

A close-up photograph showing several hands of different skin tones working together to plant small green seedlings into a black plastic seedling tray. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with green foliage.

OUR CALL TO ACTION

100% of Communities Will
Hold Power in a Racially Just Food System



NATIONAL
FARM to SCHOOL
NETWORK

We are National Farm to School Network.

We have a vision of a strong and just food system for all, and we seek deep transformation toward this vision through **farm to school** – the ways kids eat, grow, and learn about food in schools and early care and education settings. Farm to school is a win for kids when they eat nourishing food in meals and snacks, participate in hands-on activities and learn about the importance of where our food comes from; a win for farmers when school market opportunities provide reliable and consistent sales and fair pay; and a win for communities when food is grown, distributed, prepared and consumed for the benefit of every community member. But to ensure all communities see the benefit of these wins, our work must be firmly centered in equity.

Since our founding in 2007, we've collaborated with thousands of partner organizations and tens of thousands of people. We work in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., U.S. territories, and sovereign nations to grow the farm to school and early care and education movement to include more than 42% of K-12 schools and thousands of early care and education sites. And yet racial disparities continue to grow within the areas of our society that farm to school touches, impacting every community's ability to thrive.

Now more than 13 years into our story, we are reexamining our approach. **We need to be explicit about racial equity in both our words and our actions, and we need to work together to effect lasting change.**



Courtesy of W.K. Kellogg Foundation

This work must start with acknowledging the roots of our history.

Farm to school is not a recent invention. In Native and Tribal communities, this concept has been passed down by countless generations who have embraced Indigenous food knowledge and values that are in harmony with traditional lifeways. Activism for a national school lunch program that would include school gardens, food and agriculture education, and free lunches for all dates back to women-led activism in the 1890s. The origins of today's School Breakfast Program are rooted in survival and power-building in Black communities, facilitated by the efforts of the Black Panther Party in the 1960s. In the mid-1990s, Black farmers in Florida were among the first to use the phrase "small farm to school" as they pursued schools as a viable market opportunity for small, Black-owned farm businesses to sell their products. Their efforts helped propel the current-day farm to school movement.

But looking at the profile of today's movement and our organization – both of which are predominantly white – it's clear that these important roots of our history have been overlooked, and the narratives of what farm to school is and can be have been white-washed.

While National Farm to School Network was founded with core values of local and just food, we pursued equality to get us there. Equality is about everyone getting the same thing. It was not until more recent years that we've come to realize that what's needed is equity. Equity is about meeting people where they are, honoring their wisdom and histories, and acknowledging that because of systemic racism, different communities offer different assets and seek different resources and support in order to ensure basic rights are met and justice is achieved. Farm to school is not a strategy for food justice without prioritizing equity. We must return to honoring these roots and stand behind the leadership of those who have not only known about, but directly experienced, the inequities of our current food system.



Credit: Johnny McClung

As those who came before us showed us, farm to school can be a valuable unifier.

Farm to school has many touch points across our communities – in education, agriculture, environment, economy, public health, and more. It can link together kids, farmers, families, educators, food system workers, policymakers, advocates, and visionaries for the future – people like you. We share the belief that access to nourishing food is a basic human right. The belief that people are more valuable than profit. The belief that what we eat should be an affirmation of our culture and our communities. The belief that if we work together to dismantle structural racism and shift power to communities that have been marginalized, exploited, and excluded, a racially just food system is possible for every community.

What work will move us forward to a strong and just food system?

That's the question we've been asking ourselves. In 2018, we embarked on a systems mapping process to get input from our network and to sketch out the next chapter of farm to school's evolution. This process involved hundreds of stakeholder interviews, roundtable discussions and deep reflection, and surveys to thousands of members. Out of this process, one thing was very clear: **Inequities based on race persist, and we will not achieve a just food system if we do not dismantle these inequities.**



Courtesy of W.K. Kellogg Foundation



Credit: Larison Photography



Courtesy of W.K. Kellogg Foundation



**100% of communities
will hold power in a
racially just food system.**

A Call to Action.

In order to achieve a racially just food system for all, we must dismantle the inequities that prevent those that grow and produce, aggregate and distribute, supply, sell, prepare, and consume food from holding power in our current food system. This work starts with ourselves. It is essential that National Farm to School Network seeks to promote racial justice both internally within our organization with our staff, and externally with you - our partners and members. We must make changes to ensure those who are most impacted and do the work day in and day out to feed us all are the ones who drive decision-making. We need to ensure youth across all races and ethnicities have access to nourishing food and have a say in our food system. And we need to unite against the deeply racialized food system that continues to exclude, oppress, exploit, disadvantage, and cause harm to Black, Indigenous, Latino, immigrant, and other people of color in our communities.



Credit: Larrison Photography

Furthermore, our food system is central to many of the important issues of our day – a global pandemic that has made food scarce for many families and spotlighted critical jobs that undervalue and do not adequately support the people that work them; the realities of climate change forcing us to think critically about the role of agriculture and food in supporting a sustainable future; the Black Lives Matter movement calling us to acknowledge that there is no food justice without racial justice. Changing the inequities that persist within our food system will have ripple effects far beyond what we eat.



Courtesy of W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Coordinated Action.



Courtesy of National Farm to School Network

Our Call to Action must match what is needed, and what is needed is coordinated action. The inequities in our current food system are as old as the history of settler colonialism, stolen land from Indigenous peoples, and forced enslavement of African peoples, on whose backs, literally, our American agricultural system was built. It is beyond time for achieving a racially just food system to be a priority for our movement and why we're calling for coordinated action. If we are going to dismantle systemic racism, we must work together and work strategically.



Credit: Shelby Gynn Photography

We need community-based food systems – centered in racial equity and relationships – that redistribute the way power is currently held, in order to achieve food justice. Holding power isn't the same as having a seat at the table. It means community ownership and decision making by those who feed us all and those who are fed through child nutrition programs. In farm to school, shifting power can look like school district operators collaborating with Black farmers to develop menus based on product availability and living wage product price points, or with Indigenous producers to incorporate culturally relevant foods into meal planning. These ensure the ability of food creators and foodways stewards to shape their food system. It can look like the students who eat school meals being the ones to shape their meals, what's being offered, and developing skills and understanding around their own health and bodies, connections to the earth, and histories and traditions.



Courtesy of W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Our Work, Together.

We share this Call to Action as a pressing need that none of us can reach alone. It's going to take all of us, and it's achievable if we each offer our time, talents and resources to make it happen.

There are many overlapping and intersecting movements and systems that need to activate in order to move towards this Call to Action. For us at National Farm to School Network, this means focusing on how farm to school must shift and adapt to support communities in holding power in a racially just food system. With a systems change approach, we have identified three equity-centered priority areas that will help move us the further distances in the shortest amount of time to achieve this Call to Action:

- **Relationships:** How can we build new relationships – with organizations and individuals in communities – that will shift power and achieve a racially just food system?
- **Strategies:** What transformational and outcome-driven strategies will eliminate bias and redistribute power to achieve a racially just food system?
- **Programs and policy:** What program and policies will shift power and achieve a racially just food system?

You – as our partners, members, and stakeholders in the wider food systems movement – understand that this vision for a racially just food system is necessary for us all to achieve the change we each seek. Whether you work to tackle health, education, economic, environment, or other injustices stemming from our current food system, all of these require addressing racial injustices. We ask you to join us. We believe in growing stronger together, and that many small steps can add up to monumental change.



Courtesy of W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Join Us.

Learn more. Visit www.farmtoschool.org/calltoaction to share [your committment to this Call to Action](#) and to dig deeper into this work, including through NFSN Working Groups, videos, newsletter, social media, and donations.

Explore context. Take the time to understand the context and the work of those who came before you. What is the history of the people and places where you work and the reason the work is happening?

Investigate participation and power. Consider who is not at the table that is directly impacted by the work you do. Ask who holds the power now and at what expense this is happening. Invite new folks – including youth – to join you and work to collaborate and ultimately defer to those directly impacted in what the work is and how it is done.

Do the internal work. Analyze your own assumptions and biases, white supremacy in your organization culture, and consider the food traditions and values you elevate and at what cost to others.



Credit: Emily Hart Roth



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