Farming Into the Future by Centering Farmworkers

A Deep Dive Into What Diversified Vegetable Farm Employees Value in a Workplace

Sarah Janes Ugoretz , Anita Adalja, Rue Policastro

"To be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality." - bell hooks

To all of the farmers who made this resource possible – thank you.

Meet the Team

Anita Adalja (all pronouns)
Anita has spent nearly 15 years working on farms including non-profit, for-profit, urban and rural farms in New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, California, Washington, D.C., and New Mexico. In 2019 she founded Not Our Farm, a non-profit farmworker storytelling and power building project. She is also an okra farmer at Ashokra Farm and a proud food safety nerd. Anita is a USDA HGAP+ auditor, Produce Safety Alliance lead trainer and a food safety specialist with La Semilla Food Center where she enjoys exploring the intersections of farm food safety with dignified labor conditions.

Rue Policastro (they/them)
Rue is a year-round production farmer and a worker owner at Owl's Nest Cooperative Farm just a few miles outside of Washington, DC. Since 2018 they've been farming certified naturally grown vegetables for neighbors at a nearby farmers market, a 200-member CSA, and a small amount of local restaurant and food access wholesale. Rue gets excited about the perfect head of bok choy, a good stand of crimson clover cover crop, and collaborative decision-making practices. They keep farming because they love growing delicious food for people they know, and because they believe in the magic that happens in the field with a small but mighty team who cares.

Sarah Janes Ugoretz (she/her)
Sarah works with the University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension and FairShare CSA Coalition where she supports diversified vegetable farmers with their farm labor needs. She provides high-level mentorship for the Organic Vegetable Farm Manager Apprenticeship and is a co-creator and trainer on two labor management training programs – Becoming the Employer of Choice and Training (BTEC) and Training and Education for Aspiring Managers (TEAMs). Her PhD focused on supporting long-term career pathways for farmers working in vegetable production, and this publication is part of her doctoral dissertation! Sarah is passionate about collaborative work that builds positive labor experiences on farms. She works closely with farmers in all aspects of her work and also draws from her past experience as a farm employee.

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Table of Contents

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Designed and illustrated by Liv Froehlich

NOT OUR FARM

Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

FAIRSHARE
CSA COALITION

NORTH CENTRAL SARE
Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education

Who Is This Resource For?

"We all do better when we all do better." - Paul Wellstone, U.S. Senator and activist

- New farm owners who want to create a farm that centers their values around labor
- Established farm owners who want to center workers on the farm but are unsure how to do this while also keeping their business afloat
- Farmworkers who want to see a future working on farms
- Farmers who want to engage in peer learning while advancing strong labor practices on their own farms
- Farmers who want to build a lasting and supportive community of practice in this space
- Collaborators who are working to support sustainable career paths in farming

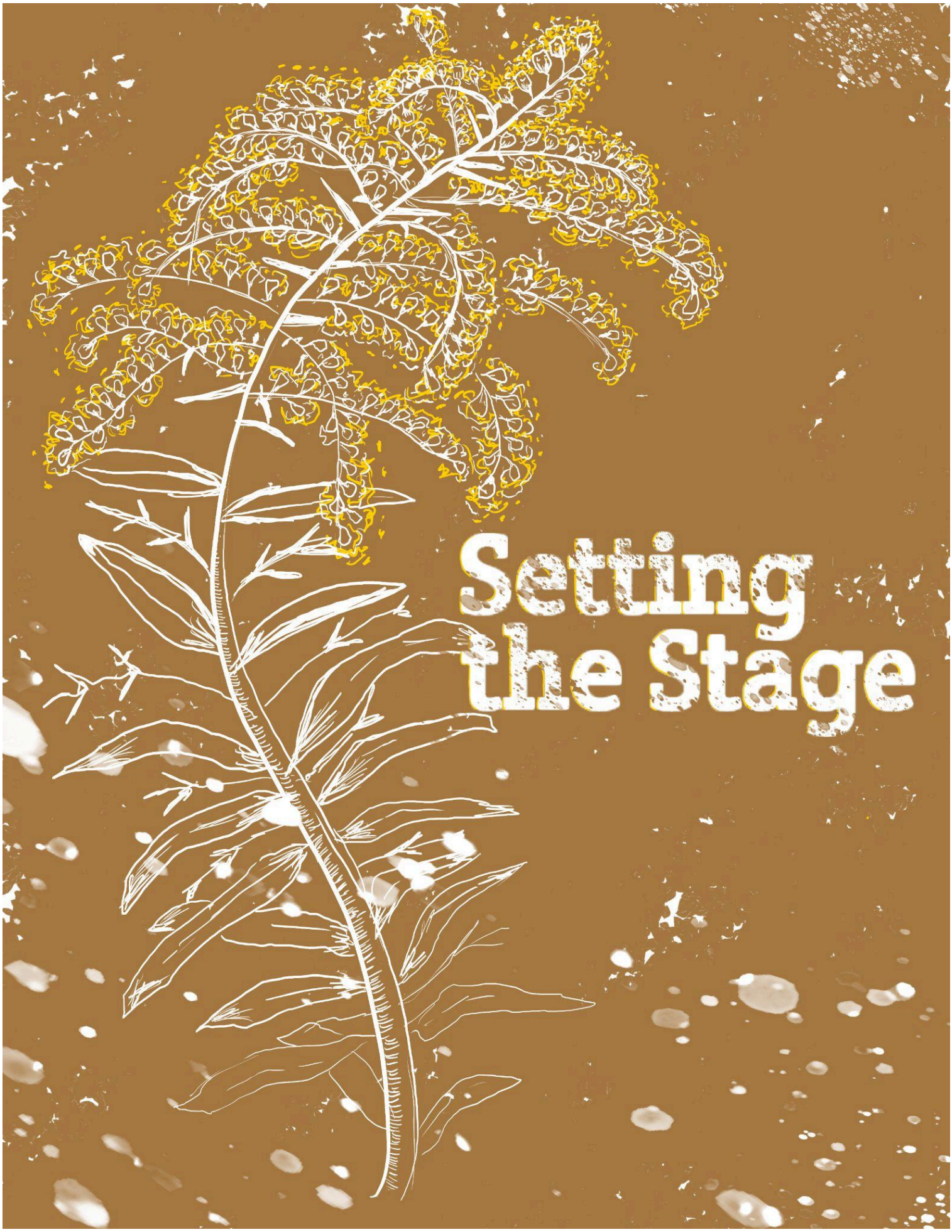
What Is Our Goal?

To provide individuals working on diversified vegetable farms with information, examples, and resources that support long-term career paths for farmworkers, enhance farmer quality of life, and strengthen farm businesses.

We know that if you're reading this, you probably have important things to contribute to this discussion. With that in mind, we are treating this as a living document so it can better reflect farmers' experiences while providing support around evolving needs over time. If you have stories, questions, or resources you'd like to share with us, please get in touch with Sarah (sjanes@wisc.edu).

A Note on Terminology

Throughout this resource, we use a few different terms to refer to people working in farming. We use "farm owners" to refer to farmers who have an ownership stake in a farm business, knowing they may also be employees of that business. We use "farm employees" and "farmworkers" to refer to individuals who do not have ownership in the farm business that employs and compensates them. And we use "farmers" to refer to these groups as a whole, with the knowledge that many who steward the land use this term to identify themselves – whether or not they own a farm business. A final note: While farm owners hosting apprentices and interns may also find this resource valuable, we have crafted this with formal on-farm employment opportunities in mind.



Setting the Stage

Setting the Stage

Across the country, farmworkers provide the labor, skill, and care that make many diversified vegetable farms possible. And in an industry as labor-intensive as this one, farm owners increasingly draw direct connections between their workforce and the long-term health of their businesses. Yet a growing number of employers have struggled to find and keep employees on their farms from season to season. As owners grapple with the questions and consequences this dilemma brings, farm employees are confronting major challenges of their own. And many have been left asking whether it is even possible to build a sustainable, long-term career as a farmworker in this industry. Can individuals working on farms experience a decent quality of life and earn a wage that supports not only themselves, but their families as well?

These questions are deeply intertwined with the history of agriculture and the value of labor in this country. Our agricultural legacy is one of dispossession and enslavement, of white heteronormative land ownership, and of what many recognize as "a stunning erasure" that obscures the contributions of farmworkers (Guthman, 2014; Bowens, 2015; Leslie et al., 2019). Over centuries, agriculture has profited immensely from the exploitation and oppression of farmworkers, and one of the most impactful means of achieving this has been through federal legislation.

> ***"Capitalism and racism did not break from the old feudal order, but rather evolved from it to produce a modern world system of racial capitalism dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide." - Maywa Montenegro de Wit (2021), citing Cedric Robinson (1983)***

Following the Great Depression, the federal government passed two laws – the National Labor Relations Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act – both of which largely remain in place today. These two laws formally recognized and protected agriculture as an *exceptional* industry, excluding farmworkers from many of the workplace protections extended to other industries – like the right to organize and collectively bargain, the observation of the 40-hour work week, and the payment of overtime wages (Weiler et al., 2016; Gray, 2013). And it was primarily farmworkers' citizenship status and race that provided the justification for this exception (Sbicca, 2018).

> ***"We recall the New Deal as a landmark victory for workers rights. That was true with some important exceptions, and those exceptions still have violent impacts on people everyday." - Charlie Mitchell, Farmer-Labor Solidarity Organizer***

All of this – and more – is woven into what it means to be a farmworker today. Yet it is also important to recognize that agricultural workers are not a homogenous group and thus experience the impacts of our agricultural legacy differently. Mexican-born workers make up a disproportionate share of this workforce, and it's further estimated that somewhere between 50 to 75 percent of those laboring in fields across the country today are undocumented (Holmes, 2013; Minkoff-Zern, 2017; USDA-ERS, 2019). Their precarious legal

status, paired with limited mobility and minimal access to labor protections, creates a class of workers "whose labor is considered essential but whose lives, evidently, are not" (Montenegro de Wit, 2021, p. 126; Getz et al., 2008).

Throughout the pages to come, we share the experiences and contributions of a specific and much smaller segment of the agricultural workforce. As a group, these farmworkers tend to be highly educated and speak English as their first language. They are working on smaller scale diversified vegetable operations, and it is likely that a different set of circumstances brought them to this work – namely their interests and passions. On the whole, the individuals who informed this resource likely experience different privileges and protections compared to the majority of our country's agricultural workers.

We identify these differences not to diminish the challenges these workers face, but rather to acknowledge that they exist. The farmworkers we interacted with often use different strategies that allow them to continue doing this work. Many have second jobs to supplement their farm incomes. They face seasonal instability and often qualify for public health benefits like food stamps. And they labor with their bodies to build something they believe in but often do not own. Despite all of this, many of these individuals are eager to build a long-term, professional career in farmworking, and whether and how we address these core challenges will have significant implications for the long-term sustainability of this industry.

> *"The truth is, farmers are deeply hurting. Many of us are struggling to see a future for ourselves in this work as it stands now, but at the same time, we are confident that we can create the farms of our dreams together." - Anita, farmer and founder of Not Our Farm*

While there is no question that agriculture's status as exceptional was meant to protect farm owners and, by extension, the industry at large, we also know that on smaller and medium-sized diversified vegetable farms across the country, farm owners' labor is also undervalued. We know that the agricultural marketplace is volatile, that federal subsidies favor conventional commodity producers, and that consolidation in the food system means that farm owners are more often price takers than price makers (Gray, 2013; Guthman, 2014). Operating within the confines of a capitalist system and layered with the uncertainty of a changing climate, farm owners are often trying to balance increasing input costs, narrow profit margins, debt payments, and the urgency of the work itself. And all the while, they're juggling the very real responsibilities that come with being not only a producer, but an employer as well.

> *"We can't always demand the price we want because of the reality of the marketplace. Our employees continue to get higher wages, the cost of inputs continues to go up, but the price stays the same. And you can only add so much efficiency before you've got nowhere else to go. So there are concerns about until the marketplace starts to support a real price, how much longer can we continue to support a low price?" - Andrea, farm owner*

Moving Forward With a Different Lens

For all of the ways in which their experiences, needs, and wants differ, we believe that farmworkers and owners share a deep passion for the work they are doing. And more often than not, they need one another. Farm owners need employees' labor, skill, and creativity to help their businesses thrive. Farm employees need owners to share the knowledge, expertise, and professional infrastructure that will help them build their careers in this field.

In ways both tangible and abstract, our agricultural history has shaped the realities in which farmers are operating today. And it has influenced our collective perceptions around what we regard as possible and what farmers believe they deserve. **With this in mind, we set out to more deeply explore one small piece of this puzzle: What do farm employees look for and value in a work experience? And by extension, what would support them in being able to pursue farmworking as a long-term career?** Through this discussion, we share some of what we've learned along the way. And let us be clear: we do not see this resource as an end point. Instead, we think of it as one part of an ongoing conversation.

This resource is the product of farmworkers' experiences, wants, and needs. And while workers have agency of their own, it is farm owners who likely have the greatest ability to use this information at the farm level and to create the conditions of support and empowerment that can open the door to long-term partnerships between farmworkers and owners. This work requires vulnerability and a significant amount of energy, and choosing *not* to engage in these ways may feel like the easier path. By providing concrete tips and highlighting farms that are making positive changes right now, we strive to illuminate possible paths forward – paths that are full of opportunities that can ultimately support strong farm businesses as well as the individuals who help those businesses thrive.

> *"Supporting long-term careers for workers is so critical to our industry, and focusing on these practical things can help us keep people long term – which meets their needs and ours." - Kendyl, farm owner*

As owners and workers, the environment within which you are farming extends well beyond the farm itself and is shaped and influenced by much larger factors. Today, the costs of agricultural production are largely externalized. They're passed along to farmers in the form of long hours, low wages, and limited benefits (Shreck et al., 2006). For these costs to be truly recognized, action is needed across the entire food system. We need to support advocacy, public policy, and legislation that advances labor protections, pricing parity, humane immigration reform, land access, reparations, and targeted financial support (Soul Fire Farm, 2022; Levy, 2019; Sbicca, 2018; Minkoff-Zern, 2017; Strohlich & Hamerschlag, 2005). After all, "there is nothing normal, natural, or unchangeable about social institutions society has erected" (Montenegro de Wit, 2021, p. 127). While these factors are huge and may feel like they are outside of our control, there are countless individuals, organizations, and institutions addressing these challenges as they work to construct more just and fair food systems. We see this toolkit as a discrete part of that work, focusing mainly on incremental changes that are possible at the farm level. However, we also link to resources,

support, and potential collaborators that tie this work to some of those broader, essential efforts.

> *"Farming [is] part of the broader dream of creating just systems that are outside of existing systems designed by the state which aren't just, and aren't designed to be just, and aren't going to be just." - Maya, farmworker*

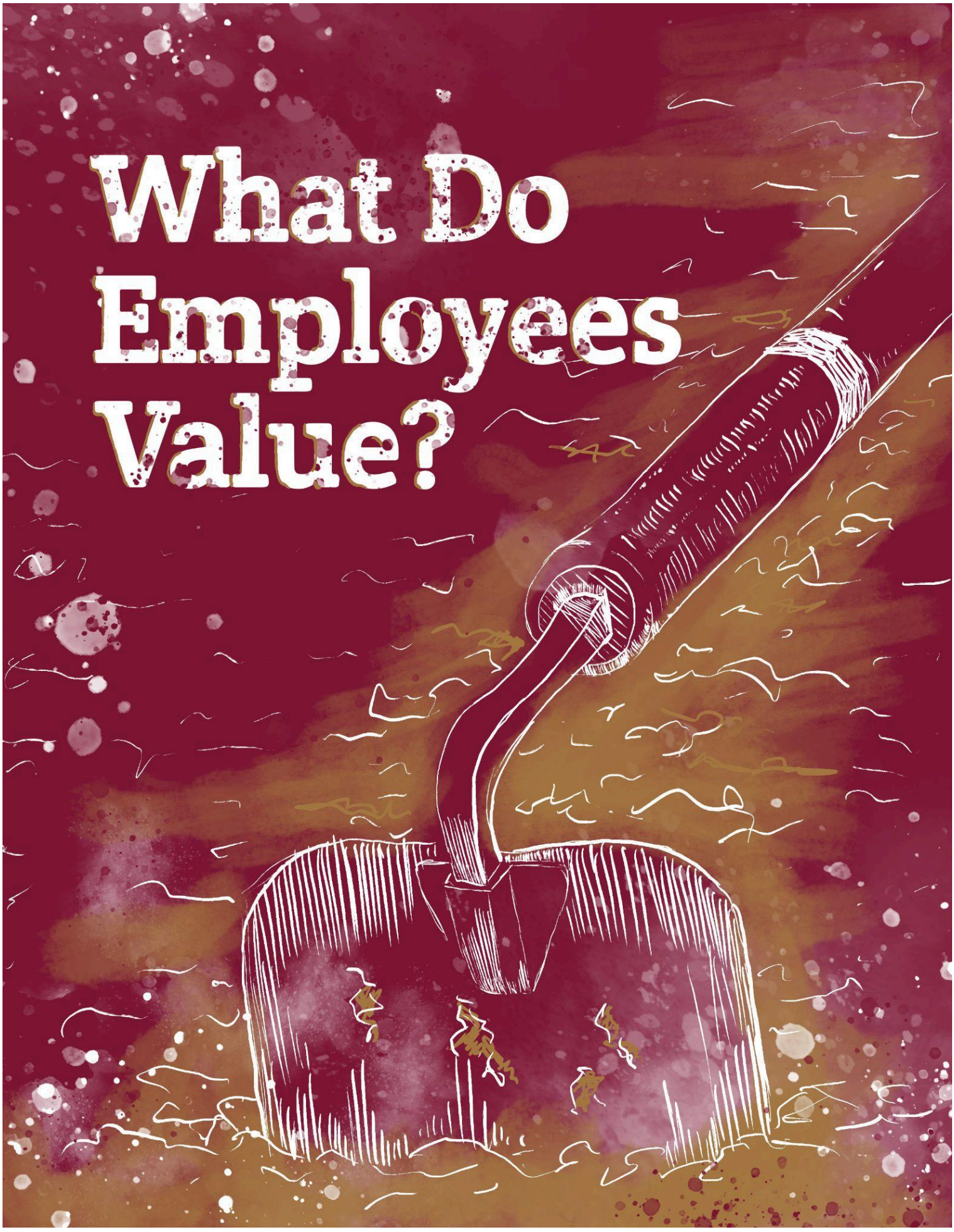
Grounding Questions

When we engage in work that is difficult and that requires us to be vulnerable, we will almost certainly experience some strong emotions. As you dig into these pages, you might feel hopeful, inspired, and proud. You might also feel defensive, frustrated, and angry. All of these emotions are valid, but when we challenge ourselves to go that next step and explore *why* we might be feeling them, we make space for reflection and learning. That process can begin by asking yourself questions like:

- What is being threatened here?
- What am I thinking this conversation says about me?
- Has my top priority shifted to preserving my ego?
- Am I trying to be right, or am I trying to do better?

Ijeoma Oluo offers these questions in her book *So You Want to Talk About Race*. We think they are powerful across many contexts, and we invite you to return to them as you make your way through this resource.

What Do Employees Value?



What Do Farm Employees Value?

What do employees working on farms value in a work experience? Turns out the answer to this question is a lot of different things! In our national *Employee Perspectives on Farm Employment* survey, we asked people: "*How important are each of these factors to you in a farm job?*" For each of the 24 factors you see below, employees assigned a value between 1 and 5, with 1 being "not very important" and 5 being "very important." As you can see, while a number of these factors are associated with varying degrees of financial investment, others – like respectful treatment and effective communication – mainly require intentionality and thoughtfulness.

TABLE 1: *How important are each of these factors to you in a farm job?*

FACTORS	AVG	FACTORS Cont'd	AVG
Respectful treatment	4.91	Farm's mission and vision	4.13
Effective communication	4.80	On-farm education and mentorship	4.08
Safe working conditions	4.75	Full-time employment	4.07
Clear expectations	4.71	Opportunities for advancement	4.02
Workplace culture	4.68	Professional work environment	4.01
Equality of task assignments regardless of gender	4.47	Farm location	3.87
Wages	4.40	Paid time off	3.71
Working outside	4.40	Health insurance /stipend	3.71
Growing practices	4.40	Year-round employment	3.67
Access to food	4.39	Opportunities for profit-sharing	3.36
Proper sanitation, bathroom, and break areas	4.33	Bonuses	2.71
Diversity among co-workers (race, gender, ethnicity, age, etc.)	4.14	Housing	2.25

Priorities and possibilities for engaging with this information will certainly differ from farm to farm. We share this information here, as we get started, because we want to emphasize that there are multiple ways for farm owners to make progress in this space. And perhaps equally encouraging is that those opportunities will likely shift and expand along the way, as farm owners continue to engage with this work.

In addition to the question we explored above in Table 1 where farmworkers rated each of the factors we presented on a set scale, we also asked four open-ended questions:

1. Which 3 factors are most important to you in a farm job?

2. What are the top 2 challenges you face as a farm employee?
3. What are the 2 most important things farm owners can do to attract employees like you?
4. What are the 2 most important things farm owners can do to retain employees like you?

After organizing and coding all of these free-form answers, the same four factors rose to the top of the list across each of these questions. **Those factors are strong communication, a professional and safe work environment, opportunities for growth and advancement, and livable wages**. In the pages to come, we explore each of these areas in greater detail – drawing from our survey and a number of other discussions with farmworkers and owners.

The Data: Quick Facts

In the pages to follow, we draw heavily from our 2022 Employee Perspectives on Farm Employment survey, as well as our in-depth focus groups discussions with farm employees from across the U.S.

Employee Perspectives on Farm Employment

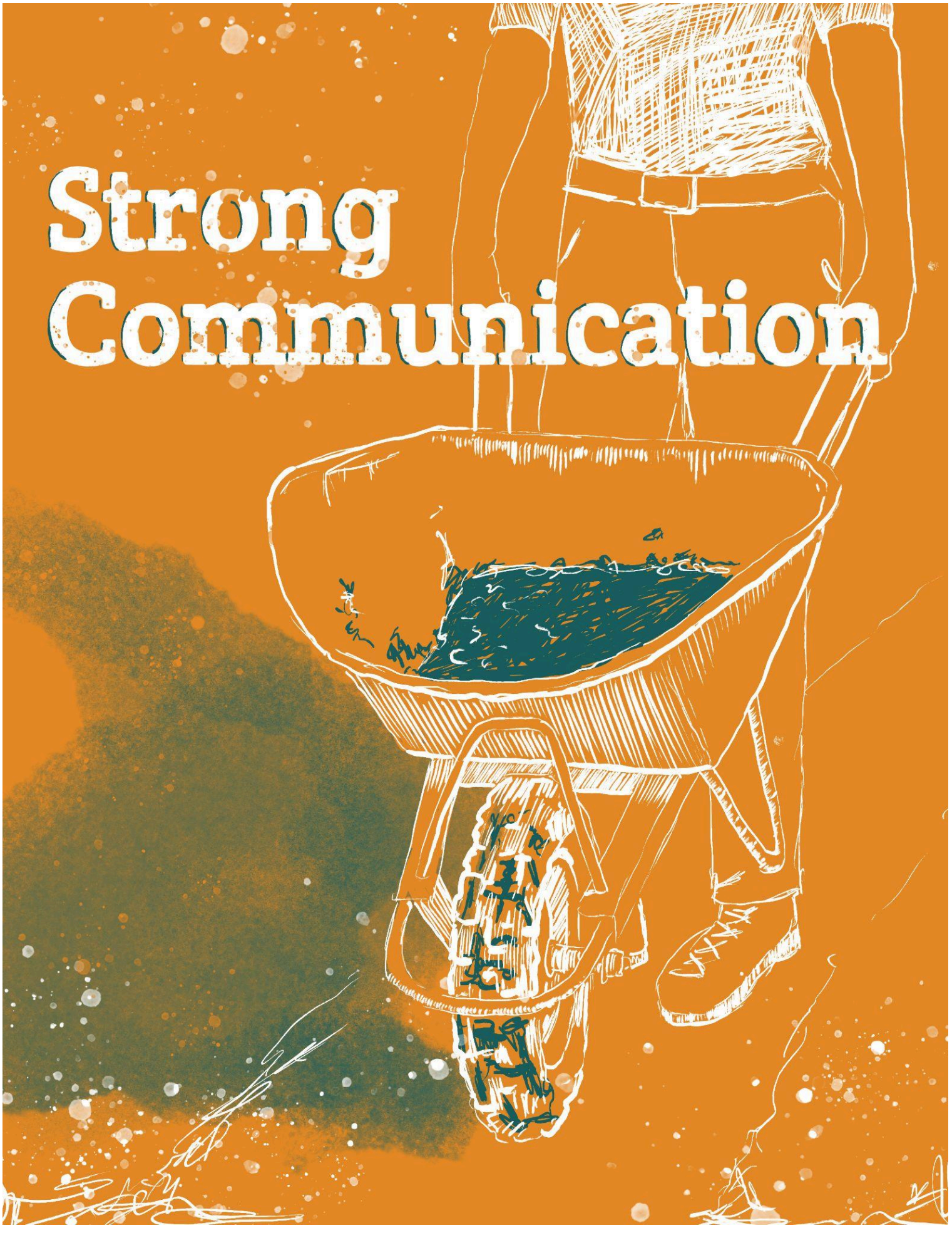
- *Electronic survey administered in English*
- *Responses collected between March and December 2022*
- *32 questions*
- *149 responses from across the country*
- *Administered by FairShare, with input from Not Our Farm and a small number of farmworkers and owners*

Farm Employee Focus Groups

- *6, one-hour discussions conducted in English over Zoom*
- *Held in June and July 2022*
- *6 guiding questions*
- *38 participants from across the country*
- *Co-hosted by Anita with Not Our Farm and Sarah with FairShare*

See page 61 for demographic information as well as details on additional data sources.

Strong Communication



Strong Communication

In a profession as fast-paced and unpredictable as farming, communication is among the most important tools farmers have at their disposal. In our survey, we asked employees: *"What type of education and training would make your farm owner a better employer?"* Coming in at the very top of the list was none other than communication. From verbal communication and nonverbal cues to tools and systems that facilitate the flow of information, employees made it clear that they greatly value regular and respectful two-way communication in their workplace. Going a step further, many also associate a strong communication infrastructure with a professional work environment.

"What type of education and training would make your farm owner a better employer?"

- *Communication: 79%*
- *Employee management: 69%*
- *Conflict resolution: 62%*
- *Racial equity: 54%*
- *Intercultural competence: 54%*
- *Empathy: 51%*
- *Time management: 43%*
- *Data-driven decision-making: 42%*
- *Production training: 33%*

Farm employees mentioned a variety of factors that they value as part of strong communication on the farm, including:

- **Practices** like regular check-ins, formal employee reviews, and crew meetings
- **Tools** like walkie-talkies, white boards, field maps, standard operating procedures (SOPs), shared community agreements, and codes of conduct
- **Systems** like project management and communication apps (Trello, Todoist, Slack, etc.)
- **Skills** like emotional intelligence, active listening, and receiving, delivering, and implementing feedback

> *"Once a month, our owners do check-ins. They'll take a whole week where they sit down and check-in with each employee for 30 minutes to an hour and ask them questions. Some people started calling it a review, but it's not a review of the employee. It's a review of the farm and the managers. They want to see what can be improved. What would make your life easier? Like with the day-to-day stuff. What else do people want to learn? Do they want to focus on a certain aspect of the farm? I really recognize that they care about us. They're not just this money machine that's trying to crank out stuff from us. This is both a job and a learning experience. And they're very aware that burnout is real and they want to take care of their employees. So that's something I've really appreciated with this farm, and it's made me plan to stay here." - Eva, farmworker*

As a farm owner, it may be easier to consider engaging with new tools and systems that support strong communication because they're more concrete and defined. Walkie-talkies are pretty straightforward, for instance, and the efficiency and value of white boards might feel obvious fairly quickly. But when it comes to more interactive, time-intensive practices like check-ins, reviews, and feedback, farm owners might feel some hesitation. Let's consider a few things owners and employees might be thinking here.

Farm Owner Perspectives

- There are just too many competing priorities during the season to make time for regular check-ins and reviews. It can be nice to fit some of this communication work in here and there, but production is what makes this farm money. If that work doesn't get done, this farm won't exist.

- I got into this profession because I wanted to grow food, not because I wanted to be a Human Resources manager.

- Sometimes I just don't have the energy for this emotional labor. I want to hear what employees think, but do I actually have the bandwidth to act on that information? And if I don't, that might lead to resentment and disengagement.

- It's hard to know how someone is going to react to feedback. I'm afraid that sharing anything but praise will generate conflict and may even cause an employee to leave – and that's a risk I can't afford.

Farmworker Perspectives

- Having a formal outlet to share my questions, goals, ideas, and feelings makes me feel heard and valued. It's also a way of acknowledging that we are whole people. We sometimes have space for this sharing while we're doing more straightforward work like weeding, but it's very much secondary to the task at hand.

- Seeing the farm owner taking time to center this dialogue shows that farming is as much about production and outputs as it is about inputs – what we are putting into the farm and each other as a team.

- Without regular feedback, it's hard for me to know if my performance is meeting the farm owner's expectations, and it's hard to continue building skills and knowledge.

At their most recent farm job:

- ***52%*** *of survey respondents participated in regular check-ins*
- ***30%*** *of survey respondents sat down with their employer for formal reviews*

> *"I often feel like a little ant just running around, especially without check-ins about why we're doing the work. It's hard to feel value in myself and my other co-workers." - Allison, farmworker*

- Being in communication with the farm owner helps me make connections between how my day-to-day work impacts the bigger picture. It helps me see how what I'm doing is informed by and contributes to the farm's mission and vision.

Exploring "What Could Be"

Building a strong communication infrastructure might feel secondary to the production goals of the farm, but it is clear that what communication looks and feels like is a high priority for employees. And as Wisconsin-based worker Hannah shared, communication is directly tied to how the work gets done. "Having those various communication pieces in place makes it easier for us to do those production tasks – and do them efficiently and with confidence. As an employee, it also helps me adapt and make better decisions on how to proceed with a task that isn't going as planned without always needing to stop and ask for help."

When communication isn't in place, the consequences can be wide-ranging. In farming, knowledge is currency. And communicating more information – whether through weekly emails, daily crew meetings, or other systems – can create feelings of inclusion, empowerment, and safety. But withholding that information can have a very different and potentially harmful impact. For example, sometimes farm owners hold the plan for the day in their heads. They know what needs to get done, but farmworkers only learn about that plan as they move from one task to the next. In situations like these, employees have no idea what their day will entail. At first glance, it may not seem like a harmful experience, but to employees, it can leave them feeling disoriented and uninspired at best, and demoralized and without agency at worst.

More likely than not, farm owners are not intentionally withholding the overall plan for the day. As an owner, maybe you feel like you need more time to figure out the details. Or maybe you hadn't considered that this could be done differently. By moving to a place where you're able to share this information with the entire crew, you're allowing employees to participate in a more meaningful and respectful way while also enabling the work to happen. You're challenging yourself to make intentional decisions around the priorities for the day and week while also supporting a deeper level of engagement and accountability. If employees are invited to hold some of this knowledge with you, they can help motivate one another to accomplish each day's tasks – just as they can see the impact of what happens on Tuesday if Monday's work isn't completed. Ultimately, sharing the knowledge and information people need to do their jobs will have a positive impact on the entire farm.

> *"Every morning at 7 we have a meeting, and we know we're going to learn the plan for the day. And I really like that. I don't really like feeling like things are completely unknown. So it's really nice to know that when [the farm manager] says we're going to do potatoes, leeks, and celery today, we're going to do potatoes, leeks and celery. There's options for what we could do instead, and he tells us those as well, but you're pretty much on the same page as everyone the whole time, which I really like. It's a team culture for sure." - Annika, farmworker*

Another key part of this communication infrastructure is feedback – sharing it, inviting it, and engaging with it. There is a tendency to look at this communication piece as extra – as something that doesn't impact the work itself but instead pertains only to relationships. But as a farm owner, when you create space for feedback, you're helping people become better at their jobs. They have a more clear understanding of what the work is and what the standards are. And it might be helpful to remember that people want to do good work, and they want to be able to take pride in that work. When farm employees have the information and support they need to level up, the results can lead to real, tangible gains for the farm business. Along the way, you'll also be normalizing feedback as a valuable part of your farm's culture instead of treating it as something to be avoided.

> *"No matter what size your crew is, whether it's 2 people or 10, I think our problem is we don't want to take the time to do it. To check in and have those regular conversations. But what if the result is that you're going to be more productive and you're going to have better morale because you're taking some time to communicate better with your crew?" - Robyn, farm owner*

Establishing this feedback loop can also support something we will take up in the next section: engaging with employees around how the farm environment can become a safer space. Create a practice of talking with workers about questions like: What are microaggressions, and what might our responses look like when they happen? What does respectful communication look like? And what are the consequences for harassment and other harmful behaviors? Engaging in these topics directly – and explicitly inviting feedback on them – can provide dedicated space and time to discuss sensitive issues like these with structure and consistency.

With this in mind, let's circle back to a few of those farm owner perspectives from earlier.

- There are just too many competing priorities during the season to make time for regular check-ins and reviews. It can be nice to fit some of this communication work in here and there, but production is what makes this farm money. If that work doesn't get done, this farm won't exist. → *Building in time for check-ins and reviews can directly impact the health of the farm business by supporting employee satisfaction, motivation, and ultimately retention. And when you know what employees are looking for, you can connect their needs to the farm's needs.*

- I got into this profession because I wanted to grow food, not because I wanted to be a Human Resources manager. → *By recognizing that employees need your attention and support, you can take a proactive approach to strengthening your skills and confidence as an employer. Prioritizing this skill as part of your own professional development can create a work environment where employees have the skills they need to do the work, while also feeling respected, valued, and supported.*

- It's hard to know how someone is going to react to feedback. I'm afraid that sharing anything but praise will generate conflict and may even cause an employee to leave – and that's a risk I can't afford. → *Sharing feedback regularly is a way for everyone to continue improving together – and doing so will help normalize it as part of the farm's culture. Employees who plan to do this work longer term want and need feedback. Without it, it will be hard for both employees and the farm business to improve.*

Taking Action

It's been said that the only constant in farming is that there is no constant. Some days are slow and steady, while others are fast and frantic. The number of moving pieces can feel endless, and plans can and do change with little notice. Within this environment, communication can bring order, a sense of calm, and a shared understanding. It can convey respect and clarify expectations, and it can build or break trust.

Below and for each topic to come, we share a collection of tips and examples for you to consider. Shared with us by farm employees, these tips identify opportunities for engagement that are both creative and highly actionable. Meanwhile, the examples we include highlight various practices and philosophies that have helped farm owners meet some of these foundational needs – often in ways that support farmworkers while also improving everyone's quality of life and strengthening the farm business.

> ***"We tend to focus on farming as it is. And we need to sit with those pain points. But there's so much more that we can do if we turn our sights instead to the question of what might be possible." - Rue, farmer***

Tips to Consider

- Be respectful, and be in control. If something goes wrong, your communication skills can help you build trust and understanding with the crew. On the other hand, behaviors like shouting, shaming, and blaming can destroy the trust and confidence employees have placed in you while also weakening the team's morale.

> ***"Emotional outbursts – they're sadly common. You don't see that a lot in the corporate world, but it's not uncommon for farm owners to just freak out. Yell at people, get kind of mean about it, and then have to apologize. And it's not usually us employees – it's***

> *almost always the farm owner. So for me, this is a question of safety. This doesn't make me feel cared about and heard. So you're paying me $16 an hour but every couple of weeks you're going to totally lose it? I'm not going to stay here for that. I'm going to look for someone who is kind and who is actively harnessing their emotions in intentional ways." - Skot, farmworker*

- Talk about communication styles and feedback during your early season orientation meeting. Explore how people tend to communicate and how that changes in different situations.
- Discuss the role feedback plays on the farm. Ask people how they most like to receive feedback, let them know how you'll be sharing it, and don't forget to cover how employees can share feedback with you.
- Communicate shared expectations and responsibilities through formal documents, like position descriptions and employee handbooks. They provide and maintain transparency, and farmers can return to these resources during the season or update them as roles and responsibilities change.
- Share meals as a great way to build rapport, support two-way communication, and strengthen community.
- Use tools and practices like whiteboards and crew meetings to clearly communicate daily priorities and weekly goals. These tools can also help employees see how their efforts and contributions feed into the bigger picture operation.

> *"We get together in the morning and we kind of lay it all out on the table. That keeps people really tied together and united around a common purpose and it keeps people from wasting time, which doesn't really make any of us happy." - Jason, farmworker*

- Schedule a recurring end-of-week meeting to allow for group reflection on what went well, what could have gone better, and what's coming up next week. This practice can also help to normalize feedback and two-way communication as part of the farm's culture.
- Implement a schedule for check-ins and formal reviews – and know that it's ok to give yourself some wiggle room! Sharing plans and any written documents ahead of time gives people a chance to reflect and prepare, and you'll likely be helping more introverted crew members feel more comfortable as they step into these conversations.
- Consider implementing an annual, end-of-season reflection meeting or retreat. There is power in looking back at what you have accomplished together, and it can be a great time to look ahead as well – to identify and discuss systems changes heading into next season. And don't forget the tasty treats!

> *"At our farm's annual reflection meeting, we used Jam Board and we ate waffles while doing this deeper visioning. We learned about each other's passions and what brings us to farming. We also talked about how we wanted our lives to look for us next year outside of farming. We are whole people outside of our on-farm work, and saying this out loud is powerful." - Anita, farmer*

Farm Employer Examples to Consider

"Getting Organized" Cassie Wyss, co-owner of Crossroads Community Farm in Wisconsin
"Employees used to talk about how coming to work felt like being in a pinball game. They never knew where they were going. But now, I have a whiteboard, and on Mondays I lay out everything – here are the field tasks waiting to be done, here are the CSA numbers so on Monday and Tuesday nothing gets done until these things are done, and then it's wholesale. So it's all divided out, and they can see all the numbers. It helps me as a manager so they see just how much there is to be done. And they can look at that board and know that that's going to take them through Wednesday. And then they can look at the field tasks and know that's Thursday and Friday. So they can see the whole scope of what we need to do together."

"Integrating Technology" Kendyl Meadows and Andy Hupp, co-owners of Three Creeks Produce, Ohio
"We use Trello on our farm. Andy spends a lot of time organizing and preparing the to-do list, plus providing all of the background info and resources people might need. So folks can use as little or as much information as they need – it's there for them. So if the task is 'Apply this product to this crop,' someone might know exactly what those next steps are because they've done it before. But if not, then they can follow those additional links and see the crop plan and the dilution rates for that specific product. We've found that this really empowers people to do this work, with the amount of support they need and want."

"Empowering Through Systems" Stacey and Tenzin Botsford, co-owners of Red Door Family Farm in Wisconsin
"We created a 'Board of Ideas and Improvements' for our farm. It's a place where everyone can write down their thoughts, ideas, and goals as they have them. We have a few major categories: things that worked well, things that didn't work well, things to push off until next winter, things for next year, and big goals. We all add to it over the course of the season, and then at the end of the year, we schedule a time to sit down and dissect the board. There's a lot of learning and conversation. And maybe the most important part about this for me was that this started as a way for me to stop saying no to innovation just because I'm busy during the season. It's a way for me to empower employees to have ideas, to share them, and to build the farm with us."

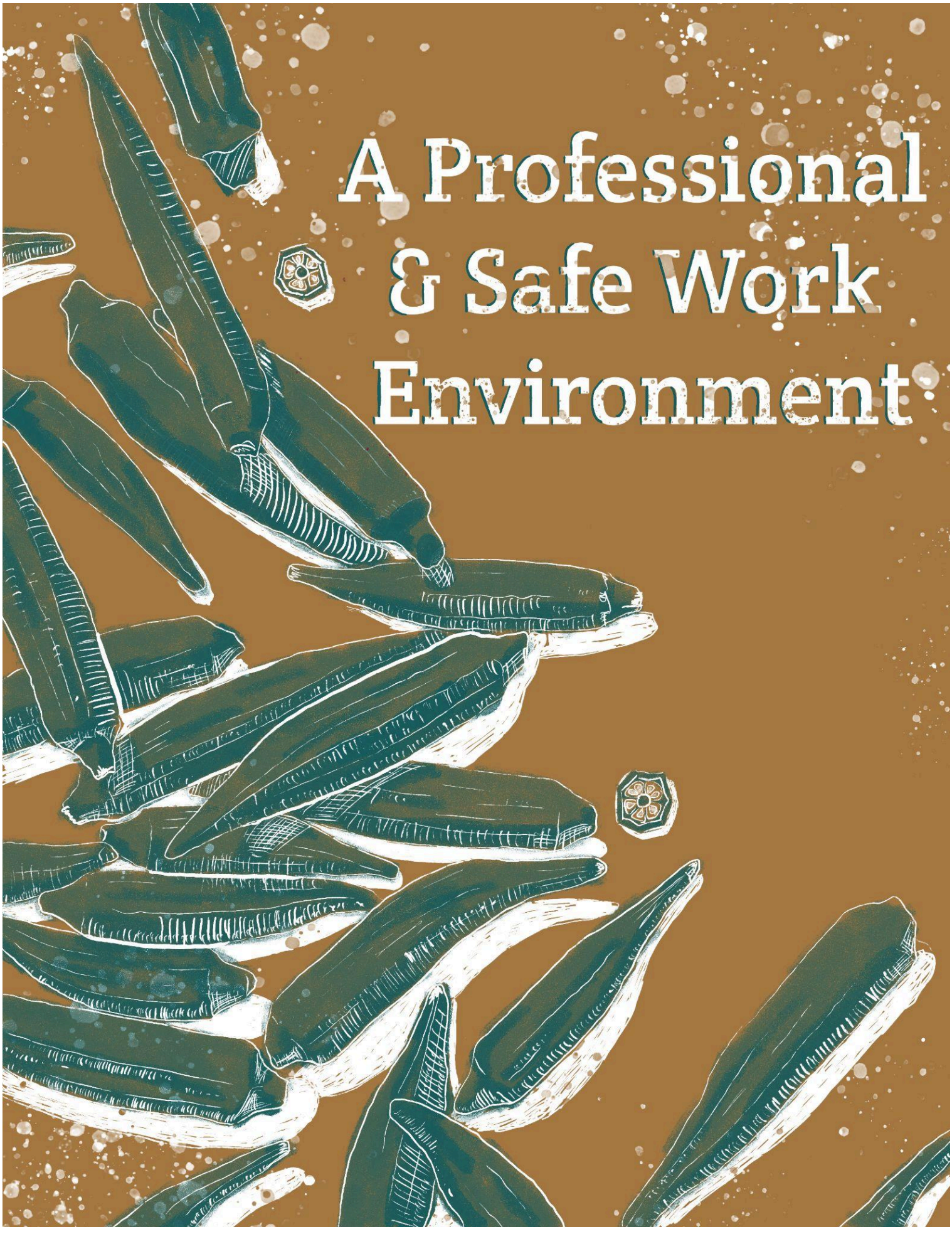
Reflective Questions

Farm employees:

- Where and how do you feel most comfortable communicating your needs with an employer? What kind of communicator are you? How does that change in different situations?
- How do you like to be managed, and how do you like to receive feedback?
- What makes you feel heard in a workplace?

Farm owners:

- When it comes to communication, what do you find most challenging?
- What about communication on your farm works really well?
- Is there one communication-related thing that you could improve over the next season?
- What sort of communication practices and structures can you build out during the off-season?


A Professional
& Safe Work
Environment

A Professional and Safe Work Environment

In certain ways, farmworking can seem informal, and there may be an assumption that people doing this work don't want to be encumbered by the systems and structures that are so common in other, perhaps more corporate industries. While employees value many of those informal aspects – like working outside and sharing meals together – many also see the work they are doing as professional and skilled. And they want that to be reflected in how the farm business is managed and how they fit into that business. So many of the things employees value and that we're talking about here are connected to and reinforced by a professional and safe work environment: well-established systems and policies to support clear expectations, regular and open communication, livable wages and benefits, and a robust workplace culture that values inclusion and fosters respect.

> *"Professionalism is so important. It's cool being friends, but this is a business so having an orientation, a handbook, setting boundaries – that's really important to me." - Joe, farmworker*

What are employees picturing when they think of a professional and safe work environment? Farmworkers shared a number of examples, including having or providing

- Employee orientations
- Employee handbooks or manuals
- Systems for inviting and offering feedback, like check-ins and formal two-way reviews
- Group norms and shared community agreements
- Clearly defined and respected work-life boundaries, including set work hours
- Clean break areas and clean bathrooms that accommodate menstruating people
- Regular breaks and a paid lunch
- Access to shade and water
- Ergonomic support and stretch breaks
- Shared meals
- The ability to decline tasks that may feel unsafe
- An intentional focus on food accessibility and social justice
- A plan for promptly addressing microaggressions, which can also be understood as a form of abuse *(see page 27 for a deeper discussion)*
- An inclusive farm culture

Taken together, these various examples lead us to a deeper question – one that asks how worker-centered a farm is. How much thought and consideration is given to farmworkers in these spaces? Consider, for instance, how people fit into the work space, how their bodies are impacted, and how they are made to feel. Kaitie, a farmworker in California, shared their experience with this question.

"It seems like a lot of the systems were designed without workers in mind. They were designed to create a certain product. Some of the existing systems considerations are great, like the sustainability practices for the land, but a lot of it is not designed for ease of work flow. And a lot of the time, it kind of feels like we're just set up to fail. One example is not making updates to buildings or worker spaces – like not setting up the wash shed for proper water flow or drainage so we're constantly having to worry about this and needing to move our bodies in weird ways. So building and space design is a huge thing. Even row design – making rows that fit our bodies and that are easy to access and move through. Certain particularities with harvest techniques can also make it really hard to be efficient or kind to our bodies. It's hard when these systems are rigid because I will make suggestions to help with these things but sometimes farmers aren't willing to make changes – and especially not in the middle of the season. So seeing things set up with workers in mind from the start or being able to make those changes and implement them the next season would be appreciated."

Engaging in this broader reflection and assessment can send a powerful message that you, as the farm owner, are committed to building systems that support both efficiency *and* physical and mental well-being – that you're not sacrificing one for the other. Maddie, a Minnesota-based farmworker, highlights the impact that investing in a worker-centered culture can have on both day-to-day work and longer-term planning. "The systems on the farm are really solid. The owners have their shit together, and that helps because it's a system we can trust in. They've honed it over time to be realistic for our bodies and our equipment, time, and schedules. And there's also a level of rigor, but it's healthy and it makes me feel proud of what we're doing. And I think we've seen all this translate to better tenure on the farm."

> ***"We really focus on understanding what could be improved. What tools do we need to make your job better? What was the worst thing about your job? And well, if everyone hates doing this, maybe we need a tool that would make things better. This gives us a navigational tool to make decisions on prioritizing equipment purchases and figuring out if there are technical things we need to change." - Janet, farm owner***

Farm owners can advance this work in a number of ways – through informal conversations, formal feedback, or structured activities. For instance, providing an outlet where farmworkers can capture ideas and suggestions for improvements during the season can lead to a robust end-of-year discussion that ultimately creates more worker-centered practices. Check out pages 20 and 34 for examples of how Red Door Family Farm and Bear Creek Organic Farm are making space for this worker input.

Asking how systems, practices, physical spaces, and infrastructure can support overall health and well-being is crucial, but we need to take this conversation a step further. Within agriculture, almost 1 in 5 farmers live with a disability (Miller, 2019). Yet the undercurrent of ableism within this industry is strong. From aging and differently-sized bodies to

neurodiversity, limitations around mobility, vision and hearing, and beyond – there is a seemingly inherent expectation that if someone is choosing to farm, they also need to meet the standards of what society considers to be "normal" or "correct" when it comes to how their bodies and minds function (Ferrante, 2022). Mercedes, a farmer who recently exited the industry, shares her experience:

> *"I am a chronically ill, chronically underweight farmer. I fatigue easier than most of my colleagues. I require more frequent meals and more rest overall than the average farmer. I don't resent my illness or living with physical limitations, but I did resent working in places where the expectation was to work so diligently that we abuse our bodies and neglect our human needs. There [was] no consideration or accommodation given to workers with different bodies or levels of ability. That's something I'd like to see change."*

What if we were to drop this deficit lens and instead focus on how farm owners can support employees who bring their whole, authentic selves to this work? What would it look like to question these harmful assumptions of what skills and characteristics farmers need? What possibilities might present themselves if we embrace and actively support all levels of ability – not just with words, but in meaningful, action-oriented ways? We cannot do justice to this topic with one short paragraph, but we can look to organizations like AgrAbility and Grassroots Gardens of Western New York for examples of what this work entails and what more inclusive farming can look like.

Initial Steps Towards Creating a More Accessible Workplace
Kristie Cabrera-Robleado*

- Be transparent with job descriptions, and include an accommodations statement.
- As a team, research and discuss what accommodations are reasonable for your farm. It is important to have this discussion even if no one on your current team needs accommodations, since it will help you be prepared for future candidates.
- Provide ergonomic training.
- Create opportunities for employees to express their concerns anonymously.
- Provide adapted tools and equipment. Some examples include the following:
    - Long-handled tools assist with reaching and can help prevent back pain.
    - Ergonomic handles on tools can limit joint stress.
    - Kneelers and stools can help prevent back and knee pain.
- Create structured check-ins with employees to assess whether their needs are being met (e.g. accessible toilets, safe equipment, water, ergonomic training, etc.).
- Invest in learning about disability justice and how the disability justice principles can be applied to the farm's work culture.

- Review all of the farm's touch points with the public (social media, website, farmers market, CSA, etc.). Assess what accessibility and inclusivity practices are in place, and identify areas that can be improved upon.
- Invest in creating a safe, human-centered work culture.

**Kristie's work is centered around unpacking ableism and views of the body and mind, understanding accessibility and inclusivity, and creating improvements to a site's physical design, educational programs and curriculums, and work culture. Contact her at: kristiecab@gmail.com.*

> ***"One thing that comes to mind for me is a better understanding or openness around people's physical abilities and disabilities. The farm I was at last year was in a really transitional place, and I experienced a lot of remnants of that culture. Of not working fast enough, not being able to lift heavy things, not working efficiently enough... I feel like a lot of adjustments were made for me while farming pregnant, but the jokes. I would still hear those comments around not being able to work fast enough, not being able to lift heavy stuff. And those jokes were never made at me, but they were still felt. Like, 'Why can't you lift a 50-pound tote right now? What could possibly be the reason?!' Or 'Why are you moving so slow?' or 'Do you really have to sit and harvest those radishes?' Maybe it was my mindset at the time, but it does get to you even if it is a joke. So I think the positive side of that is that there were opportunities to assess when that conduct or behavior would come up, but in the moment it really got into my head when people would make those comments about my fellow workers – not just me. So we keep saying 'We need more farmers. We need more farmers.' But the reality is that a lot of people suffer from unseen disabilities or seen disabilities, and I'm just wondering how we can adjust workplace culture to accommodate them. Or just cultivate a deeper understanding." - Anonymous, farmworker***
>
> ***"Trust in employees to understand their own bodies." - Survey respondent***

Another thing that came up often during our discussions about supporting a professional and safe work environment was the physical and emotional burnout farmworkers see among their employers and often experience themselves. We all know that balance and quality of life is a clear goal that both owners and workers strive for, but in this profession, it's often an elusive one. At the same time, we also know that urgency – not rest – is highly valued within white supremacy culture (Okun, 1999). There are always a million things to do on the farm, so rushing may feel like a natural default. Not taking time to rest. Eating lunch on the run. Working every weekend.

> ***"Our body is already this beautiful place that wants us to heal, that wants to be well, that can move at the pace in the space that is most ideal for us. We've forgotten that. We've totally just missed out on any of the sleep wisdom and the body wisdom. We've ignored it. We've ignored it for, 'I'll sleep when I'm dead.' We've ignored it all for***

> *productivity as a function of our worth, for perfectionism, for profit over life, for seeing burnout as normal. We see burnout as just a normal phase of life. It's not normal to burn out. That's not normal!" - Tricia Hersey, Rest Is Resistance: A Manifesto*

These practices paint a clear picture of what it means to do this work: that to be a farmer is to continually sacrifice – your body, your financial well-being, and your quality of life. Not questioning this assumption is harmful in many ways, and for employees, it can also minimize their experiences and feelings when they push for things that do support greater balance – like set work hours or a paid lunch break. It is also why many workers spoke about the significant impact of working for a farm owner who models behavior and reinforces practices that contribute to a more sustainable and healthy work-life balance. And as one farmworker reminds us, embracing this can actually support the farm's bottom line. "If you take small breaks during the day, you're actually going to be more productive."

> *"I'm currently in a leadership role and I find that it's super important to model saying things like, 'Hey my body is hurting today,' or 'This particular action or activity is hurting my body in this way.' And just setting the example of switching tasks, taking breaks, changing it up after a while. It's great if employees and workers can do that, but I think if there is a hierarchy, it has to come from the top down with the manager or whoever is in that position of power saying that, 'Hey, it's ok to take care of your body and you need to do that'." - Anna, farmworker*

An Invitation To Understand Your Impact

Modeling behavior also contributes in very real ways to how safe and inclusive a farm work environment may feel and ultimately be. For instance, if the farm owner says sexist, racist, or other harmful things – or if employees are not challenged when they do so – it creates an unsafe and potentially hostile environment. And it sends a clear message that saying these things is ok and carries no consequence. One common way we might see this happen is through what are most often referred to as microaggressions. We can think of these as our biases in action – they are subtle forms of oppression that may seem well-intentioned and complimentary, but in reality, they invalidate a person's identity and experience (Sue, 2021). Though they're typically portrayed as minor, these actions can in fact cause deep and lasting harm, especially as they add up over time. Because of this, we also acknowledge that microaggressions should also be recognized as a form of abuse (Brunner, 2019).

> *"When a person thinks of a micro-aggression, they're primarily thinking about the perpetrator: I did a minor sort of thing. But from the standpoint of the victim, if those things are happening to them 10, 20, 30 times in a day, then it operates very differently than the term actually connotes. It operates more as a form of abuse." - Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, anti-racist activist, author, professor*

What are some examples of microaggressions?

- Telling a Black person that they're "really articulate." *Possible translation: You sound more educated than I expected you to be.*
- Calling someone's family "non-traditional." *Possible translation: Your parents are both the same gender, and that's not what I'm used to.*
- Asking someone where they're really from. *Possible translation: You don't look like an American to me.*
- Talking with a Mexican American about how much you love Mexican food every time you see them. *Possible translation: This is probably the only thing we have in common.*

Let's put ourselves in the farm setting for these next few examples.

- Deciding not to accommodate or acknowledge dietary needs at a farm crew potluck.
    - *Possible translation: I don't see your dietary needs as real or valid.*
    - *How this might be felt: You're making me feel like a burden and like I'm not a full member of this group.*
- Assigning farm tasks based on gender identities.
    - *Possible translations: You're not a man, so you don't have the skills to operate the cultivator. You're non-binary, so I'm going to assign you tasks according to what I assume was your assigned sex at birth and based on how I view gender roles here on the farm.*
    - *How this might be felt: You see my gender as an indicator of what I can and can't do. You don't see my skills, my knowledge, or my experience.*
- Not accommodating religious holidays or practices that coincide with work (e.g. the Jewish Sabbath).
    - *Possible translation: You're just using this as an excuse to get out of the farmers market.*
    - *How this might be felt: You're questioning my character and putting me in a position where I feel like I need to prove to you that I'm being authentic and honest.*

> ***"When a microaggression happens, we need to build out the space to talk about it instead of all of us staying in our heads thinking about it until we finally realize we're all struggling with the same thing and we should talk about it." - Liz, farmworker***

It's also important to recognize that microaggressions, while tied to individual actions, are a symptom of a larger culture – more specifically, of white supremacy culture. The Centre for Community Organizations (COCo) explains in great detail how white supremacy culture informs, replicates, and reinforces itself within workplaces. We see these characteristics play out every day, in big and small ways, and we can identify a lot of them in the farm setting as well – an emphasis on both efficiency and urgency, limited transparency in how

decisions are made, avoiding difficult or uncomfortable conversations, and a tendency to overvalue a rigid approach for how things are done while undervaluing creativity, innovation, and skill across the team.

We can also see how the characteristics associated with white supremacy culture are often interwoven with many of the "isms" that show up in these microaggressions – from racism and sexism to heterosexism, ageism, ableism, and more. And while sometimes very obvious, the ways in which white supremacy culture manifests in our everyday lives can be very subtle – just like how microaggressions may *feel* subtle to the person who is committing them.

If we return to our earlier example of assigning farm tasks based on gender identities, we might see the influence of two characteristics of white supremacy culture in particular:

- Paternalism: I'm in charge, and the decisions I make will ultimately be the best for you. Operating that piece of equipment is going to be too difficult or complex, so I'm saving you the trouble.
- Either/Or Thinking: This is how I've always assigned these tasks. You're expressing your gender in a way that I'm not necessarily familiar or comfortable with, and I'm not inclined to change what I've always done in order to accommodate you.

We might be entering an especially uncomfortable territory with this discussion. Remember those grounding questions we shared at the beginning? If you're experiencing some strong emotions right now – frustration, annoyance, maybe even dismissal – it might be helpful to return to them and invite yourself to consider:

- What is being threatened here?
- What am I thinking this conversation says about me?
- Has my top priority shifted to preserving my ego?
- Am I trying to be right, or am I trying to do better?

Pick one, and sit with it for a minute or two. And then know this: We can probably all see very obvious ways in which white supremacy culture is shaping how we think and act – even how we understand the world. Similarly, we've all likely committed microaggressions. Each of us has biases, and those biases shape our thoughts and influence our actions. This doesn't mean we can't also seek to understand, to learn, and to do better. This work is ongoing, and wherever you're at, there's an opportunity to engage. See COCo's Antidotes for each white supremacy culture characteristic, and check out the appendix for some helpful resources.

Before we consider some perspectives here, we want to share one additional consideration. We've been talking about how you as the farm owner can strive to create a safe work environment for employees, but you have less control over what they may experience outside of work hours. Workers spoke about how off-farm experiences can and do impact

how they show up in the workplace. When someone is constantly misgendered by a landlord, seen as "other" in a majority-white space, feeling isolated from a queer community, or struggling to access neurodiversity-affirming care, stepping into a work environment that also feels unsafe can be a step too far. We share these considerations to reiterate this point: A farm that is not sensitive to the identities of its workers may not be a place where people choose to remain for very long.

At the end of the day, building a professional and safe work environment requires care and attention for farmers' physical and emotional selves. As the farm owner, you play a major role in establishing and shaping the culture that can ultimately address these needs. You set the example – through your own actions and through the policies and practices that can help create and maintain a work environment grounded in respect and inclusivity.

> *"The culture of the farm owners is extremely important. I have too many experiences of farm owners dragging others through the drama of their personal lives and owners failing to maintain boundaries around their stress, abusive interpersonal habits, and generally acting like they run a small kingdom. For it to be worth it to stay in such a back-breaking industry, workers at least need to be valued as human beings who are making the farm function, and if we didn't show up to work, the farm wouldn't be a farm. And that means expecting your workers to live full lives." - Survey respondent*

Farm Owner Perspectives

- If a microaggression happens, the crew can work it out for themselves. It's not really my business, so I don't want to get in the middle of things. Plus, it makes me uncomfortable because I don't necessarily feel like I have the skills or knowledge to respond well.
- It's fine for employees to take a break here and there or to pause for some stretching, but I really need to stay focused and on task. Efficiency is how we all continue to get a paycheck, and I'm used to operating at this pace anyway
- We don't do time off because we only have so much time to get the work done. The agreement is that we all work really hard during the season, and then folks can rest during the off-season. As they say, we have to make hay while the sun shines.

> *"I think having paid time off is tied to a professional workplace. Even three days – if you have an operation that is running smooth enough, I think you could move people around to allow for that. Especially during the summer here when people need a break. Sometimes it's 60 hours and you feel like you're not doing anything but returning to the farm." - Hannah, farmworker*

- My work starts before employees get here and ends long after they leave for the day. Weekends, holidays – the work is never really done. So it can be hard to think about

offering some of these things – like paid time off or always ending at the same time each day – when employees will never really work as hard as I do.

Farmworker Perspectives

- As a queer farmer or a farmer of color, it can be a struggle to feel safe and build community – especially in rural settings. And farm work can already feel lonely and isolating at times. Stepping into an inclusive and respectful farm culture – and having some of that institutionalized and enforced through policies and practices – can create a safer environment where I can also focus on applying and building my skills as a farmer.

> ***"As far as farm culture – for me it's very important to have a diverse and inclusive space. I hold identities as a Black, queer person, and I feel like it's very important to have people around me who share some of those identities with me as well. And I think also to hold space to have conversations about how people of marginalized identities often have trouble in farming and along their journeys becoming farmers." - Farmer Tolu***

- My body and my physical and mental health are crucial resources. And when I'm working on farms where I don't have any formal ownership and where my employer may not have worker's compensation, I need to be able to protect myself by taking breaks, by stretching, and by declining tasks that feel unsafe to me.
- I need opportunities for rest during the season. Pushing straight through to the off-season doesn't actually mean we're arriving at a time of rest. It often means that we now need to find winter work so that we can return to farming in the spring. It's less a time of recovery and more a time of financial instability and stress.

> ***"The off-season is a time of scraping by for me. And I feel like it leaves a lot of people in the lurch." - Sasha, farmworker***

Exploring "What Could Be"

Employees want to work on farms that offer a professional, balanced, and inclusive work environment that is grounded in both physical and emotional safety. For those who consider this work their career, having practices and systems in place that support them may also serve as powerful retention tools. Let's circle back to some of those earlier points.

- If a microaggression happens, the crew can work it out for themselves. It's not really my business, so I don't want to get in the middle of things. Plus, it makes me uncomfortable because I don't necessarily feel like I have the skills or knowledge to respond well. → *Feeling unprepared and unsure of what to do in these situations can*

be intimidating, and it may feel safer for you to not engage. But employees are looking to you to set the tone and guide the culture on the farm. Taking no action sends a loud message – that you are complicit. By increasing your own understanding and by incorporating inclusivity into your farm's policies and practices, you'll build transparency for employees and you'll have more tools to lean on in the moment.

- It's fine for employees to take a break here and there or to pause for some stretching, but I really need to stay focused and on task. Efficiency is how we all continue to get a paycheck, and I'm used to operating at this pace anyway. → *In a profession that is physically demanding and that doesn't tend to provide formal health care, having the time, space, and permission to care for our bodies is crucial. Employees are looking to you as the owner to set the tone and model behavior that supports stronger physical and emotional sustainability. You may think that granting that permission is sufficient, and maybe at times it will be. But workers repeatedly emphasized that for that permission to have real meaning, it needs to be demonstrated through the owner's actions. This might include having lunch with the crew a few days a week, joining them for a stretch break, or sharing with them how you prioritize these needs for yourself if they never see you stopping for lunch.*

- We don't do time off because we only have so much time to get the work done. The agreement is that we all work really hard during the season, and then folks can rest during the off-season. As they say, we have to make hay while the sun shines. → *Prioritizing and scheduling time off for farmers during the season can have a lasting impact on overall work-life balance, while also pushing back on the assumption that being a farmer means you don't get to have a life outside the farm. Integrating time off for everyone can provide opportunities for employees to build new skills when their colleagues are away, and knowing that a break is coming up may also allow workers to pace themselves accordingly.*

- My work starts before employees get here and ends long after they leave for the day. Weekends, holidays – the work is never really done. So it can be hard to think about offering some of these things – like paid time off or always ending at the same time each day – when employees will never really work as hard as I do. → *As the owner, you're going to work more than employees – that's a fact. You're also going to enjoy things that workers may not have access to, like profits and setting your own schedule. Even so, you might feel dismissive or even resentful when employees ask about or expect things like paid time off. How can you get more comfortable with recognizing that it's ok for employees to seek these things? Do you see ways that doing this can ultimately help the business? And are there ways to create more of this for yourself?*

> ***"The farms I've worked at have been small farms where the owner's entire livelihood is the farm, and there's this expectation that everyone needs to sacrifice themselves to keep the farm going. Put aside your own needs for the greater good of the farm. So being more attentive – maybe it's time for a water break. Being aware of the time and trying to end***

> *on time. Not pushing back meals in order to complete tasks. Those are instances where I feel like I have to push myself beyond my limits for the farm, and I don't want to have to do that." - Olivia, farmworker*

Taking Action

As we've seen, many different things can contribute to building a professional and safe work environment – one that employees value and are more likely to return to over time. Below we offer some tips shared by farm employees, as well as examples of how farm owners are currently engaging in this work.

Tips to Consider

- Respect and gratitude matter – and they don't cost you anything.
- Make sure people know how they're getting paid and pay them on time, every time.
- Respect employees and their time by establishing work hours and sticking to them. If you'd like to provide an opportunity for employees to put in additional hours, make sure those parameters are clear.
- Support ergonomic awareness and healthy body mechanics. You can do this formally through trainings, informally with active discussions and ongoing demonstrations, and structurally by making sure spaces, tools, and equipment fit workers' bodies. Check out Labor-Movement as one possible resource.
- Actively explore with employees how you can support greater ease and accessibility within the farming environment, and choose to invest in infrastructure and equipment that make production and other aspects of the job more sustainable for everyone. Do you need smaller or larger gloves? Maybe another wheelbarrow or a lightweight wheel hoe? Can you incorporate anti-fatigue mats into the packshed or at other workstations as a way to ease the strain on people's bodies?

> *"I've worked on a farm where the expectation was that you'd work through the pain. Like, you're going to get hurt doing this work because it's a tough job. But it's just inefficient for the farm when it's go-go-go but you're injuring yourself. It's just not sustainable." - Anthony, farmworker*

- Consider offering formal paid time off to workers in the form of vacation days, sick days, or both. Explore whether you can encourage employees to take time off during the busy season, and consider taking time off yourself. Start small, and see how it goes.

> *"When I'd ask for a day off, [the farm owner] would say things like, 'Well I haven't had a day off in 10 years!' So there was always this guilt. I was working 60 hours a week, 6*

> *to 7 days a week, and I'd say that I needed to come in late once in a while so I could rest, and he would say things like, 'I wish I could sleep in!'." - Anonymous, farmworker*

- Institutionalize your commitment to creating and maintaining a safe, inclusive workplace, and make space for ongoing conversation on the topic – starting with your annual orientation. Does the team create community agreements? What about communication guidelines? Do you have an anti-harassment policy, and do you enforce it? Do employees know how they can register grievances, and is there transparency within that process? Are there ways the farm can support anti-racist and anti-sexist learning?

- And finally, as we saw earlier, farmworkers want their employers to engage in racial equity training and build their intercultural competence. Look for opportunities to learn – either individually or through affinity groups – and apply that learning to the farm as a way to actively shape its culture.

Farm Employer Examples To Consider

"Building Culture with Community Agreements" Amara Ullauri – Rock Steady Farm, New York
"It is important for our team to create community agreements because it is a process that centers self-determination and consent as core values that are integral to democratically run workplaces. It is self-determination in action because each year, as our team grows and changes, we revisit our community agreements to ensure that the agreements align with team needs. Creating these agreements is a consensual process as well, requiring multiple conversations for team input, discussion and final approval which we ritualize in some way. For example, for the past two years we have planted sunflowers as a way to activate our agreements. I love this ritual because as the sunflowers grow it is the responsibility of all of us to take care of them, mirroring the way we care for each other. These activities support us in collective culture building, meaning full team input into how we want to sustain and cultivate relationships with each other, our community and the land. Therefore, our community agreements also invite our extended community, such as volunteers, CSA members, and so one to hold these agreements with us. We make our community agreements public on our website and share them with any group that visits the farm. We are aware that community agreements are not intended to avoid conflict, but rather give us pathways to address conflict in a generative way that reduces harm. Because of this, community agreements are not stand-alone static documents. This process is supported by other policies such as feedback systems and additional culture building practices that build trust amongst the farm team."

"Creating a Worker-Centered Workplace" Brian Bates, co-owner of Bear Creek Organic Farm in Michigan
"On our farm, employees play a pretty central role in shaping how we do things. At the end of each season, we spend a lot of time reflecting and reassessing. One of the things we do came

from Taylor Mendell with Habit Farming. She does this thing called Hippo Camp – it's an annual business review process. So we followed her lead on her 'Achievements + Disappointments' activity. Basically, it's a big picture thing that helps us get the juices flowing. Everyone knows what didn't work well, but we also need to spend time reflecting on what did work well. So we all take time to record these things. Then for the disappointments, we talk through each of them and assign a letter: I for infrastructure, R for research, E for equipment, or S for systems. That helps us identify what our next step might be. So if we had a major pest issue, we might assign that an R and spend a little time researching what we might need to do differently next year.

"Then, we move from that big picture approach into our annual 'Improvement Ideas Project' where everyone spends 2 or 3 hours walking around with a clipboard and jotting down things we might want to change. It's like a scavenger hunt to find things we can do better or that can be better. Then we all reconvene. I'll stand in front of a big flip chart, and we go structure by structure with people calling out their ideas. Then we'll rank things. The low-hanging fruit that we can knock out in 15 minutes or less, that stuff gets done right away. For everything else, someone or maybe a two-person team is the champion of those tasks. People usually volunteer. If it's something that involves buying something expensive or cutting through a wall, I'll usually be part of that team to provide support. So there's a lot of space for ownership and independent work here – and by doing this every year, we're coming up with fewer and fewer things we feel like we need to change. We're getting more granular, which is a good sign. Our next step is probably to expand this into a process audit – that will be more complicated and much slower, but that's the next step."
+See the appendix for the Bear Creek Organic Farm activity worksheets

"Prioritizing Time Off" Kat Becker, owner of Cattail Organics in Wisconsin
"A summer vacation was something that always felt like a combination of irresponsibility, selfishness, and impossibility as a vegetable farmer. When I went through a big farm and life change and was able to rethink almost all my preconceived notions of what was possible or impossible, taking a summer break and enjoying the incredibly beautiful time of year summer is in the Upper Midwest became a goal. I started with a 3-day 2-night commitment, with the goal of getting to the point where we could have a full week off in the middle of the season. We aren't there yet but we are close, and the goal was solidified when my 15-year-old son grumbled to me about how he had things that were important to him that he misses for winter family trips and 'everyone else travels in summer.' We currently schedule 4 or 5 days off in late June or early July when we have a break in our intense planting calendar. Our employees are given those dates and times we need all hands on deck, and we schedule extra work for a few folks too. They know it is hard for us to leave, and they are incredibly supportive of us taking off time too.

"We offer all our employees 3 days of PTO from the get-go, but honestly we should offer more. We also encourage employees to schedule a couple of long weekends or a longer time off (1 week) in the farm season. This is not because we want them gone but because we also want them to enjoy life outside the farm, for them to feel like we respect their lives, and because farming can be really taxing. We don't want them to burn out just like we don't want to burn

ourselves out. On top of our 'big break' part of how we are setting up our farm, staffing, and our own boundaries is to allow more overnight trips and space for a real day of rest or play. I used to be really self-conscious of people seeing me take time off when they were working, but now some of those things just go on the calendar so my employees can see."

Reflective Questions

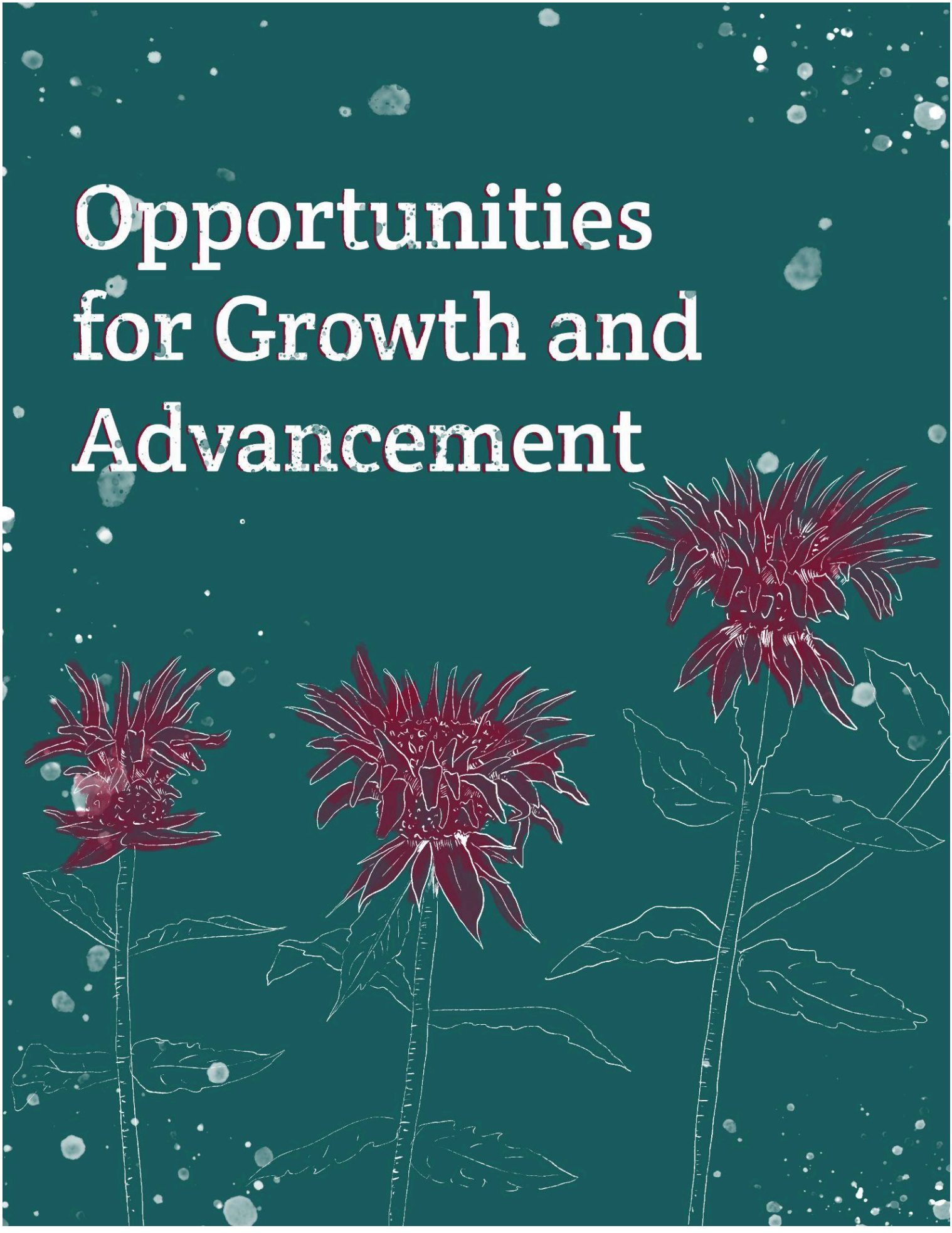
Farm employees:

- What makes you feel safe in a work environment? What are your needs?
- How do you, as a worker and individual, participate in building a culture of safety?
- What are your non-negotiable boundaries when you're considering a farm job? Are they compatible with your current employment situation?
- What sort of professional support would you like in a farm job? What would truly support your growth – both as part of and separate from the farm?

Farm owners:

- Are there ways you can identify infrastructure improvements or other steps that might improve the sustainability of the farm workspace?
- Looking back at the list of things employees associate with a professional and safe work environment, are there two or three things you'd like to make progress on during the next year?
- As a farm owner, are there some places where you can make progress on your own goals around work-life balance?

Opportunities for Growth and Advancement



Opportunities for Growth and Advancement

More than 60 percent of the folks who participated in our survey want to be farming 5 years from now, and professional development is a huge part of making that goal a reality. In our survey, we asked employees: *"What type of education and training would help you advance your career in this field?"* At the very top of the list, at 74 percent, was dedicated training in production, followed by data-driven decision-making and employee management. New and beginning diversified vegetable farmers overwhelmingly come to this work without a family background in farming, which means they're looking to farm owners and experienced managers to provide that intentional training and trusted mentorship that will help them move forward in this profession (National Young Farmers Coalition, 2022).

> ***"A big thing for me, not coming from an agricultural background, is openness to that and willingness to teach me and walk me through things I might not know or understand. If people are open to learning and willing to teach, then everyone can learn more about the farm's systems and have the farm operate at its optimum." - Mark, farmworker***

"What type of education and training would help you advance your career in this field?"

- *Production: 74%*
- *Data-driven decision-making (like budgeting, crop-planning): 69%*
- *Employee management: 68%*
- *Conflict resolution: 61%*
- *Communication: 55%*
- *Racial equity: 52%*
- *Intercultural competence: 51%*
- *Time management: 45%*
- *Empathy: 35%*

Providing educational opportunities can have some long-lasting and highly beneficial impacts. First, employee professional development directly supports employee retention. We asked farmworkers: *"What are the top two things farm owners can do to retain employees like you?"* And 51 percent said exactly this – provide them with the support they need to take on new responsibilities and grow in their positions. Fortunately, there are a number of different ways to support education on the farm, like making time for additional training through field walks, holding weekly deep dives into various topics, or even engaging in informal discussion during more straightforward tasks. Creating a less flat, more textured management structure is another option and can make space for formal management positions or for crew lead roles that support targeted skill-building in one key area, like

irrigation or the farmers market. Off the farm, professional development stipends can connect employees to conferences, trainings, or classes that allow them to interact with other farmers and dig into specific topics of interest. And don't forget about the simple act of introducing employees to other farmers in your community – whether for a farm visit or a simple conversation.

> *"I talk to a lot of growers who see labor as a liability. If you shift your mindset to instead see labor as an asset and focus on how to leverage that, it changes everything. It unlocked a new way for us to look at this. And now we fill the slow times with trainings and other things that help us be the best versions of ourselves in the busy times." - Brian, farm owner*

Investing in employees' growth can also build greater capacity for farm owners. Without the chance to develop a more nuanced understanding of how the various components on the farm work together, workers will probably struggle to take the initiative and feel confident that the decisions they're making are aligned with the farm's priorities. In the same way that working on an assembly line may only give someone a narrow idea of what they're building, providing employees with a more complete picture of the whole process will expand their scope of understanding so everyone can see what it is they're actually working towards.

> *"When employees ask me questions, I usually need to think about why I do things the way I do them because I'm so used to operating on autopilot. It takes time and thought to put my years of experience and instinct into words and an action plan that employees can understand and follow, but I know it's making me a better farmer. And it means that together, we have more knowledge to bring to this work." - Bethanee, farm owner*

There is no doubt that it can be difficult for farm owners to let go of some of this control and start delegating in bigger ways. Yet when you do, you're making space for so many powerful things – creativity, thought partnership, innovation, and maybe even shared decision-making. Working with employees to expand their skills increases trust, competency, ownership, and accountability. And ultimately, it builds autonomy. As workers are empowered to take on additional responsibilities and tasks – and perhaps move into new roles on the farm – owners will likely have more time and energy to engage in work that may have previously felt out of reach. For instance, you may be able to deepen environmental sustainability, improve worker-centered systems, diversify the farm's revenue-generating activities, or build out a structure for sharing annual proceeds. Ultimately, by supporting workers in these ways, everyone – including the farm – will benefit.

> *"At our farm, we strive for enough structure to really let autonomy flourish." - Holly, farm owner*

Even so, investing in these opportunities may feel daunting, and farm owners might have some serious hesitations about wading too deeply into these waters.

Farm Owner Perspectives

- All of our livelihoods depend upon this business succeeding. As much as I might want to, I just can't take the risk of moving these critical things over to an employee who doesn't have the expertise and experience I've built over the years.
- Employees are never going to do this work as efficiently as I can. Taking the time to train on tasks that workers don't usually do is too costly when we have so many things that need our attention each day.
- I drive the tractor, and I work with the machinery. That's just how things are done, and there's no room for an employee to move into that role. Those skills are more advanced, and frankly, it would be a liability.
- I want to support workers in this deeper way, but I've been burned. This work isn't quick – it takes a lot of energy, time, and patience to support employees in these ways. But then when workers leave the farm, they take all of that with them, and we're left with nothing.

Farmworker Perspectives

- Without the opportunity to continue learning, it's going to be hard for me to connect my day-to-day work to the bigger picture of why this work matters. Plus, I'll be missing out on those finer details that help me understand how the decisions we make can impact what is going to happen later in the season. For instance, my experience hauling massive silage tarps around might shift dramatically if I also understand that this is part of our low-till practices on the farm – practices that feed into a larger conversation about soil structure and climate resilience.
- If I'm going to be able to build a long-term career in farmworking, then I need to continue taking on more responsibility. I might be able to make some progress by taking classes and talking with other farmers, but what I really need is the support of a trusted mentor who can guide and support me in an intentional way.

> ***"Right now I don't see the point in staying here. Same stuff, different day. It's not necessarily a bad thing, but once you get to a certain level, how can you not want to take that next step and have new responsibilities and growth?" - Anonymous, farmworker***

- If I'm not making the wage that I'd like to be making, then I at least want to be able to build some concrete skills through this work. Even if I don't see a future for myself at this farm, I'll still be applying those skills while I'm here and in ways that benefit the farm.

Exploring "What Could Be"

When people are learning new things, it's almost guaranteed that mistakes will be part of the process. Mistakes can be frustrating, and they can be costly in terms of dollars and time. They also present a huge opportunity for learning when farm owners empower employees to correct those mistakes. Sometimes those corrections will require a certain level of support from the owner, either through explanation or demonstration. But ultimately, if handled with care and patience, mistakes can strengthen the trust between employer and employee while also building knowledge and autonomy. With that in mind, let's reimagine some of those earlier concerns.

- All of our livelihoods depend upon this business succeeding. As much as I might want to, I just can't take the risk of moving these critical things over to an employee who doesn't have the expertise and experience I've built over the years. → *Learning should be an intentional process. Starting with smaller, straightforward tasks may help you feel more comfortable letting go of some control in a low-stakes way. As your shared trust and confidence grows, you can continue to work towards sharing greater responsibility. And when you're training employees in things you know they're eager to learn, that can bring an even deeper level of engagement and accountability into the equation.*

- Employees are never going to do this work as efficiently as I can. Taking the time to train on tasks that workers don't usually do is too costly when we have so many things that need our attention each day. → *That first part is probably true. As the farm owner, you may already have years or even decades of experience. But training is also an opportunity to spread out the work, to increase understanding, and to build employee motivation. If you do it well, returning employees may be able to step into a trainer role and support new employees in a way that meets their needs and increases your own capacity.*

- I want to support workers in this deeper way, but I've been burned. This work isn't quick – it takes a lot of energy, time, and patience to support employees in these ways. But then when workers leave the farm, they take all of that with them, and we're left with nothing. → *As we've said before, employees will leave. And that may happen even if you provide all of the things we've been talking about. Our conversations with farm employees indicate that the likelihood of workers leaving increases if you decide not to engage in this work. Plus, the systems, practices, and skills you develop to accommodate this deeper training and advancement will stay with the farm even as employees depart, making it easier for you to support future employees as they move along that continuum of skill development.*

> ***"As a new farm owner, when employees made a mistake, I'd often address them in similar ways to my previous farm employers. Even if I told myself I would do it differently, when I was stressed and had a lot to do, oftentimes I'd miss the mark. 'You don't rise to the level of your expectations, you fall to the level of your training.' For me,***

> *previous employers would often comment to other employees about a mistake another person made behind their back. 'So-and-so is going so slow.' Or even more generic statements that indict a specific employee. In the short term it built cheap rapport, but in the long term it can lead to a lapse in trust and cause a fracture within the team. Once I noticed myself doing that as a new farm owner, I had to unlearn that behavior and take full ownership of employees' mistakes as my own. Mistakes need to be addressed promptly, professionally, and within the presence of the employee making them. I had to learn to default my mindset to assuming employees want to learn and want to improve, and that it's my job to tailor my feedback and teaching to match each individual's learning style. Creating a space in which employees feel safe making mistakes is the ultimate goal for getting the best long-term results for both the employer and employee. Employees operating out of fear are not going to produce good results and probably aren't going to stick around for multiple seasons. You are the coach, not the referee. And approaching mistakes like this invites opportunities for more learning and communication. You're building trust and deeper rapport so everyone can move forward instead of back." - Evan, farm owner*

Taking Action

For those farmworkers who are eager to build a long-term career in this field, providing opportunities for growth and advancement is a top priority. Even for those who may just be interested in this work for a few seasons – connecting people with new tasks and responsibilities introduces greater balance to the workday. The positive impacts of this effort are wide-ranging – from higher morale and motivation, to improved productivity and quality of work. It could be exciting to see which doors might open, and along the way, farm owners may find that there are real opportunities to build long-term partnerships with employees who are eager to step into some of those larger roles.

Tips to Consider

- Be transparent about what is possible over time. For instance, if you know you aren't open to having employees operate bigger machinery or you don't plan to create formal management positions, share this information early on. Doing so keeps expectations clear and is in everyone's best interest.
- Check in regularly, talk about goals and interests, and then keep checking in! Prioritizing this two-way communication is a great practice in general, but it's an especially important tool for supporting career farmworkers.
- Establish parameters. What does in-depth training and discussion look like? When and where does it take place? Are there times when deeper discussion isn't ideal or appropriate?
- Connect employees to resources that will help them learn and grow. That might include formal field days, informal visits to other farms, or introductions to your own

community of farmers. Providing a formal stipend can also increase access to conferences, classes, and trainings – and it definitely sends a message that you value employees' goals and their professional development.

- Think about how coaching as a leadership style can help you in this space. Start by delegating smaller tasks and build from there as skills and shared trust increase over time. Make it clear that regular feedback is part of this process, and be intentional about how you approach mistakes because they're all but guaranteed to happen along the way.

> *"Trust the people and they become trustworthy." - adrienne maree browne*

- Provide wages and titles that accurately reflect formal responsibilities. If new responsibilities go beyond the scope of an employee's current position description, that probably means it's time to review and revise it.
- Consider creating team lead roles or even formal management positions to support and retain long-term farm employees and partners.

Farm Employer Examples to Consider

"Supporting Deep Professional Development" Abby Benson, manager at Featherstone Farm in Minnesota

"We have worked to support our employees' professional development with the resources we have available to us and have found this leads to more buy-in and employee retention, and develops real skills that improve our farm business. It can be as simple as connecting employees to other farmers or organizations in our circle who they may be able to learn from. For example, one employee is really interested in pollinators and native plant habitat, so I have tried to connect him with other farmers I know doing that kind of work on farms and empowered him (and made funds available) to work on a project that would allow him to dig deeper into that work here at Featherstone. I also have a specific budget set up to spend on classes, field days, conferences, books, webinars and so on so employees can expand their knowledge in areas that are very specific to their jobs here on the farm. Years ago, Featherstone paid for me to go on a couple trips out East to attend a conference and do farm visits. I learned so much that I was able to bring back to the farm and ultimately benefit the business, and made connections that I continue to lean on today. I constantly encourage the people I manage to seek out educational opportunities that will benefit both them and the farm."

"Creating 'Team Lead' Positions to Advance Learning" Liz Lyon, manager at Gwenyn Hill Farm in Wisconsin

"Each of our produce crew members takes on a lead role during the growing season as part of their normal job duties. Each lead role is focused on either an ongoing project, such as managing seed trials throughout the season, and/or ongoing production or sales-related tasks,

such as field irrigation or farmers market preparation. Some lead roles involve daily tasks and some require less frequent responsibilities.

"The reason behind implementing lead roles on our farm was two-fold. First, having crew members take on leadership roles allows our farm managers to share some of their hefty workload. Second, crew members appreciate the opportunity to have more ownership and responsibility over a part of our production activities. Giving our employees ownership and autonomy over a designated project or task allows them to grow their skills and confidence related to this topic. It also increases their investment in both their specific project/task and the farm as a whole – they are playing an important role in keeping things running and are relied upon for their assigned area of responsibility. (Keep reading)

"Going All In" Mary Bricker and Noah Jackson, co-owners of SweetRoot Farm in Montana
"We decided that this farm just can't run without our employees. We need them, and they need us. So we went all in. We added winter tunnels and more caterpillars. We built a huge packshed. We put up cabins for on-farm housing. From a revenue perspective, we didn't need to do this – we were doing fine. But we really settled on the fact that if we couldn't provide year-round work, we were going to continue to be stuck in this position of constantly seeing our skilled employees leave the farm. We also realized that skills we were trying to cultivate often needed year-round commitment. Our crew needs to see the full cycle of crops, and likewise, if we are to help people see and think like farmers, they need the practice of continual observation and growth, just as we do.

"And I can't believe it, but we've bankrolled the whole thing with the farm proceeds. We thought about one big counterpart funding opportunity, but that one option didn't cover any labor and it would have most likely stretched out our building process into several years – rather than two. The build will be around $200K – but we also saved tens of thousands of dollars on the whole project by trailing to the farm tons of reclaimed materials – from plywood to beams to metal roofing and all the lumber, roof sheathing, and more.

"At the end of the day, it's a tool that checks a lot of boxes: a new farm store, a connected wash/pack with three coolers, a lean-to loading and outdoor spray area, a space for some events, a break room, an attached greenhouse, and a well-insulated footprint that's about 55x80. The greenhouse is 20x80 (that's included in this footprint). This includes more cooler space for cut flowers, and it adds space for taking a hobby mushroom growing-dabbling-thing into a real farm enterprise that's easy enough for crew to help manage and run. The risk on us isn't lost – we could have almost paid off all my student loans and the last of our land debt with what we spent. I think the whole thing though was about making farming more enjoyable, and we realized we were all in it for the long haul."

Reflective Questions

Farm employees:

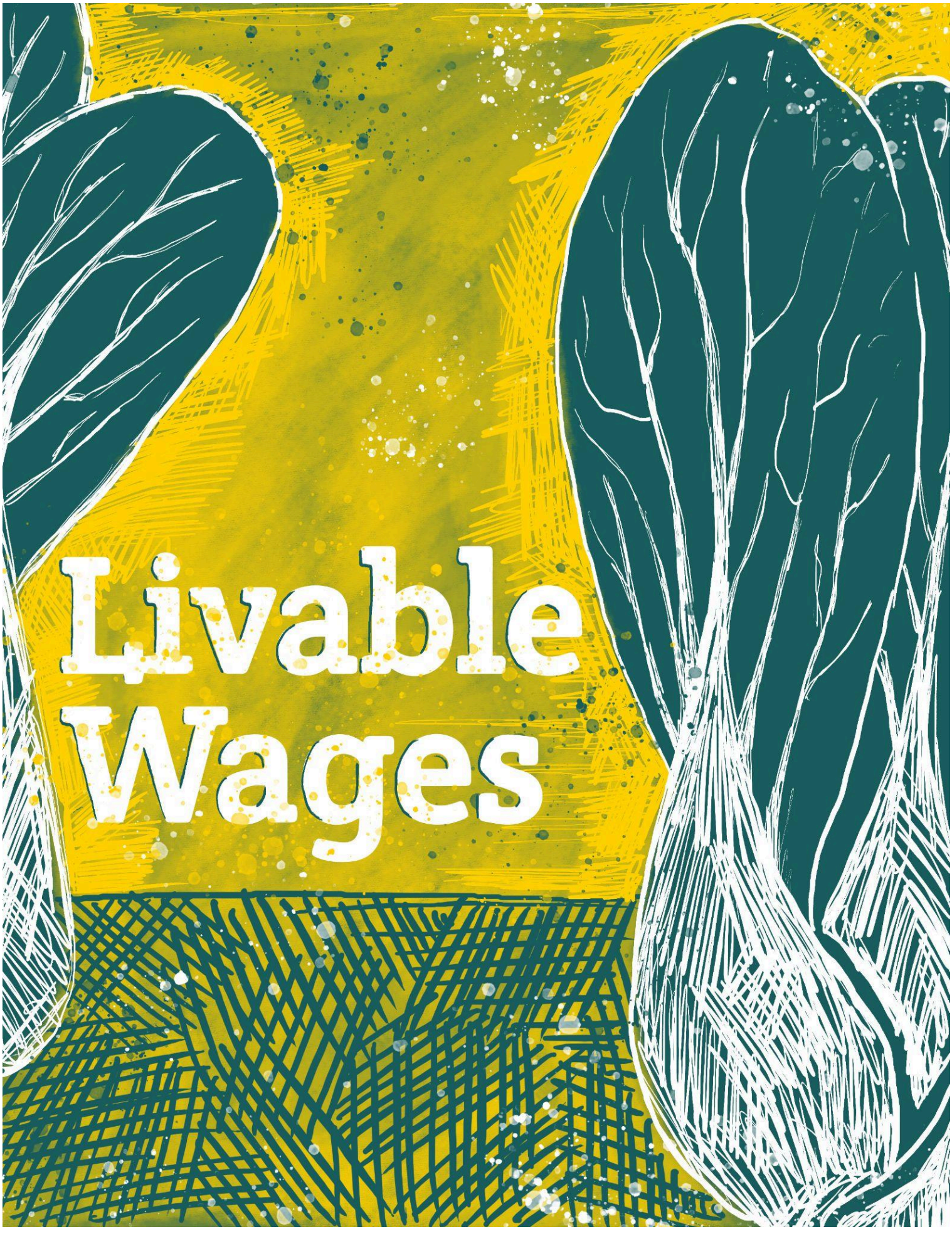
- Where do you want to dig deep with your on-farm learning?
- Where do your goals for farm learning match the needs of the farm? And where can you advocate for more investment in your growth?
- What life experiences or non-farm skills are you bringing with you to the farm? And how can those experiences and skills benefit the farm operation?

Farm owners:

- How can you engage in delegation as a way of freeing up your own mental, emotional, and physical capacity? What are some clear ways that doing so can benefit the farm?
- Are there ways you can support employees' professional growth and development that will also have a positive impact on your local and regional community?
- Are there three specific areas where you can adopt a beginner's mind approach on the farm?

Beginner's Mind: A Concept and an Opportunity

Beginner's mind is a Buddhist practice that encourages us to approach activities with an open mind. Within the farming environment, there is great power in beginners – those who are new to farming or new to your farm and who aren't yet familiar with and steeped in the farm's norms around how things are typically done. Recognizing this as an opportunity can encourage creativity and make space to consider new ways of doing things. In the process, you might be surprised by what's actually possible.


Livable
Wages

Livable Wages

Remember earlier when we mentioned that over 60 percent of the employees we surveyed plan to be working in agriculture 5 years from now? One in 4 of them is hoping to be in a management-level position at that point. While making progress in the 3 areas we've just explored might require more time and attention than money, we cannot overstate the importance of livable wages. No one can work at a job they love for very long if their wages do not support the basic necessities of their lives *and* allow them to make progress on their financial goals.

Let's take a closer look at the financial realities of the farmworkers who participated in our survey.

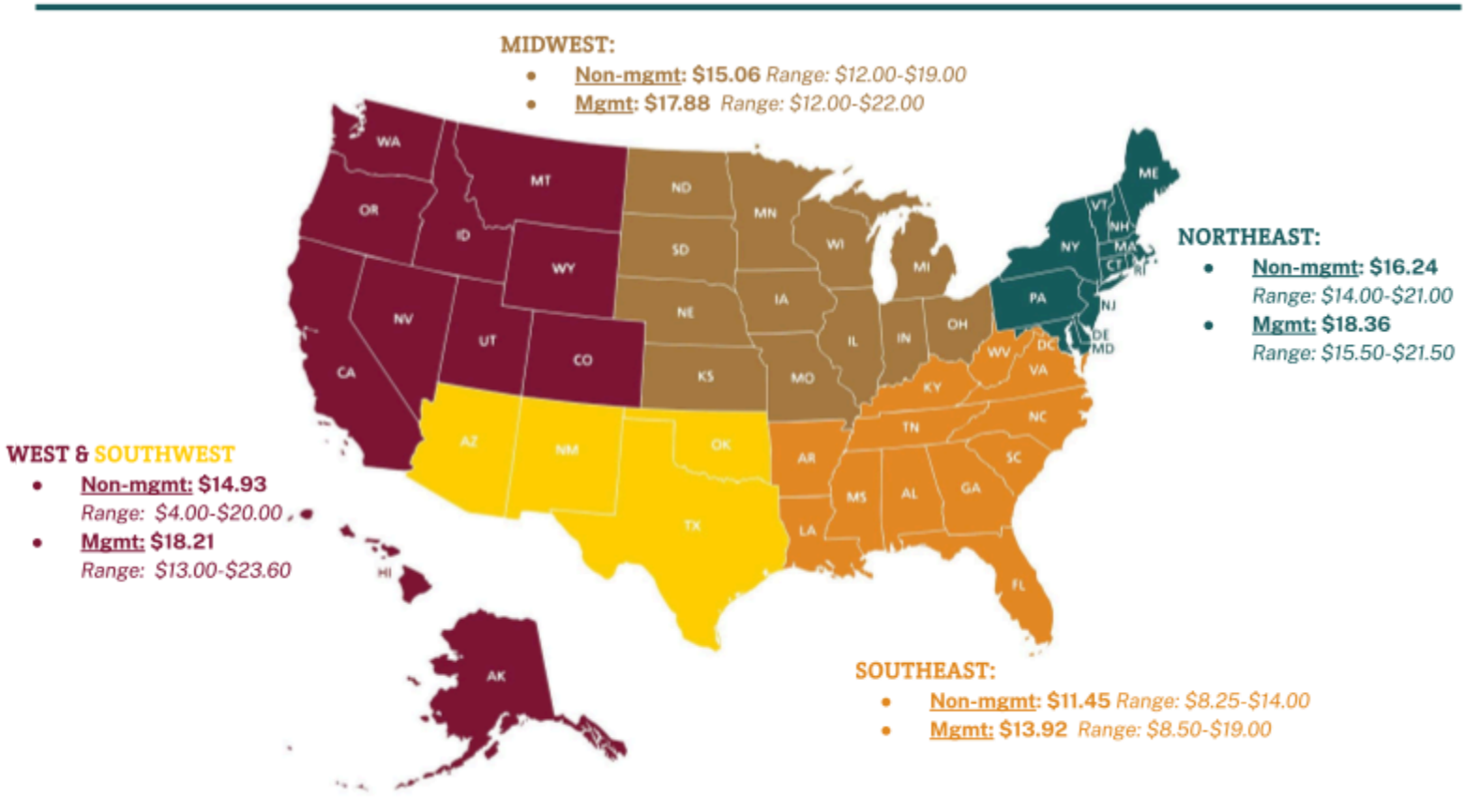
What did employees make on farms in 2022?*

**These numbers reflect wages employees were making at both for-profit and not-for-profit farming operations.*

NATIONAL:

Non-management: $15.61/hr *Range: $10.50-$21.00/hr*

Management: $17.38 *Range: $8.50-$23.60*



What did farm employees consider to be a fair wage in 2022?

We also asked employees what they considered to be a fair wage, based on different levels of professional farmworking experience.

EXPERIENCE LEVELS

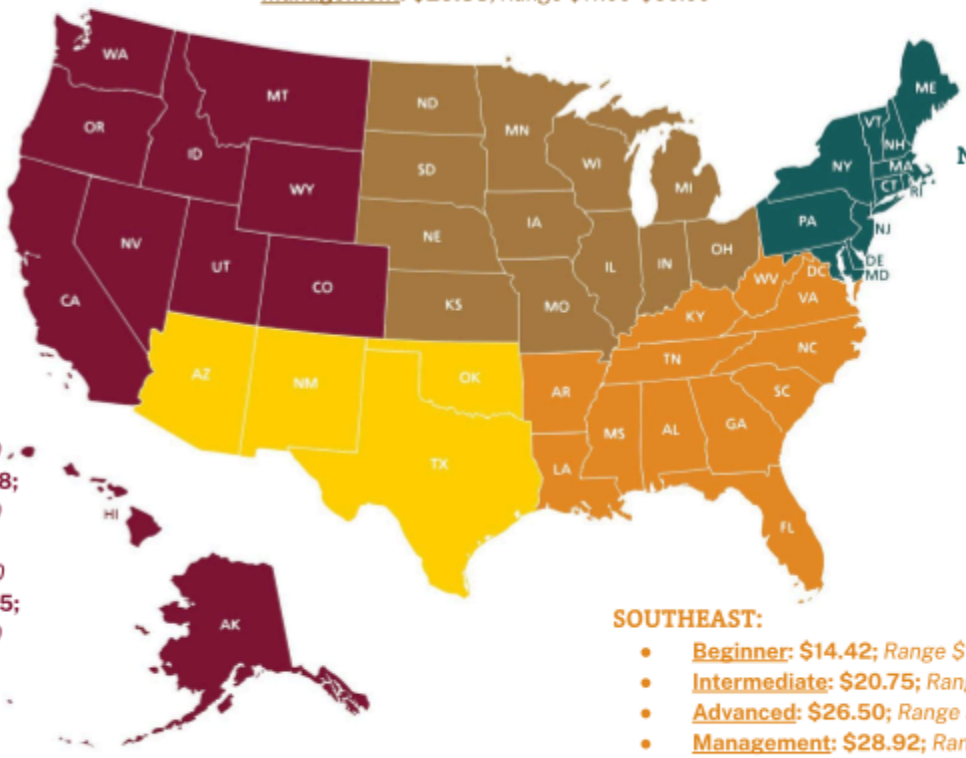
- Beginner = 1 to 3 years of experience
- Intermediate = 4 to 8 years of experience
- Advanced = 9 or more years of experience
- Management

NATIONAL:

- **Beginner: $16.74;** *Range $10.00-$25.00/hr*
- **Intermediate: $22.50;** *Range $15.00-$40.00*
- **Advanced: $28.26;** *Range $17.00-$50.00*
- **Management: $30.68;** *Range $17.00-$50.00*

MIDWEST:

- **Beginner: $15.90**; *Range $12.00-$24.00*
- **Intermediate: $21.15**; *Range $15.00-$30.00*
- **Advanced: $25.97**; *Range $17.00-$40.00*
- **Management: $29.33**; *Range $17.00-$50.00*



NORTHEAST:

- **Beginner: $18.41;** *Range $14.00-$25.00*
- **Intermediate: $24.67;** *Range $16.00-$40.00*
- **Advanced: $31.30;** *Range $20.00-$50.00*
- **Management: $33.44;** *Range $20.00-$50.00*

WEST & SOUTHWEST

- **Beginner: $17.38;** *Range $15.00-$25.00*
- **Intermediate: $22.88;** *Range $18.00-$30.00*
- **Advanced: $28.88;** *Range $22.00-$45.00*
- **Management: $30.75;** *Range $18.00-$50.00*

SOUTHEAST:

- **Beginner: $14.42;** *Range $10.00-$20.00*
- **Intermediate: $20.75;** *Range $15.00-$30.00*
- **Advanced: $26.50;** *Range $17.00-$40.00*
- **Management: $28.92;** *Range $19.00-$50.00*

As we've already discussed, the ability to choose this work – and to exert a certain level of influence over its terms – varies across different segments of the agricultural workforce. For many of the employees we spoke with, being in agriculture usually involves finding ways to make this career choice work despite lower wages and limited benefits. And based on the data above, employees are continuing to do this work despite a notable gap between their actual wages and what they perceive as fair. But that choice is not without consequences. As Kim, an Illinois-based farmworker, shared, "There's no saving going on. There is no planning for retirement with this kind of job and this kind of wage. We can't really thrive.

And I'm going to need to buy a new car soon so that means I have to start cutting back further." Many also grappled with the disconnect between how local food is valued in our broader societal discourse and how that is or is not reflected in farm-level wages. "This is some of the hardest work that is done. Some of the most important work – growing food for people. And I get it. There's not a lot of profit margin in farming unless you've really got it dialed in. But I worked 70-hour work weeks [for] $11 an hour."

> ***"I think about crew turnover a lot. The years you worked with a crew that clicked so hard and so good – I want that for a long haul, for a stretch of more than two seasons. What I've seen deter people after two or three years of seasonally farming is the lack of benefits. Not guaranteed a job back, not being eligible for unemployment. All of those barriers to financial security can make choosing seasonal farm work a challenging career choice. [At times] I've said I need to get a 'real' job or get married in order to survive...[and] I'm still wondering what happens when people have children? The only people I know who have kids are the farm owners." - Keely, farmworker***

Painting a More Complete Financial Picture*

- ***52%*** *of employees have a* ***second job****, and another* ***18%*** *have had a second job in the past.*
- ***1 in 4*** *employees receive* ***public benefits****, like SNAP/food stamps.*
- ***53%*** *depend on* ***external financial support*** *in order to work on farms, like a partner's income or access to a parent's health insurance plan.*
- ***76%*** *said a* ***health insurance stipend*** *would increase their ability to accept farm employment, with $100 to $200 per month identified as the most impactful amount.*
- ***30%*** *received a* ***formal CSA share*** *from their most recent farm employer.*
- ***24%*** *received an* ***annual gear stipend****. The average stipend amount was $129 per year, with a range of $70 to $200 per year.*
- ***9%*** *had access to a* ***retirement plan,*** *and* ***5%*** *received a* ***matching contribution*** *of 3% through their employer.*
- ***8%*** *received* ***health insurance*** *directly through their employer.*

**Data based on survey responses*

While many employees are able to find ways to continue farming despite these serious financial challenges, an untold number of would-be farmers are likely excluded from this opportunity altogether. As New York-based farmer Larry Tse points out, paying unsustainable wages "has skewed our industry to training farmers predominantly from the

middle to upper classes, as most folks coming from underprivileged and working class backgrounds are not able to take such a financial risk." There are a lot of historical and contemporary forces packed into this statement, but at the farm level, owners can engage with this by exploring what a more sustainable wage might look like. What opportunities might offering a more fair wage create in the short term, and what deeper change might this support over the long term?

Simply put, providing a more livable wage will make it more possible for individuals to enter this industry – and to bring their skills, their lived experiences, and their passions to this work. And as a farm owner, one key thing to recognize is that this doesn't need to be an all-or-nothing approach. As Abby, a farm manager in Minnesota emphasized, "Sometimes even a small amount goes a long way. A small raise or bonus or benefit shows employees you value them, even if you can't afford something big every year. For instance, one of our owners gives gas cards to employees commuting from further away." At the same time, showing employees that there is a progression to what they can make over time matters. Being able to see what that financial picture might look like one, three, and five years from now can help them assess how that fits in with their broader needs and goals. Simply put, when farm employees have access to higher or progressive wages – wages that support their needs and that they perceive to be more reflective of the value of their labor – they're more likely to continue doing this work.

> *"I don't have anxiety because of work now. When I got my paycheck yesterday, I wasn't scrambling to deposit it so it was available today, and I wasn't down to $2 in my account. I can actually pay my bills. I feel better about what I'm doing with my life, and I'm able to take care of myself better." - Jimmy, farmworker*

A raise in wages may be associated with a number of things – returning for another season of work or taking on additional responsibilities, for example. Within this context, it is also worth asking: When wages do go up, do farm owners' expectations change? Do they expect employees to produce that much more for the farm as a means of justifying or offsetting that higher wage? One farmworker shared her experiences in relation to these questions. "I know my employers value my labor without it having to be so much more, or for me to have to be so much more to justify my wage. There isn't this expectation that I need to be consistently on the clock and pushing myself harder and harder because they've offered me this more fair wage. It actually makes me a lot more comfortable – that idea that this could be a potentially viable career."

> *"I'm paid $14 an hour currently. I know it's not wildly high, but it's something that I've been ok with for now. Probably can't do several more years on a wage lower than living wage minimum, but my employer knows this and we're considering raises and alternative living and working agreements. Basically, the overall experience I have with them is that my labor and passion is valued, and they are going to invest in me with the tools and resources they have. Of course it's not perfect, but it's a conversation I have the ability to have without falling into poverty." - Magdalen, farmworker*

When it comes to wages, farm owners may feel that this area is where they have the least ability to make changes. And if you're a farm owner looking at this information, you may be experiencing a lot of strong feelings and emotions right now.

Farm Owner Perspectives

- It's not my fault that the agricultural industry is so unfair.
- I'm not even paying myself a living wage, so how am I going to justify doing that for employees?
- My profit margins are getting smaller and smaller in this environment. Where am I going to find that extra cash flow?
- If I raise my starting wages, that means my entire pay scale has to shift up.
- Even if I pay a higher wage, people might still leave the farm after one season.
- I can't pay as much as I'd like but I know employees really value dedicated education and training, so I'm going to focus on that instead.

> ***"The livable wage question is a tough one. That's what breaks my heart the most. It's not just for the employees but for owners too. For us, if you don't have a spouse working off of the farm or if you weren't gifted land, you're in a tough position with making it work. When we bought this land, we had $25 in our bank account. But we've been able to build back over time, and that's helping us meet some of these deeper employee needs." - Michael, farm owner***

At the same time, farm employees are likely having some strong feelings of their own.

Farmworker Perspectives

- My work brings and adds real value to the farm business, and I should be fairly compensated for that.
- I'm taking home a paycheck. Unlike farm owners, I'm not building equity, accruing assets, or getting a share of the farm's profits each year.
- As long as I'm farming, I don't have stable work for several months out of the year. For farm owners, the off-season is a time for reflection and planning. For workers, it's often a time of stress – of needing to find a second job to maintain a steady income so that I can continue returning to farming.
- I'm laboring with my body as my primary resource – a risk that may have enduring consequences and that may not be covered by health insurance or worker's compensation.

> *"It's concerning to do this work and not have health insurance – and yet, it's so common. You're juggling knives and heavy things all day long and you're like, 'By the way, don't cut yourself and don't hurt your back!'." - David, farm owner*

Exploring "What Could Be"

Wages can feel like an intractable issue for both owners and workers. There are just so many challenges to overcome, and their intersectionality can leave everyone feeling defeated. In keeping with our aspiration to explore *what could be*, let's reframe some of these fears and worries.

- I'm not even paying myself a living wage, so how am I going to justify doing that for my employees? → *If I identify ways to invest in my employees, we might all be able to earn more over time. This investment could broaden the equation. Meeting employees' needs in ways that also benefit and support the farm can lead to cost savings in the form of stronger retention, increasing skill on the farm, and more innovative, resilient, and efficient systems.*

- If I raise my starting wages, that means my entire pay scale has to shift up. → *If I can offer a wage that is more in line with the value of the work employees are contributing, there is a greater chance people will feel respected, be able to meet their needs, and be able to envision a future at this farm. And in more concrete terms, paying a higher wage can translate to increased motivation, stronger work performance, and ultimately a higher-quality product.*

- Even if I pay a higher wage, people might still leave the farm after one season. → *Employees will leave – that is inevitable. And offering a more fair wage sends a signal to the farmworking community that on your farm, you recognize and actively value labor. Workers talk to one another, and that networking can play a major role in bringing new employees and valuable skills to your farm.*

Taking Action

The reality is that farmworkers need to be able to do more than just scrape by. As Katie, a farm owner in Illinois, reflected, "I can have all of that other stuff in place – great communication, positions for them to grow into, an awesome workplace culture – but if my employees can't get by on what I'm paying them, they're just not going to stay. They won't have a choice. They're going to need to find something else so they can pay their bills." Let's take a look at some concrete tips and examples that can provide support in this space.

Tips to Consider

- Use tools like position descriptions and employee manuals that include details about pay and benefits. In addition to providing this key information, these documents can help keep expectations clear. For instance, does a raise come with new responsibilities? Does it come with different work hours? Updating position descriptions can ensure that expectations are clear for everyone.

> ***"The farms I respect the most are the ones making connections for you through the other farms they know. Managers and bosses should be talking to other managers and bosses to make sure that people know where the work is." Jesse, farmworker***

- Separate from wages, consider what assistance you might be able to offer to support employees' financial well-being. Is it a monthly gas card or a CSA share? A health insurance stipend or housing? Assistance with finding off-season work? Professional development stipends to support learning through classes, conferences, or trainings?

> ***"We provide health insurance for our 4 full-time, year-round employees. Customers will often ask us if there are other ways they can support the farm, and this is it – we encourage them to donate in support of employee health insurance. We have a donate button on our website, and 100% of those dollars plus any dollars tied to our sunflower sales go right into the insurance pool. As we say on our website, far too many 'sustainable' farms suffer employee burnout, high turnover rates, and substandard wages. We make it clear that by investing in our staff, customers are investing in a sustainable local food economy that keeps workers employed, insured, and happy."***
> ***- Brian, owner of Bear Creek Organic Farm***

- Explore whether there are any other partners who might help you meet some of these needs.
    - Think about collaborations and bartering opportunities with local businesses and producers. Farmworkers shared examples of exchanging farm food for therapy or coaching sessions, yoga packages, apparel and tool discounts, and machinery and vehicle maintenance. Consider formally incorporating these options and parameters into your farm's employee manual. You could empower employees to explore barter opportunities on their own, or you could establish these relationships directly through the farm and make those traded services more readily available to employees.
    - Is there a role for your CSA members in this space? There may be opportunities to explore around affordable housing and stronger wages and benefits. Do your CSA members have housing for rent? Would they make donations in support of employee health care or wage increases? Regularly highlighting employees' contributions in newsletters and over social media

can deepen CSA members' understanding of the crucial role workers play in the farm's existence and can help frame this as a larger conversation about community care and reciprocity.

- Are there work essentials you can provide for employees? These might include CamelBaks or water bottles, tick spray, sunscreen, rain gear, pocket knives, or work gloves.

> *"Provide the essentials. I spent so much money on tick spray. I remember thinking, 'Do I want to buy another bottle of this?' And it's like yea, I should buy it and even though technically it's not that expensive, when you use it so much, it adds up." - Allison, farmworker*

- Consider profit-sharing opportunities. These systems are customizable and can range from very simple to incredibly complex. An end-of-year bonus may be 50 cents for every hour worked during the season, for instance, or it may be linked to the farm's gross sales. See our example below for how Chickadee Creek Farm approaches this.
- Be in communication with employees. Consider how transparent you can be, and whether that might change as an employee grows with the farm. Are you comfortable sharing your profit and loss statements? Can you talk about how labor costs factor into the bigger picture? Are you able to speak candidly about what's possible when it comes to wages? Can you ask employees what they need to make this work? Engaging in this communication requires trust, but it also builds trust.

> *"Financial transparency is a huge part of worker-centered farms that people don't pay attention to or talk about. But if you actually want to be a worker-centered farm, tell people how much you make a year. How much materials cost. How much feed costs, and how much the crew costs. Just be real with people, because I think the tension can build really easily if people think, 'Hey, I only make $15 an hour but it seems like we make a ton of money.' I was telling my farm owner that I felt like this was really important, and she asked why. Some people want to have their own farms and want to know if it's possible for them. And everybody wants to know that they're not just being undervalued. It's important to share this." - Eva, farmworker*

Wages are one piece of the financial puzzle – a big piece, to be sure, but there are additional factors that contribute to employees' financial situations. We asked employees: ***"What practices and policies were in place at the farm you worked on most recently?"***

- *Paid time off: 43%*
- *Regular raises: 42%*
- *Bonuses: 27%*

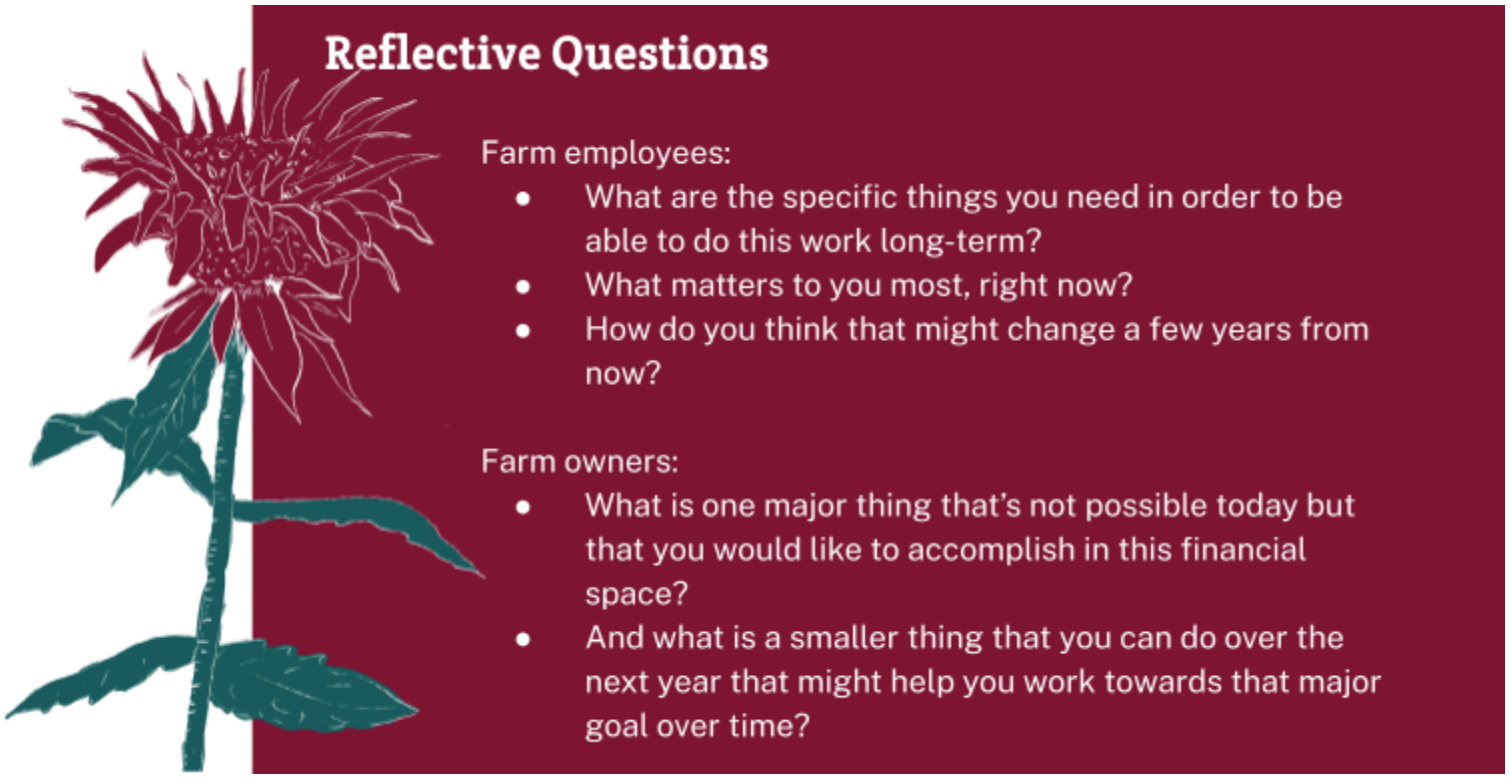
- *Overtime: 25%*
- *Farm gear stipend: 24%*
- *Housing: 22%*
- *Retirement plan: 9%*
- *Health insurance: 8%*
- *Retirement contribution: 5%*
- *Health insurance stipend: 3%*
- *Housing stipend: 2%*

Farm Employer Examples to Consider

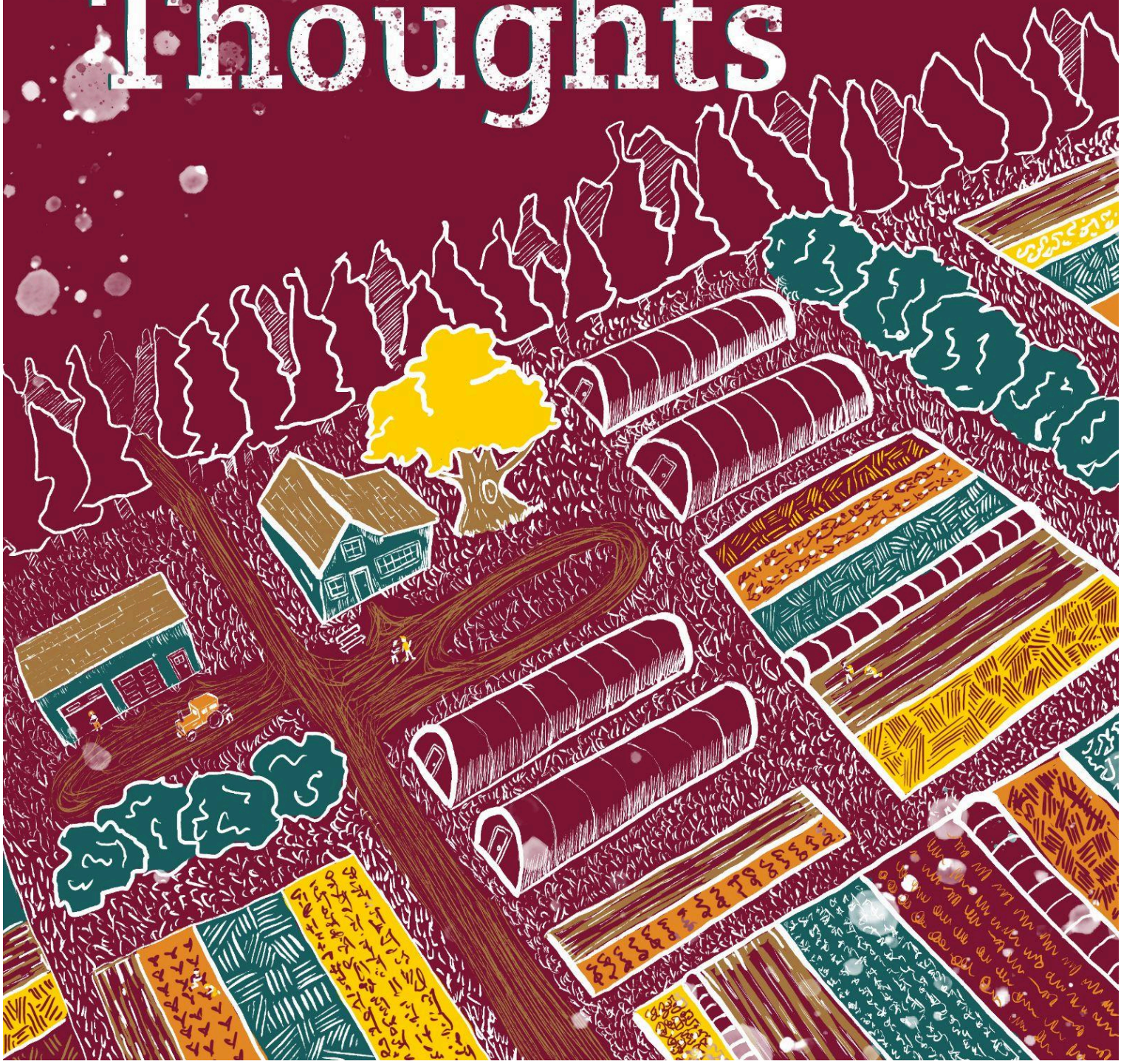
"Looking for Those Grants" Michael Whamond, co-owner of Hillview Farms in California
"In California, we really started looking at grants. There's a lot of money being put into that farm-to-school space. Some of those grants are $150,000. So if you're a farmer who has been doing this work for a while, you can probably make those infrastructure adjustments to make that work. And then that money can open up these new opportunities and allow you to invest more in labor. That's what has really helped us get up to that $16-$20 an hour range."
+Other farm owners have talked about achieving this through USDA Value-Added Producer Grants.

"Keeping the Gas Tank Filled" Richard Wiswall, co-owner of Cate Farm in Vermont
"Money talks. People will stick around if you pay them well and they're happy. It's a great exchange. That said, that's a tough call for farms who usually are a lower-margin business. Labor is often going to be the single biggest expense category. So you look at your budget and you're like 'Oh my goodness, I have a $200K budget and I'm spending $80K on labor, and I need to figure out how to cut that cost.' And unfortunately, because of that mentality, they pay people as little as they can and try to do cost cutting. That, I think, is wrong. Farming is a labor-intensive business and you have to recognize that that's part of the business. Like you have to buy gas for your car – you can't get away with adding water to it. The owner's number one job is to make sure the business succeeds into the future, and part of that is to push a pencil and figure out how to make it work from a business end. My push is to get farmers to look at: 'Ok, how can you pay yourself more? How are you going to pay your employees more? And how are you going to save for retirement?' We've done that work, and my employees stick around for years. They have retirement plans. They're invested in the farm because the farm is invested in them. And they're skilled – they know what they're doing. There are of course some new people coming and going, but generally, that formula is a win-win-win for everybody because people get paid well, I still get paid well, and employees stick around. It's a more efficient operation. So our labor costs are – on the top end, we've got $29.75, two at $22.50, $20, $19, and $17 an hour. Anyone who is coming in is at $16. So again, that's the cost of doing business. Separate the emotional stuff out and look at it as if you're buying gas. You can't drive a car without gas. You can't run a farm without labor."

“Sharing the Profits” Jess Niederer, owner of Chickadee Creek Farm in New Jersey
“Running this farm, the most challenging thing for me was retraining people. It’s just hard to have a revolving door of people coming in and out, so I was interested in creating a workplace people would be interested in staying at so that I’d also be able to reduce that burden on myself. And also in terms of ethics and morality, I’m just interested in creating a workplace that I would want to work at and be inspired to stay at, were I not in a farm ownership role. So one of the ways I’m building that is through this bonus structure. It’s a way for people to have more of an explanation for what they’re getting paid. We designed our formula based off of what we wanted to incentivize and what seemed fair. And that’s kind of the neat thing about a formula. We wanted to incentivize people coming back year after year, so our formula really weights longevity on the farm. And I think that makes a lot of sense in terms of what the farm’s bottom line experiences anyways. If you have a crew that really knows what it's doing already, they’ll be much more productive and do better quality work. Our formula is set at 6.5% of our gross sales. (Keep reading)



Concluding Thoughts



Concluding Thoughts

As we come to the end of this discussion, we elevate the words of the farmworkers who have shaped and informed this resource. This quote in particular – shared by Kaitie, a farmer in California – seems to capture the shared sentiment that many of the workers who spoke with us are feeling right now:

> *"Along with environmental and economic sustainability, we need to consider the principles of worker sustainability. If farmers ask how they can continue to make progress on meeting some of these needs, we may find that more and more workers are able to make it through multiple growing seasons. And more of us may even be able to do this as a career, staying and growing with the farm over the years. Many of us do not feel like that is possible right now, but we want it to be. I think it starts with shifting to a more worker-centered approach and recognizing that the prioritization of quality working conditions is an integral part of the farm's success. By doing this we can improve the well-being of farmworkers, increase retention rates on the farm, and strengthen business longevity for farm owners."*

As we consider the path before us, it may feel unclear, full of questions and doubt. But there are some things we know with absolute certainty. We know that we are operating in an environment where racism is embedded in the fabric of our country – in our social, political, and economic institutions – and where the greatest reward is found through extracting rather than nourishing our resources (Montenegro de Wit, 2021; Lakhani, 2021; Holt-Giménez, 2017). We know that within our agricultural system, the labor that farmers perform is exploited. It is not protected or valued as it should be and as it needs to be. And we know that, on the whole, this system is unfair and that smaller scale diversified vegetable farmers experience the resulting consequences in very real ways.

> ***"The system as it exists is so deeply unequal and extracts so violently from the environment, farmers, and working people that the status quo simply can't stand."***
> ***- Charlie Mitchell, Farmer-Labor Solidarity Organizer***

In this environment, the natural order is for power imbalances to position people against one another in harmful and sometimes violent ways. This resource is primarily focused on farm-level action and cannot begin to make any significant progress in that larger space. We do hope, however, that it offers a call to action for farm owners and workers to see and seek common ground through shared needs and interests. In identifying these priority areas, we aim to provide farms with tools that can help them succeed even within this deeply challenging environment.

> ***"Ethical behavior is doing the right thing when no one else is watching – even when doing the wrong thing is legal." - Aldo Leopold, writer and scientist***

Workers' voices are a powerful tool for world creation, for shaping the future of farm spaces. And so much of what brings people to farming is their drive to create something beautiful and different, something fair and just. This resource is full of places where workers have said this work – and this progress – can happen. As we draw this conversation to a close, we invite you to spend time with these questions offered by Sajo, a farmer based in the Northeast. Sajo asks us to consider:

- What do we need to change?
- What do we need to be creative about?
- And what do we need to admit to ourselves that is not working?

We know that stepping into this work is risky. It requires vulnerability and trust. And it will make you feel uncomfortable, exhausted, inspired, and proud. This work we are inviting you to take up is lifelong work. You will experience incremental changes and leaps forward, and at times, you may also feel like you're falling backwards. That's ok – that's part of it. We'll leave you with the words of Rick Rubin, co-founder of Def Jam Recordings: "Not all projects take time, but they do take a lifetime."

Organizations Doing Important Work*

There are too many organizations to list here, but we wanted to share a few as a starting point. Please help us build this resource over time by sharing your recommendations HERE.

Model farms, as identified by survey participants:

- Soul Fire Farm, Rock Steady Farm, Swanton Berry Farm, Banzhaf Garten Organic Farm, Bear Creek Organic Farm, Big Train Farm, Common Ground Farm, Crossroads Community Farm, Footprint Farm, Honey Field Farm, Lovefood Farm, Massaro Community Farm, Mile Creek Farm, Park Ridge Organics, Pyramid Farms, Quail Hill Farm, Sundance Harvest, Three Creeks Produce, Tipi Produce, Tumbling Shoals Farm, Vitruvian Farms, Winterfell Acres

Policy and advocacy-focused organizations:

- HEAL Food Alliance, National Black Food and Justice Alliance, Agricultural Justice Project, National Young Farmers Coalition, Real Organic Project, Farmworker Justice, Land Back, Sunrise Movement

Awareness-raising organizations:

- Good Food Jobs, Civil Eats, Food Tank

Organizations advancing worker-led social sustainability:

- Milk with Dignity, Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Food Chain Workers Alliance

**Organizations and farms listed above are based on the recommendations we receive. FairShare and Not Our Farm are not vetting these resources individually at this time. Please reach out with any questions or concerns, or if you have further information related to these resources you wish to provide.*

Data Sources and Demographics

For this resource, we drew from several years' worth of conversations with farm employees and farm owners working on diversified vegetable farms across the country.

- 2019: In-depth, in-person interviews with 15 farm owners in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois*
- 2020: In-depth, online interviews with 15 farm employees in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois*
- 2021: Online group discussion with nearly 50 farm employees from across the country
- 2022: Six in-depth, online focus group discussions with 38 farm employees from across the country*; co-hosted by Not Our Farm and FairShare
- 2022: National Farm Employee Perspectives survey administered through FairShare with assistance from Not Our Farm

We also drew from Not Our Farm's interviews with farmers from across the country.

**Indicates that participants were compensated for their time. Farm owners and farm employees were compensated at the same rate.*

Of note:

- All interviews, discussions, and data collection were conducted in English, which means that only specific voices and experiences are reflected in this resource at this point.
- We collected demographic information from 2022 focus group participants and prioritized centering BIPOC voices and experiences through these discussions. Respondents of the 2022 survey were given the option to provide demographic information. See HERE for a demographic summary of these two groups.
- It is very likely that Latinx voices and experiences are underrepresented in this research, while white voices and experiences are overrepresented. The USDA Economic Research Service estimates that 64% of the agricultural workforce is Hispanic and 31% is white. While USDA demographic data is not broken down to reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the smaller-scale diversified vegetable farm workforce, our future work will focus on better inviting the experiences of Latinx agricultural workers.

Glossary

- **Worker-centered:** Intentionally asking how systems, policies, practices, and spaces impact farmworkers in ways that amplify support and minimize harm. This framework recognizes workers as foundational to the success of farm businesses and is at the heart of this resource.

- **Ableism:** A set of societal attitudes that devalue and limit the potential of persons with disabilities. Ableism may be conscious or unconscious and is embedded in culture (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2012).
- **Apprenticeship:** A legally defined program that must be registered with the government. If a farm's apprenticeship program does not meet the legally established requirements, it is not actually an apprenticeship. Requirements include the following: the program exists in writing, specifies the program sponsor, includes metrics and written descriptions of processes to be learned, and provides organized related instruction. The Organic Vegetable Farm Manager Apprenticeship Program, sponsored by FairShare CSA Coalition, is an example of a registered program.
- **Assets:** Items owned by the farm business that have value – like land, equipment, and infrastructure.
- **Equity:** The share of business assets, based on earnings and capital. Equity is often seen as a basic measure of the business's financial strength and is a benefit that sits with ownership and may be extended to workers.
- **Fair Labor Standards Act:** Enacted in 1938 as part of the New Deal, the FLSA established key labor standards pertaining to minimum wage, overtime pay, recordkeeping, and youth employment. Federal and a majority of state laws continue to exempt farmworkers from these labor protections, with the original exemption tied to excluding Black farmworkers in order to win political support of Southern Democrats (Brown, 2021).
- **Intercultural competence:** The ability to work effectively across cultures in a way that acknowledges and respects the culture of the person or organization being served (González, 2012). Building intercultural competence is an ongoing process.
- **Internship:** An approach farms may use to emphasize educational opportunities in the workplace, sometimes in exchange for a monthly stipend and lodging. Employment laws apply to this arrangement, however, and interns may actually be employees. As Farm Commons states, "The internship needs to be like a classroom learning experience and the farmer can't gain any economic benefit from it. Generally, if the productive work of the farm business is being accomplished, the farm is considered to gain an economic benefit, and the worker is likely an employee.

Also, the experience must be for the benefit of the intern rather than the employer and the intern must understand the position is not employment" (Farm Commons, 2023). Sharing their experiences, farmworkers tended to feel more taken advantage of under the internship model than supported.

> ***"What I've experienced is that a lot of those internship opportunities are like, 'If you manage to get all of this work done and we get ahead of schedule, then we can spend some time on this education piece.' But that's very vague because if it's never intentionally fit into the schedule, then you're left wondering – what happened to this educational opportunity and are we really doing this poor of a job with the work itself that we're falling so far behind?" - Anonymous, farmworker***

- **Livable wage:** Workers who informed this resource used many terms – like decent, fair, progressive, living, livable, and reasonable – when talking about wages. With *livable wages* we refer to the spirit of rewarding labor with increasingly fair compensation. Unlike *living wage,* this term is more subjective and its understanding will likely differ from person to person.
- **Living wage:** the minimum income necessary for a worker to meet their basic needs.
- **Microaggression:** Subtle forms of oppression that may seem well-intentioned and complimentary, but in reality, invalidate a person's identity and experience (Sue, 2021). Because of the deep and compounding impact of these acts, we also acknowledge that they can be considered a form of abuse.
- **National Labor Relations Act:** Enacted in 1935 as part of the New Deal, the NLRA recognized the right of private sector employees to organize, join unions, and engage in collective bargaining without fear of retaliation. Farmworkers were and continue to remain largely excluded from these protections.
- **Neurodiversity:** Describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways and that there is no one "right" way of thinking, learning, or behaving and that we should not view differences as deficits (Baumer et al., 2021).
- **New Deal:** A series of programs, public work projects, financial reforms, and regulations instituted during the Great Depression that together sought to stabilize the economy. The Fair Labor Standards Act and the National Labor Relations Act were created as part of this platform.
- **Privilege:** A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group (Oxford Dictionary). Within this farming space, privilege varies based on factors like race, ethnicity, ownership, gender, sexual orientation, differing degrees of ability, socioeconomic status, and more.
- **Reparations:** The act of making amends for a wrong one has done by providing payment or other assistance to those who have been wronged (Oxford Dictionary).

Through overt actions in the form of land theft, enslavement, Jim Crow, redlining and many others, the U.S. extracted value and wealth from people of color to advance its own wealth-building enterprise (Ray et al., 2020; Coates, 2014). The call for reparations is a call for recognizing this and moving towards justice and healing.

- **White supremacy culture:** The idea that white people and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions are superior to people of color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions (Page, 2019). White supremacy culture expresses itself at many levels, including individually and structurally, and it serves to "support, reinforce, and reproduce capitalism, class oppression, gender oppression, heterosexism, ableism, [and] Christian hegemony," among others (Okun, 2023).

Appendix

Examples

- Centering Workers on Farms: Tips and Reflection Questions
- Ashokra Farm Roles
- Owl's Nest Farm's Decision Matrix for Operations
- Bear Creek Organic Farm's Improvement Ideas worksheet
- Bear Creek Organic Farm's Who, What, When, Where, and How worksheet
- Rock Steady Farm's Community Agreements
- National Young Farmer Coalition's Community Commitments
- Staying Safe While Working in Conditions of Smoke and Fire
- Park Ridge Organics' Self-scoring for Farm Tasks tool

Resources for Ongoing Learning and Support

- MVEG Network's Communication on the Farm: Systems for Success
- Farm Labor Dashboard
- ATTRA Beyond Basic Compensation
- MOFGA/Not Our Farm's Centering Workers on Farms
- MOFGA/Rock Steady Farm's Supporting an Inclusive Workplace Culture
- Groundswell Center's Farming for Justice Series: Unpacking Race and Disability Injustices on the Land
- Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture
- National Young Farmers Coalition Racial Equity Toolkit
- 1619 Podcast - The New York Times
- Labor-Movement

Formal Trainings for Ongoing Learning and Support

- Becoming the Employer of Choice (BTEC) labor management training for farm owners and experienced managers
- Developing Intercultural Competence as Farm Employers (BTEC session)
- Training and Education for Aspiring Managers (TEAMs) labor management training for aspiring and early-career farm managers

Ongoing Support

- Not Our Farm
- FairShare Farmworker Network listserv (click here to be added)

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Not Our Farm

https://notourfarm.org/

Instagram: @notourfarm

Not Our Farm (NOF) is a non-profit farmworker storytelling project that strives to celebrate and share the stories of non-owning workers on farms. We aim to increase visibility around the challenges and abuses that happen on farms, regardless of the size, location or reputation. NOF is building power among farmworkers by cultivating a virtual space of community in which farmworkers share their stories and skills, create resources and form relationships with each other.

FairShare CSA Coalition

https://www.csacoalition.org/

Facebook: /FairShareCSACoalition
Instagram: @fairshareCSA

Fairshare CSA Coalition is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization based in Madison, Wisconsin, and serving the Midwest region. Our mission is to support and connect farmers and eaters through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). We envision a future where CSA is the backbone of a strong local food system and where all families have access to locally produced, organic food from small-scale farms. FairShare serves farmers through workshops, peer-to-peer support, and management and leadership training.