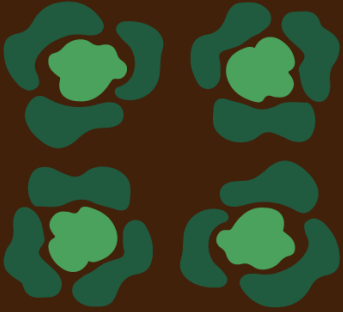


A PLOT



TO SAVE



THE
WORLD

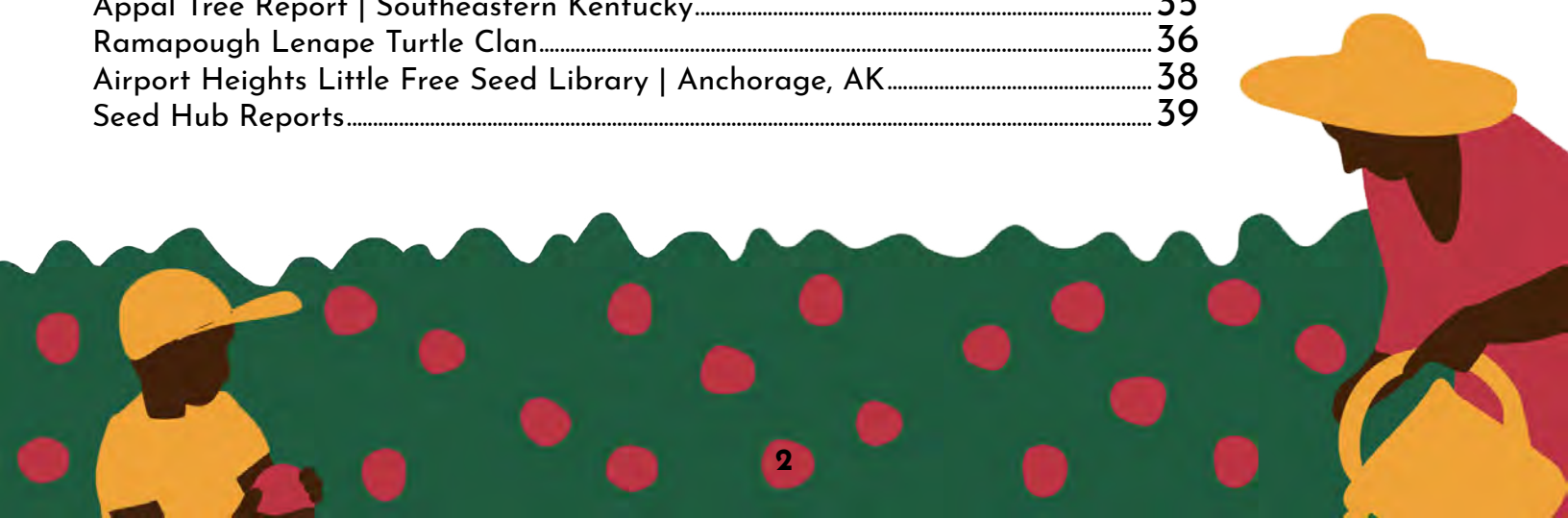


Cooperative Gardens Commission

2020 REPORT

In this Report

| | |
|---|----|
| Background..... | 3 |
| Who We Are & Resource Sharing Map..... | 4 |
| 2020 Hours & Effort Invested..... | 5 |
| Your Support..... | 6 |
| Why the Cooperative Gardens Commission..... | 7 |
| Website Overview Information Hub..... | 9 |
| How to Get Involved..... | 10 |
| Cooperative Gardens Documents & Dispatches | |
| Collective Documents | |
| Community Agreements..... | 12 |
| Policy Platform Introduction..... | 13 |
| Reparations Roadmap..... | 16 |
| Working Group Dispatches | |
| Seed Distribution..... | 17 |
| BIPOC..... | 18 |
| Outreach..... | 19 |
| Anti-Oppression & Allyship..... | 20 |
| Accountability..... | 21 |
| Media, Design & Messaging..... | 23 |
| Become a Commissioner..... | 24 |
| Commissioner Reports | |
| Bonnetta Adeeb Steam Onward..... | 25 |
| Patricia Larenas Multiple Projects, Mountain View, CA..... | 26 |
| Hummingbird Carole Segura..... | 29 |
| What's Next..... | 30 |
| Seed Distribution Hubs..... | 33 |
| Featured Seed Hubs | |
| Ekar Farm Denver, CO..... | 34 |
| Appal Tree Report Southeastern Kentucky..... | 35 |
| Ramapough Lenape Turtle Clan..... | 36 |
| Airport Heights Little Free Seed Library Anchorage, AK..... | 38 |
| Seed Hub Reports..... | 39 |



Background

Cooperative Gardens Commission (CGC) started in March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. CGC is a decentralized collective of volunteers working to increase community food production, resource-sharing, and food sovereignty especially in communities that were struggling before the pandemic.

Due to the lack of fresh healthy food, and limited access to food and seed sources, CGC initiated a “Call to Action” for farmers, gardeners, seed keepers, seed savers and entrepreneurs, Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color (BIPOC), and displaced workers. The call was to come together in order to create a sustainable regenerative way to create seed hubs and share educational resources to communities on a national, and now international, level.

Our grassroots development took root! Individuals and organizations use these distributed resources in ways that suit specific needs of their communities. The overall goal of CGC is to empower local movements toward food security by creating a network of food growers through gardening and farming. Our goal is to grow these networks into resilient communities that are healthier, more vibrant, and interconnected.

Now is the time for a dedicated, collective effort to cultivate as much nutrient dense food as possible. Globally, the number of people approaching starvation rose 40% in the last year, from 135 to 270 million. The UN held a special session in December 2020, the first ever to address a pandemic, in which food security and humanitarian needs were deemed a priority. “Famine is literally on the horizon,” said David Beasley, Executive Director of the World Food Programme.

To date CGC has provided free seeds to an estimated 12,000 gardens via 257 local seed hubs in 41 states.

This report aims to detail where CGC has been, where we are going, and how you can get involved.

You can get in touch with us at:
CooperativeGardens@gmail.com

Cooperative Gardens Commission



Who We Are



The Cooperative Gardens Commission is composed of hundreds of volunteers from across North America working as a collective to facilitate the conscientious sharing of resources – including seeds, soil, equipment, labor, land, and knowledge – and build solidarity across traditional divides. We are farmers, gardeners, activists, and organizers. We believe increasing local food production can help build community power and resilience.

While CGC began developing a new network in the face of this tragic pandemic – and the ineffective government response to it – we recognize that the movement for food sovereignty and against food apartheid is wide and deep, so we primarily seek to support the work of existing networks and projects.

Our Guiding Principle

#CoopGardens is a movement for everyone – regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, survivor status, ability, nationality, language, economic status, appearance, age, religion, immigration or documentation status, background, health, or any other personal characteristic.

How We Organize

The CGC is a grassroots organizing collective. We are open, transparent, non-hierarchical, and committed to consensus-based decision-making. Most of our work happens within our various Working Groups (referred to as “WGs” in this report), primarily meeting online via Zoom, while the full collective meets on the 1st and 3rd Monday of every month at 8pm ET/5pm PT via Maestroconference conference calls.

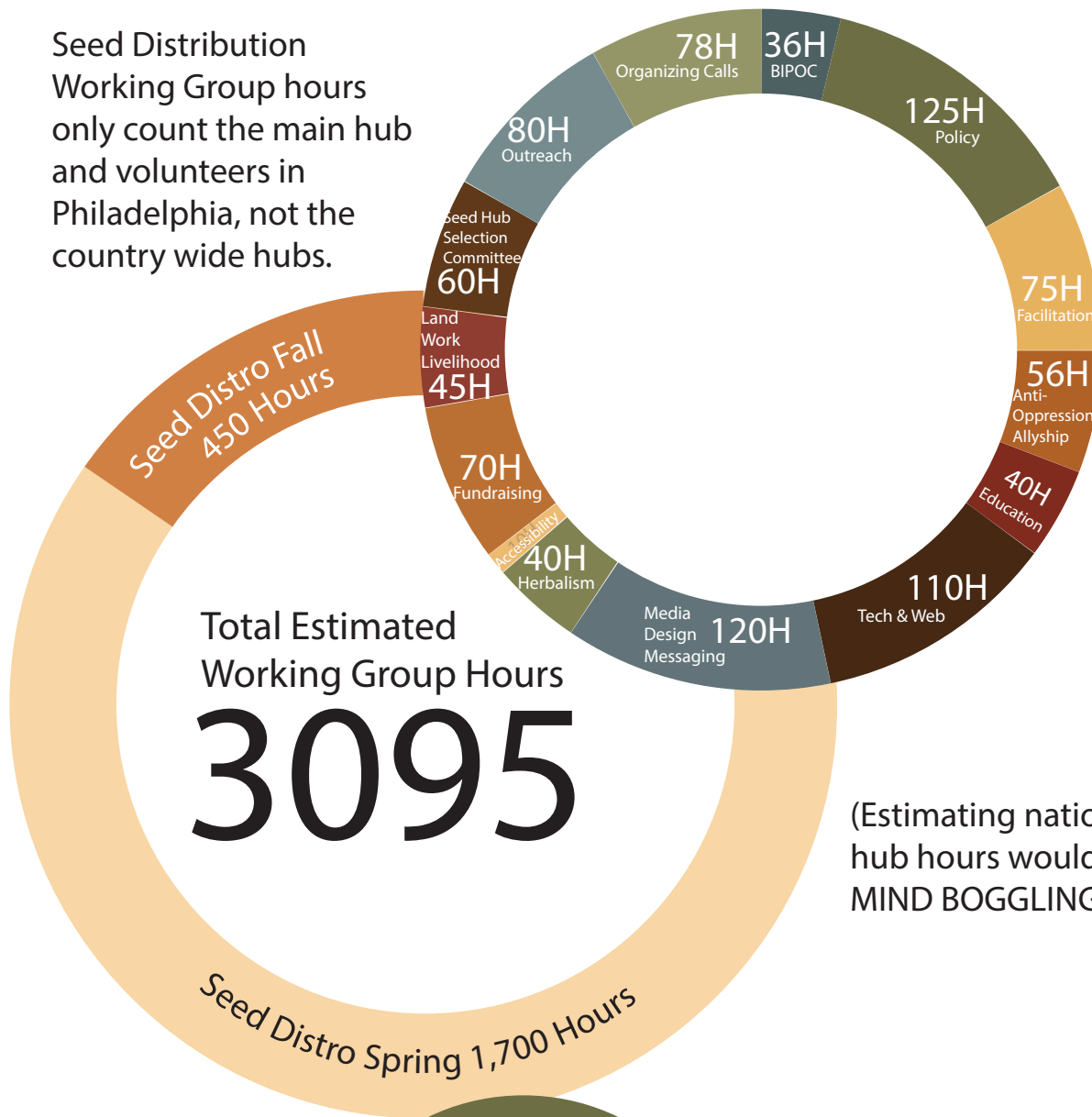
CGC operates as a non-profit organization under the fiscal sponsorship of The Experimental Farm Network Cooperative, a Philadelphia-based 501(c)(3).

Resource Sharing Map

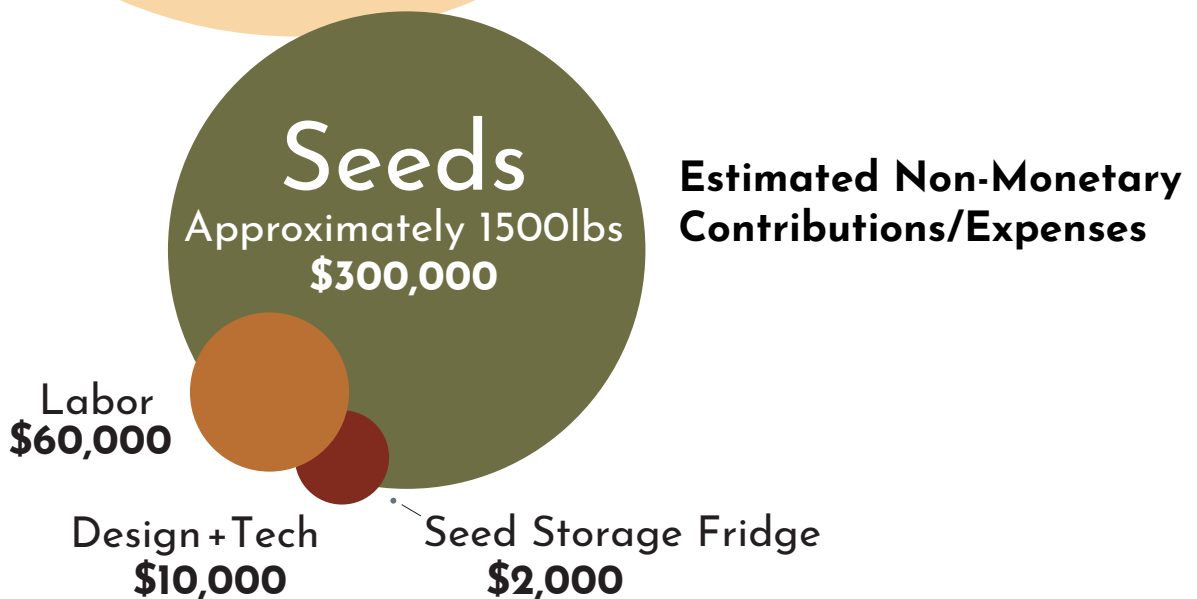
If you have resources to offer folks in your community, please go to the coopgardens.com website and PUT YOURSELF ON THE MAP. If you know other people who are great resources, ask them to put themselves on the map! You can click the button “Share Resources” on the front of the website.

2020 Hours & Effort Invested

Seed Distribution Working Group hours only count the main hub and volunteers in Philadelphia, not the country wide hubs.



(Estimating national seed hub hours would be MIND BOGGLING!)



Your Support

We have not prioritized fundraising thus far – our focus was on doing the work – but moving forward your help is increasingly necessary. So far we have sent free seeds to over 257 local seed hubs. We intend to continue seed distribution efforts for coming seasons as well. Our 2020 distribution costs came to about \$4,000, including packaging, shipping, and materials. In 2021, we anticipate our costs will be even higher.

One-time donations can be sent via any of the following:

- 1 Venmo@CoopGardens
- 2 [GoFundMe](https://www.gofundme.com/)
- 3 Directly via check:
Cooperative Gardens Commission
c/o Experimental Farm Network
7153 Sprague St.
Philadelphia, PA 19119

Help to sustain our growth by choosing one of the following options via Patreon.com/coopgardens

\$6 per month

Seed Money



This will help us cover shipping costs of seeds!

\$10 per month

Start Seedlings



Our org has taken root! This level of support goes towards seeds + minimal printing costs.

\$35 per month

Plant Trees

If you contribute at this level it will help us continue sustainable growth. We can send you a printed copy of the 2020 report. You will also receive the following gifts over the course of the year. We appreciate our supporters!



\$100 per month

Fund Our Organizing

Traditional funding sources such as grants for non-profits are on our radar, but we do not have a dedicated grant writer. Supporting this fund would allow us to help the group that regularly contributes cover basic living expenses.

\$250 per month

Micro-Grant Program

Focus your funding and support towards our in-development micro-grants program. Our grants will prioritize BIPOC led farms and food related businesses. You will receive updates about programs receiving your support!



These are the gifts we will send every three months, as thanks for your support for the Micro-Grants or our Organizers!

Why the “Cooperative Gardens Commission”

by Nate Kleinman

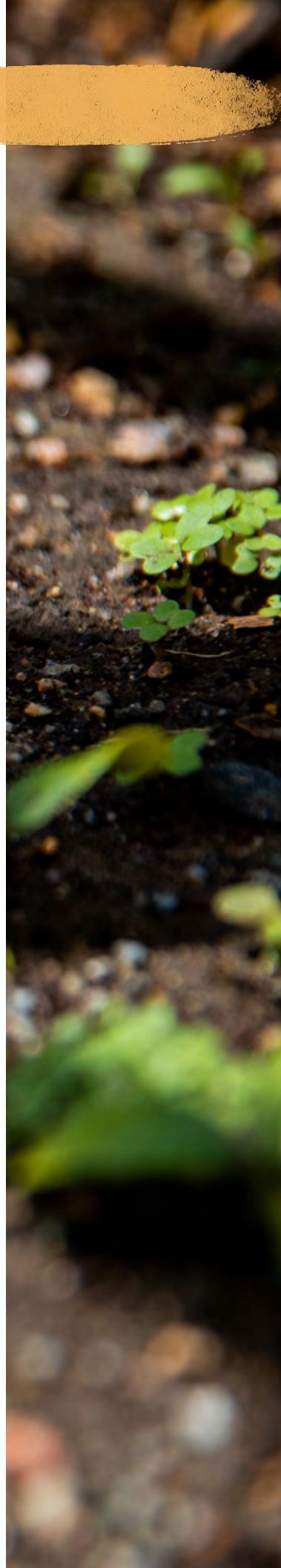
Co-Director - Experimental Farm Network

The seed for the Cooperative Gardens Commission was planted with a post on the Experimental Farm Network instagram page on March 18th, 2020, days after COVID-19 shutdowns began. The first line blared “Corona Victory Gardens!” beneath photos of old propaganda posters from both world wars, followed by a brief polemic calling for people to grow more food this year – to create “victory gardens” to feed people during our coming fight against the virus – and an invitation to a conference call two days later to initiate an organized “Corona Victory Gardens” effort. I thought it was a good idea, but I did not anticipate the outpouring of support and excitement that followed.

Some 130 people called in to our first organizing call. Participants included leaders of important seed companies, non-profits, and community organizations, along with concerned individuals from across the US. A few voices spoke out against the name “Corona Victory Gardens,” mainly due to its militaristic connotations. I left the call convinced we needed to have a longer discussion on the topic, but I still thought it was a good name. I believed that it would capture imaginations by tapping into nostalgia for the “victory gardens” of World War II, which are widely remembered as a positive expression of resilience and patriotism. But immediately after the call I opened an email from Leah Penniman and Larisa Jacobson of Soul Fire Farm. I had reached out to them asking them to join our effort, and they responded in part by explaining to me some of the untold history of “victory gardens.” I was quickly convinced that – while the nostalgia and enthusiasm for “victory gardens” was real and potentially useful for us – the name had to go.

I didn’t know about the deep historical connection between the “victory gardens” movement of World War II and one of the darkest chapters in our country’s history: what is euphemistically called the “Japanese internment”, characterized by forced removal, brutal mistreatment, and theft of land and other property – collective punishment and harsh imprisonment on a horrifying scale. When President Roosevelt decreed the removal of all Japanese-American people from the entire West Coast in early 1942, it swiftly led to widespread food shortages. Japanese-American farmers produced some 40% of fresh vegetables in California at the time. It was those food shortages which actually kickstarted the iconic WWII “victory gardens” movement. Perhaps not coincidentally, by some estimates “victory gardens” ultimately ended up producing around 40% of all vegetables consumed in the US during the latter years of the war. Our task, it seemed to me, was to find a way to duplicate the success of the “victory gardens” moment, but to do it in the right way.

On our second conference call, three days after the first one, some 160 people turned up. After I shared the concerns about alienating Japanese-Americans with the name – also noting the rise in anti-Asian bigotry and violence at the time – we spent a good portion of the call debating what to

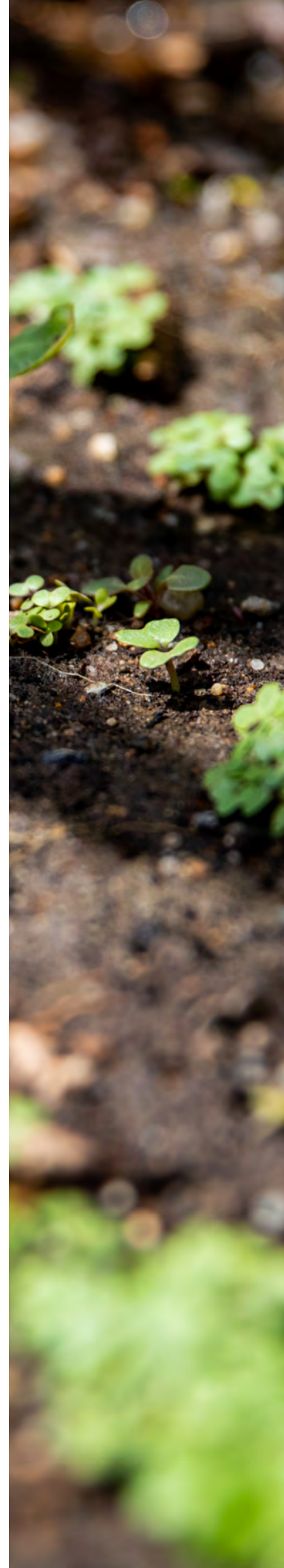


call ourselves. Some other proposals included Solidarity Gardens, Prosperity Gardens, Sovereignty Gardens, and Food Security Gardens. Ultimately we settled on Cooperative Gardens Commission. “Cooperative” draws a contrast with “victory,” because it’s not about defeating anyone, but working together. “Co-op Gardens” is a quick and easy shorthand (and coopgardens.com was available). “Cooperative” is not a highly politicized word, and it evokes good feelings among many farmers – whom we knew we needed to join our effort – both because of the Cooperative Extension System, and because farming cooperatives have such a rich history. I liked the acronym “CGC” (“CDC does medicine. CGC does food.”), and that “Cooperative Garden Commission” sounds very official, almost like it could be a government agency. (This was part of the successful strategy of the National War Garden Commission during World War I – which sounded even more official, but was actually a non-governmental organization as well.)

Some on that second call thought we were overreacting, but most of us quickly came to understand that “Corona Victory Gardens” was a deeply inappropriate name for our cause. The connection between Victory Gardens and the oppressive treatment of Japanese Americans may not be widely known among most Americans, but it is part of the collective memory of many Asian Americans. The last thing we wanted to do was alienate a broad segment of the population. As a collective, we understood that without the participation and leadership of BIPOC people (Black, Indigenous, & People of Color) in this nascent movement, we would surely fail to achieve our goals.

In retrospect, I’m glad the name change became a part of the story of this movement. I view it as an opportunity: Not only does it give us a chance to teach people about our country’s real history, and to demonstrate what it looks like for a majority-white organization to really listen to the concerns of BIPOC allies, but it also gives us an opportunity to draw a parallel to today’s migrant workers – especially in California – who are responsible for so much of the fruit and vegetables we eat, as Japanese-American farmers were in 1942. People of Latin American descent make up 18% of the US population, but they make up 83% of all field laborers (and only own 3% of all farms), with the vast majority of them being born outside the US.

Migrant workers were already living in fear before the pandemic – threatened by enforcement crackdowns, mass deportation, and child separation. Now they labor on despite the additional fear of the virus, and with far too many working in unsafe conditions. The same is true for workers in other parts of the food supply chain, including factories, slaughterhouses, and meat-packing plants. As the pandemic brought food shortages and even rationing to US supermarkets for the first time in recent memory, the news media began coming to us to tell the story of CGC and our efforts to help more people grow their own food. We were able to use that media interest (no doubt piqued by the phrase “victory gardens”) to talk about the real history of our country and highlight the structural injustices that still exist in our society today. If we hadn’t changed our name, we would never have been in the position to help get those critical truths into the public consciousness.



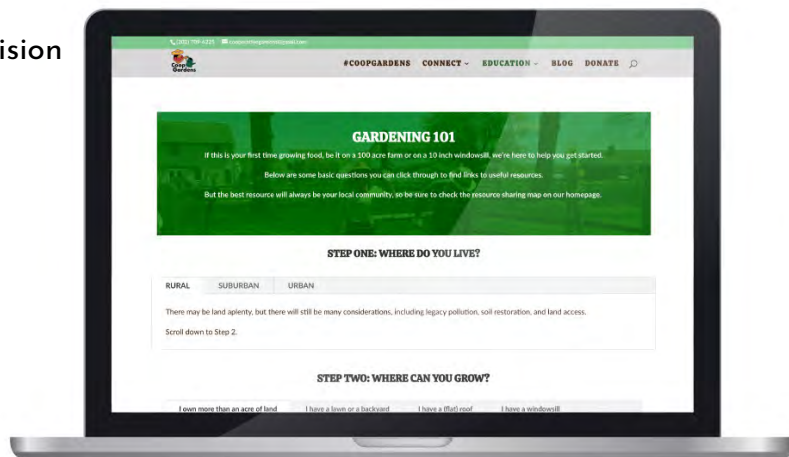
Website Overview | Information Hub

Coopgardens.com was designed and built by several volunteers with the intention of connecting people with the resources and information needed to plant gardens, and become involved with the Cooperative Gardens Commission.



THE WEBSITE INCLUDES

- Educational flow chart which helps people start gardens
- Map where folks can share resources and contact information
- Blog with content posted by members of the organization
- Links to media about the work being done by the organization
- Donation information
- Ways to get involved
- A hotline and email to contact for assistance
- Cooperative Gardens Commission mission, and vision
- BIPOC led learning resources
- Herbalism education
- Meeting times and ways to join working groups

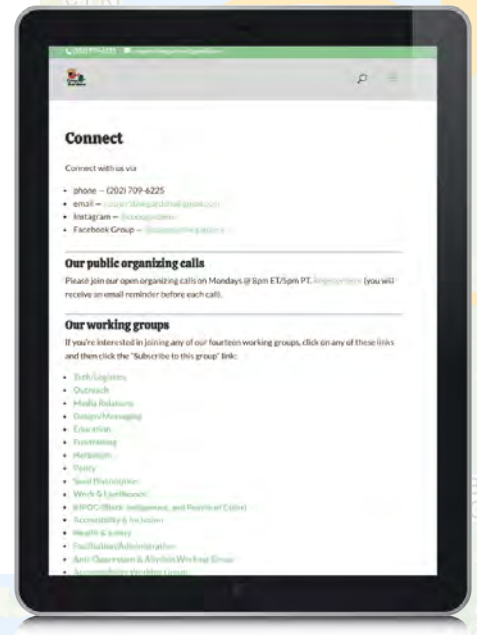


How To Get Involved

Join our organizing calls every 1st and 3rd Monday night, [register here](#). In each gathering we hear what's going on with CGC, get working group reports and discuss and adapt to the many things going on this year. This is one of the best ways to get an overview of what CGC is about and can be helpful in determining which working group(s) you'd like to join!

Visit CoopGardens.org to learn more about our goals, projects and where to get involved. A simple way to get started is by putting yourself on the map.

Interested in starting a community garden or outfitting your local community with enough seeds for one? [Sign up to be a seed hub!](#) CGC launched a free seed distribution project with local and regional hubs from coast to coast. You can find a hub in your area using the map. This effort has been organized by our Seed Distribution Working Group. You can fill out the form and sign up to become a seed hub for 2021!



| Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday |
|--|--|---|-----------------|
| 7pm Outreach 8pm Main CGC Organizing Call | 2pm Tech/Logistics 6pm Media, Design & Messaging 8pm BIPOC | 1pm Policy 2:30pm Land, Work & Livelihoods 6pm Anti-Oppression & Allyship 8:30pm Finance/Fundraising | 8pm Seed Distro |
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Cooperative Gardens Dispatches

Collective Documents

Community Agreements
Policy Platform Introduction
Reparations Roadmap

Working Group Features

Seed Distribution
BIPOC
Outreach
Anti-Oppression & Allyship
Accountability
Media, Design & Messaging



Seed
Distribution

Outreach

Policy

BIPOC

Facilitation
Administration

Community Agreements

How we work

Cooperative Gardens Commission gathers around shared community agreements. We are a decentralized, non-hierarchical organization. We meet two times per month in organizing calls, and in working groups.

We center all of our organizing around the following main points:

- We aim to gather and organize from a practice of respect, love, and openness
- We practice needs-based resolution versus punishment
- Language is important and the key to this movement
- Through our community work, we reconnect to our cultures and traditional lineages
- As a collective being we support Reparations for Black, Indigenous and People of Color
- We have established a working group etiquette that you can explore in the link below
- This is a living document and as our movement progresses, we welcome any input

Accessibility

[Read the full Community Agreements document](#)

Organizing

Media,
Design &
Messaging

Anti-
Oppression
& Allyship

Accountability

Tech &
Logistics

Herbalism

Education

Policy Working Group Dispatch

The CGC Policy Working Group is working to develop a detailed policy platform to drive our collective's future lobbying and coalition building efforts. If you would like to join this effort, or you have any proposals to offer, please write to cooperativegardens@gmail.com to get connected. Below are some of excerpts from our policy-platform-in-progress:

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced millions of people in the United States to realize what many marginalized communities have long known: that our agricultural system does not provide equally for all of us. While wealthy communities have access to fresh, varied, healthy and organic food, poor communities – and communities of color in particular – suffer from food apartheid, with access only to food that is highly processed, monotonous, unhealthy and often laced with the harmful chemicals ubiquitous in the dominant industrial farming system... [R]ather than providing healthful sustenance, American agriculture is structured primarily to make profits for transnational corporations. The pandemic has brought American agricultural policy to a crossroads: a new system could prioritize equal access, food and health sovereignty, corporate accountability, agroecology, ecosystem preservation, and climate resilience, while continuing this failed system would only guarantee further inequality, ill health, food shortages, labor exploitation, and environmental degradation.

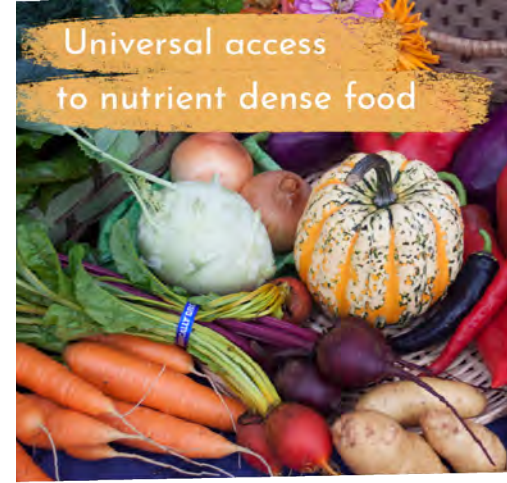
To address these inequities and social challenges, the Cooperative Gardens Commission advocates a full-scale paradigm shift in national food and farming policies, as well as in the dominant political economy, which negatively impacts the entire world. This will entail comprehensive transformations to the extractive globalized agricultural seed, trade, and land use paradigms...

To achieve these ends, we propose policy changes in the following five arenas: land & water justice, smallholder & farmworkers' rights, seed freedom, local food sovereignty & corporate accountability, and ecosystem stewardship & climate resilience.

I. LAND AND WATER JUSTICE

- Better funded and accessible federal loan programs for farmers,
- Extended moratorium on farm foreclosures,
- Establishment of a Truth & Racial Healing Commission independent from the US Department of Agriculture to examine instances of discrimination – past and present – and make recompense to those who lost land due to systemic racism and other forms of discrimination,
- A well-funded national land bank designed to transfer underutilized land (abandoned land, land appropriated fairly, or land purchased by the land bank) to new farmers who commit to using regenerative organic practices, with priority given to Black, Indigenous, and other farmers of color.
- Creation of a federal FarmLink or LandLink service to connect landowners to would-be farmers,
- Tax incentives for landowners who open non-farmed land to regenerative farming or agroforestry,

Photos: CSA MKJ, Food Deserts in the US, Homestead Records, depleted soil in fire season South West Idaho, Free Seeds at XM Gardens



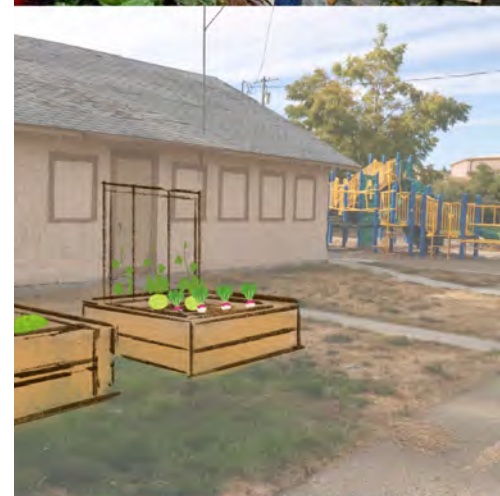
Food Deserts in the United States



- Increased funding and visibility for federal sustainable agriculture grant programs, including bridge-funds for farmers transitioning to organic practices and seeking USDA organic certification.
- Expand heirs property land tenure and retention rights,
- Enshrine in law respect for indigenous territorial sovereignties.
- Facilitate multi-stakeholder coalition-building to research and deliberate on more transformational agrarian reform...
- To address water privatization, establish community driven water planning that prioritizes community vision, input from farmers, and long-term sustainability;
- Reform the Clean Water Act;
- Demand lawmakers bring an Earth Jurisprudence perspective to land and water policy;

II. SMALLHOLDER & FARMWORKER RIGHTS

- Integrative policies to support young, new, beginner, returning, and especially BIPOC farmers and food producers...
- Mandating fair prices & updating "Parity" protections...
- Farmworker Rights
 - Farm workers have the right to a safe and healthy working environment,
 - Raise the minimum wage for farmworkers to a living wage.
 - Force farm employers to provide paid time off, overtime protections, hazard pay, and family/medical leave.
 - Establish a right to organize with collective bargaining protections for farmworkers and whistleblower protections.
 - Amend the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) and Fair Labor Standards Act to no longer exclude farmworkers.
 - Provide farmworkers access to workers' compensation and disability insurance.
 - Create a fund and framework to support legal assistance for farmworkers to fight against exploitative practices (including wage theft, unfair firings, workplace discrimination, poor living conditions, unsafe/unsanitary working conditions, etc).
 - Replacing current temporary/guest worker programs with longer term programs that center justice for farmworkers.
 - Mandate the use of best practices regarding health & safety for farmworkers to protect against COVID19 (including physical distancing, testing, personal protective equipment, etc).
 - Force employers to provide quality child care for children of farmworkers while schools are closed for in-person learning, saving farmworkers from being forced to bring children into the field.
 - Provide fair price supports so that small-scale low-income farmers can afford the above provisions for farmworkers.



Photos: Pastured Cattle Farnsfield UK CCBY Alan Murray, NYC Food Policy Strawberry Field, School yard raised bed idea MKJ, Purple potatoe Idaho MKJ.

III. SEED FREEDOM

- Intellectual Property Reform [to remove proprietary seed laws including utility patents on seeds]...
- Agrobiotech Regulation:
 - Create strict new regulations on GMOs and gene editing
 - Ban state and local preemption laws that currently prevent states and municipalities from regulating or banning the planting of GMO crops.
 - Allocate farmer-transition funds to states and municipalities that decide to become GMO-free zones...
- Expanded and Equitable Access to Germplasm/Seeds...
- Seed sector monopoly/political economy...

IV. LOCAL FOOD SOVEREIGNTY & CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY:

Federal, state and municipal policy must establish a legal right to grow food, and to facilitate individual and community access to resources for production, processing, and distribution of food...

V. ECOSYSTEM STEWARDSHIP & CLIMATE RESILIENCE

- Restrict toxic synthetic pesticides...
- Regenerate biodiversity & protect pollinators...
- Climate Crisis & Survival...
 - Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions...
 - Focus on soils and carbon sequestration...
 - Agroecology research...
 - Agrobiodiversity preservation...
 - Moratorium on CAFOs and regulation of their methane emissions...

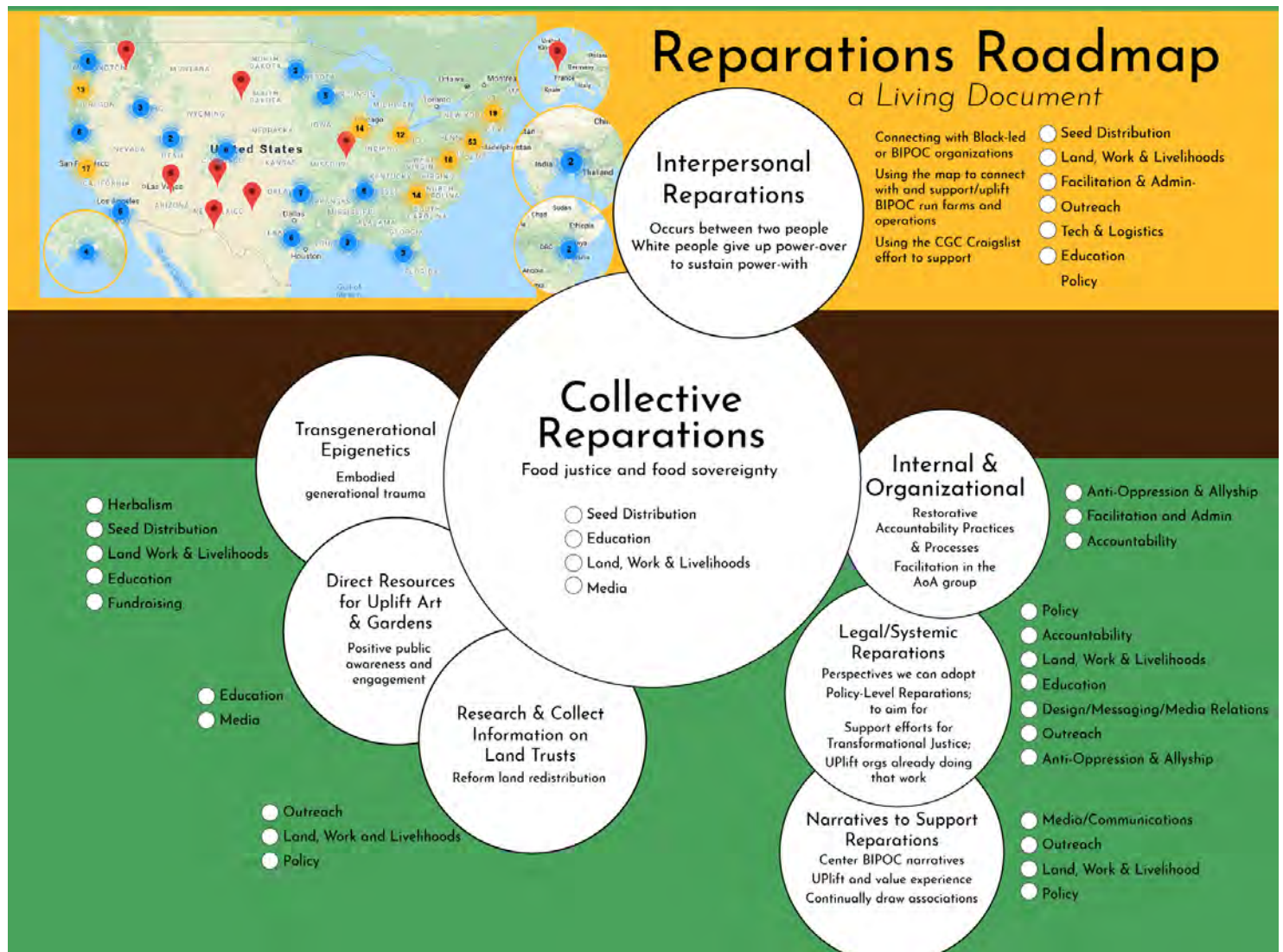
CONCLUSION

Governance Transformation: This policy platform proposes the transformational principles and goals above, but also a transformation of governance and policy itself:

- Radical Democracy/Civic Engagement
- We begin with the urgency of including more and more diverse voices in decision-making around agricultural and agri-food policy at large. Our policy platform is not and cannot be comprehensive, it emerges from dialogue and community work and ongoing food justice movements that we are honored to be working with... rooted in a fervent desire to develop a system that is actively anti-racist and which prioritizes indigenous rights and sovereignty... [A] central aim/demand of our policy platform is the need for authentic democratic forums for direct participatory governance – beyond mere passive “civic engagement”...
- Antitrust
 - End corporate monopoly and extreme concentration/consolidation...
 - International Solidarity...
 - Recognize and respect that US policies reverberate around the world (in particular due to domination of US-multinational corporations), and that we have a duty to reduce harms for which we are responsible, in whole or in part...



Photos: Local Food Initiative Lazy Bed, Home-stead Sproutlings MKJ, Extended Season Raised Bed Oregon State University Flickr.



From the Reparations Roadmap:

The Anti-Oppression and Allyship (AoA) Working Group is composed of white (and conditionally white) members of CGC participating in the ongoing process of becoming allies and accomplices. The AoA group was started in response to a request from our fellow organizers in the CGC BIPOC Working Group, and this “roadmap” was initiated in response to the collective drafting process of our Community Agreements. The Reparations Roadmap represents the culmination of months of work, attempting to understand various models and histories of reparations, for Black and Indigenous and all Communities of Color. It is an earnest, if imperfect, distillation of our findings aimed at applying them to our work in and outside of CGC. It should be considered a living document that will undergo revisions and expansions as our group grows.

We envision reparations as a step forward toward a new way of being. We believe the process of reparations is as interpersonal as it is systemic. The work of reparations starts with the collective healing, and creation of accountability structures between white allies. In doing so, we fortify ourselves to continue to do the hard work of dismantling systemic racism, so that we may co-create a just future for all, centered around food.

We as white people acknowledge that the purpose of participating in reparations work is not to earn the accolades of Black, Indigenous, or other People of Color, nor is it to offer any kind of “help” or charity. This is an act of solidarity. It is our responsibility as beneficiaries of the wealth accumulated at the expense of the lives and livelihood of generations of people and Communities of Color.

We meet every other Wednesday at 6pm EST

Seed Distribution Dispatch

The CGC seed distribution has been a very effective part of the mission of the organization. Over the course of the first 4 months of the existence of CGC, the Seed Distribution working group developed a process for acquiring free seeds, identifying and engaging a network of Seed Distribution Hubs, packaging and shipping seed packages that represented the highest nutrition content and most plant diversity possible. The program we developed could be easily modified to the specific needs of the seed hub, acknowledging the cultural preferences of and resources available to the Seed Hubs.

The central hub, located at Making Worlds Books, a radical cooperatively-run book store that generously donated the space for our use, was staffed by volunteers from a variety of backgrounds and interests. Our Philly volunteer list grew to over 50 wonderful people from in and outside of CGC organizing. The Seed Distribution working group worked tirelessly to identify and prioritize the groups and individuals, 200 in all, who would receive the packages for redistribution to their communities, leading to nearly 10,000 gardens touched by the work of CGC Seed distribution. Our work is ongoing, as we tackle a massive outreach effort to collect and sort data on our network of hubs, hearing the stories of this network of community organizers. In preparation for next year's spring Seed Distribution, we continue our work of soliciting seed donations and hope to increase the number of our Seed Distribution Hubs by 50%.



We meet every other Wednesday at 8pm EST

Photos by Grace Winter

BIPOC Dispatch

The purpose of this working group is to provide a safe space for those who self-identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) to be in community with each other, and to benefit the CGC with our input regarding shared goals around food justice. Towards that end, BIPOC members strived to have representation in each CGC working group.

BIPOC members situated across the USA leveraged our connections, relationships, and local/regional knowledge in order to benefit BIPOC communities. The following examples demonstrate the importance of including BIPOC leadership in order to fulfill this organization's goals to provide support and mutual aid to underserved and historically marginalized communities:

BIPOC WG Contributions to CGC

- Our members played an important role in ensuring that the Seed Distribution program focused on the recruitment of BIPOC-led seed hubs, and hubs that distribute to BIPOC communities. We also participated in the selection committee that determined which applicants received seeds first.
- Collaboration with the Seed Distribution WG on ranking and evaluation of seed hub applicants and participants. This included 257 seed hubs and 12,000 plus gardens and urban farms, and growing seeds received and saving seeds.
- Ensured that BIPOC was included in all the WGs in order to have a voice and equal representation.
- Provided openings, ceremonies, and sacred and indigenous songs to the group meetings.
- Providing content and collaborating with the Media WG to highlight the diversity and cultural diversity and political climate, and our commission.
- Providing facilitation and administration for meetings and creation of the commission.
- Providing policy and input on people of diversity and topics of importance to BIPOC farmers and especially to reparation and land use.
- *Las Abuelitas* (the Grandmothers of the BIPOC WG) is a core group of the BIPOC WG and CGC at large.

BIPOC WG Creations

1. We have a document in progress that is an indigenous medicinal and herbal educational pamphlet gift to the CGC.
2. We drafted the Community Agreements document, a part of which follows:

Main Points of the Community Agreements

We center all our organizing around these:

- We make space for learning and processes of decolonization
- We aim to gather and organize from a practice of respect, love, and openness.
- We practice needs-based resolution versus punishment
- Language is important and the key to this movement
- Through our community work, we reconnect to our cultures and traditional lineages
- As a collective being, we support Reparations WG Etiquette

Ongoing tasks:

1. Work with the Accountability WG to determine our internal mediation process; making it accessible for folks to initiate the process. Present this process on a group call.
2. Help Anti-Oppression and Allyship to continue developing the Reparation Road Map
3. Continue to integrate the Community Agreement practices into every WG, working with the Accountability and Facilitation/Admin WGs as necessary.

Learn More:

[Bonetta Adeeb Report](#)

[Patricia Larenas Report](#)

[Hummingbird Carole Segura Report](#)

We meet every other Tuesday at 8pm EST

Outreach Dispatch

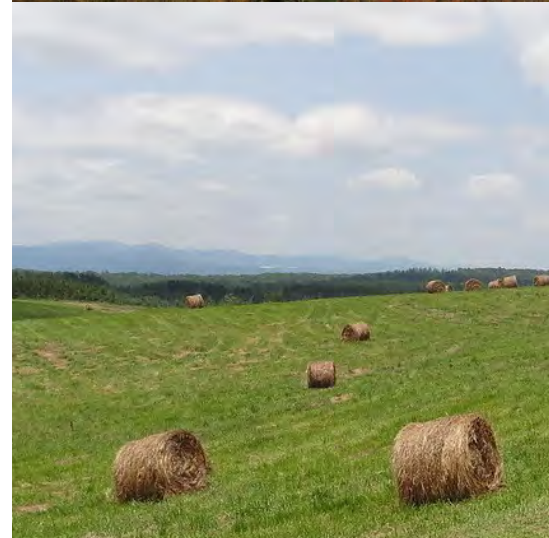
The Outreach Working Group began organizing in the opening weeks of the pandemic, with our first meeting being held on March 26 2020. In its early stages, Outreach worked to centralize listings of national, regional, and local organizations with the intention of inviting these organizations to join with CGC. In our first month, we created a national outreach database and shared this resource with other working groups in CGC.

Across our second month, the group conducted outreach efforts to all of the original respondents to the Victory Gardens (now Cooperative Gardens) first organizing call. This outreach effort included creating state-wide email lists where interested parties could be connected and begin to organize. At this time, members of Outreach also helped to create what now exists as the CGC Seed Hub Network. Members of the Outreach team contacted potential hubs, and gathered information about what seeds and materials they would need to get up and running. Outreach shared this information with the Seed Distro group.

Since our early efforts, Outreach has continued to connect growers, farmers, and seed keepers with the movement. We conducted two special efforts more recently, which are still active parts of our work together.

First, we understood the unique position of CGC to conduct research and outreach with land trusts and farmland preservation organizations across the nation. We began with an effort to reach out to land trusts and farmland preservation organizations in the Northeastern region, learning about their resources and interest in supporting CGC. We were particularly influenced by the guiding principle that the lands and resources trusts and preservation organizations have could help to support people from marginalized communities, especially through processes of repatriation and reparation. Through this outreach, we created an internal database of interested parties and the resources they can offer.

Second, we have recently assisted with outreach to seed hubs across the country in order to support the Seed Distribution Working Group. We look forward to continuing these efforts over the 2021 growing season, and invite you to join us!



We meet the first and third Monday every month, at 7pm EST

Photos for Imaginations Sake: Farmland cows CCBY Erika Karl on Flickr, Farmland Corner CCBY Paul Cole on Flickr, Pequest River Valley, Old Farm Sanctuary CCBY Nicholas A Tonelli on Flickr, South Carolina Hwy 11 Oconee County CCBY Martin LaBar on Flickr

Anti-Oppression & Allyship Dispatch

AoA working group was started in Mid-june as a response to an ask from our fellow organizers in the CGC BIPOC working group to come together and work on the process of unpacking our privilege.

The group meets weekly at 6pm on Wednesdays and is composed of white (and conditionally white) members of CGC seeking to participate in the ongoing process of becoming allies and accomplices. The group is facilitated to include conscious reflections of personal, familial and community histories in relationship to racism and white supremacy. In response to the reckoning with the racist justice system surrounding the murder of George Floyd, AoA composed an outward facing statement in support of the movement for Black Lives. In the process of drafting the Coop Gardens Community Agreements, it was asked of the AoA working group to start a process of researching reparations and its relationship to our work in CGC. The "roadmap" linked below represents months of work attempting to understand various models and histories of reparations. It is an earnest, if imperfect, distillation of our findings aimed at applying them to our work in and outside of CGC.

We recognize that there is a measure of healing to be had for white people (or people of European descent) engaged in this work to undo some of the psychic, emotional, and spiritual damage caused by benefitting from the suffering and oppression of millions of people across generations. The work of reparations includes collective healing and creation of accountability structures between white allies. In doing so, we fortify ourselves to continue to do the hard work of dismantling systemic racism, so that we may co-create a just future for all, centered around food.

This is an ongoing process, many of us find solace, initiative, and encouragement in our weekly meetings. You are invited to join us in the work!

We meet every other Wednesday at 6pm EST

Photos: Stringing tobacco. Florence County, South Carolina Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection CCBY Cox, Ansel Adams's Manzanar photographs, Passon Field Victory Gardens_Phillly_PA 1943, TGNI_Flickr, Living on Free Land, Chris Burkard New York Times



People of Color have grown most food in the US



WWI & WWII white people participated in US food security and 20 million Victory Gardens in 1943

After WWII that enthusiasm was replaced. Convenient commodified unhealthy foods were instilled.



Systems of oppression and racism continue to repeat until we interrupt and dismantle them.



Building on Free or Inherited Land

Accountability Dispatch

We practice needs-based resolution versus punishment. We call for accountability, mediation, and restorative justice processes to be available.

- CGC Community Agreements

Using the Cooperative Gardens Community Agreements as a foundation, the Accountability working group seeks to create structures for, and to practice, accountability, mediation, and restorative justice within or related to the Cooperative Gardens Commission.

In brief, accountability is the ability to recognize, end and take responsibility for violence. We usually think of the person doing harm as the one to be accountable for violence. Community accountability also means that communities are accountable for sometimes ignoring, minimizing or even encouraging violence. Communities must also recognize, end and take responsibility for violence by becoming more knowledgeable, skillful and willing to take action to intervene in violence and to support social norms and conditions that prevent violence from happening in the first place. - Creative Interventions

This working group started compiling our shared knowledge of conflict mediation and restorative justice in late spring of this year. Restorative justice is, "An approach to achieving justice that involves, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense or harm to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations in order to heal and put things as right as possible (H.Zehr). While the term restorative justice has recently been defined amongst Western academics, the practice of restorative justice has existed and continues to be practiced in Indigenous communities to the American Continent and New Zealand, including but not exclusive to Cree and Ojibway First Nations, Diné, and Maori people.

We proceeded by researching to learn more, and by mapping out a structure of what conflict mediation using a restorative justice framework will look like within The Cooperative Gardens Commission. Additionally, the Accountability working group is in the process of creating an anonymous-optional reporting structure for reporting conflict within or related to the Cooperative Gardens Commission, to be published in the new year. For accountability's sake, we hoped to have this published in the fall, but were not able to get there.



Our Working Group meeting discussions have centered on how we can practice accountability. We seek to practice in a way that is abolitionist and decolonial - in a way that does not uphold white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism. For white members of this working group, this practice is integral to practicing allyship. We aim to practice structured role play during meetings for interrupting violence. This will allow us to encounter a situation where we can more effectively interrupt individual and community violence, or call someone in from an offensive action, or statement, and help them see how that's related to systems of oppression and understand why we don't participate in or condone actions such as those. We know this is a process we need to develop.

As we continue building a learning base, we are looking to other organizations that have structured their accountability process around restorative justice. *Tools For Addressing Conflict* was particularly helpful in developing what we have so far. This toolkit was prepared by Prentis Hemphill and the [Black Lives Matter Healing Justice Working Group](#).

This working group is always looking for more members. We as an organization would greatly benefit from participation from those with a background in restorative/transformational justice and conflict mediation.

We meet every other Wednesday at 6pm EST

Photos Previous Page: Civil Rights 1963 The Granger Collection, Victory Gardens NYC 1943, Mother and Children poss related to Black River Falls, Wisconsin Lee, Russell, 1903-1986, photographer, US Resettlement Administration, South Central Farm, Los Angeles 2006 CCBY Joshua McIntosh, Feed LA event, Aug. 2020 [U.S. Air Force photo/Lina Satele]. This page: CSA MKJ.



Media, Design & Messaging Dispatch

@CoopGardens

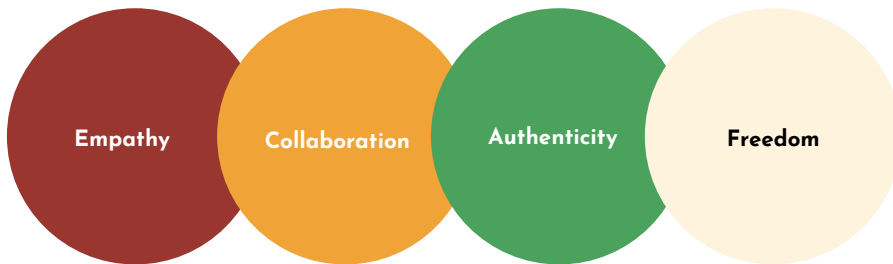
Instagram 1,708 following

Facebook Group 1.4K members

Facebook Page 419 like/ 442 following

Featured in [The New York Times](#), [The Philadelphia Inquirer](#), [WCNC.com](#), [Politico](#), [CBS New York](#), [NJ.com](#), [Civil Eats](#), [WHYY](#), [San Francisco Chronicle](#), [Washington Post](#), [Texas Monthly](#), [Capital Press](#), [Slate Magazine](#) and [Eater.com](#).

As part of our work and commitment to traveling a road to reparations we will be using principles of Non-Violent Communication.



- **Empathy** By sharing awareness articles in solidarity with BIPOC, LGBTQIA, and Differently Abled members in CGC and in simultaneous movements. As it relates to food security, food justice and food sovereignty.
- **Collaboration** By sharing things we are collectively working on and working towards. Useful seasonal advice. Inviting others in. Inviting org to org collaboration.
- **Authenticity** Celebrating successes of our growth. Highlighting seed hubs and Commissioners. Sharing the challenges we face so we can tackle them together. Requesting support more regularly and frequently so this can continue.
- **Freedom** Food sovereignty and food justice are forms of freedom. Having abundant, healthy, locally grown food is a form of freedom.

We meet every other Tuesday at 6pm EST



Free to download and use, posters by Sarah Medina

[Sarah Medina Design](#)



Free to use safety poster for download by Mary K [A Creative Asset](#)

Become a Commissioner

The Cooperative Gardens Commission is recruiting new Commissioners for the 2021 growing season! Commissioner is a new role that we are defining to offer a title for an active volunteer in the group.

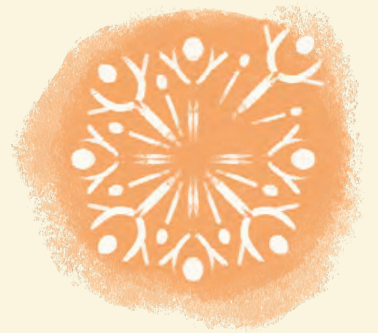
Qualifications are minimal but meaningful:

- Commit to at least one working group for a six month period
- Attend at least one of the two Monday night CGC Organizing Calls each month
 - Help facilitate or take notes for a call every other month
- Commit to familiarizing yourself with CGC community values

Your involvement level is up to you, we welcome imaginative adaptation. *For example:* social media account management and/or watcher, independent study, grant researcher/writer/editor, web design/development, groundwork community outreach.

Recommended: Add yourself as a resource to the CGC map at CoopGardens.com

Already involved with other organizations? Great!
Let's find where our interests overlap.



**"They tried to bury me,
they did not know I
was a seed."**

[Become a Commissioner Today!](#)



Spread
the
wealth



Bonnetta Adeeb

Commissioner
Steam Onward
Accokeek, MD

The mission of STEAM ONWARD is to increase the number of minority and under-served youth pursuing higher education in STEM related fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

After receiving donated seeds, youth in the program repacked the seeds for individual donation.

We created seed labels, placed them in smaller seed envelopes, and created a page on the website – SHOP SEEDS – and promoted online. Seeds are free, but we charged \$3.50 for postage and handling – covering the postage, seed envelopes, mailers, labels, printer ink, and small stipend for the youth who did the repacking. To avoid hoarding of seeds, we limit each order to four packs of seeds.

We've sowed a mix that can be harvested all winter and in the spring to cover and enrich soil. I have sowed the following mix in plots at food pantries that can be harvested all winter: radish, clover, turnips, cress, collards, kale, daikon, peas, and more.



Bonnetta Adeeb
DMV Seed Hub - Cooperative Gardens Commission
President & Founder of Steam Onward Inc.

This FARMACY GARDEN project is sponsored by STEAM ONWARD with support from the Cooperative Gardens Commission, National Farm to School Network, and Ujamaa Farming Group. For information and volunteering, visit STEAMONWARD.ORG.

[Read Bonnetta's Presentation](#)





Patricia Larenas

Commissioner
Mountain View, Ca

I'm a former garden designer who has studied horticulture at my local community college, Foothill College's Environmental Horticulture and Design program. My special interest is in urban edible gardening and local agriculture. I also have a special interest in seed saving. Before my garden design career I was a project manager in Silicon Valley, with a masters degree in public administration.

I've lived in the San Francisco Bay Area for almost 50 years. I was born in Chile and immigrated with my family to California. I live in Santa Clara County, in which, according to census data, only 60% of the population was born in the USA. The highest percentages of foreign born people are those of Latino /Latinx countries (26%) and Asian countries (34.4%). African Americans make up 2.5%. ([US Census Bureau](#), specifically from the 2010 census, and from the 2012-2016 American Community Survey)

My Seed Distribution

I received seeds on July 3rd as a part of the seed distribution for BIPOC members of Coop Gardens, and again in September as a seed hub.

From this stock of seeds I'm supporting the organizations listed below. Note: I followed best practices while distributing seeds during Covid-19.

1. **La Mesa Verde, San Jose CA** This is a project of the Sacred Heart Charities, which also has a food pantry (food bank) and provides several types of aid to the low income community, which has a high population of Latinos/Latinx. They have a program with about 150 member families who have had garden beds installed by the program, which also provides gardening education in English and Spanish through an 11 month course taught by Master Gardeners (they add 50 families more per year).

I provided 80 seed packets of fava beans (grown by my sisters) and 40 each of peas and lettuce for their seed give away in October. (They had 80 members requesting seeds for fall- up to 150+ will need seeds for spring 2021).

I will be giving them my leftover seeds I have for their seed library, and will offer them seeds whenever I can, ongoing.

LaMesaVerdeSHCS.org/about



Fernando Fernandez Leiva, Organizing Coordinator, at La Mesa Verde receiving my box of seeds



The Soil and Water Cooperative Garden in Mountain View CA: during Covid-19 restrictions, volunteers work at the garden one or two at a time.



2. Soil and Water Garden is a cooperative garden located in Mountain View's Heritage Park. The need for space to garden edibles is very high in our city. This garden has a diverse membership (race/ethnicity); the garden managers are from India, and have been a welcome source of information on preferred culturally appropriate foods for their heritage.

Last year they had about 140 volunteers (individuals/ kids) at the garden, and donated their harvest to the Day Workers Center of Mountain View and MV Community Services Agency food bank. This year they think they likely had less volunteers, due to pandemic restrictions.

I've provided various seed packets on two occasions, and will provide more seeds as I'm able to, ongoing. (I have asked for numbers of people they serve-TBD).

SoilandWaterGarden.org/about-us

3. Day Workers Center of Mountain View offers ESL classes and ensures fair wages for day/hourly workers, mostly Spanish-speaking. Their facility provides a safe place for these workers to congregate, be contacted and picked up for jobs. Additionally, the Center provides breakfast and lunch 6 days a week for 25 to 35 people per day. Their vegetable and herb garden beds provide a modest, but important amount of fresh food for this program, and is also a source of pride and enjoyment for the Center. I provide seedlings for their garden from my seed hub stock, and advise them on growing and managing the garden.

I'm also helping plant more perennial edibles into their landscaping. This is an ongoing effort.

DayWorkerCenterMV.org/who-we-are

DayWorkerCenterMV.org/

4. Sisterhood Gardens - Jamie Chan, a CGC seed hub in San Francisco. In September I dropped off several seed packets I had left over (beets, lettuce, peas, kale/mustard mix). This is a very active program!

Sisterhood Gardens has a very active community garden program that includes a seed library and seedling give-aways. They are funded by the Chinese Benevolent Association, in San Francisco CA

5. Collective Roots Community Garden/ Fresh Approach

I visited this community garden in the very underserved area of East Palo Alto. I gave a small donation of seeds to the garden program manager, Najiha Al Asmar. They have a very active program that includes a seed library, and they have plenty of seeds. She has a contact at the local Home Depot store- she said they donate their leftover retail seed packets to the garden, as well as bags growing soil, etc.

This is a nice contact, local for me, I enjoyed learning about their programs.



Center Director Maria
Day Workers Center of
Mountain View

Marroquin (below)
and Humberto (above,
watering newly planted
favas I grew and
planted with him)



Other Activities :

Connecting Local Seed Hubs

As a volunteer with CGC's Seed Distro effort, I've attempted to connect what I call the "Bay Area and Beyond Seed Hubs"; there are 15 total (myself included), with an additional one from the LA area. I first connected with them through gathering data for our first survey. Several hub members had expressed wanting to connect with other local seed hubs, and it seems a like a natural evolution to share seed packets and information about each other's programs. Several members have expressed interest in having a seed swap where we'd send each other seeds, for example varieties such as cilantro are always in demand.



I've set up a FaceBook group that about half of the members have joined, and I'm in touch with them through email so I'm sure to contact all of them with any announcements or survey questions.

Mountain View Library Seed Saving Tutorials

I also gave a zoom seed saving tutorial with two sessions, each one and a half hours long, invited and hosted by our local library. They hope to post the talks on their YouTube channel to make them available.



Photo: Nanticoke Squashes, Experimental Farm Network.



Sisterhood Gardens





Hummingbird Carole Segura

Commissioner
Seed library/ Seed hub
Humboldt County, CA



I received seeds for the creation of a seed hub, and have disseminated them as such;

- Collaborated with Cooperation Humboldt's, "Food Not Lawns" to provide free seeds to create several home gardens located throughout the community. Dropped off over 100 seed packets.
- Working with Kneeland Glen Farm Stand, (cottage industry style farm store), to set up and manage a seed distribution site. Many locals frequent this establishment to shop for fresh local organic produce, canned items, fresh dairy, soap, and a variety of handmade food and textile items, and more. The seeds offer an opportunity for locals to grow fresh organic heirloom food. Dropped off over 300 seed packets.
- By advertising through FB CGC of Northern California, and on Craigslist, I have stayed in contact with those who have requested seeds. Mailed and dropped off over 200 seed packets to individuals.
- A FB contest was created for those participants to add photos of their garden to have a chance to win free seeds. Seeds were provided by myself and CGC seed distro.
- Many seeds have been grown out and shared with community members and more planned for the spring.
- I also seed save and am an active Seed Library.



What's next?

By Nate Kleinman

My colleagues asked me if I would write a discussion of the future of Co-op Gardens for this report. While our focus here has mainly been on what we've accomplished over the past eight months, in each of our various working groups (most of which I'm a part of) our focus is on where we're going, so I'm happy to attempt this task.

Of course, the way we're structured – as an open, non-hierarchical, consensus-based collective, with no one person or committee driving the overall direction of the organization – makes it difficult to predict where we're headed. Therefore my intent is to offer best guesses based on my knowledge of the people and working groups of CGC. I hope my experiences will provide a window into how we work and where we might be going. For simplicity's sake, I've broken it down into six sections:

1. Free Seed Distribution

The surest bet is that we will build on the successes of our 2020 free seed distribution. The Seed Distribution Working Group is our largest working group, with a core of "Seed Distro" organizers meeting via Zoom every week since our first meeting on April 10th. With much more time to prepare for our 2021 distribution, we expect to get seeds out earlier and more deliberately. We aim to get seeds to more people this year, and through more local and regional seed hubs. We also plan to double down on our efforts to recruit seed hubs in historically oppressed communities – a critical focus of our diverse group of organizers.

There are still some unknowns, including how many people or organizations will apply to be hubs, how many seeds we will be able to get donated to us, and where we'll base our central seed sorting, packing, and shipping operation (it will be somewhere in the Philadelphia area again, that has already been decided). We also don't yet know how the relationships between the seed hubs and the main CGC organizing collective, including the Seed Distro WG, will develop. Within our decentralized model, each seed hub is unique, and that won't change – but we do hope to find ways to help seed hubs become centers for resource-sharing beyond seeds. We've had many discussions about offering more support to hubs, but unless we suddenly receive some serious monetary donations, it's unclear how much additional support we'll be able to muster.

2. Resource Sharing

Since the beginning of CGC, a major focus has been facilitating resource-sharing toward helping more people grow more food. In the early days, we proposed using existing online platforms (especially craigslist) and a novel hashtag (#coopgardens) to help people find others in their communities offering free resources. By early summer we put a resource-sharing map front and center on our website (www.CoopGardens.com), thanks to the work of an ad hoc group organizers. Anyone with gardening, farming, or food-processing/preparing resources can put themselves on the map, so anyone in the US who comes to the CGC website will be able to find someone nearby who can help them grow food.

At present, the map has over 250 entries, in all but five US states, and with a few scattered entries from around the world. It's a great start, but in order for it to be as useful a tool as we want it to be, we need many more people to add themselves. The Seed Distro Working Group is seeking to get as many seed hubs on the map as are willing, and we will also be leaning on the Outreach Working Group and the Media Working Group to reach more people in 2021 and help further populate the map. For the foreseeable future, this will likely be our main tool for facilitating free sharing of resources.



3. Racial Justice, Reconciliation, & Reparations

The interrelated issues of racial justice, reconciliation, and reparations, are huge and challenging. They often seem intractable. But there is a broad commitment among CGC organizers to keep them at the center of our work. We recognize that the United States is both deeply scarred by our history of white supremacy, and that all of us – especially people in BIPOC communities (Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color) – are still continually wounded by its ongoing persistence. As people of conscience, we all have a role to play in fighting white supremacy, building bridges of reconciliation, and making amends.

For months now, CGC has been blessed to have a BIPOC Working Group. Some members of the collective have focused most or all of their CGC energies in that group, and it has improved the overall collective immensely. Members of the BIPOC group led the drive to create Community Agreements for CGC, with a focus on racial justice (including specific support for reparations), and helped ensure the Seed Distro group prioritized getting seeds to BIPOC communities. Recommendations from the group have helped to make our main organizing conference calls more grounded and inclusive, and requests from the group led to the creation of two new working groups: the Accountability Working Group and the Anti-Oppression & Allyship Working Group (AOA). AOA, in turn, took up another specific request from the BIPOC group to study the issue of reparations and report back to the broader group about how we as CGC can further the cause of reparations. The results of that process are ongoing, but for many weeks now the AOA group and the BIPOC group have been working together on a “Reparations Roadmap,” a document we believe will both guide us moving forward, and serve as a model for other organizations (in particular majority-white organizations) interested in the concept of reparations but unsure of how it might relate to their work.

As a white person myself (my ethnic heritage is primarily Eastern European Jewish), and as a leader within this collective, I’ve done my best to not duplicate the patterns of oppression that undergird so many organizations in our society. I try hard to both defer to BIPOC colleagues on issues related to justice and equity, while also not creating extra emotional or intellectual labor for them in the process. It’s certainly a balancing act, but in the context of respectful relationships based on mutual aid and solidarity, I believe we have managed to build a multiracial/multiethnic community worth taking pride in and nurturing further.

Moving forward, racial justice and equality will continue to be driving forces in all of our work. Whether it’s the Seed Distro Working Group beginning to address issues of racial justice within the broader seed community (such issues are too often ignored or addressed only superficially), the Policy Working Group developing and lobbying for anti-racist public policies, or the Land, Work & Livelihoods Working Group working to support and empower BIPOC people who want to make a living off the land, I have no doubt we will continue to center the cause of racial justice and reparations in everything we do. We hope all of you reading this will help to hold us accountable if we ever fail to live up to that commitment.

4. Land, Work & Livelihoods

Among the most difficult issues we've attempted to address is land justice. At a time when the number of Black farmers has plunged from nearly 1 million to less than 50,000 in just a century, the USDA and other lenders still discriminate against Black farmers, and corporations snap up farmland left and right, few equity issues are of more importance. As a new organization, CGC lacks the resources and experience to make the kind of difference we would like to. But that won't stop from trying – though we will do our best to defer to the organizations and individuals that have been working on land justice issues for a long time.

Our primary purpose from the beginning was to get more people growing food, but we realized very early that access to land was the primary factor determining whether or not an individual or group can grow food and achieve anything approaching food sovereignty. Our Outreach Working Group began reaching out to land trusts to determine whether any would be willing to explore opening some of the land they control up to agricultural production, and in particular under the control of BIPOC farmers or gardeners. When the first offer of land (about 60 acres in New Hampshire with no structures or other improvements) came our way just weeks later, we realized we might be moving too fast: we had no process in place to figure out what to do next. We ultimately decided that the Work & Livelihoods Working Group (created to examine and attempt to deal with the crisis of unemployment sparked by the pandemic) would become the Land, Work & Livelihoods Working Group, so that these interrelated issues could be addressed together.

In 2021 and beyond, I am hopeful the Land, Work, & Livelihoods Working Group will find ways, however small, to help members of the CGC collective create new sources of prosperity and perhaps even new communities in which to live and work and play. Under the leadership of Bonnetta Adeeb, we are discussing incubating a Black-led seed-growers cooperative in southern Maryland. We are continuing discussions about how best to use the privilege of many of our members to help convince white-led organizations to commit themselves to land justice and reparations. And we are also focusing on land justice issues in our Policy Working Group as we craft a policy platform for CGC.

5. Policy

I am optimistic that policy will become a much larger focus for CGC in 2021. With a new administration coming to power in Washington, D.C., and the pandemic laying bare existing inequities in food and farming like nothing has in living memory, issues that our collective cares about are going to be front and center. Next year also marks just two years before the expiration of the last farm bill, when negotiations and lobbying for the next one traditionally begin in earnest. While the CGC Policy Working Group spent a good portion of 2020 working on a "policy platform" for CGC to adopt, we still have work to do to finish it. It's my hope and expectation that in 2021 we finish our platform, begin sharing it with the wider world, and start using it as the basis for lobbying efforts. I'm also hopeful that by spelling out our stances on some of the major issues of the day (many of which, of course, are not even under discussion in the halls of power) we will be able to start joining existing coalitions in the broader food sovereignty community and lend our energy to their efforts.

6. Organizational Expansion

In order to make all of the above a reality, we will need CGC to continue growing. We need to continue recruiting new volunteer organizers – we hope our call for new "Commissioners" aids in that effort – and we need to find the financial resources to fund our work. In less than a year we have accomplished so much, while we've barely spent any money and relied exclusively on volunteer labor. That is unsustainable. If we had unlimited funds at our disposal, I would advocate for hiring many of the volunteer organizers who currently devote so much of themselves to this project – in some cases working more than full-time hours – without asking for anything in return. But that doesn't mean we don't deserve compensation. In the next year, we are already planning some major fundraising efforts – including an online concert event – which we hope will allow us to go beyond merely funding the costs of seed distribution. We don't ever want to fall into the trap of the "non-profit industrial complex" (becoming a bloated "institution" focused primarily on justifying our own existence) but it would be nice to have the resources to hire people for some key roles to ensure continuity well into the future and allow us to help more and more people grow their own food.

Seed Distribution Hubs

The purpose of this project is to solicit, repackage, and distribute free seeds to individuals, organizations, and community gardens across the United States, who then act as seed distribution hubs for their area. The Seed Hubs are empowered to engage members of their community in a local network of resource sharing. This process of distribution creates new community ties through seed sharing, with the hope they will expand to broaden and strengthen local foodways. Simultaneously promoting environmentally sustainable gardening and farming methods.

CGC's Free Seed Distribution program was coordinated and implemented by volunteer organizers working on a shoestring budget to help communities feed themselves in the midst of a historic pandemic and persistent social inequality. In the spring of 2020, we leveraged personal relationships to solicit donations of quality vegetable and grain seed (nearly half a ton), repackaged bulk donations, identified seed hubs across the country (with a focus on historically marginalized communities), and shipped seeds before summer began. Seed donors included more than 20 seed companies, including Fedco Seeds, Johnny's Selected Seeds, High Mowing Seeds, Adaptive Seeds, Siskiyou Seeds, Restoration Seeds, Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, Row 7 Seeds, Common Wealth Seeds, Quail Seeds, Living Seed Company, Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds, Experimental Farm Network, Seed Savers Exchange, Jordan Seeds, Calvin's Peas, Wood Prairie Family Farm, Wannamaker Seeds, Redwood Organic Seeds, Delaware Valley University, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, MASA Seed Foundation, and True Leaf Market.

Our decentralized network structure, along with our consensus-based decision-making process, mark us as unusual (if not unique) in the broader NGO landscape, along with the deep support we've received from within the small-scale organic & regenerative seed movement. Our open organizing meetings and welcoming organizational culture have encouraged the active participation of volunteers from Alaska to Florida. Additionally, prioritizing support for BIPOC communities (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and making a concerted effort to recruit seed hubs and volunteer organizers in such communities further sets us apart from many non-profit organizations with a national scope.

There are many CGC organizers representing parts of the organic seed movement—seed savers, breeders, companies, community leaders, etc. Working together we have managed to apply the principles of that movement to our work. This means taking care to only request and share untreated non-GMO seeds that can be saved, not patented or otherwise restricted, adequately labeled, and in many cases culturally important.

We believe growing food can be an integral part of a comprehensive approach to improving the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities, especially during a pandemic. Our program is designed to fill a real material need for successful gardening, which empowers communities for self-reliance and contributes to a robust, healthy, and resilient food web.





Ekar Farms

Sue and Hannah
Sue@ekarfarm.org
Denver, CO
www.ekarfarm.org



With seeds from the CGC and local donations from MASA seed foundation and Denver Urban Gardens, Ekar has been able to distribute about **3,400 seed packets to 1,126 people**. They have cultivated relationships and collaborative efforts with 25 organizations.

To date they have started to accept garden donations for 2021, while tracking some of the seed harvest of 2020.

“The photos depict Hope Communities, Hidden Brook in East Denver. It’s a 40 bed community garden at a low-income apartment complex. It’s a diverse community with most of the gardeners coming from Nepal and Burma. They had some really beautiful stories about growing and saving seeds that they brought from home. We distributed about 560 seed packets (and 60 odd plant starts) to their gardeners.

Thanks for all you do. I hope this swell in the season finds you well! ”



Instagram: [ekarfarm](#)
Facebook: [@ekarfarm](#)
Website: [www.ekarfarm.org](#)

Also provided seeds to Hope Communities
Facebook [@hopecommunitiesdenver](#)



Photos Courtesy of Michelle Christiance



The Appal-TREE Project

Community Farm Alliance's Healthy Communities Initiative Distribution: Southeastern Kentucky



With an average food insecurity rate of around 24%, Appal-TREE's 3-county service area is a perfect match for the mission of #CoopGardens. Appal-TREE's Healthy Cooking Classes and Go H2O water promotion project both aim to empower youth to make healthier food and beverage choices by increasing fruit and vegetable intake and choosing water over sugary beverages. In addition to introducing new produce and recipes, the classes encourage families to work together to change the ways they think about and prepare foods. Grocery store trips, social media follow-up with veggie and fruit-heavy recipes, and links to other health conscious programs are natural extensions of the project. Last summer, their Farm Camp for kids aged 4-17 focused on farming and gardening as a hobby. Youth were introduced to planting, care, harvesting, prep, cooking, and, of course, lots of local fruits and vegetables. Campers were exposed to farm animals, the business of farming, food security and lots of garden/farm themed fun.

Beginning in mid-March of 2020, the Appal-TREE Project, which holds in-person cooking classes of 12-20 participants and on-site social marketing and data collection in middle and high schools, was unable to execute normal activities due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. In an attempt to remain relevant to cooking class participants and Go H2O students, Appal-TREE utilized social media and community partnerships to share water and healthy food-related content, activities for kids and families, and gardening ideas. CoopGardens' Seed Hub opportunity was a perfect fit with Appal-TREE's new mission to be of service in their communities, but in new ways. They applied to be a distribution partner. After receiving a box (and waiting 3 excruciating days to open it, in keeping with the agreed upon policy!) the next two weeks were devoted to organizing and cataloguing the seeds, breaking down the seed packets into amounts that would serve one or two families, curating sets of seeds that contained a nice variety for each family, bagging/tagging each set, and finally boxing them for contactless distribution. During this time, local partners were sought to use as distribution points and social media advertising began. The following week, boxes were distributed to partnering organizations and Facebook posts announced that free garden seeds were available to anyone who showed up. Over 150 families and ten different group living facilities were the happy recipients of these seeds, lovingly donated to #CoopGardens, freely given to CFA's Appal-TREE Project, and gratefully passed on by Appal-TREE staff.



Ramapough Lenape Turtle Clan

Interview with Ramapough Lenape Turtle Clan Chief Vincent Mann and Clan Mother Michaeline Picaro Mann, co-founders of the Munsee Three Sisters Medicinal Farm and a CGC seed hub in Newton, NJ
Conducted by CGC's Nate Kleinman, edited for length.

Nate: What was your general growing experience was like this year?

Clan Mother Picaro Mann: Our experience growing this year was amazing!

Chief Mann: Yeah, it was truly amazing. Unfortunately one of the issues that we had in the beginning was lack of water. And then once we got the water and were going to enclose the vegetable part, outside of the squash and beans, corn and pumpkins, things were pretty good. And then just at harvest time, we waited an additional five days because we were doing a documentary film [The Meaning of the Seed]... and what ended up happening in those five days, the moon came, we were ready for ceremony, and to do the harvest, and then I said "let's just wait until the documentary so that there's some corn and beans and squash... and I went there three days before the filming and the deer had just completely devastated our crop..."

Clan Mother Picaro Mann: But it wasn't a complete loss... we had really good success with a lot of different vegetables, and of course we use nothing except for ladybugs for pest control (and me out there picking bugs off the plants!). So it was really good, but when we lost everything... you kind of feel a little bit of devastation, but when we reflect back on making new relationships and new friendships with different people from all over. The volunteers really got a lot out of it, you know most of the people come from areas where they don't have a place to go and get their hands in the soil and experience nature... so there was a lot of healing.

Nate: Were the seeds sent to you from Co-op Gardens helpful? Were you able to share them with a lot of people?

Chief Mann: What we chose to do was plant most of them ourselves, to produce food for the community and produce more seed ourselves for the future. At the Munsee Three Sisters Medicinal Farm, still a very new project, we're ultimately going to plant some 8 acres. We have one greenhouse up right now, 16 x 100ft, that we're going to use to start seeds and then convert for growing tomatoes. Behind the greenhouse we have half an acre of garlic, 20,000 cloves planted by hand... In the future we want to plant an acre of onions, and in front of that will be all the market beds [with mixed vegetables]. Lots of potatoes too. And we want to do all of our traditional beans, just all different varieties good for storing as dry beans for long term food.

Nate: What is the significance of growing all of these crops when it comes to self-sufficiency and food sovereignty?



Chief Mann: Our community, the Ramapough Munsee people, for decades have been living in a Superfund site [where toxic waste was dumped by the Ford Motor Company]. It's not safe to grow food there. People have all sorts of different health ailments because of that. So the idea of creating Munsee Three Sisters Medicinal Farm is that we view food as medicine. And so this is going to call us not only to realize food sovereignty for our people, but also in particular to grow certain varieties of crops that can be used for their health benefits, boosting their immune systems and more... Our people have been basically living with an epidemic for 56 years [due to the effects of the toxic waste]. Now we're getting double slammed with Covid. So being able to create this space to grow healthy medicinal vegetables, to provide jobs, and food, and to help keep people out of the grocery stores during this pandemic, it's so important...

Our people in the Turtle Clan live very, very close to the earth, harvesting, hunting and gathering. These are all things our community still tries to do. Hunting and fishing are common, but the harvesting of wild edibles and medicinals has mostly come to a complete stop. When you lose that, you lose that sense of community, of going out and doing it together. You lose your language, the knowledge that comes with harvesting those things, you know? So our hope is also to be able to take wild edibles and medicinals and actually grow them too, in the fields and forest where we farm.

Nate: I'm curious about the varieties of things you grew this year, including the Lenape ones we brought you [via Experimental Farm Network], what it was like to be growing some traditional varieties for the first time.

Chief Mann: The cultural significance of being able to grow the seeds that have been rematriated to us, that you guys played a part in bringing to us – to actually have those seeds in our hands, plant them into the ground, nurture them, watch them get their legs and begin to crawl, and then suddenly they're walking! You know, for us that feeling was just immeasurable, to be holding the descendants of our ancestors. Relatives. Because that's how our ancestors saw them. The healing that comes from just holding those seeds and knowing that we have them again... truly an absolutely amazing thing. Moving forward, through Munsee Three Sisters Medicinal Farm, and our non-profit Ramapo Culture and Land Foundation, we really are going to show that we can do like our ancestors did, and save these seeds. We need to have a group of folks who are indigenous that are leading the way, to make sure that these continue to be grown and rematriated back to our people, because our community is not just here [in New Jersey]. Our Lenape community is in Canada, three of them, in Wisconsin. We have two communities in Oklahoma, one in Kansas, one in Pennsylvania, and two more down south here in Jersey... We're going to step into that role. If elders, if others in those communities don't have these seeds, we're going to provide them for them. And as we ramp up production next year and beyond, we'll be able to provide food too. The food sovereignty we seek goes way beyond us.





Airport Heights Little Free Seed Library | Anchorage, AK

Seeds Distributed to 100 People
Networked with 2 Organizations

There were some challenges. A second little free Seed Library was set up in another neighborhood, but it was vandalized and the entire structure disappeared. Some people had trouble with the transition to a seed library and tried to continue to deposit books. Still, thousands of seeds were successfully dispersed! A few volunteers kept the seed library tidy and re-stocked it every few days.

When Anchorage began its Covid-19 “hunker down” order in March this year, gardeners began to plan in earnest. What if we could share resources, both material and informational, so that anyone who wanted a garden could have one? One of those critical resources, of course, is SEEDS.

Seed sharing was a key early element of the plan to spread gardens. A tactic we adopted was to use a “Little Free Library.” Anchorage has many of these book-sharing boxes in neighborhoods across the city. In Airport Heights, the library near Tikishla Park was redecorated with a sign declaring it a “Seed Library” for the months of April and May. Patrons were free to take or give seeds as needed. Neighborhood volunteers, including students, were recruited to divide seeds into smaller packets. The Seed Library was promoted on the Facebook page of a new local group, Anchor Gardens, formed with the mission “to make gardening resources and materials accessible to everyone in the Municipality of Anchorage.” The location of the library was really ideal, as many people pass through the park on a daily basis and it is located in midtown.

The Organic Seed Alliance and the Cooperative Gardens Commission sent large donations of seeds, and these were incorporated into the Seed Library and also advertised on Craigslist. Neighborhood volunteers again divided and packaged seeds. Some unusual seeds, like sorghum, were donated to the Grow North Farm gardeners of Refugee Assistance and Immigration Services.

There were some challenges. A second little free Seed Library was set up in another neighborhood, but it was vandalized and the entire structure disappeared. Some people had trouble with the transition to a seed library and tried to continue to deposit books. Still, thousands of seeds were successfully dispersed! A few volunteers kept the seed library tidy and re-stocked it every few days.

On June 1, we closed the Seed Library and returned it to its former state as a book library, but plans are in place to re-open it next March. This, along with ads on Facebook and Craigslist, was a great method of distributing seeds.





Seed Hub Reports

Pamela Barroso | Pittsburgh, PA

Seeds Distributed to 30 People
Networked with 5 Organizations

Challenge: I have been a passive gardener in the past and now I am working toward developing growing information, understanding planning systems and educational resources to support the community growing needs or questions. At the same time I am learning how to save seeds. This has been a learning curve to learn but am getting better at understanding how to share this knowledge and appreciate the opportunity to have CGC support me in this endeavor.

What Worked: I had some elderly patrons express interest in learning how to grow container gardens in order to eat more nutritious from home.



Global Village Farms



Global Village Farms

Global Village Farms | Grafton, MA

Seeds Distributed to 110 People
Networked with 12 Organizations

Thanks for seeds, I can't wait for another year of sharing love and life.

Challenge: The pandemic

What worked: People were excited about seeds more than ever this year.



Global Village Farms

Novella Carpenter | Oakland, CA

Seeds Distributed 3 + The Black Earth Collective

It was nice to give one organization a large quantity of seeds – like lots of lettuce and pea seeds.

Church Community Services, Seed to Feed Program Elkhart, Indiana

Seeds Distributed to 500 People
Networked with 25 Organizations

Challenge: We have a huge base for distributing seeds, but because of covid there were very little seed exchanges to be able to exchange flower seeds for vegetable seeds.

What worked: Working in our community garden, I had a community member come up and tell me how they started a backyard garden for the first time with the seeds and plant starts we gave away at our food pantry. They said, they had just lost their job and were nervous about the future. Having a garden brought joy to their families' life but also gave them a reliable source of food that they didn't have to purchase. They said they would be expanding it next year if everything goes as planned.





Foodscaping CO



Foodscaping CO



GRuB Garden Raised Bounty

Ekar Farm | Denver, CO

Seeds Distributed to 800 People
Networked with 28 Organizations

What worked: Distributed via events, such as seed swaps, farmers' markets, etc. Person-to-person. Designated contactless pick-up.

Ekar Farm - Rocky Mountain Seed Hub | Denver, CO

Seeds Distributed to 1126 People
Networked with 18 Organizations

Challenge: Timing of when we received seeds (and how it corresponded with our seasons.) ex. Receiving tomato seeds in June. Also I think I'd love to find a way to actually determine whether it was successful (the growing part, after distribution) but our small organization didn't have the capacity to be in touch with all of the people who received seed.

What worked: We worked with several food bank organizations and it was really great to be able to provide seeds as a bonus during the regular food pick ups. We sometimes distributed in person and talked with folks about what they were excited about for their gardens. We ended up meeting a lot of great people and communities! Like the folks at Hope Communities: Hidden Brook apartments, many of whom were from Burma and Nepal and had brought/saved/shared seeds from home for years.

Foodscaping CO | Eugene, OR

Seeds Distributed to 150 People
Networked with 21 Organizations

Challenge: [To get] As many seeds as possible; we will be really pushing out the boat in 2021. In August 2020 the NAACP opened a new community garden here in Eugene. We supplied many seeds to that project and there have been several harvests from those seeds as they grew. The garden is called Annie Mim's Community Gardens, North.

Garden Raised Bounty (GRuB) | Tumwater, WA

Seeds Distributed to 200+ People
Networked with 10+ Organizations

What worked: I appreciate what you are doing. Please check out our website, www.goodgrub.org. We look forward to working with you in the future. As many seeds as you can provide.

Our military veteran volunteers build free backyard, raised bed, gardens for marginalized members of our community. With your help we were able to keep our "free seed shed" stocked as well as provide seed packets to go along with our garden this season. We've got a goal of completing 200 gardens by the end of the year and are almost there!



Grow Local Colorado | Denver, CO

Seeds Distributed to 250 People!

Networked with at least 6 Organizations

Challenge: Coordination was a challenge but that is expected when there is such a big turn out for an event.

What worked: A group of local food organizations came together to distribute the CGC seeds. In a 2 week period we were able to put out that word of our seed distribution in two different locations in Denver. As soon as we put out the word the 250 slots available for safe pick up filled up within 24 hours. Teachers picked up seeds for their school gardens. Community garden leaders not only picked up seeds but helped with distribution. Families with young children were there to get seeds for their first garden. Within two hours we had spread the joy of gardening with our community.



Greater Newark Conservancy | West Orange, NJ

Seeds Distributed to 300 People

Networked with 15 Organizations

<<This is Akoth, the most glowing community gardener in Newark celebrating seeds early in spring.

Challenge: We had people select seeds using an online form and pick up at our office. Lots of people requested seeds (which we spend a lot of time pulling and putting into packets) but then didn't pick up. Mailing seeds would help that but we like to meet up with new contacts when we can. We just need to figure out an accountability system.

Getting seeds ready early in spring (or even Feb./March) would be great. Most people don't have means or knowledge to grow on warm-season seeds. So cool season and all direct seeds are most valuable. We are working on getting support from farmer/growers to start extra seedlings for us to share.

What worked: We've been distributing seed company donated seeds to individuals and community gardens for years but inspired by the increased need and interest under the pandemic and supported by the additional seeds provided through CGC we were able to really up our game. We shared seeds with probably 3 times as many people as in past years and have continued to promote it through our website, weekly online gardening series, and at events.

The seeds have been a great bridge between different programs we do so that a parent that does an online Family Fun in the Kitchen cooking program learns about the seed share, then requests seeds that they start growing at home with their kids, they then decide to jump into a community garden and learn more during our weekly Know It and Grow It online gardening class. That overlap is happening in many different forms and it is really cool to see.

Akoth

Green Oasis

Also received seeds!

Facebook/Insta:

@GreenOasisVillage



XM Gardens

Tammy Miller at XM Gardens | Durant

Seeds distributed to 40 people

Challenge: Packaging and mailing costs to individuals.

What worked: Easy for folks to pick up on Saturday mornings at our booth at the local Farmer's Market. Reached a good cross section of the population. Some came just for the seeds. Social media provided wider coverage and resulted in seed being mailed to folks in neighboring counties.



STEAM ONWARD INC

STEAM ONWARD INC | Accokeek, MD

Seeds Distributed to 410 People

Networked with 45 Organizations

I love this organization

Challenge: We had too many requests at one time. That overwhelmed our system.

What Worked: The excitement of people receiving free seeds.

C.R.O.P.S. | Linwood/Atlantic City, NJ

Distributed seeds to at least 200 People

Challenge: We run our own farmers markets and gardens and used them as avenues of distribution.

We needed less seeds that required a lot of space to grow. More container friendly varieties would be welcomed (we had a lot of melons, pumpkin and squash).

What worked: We felt that by creating container gardens, we were best able to meet people where they were. In a city many do not have land or even means to easily get to a store that sells soil etc. So by collecting donated containers and soil donations, we were able to distribute over 100 container gardens in Atlantic City and the surrounding areas.



A PLOT TO SAVE THE WORLD

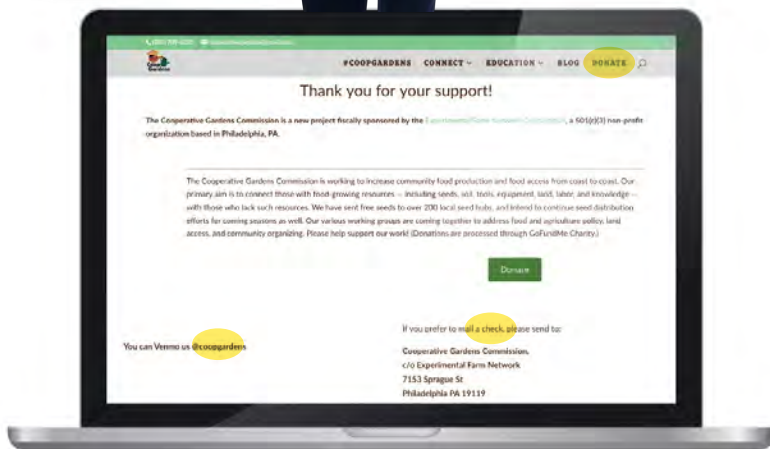
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Thank You Seed Donors!!!

We're incredibly grateful to the companies and organizations that donated seeds for us to redistribute – and we thank you in advance for your continued support. Together we are supplying a vital resource to communities nationally and globally.

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Connect With Us

(202) 709-6225
cooperativegardens@gmail.com
CoopGardens.org

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Please join our open organizing calls on first and third Mondays of each month @ 8pm ET/5pm PT.

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