

# The Practitioner Landscape: How Faith Communities Are Involved in Food Systems Work

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## World Food Policy Center

The World Food Policy Center is a research, education, and convening organization within Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy. Its mission is to advance connected and inclusive food system policy and practice in support of *equity* and *resilience* of local and global food systems. WFPC work centers on economic development through food justice; root causes and narratives of racial inequity in the food system; moving aid from charity to capacity building; governance in support of equity in power and benefit; local food system analysis; and public health and nutrition. The conclusions and recommendations of any World Food Policy publication are solely those of its author(s), and do not reflect the views of the Duke University or its other scholars.

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# Glossary

<b>‘Adl</b> [Arabic]	In Islam, the Quranic term for justice or divine justice, referring to a balanced, or just approach, to all things for which one is held accountable on the Day of Judgment.
<b><i>Al musharakah</i></b> [Arabic]	“The law of sharing,” which mandates that Muslim farmers share food they grow, cost-free, with those who cannot afford to buy it.
<b><i>Amanah</i></b> (pl. amanat) [Arabic]	Quranic term for ‘trusteeship’ or ‘guardianship’ referring to the obligation of Muslims to behave justly with that which has been entrusted to them by God (e.g. all of creation, including land, animals, body/mind/soul, community, time, knowledge, etc.) or by others (e.g. secrets, promises, financial responsibility, rulership).
<b>Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC)</b>	BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, People of Color. BIPOC recognizes that Black, Indigenous and people of color are severely impacted by systemic racial injustices in the US. It calls out Black and Indigenous peoples specifically as a way of recognizing their different experience under colonialism than other peoples within the US (via chattel slavery and conflict-related violence).
<b>Creation care</b>	A relationship with God’s creation and a ministry of caring for and healing the earth. Creation care is a form of faith-based environmentalism.
<b>Community-rooted</b>	“Leverage community residents’ expertise and resources, as an alternative to ‘community-based’ organizations that can marginalize community voice, limit capacity building, and neglect the underlying causes of community conditions” (Smith et al. 2020).
<b>Equitable Food-Oriented Development (EFOD)</b>	As defined by the EFOD Collaborative, “a model that dismantles the social and financial systems that perpetuate poverty, racism, and poor health that prevent the development of local and inclusive food economies.” (EFOD Collaborative, 2019)
<b>Faith-based</b>	Initiatives whose mission, vision, and values are explicitly framed by theological, ethical, or spiritual beliefs.
<b>Faith-placed</b>	Initiatives taking place on the grounds of a faith community or faith-based organization, but whose mission, vision, and values are not explicitly framed by theological, ethical, or spiritual beliefs.
<b>Faith-based and faith-placed</b>	Initiatives whose mission, vision, and values are framed explicitly by theological, ethical, or spiritual beliefs; initiatives take place on the grounds of a faith community/ faith-based organization (D. Harris 2018).
<b>Faith-based non-profit</b>	A 501©3 organization whose mission, values, and work are grounded in spiritual/religious beliefs and/or practices.
<b>Faith-based practitioner</b>	An individual whose mission, values, and work are grounded in spiritual/religious beliefs and/or practices; may establish a non-profit or for-profit organization to house his or her work.
<b>Foodways</b>	The eating habits, culinary practices, and food-related economic practices of a people, region, or historical period.

<b>Food apartheid</b>	A term coined by food justice activist Karen Washington, it requires we take into account the systemic racism permeating America's food system when considering a location's food environment. The term "food desert" takes into account only the presence and location of food stores/healthy food access in an area, as opposed to the systems and policies that disadvantaged BIPOC communities.
<b>Food justice</b>	Food justice aims to "institutionalize equity in and control over the food system" and requires "a transformation of the current food system, including but not limited to eliminating disparities and inequities". The food justice movement is rooted in social justice and arose from a failure of dominant food movements to address social justice issues in the food system (Cadieux and Slocum 2015). This movement also overlaps with the community food security movement, but is more progressive. Food justice aims to address the ways low-income communities of color are negatively impacted by the industrial food system. Specifically, food justice frames its conversation on food security in the "context of institutional racism, racial formation, and racialized geographies" and works to confront and address structural racism in the food system (Holt-Giménez and Wang 2011).
<b>Food cooperatives</b>	A food production and/or distribution enterprise organized, owned, and managed collectively amongst members as opposed to privately or publicly.
<b>Food sovereignty</b>	A community's right to healthy, culturally appropriate food produced sustainably, the power of self-determination, and the ability to decide what to grow and how to grow it (Alkon and Agyeman 2011).
<b>Food security</b>	One of the most broadly accepted definitions is from the World Food Summit in 1996, defined as having "physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy lifestyle". Food security is typically measured via a number of indicators within the categories of availability, access, utilization, and stability. Several scales or tools are used to assess the severity of food security for an individual. The FAO uses the Food Insecurity Experience Scale, utilizing a spectrum from food secure/mild food insecurity, to moderate food insecurity, to severe food insecurity (the last category indicative of no food for a day or more).
<b>Food system</b>	The ecosystem of relationships responsible for the food we eat, including its production, processing, packaging, transportation, distribution, consumption, food law, economics and policy. Food systems promote individual, community, and environmental health to varying degrees.
<b><i>Halal</i> [Arabic]</b>	That which is permissible or lawful according to the Quran, this includes permissible foods and food preparation methods.
<b>The Harmony Way</b>	For many Indigenous peoples in the US and their spirituality, this refers to "right living", or living in balance and harmony with all creation.
<b><i>Kashrut</i> [Hebrew]</b>	Jewish laws describing permissible foods and food preparation methods.
<b><i>Mizan</i> [Arabic]</b>	In Islam, living in balance or in harmony with all creation; accountability for one's earthly deeds measured against Quranic requirements occurs on the Day of Judgment.

<b><i>Pe'ah</i></b> [Hebrew]	A Jewish law mandating that Jewish farmers leave the corners of their fields unharvested so the hungry might take and eat what was grown, cost-free.
<b>Regenerative agriculture</b>	“Regenerative agriculture farming principles and practices increases biodiversity, enriches soils, improves watersheds, and enhances ecosystem services. Regenerative agriculture aims to capture carbon in soil and aboveground biomass, reversing current global trends of atmospheric accumulation. At the same time, it offers increased yields, resilience to climate instability, and higher health and vitality for farming and ranching communities.” <sup>1</sup>
<b>Root causes</b>	The pervasive structures, attitudes, and inequities which create persistent ‘symptoms’ like hunger, poverty, and environmental degradation.
<b><i>Sawm</i></b> [Arabic]	In Islam, the practice of fasting during the holy month of Ramadan and other voluntary fasts, which entail abstention from food, drink, sexual activity between dawn and dusk; the practice heightens awareness of the presence of God and gratitude for God’s bounty.
<b><i>Shmita</i></b> [Hebrew]	A set of Jewish laws mandating Jewish farmers work the land for six years and allow the land to lie fallow – or rest – in the seventh year.
<b><i>Tza’ar ba’alei hayyim</i></b> [Hebrew]	A Jewish law mandating compassion for animals and safety from exploitation or abuse.
<b><i>Tzedakah</i></b> [Hebrew]	The Jewish ethic of justice or righteousness; also translated as charitable giving.
<b><i>Qist</i></b> [Arabic]	In Islam, justice or just, fair, or good relationships and reciprocal interactions among human beings and between human beings and God for which individuals are accountable.
<b><i>Zakat</i></b> [Arabic]	A pillar of Islam that mandates the purification of one’s wealth, gratitude for God’s bounty, and the exacting of justice through charitable giving to those in need.



# Executive Summary

People of faith, houses of worship, and faith-based nonprofit institutions play a significant role in promoting the health and well-being of their communities through food. They grow food, feed the hungry, provide educational resources to congregants and communities to promote food justice, and participate in economic development through food-based enterprises. This report seeks to assess the food and faith practitioner landscape in the United States, with particular attention to justice-centered approaches pioneered by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

Faith and Indigenous communities hold rich theological, ethical, and spiritual traditions that promote balanced relationships between people, food, and the land from which they come. From diverse faith traditions, academics and practitioners are re-imagining food systems that promote justice, equity, and healing using religious ethical frameworks, practices, and rituals.

This project examines the landscape of organizations operating in the United States at the intersection of food and faith across Christian, Muslim, and Jewish religions, in addition to the spiritual traditions of several Indigenous communities in the United States. Entities working within the food and faith space include: faith communities, faith-based non-profit organizations, individual faith practitioners, and academic and philanthropic institutions. The goal was to understand the theological basis for faith-community involvement with the food system, to map the faith-practitioner landscape of activities related to food, and to identify trends. Faith communities are involved in a variety of political and advocacy activities at US state, federal, and global levels, but this report primarily focuses on faith practitioners affecting change in their local communities.

Both charitable and justice-based approaches are needed to combat food insecurity. However, to tackle the root causes of the issue (rather than just treating the symptoms), a broader, justice-based toolkit is needed. Faith communities are increasingly engaging in food justice efforts.

A food-justice focus (instead of strictly a charitable lens) entails: 1) Addressing chronic needs and root causes such as racial inequity, structural inequality, low access to land and capital, and generational poverty; 2) embracing solutions that build local capacity and fuel systemic change; 3) empowering leadership and expertise reflective of the affected community; and 4) exploring holistic solutions focused on restoring food systems and relationships.



*Faith-based perspectives typically emphasize the dignity and sanctity of creation and offer holistic frameworks that integrate equity, economic, and environmental concerns, often called the three legs of sustainability. Faith-based perspectives can provide new paradigms through which to assess food, consumption, and the production and the attendant social relations; assess our scientific, economic and social approaches; and acknowledge the moral and religious dimensions of the world food crisis.*

—A. Whitney Sanford  
*Food Crisis, Zygon, vol. 49, no. 4,  
December 2014.*

# Key Findings

## In the food and faith academic and theological literature

- Theological and spiritual beliefs across many traditions share four cross-cutting, food-related themes: connecting to land, responding to food insecurity, cultivating faithful foodways, and reimagining ritual practices.
- The most recent, innovative activities of food and faith practitioners are largely missing, as the academic literature focuses more on theology than faith practice.
- BIPOC and non-Christian practitioners are underrepresented.
- The number of food and faith publications increased in the last two decades, primarily from Christian traditions.

## In the practitioner landscape

- Faith-based and faith-placed anti-hunger initiatives deliver charitable food aid nationally and globally through food pantries, gleaning networks, public programs, and emergency food aid.
- Faith and Indigenous communities also mobilize spiritual value systems to tackle the root causes of injustice and build food justice, land justice, and economic justice.
- There is increasing attention to food justice in the food and faith landscape (beyond activities such as emergency food aid), building on a long history of justice-based work in BIPOC faith communities.
- Faith community food-related programming fell into three categories:
  - **Health justice interventions dealing with chronic hunger and diet-related disease.** Many faith communities prioritize health interventions due to high incidence

of chronic, diet-related disease in the US. Faith-based and faith-placed initiatives can be powerful motivators of health behavior change and sources for healthy, culturally important foods which seek to reduce racial health disparities.

- **Economic justice interventions dealing with economic opportunity and food sovereignty.** Communities of faith and Indigenous communities develop and sustain alternative food systems to build community self-sufficiency, economic empowerment, racial equity, and resilience. The work often seeks to uproot dependence on processed foods and consolidated food systems that contribute to food insecurity and undernutrition, especially within BIPOC communities.
- **Land justice interventions dealing with land access, preservation, and healing connection.** Many scholars and practitioners trace the origin of unsustainable and unjust food systems to the rise of industrial agriculture. They argue that it has left people disconnected from the land and their sources of food, producing a wide range of physical, spiritual and ecological ailments. In response, many practitioners promote solutions which seek to revitalize agricultural knowledge, regenerative and organic practices, and spiritual connections to the land and creation.

There are several barriers to large scale implementation of justice-centered food and faith work. These challenges stem primarily from continued racial inequity, wealth disparities, power differentials, and [white dominant narratives in food systems movements](#).

# Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic has urgently highlighted our continued need for the role that faith communities play as a part of the food security safety net. While there will always been a necessary role for faith communities to play in emergency food provision, we can help expand the toolkit for this community to engage in activities that address the root causes of food insecurity. Philanthropy, academia, and non-profits providing technical assistance all have an important role to play to this end.

## For academic institutions and researchers

- Build relationships with, study, and write about practitioners, with the goal of uplifting and sharing their work. Academic visibility for such work translates into validation, and this has the potential to influence philanthropic interest and support.
- Greater investment in scholarly writing at the intersection of food, land, and environment from more religious perspectives (non-Christian), including examining topics of race.
- Consider the importance of a faith-based as opposed to faith-placed orientation in the design of community interventions. Work to create culturally-relevant, culturally-appropriate health interventions that incorporate the particular faith, ethics, and spirituality of the population the intervention seeks to serve.
- Advocate for and support specialty groups within academic societies (such as the American Academy of Religion) focused on food systems to encourage study of the ways in which faith communities address food systems challenges, both in theory and in practice.

## For non-profit organizations providing technical assistance

- Advocate for churches/synagogues/mosques etc. to leverage their existing assets in creative and justice-oriented ways to address food-related community needs.
- Create opportunities for practitioners across faiths to routinely convene, build relationships, and share lessons learned, with the goal of promoting the cross-pollination of ideas and more powerful partnerships.
- Promoting Equitable Food-Oriented Development (efod.org) to churches/synagogues/mosques/ First Nations communities to promote equitable local economic growth.
- Support networking among BIPOC food and faith practitioners to increase the spread of best practices.

## For philanthropy

- Provide or support greater technical assistance provision for grant writing to address the lack of capacity of community-level faith-based organizations.
- Develop partnerships with community-development financial institutions. Provide free/ low-cost capital as collateral for faith-based BIPOC food-oriented business startups or expansion financing. HAZON's Adamah Foods and First Nations Kitchens are great faith-based business examples that provide culturally relevant food.
- Support greater flexibility/more openness with regards to the grant deliverables and requirements for faith-based practitioners working at the community level to address the specific needs and goals of these practitioners and their organizations.

- Seek input from faith practitioners about what constitutes success of a grant project. The foundation's measures of success should support the community's ideas of success. When philanthropy's measures of success do not complement the community's goals the disconnect will result in a lack of resonance with the community.
- Adopt Equitable Food Oriented Development ([efod.org](http://efod.org)) project principles and support faith-based food justice investment that emphasizes community ownership, community wealth, and wellbeing.
- Prioritize investment in faith-based practitioners of color engaging in food justice and food sovereignty work at the grassroots/community level to address the root causes of food systems challenges and to promote self-determination and self-sufficiency for BIPOC communities.
- Invest in conferences and convenings that bring together academics, funders, and practitioners of various faith backgrounds for knowledge sharing, problem solving, and capacity building to promote the cross-pollination of ideas and relationship building.
- Provide funding for BIPOC and non-Christian practitioners to share their stories with a wider audience to disrupt prevailing, narratives grounded in white dominant ways of knowing and working.



# Introduction & Methods

The Duke World Food Policy Center partnered with the Duke Divinity School to undertake a project examining the landscape of organizations operating in the United States at the intersection of food and faith across Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Indigenous traditions. This project sought to understand the:

- Underpinning theology connecting each tradition to the food system;
- Practitioner landscape of activities, including trends and bright spots.

To accomplish this, the WFPC reviewed over 140 academic and gray literature sources published in English, including books, journal articles, presentations, dissertation manuscripts, podcast interviews, conference talks, reposts, magazine articles, blog posts, and a master's thesis. This scan of academic food and faith literature included special attention to the theology, ethics, and spiritual frameworks which inform faith community belief and practice related to food.

We identified relevant literature using the following keywords: food and faith; food and Islam; food and Christianity; food and Judaism; food and indigenous communities; Native American Spirituality and food; food, faith, and health; food and theology; food and ethics; food and spirituality; food, faith,

and race; faith and agriculture; and food, faith, and economic development. Formal and informal interviews, bibliographic data, and academic syllabi from food and faith experts of multiple faith traditions also informed the literature review process and contributed to this report's review of non-academic food and faith discourse.

The WFPC also interviewed 25 food and faith academics and practitioners identified with the help of a network of experts. Interviews followed an interview guide and lasted between thirty minutes to one hour. Insights were also drawn from seven additional interviews for WFPC podcasts, and a workshop on this topic held with food and faith academics and practitioners. For the interview guides, see **Appendix C**.

While the main study was on the religious traditions of US Christian, Muslim, and Jewish faiths, there must be a caveat that this report cannot represent every perspective and perfectly generalize across all sub-sects of these—for example, the breadth of racial and ethnic spiritual traditions within Black, Latino/Hispanic, or Asian American Pacific Islander communities. The report represents findings from the literature and interviews analyzed only. We included Indigenous groups in the US as their relationship with food and land often carries a spiritual ethos. The perspectives of representatives from Lakota, Cochiti, and Occoneechee tribes who are Indigenous to land now considered the US were included in this analysis.

# Academic Research has not Kept Pace with Faith-guided Food Practices

Academic literature focuses more on theology than food and faith practitioner work.

BIPOC and Non-Christian practitioners are underrepresented in academic literature.

The number of food and faith publications has increased in the last two decades, but focuses primarily on Christian traditions.

We set out to understand the food and faith landscape to understand how theology and food are connected across spiritual traditions, and to see what trends we could find. The following key findings from this scan were notable:

## The activities of food and faith *practitioners* are largely missing from academic literature

However, although many BIPOC *faith communities* have engaged in food justice efforts, these efforts are not well represented in mainstream academic literature. The academic literature published in journals focuses more on *theology* than the practitioner realm (Ayres 2013; A. Krone 2015; Sellers-Peterson 2017).

## BIPOC and non-Christian practitioners are underrepresented in the academic literature

While the majority of Americans are both white and Christian, a disproportionate amount of the reviewed academic literature focused on food and faith from a white and Christian perspective (Pew Research Center, n.d.). Out of approximately 24 books and dissertation manuscripts that engage explicitly with the theological, ethical, or spiritual dimensions of food, 20 are grounded in the Christian tradition; three are written from or include either a combined Indigenous and Christian perspective or a Jewish perspective (Fields 2010; Woodley 2012). Fewer than four books and articles reviewed consider Black Christians' perspective on food and faith ("Soil and Souls — Rev Dele" 2018; McCutcheon 2015; M. Harris 2017).

## The number of food and faith publications increased in the last two decades, primarily from Christian traditions

The majority of published work we reviewed represented Christian traditions. There are many possible reasons for this. It is possible that keywords such as "food and faith" disproportionately return studies and publications representing Christian approaches. Food systems work emerging from other religious, spiritual or cultural traditions might utilize different terminology, such as food sovereignty or food justice. It is also likely that institutional biases favor Christian theological perspectives, that funders in the U.S. support initiatives based in Christian churches disproportionately, or that these approaches are more likely to be documented in the academic literature.

While published literature in the "food and faith" subfield is growing (notably from white Christian perspectives), ritual and charitable food practices are certainly not new within faith and Indigenous communities. The next section deals with the theological underpinnings of how faith and food are connected.

# Food and Agriculture have Common Theological Grounding Across Faith Traditions

Theological and spiritual beliefs across many traditions share four cross-cutting, food-related themes: connecting to land, responding to food insecurity, cultivating faithful foodways, reimagining ritual practices.

Connections to food, agriculture and the food system have common themes across the religious and spiritual traditions reviewed for this report. These include:

## Connecting to Land

Religious texts and traditions emerge from and respond to ecological realities and agricultural practices. Scholars and practitioners working in food and faith reflect on environmental crises of agriculture like soil degradation, erosion, industrialization and extraction by centering land as a source of food, life, and shared identity from historical and scriptural perspectives. Spiritual and religious principles including *shalom* (Hebrew: peace), *‘adl* or *qist* (Arabic: justice), and the “Harmony Way” (Woodley 2012) all move beyond environmental sustainability to encapsulate a vision of mutual flourishing with more than human creatures and places.

## Responding to Food Insecurity

Feeding those in need is another way people of faith pursue justice in the world and seek to live in right relationship with the divine and with their neighbors. Invocations for charitable giving, including the sharing of food, are present in all faith traditions.

## Cultivating Faithful Foodways

People of faith make eating choices informed by their religious traditions. From Kashrut to Halal (Jewish and Muslim permissible foods and food preparation methods) to Indigenous food sovereignty movements (the ability to decide what to eat and agency to produce it), belief informs everything from the way practitioners eat, to how they eat, to what they eat.

## Embodying Ritual Practices

Just as faith informs eating, so eating informs faith, belief, and practices. Fasts, holy meals, ceremonial foods and medicines foster shared identity while orienting practitioners toward the sacred through embodied practice.

A summary of faith traditions that correspond with the themes outlined above can be found in [Table 1](#) below. For expanded commentary, see **Appendix A**.

**Table 1: Food Themes with Examples Across Multiple Faith Traditions**

Themes	Traditions
Connecting to Land	<p><b>US Indigenous Peoples:</b> The “Harmony Way” and “kincentric awareness” reveal inherent connections between humans and land; cultural identity is defined by land, ecosystems, sacred plants, and traditional foods</p> <p><b>Islam:</b> The Quran instructs harmonious relationships among human beings, creation and the Divine. Creation is a divine gift entrusted to human care. Muslims are accountable for land stewardship on Judgement Day. <i>‘Adl and qist</i> (justice), <i>amanah</i> (trust), and <i>mizan</i> (balance)</p> <p><b>Jewish:</b> Scriptural texts and traditions convey deep connections to land and agriculture, e.g. <i>kashrut</i> (food laws), <i>shmita</i> (giving land a period of rest), <i>pe’ah</i> (leaving the corners of fields unharvested for gleaning), and <i>tzedakah</i> (charity); God’s covenant with Israel includes all creatures</p> <p><b>Christian:</b> Scripture describes living in balanced relationship with land; land and food are gifts requiring stewardship and must be shared; all creation is included in future reconciliation</p>
Responding to Food Insecurity	<p><b>US Indigenous Peoples:</b> Indigenous-led advocacy organizations build indigenous food sovereignty and revitalize native foodways (eating habits, culinary practices, and food-related economic practices of a people, region, or historical period) to target food insecurity’s root causes</p> <p><b>Islam:</b> Quranic prescriptions, prophetic examples, and practices of <i>zakat</i> and <i>al mushakah</i> (the law of sharing) encourage Muslims to address food insecurity</p> <p><b>Jewish:</b> The practices of <i>tzedakah</i> and <i>pe’ah</i> attend to the hungry</p> <p><b>Christian:</b> Biblical texts teach Christians to feed those who are hungry out of love for Christ (e.g. Matthew 25:35-40, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat”)</p>
Cultivating Faithful Foodways	<p><b>US Indigenous Peoples:</b> Ancestral agricultural traditions and traditional food preparation practices inform cultural identity; eating, planting, hunting, fishing, gathering, and sharing establishes kinship communities with plants and animals and informs spiritual belief and practice</p> <p><b>Islam:</b> <i>Halal</i> laws dictate appropriate food choices and food preparation, upholding ethical treatment of animals to please the Creator</p> <p><b>Jewish:</b> the laws of <i>kashrut</i> dictate food choices, emphasizing the ethics of food preparation and eaten: <i>tza’ar ba’alei hayyim</i> forbids casing suffering to living creatures without cause and prevents cruelty to animals</p> <p><b>Christian:</b> Faith-based farms and food enterprises promote local, sustainable, and humanely-grown food for everyday and sacramental uses to promote stewardship of creation</p>
Embodying Ritual Practices	<p><b>US Indigenous Peoples:</b> Traditional foods and medicines are blessings from the Creator and an integral part of spiritual ceremonies</p> <p><b>Islam:</b> The practice of <i>sawm</i>, or fasting during the month of Ramadan embodies faithfulness to God and the third pillar of Islam</p> <p><b>Jewish:</b> Foods prepared routinely and at holidays manifest beliefs and tell sacred stories, for instance, during the <i>Seder</i> meal; ritual fasting takes place during <i>Yom Kippur</i>, the day of atonement</p> <p><b>Christian:</b> In celebrating the Eucharist, eating becomes worship and spiritual practice</p>



Table 1 Sources: (AbuLughod 2018; Bahnson and Wirzba 2012; Berry 2002, 20; Carter, Dr. Christopher 2018; Ali 2016; Clarke and Tittensor 2016; Cooley 2019; Coyhis and Simonelli 2008; E. F. Davis 2008; E. Davis 2009; Fields 2010; Hackney and McCullough 2019; Heyneman 2004; A. Gross 2013b; A. M. Krone 2016; A. Krone 2018; Murphy 2019; Nayed 2008; Nasr 2002; N. L. Parish 2018a; Phillips et al. 2014; Raudvere 2014; Richardson 2004; Winner 2010; Wirzba 2011; Woodley 2012; Everett 2019; Dunbar-Ortiz 2014; Snyder and Scandrett 2011; Salmón 2000; Barazangi, Zaman, and Afzal 1996; Fields 2010; Wirzba, Dr. Norman, n.d.; Hermann, Liu-Beers, and Beach 2015; Khadduri 1984; Magida 1994; King 2017)

# The Landscape of Practitioners is Highly Multi-sector and Goes Beyond Traditional Faith-based Institutions

## Faith-based or faith-placed?

We distinguish between faith-based and faith-placed interventions in the food and faith landscape. By *faith-placed*, we refer to initiatives that take place in partnership with faith communities utilizing faith community resources such as meeting space, industrial kitchens, or volunteer hours. *Faith-based* initiatives tend to be led by faith communities and explicitly aligned with a community's spirituality or belief systems. Food banks, food pantries, and meal centers, and other charitable responses to food insecurity are often faith-placed. Food and faith initiatives can be faith-based, faith-placed, or both.

Faith communities manifest in many ways: in religious expression, and in form and function. For the purposes of this report, “faith community” refers to a community which shares religious or spiritual beliefs and practices. **Table 2** illustrates the many kinds of entities working at the intersection of food and faith.

Sharing food connects communities and can promote their physical health and spiritual wellbeing. Food is highly significant for the ritual practice, social life, and charitable work of faith communities (Romero-Briones 2018; Two Bulls 2018; Wirzba 2011). Scholars, practitioners, and faith communities are becoming more concerned about the ethical shortcomings of food and agricultural systems and their impacts on the ways faith communities eat and share food (Bahnson and Wirzba 2012; A. Krone 2018; Clough 2014). Faith convictions inform work and advocacy to promote fair labor practices, healthy food preparation, human and environmental health, sustainable agriculture and more.

**Table 2: Entities at work in the food and faith space**

Entity	Definition	Examples
<b>Faith Community</b>	A community sharing a common set of religious or spiritual beliefs and practices	Mosque Synagogue Church Indigenous community <sup>1</sup>
<b>Faith-based Nonprofit Organization</b>	A 501(c)(3) organization whose mission, values, and work are grounded in spiritual or religious beliefs and/or practices	Faith-affiliated food pantry Faith-affiliated meal center Hunger-relief NGO Faith-affiliated social service provider
<b>Faith Practitioner</b>	An individual whose work is informed by values and practices grounded in spiritual or religious convictions	Religious leader Community organizer “dinner church” host <sup>2</sup> Farmer/grower Food entrepreneur Food systems educator
<b>Academic Institution</b>	An institution advancing education and research from a variety of disciplinary approaches, including religious studies, theological studies, ethics, ethnographic research, Indigenous studies, and environmental studies	Divinity school Seminary Religious studies department Research institute
<b>Philanthropic Institution</b>	A non-profit nongovernmental entity that leverages its capital assets to advance work and research in particular fields	Foundation Endowment

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this report, Indigenous, First Nations, and Native American communities are related to but distinct from other kinds of faith communities. While Indigenous communities hold spiritual beliefs and maintain sacred connections to specific foods and plants, they are unlike faith communities that are defined by religious creeds and more global in nature.

<sup>2</sup> Eating sustainably, locally-grown, and prepared food as an act of worship in small groups or “dinner church” settings (Hackney and McCullough 2019; Vanderslice 2019)

# Food Assistance from Faith Communities Functions as a Second Social Safety Net

## *Emergency Food Assistance and Communities of Faith*

Faith-based and faith-placed anti-hunger initiatives deliver food aid nationally and globally through food pantries, gleaning networks, public programs, and emergency food aid.

Across the United States and beyond, churches, synagogues, and mosques are sites of hunger relief, providing a “second social safety net” when federal food assistance is not available, accessible, or sufficient (Cnaan 1999). People of faith donate time and money to local and global anti-hunger initiatives, and religious belief motivates charitable giving. Types of charitable activities in the food and faith arena include:

### **US food distribution**

Faith-placed community food pantries provide groceries to address acute and chronic hunger in partnership with food banks or as congregate feeding sites. Non-profit organizations such as the Christian faith-based Feeding America partner with faith communities across the U.S. through their network of 200 food banks and 60,000 food pantries (Feeding America 2021). Approximately two-thirds of Feeding America’s food pantries are affiliated with faith communities (Anonymous 2018).

### **Serving prepared foods**

In addition to food pantries, faith communities operate meal centers, or soup kitchens, which provide prepared meals for free or below market price.

### **Connecting farmers with pantries**

Non-profit organizations connect farmers and gardeners with faith-based food pantries to increase availability of fresh produce. For example, according to interviews, over two-thirds of 8,500 food pantries in the AmpleHarvest.org network are faith-placed. The Cornell University Cooperative Extension New York City Faith-Based Food Hubs program connects faith-based organizations with New York farmers through direct marketing. The “Hub” church collects orders, negotiates with producers on price and delivery and organizes church volunteers to unload and distribute food each week (Cho, Parker, and Tobias 2013).

### **Global emergency relief**

Worldwide, religious non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as World Vision International, Muslim Aid, Islamic Relief USA, American Jewish World Service, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, Catholic Relief Services, Bread for the World, and, among others, provide emergency food aid to communities in need. Approximately 60% of faith-based NGOs are Christian, 16% are Muslim, and 7% are Jewish (Peterson 2010). Many of these organizations were founded to alleviate global hunger in times of war, famine, or economic distress (Simon 2009).

Faith communities address both acute and chronic food insecurity through charity. Emergency food assistance is needed to address the immediate needs of society's most vulnerable, especially in times of crisis. Faith communities and faith-based organizations can organize rapidly to respond to crises and provide resources. During the COVID-19 pandemic, religious organizations were often the first to step in and reach those most impacted, owing in part to their pre-existing relationships within communities and strong networks of caretaking (Lietz Bilecky 2020). Indigenous advocacy groups worked to protect Native communities, especially those living on reservations, through emergency response funds and other resources (First Nations Development Institute 2020).

COVID-19 has made it apparent that conceptualizing food banks and pantries as *emergency* food assistance obscures the reality that for many people in the US, these resources serve as a day-to-day lifeline. Over time, however, solely focusing on charitable approaches can serve to reinforce relationships of dependence rather than building food justice through systems change (Souza 2019; Poppendieck 1999).



# Expanding the Practitioner Toolkit from Charitable Approaches to Justice-based Approaches

Faith communities are increasingly focusing on food justice work.

Faith communities have long led hunger relief efforts and other forms of food assistance through charity. This service provision is critical, especially in times of emergency. However, faith practitioners are increasingly innovating to address food systems issues by seeking to address root causes. Root causes are the pervasive structures, attitudes, and inequities which create persistent ‘symptoms’ like hunger, poverty, and environmental degradation. Justice-centered approaches in food and faith seek to correct the root causes of poverty, food insecurity, and environmental degradation by restoring spiritual connections between people, food, ecosystems, and economies.

## *Addressing the Root Causes of Unjust Food Systems*

Faith and Indigenous communities mobilize spiritual value systems to tackle the root causes of injustice and build food justice, land justice, and economic justice.

While responding to food insecurity through charitable food assistance is vital for meeting acute and urgent needs, justice-centered work is necessary to address food insecurity’s chronic and systemic causes (Brown 2019).

Ideally, justice-centered approaches are community-led, meaning that community leaders identify problems and define solutions using place-based knowledge and expertise. Such solutions center frontline communities, who are disproportionately impacted by economic inequality, systemic racism, land loss, and environmental degradation. Justice-centered solutions take an asset-based approach, affirming that communities most impacted by systemic injustices are in the best position to understand and solve complex problems.

Justice-centered approaches can take a faith-based approach to foreground the knowledge, traditions, and belief systems communities hold. **Table 3** describes key characteristics of charitable and justice-centered work. Interventions of similar types can be more or less justice-centered depending on multiple factors. Any organization (even those defined as charities) can move toward justice.

Faith-based and community organizations take justice-centered approaches by targeting the root causes of chronic, diet-related disease, economic inequality, and environmental degradation linked to dominant food and agricultural systems. In the following section, we look at types of justice-based interventions that are emerging to address community health, economic development, and sustainable land use through food and faith.

**Table 3: Comparing charitable faith work to justice-based work**

Charitable Work	Justice-based Work
Addresses acute and immediate needs, such as hunger	Addresses chronic needs and root causes such as racial inequity, structural inequality, low access to land and capital, and generational poverty
Solutions meet immediate needs (short term)	Solutions build local capacity and fuel systemic change (long term)
Leadership based on professionalization	Leadership reflects affected community
Top-down needs assessment and program design	Programs are community-led, though they may be supported by faith communities
Expertise is credentialed	Expertise is community-rooted
Relies on external resources (deficit mentality)	Relies on community assets (Asset-based Community Development)
Delivers help (relieves hunger)	Empowers communities to exercise agency and mobilize resources for self-help (builds ownership)
Reductionist: focused on individual problems, incrementally	Holistic: focused on restoring just food systems and relationships

Source: Informant interviews, Smith et al. 2020, Rans 2002, R. R. Joyner and Treyz 2019

# The Landscape of Food and Faith Justice-based Interventions

Our interviews and literature review helped identify a diverse range of food justice-based initiatives by faith communities. We identify three main categories of intervention (health and nutrition, economic development, and land use) and describe the types of activities occurring in each category, including a few examples of organizations doing the work.

## *Health Justice Interventions: Chronic Hunger and Diet-related Disease*

Many US faith communities prioritize health interventions due to high incidence of chronic, diet-related disease throughout the country. Faith-based and faith-placed initiatives can be powerful motivators of health behavior change and sources for healthy, culturally important foods which seek to reduce racial health disparities.

Studies exploring the potential for faith-placed health interventions have increased over the past 20 years. Evidence demonstrates that faith-based organizations and faith communities can serve as viable sites for reducing diet-related chronic diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and cancer, which are disproportionately experienced by Black, Latinx, and Indigenous populations. Researchers and practitioners point to the importance of creating culturally-relevant health interventions that connect to the faith convictions communities hold.

A substantial body of literature describes the successes of *faith-placed* health interventions within Black churches (Campbell et al. 2007; Carson et al. 2012; DeHaven et al. 2004; 2011; Lancaster et al. 2014; Ralston et al. 2014; Robinson et al. 2015; Scarinci et al. 2014; Whitt-Glover et al. 2014; Wilcox et al. 2013; J. Williams 2011).

Multiple studies from our literature review link food and diet to disproportionate occurrences of diabetes and cardiovascular disease amongst US Indigenous communities (Patchell and Edwards 2014; Stang 2009; Welty et al. 2002). This is due to loss of ancestral lands and agricultural practices, restrictive hunting and fishing regulations, lack of cold storage, and lack of access to nearby, well-stocked grocery stores with more healthy or traditional food options

(Stang 2009; Murphy 2019). Rev. Canon Robert Two Bulls of First Nations Kitchen describes the diet of his ancestors as healthy, in contrast to “reservation-era” foods, which are highly-processed commodity products which are not produced locally (Two Bulls 2018). Several research studies demonstrate the potential for improved nutrition and diabetes reduction amongst US Indigenous peoples through the re-introduction of traditional, indigenous foods (Burns Kraft et al. 2008; Patchell and Edwards 2014; Phillips et al. 2014).

Below are several examples of how faith communities address health disparities and chronic disease through faith-based and faith-placed interventions. Faith communities:

- Provide healthy food during and after community events to promote eating that benefits individual health and spiritual wellbeing (A. S. Gross, Myers, and Rosenblum 2020; R. R. Joyner and Treyz 2019; Opalinski, Dyess, and Gropper 2017; Strickler 2017; Two Bulls 2018; Norman Wirzba 2019)
- Serve high-quality, local, healthy, and culturally relevant foods when distributing meals

- Operate “central kitchens” in churches or houses of worship to cook healthy meals for children attending local daycare centers. This model leverages economies of scale by creating a central location for processing, cooking, and packing of healthy foods for deliver to local daycare centers. Most daycare centers are small and do not have the staff or kitchen infrastructure to do this on their own and may, as a result, over rely on convenience processed foods.
- Host health promotion activities and invite health care providers for open clinics at houses of worship (Campbell et al. 2007; Carson et al. 2012; DeHaven et al. 2004; 2011; Lancaster et al. 2014; Ralston et al. 2014; Robinson et al. 2015; Whitt-Glover et al. 2014; Wilcox et al. 2013; L. B. Williams et al. 2013)
- Increase awareness and advocacy on the connection between racial disparities, the built environment, historical outcomes of policy decisions, and the social determinants of health<sup>2</sup>

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2 These include neighborhood and built environments, food environments, healthcare, social and community context (stress, trauma, addiction, and abuse), social inclusion, education, and economic stability. (D. Harris 2018; R. Joyner 2018; R. R. Joyner and Treyz 2019; Stang 2009)

## HIGHLIGHT

### Faith-Based Health Interventions

In some cases, interventions take a *faith-based* approach, explicitly connecting health behaviors with faith convictions or religious narratives.

Example programs include:

- *Eve’s Apple*, a faith-based nutrition education pilot program for Black women in Little Rock, Arkansas (Robinson et al. 2015)
- *FAITH* (Faith-Based Approaches in the Treatment of Hypertension) for Black communities in predominantly Black churches in New York (Lancaster et al. 2014)
- *The GoodNews* (Genes, Nutrition, Exercise, Wellness, and Spiritual Growth) community-based participatory research program focused on cardiovascular disease in Black people (DeHaven et al. 2011)
- *FAN* (Faith, Activity, and Nutrition Program), a church-based intervention program focused on increasing physical activity and fruit and vegetable consumption (Wilson et al. 2013)

## HIGHLIGHTS

### First Nations Kitchen

First Nations Kitchen is a justice-focused, Gospel-based ministry *for Indigenous people by Indigenous people* in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The is a volunteer-run kitchen that provides scratch-cooked, healthy, organic and Indigenous meals to those living in the city's nine-acre Little Earth of United Tribes neighborhood, home to the largest urban Native American community in the US. First Nations Kitchen seek to provide an environment of radical hospitality and cultural empowerment. The organization frames food as medicine, encourages ancestral foods of Indigenous people indigenous, and seeks to eradicate heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and obesity from the native community. Though All Saints Episcopal Indian Mission cooks and provide meals every Sunday, including holidays, served with dignity. Local co-ops donate organic fruits, vegetables, and dairy products and the menu includes wild rice harvested using traditional practices. During COVID-19 pandemic, First Nations Kitchen operated a weekly produce giveaway (Strickler 2017; First Nations Kitchen 2021). For more information see <https://firstnationskitchen.org/>.

### Central Kitchens Pilot Project in North Carolina

In North Carolina, a collaboration of state health agency members, philanthropy, faith communities and researchers are conducting a feasibility study in Hartnett County on the potential for rural United Methodist Churches to serve as central kitchens sites. The model is scratch-cooked, healthy meals prepared in a central kitchens and served to children in rural, early child-care settings. The kitchens will hire local employees and source food locally to promote local economic development. The team has conducted surveys probing for interest with Smart Start agencies, Child Care Resource and Referral agencies and United Methodist Churches. The partnership includes North Carolina Child Care Services Association, UNC Center for Health Promotion Disease Prevention, Resourceful Communities, the Center for Environmental Farming Systems, the Duke World Food Policy Center and the Rural Church Division of the Duke Endowment. For more information see: <https://wfpc.sanford.duke.edu/projects/central-community-kitchens-child-care-nutrition>

## *Economic Justice Interventions: Economic Opportunity and Food Sovereignty*

Communities of faith and US Indigenous communities develop and sustain alternative food systems to build community food sovereignty, economic empowerment, racial equity, and resilience. Their work seeks to uproot dependence on processed foods and consolidated food systems that contribute to food insecurity and undernutrition, especially within BIPOC communities.

Many BIPOC communities have been sustaining alternative food systems as a matter of survival and self-determination for centuries (Penniman 2018; White 2018). Since the founding of the United States, plantation agriculture – and later, agricultural industrialization – disenfranchised communities of color via labor and land. Dominant food and agricultural systems in the U.S. have severely limited the capacity of BIPOC communities to protect and determine cultural foodways (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014; Penniman 2018; Twitty 2017; White 2018).

Despite the pressures of discriminatory government policies farm lending practices, social marginalization, (Daniel 2015) land loss, and food apartheid in rural and urban environments (Penniman 2018), rich agricultural knowledge, skills, and seeds have been preserved and protected for generations by BIPOC growers.

Nineteenth and twentieth century African American scholars and farmers Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, and W.E.B. Du Bois are three of the intellectual predecessors of today's food sovereignty movement within the Black Agrarian tradition. They promoted economic cooperation, group economy, and self-sufficiency for Black, Southern farmers who were denied access to resources (jobs, capital, land). For them, "agriculture was a strategy of resistance and community building", embodied by Black agriculture cooperatives, and collectively-held land assets and food businesses (White 2018). Several of these collective economic endeavors had faith ties. For example, Fannie Lou Hamer's Freedom Farm Cooperative in Sunflower County, Mississippi, was supported by faith communities (Brown, Rev. Dr. Heber 2018).

For Black Christians, Muslims, Indigenous, and Jewish communities, food businesses are a route for achieving economic self-sufficiency and community food sovereignty. For example, pastor and farmer Vernon Johns, who preceded Martin Luther King Jr. at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, advocated for rural Black farmers and Black urban residents to cooperatively control agricultural production and food distribution through restaurants and grocers to promote Black community economic self-sufficiency (Johns 1977). Following this tradition, the Black Church Food Security Network operates farmers markets within Black churches and utilizes church land to provide healthy, affordable, and locally produced food for urban congregations (Brown, Rev. Dr. Heber 2018) (See highlights).

In the early 1970s, the Tohono O'odham Nation of Arizona founded San Xavier Co-op Farm to promote Indigenous food sovereignty. The co-op's founders honor the O'odham's 4,000-year agricultural legacy, grow traditional foods, embody traditional O'odham values such as care for land and animals, and catalyze economic development. In addition to growing food, the co-op holds ceremonies grounded in indigenous spirituality (Patel 2019).

Many of these approaches follow an Equitable Food-Oriented Development (EFOD) framework, as defined by the EFOD Collaborative. The EFOD Collaborative has identified five criteria for EFOD: 1) the work must be equity- and justice-first; 2) it must be place-based; 3) it must use market-based business strategies; 4) it must be led by the community and derive from community organizing; and 5) it must result in community ownership.

Currently, faith communities engage in economic food oriented development through:

- Food-related workforce development: connecting youth to gardening and agriculture to build skills, generate income, improve career prospects, learn from their elders, heal from trauma, connect to the earth, and promote a sense of pride and community belonging (Hermann, Liu-Beers, and Beach 2008; R. R. Joyner and Treyz 2019; Vroblesky 2012).
- Utilizing faith community assets at low-cost such as buildings, industrial kitchens, and land to incubate food enterprise (Brown 2019; Clark 2018; N. L. Parish 2018a; Rans 2002).
- Developing alternative capital flows, such as angel investor networks to support aspiring farmers and food entrepreneurs (Moharram, Dr. Hisham n.d.).
- Supporting small and mid-scale farmers in the community, particularly farmers of color, to boost local economic development (Brown 2019).
- Establishing food cooperatives, community supported agriculture (CSA), and selling value-added products to create jobs, generate income, and spur local economic activity (Patel 2019; Sadeh 2018; Treyz 2017).
- Engaging in advocacy for fair wages and safe working and living conditions for migrant and seasonal farmworkers.
- Providing land access for communities of color and Indigenous nations as a form of reparations (Penniman 2018; Soul Fire Farm 2018).
- Leasing faith-owned land to small farmers to address barriers to land and capital for young and BIPOC growers (Agrarian Trust, n.d.; Clark 2018; Rev. N. L. Parish, n.d.; N. L. Parish 2018b; Winston 2018; Wilson 2018).

To truly take an EFOD approach, efforts must be community driven and community owned. Many of the initiatives noted above are trending in that direction and increasingly becoming community led and institution supported.

## HIGHLIGHTS

### **The Black Church Food Security Network**

The Black Church Food Security Network (BCFSN) is a network of black churches, founded by Rev. Dr. Heber Brown III of Pleasant Hope Baptist Church in Baltimore, Maryland, Aleya Fraser of Black Dirt Farm, and Rev. Darriel Harris of Center for a Livable Future's Baltimore Food and Faith Project. The ethos of the effort is an asset-based approach in organizing and linking the vast resources of historically African American congregations in rural and urban communities to advance food and land sovereignty. BCFSN is a cooperative food network connecting farmers of color to black churches, with the goal of generating needed income for farmers and providing fresh, health, and affordable produce to Black communities.

As of February 2021, the network includes Black farmers as far north as Sandstone, Minnesota and as far south as Fort Sam Houston, Texas, with the majority of Black farmers located along the east coast from Florida to Massachusetts. The network seeks to create an alternative food system to serve and meet the needs of African American farmers and consumers who do not equally benefit from mainstream, dominant food systems while celebrating Black food identity, culture, history, and spirituality. Food is framed as liberation. For more information see <https://blackchurchfoodsecurity.net/>.

## The Good Tree Farm of New Egypt

The Good Tree Farm is a Muslim-based co-op farm and food enterprise in New Egypt, New Jersey founded by plant scientist and engineer Dr. Hisham Moharram. The business is an incubator for organic food and household product-related businesses and cultivates aspiring food entrepreneurs who need access capital and technical assistance from the Good Tree's network of investors who contribute to a pool of collectively-held resources. The Good Tree Farm creates opportunity for young people from socioeconomically disadvantaged faith communities to engage in farming. Moharram has created an agribusiness internship system. What's more, the business also draws together individuals with modest capital in intentional community—to invest in the diversified farming co-op with the common cause goal of caring for all.

Profits are distributed among all team members based on their contributed hours. The Good Tree Farm self describes as faith in practice, justice activism, and community mobilization. For more information see <http://www.goodtreefarm.com/>.

## FaithLands

FaithLands is a growing national movement to connect and inspire faith communities to use their land in new ways that promote ecological and human health, support local food and farming, enact reparative justice, and strengthen communities. The initiative is led by the Agrarian Trust (<http://agrariantrust.org>) and a multi-faith leadership team working to shape a national dialogue to support faith communities in considering options for their land. The movement has garnered media attention from *CivilEats*, *Yes!Magazine*, *InTheseTimes*, and the *Religion News Service* among others. The long-term goal of the effort is to make church-owned land available for farming, develop faith-based land use partnerships, donate land to be held by a community land trust, restore land directly to Indigenous communities and other communities of color, and create ecological management plans are just some ways that faith communities can promote healing and justice.

An initial endeavor of the movement is the **FaithLands Eastern NC Pilot Project**. Launched in 2019, the pilot is led by a coalition including The Conservation Fund, F.A.R.M.S., the Presbyterian Hunger Program, and Agrarian Trust. The project's overarching goal is to support North Carolina faith communities in making their lands available to historically underserved farmers including African Americans, Native Americans, Latino/Hispanic, Asian Americans, and women in addition to military veterans. For more information see <https://agrariantrust.org/faithlands/>.

## Land Justice Interventions: Access, Preservation, and Healing Connection

Many scholars and practitioners trace the origin of unsustainable and unjust food systems to the rise of industrial agriculture. While industrialized agriculture has dramatically increased commodity food production scales, many argue it has left communities disconnected from the land and their sources of food, producing a wide range of physical, spiritual and ecological ailments. In response, many practitioners promote solutions which seek to revitalize agricultural knowledge, regenerative and organic practices, and spiritual connections to the land and creation.

Literature on food, faith, and regenerative agriculture focuses on the theological, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of food production and consumption. In our research, we found the majority of work related to this theme reflected Christian or Jewish religious traditions.

Many authors describe the prevailing industrial agricultural system based on the commodification of plant and animal life as unfaithful to scripture, which instructs balanced relationships with land, neighbors, and creation (Bahnson and Wirzba 2012; Wirzba 2011, A. Gross 2013). Commercial agricultural practices and industrialized eating habits intensify environmental degradation and global

climate destabilization, diminishing soil health, contaminating land and water, emitting excess greenhouse gases, and mistreating farmworkers and animals alike (Bahnson and Wirzba 2012; Carter n.d.; Carter, Dr. Christopher 2018; Davis 2008; A. Gross n.d.; “Come to the Table: How People of Faith Are Relieving Hunger and Sustaining Local Farms in North Carolina (2nd Edition)” 2015; Kirschenmann 2010; ornelas 2018; N. L. Parish 2018b; Barlow 2012; Wirzba 2011). Some argue that land and animal-honoring theology, ethics, and spirituality and their corresponding practices have been greatly diminished and even destroyed in the wake of agriculture’s industrialization (Berry 2002; Jung 2004; Wirzba 2015).

Some Christian theologians writing on food and faith consider how anthropocentrism – a view that centers humankind in the created world – as well as patriarchy, colonialism, and white supremacy cause abusive practices within food and agricultural systems. Dominant Christian theologies can problematically center human rationality while diminishing the significance of physical existence and relationships for human being and flourishing. The result often privileges wealthy, white men who define the standards, while those considered irrational – including land, animals, women and people of color – become vulnerable to exploitation (Carter, Dr. Christopher 2018; Jennings 2011; Wirzba 2011; 2015). For these authors, today’s food systems challenges are related not solely to institutional, technological, or political problems, but to theological, ethical, and spiritual errors that obscure faithful understanding of land, soil, animals, humans, and their relationship (Davis 2008).

Multiple authors have published studies on faith-

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*Across faith and religious traditions, worshipers are often taught that they have a moral obligation to take care of themselves, their communities and the planet. As climate change threatens communities in the U.S. and throughout the world, public health and faith-based groups are relying on each other to create a safer, healthier environment.*

—Julia Haskins

*Faith-based groups making climate, health a priority: Public joins faith groups on food access, sustainability, The Nation’s Health, Vol 47, Issue 5, July 2017*

based and faith-placed farms, gardens, dinner churches, and food hubs across the United States (Ayres 2013; Bahnson and Wirzba 2012; A. M. Krone 2016; N. L. Parish 2018a; Sellers-Peterson 2017; Vanderslice 2019; Wirzba 2015; Norman Wirzba 2019). These sites seek to rework theological frameworks to promote creation care (faith-based environmentalism) and the mutual flourishing of people and places (Bahnson and Wirzba 2012; Davis 2009; Harker and Bertsche Johnson 2016; A. M. Krone 2016; Snyder and Scandrett 2011; Wirzba 2015; Snyder and Scandrett 2011). In the last twenty years, there has been a rise of faith-based and faith-placed community gardens and farms amongst mainline Protestant, primarily white, Christian congregations to promote local, healthy, and sustainable food production. This work differs from food sovereignty work in that its objectives are not primarily motivated by economic conditions like food access or survival.

Faith communities seek to regenerate land and heal disconnection by:

- Providing Sabbath rest for the land, which promotes soil health and agricultural sustainability (A. M. Krone 2016; A. Krone 2018; Passow 2018)
- Practicing regenerative agricultural methods and organic gardening to grow healthy food improve soil health, mitigate climate change, and sequester soil carbon (Bahnson and Wirzba 2012; D. Harris 2018; N. L. Parish 2018b; Sellers-Peterson 2017).
- Writing liturgies attentive to land to embody connections between people, food, and places (Hackney and McCullough 2019; N. L. Parish 2018a).
- Stewarding the land in ways that promote self-care, trauma healing, and a spiritual connection to ancestors, heritage, and community (M. Harris 2017; R. R. Joyner and Treyz 2019; N. L. Parish 2018a; Barlow 2012; Winston 2018; Dele 2018).
- Eating sustainably, locally-grown, and prepared food as an act of worship in small groups or “dinner church” settings (Hackney and McCullough 2019; Vanderslice 2019).

## HIGHLIGHT

### Native American Agriculture Fund

#### The Native American Agriculture Fund

(NAAF) is a nonprofit agency dedicated to supporting tribal food sovereignty by serving the needs of Indigenous farming and ranching communities. The fund came into being as a result of the Keepseagle class action lawsuit whereby the federal government was found to have discriminated against Indigenous farmers and ranchers. NAAF is intended to serve the needs of all US Indigenous tribal nations and communities. A key element of the fund's work is administer financial distributions to Native Community Development Financial Institutions. These CDFIs then provide loans to Indigenous ranchers and farmers for seed purchases, farmland upkeep, equipment and building infrastructure, livestock purchases, repairs, and all of the day to day agricultural needs that require financing. NAAF also seeks to attract aspiring young Indigenous people to farming and ranching careers; to promote traditional Indigenous and sustainable agricultural practices; to promote Indigenous culture and identity; and to provide ongoing technical support, education and networking opportunities. For more information see <http://nativeamericanagriculturefund.org/>

## HIGHLIGHTS

### HAZON: The Jewish Lab for Sustainability

Hazon is faith-based environmental organization in the U.S. and is building a movement that strengthens Jewish life and contributes to a more environmentally sustainable world for all. As the Jewish lab for sustainability, Hazon affects change through immersive experiences and inspires individuals and communities to make specific commitments to change with a particular focus on food systems. The effort is rooted in seven core principles: 1) vibrant experiential education that renews Jewish Life; 2) connections between Jewish traditions and the outdoors food, farming, and ecology; 3) intellectual excellence and rigor; 4) justice, diversity, and inclusion; 5) a focus on leadership, because leadership amplifies impact; 6) healthy and sustainable actions; and 7) investing in our own people. The organization seeks to achieve the following by the end of 2022: to engage 50,000 people in a Jewish experience that has shifted their understanding of what it means to be Jewish; to create a network of 600 new leaders with the skills to engage people in a national movement; and for at least 180 Jewish organizations and 10,000 Jewish people to have made specific commitments towards a more ethical, sustainable food system. For more information see <http://hazon.org/about/mission-vision/>. In addition, HAZON also manages a Jewish-based, kosher and kashrut food enterprise located in the Housatonic Valley of Connecticut. The enterprise runs a CSA program and sells value-added products, which generate income to support the financial sustainability of Adamah's certified organic 10-acre farm. A team of young adult fellows (ages 20-30) tend to the farm and learn agricultural skills while studying the spiritual dimensions of food from a Jewish perspective. For more information, see <https://hazon.org/isabella-freedman/adamah-foods/>

### Plainsong Farm & Ministry

The Plainsong Farm & Ministry in Rockford, Michigan is a non-profit Christian faith-based farm and ministry that grows food, facilitates worship experiences (e.g. "Blessing of the Fields," Sabbath services) and provides educational opportunities such as seasonal worship and discipleship programs which include shared meals. Plainsong Farm grows organic vegetables and heirloom wheat, which is milled locally and distributed to member churches through a CSA to bake communion bread. The goal of this ecumenical non-profit organization is to promote agricultural biodiversity and regenerate soil while reconnecting people, places, and God. On a national level, the organization seeks to help churches use land for good: to grow food, make justice, and mitigate the effects of climate change. For more information see <https://plainsongfarm.com/>.

# Barriers to Success in Food & Faith Work

There are several barriers to implementation of justice-centered food and faith work at local, regional and national scales. US policy and culture were founded on principles of colonialism. Colonialism led to the violent disenfranchisement of Indigenous peoples from their lands and ancestral foodways. The enslavement of Africans and stolen labor helped to establish the economy of the US, while post-Civil War reconstruction did little to provide resources, rights and protections for freed slaves and their descendants. American policy has continuously disadvantaged BIPOC by restricting access to land ownership; restricting access to or dismantling business ownership; forcing BIPOC families off farms through intimidation and private property laws; limiting employment opportunities; restricting where BIPOC communities can buy homes; allowing predatory lending; allowing predatory food marketing; restricting protections for immigrant farm workers and food processing workers, and more (Norton 2020).

Unwinding this cultural, economic, and policy legacy is profoundly challenging. Duke WFPC research on narratives of white dominance in food system policy and practice describes the deeply interconnected and self-reinforcing elements of systemic racism (Conrad 2020). Whiteness is an unnamed presence that shapes the discourse and focus of food system reform. Our country's ideals for health and nutrition are those of white Americans—ignoring the culturally relevant foods of BIPOC Americans. Whiteness helps perpetuate structures of power and privilege that favors white people, and enables white activists and organizations to assume their ideals and emotions are universally shared. Consequently, many historically white-led organizations find that their policies and programs fail to resonate with BIPOC communities.

Funding can also be difficult to obtain for community-based food and faith initiatives, and this is often magnified for BIPOC communities. Power differentials such as those between white-led funding organizations and BIPOC practitioners pose significant challenges to forward progress in food and faith work. Power differentials manifests most strikingly in monetary terms: white-led organizations and philanthropy hold significantly greater financial resources than community-based organizations, many of which are led by BIPOC people. It is often difficult for BIPOC practitioners to define frameworks, needs, challenges and solutions when food and faith frameworks are devised by white-led organizations. These frameworks can also push non-Christian ways of knowing to the margins.

Community-led and faith-based initiatives often lack access to resources and “look” very different than a typical business enterprise in terms of business practices, finances, staffing and payroll. This characteristic is compounded by the effects of historic and systemic racial wealth gaps—and ongoing discrimination in assessment of lending risk readiness. They may also lack the required social capital or credibility to garner respect and support from scientific, academic or environmental communities.

# Recommendations & Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has urgently highlighted our continued need for the role that faith communities play as a part of the food security safety net. But while there will always been a necessary role for faith communities to play in emergency food provision, we can help expand the toolkit for this community to engage in activities that address the root causes of food insecurity. Philanthropy, academia, and non-profits providing technical assistance all have an important role to play to this end.

**For academic institutions and researchers to more effectively support food and faith practitioners, particularly BIPOC practitioners, we recommend:**

- Build relationships with, study, and write about faith-based practitioners, particularly BIPOC practitioners, with the goal of uplifting and sharing their work. Academic visibility for such work translates into validation, and this has the potential to influence philanthropic interest and support.
- Greater investment in scholarly writing at the intersection of food, land, and environment from more religious perspectives (non-Christian), including examining topics of race.
- Consider the importance of a faith-based as opposed to faith-placed orientation in the design of community interventions. Work to create culturally-relevant, culturally-appropriate health interventions that incorporate the particular faith, ethics, and spirituality of the population the intervention seeks to serve.
- Advocate for and support specialty groups within academic societies (such as the American Academy of Religion) focused on food systems to encourage study of the ways in which faith communities address food systems challenges, both in theory and in practice.

**For philanthropy to more effectively address root causes and challenges related to food systems issues, we recommend:**

- Provide or support greater technical assistance provision for grant writing to address the lack of capacity of community-level faith-based organizations.
- Develop partnerships with community development financial institutions. Provide free/ low cost capital as collateral for faith-based BIPOC food-oriented business startups or expansion financing. HAZON's Adamah Foods and First Nations Kitchens are great faith-based business examples that provide culturally relevant food.
- Support greater flexibility/more openness with regards to the grant deliverables and requirements for faith-based practitioners working at the community level to address the specific needs and goals of these practitioners and their organizations.
- Seek input from faith practitioners about what constitutes success of a grant project. The foundation's measures of success should support the community's ideas of success. When philanthropy's measures of success do not complement the community's goals the disconnect will result in a lack of resonance with the community.
- Adopt Equitable Food Oriented Development (efod.org) project principles and support faith-based food justice investment that emphasizes community ownership, community wealth, and wellbeing.
- Prioritize investment in faith-based practitioners of color engaging in food sovereignty work at

We hope this report has helped you understand the spectrum of activities embraced by food-and-faith practitioners, including the expanding toolkit of justice-related activities that will help communities address the root causes of food insecurity.

the grassroots/community level to address the root causes of food systems challenges and to promote self-determination and self-sufficiency for BIPOC communities.

- Invest in conferences and convenings that bring together academics, funders, and practitioners of various faith backgrounds for knowledge sharing, problem solving, and capacity building to promote the cross-pollination of ideas and relationship building.
- Provide funding for BIPOC and non-Christian practitioners to share their stories with a wider audience to disrupt prevailing, dominant narratives grounded in white, male ways of knowing and working.

For **non-profit organizations** providing technical assistance, we recommend:

- Advocate for churches/synagogues/mosques etc. to leverage their existing assets in creative and justice-oriented ways to address food-related community needs.
- Create opportunities for practitioners across faiths to routinely convene, build relationships, and share lessons learned, with the goal of promoting the cross-pollination of ideas and more powerful partnerships.
- Promoting Equitable Food-Oriented Development (efod.org) to churches/synagogues/mosques/ First Nations communities to promote equitable local economic growth.
- Support networking among BIPOC food and faith practitioners to increase the spread of best practices.

“

*One of the best ways for us to remember our connection to soil and our need to take care of it is to start paying more attention to food and the ways that we eat. Eating is fundamental. Every time we take a bite or gulp we bear witness to the fact that our life consists of a bewildering variety of memberships that we call creation. Eating joins us in multiple ways to the lives of microorganisms and worms in the soil, to the gifts of photosynthesis and soil regeneration, to the lives of plants and animals, and to the diverse cultural and culinary traditions that give us tasty recipes and times of feasting and fellowship. Food simply is the source of our health. When properly engaged, it can also be a source of justice, peace and joy.*

- Norman Wirzba

*Soil, Food & Faith: whoever is joined with all the living has hope, , Presbyterian Record, Vol 132, Issue 3, Mar 2008*

# Appendix A: Expanded Commentary - Food & Faith Themes Across Faith Traditions

## Connecting to Land

**Indigenous communities** practice and preserve physical, social and spiritual connection to land, considering the land and all surrounding life *kin* (Salmón 2000). The “Harmony Way” involves living in balance with all things (Woodley 2012; Rybak and Decker-Fitts 2009). Many Indigenous cosmologies do not privilege human beings over other creatures or the earth; human beings are creatures embedded in a web of created beings and places who are teachers (Cooley 2019; Coyhis and Simonelli 2008; Kimmerer 2013). First Nations creation narratives are deeply rooted in the natural world, illustrating the inherent connection between people and land (Rybak and Decker-Fitts 2009). Whereas intimate connection to land through food is essential to cultural identity, disconnection from the land through dispossession or displacement impairs spiritual expression individually and collectively (AbuLughod 2018; Romero-Briones 2018).

In the **Jewish tradition**, the Torah contains prescriptions for sustainable agricultural methods, land use, and just treatment of farm laborers and migrants (Davis 2009). Living in *shalom*, or in a state of wholeness, requires right relationship with the land. The practice of *shmita*, giving land a Sabbath rest, is described in the books of Exodus and Leviticus to ensure the land’s fertility is preserved, to prevent its exploitation, and to enable sustainable crop production and income generation (A. Krone 2015). While *Shmita* is not widely practiced by American Jews, a number of Jewish farmers are recovering the practice as part of a movement for sustainable and regenerative Jewish agriculture (Passow 2018).

**Christian** food and faith scholars and practitioners also look to biblical texts for wisdom on sustainable land use and reconciliation with degraded landscapes impacted by industrial agriculture. Restoring right relationship with land requires honoring God’s creation and fighting against exploitative, oppressive relationships with land,

animals, plants and people that have become dominant in Western culture (Bahnsen and Wirzba 2012).

Similarly, **Islam** requires living in balance – or *mizan* – with creation, which includes honoring land, animals, agricultural workers and the food they provide (Nasr 2002). The Quran warns readers not to disrupt the balance of creation, and encourages Muslims pursue justice – ‘*adl* or *qist* – by honoring all living and nonliving beings to please the Creator (Nayed 2008; Timani 2012). Particularly in Sufi and Shia traditions and the ‘*Alid* tradition in which they are rooted, all created entities have a soul and obey Divine laws. All creation is ‘*amanat* – entrusted by God for human care – and manifests Divine intellect (Barazangi, Zaman, and Afzal 1996; Moharram 2018).

## Responding to Food Insecurity

Many **Indigenous** leaders and communities fight food insecurity caused by centuries of land dispossession and displacement. Government food assistance programs on tribal reservations often promote dependence on corporate food systems. Many indigenous-led advocacy organizations seek to rebuild indigenous foodways to target hunger’s root causes. The [First Nations Development Institute’s Nourishing Native Foods & Health](#) program provides small grants for Indigenous agriculture. [The NATIFS Indigenous Food Lab](#), [First Nations Kitchen](#), [Café Gozhóó](#), and others are working to revitalize indigenous cuisine to address health disparities and food insecurity within many Indigenous communities (Rawal 2020).

In **Jewish** traditions, the practice of *tzedakah* – meaning justice, righteousness, or charitable giving – encourages Jews to address hunger in times of feast and famine (Stein and Isaacs 2017). The law of *peah* mandates that Jewish farmers leave the corners of their fields unharvested so the hungry can take and eat the produce of the land freely (Raboy 2000). *Tzedekah*, *peah*, and *shmita* provide a food security

safety net for those without land or resources to buy food (A. Krone 2015).

Biblical texts encourage **Christians** to feed the hungry as an expression of their love for Christ (e.g. Matthew 25:35) (Bahnson and Wirzba 2012; Everett 2019; Hackney and McCullough 2019; N. L. Parish 2018a). In his ministry, Jesus performed miracles to feed the hungry, inspiring people across time and space to similarly address food insecurity in their communities. The Eucharist meal foregrounds the sharing of bread as central to Christian hospitality and admonishes Christians to resolve conflict and share food with those in need (e.g. 1 Corinthians 11-13)(Jung 2004).

One of the pillars of **Islam**, *zakat*, or charity, mandates that all Muslims tithe with monetary contributions or gifts in-kind (Ali 2016; Barazangi, Zaman, and Afzal 1996; Clarke and Tittensor 2016; Richardson 2004). This divine commandment and act of worship seeks to mitigate food insecurity within Muslim communities (Ali 2016). *Sadaqa* encourages charitable giving beyond the required percentage prescribed in *zakat* (Clarke and Tittensor 2016). Additionally, *al musharakah*, “the law of sharing,” mandates that farmers share food with those who cannot buy it (Barazangi, Zaman, and Afzal 1996).

## Cultivating Faithful Foodways

For **Indigenous** communities in the US, growing, harvesting, and eating traditional foods are crucial for the formation and maintenance of cultural identity that connect indigenous peoples to ancestors both spiritually and materially (Cooley 2019; Kimmerer 2013; Murphy 2019; Romero-Briones 2018). Indigenous food sovereignty movements seek not only to reclaim the means of agricultural production, but spiritual self-determination through culturally-important foods (Romero-Briones 2018). In **Judaism**, the *kashrut* laws outline dietary proscriptions and food preparation practices for Jews. To eat *kashrut* – meaning “fit” or “appropriate” in Hebrew – is to eat food that is holy in the eyes of God (Winner 2010). *Tza’ar ba’alei hayyim*, the Jewish law which forbids causing suffering to living creatures without cause, mandates compassion for animals and prohibits their exploitation or abuse (A. Gross 2013). Jewish foodways therefore attend

to the ethical treatment of land, animals, and farmworkers (A. S. Gross 2014; A. Krone 2018). Food is also central to the maintenance and renewal of cultural identity in Jewish practice (Greenspoon 2005).

Those of **Muslim** faith follow Quranic prohibitions against eating pork and pork products. *Halal* laws dictate which foods are appropriate to eat and how those food should be ritualistically and ethically prepared from production to slaughter to consumption (Raudvere 2014).

Most **Christians** find permission to abandon Jewish dietary laws such as *kashrut* in the New Testament (e.g. Romans 14, 1 Timothy 4, 1 Corinthians 10). However, Christian theologians and activists newly concerned with animal welfare and the health impacts of industrialized meat production affirm the sacred value of animal life to encourage nonviolent animal agriculture and balanced diets (Clough 2014). A minority of Christians, notably Seventh-day Adventists, practice vegetarianism for faith-based reasons (Grant and Montenegro 2014; Rapport 2014).

## Embodying Ritual Practices

For many **Indigenous** peoples in the US, traditional foods and ceremonial dishes constitute identity-forming connections to the ancestors and ancestral homelands. Lack of access to traditional, unprocessed, and healthy indigenous foods impairs these spiritual connections, while the revitalization of native foodways strengthens them (Phillips et al. 2014; Romero-Briones 2018; Two Bulls 2018). In **Islam**, the pillar of faith known as *sawm* requires that Muslims fast during Ramadan if they are able to, or pay the *zakat* tithe (Raudvere 2014). This practice of atonement is believed to purify and cleanse the body, sanctify life, and enable a closer relationship with Allah, the Creator (Nasr 2002; Raudvere 2014). The practice also serves as a tangible reminder of the experience of hunger, generating compassion for those suffering from food insecurity (Esposito 2011; Nasr 2002). The Persian or Iranian Parsi new year, known as Navroz, Nowruz, or Farmer’s Day, connects the renewal of land and vegetation on the spring equinox to spiritual renewal and recommitment through sharing ritual foods (Sharma and Yosufi 2018).

**Christians** practice the sacrament of communion, or the Eucharist, breaking bread and drinking wine in remembrance of Christ. “Breaking bread,” at the communion table or through a shared meal connects Christians to God and to one another. Practices of hospitality, especially with those on the margins, are central to faithful witness. Food is sacramental in the context of communion, though for many Christians, food’s sacramentality applies to food preparation, cultivation, and eating (Wirzba 2011).

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# Appendix C: Interview Guides

## VERSION A: FOOD AND FAITH ACADEMICS

- Tell me about your research/area of expertise in the food and faith realm
- As you see them, what are the **biggest challenges to research** progress [IN YOUR AREA OF EXPERTISE]?
- Biggest challenges to progress in **policy and practice** [in your area of expertise]?
- What are the **biggest opportunity areas** in food and faith?
- What are the most successful programs or best practices?
- **Who has the influence/leverage** to help address these challenges and create opportunities? *[leverage federally or locally]*
- Broadly in the food and faith research field, what recent **trends** can you identify?
- Moving into the policy sphere: in your opinion, what are the **key [federal/state] policies** affecting food and faith [in your area of expertise]?
- *[Helping / hurting / conflicting]*
- In what ways could your work be **better connected to the food policy space**? *[horizontal disconnects]*
- What **barriers exist in translating** your research into policy and practice? *[vertical disconnects]*
- What **solutions** would you suggest? Any bright spots you can highlight?
- For assessing the gap between food and faith and policy knowledge, who/what (other than yourself) are the **best sources** in the literature (organizations, individuals, key annual reports)?
- What outcomes would you like to see from the Food and Faith meeting in November? Interest in scholarly output?
- Are there **any other comments** you would like to add? Things we've missed?

Thank you very much for your time.

## VERSION B: PRACTITIONER

- Tell me about your organization's work related to food and faith
- What are the main objectives of the program/organization?
- What are the key groups your organization interacts with or collaborates with?
- Who are the most influential players (either persons or organizations) who shape the food and faith space?
- What kind of influence do they have?
- Who is left out of key conversations about food and faith?
- What policies get in the way of your work? What policies are helping? *[example]*
- Where, if anywhere, do policies *conflict*?
- What best-practice model programs or policies can you identify?
- What are the unique challenges your organization faces?
- What gaps in community resources exist (financial and otherwise)?
- What are your top two barriers to doing your work at the level which you'd like to?
- What are the top two things that would be most helpful for you to do your work more effectively?
- Are there different challenges for different parts of the population?
- What community strengths can be leveraged here?
- What is changing in the food and faith context, in local or broader trends?
- What changes need to happen to help the field address these challenges?
- What food policies would you prioritize?
- What outcomes would you like to see from the food and faith convening in fall 2018?
- Are there any other comments you would like to add? Things we've missed?

Thank you very much for your time.



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