

2020

A YEAR OF
RELIEF,
RECOVERY &
RESILIENCE



WORKING
FOOD



WHAT A YEAR!

When food insecurity intensifies, local markets shift and shudder, online learning becomes the new way to connect, and home gardens spread like seeds in the wind - we all remember why local food community matters. The global food system staggered and revealed its weakness. But local producers, community organizers, and countless creative partnerships kept people fed, farmers growing, home gardens thriving, and minds both young and wise inspired and engaged. While this year was a devastating one and continues to take a toll on individuals and local businesses, there have been many silver linings and blessings amidst the frustrations and uncertainty. We are reminded of the teachings of our most humble and critical partners, our seeds:

"For a seed to achieve its greatest expression, it must come completely undone. The shell cracks, its insides come out and everything changes. To someone who doesn't understand growth, it would look like complete destruction."

~Cynthia Occelli

With deep gratitude, we were able to go above and beyond to serve our community during a great time of need and upheaval. We were nimble, creative, and collaborative more than ever. I am so proud of our staff, board of directors, volunteers, donors and other community supporters for pulling through, so we could grow together. Even though it may have felt and looked like unraveling and chaos for a long time.

Melissa DeSa

Community Programs Director & SeedEO



STARTING WITH A SEED,

As with many global crises of our past, the COVID-19 pandemic saw many turning to their own yards to grow food. Such events have a way of reminding us of the fundamentals of survival, and inspire us to do better. Demand for our seeds and plants skyrocketed in a very short period of time. Pressure on the global seed supply left growers at all scales from backyard gardeners to farmers with weeks-long delays, or in some cases no ability to order seeds at all. Seeds became the new toilet paper, and many turned to us as a reliable source for seeds, plants, and information.

Our Southern Heritage Seed Collective was able to rise to the occasion and meet the demand. We created an online shop to process orders safely, offering drive-thru pick up options and shipping. We donated many plants and seeds to community initiatives like GRACE Grows homeless center, seed libraries, community gardens, and more.



- **65%** of our seed varieties available were locally grown!
- Since March, we distributed over **4,500 seed packets** and over **3,000 edible plants** with help from our partners at Grow Hub.

HELPING PRODUCERS & NEIGHBORS IN NEED,

We organized a drive-thru farmers market for 12 weeks during the height of the pandemic. At this time many markets were shut down, farmers had surplus they couldn't sell to restaurants and schools, and community members felt unsafe to shop at grocery stores, where shelves were often bare. We served over **400 residents** and **10 + local producers** for an estimated **4,000 encounters** during the 12 week market period. The response was overwhelmingly positive from both customers and farmers. This spring, regular market operations have resumed and we still host a CSA pick up and pre-order market every Thursday for a local seafood business, meat farmer and vegetable grower. A women-led meat producer co-op is in the works to operate in our facilities starting this spring.



WE KEPT LOCALS HIRED,

Through our Meal Relief Program, we hired **4 local restaurant/catering businesses** to procure over **23,334 meals** in 42 weeks, purchased from **3 local producers**, and collaborated with **11 community partners** to distribute meals to their clients.

We maintained part-time employment for **2 adults with disabilities** that help with custodial and garden work.

New and evolving youth programming allowed us to share resources including funding, for **3 Black-led organizations** that are critical partners for our programming.

Our commercial kitchen remained open for those local businesses still in operation and needing shared space.

Over \$100,000 re-circulated locally through Meal Relief Program!

"We at Human Rights Coalition felt so privileged to be a part of this Meal Relief Program. The longevity of the effort in particular, gave many families a sense of stability that has been sorely lacking during the pandemic." -HRC Employee



"The food was a help because I had no finances for food and what you provided for my daughter and I will hold us over for a while. I'm so thankful for the kindness of strangers who I consider my angels. Please send my thank you's to all involved that helped even in delivering the food. Thanks again. God Bless." -A Family Promise of Gainesville client

AND MINDS BOTH YOUNG & WISE INSPIRED!

We have always been passionate about sharing our love and knowledge of food issues. It's what grows a community that cares and connects to the land, food, and people. While our in-person programming shifted dramatically, we are proud of what we could still offer our community both at home and afar.



Over 100 people tuned in to hear inspiring tales and some practical how-to on stewarding our most precious resource in the fight to combat food security and climate change: our seeds!

Southern Seed School Online

- Built a new web page packed with our favorite seed articles, videos, links, and more available free 24/7.
- Filmed 5 local growers showcasing various techniques for seed and food production.
- Hosted Southern Seed Social with award-winning authors **Janisse Ray and Ben Cohen** and local seed keepers for an inspirational and practical look at seed.
- Hosted first ever **Florida Seed Librarian Summit** in collaboration with Northeast Florida Library Information Network (NEFLIN), Alachua County Public Libraries and Ben Cohen, inspiring and connecting **50 seed librarians** with ideas and pandemic-proof distribution.
- Find it all on our Working Food Youtube channel!

"The speakers were incredible. I can honestly say that every single speaker both reinforced my emerging journey and decision to move toward sustainability of life via seeds, but also each of them genuinely touched my heart. I was born and raised in Gainesville, so am not surprised by the love and generosity found in this community. But again, the Working Food community reinforces my love for my hometown."



"It was very inspiring to hear words of wisdom in this time of such uncertainty"

Heirloom Collard Project

Collaborating with Seed Savers Exchange, Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, The Utopian Seed Project and SeedLinked, we launched the national Heirloom Collard Project. It included **250 gardeners across the country**, with a generous helping of Southeastern growers for the largest ever citizen science variety trial!

We celebrated the year's end and finale of the trial with Collards Week, as part of the Culinary Breeding Network's Winter Vegetable Sagra. Notable speakers included **Michael Twitty, Amirah Mitchell, Ashleigh Shanti, Jon Jackson and Ira Wallace.**

visit: heirloomcollards.org



Tomato Bootcamp

From seed to seed, we offer expert local advice on how to grow tomatoes - one of the most loved but most challenging to grow in our climate. Special guests included author, educator, and plant breeder Craig LeHoullier, joining from his garden in Hendersonville, NC and local educator and tomato plant breeder Tim Noyes. **90 students tuned in live!**

COLLARDS FOR ALL Y'ALL!

Our project collaborators at the University of Florida Field & Fork were 1 of 8 sites around the country to grow all **20 unique collard varieties** from the collection at Seed Savers Exchange. We hosted **2 Collard Field Days** for chefs, farmers, home gardeners, and really anyone just curious about collard diversity! They weighed in over **1,000 lbs of fresh collards** that were donated to the food pantry and other organizations like Chef Empowerment and Grow Hub. Students learned about crop variety trials and organic farming.

Melissa DeSa and Farmer Lennon Fisher Jr. check out the collards during the first Collard Field Day at UF.



Youth Culinary Empowerment

We developed the Young Chefs series of cooking classes for teenagers with the Greater Duval Neighborhood Association's Out East Youth group. In these biweekly classes, students tuned in to a live cooking class taught by Chef Carl of Chef Empowerment Underground Kitchen. All students were delivered a meal kit to their homes, which included all the ingredients and any specialty kitchenware to make a family meal. It's truly a local economy multiplier effect- distributing resources to numerous local producers and retailers, and other non-profit organizations to accomplish the work. It takes a village!

"As a small farm we are dependent on weekly market sales which have a tendency to fluctuate. Partnering with organizations like Working Food allows us to continue to grow and expand our reach further into the community. By supporting local small farms through programs like these we can work towards a more secure, sustainable and equitable future." Lauren & Eric Morales, Humble Nature Farm



Youth Science & Garden Education

While our garden programs had to shift this year, we continued collaborating with the Cultural Arts Coalition on their new and exciting Science Bus project! We taught classes online and through hands-on mobile kits we developed on soil, plants, seed biology, seed ecology, flowers and pollination. These programs were redesigned from favorite youth gardens classes to be portable, COVID-safe, and done without the aid of a garden. Beginning in April we will jumpstart our Garden Sprouts Train-the-Trainer program with the SWAG (South West Advocacy Group) Daycare Center. This is part of our ongoing efforts to share our years of accumulated experience, so that others may successfully host their own programs!

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WITH GRATITUDE

This year more than ever, was all about COMMUNITY. Like a seed that needs good soil, clean water, sunshine and loving hands to tend the garden, we all need a supportive network in which to thrive. Especially when times are tough. We are so grateful for both our new and long time partners that weathered the storm and led the way with us.

Community Partners & Friends

Cultural Arts Coalition | Chef Empowerment Underground Kitchen | Grow Hub
Greater Duval Neighborhood Association & Out East Youth | Mildred's Big City Food
Partnership for Strong Families | Chef JJ Creations | Daniel's Dining | East End Eatery | Aces in Motion
Civic Media Center | Family Promise | Human Rights Coalition | Girls Place | GRACE Marketplace
Kids Count | Peaceful Paths | The Utopian Seed Project | Southern Exposure Seed Exchange | Seed
Savers Exchange | Culinary Breeding Network | Lost Valley Farm

Funders & Supporters

Donors, members & volunteers too many to list! Thank you! | Bryson Family Foundation
Lydia B. Stokes Foundation | The City of Gainesville | Alachua County | University of Florida
Rotary of Gainesville | UNFI Foundation | CLIF Bar Foundation | Whole Kids Foundation | Cade Royalty
Fund | The Patti Shively Foundation | Community Foundation of North Central Florida | McClave Family
Foundation | Opal Industries | Fracture | Feathr | First Magnitude Brewing Company | Florida
Wildflower Foundation | Hogtown Brewers | Infotech | Blue Highway Pizza | The Illuminate Group
Plantstay | Bosshardt Realty

IN COMMUNITY,

The Working Food Family
Melissa DeSa, Jesse Wilson, Sarah Sterling, Lauren
Samuels, Jenna Niblack, Meg TheLosen, Jean Theurer,
Nkwanda Jah, Candace Spencer, Lisa Gearen, and
Anna Prizzia.

