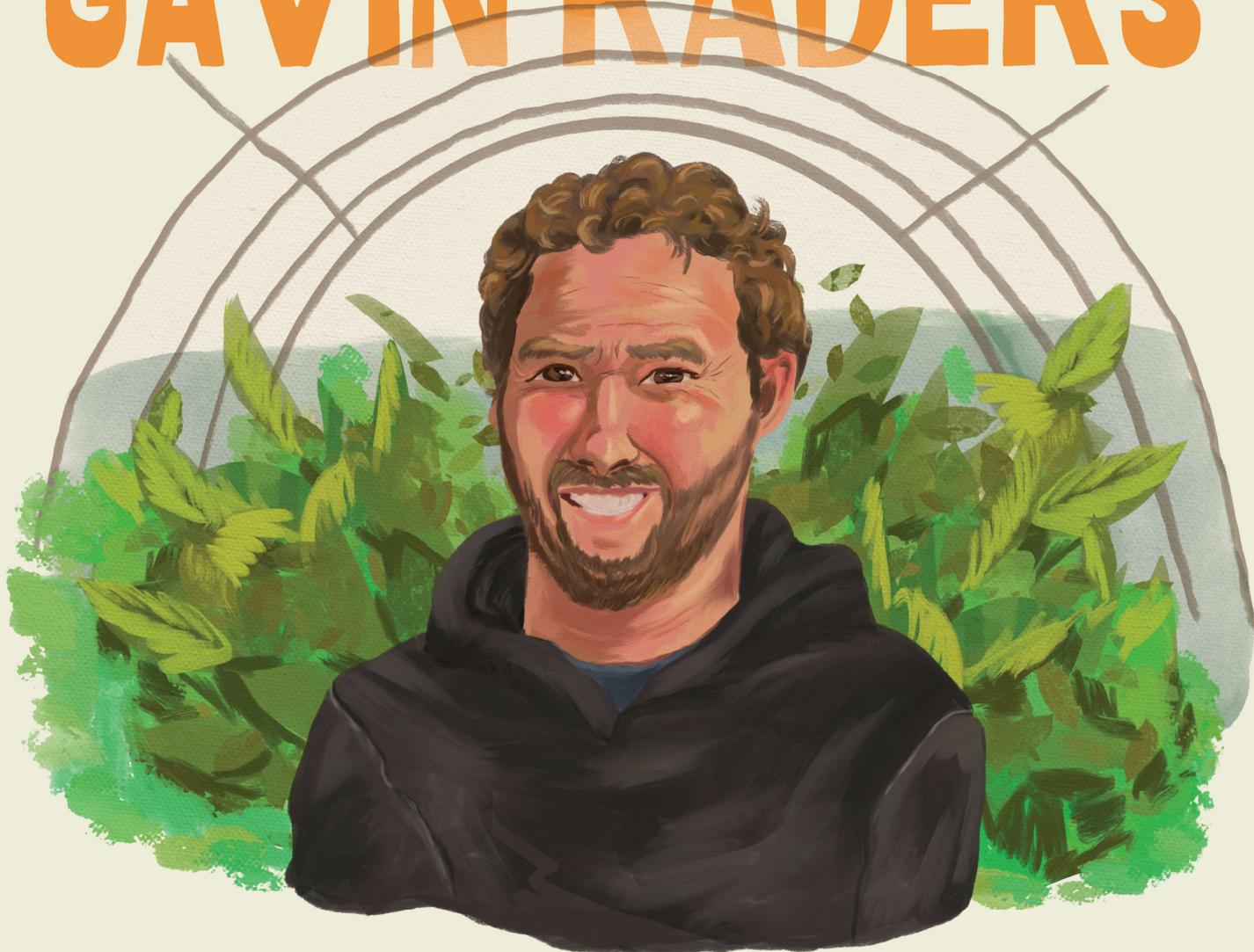


Karen started the Black Farmer Fund in Chester, New York with a group of like-minded individuals. She noticed that there were people doing good work, but they were all working in silos on their own. By providing funding and technical assistance, this coalition offers a supportive ecosystem with the hopes of building a local food system that is fair and just for people who have been overlooked historically.

“WE NEED NEW IDEAS, WE NEED A BREATH OF FRESH AIR, WE NEED A NEW START. AND HOPEFULLY IT WILL COME ON THE BACKS OF YOUNG PEOPLE.”

-Karen Washington, Chester, NY

GAVIN RADERS



“MY ROLE IS REALLY TO HELP MAKE REPARATIONS IN TERMS OF LAND AND MONEY TO COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE BEEN OVER-INCARCERATED, OPPRESSED OVER GENERATIONS.”

Gavin is the co-founder of Planting Justice, an organization based in Oakland, California. They operate a 5-acre farm in the heart of Deep East

Oakland, where the unemployment rate is among the highest in the nation. This farm is the only source of fresh organic produce in this area, and some of the produce is used for food boxes for resource-limited families who need it the most. Gavin is very concerned about the families in his program becoming dependent long-term on food assistance, which inspired the design of the Planting Justice program.

In Oakland, when formerly incarcerated people re-enter the community, they often have few options for creating a better life for themselves and their families. Planting Justice is literally planting seeds of hope, helping people flourish through education, training, and resources, and offering sustaining support that results in a literal harvest that is feeding the entire community. Often, their employees come straight from the prison system, and by working with Planting Justice, they receive a full-time, well-paying job with benefits. Since its inception, Planting Justice has employed 85 formerly incarcerated individuals. Currently, they have a staff of 55, and are proud that only 2 former Planting Justice staffers have returned to prison.

Planting Justice is creating change in a community by equipping local people with resources and giving them the tools to harvest, cultivate, and craft food sovereignty in their own communities. Planting Justice is supporting the community by offering skills training that helps people earn a living wage so they can care for their families and pursue their dreams with hope for the future. By creating the space and infrastructure for this to happen, and uplifting employees into leadership roles, Gavin's organization operates based on solidarity, not dependency. This is creating sustainable change that is positively impacting families in this community.

“WE ARE NOT TRYING TO REPLICATE THE NONPROFIT SYSTEM AND CREATE DEPENDENCY. WE ARE CREATING SPACE FOR PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY TO BRING WHAT THEY HAVE AND GIVE THEM THE RESOURCES THEY NEED.”

- Gavin Raders, Oakland, CA



Food justice is not just a distant ideal—it's a practice rooted in everyday choices, relationships, and collective care. The people and stories in this book remind us that transforming our food systems starts locally, with communities reclaiming power over how food is grown, shared, and valued. The list that follows offers practical ways to get involved, whether you're tending soil, sharing tools, organizing with neighbors, or pushing for policy change. These actions may seem small, but together they weave a powerful network of resistance, resilience, and renewal. Wherever you are, there's a place for you in this movement.

1. SHOP AT AND ORGANIZE FARMERS' MARKETS

Support local producers and shorten the food supply chain by buying from and helping organize farmers' markets in your neighborhood—especially in food apartheid areas. This helps keep food dollars in the community and builds farmer-consumer relationships.

2. START OR SUBSCRIBE TO A CSA (COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE)

Join a local CSA to receive regular produce directly from nearby farms. Better yet, help establish a CSA that prioritizes access for low-income residents by including sliding scale or SNAP-friendly payment options.

3. VOLUNTEER AT AN URBAN FARM OR COMMUNITY GARDEN

Dedicate time to helping with planting, harvesting, or educational programming. Urban farms often need consistent hands-on help, and it's a direct way to strengthen local food production.

4. COLLECT AND DONATE FOOD SCRAPS FOR LOCAL COMPOSTING

Start a home compost bin and coordinate with local urban farms or gardens that accept community compost donations. This reduces landfill waste and returns nutrients to local soil systems.



5. ORGANIZE FOOD JUSTICE EVENTS IN SCHOOLS, CHURCHES, OR COMMUNITY CENTERS

Leverage social networks (like parent-teacher groups, congregations, or other community networks) to connect local produce to local schools, places of worship, or other community spaces.

6. BUILD OR SUPPORT TOOL LIBRARIES FOR URBAN GROWERS

Create a lending library for gardening tools, seeds, or cooking supplies that community members can borrow for free, lowering the cost barrier for home or community food production.

7. COORDINATE LOCAL PRODUCE DELIVERIES OR FARM BOXES

If you have a car or bike, help with weekly delivery of produce to elders or people with disabilities. Many urban farms lack distribution capacity—volunteer drivers can make a big difference.

8. CAMPAIGN FOR MUNICIPAL SUPPORT OF URBAN AGRICULTURE

Join or form a local coalition to pressure city councils to adopt policies that support land access, water rights, zoning changes, or funding for community gardens and small-scale farmers.

Thank You
to our

COLLABORATORS!

AFRICA



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UNITED STATES & HOPITUTSKWA (LAND OF THE HOPI NATION)



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Cedar Grove, NC*



*Martin Bourque,
Berkeley, CA*



*Fernando Fernandez,
San Jose, CA*



*Dishawn Harris,
New Haven CT*



*Lilian Hill,
Hopi Reservation, AZ*



*Dr. Michael Kotutwa Johnson,
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*Geeta Mehrotra,
Atlanta, GA*



*Alexis Racelis,
South TX*



*Gavin Raders,
Oakland, CA*



*Karen Washington,
Chester, NY*



*Malik Yakini,
Detroit, MI*

Across continents and cultures, farmers, organizers, and communities are reclaiming power over what they grow, how they grow it, and who gets to eat. This is not just a book about food. **It's a call to action.**

In this rich tapestry of global voices, from Indigenous stewards in the U.S. to women landowners in Asia and cooperative growers in Latin America—Food First reveals the frontline stories of those fighting for food systems that nourish people and the planet. Through first-person interviews, historical insight, and visual storytelling, it explores how colonialism, capitalism, and climate change intersect with what ends up on our plates and who goes hungry.

Whether you're a farmer, activist, or everyday eater, this book invites you to join a growing movement: one that uplifts local knowledge, reclaims ancestral practices, and sows the seeds of food sovereignty.

For more information, visit:

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