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Marbleseed Welcome

In January 2023, a group of farmer leaders and agricultural educators joined me for a training on dialogue-based, learner-centered approaches to farmer education. This training foreshadowed a vision of the Open Space method coming to life at the annual Marbleseed Organic Farming Conference. Titled a “convergence,” this time at the conference would be the culmination and demonstration of farmer-led self-organized learning.

We hope that this new dimension and process will continue to add to the magic of the Organic Farming Conference. It created a structure for meaningful networking and ideas exchange and the pages of this book are a reminder of what we shared as a community about what it means to move toward true “Farm/Farmer Viability”.

I hugely appreciate all of you that shared your time and insights to create this Book of Proceedings.

To continued conversations and mobilizing community,

—Lori Stern, Executive Director at Marbleseed

Boozhoo indinawemaaganidog. Hello, my relatives. As coordinator of the Farmer Viability Convergence, I worked closely with our facilitator to develop an event that was welcoming and empowered participants to share their expertise based on years of lived experience. Surely, the Convergence was a learning experience for all of us regarding the content, and for Marbleseed regarding the organizing and facilitation of such as event. While

participants expressed feeling that the Convergence was a safe space to be vulnerable with one another and that many of our experiences and challenges are “not so different,” it is critically important to recognize, embrace, and learn from our diversity of lived experiences and the historical contexts that have shaped the realities we face in the present. Therefore, it is



important to acknowledge that the notes that are reproduced herein are not representative of the full discussions that took place and are intended to be starting points to continue the discussions. The depth of which the notes connect to the conversations is reliant upon the notetakers, their capacities to process information from spoken to written word amid a lively and engaging conversation from one moment to the next, and their perceptions of what is important to document which is informed by *their* understandings and lived experiences and may differ widely from each session's convener. As such, the depth of each session's notes varies widely from session to session. Participants' handwritten notes have been transcribed verbatim, with some clarifications provided by participants where I was unsure of what I was reading. Surnames have been reduced to initials to respect participants' privacy. Occasionally a passage may end mid-sentence, which is evidence of the liveliness of the discussions at hand. We thank all our participants for sharing their knowledge and hope you will join us in continuing these discussions on the Ag Solidarity Network (<https://agsolidaritynetwork.com>).
—Alex Kmett, Farmer Education Specialist at Marbleseed

Facilitator Message:

Welcome everyone! We hope this document helps ignite memories and further insights for people who were able to participate in this event, as well as providing ideas, inspiration and a sense of what it was like to be part of the event for any who may have been unable to attend, or are otherwise interested to learn what happened at this 'convergence.' The notes and notions that follow offer some record of this, as well as the deep passion, caring and effort that participants brought with them to these important discussions.

As facilitator, it was a most enjoyable *honor* to be able to witness the lively energy and engagement that people brought to their dialogues with others. Overall, this productive group managed to generate thirteen full hours of intense farm viability exploration, insight and wisdom (during a mere 3.5 hours of time together). Hopefully those who might read through these notes from these discussions are also able to gather (or recall) the sense of excitement, engagement and fun arising in the process as well. In relating to others with both similar and different perspectives the crucial importance of 'WE' for farm viability emerged with renewed emphasis and vigor (as heard in the closing circle of the event).

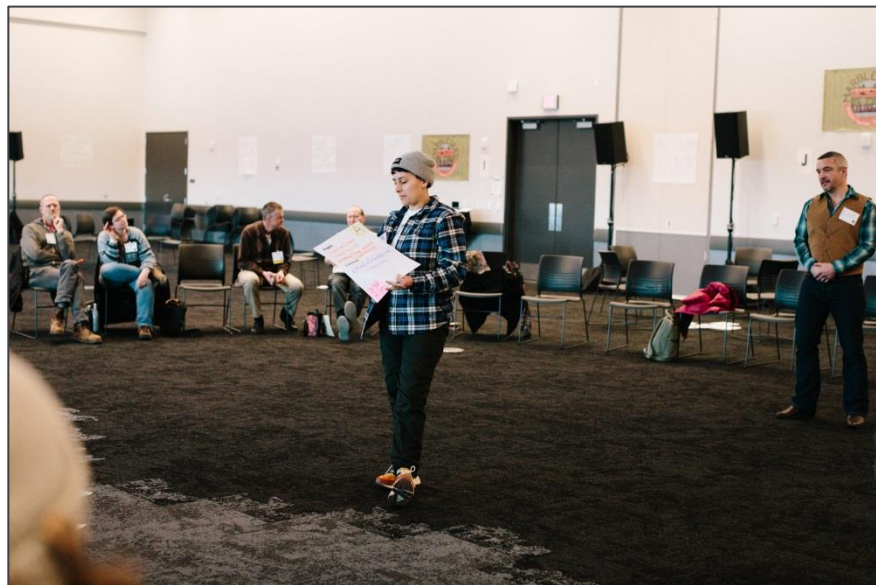
Please share and enjoy these Proceedings, with due thanks to Marbleseed and to all who joined in these timely discussions! May we keep them going!

--Owen Hablutzel



Opening Space

--all photos this page
by *Justine Bursoni*



SESSION ONE



*TOPIC: Reparations, Land back, dismantling white supremacy,
Alternatives to Capitalism*

CONVENER: Chalchiuhkoatl K., and Jeanne L.

NOTES-TAKER: Jeanne L.

*OTHER PARTICIPANTS: Oren J., Wally G., Elizabeth M., Dylan B., Laura F., Thomas L., Tom K.,
Eliana P.*

NOTES:

Reparations: how do we bring repair and healing to the communities that were harmed?

Land back: Can we return the land to the people who it was stolen from?

Dismantling white supremacy – it wasn't always the system! What if it wasn't the case?

Diversity of life, embracing the uniqueness of the plants and animals in a certain place.

Common agricultural practices regarding breeding plants and animals has roots in eugenics and white supremacy. These are ideological patterns that can translate into other parts of life.

The term white supremacist can be offputting to people or easy for them to reject, to not see themselves in it.

A simple perspective: I am a capitalist. I want to grow the most delicious tomatoes, at the highest volume, at the cheapest price. Attending the session to broaden his perspective.

Anger can be a tool for important change.

O: I get to have the opportunity to engage in work outside the farm. I decided not to try to make the farm economically profitable. Set his farm up as a co-op.

Value: Limits on time and space.

→ the confidence of being a member of a co-op has brought prosperity

→ co-op owns the livestock and equipment

Cooperative model has the benefit of each person brings to the table what they are able to; each person gets one vote.

C: A tribe has lost 90% of their land, have bought back 30%

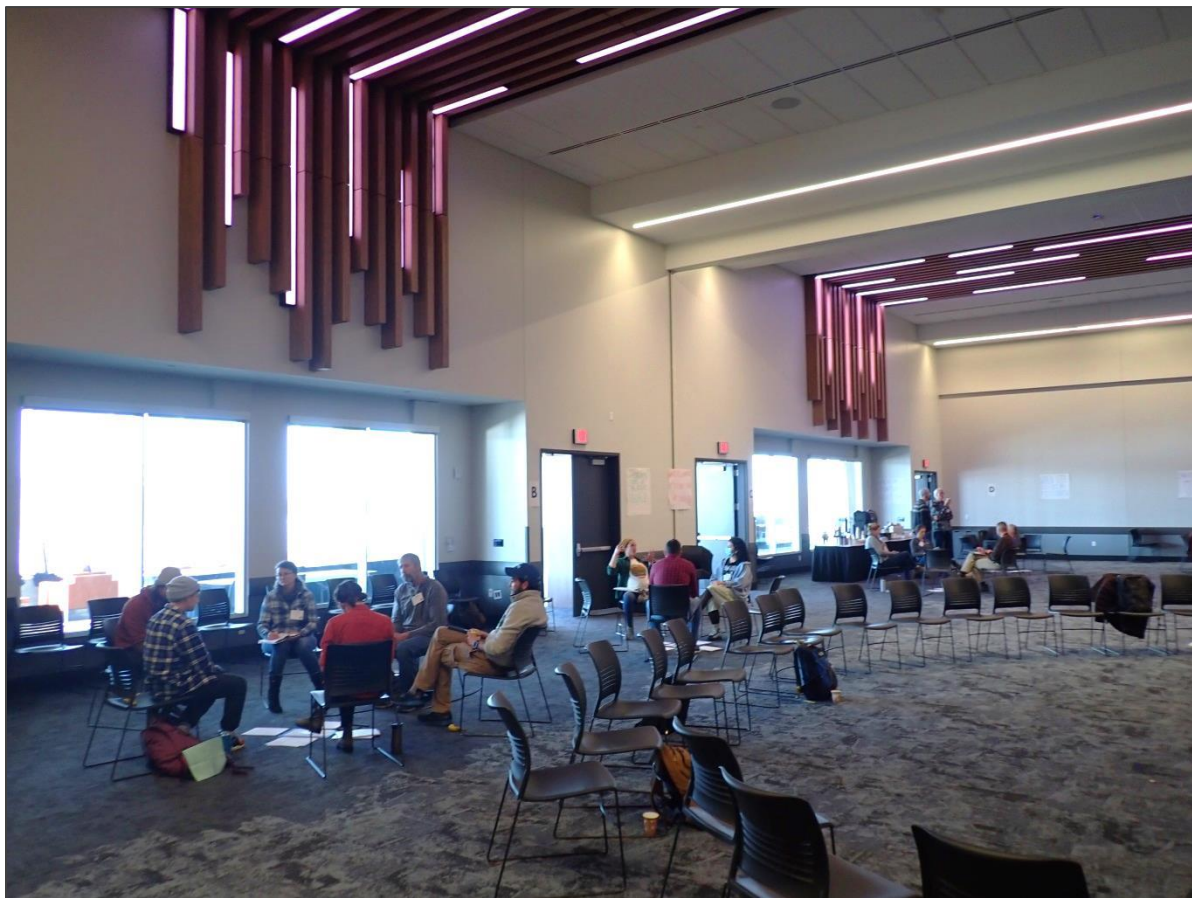
Farmers offering access to land for indigenous folks

-Land acknowledgments are a small first step which might lead to conversations on the level of city government.

-United States maps don't show indigenous lands

-for a large part of my life I didn't even have the knowledge of these lands

-are farms even viable? They haven't always existed.



O: "when you come to the land, plant fruit trees"

Building Soil, long term investments; plant for prosperity for future humans.

It's easy to fall into the trap of I have some therefore I deserve more.

-if I need financial resources to do something can I access them?

L: the concept of ownership of land is inherently colonial. Being less ownership focused can be a valuable perspective shift.

O: Maybe we all own all the land, and we all have a responsibility to all of it.

C: Trash is going to the earth whether or not it is dropped in the street or in a trash bin. We need to stop making trash in the first place.

O: CSA members pay what they can, take what they need. Things aren't bagged in plastic, just in bulk at the market.

-you can be in business as long as you want to be in business.

L: I wear a land back pin: folks are scared to talk to me.

T: It all comes back to money. Can we rebuild the system bottom up?

C: I'm up for decommodifying food. We grow food collectively. I make herbal medicine. I want rest, I want to live.

D: I want that life but I still need money, healthcare. Top down relocation of resources can be more efficient; ie, universal healthcare.

O: Maybe conventional healthcare isn't necessary

C: What type of capacity could we have if we all participated? When indigenous folks made maple sugar they all were working the sugar bush.

O: What if we stop feeding people? They would quickly come out to help.

S: Should people be able to buy soda with SNAP?

C: This conversation has led to agency. People need to make their own choices.

O: if we were to ban soda for SNAP we would need to ban it for everyone.

T: Increasing inequality in income and wealth, economic rules, taxation, etc, have set things up the way they are today.

Movement in WI to switch to a flat tax would increase inequality even more.

D: Top down change is sometimes needed because these rules are so entrenched.

O: Or you can choose to remove yourself from the game

ND everything is either co-op or state owned, influence is lower.

Rejecting eugenics at intersection of seed saving and animal “breeding”

Are top down interventions ideal to address systemic human challenges, or does a grass-roots approach do the most good ?

Life is about living, eating, relating and enjoying more so than acquiring wealth/things/power – how do we shift?



How do we address this in farming spaces?

-some folks WON'T COME if it mention white supremacy

-Where is our responsibility for those conversations?

-“support group” round-table discussions

TOPIC: *Rural/Urban Divide > Impact on Food System*

CONVENER: *Victoria O.*

Farm Viability Convergence Proceedings -- February 25, 2023 -- Marbleseed Organic Farming Conference
Made possible with funding through “Farmer Self-Organizing” NCR-SARE ENC22-209

NOTES-TAKER: Victoria O.

OTHER PARTICIPANTS: Thomas L., Rivianna Z., Kattia J., Ashley S., Bernie H.

NOTES:

Us vs. Them

Small town industrial ag farmers vs 2-acre diverse veggie farmers

-Guy on the tractor

Division<

-Urban hipster liberal “elite foodie”

Cities not having connection to the land

Bridging

Unifying people

—can people agree on the state + truth of how the world works, climate change

Pre-judgement/misconceptions

-Rural/traditional values

There is a reason for the divide-

“Controlling” the narrative—media.

maintains the divide,

Economic incentive to maintain the divide.



We have all the resources to resolve the divisiveness & inequalities

Liberal = “inclusive”

But “inclusivity” convos & being critical in certain ways can create exclusivity or polarize people

~Mediator~ middle ground

-relative not offending or alienating

*facilitating.

Disconnect of people in cities of not thinking about where food/resources come from

Policing the land:

- Land access
- Relationship with land
- Police presence in general

Not thinking about where your food comes from

Big employers (i.e. Amazon) staying in wealthier, not red areas

Opioid crisis – not having opps

- Who was impacted: white young men, didn't want to do dad's job, value of people as compared to other car on drugs.

Why are people moving to:

- Cities
- Countryside

Younger gen moving to rural

- Shifting rural culture

Developments—urban sprawl, absorbing farmland

Rural food getting taken to the city

- Feeding people, growing community in rural

“peri-urban”

What is urban? 1 million people.

What is rural? 50,000 or less

40 miles from MSP > close enough to serve urban populations in need, i.e. Native

“The spirit of Grant Farm” – memorializing farm in a development

[drawing of three concentric circles] reserving the countryside

Townships > [zigzagging barrier line]

Municipality > layers of involvement

County > who has power

Lower Income

- By slaughterhouses
- On subsidies

Rural Development

- Less corporate meat processing
- More power for the worker, less exploitation
- Profit sharing

Consolidation in meat processing



- Subcontracting out
- Putting the humanity back into big oppressive systems
- PEOPLE making decisions for \$\$\$ not people
 - Politics/government being so corrupt
 - Government making such slow movement
 - Capitalist society
- Gift economy—trading

- Many young people without having physical hands-on skills

A circle, not a divide.

[drawing of two arrows, curved to form a circle/formed to demonstrate feedback]

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reciprocal not extractive

Farmer Burnout

How/what

- Right pricing of food
- Capitalism, inequities in pay
CEO
MANAGER
WORKER/LABORER

Consumption patterns

- Saving money on food, to spend on other things
Glitz
Glam

Food not being as high priority

Food as STATUS for elite “organic”

- Desire for low-income, out of reach

Federal programs to resolve—double your bucks

Conversations coming back to the money

- Not the only way, bartering
- Needing to make money to keep going

City < > Country

Organic farming interest,
not being able to make a living
working for McDonald’s instead

Subsidies in agriculture,
ending small farmer
the invisible hand—control.

80% of farmers work outside their farm.

Farmer suicide rates: isolation, financial security

Power of Land to pass on knowledge between generations

Welcoming immigrants into rural, w/ empowered roles

- Refugees
- H2A visas
- Dairy industry in WI relies on Latinos
- Hmong farmers owning land
- Empowering different cultures/ag skills to be in rural

AI replacing farm labor

Township—regulations on segmenting land

- i.e. 1 house on 40 acres
- township boards being intimidating, lots of power. “old boys”

Legal language – not being accessible to general public.

The real cost of growing food > education (educating?) urban

- how long it takes to grow your food.

Products/food ingredients imported from all over

Pressure to make a living, support your families needs is participating/supporting the over the broader community

So if you aren't meeting #1, #2 will be overlooked



TOPIC: *New Homesteader's Act*

CONVENER: *Tom M.*

NOTES-TAKER: *Jenna L.*

OTHER PARTICIPANTS: *Melissa D., Ashley S., Jenna L.*

NOTES:

"Virtually all the farmland that is "owned" and managed now, by almost exclusively older white farmers was stolen from someone and given to someone else. Generational wealth resulted from this and is part of what is preventing new farmers, and particularly under-resourced farmers, from accessing land. We need to be thinking in terms of radical transformation, not small tweaks. The Homesteaders Act resulted in [the] federal government giving stolen land away, and the government can do it again. Return all federal lands to tribal control and find a path forward that makes some of that land available to farmers to farm, focusing on access for BIPOC producers first and hopefully finding a path to a future where we can all occupy spaces together and provide for collective needs in keeping with tribal wishes and consistent with Indigenous knowledge and relationships. The colonized idea of land ownership is the root of so many of the hurdles that stand between us all and a livable future. It becomes about money, and not about life. Every person on Earth has a Creator-given right to land under their feet and the opportunity to realize a life from respectful stewardship of that land. That can only happen if we find ways to put people back on the land in some system to ensure they manage it in a way that provides that same right for every generation that follows." – Clarification provided by Convener

Can there be legislation to

Nearly impossible to have young people access land

The farmers are getting older + young people can't make it happen

How can we give them the reigns?

Young people are ready, smart, driven

What to do with the people who already own the land?



Government buys a lot of the land + redistributes it to people who want to use it.

Original Homesteaders Act

- Treaty w/ all Native people
- Gave the land to immigrants
- To move the people west
- Had to

Government already has a lot of land, they don't even

Maybe not government, maybe a non-profit.

If government would take the land, it will just go back to large corporations.

Government is influenced by big money.

TOPIC: Are Farmers DOING OKAY? Are we caring for ourselves sustainably?

CONVENER: Laura F.

NOTES-TAKER: Anna Z., Laura F., Lori S.

OTHER PARTICIPANTS: Bernie H., Dela E., Lori S., Ryan E., Anna A., Anna Z., Charlie J., Jeremy M.

NOTES:

- Regenerative Systems must be generative
- Brutal work ethic a point of pride, culturally
 - How does that lay the foundation for (white supremacy) an unsurvivable work culture?
- How do I shift for well-being as the goal?
- More than “just working” when you’re farming.
- If you use work to avoid yourself, only you suffer.
- How do you continue to have hope?
- Making time for what you find beneficial
- It’s easy to decide that lack of time or money is a good reason to skip self-care
- Farming is very isolating, conferences help a lot
- “I like the question” Gotta be profitable—push ourselves

- We have to take care of ourselves
- Work ethic
 - Deny our need
 - Burdened
- Others find time to go to family events, ballgames, etc.
 - Doesn’t seem to hurt them
 - How do they do this?
- I don’t have to keep doing that (work all the time)
- Holistic International?
- How do I live + work here that brings me joy?

- We hide from ourselves
- If we just keep working, we don't have the time to stop + think
- We (farmers) can support each other better than anyone else
 - Others don't get it
- How do you continue to have hope?
- Mental, emotional, spiritual energy?
 - Has to be personal
- Making time for beneficial things (massage therapy)
 - Is it because you want to feel that good again?
- Don't do things because time + money constraints
 - Self care
- 80s-90s farm crisis-
 - "Have a nice day, if you can" >Horried
- Coming to conferences
- Farming is isolating
- Connection at conferences helps sustain throughout the year
- Covid hurt even more
- *Don't hear from the farmers who aren't doing okay
 - Stopping farming
- Do we just have to stop farming to be okay?
- High turnover of small WI regenerative ag
- Listserv
- What's the next big thing to be profitable?
 - More stressed out + anxious
- Keep showing up > HOW?
- How do we keep showing up for farmers?
 - Be honest about personal struggles; honest w/ customers
 - Positive and negative responses
 - Do other farmers
 - What to hear? Who else would you talk to?
 - Could conference have support groups?

- *Support system



- SHOWING UP:
 - Share w/ peers > peers are competitors
 - At Conference, meet people who don't compete for the same markets
 - My spouse is my support system
- What size do you need to be viable?
- Have to be talented to be successful
 - Not size
- Co-ops want to buy from small farmers, not corporations
- Where is our personal dignity?
- Do things that give back to you
 - Engage with customers/other people
 - Running
 - Time to walk away for the day
- Are farmers okay?
 - If not, will we have food?
- What is our attitude about generational shifts?
 - Don't write off older/younger generations
- Maybe there's something to be said for not working all the time?!
- Can we get to the place where we don't have to do everything?

- Marketing, distribution, etc.
- Try to protect employees, still leave
 - Crazy hours to try to cover
 - Not showing up as my best self
- If you just planned better, than you could stop at 5:00—personal experience
 - Input from this conference
 - Is it realistic?
- Our employees aren't young farmers, not invested
- Society puts crazy expectations on everyone (i.e., better parenting)
 - Same for farmers
- Way more rules than necessary
- How do we communicate w/ CSA customers?
 - Notes, emails, no longer emails, sticker w/ box
 - Other people are busy

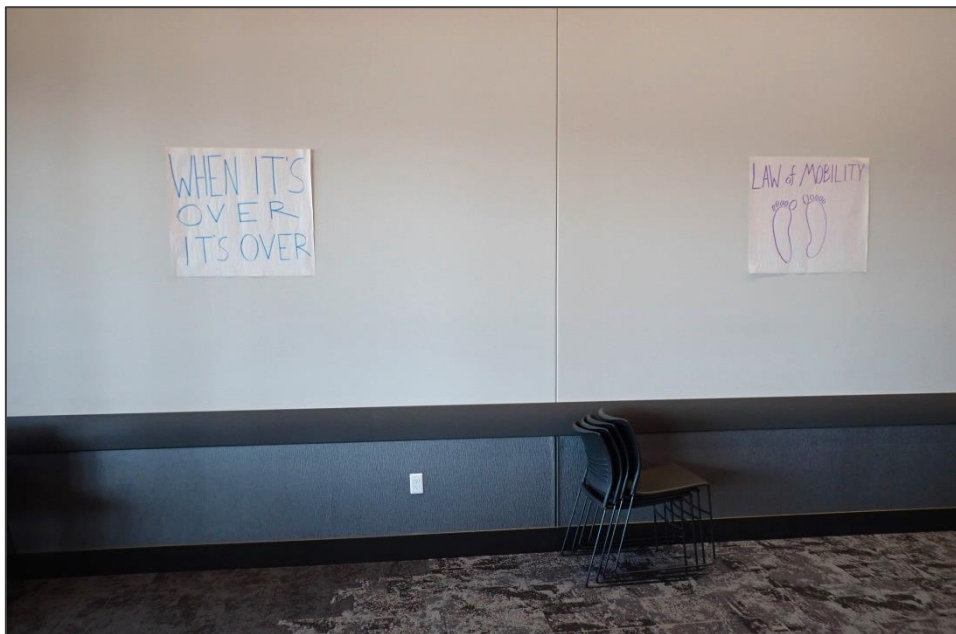
- Could we benefit from peer support?
 - What does that look like?
 - Who is responsible for doing that?
- Peers could also be competitors in farming—how does that affect our trust in each other and vulnerability?
- Making connections
- Energy Returns on Energy Invested principle could be considered a regenerative principle
- Choosing our activities for our brilliance + enjoyment means more energy return.
- Generational shifts in the workplace/farming
- If farmers aren't okay, where do we get our food?
- Consumers want the stories about the people growing their food, but where does that care end?
- When you have employees you worry about their well-being too

- Post-pandemic/connection in person vs. technology
- Farmers busy—everyone busy

-Take Aways-

- Want an economic revitalization small-med. farms
- Re-boot?@

- ? Accept that farming is more a vocation—do we have to accept that?
- Organic as marketing impact that other farmers don't have
- Other income streams that have not been considered “farming” (grants, marketing, swamp)
- Need to normalize talking about the struggles of farming
- Models of employee buy-in to feel less ‘alone’
- Change the world as well as how to be
- Farming has changed a lot—expectations and knowledge required also changed
- Earth connection smaller part of farming
- New farmer vs generational farmer
 - Power of paradigms—“how it's always been” can be downfall
- Employees—take opportunity to mechanize; ↓ employees > scale consideration for happiness...



TOPIC: Role of Hospitals (and Other community Institutions)

CONVENER: Jake L.

NOTES-TAKER: Eliana P.

OTHER PARTICIPANTS: Jake L., Eliana P., Sheri D., Melissa D.

NOTES:

- Gunderson NP Hospitals>Lax
- Pandemic built rooftop garden
- Hospitals they do different programming around country
- Partner with other folks/orgs in the community
- The common market>>Has worked with food as a social determinant for health
- Medicare (medical tailored meals) reimbursement programs in Massachusetts
- Still figuring out what food impacts and how to have the right metrics to validate value of investment
- [Close] to official to approve this farm ops. Program
- NPH to keep their status > CHB dollars.
- Jake currently doing all the work > started the garden during pandemic > he is a P.A.
- Food at hospital is not scratch >> kitchen & food service infrastructure is not set up to make it!
- As part of getting the rooftop garden together, about 100 people shown interest in more nutrition education & others about growing exclusively
- Melissa question: Will the hospital pay for the cost of what actually takes to produce the food?
 - Jake: We have not done that math yet
- Reimbursement tied to better health outcomes.
- Hidden cost with conventional makes it challenging to dissipate the perception of benefits of organic amid the higher cost. Conventionally grown has unaccounted cost to society.
- Smart Farmer (IL) (case study) >> building a partnership with for profit or non-profit to take on model

- [Gundersen] hospital merged w/ a hospital in the East part of WI that has a lifestyle medicine program/clinic >> the plan is to extend that program for this hospital in the Lax area under the farm >> plan to have a farmer on staff & include a nutrition/culinary education component



- Clarification: This is likely referring to Gundersen Health System merging with Bellin Health (out of Green Bay). Bellin has a lifestyle medicine clinic, and Gundersen is planning what that will look like at Gundersen. The dream would be to operate a hospital farm as part of a lifestyle medicine department in order to link agriculture and healthcare.
- Book recommendation: The Well Garden Mind
- Less than 50% of medical students think that nutrition is important.

TOPIC: How do I help my daughter / children become an organic farmer?

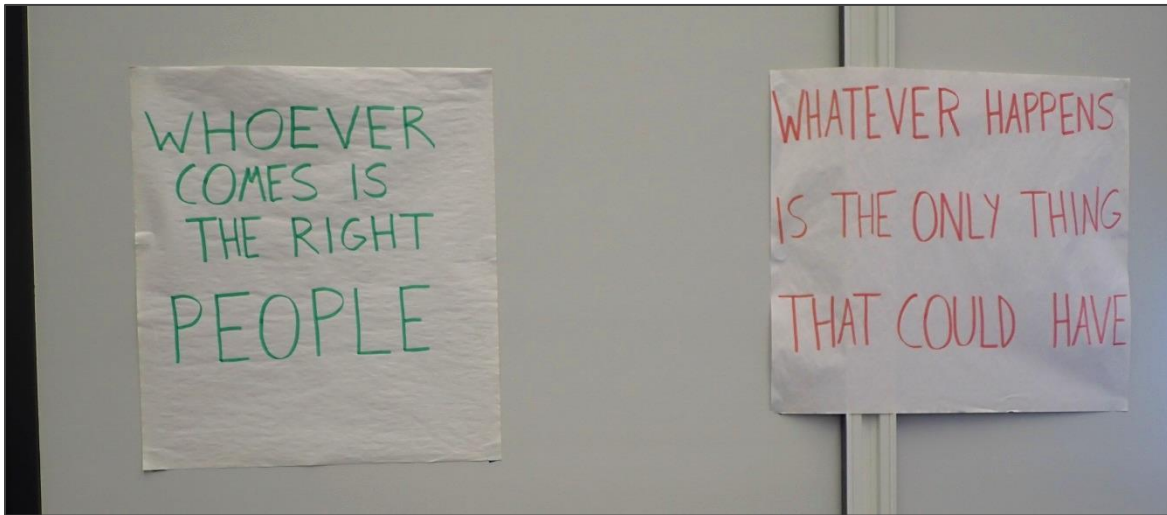
CONVENER: Jeff

NOTES-TAKER: Liz

OTHER PARTICIPANTS: Elizabeth M., Bernie H.

NOTES:

- Generational wealth / access to land -- a responsibility as a child to do something meaningful with the land.
- Marriage: it is a team effort and you have to be in it as a team
- Teach your daughters how to use machinery!
- Let them know all the little quirks about the farm.
- Ask / include her in the decision making – don't impose, don't assume you have the same ideas for the future. Talk through it together.
- Encourage your children! Ask them what they want



TOPIC: Viability for Tribal Harvesters, Land, and Water

CONVENER: Bagwajinini Alex Kmett (Red Lake Ojibwe)

NOTES-TAKER: Anna Z., Lauren L., Bagwajinini Alex Kmett (Red Lake Ojibwe)

OTHER PARTICIPANTS: Lauren L., Wade M., Elizabeth M., Ken M., Anna Z., Charlie J.

NOTES:

- **Respect Tribal sovereignty and honor treaties**
 - [Treaties are agreements between governing nations, and rights are outlined for both parties.](#)
 - Think “international agreement” rather than “outdated race-based law.”
 - Myth: terms of surrender for “losing the war”

- What war?
 - Between the Federal government and Native Nations
 - Tribal sovereignty & jurisdiction *supersedes* the State.
 - Tribes have their own conservation codes, and regulatory agencies (e.g. Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission, 1854 Treaty Authority, etc.)
 - Sustainable land, water, and forest management have been happening for millennia, so seamlessly that settlers believed Natives weren't utilizing resources.
 - "TEK" (Traditional Ecological Knowledge) is based on what might be called "Original Law" or "Natural Law," Chi-inaakonigewin in Ojibwe. Our original treaty as human beings.
 - Reciprocal model of relationality with nature.
 - Manaaji'idiwin – respect, going easy on one another.
- Treaties with Tribal Nations form the *legal basis for settlement and your continued occupation* within the ceded territories referenced.
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples ([UNDRIP](#), 2007) defines ownership rights to cultural and ceremonial expression, identity, language, employment, health, education, and other issues.
 - Foodways are central to many of the above.
 - Context: American Indian Religious Freedom came in 1978.
- Recognize Indigenous peoples within the Americas' contributions to agriculture and modern food systems:
 - Southern Indigenous relatives' continued labor within the United States
 - Farms, meat-packing plants, food-prep, etc.
 - [Impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement on Native corn producers south of the US border.](#)
 - The viability of growing Native corn varieties is threatened by a market flooded with sweet corn.
 - Northbound migration, particularly Indigenous farmers
 - Whole world eating foods that were exported from the "Americas" (the "Columbian Exchange") after millennia of developing and domesticating food crops (especially in Central and South America):
 - Beans, cacao, cashews, corn, peanuts, pecans, vanilla, avocado, cassava roots, chili peppers, guava, pimentos, pineapples,

potatoes, pumpkins, squash, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, quinine, rubber, tobacco, etc.

- Countless acres ceded by treaty and/or forced removal.
 - Modern farmers (“overwhelmingly white” ~99% of farms in MN) continue to profit from the above crops (or have at the least, benefited from inherited wealth), on lands that Native peoples were divested of.
 - 1862 Morrill Act
 - [Land Grab \(Land Grant\) Universities](#)
 - \$500m channeled to the University of Minnesota from leases & land sales after Dakota exile.
 - “The U’s permanent trust fund controls roughly \$600m in royalties from iron ore mining, timber sales and other revenues derived from land taken from [Dakota and Ojibwe peoples].” ([TRUTH via MPR](#)).
 - 1887 Dawes General Allotment Act
 - “Surplus lands”
 - Illegal occupation of Upper Red Lake
 - Remapping of boundaries determined in the Agreement of 1889.
- **Tribal food systems do not start and end with agriculture.**
 - Hunting, fishing, and gathering make up a substantial part of traditional food systems. Ag plays (and played) a part, though to what extent varies regionally.
 - Several treaties outline “usufructuary rights” to engage in these practices on off-reservation public lands.
 - Lands set aside for reservations were often not suitable for farming.



- Agriculture was used as a tool of colonization.

- Break up land held in common and assign allotments to individuals (Dawes General Allotment Act, 1887) who were “encouraged” to take up farming on nonarable land.
 - Divested individuals of allotments through claims of debt or enticing them to sell.
 - Additional “surplus” land sold to settlers for pennies on the dollar rather than remaining under the aboriginal title.
 - Ag does play a large part in Native peoples’ modern food system, as a response to impediments on Indigenous land access, in efforts to restore food sovereignty to our respective nations.
 - Access to healthy ingredients in food deserts.
 - Seed keepers, TEK-holders
 - Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance, Intertribal Agriculture Council
 - Indigenous Ag has played a tremendous part within individual tribal food systems across the Americas (especially in warm climates) and, in general, has contributed greatly to the modern globalized food system through the historic development of various major food crops (such as corn, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers).
- **Impediments to Indigenous land access negatively affect the ability to engage in traditional food systems:**
 - Historically:
 - Slaughter of buffalo
 - Intentionally done for control of food and resources to take control of the Great Plains region.
 - Restricted from leaving reservations in early reservation-era
 - High population within a small area of land puts extra pressure on the ecosystem; unsustainable to hunt/fish/gather solely on reservation lands.
 - Reliance on commodity foods (flour, sugar, dairy) & reduced access to culturally appropriate foods
 - Negative impacts on health, wellness, *cultural viability*
 - Diabetes, heart disease, liver disease, digestive issues
 - Breach of treaty terms: provisions often came late, to different locations than were previously agreed upon, and/or in inadequate amounts.
 - Cause for Sandy Lake Tragedy of 1850

- ~400 dead from starvation, disease, and exposure to cold.
 - Cause for the [Dakota War of 1862](#)
 - resulted in the largest mass hanging in the United States and the exile of all Dakota people beyond state boundaries.
- Clearcutting of forests, damming of rivers, rail, and general “development”
 - Devasted ecosystems, interrupted animal migration, flooded gardens, destroyed wild rice beds, and desecrated graves.
 - Fewer lands to engage in traditional food systems on
 - Illegal logging practices in the Leech Lake area: setting fire to live trees to pass them off as “dead timber,” diminishing the natural environment for a profit at expense of Ojibwe peoples’ cultural and economic viability.
 - Lumber barons such as T.B. Walker donated some of his extreme wealth to the development of MPLS during an economic depression.
 - A contributing factor that led to the 1898 [Battle of Sugar Point](#), a decisive loss for the United States.
- Several tribes (especially in Eastern US) have been displaced from their traditional homelands and forced to regroup in different eco-systems.
 - Loss of entire branches of knowledge because of disconnect from land → our languages are tied to traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), and by extension our food systems.
 - Indian Removal Act 1830
 - *"for an exchange of lands with the Indians residing in any of the states or territories, and for their removal west of the river Mississippi."*
 - Southern tribes to Oklahoma
 - Northern tribes to Kansas
 - Trail of Tears (1830-1850)
 - Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee, and Seminole
 - Southeastern US to Oklahoma
 - [Sandy Lake Tragedy](#), a failed attempt at relocating all Ojibwe through trickery (1850)
 - Exile of Dakota and Ho-Chunk from Minnesota 1863

- The Long Walk of the Navajo (1864)
 - 1862 Morrill Act
 - Land Grab (Land Grant) Universities further dispossess Native peoples of land.
- Modern (and continuing):
 - Land access issues
 - Increasing land prices, persistent poverty
 - High rates of homelessness, among the highest per capita in the USA.
 - Fractionated estates, more people per acre.
 - Continual impact of historic unethical divestment of land/resources, displacement of entire Native nations.
 - Very little intergenerationally accumulated wealth to inherit in comparison to settler populations.
 - Industrial pollution & water quality impact the viability of a diet rich in fish and wild rice
 - Sulfides, mercury, “forever chemicals,” etc.
 - High levels of mercury and PFAs in fish
 - Sulfides affect wild rice’s ability to germinate
 - Algae blooms from ag runoff choking out fish
 - Wild rice habitat revitalization on reservations, continuing decline of water off-reservation.
 - Aquifer breaches during pipeline construction
 - Threat of bitumen leaks
 - Genetic modification of wild rice by the University of Minnesota threatens crop viability and integrity.
 - Impact on soil from mainstream commercial agriculture
 - Impacts of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers on wild edible and medicinal plants
 - The demand for participation in the dominant culture, regular employment, etc. makes it difficult to engage in seasonal, time- and labor-intensive traditional activities and foodways.

- Challenges to Tribal sovereignty and usufructuary rights



- Harassment of Tribal harvesters exercising off-reservation treaty rights on public land/waters over:
 - Fishing
 - Netting
 - Nets are often cut and confiscated; charges dropped.
 - Dropping charges prevents the issue from being resolved in Supreme Court.
 - Spearing
 - [Families with children harassed by throwing rocks and threats of being shot as recently as Spring 2021 on Mille Lacs Lake in Minnesota](#)
 - What if it was your own kid, planting seeds?
 - [Wisconsin Walleye War](#)
 - 1970s through early 1990s.
 - Ongoing harassment
 - GLIFWC found Ojibwe only speared 3% of walleye in the treaty-ceded territory.

- Reports of gunshots, bombings, rock-throwing, and slingshot attacks on Ojibwe people.
 - Tapping maple trees
 - Taps pulled from trees by DNR.
 - Subsistence harvest of berries, timber, and medicinal plants on state land
- Cross-border (“international”) intertribal cooperative agreements
 - Colonial nations want to control and take tribute in the form of tariffs.
- **A lot of reservation communities are considered food deserts.**
 - Economic and geographic barriers to obtaining healthy foods.
 - Navigating USDA grants is extremely complex.
 - Historic relationships with BIPOC people result in continued distrust of Federal agencies.
 - Federal Indian Law regarding land status and eligibility for different programs is also complex
 - A need for food sovereignty
 - Food Sovereignty is not the same as food security or food justice.
 - Overapplication of the term diminishes the understanding of and respect for the sovereignty of American Indian peoples who have a *specific geopolitical relationship* with/identity within the United States *as sovereign nations*.
- **Inawendiwin: interrelationality, kinship. Recognizing our relationships with all living and non-living beings across time/space**
 - We are all related, regardless of bloodlines or perception of life/animacy.
 - As humans, we breathe the same air, drink the same water, and are poisoned by the same microplastics.
 - Community is multifaceted, multilayered, with lots of overlap and intersection.
 - Every action has a reaction. We must consider the direct and indirect impacts of every decision on our relatives.
 - Relatives that we are accountable to:
 - One another
 - Soil, rocks, air
 - Plants, animals, fungi, protists, etc.
 - Intergenerationally: ancestors → us → descendants

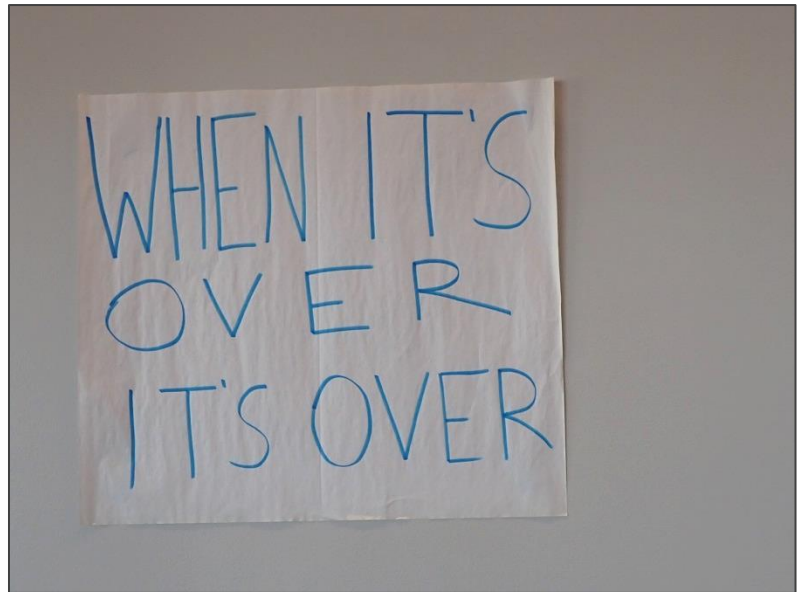
- **Ojibwe peoples are unified by language, culture, and spirituality. Politically there has always been a degree of sovereignty/autonomy between families/bands/communities.**
 - Currently roughly half of Ojibwe peoples are in communities spread across 4 US states, and another half in Canada.
 - Seasonal Rounds: Families/bands would travel between seasonal camps (Spring – Maple sugar; Summer – Fishing; Fall – Wild rice; Winter – Hunting) and move all camps as necessary to avoid exhausting resources in a delicate ecosystem. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) = regionally appropriate sustainable resource management.
 - Similar concept: rotational cover-cropping
 - Critique of permaculture movement: the commodification of TEK, erasure of Indigenous people’s contributions to knowledge through rebranding
- **Intergenerational traditions around food: How do we keep youth engaged in TEK, food systems**
 - Trying to do as much land-based learning as possible through the medium of the Ojibwe language.
 - Endazhi-nitaawiging Charter School at Red Lake reservation (“The Place of Growth”/ “Where it Grows”
 - What is “it?”
 - Our children, our language, our knowledge and foodways, our dreams, our future.
 - Exercising educational sovereignty
 - Throughout the pandemic, we reportedly lost 20% of our language speakers.
 - Like losing volumes of highly specialized encyclopedic knowledge.
 - Many communities host events like “Take a Kid Ricing Day,” “Take a Kid Fishing Day,” etc.
- [Land Back](#)
 - Only 2.3% of the total area of the USA is comprised of reservation land.
 - Aspects of Land Back:
 - Return of Indigenous land and life
 - Title, jurisdiction, land stewardship
 - Time, space, capacity to engage in our own ways of knowing, being, and valuing – uninterrupted.
 - Micro and macro scales
 - Restorative practices (water, soil, and air quality; biodiversity)

- Identify what land we should start with? Large?
 - Fear in small communities – “They’re coming for me!” / “My family farm is everything!”
 - No expectation for people to get back on the boat – but must choose a starting point to address longstanding issues regarding historic dispossessions, displacements, treaty violations (international law), and acts of genocide.
 - This is not a zero-sum game.
 - When lineage breaks, can it go back to a prior lineage instead of getting sucked into a corporation?
 - Depends on if that landowner was in debt.
 - Corporately held private land
 - Further Native influence, offices within the Bureau of Land Management, USDA, EPA, etc.?
- [“We \(white people\) want to be more indigenous to a place.”](#)
 - You all were at one time, but exchanged that in a bid to extend dominion beyond that particular place.
 - The impulse to become indigenous to a place your ancestor’s settled in is intrinsically tied to the historically extractive relationships that settlers hold with Indigenous peoples, Indigenous knowledge, and the land.
 - ~~Allyship~~ ~~Accompliceship~~: How to uplift Native peoples in political advocacy without ego getting in the way
 - We’re in this together. Be a good relative. [Put in work.](#)
 - Be willing to listen, honest, and aware of your intentions.
 - Stay humble, patient, and willing to learn.
 - Reckoning with truth can be uncomfortable, but so is enduring a slow-burning genocide with constant reminders around every corner.
 - Native peoples are protective of knowledge from exploitation.
 - Data sovereignty
 - Who holds license to share our stories?
 - Seek permission:
 - Depending on the contexts (media, research) one might have to receive approvals from a Tribal media coordinator or Institutional Review Board.



- Pretendianism
 - Family rumor of G-G-Grandparent being Native American does not give license to speak on issues on behalf of our communities.
 - Co-opting Indigenous identities and traumas for one’s own benefit is highly problematic.
 - An avoidance of accountability, masks latent post-colonial guilt
- Provide a platform for Indigenous peoples.
 - “We need to do something better, but we (White people) shouldn’t control the conversation.”
 - “Mainstream” organic/sustainability groups aren’t focusing on solidarity so much as inclusion.
 - “Indigeneity, Sovereignty, and Relationality are different from and transform [Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion] practices.” (UMN American Indian Studies)

- Checking a diversity box for funding—a common critique of institutions by BIPOC
- Listen and help to spread ideas.
 - People need to hear from their peers on these issues.
- Indigenous peoples are very capable of speaking for themselves, but often lack the platform for their voice or story to be widely heard.



TOPIC: Land Access

CONVENER: Darin V.

NOTES-TAKER: Aimee M.

OTHER PARTICIPANTS: Aimee M., Bob W., Ken M., Wally G., Jenna L., Stathis P., Charlie J., Dan C.

NOTES:

- People want to farm, but don't have land.
- Marbleseed has a mentorship program where older farmers help those getting in.
- Access for emerging farmers
- Some people have finances to get land or it's in the family so they get it easier.
- How to get older farmers to transition to younger farmers who need the land
- Easier to pass land to family than a stranger (via Trusts)
- Talk of a federal grant program to help fund purchasing (being developed?)

- LSP > People do come and say we have land we want to pass on. This has not happened to WI farmers union—though they are interested in that.
- In WFU not a lot of discussion about land access recently. Dozen questions a year maybe.
- Really sad when you see last kid in a family graduates H.S. and family sells all the equipment because they don't want the kids to farm. Some kids do want to—but now all the equipment is gone.
- Used to be a “profession” of a substitute farmer to take over farm if farmer wants to take vacation
- WFU had done something with a workers group... union... thing
- Don't get tied down to the farm
- How to encourage farm incubator projects so beginning folks can get some experience.
- (side conversations about how to get volunteers/help from CSA members, in emergencies)
- There was a guy who had a CSA farm with interns and got out of it because morally didn't want to train people up in a job they can't make money in :\
- Talked about BIPOC folks who have a lot of struggle getting land, keeping land, getting going because of their color.
- Land is expensive and just keeps going up.
- A lot of farmers own 40 acres but only farm 3 or 4.
- Challenge of matching up very specific land good for XYZ with people who very specifically want to do ABC type of farming
- Sharing our roots / Big River Farm
- Lots of people just want land. Can they get together to purchase bigger piece of land to share?



- TM – a place buying the land in 100 cities (transcendental meditation) and letting people farm it. Code of conduct; must be organic
- “Real” incubator is having the older/past farmer mentor
- Agrarian Land Trust – picking up land, using consensus
- Have to be careful with people/orgs helping with land access. The farmers can get burned.
- Sadly there are wealthy people buying up swathes on land as investment, driving up prices.
- Dynasty Trust. Covenant to keep in family who is doing organic—or some other young person
- Hutterites Colonies in South Dakota
 - 180 colonies, each own a lot of acres.
 - But farming with technology. But confinement and row crops.
- Urban farm land access
- Detroit—estimate 1,850 farms, 40-50 acre plus. Really into urban farming!
 - Lots of foreclosures and over assessed on taxes
 - 19 sq. miles of vacant land
 - City owns a lot—they want developers
 - Investors are out of state or foreign often
 - What about the people who remained—they want a fair shot at buying this land
 - What’s the economic value of the work that has been done for years?
 - Power grabs and land consolidation—these folks don’t know what’s happening at the level we’re all at.
 - Detroit Hantz – buy land and plant trees, bought for pennies; farmers said can we buy for that price? City bought land back and guy made millions. Gross. What if city did a covenant?



SESSION TWO



TOPIC: Economic Models that Promote Community-based Food Accessibility and Profitability

CONVENER: Liz M.

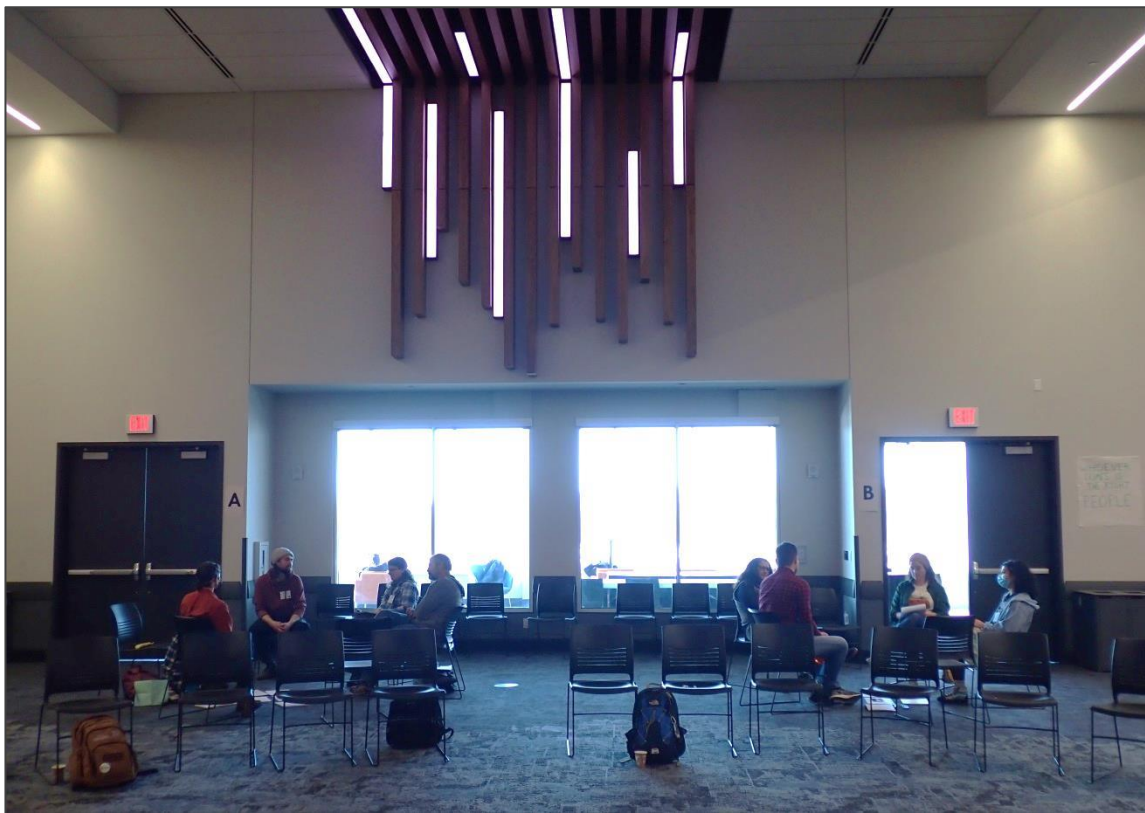
NOTES-TAKER: [?]

OTHER PARTICIPANTS: Darin V., Jeremy M.

NOTES:

5th Seasons Stakeholder Coop

- Many stakeholders work together to create value-added products



TOPIC: Making a Living Farming While Sustaining the Earth

CONVENER: Melissa D.

NOTES-TAKER: Dela E.

OTHER PARTICIPANTS: Anna Z., Daniel D.

NOTES:

This was the mission and vision of our farm over 30 years. Most of those years off farm income was a necessity to help pay the bills and provide health insurance. Being a cancer survivor pre Obama care meant health care for me was beyond affordability for over a decade. Organic farming was intended to be earth healing and for the small acreage we farmed obvious healing took place but it has felt relatively insignificant in the ocean of conventional farm in our farmhood. Over the years of our tiny farm's healing mission all around us more and more chemicals have been applied on neighbors ground. How much difference have we made?

Goats – value added goat soap, grazing, Air B&B agrotourism [ways to help sustain]

Spray drift terrible threat to small sustainable farms.

Not wanting to deal with tourists low-level knowledge.

Important to educate consumers.

-supplementing with off-farm work

-10 years without health insurance (Obamacare changed that) – cancer-

-eating healthy can still be an issue for farmers

-living city, time issues



- Small farm – felt so insignificant
 - But it's your Eden
- spray drift is a huge problem
 - does crop insurance work for this?
- margins are so tight
- people are voting with their dollars – eating better
 - want organic food and the experience
- Goat yoga – anything that will put \$ in pocket
 - need to partner with people
 - have to risk it
 - some farmers don't like this
- Some farmers don't want to do agrotourism
- agrotourism can be a good educational opportunity
- “I will dumb it down, if you pay me”
- people who can't identify veggies are part of the problem → some surface level education is better than nothing
 - not life giving for some



TOPIC: *Can Farming Become More Than the Weekend? (Jenna L.) & Where Do You Start? Foundations? (Jeremy)*

CONVENERS: Jenna L., Jeremy

NOTES-TAKER: Jenna L.

OTHER PARTICIPANTS: Bob W., Jenna L., Ryan E., Ashley S.

NOTES:

Playground slow evolution

Figure out what people want

- Control inputs / produces
 - Grow own feed – for pigs
- Money save—can be own mechanic
- Can you share with neighbors equipment?

Farming More Than The Weekend

F Work, kids, +farming
Can't do it all

How to manage time?
Timeblocking.

Need a job to fund the farming
Prioritizing family

How do you figure out what to do?

E Want a good foundation

Want to know what you want to do first and should take time to get to know your piece of land so it's successful BUT fruit crops take so much time to fruit that you need to get them in the ground.

HMI Holistic Management International

This helps you decide who you want to be + utilize the land you have.

What scale to go to? Just for us? For more? 2? 20?

Ryan E.

Bob W.

Ashley S.

Start small. By the time you get bigger then you have the customers

Play around figure some stuff out figure out what people want that you can do and go from there.



TOPIC: *Myth of the Independent Family Farmer Pulling Themselves Up by Their Bootstraps*

CONVENER: Melissa D.

NOTES-TAKER: Melissa D.

OTHER PARTICIPANTS: Melissa D., Aimee M., Brook K., Jeanne L.

NOTES:

- Prairie Fire: the Life of Laura Ingalls Wilder
- We have an incredible public network that supports our businesses
- Everything is designed to keep us in debt
- We have little financial literacy here, in this country
- Hard to find the time to find those bootstraps
- Near ... – had so much free labor, not realistic
- Can pay myself \$100/week – maybe? Not enough.
- Martyrdom culture—can cause a health crisis
- Our current model—very destructive
 - But we need farmers
 - Can farms be viable? In our current system
- In our society—our value is how much \$ you make.
- I am bad at rest. We need rest.
- Need boots first.
- If farming is our culture heritage—why don't we support it (small sustainable farms?)
- Why \$59 million for only 6 new slaughter plants
- Cheap food system built on the back of beg farmers.
- We need more transparency about why we farm & why we stop.
- Our “story” is waaay too idealized.
- There are people doing quite \$ well—the barons.




TOPIC: *Storytelling for Change (Growing Our Understanding)*

CONVENER: Lauren L.

NOTES-TAKER: Lauren L.

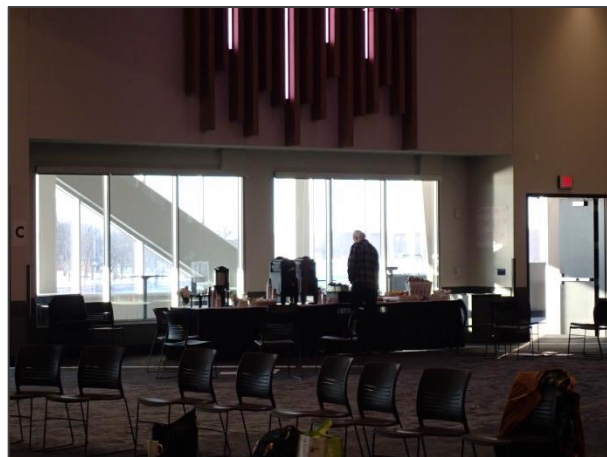
OTHER PARTICIPANTS: Charlie J., Lauren L., Wally G., Darin V., Stathis P.

NOTES:

- Division—
who is
pushing the
narrative
 - Pooling our
stories for
power
- 
- What is the narrative we all share?
 - Co-operative model: Electrification—people were so excited to work together
 - Now it seems to be so focused on political division
 - Me vs. we
 - The story of how we're powerless alone
 - Charlie's farm co2/DAPL pipeline//Wally's story of police liaison
 - The PR story vs. the political story
 - Stathis's story—Train Derailment (Palestine's) clean up waste coming oo the Detroit Co.
 - Independence
 - Slain in the game/credit
 - Loss of rights
 - News alert: well infection instead
 - Division/Othering
 - Powerless alone
 - Isolation//social media
 - Calling out: neighborliness

- Dominant narrative vs shared values/experience
- We have to be vulnerable & share stories to show we're not alone & to build power
 - Our exact stories are different, but the themes are the same:
 - Isolation
 - Disenfranchisement
 - Powerlessness
 - Perception of inevitability
 - Pollution/danger
 - Heightening burdens & fewer resources available
 - Etc.





Farm Viability Convergence Proceedings -- February 25, 2023 -- Marbledseed Organic Farming Conference
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CLOSING CIRCLE

After both hour-long sessions of meetings were completed participants regrouped for a closing plenary. A package of Marbleseed seeds was passed around the circle and as these made their way around participants were welcome to volunteer any thoughts or reflections about something they may have learned or noticed during their time at the Convergence event. Our volunteer scribe was able to note the comments below:

- Reflecting how Ojibwe food system goes beyond farming but also involves harvesting wild rice, fishing, hunting, respect for treaties, land access, etc. Extending back and ancestors and how to engage and keep going. These are topics that haven't had much discussion outside his community so grateful for having people listen, learn, and grow relationships.
- Farm family issues. Five children and have built farm and worried how it's going to be passed on. Stressful. Hearing other peoples' problems can be helpful. Sometimes what we hear isn't what was meant to be said.
- Gratitude. Thank you for the space
- Grateful for community therapy session.
- Appreciate most ties back to session if farms are ok. Need for connection. This is the place. Come for technical help but also get others who also have the same struggles who are and are not like you.
- Worried about the powerlessness, siloing. Good to (be) in a space where there is power of sharing.
- It is amazing. Heart is full. ...We're not so different. Doesn't matter if (we) have one or 1,000 acres. We're all getting screwed. No matter the location. Come to Detroit.
- Nothing too specific... I feel like this was a space where I got to talk about what I wanted to. For me it worked.
- Soil is community. This conference is community of life. We are stronger together. All across USA and world. Life is soil, doesn't need infrastructure to build.
- Still processing. Ask Monday. Thank you for learning from you.
- So much work to get conference together. Thank you Marbleseed staff. By the end, so wonder where the time went.

- Feel grateful for this container. Conferences aren't their favorite container. This space was set up well. Felt folks were listening and they were held. Felt heartily in community and that's so helpful. Most people in the circle they wouldn't have normally had a conversation with. Thanks for being the right people.
- Nice to have conversations with (a) small group of people
- Need to integrate more into the conference
- Thank you. Small circle helped go deeper into topics. Listening gave new viewpoints into topics.
- More [faith?] of good ideas and how we can impact the world in a different way. There are other good people out there.
- Be transparent so others know the struggles of farming. How important connection is. Broken society is in lack of purpose and connection. We have a purpose of what we do and this can help heal.
- Scattered thoughts. Wished to talk about opportunities, not as many problems.
- Vision that we can make a space like this for the conference in the future. Safe and whole selves come in the room and this is a microcosm of the community. How can we bring this forward?
- Usually have backlog... Got contacts of people who had a good connection with. Can we have more contacts?
- Urban and rural have the same problems. We all don't make money. This is good to have a [...]
- Came tired and leaving good and uplifted. Hope we can do more. Very fruitful.
- Didn't solve what farm viability looks like. Heard things that wasn't agreed with. What's viable to one isn't to another. Different farmers, different systems is the way to viability.
- Really struggled with this. Been really special to have conversations that are niche and complex. Ground rules are really appreciated. That a person has a responsibility to make the most of their time.
- Feels less alone in her own way. Reinvigorate her life and farm, and get serious about what she's wanted to do.
- Grateful that the concerns of farming have come out today. Gives courage to meet challenges.
- Echoes what everyone else said. A lot of processing and thinking and to get [...]

