



2020

IMPACT REPORT

PHOTOS: ELISABETH SPRATT AND HARLIN MILLER



Wallace Center
AT WINROCK INTERNATIONAL



A LETTER FROM OUR CO-DIRECTORS

Reflecting on the past year-and-a-half, the Wallace Center – like the rest of the world – is humbled by how this time has changed our lives, relationships, and the ways we work. The double pandemics of racial injustice and COVID-19, coupled with a divisive election, continue to profoundly shape how we serve our partners, allies, and communities.

We recognized that we needed to be nimble and responsive; to use our gifts of networking to serve our partners. Recognizing that communities of color have long been at the frontline of the problems with our conventional food systems and the community-based solutions that addressed them, the Wallace Center reaffirmed our commitments to actively center racial equity and justice in farming and food systems.

In asking our partners how we can best support them through a difficult year, our team learned new ways to collaborate and deepen our work to support healthy farms, resilient communities, and vibrant economies. Farms, food businesses, and communities were strained, with already vulnerable communities pressed to the breaking point and communities of color at risk of being ignored. Despite the year's challenges, we're inspired and called to action by the countless examples of compassion, ingenuity, and resilience demonstrated by the leaders and practitioners in community-based food systems. The collaboration between farmers, businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and everyday heroes to feed their communities during tough times demonstrated the power of decentralized and democratized farming and food systems!

Last year marked a point of evolution for the Wallace Center. Dr. John Fisk, who was at the helm for 15 years, transitioned out of the organization. John was instrumental in establishing the Wallace Center as we know it today, leaving behind an enduring legacy. Recognizing the need for a more streamlined workflow, we created Winrock Solutions. Led by the Wallace Center's former executive director, Lucy Jodlowska, Winrock Solutions is a new entity within Winrock International that will house foundation-funded domestic programs.

Through a new co-directorship model enacted in the fall, we are practicing the systems leadership model that we champion as we strive to be a more responsive organization. This goal is informed by a new strategic plan, which our team thoughtfully and intentionally crafted. Our plan focuses on deepening our internal capacities as a human-centered organization so that we can better serve and support the change ecosystem that is reimagining and redesigning farming and food systems.

The Wallace Center recognizes that this is a pivotal moment in the movement for advancing sustainable and equitable food systems. We will continue to stand in solidarity with our partners and allies in challenging those that create and maintain the inequities in our farming and food systems for the sake of power and money.

As we continue to emerge from the chaos, we're honored to work with the farming and food systems practitioners who inspire and hold us accountable to our mission. We're excited to share notable moments of our journey in this report and look forward to partnering with you to create a more equitable and just future.

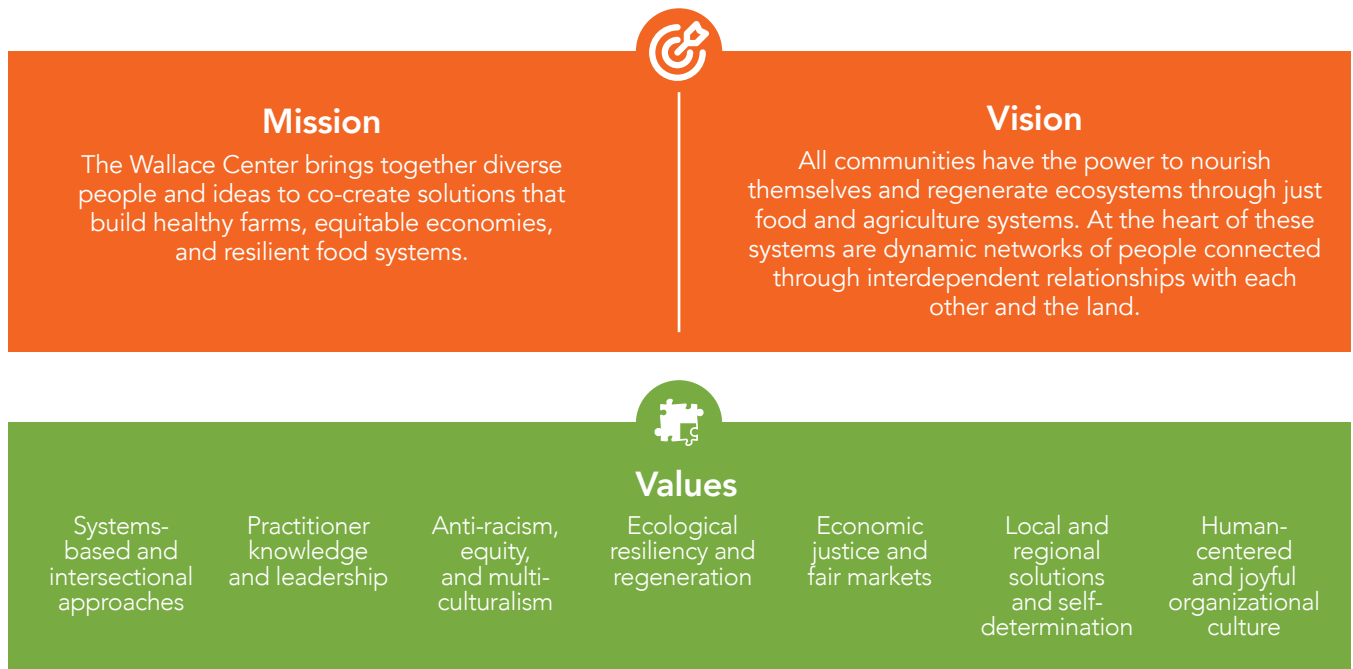
In solidarity,

Susan Lightfoot Schempf and Pete Huff
Co-Directors, Wallace Center

WHO WE ARE

Recognizing the deep impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic had on farming and food systems, the Wallace Center reassessed its role in supporting these systems. Through a collaborative and iterative process designed and led by Wallace Center's Co-Directors, the staff redefined the Center's theory of change, priorities, and internal staffing and operational structures. In a multi-year process, we infused our commitment to centering racial equity in our work into the backbone of the strategic plan: a plan that informs the way we approach our work.

We're excited to share the Wallace Center's new mission, vision, values, and human-centered agreements that guide how we show up externally to our partners and internally to our staff.



Human-Centered Agreements

- Contribute to Supportive, Empathetic, & Joyful Team Culture
- Center Emotional, Physical & Mental Wellness
- Prioritize Growth & Development
- Maintain Achievable Workloads
- Contribute to Authentic Organizational Accountability
- Cultivate Transparent & Participatory Decision-Making
- Honor Personal Styles, Needs & Boundaries
- Promote Open, Honest & Respectful Communication

WALLACE CENTER STAFF IN 2020



Elizabeth Atwell
Project Manager,
Food Systems
Leadership Team

John Fisk*
Director of Strategy
and Partnerships

Annalina Kazickas
Senior Program
Associate, Food Systems
Leadership Team

Kelsey Vergin
Senior Program Associate,
Resilient Agriculture and
Ecosystems Team

Ellie Bomstein
Project Manager,
Food Systems
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Pete Huff
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Natilee McGruder*
Communications
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Tracey Boulandi
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Lucy Jodlowska
Executive Director,
Winrock Solutions

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Elsy Zaldivar
Program Associate

* denotes staff who transitioned from Wallace Center



PHOTO: SARAH WHITE

WALLACE CENTER'S RACIAL EQUITY JOURNEY

For the last several years, the Wallace Center has been undergoing an internal transformation to [center racial equity](#) in our program work and internal culture. This process started in earnest in 2017 with staff trainings and the creation of a racial equity committee, whose purpose was to develop steps to operationalize racial equity in our work.

Our journey evolved with the year's events. With the double pandemics of police brutality toward BIPOC individuals and COVID-19, the Wallace Center recognized that our efforts toward centering racial equity needed to evolve and accelerate. While Wallace Center's Racial Equity Commitments serve as a foundation for this work, it's just a start. We have developed tools and metrics that operationalize our commitments and track our progress, partnered with BIPOC-led organizations, and grown the Center's culture to be a safer and more welcoming place to work.

We are also leveraging our national platform to amplify the work of BIPOC individuals and BIPOC-led organizations and direct resources to these organizations and communities. Early in the pandemic, we partnered with First Nations Development Institute to address critical supply chain disruptions in Navajo, Hopi, and Pueblo communities in the Southwest. The Wallace Center provided technical assistance and conducted a fundraising effort that raised over \$100,000 for food and water supplies for those communities, resulting in more than 28,000 gallons of water being delivered. We have also created a monthly Giving Circle to encourage our networks to donate to causes and organizations that are redistributing funds in support of BIPOC leaders, organizations and communities. Recent features have included Reparations Summer, Black Votes Matter Fund, Black Food Fund, Black Farmer Fund, and the Farm Workers Association of Florida.

The journey toward our collective liberation has no endpoint.

We invite your feedback, reflections, and questions as we interrogate our blind spots and rebuild systems and processes to prioritize equity and shift organizational culture.

WALLACE CENTER'S COVID-19 RESPONSE



COVID-19 and the Wallace Center

The World Health Organization declared that COVID-19 was a pandemic during the Wallace Center's fifth biennial convening of food systems practitioners and supporters in New Orleans. Almost overnight, fear of the pandemic became widespread and markets for local food collapsed as institutions canceled their massive food orders, schools shut down, and unemployment skyrocketed.

Recognizing the immediate impact of the pandemic on food systems, and anticipating its longer-term effects, we pivoted the National Good Food Network conference to hold an emergency session for food hub practitioners, community organizations, farmers, funders, and government agents to make sense of COVID's impact. Through this session, we developed a rapid response plan and identified recommendations for how food systems stakeholders might collectively support farmers, food businesses, and communities through unprecedented times and a daunting future, and created a collective "[Call to Action on Food System Disruption by COVID-19](#)".

A Networked Approach

The Wallace Center's COVID-19 response strategy emerged directly from this emergency session. To quickly disseminate information, coordinate responses, and mobilize collective action, we created the Food Systems Leadership Network COVID-19 Response Group. This online listserv of over 1,000 people from across the country focused on troubleshooting challenges, identifying opportunities, and amplifying the solutions emerging across the U.S. in response to the pandemic and its associated impacts on food systems and economic disruptions.

Wallace Center staff analyzed the rapidly unfolding conversations taking place in the listserv, created [an online and opensource folder](#) for shared resources and analysis, facilitated Rapid Response Calls on trending topics, and translated knowledge back to members, as well as to funders and the USDA.

FROM MARCH THROUGH AUGUST,
OVER **1,700 PARTICIPANTS**
JOINED **14 CALLS** HOSTED ON
TOPICS INCLUDING:

- Value Chain Adaptations
- Impacts of COVID-19 on Small and Mid-Sized Meat Processors
- CARES Act Financial Assistance
- Food Hub responses
- Using Mapping for Food Systems Access
- Farmers to Families Food Box Program

After several months in emergency response mode, the Wallace Center joined the [Local Food Systems Response to COVID-19](#) project, a USDA-funded collaborative of national organizations to understand and catalog the impact of the pandemic on local food systems and align response efforts. Wallace Center participation has been centered on representing local food value chain businesses and sharing insights around how this sector has changed as a result of COVID. Through sharing learnings with other networks and organizations, we have been able to design more collaborative, holistic, and systemic responses in support of local and regional food systems practitioners.

FARMERS TO FAMILIES FOOD BOX PROGRAM

As part of the US government's Coronavirus Food Assistance Program, the USDA sought to purchase and distribute fresh produce, dairy, and meat products to communities across the country.

Supporting the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program

The Wallace Center also played a key role to ensure that local and regional food businesses and organizations were able to be competitive, apply for, and participate in the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service's Farmers to Families Food Box Program. Over five months, we provided direct technical assistance to farmers, food hubs, and distributors whose locally focused markets had disappeared due to the pandemic. Based on our involvement in the project and associated research and consultation with contractors, we created a [report](#) highlighting a series of recommendations to support USDA in designing and implementing future programs like the Farmers to Families Food Box Program.



PHOTO: HARLIN MILLER

PROGRAMMATIC HIGHLIGHTS

Visit [this page](#) to learn more about Wallace Center programming and access resources referenced in this report

Cultivating Peer Learning Networks to Share Innovations and Scale Impact

The Wallace Center is an ardent believer in the power of networks for transformative change. In the face of ecological and social complex challenges the ability to create change is beyond a single individual, organization, or entity. Through a networked approach to this work, we seek to accelerate the dissemination of effective practices, coordinate our actions, and create the opportunity for a diverse range of actors to be in relationship with each other.

And 2020 was a big year for Wallace Center's national networks! The Wallace Center merged its decade-old National Good Food Network with the Food Systems Leadership Network (FSLN) while partnering with several organizations to develop and launch the Regenerative Ag Idea Network (REGAIN).



PHOTO: ELISABETH SPRATT

Regenerative Ag Idea Network

Launched in January 2021, the Regenerative Ag Idea Network ([REGAIN](#)) connects, informs, and empowers educators, advocates, and leading practitioners working to advance regenerative agriculture in the U.S. The REGAIN online platform provides a virtual space where members can discuss challenges, share successes, access peer expertise, share resources, promote events and create opportunities for collaboration in the Upper Midwest and across the country. REGAIN is collaboratively managed by the Wallace Center and a growing group of partners – which currently includes Savanna Institute, Green Lands Blue Waters, Illinois Stewardship Alliance, Practical Farmers of Iowa, Sustainable Farming Association, Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, GrassWorks Inc., and Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service.

Food Systems Leadership Network

Since 2018, the Food Systems Leadership Network ([FSLN](#)) has connected leaders, strengthened individual and collective change capacity, and fostered collaboration across communities to advance more equitable, resilient, and sustainable food systems. In 2020, the Wallace Center combined the resources and technical expertise housed within its National Good Food Network ([NGFN.org](#)), like value chain coordination, food safety, and food hub development, with the FSLN's expertise in systems leadership, collaboration, and racial equity. By creating one, online community and resource hub under the FSLN umbrella, we aim to streamline resources, expand and strengthen the knowledge of network members, and facilitate collaborations across the value chain to accelerate the realization of a just, equitable, and sustainable food system.

PROGRAMMATIC HIGHLIGHTS

The projects shared here offer a snapshot into the work that the Wallace Center has the privilege of facilitating, none of which would be possible without close collaboration with the numerous funders, organizations, and individuals who so generously offer their time, resources, and thought partnership to advance this work.



Supporting Local and Regional Work on Grazing

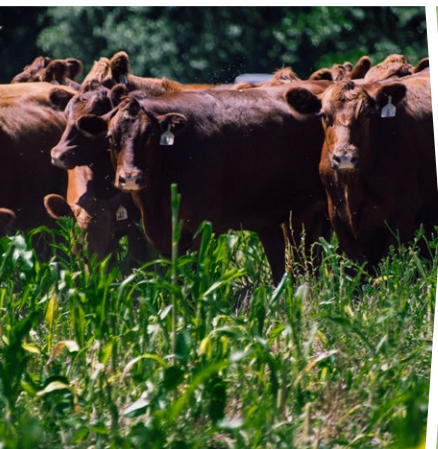
The Wallace Center's [Pasture Project](#), which works to advance regenerative grazing in the Upper Mississippi River Basin, supports place-based work on grazing in four watersheds in the Upper Midwest: Blue River Watershed in Indiana, Embarras River Watershed in Illinois, Upper Fox and Kishwaukee River Watersheds in Illinois, and Tainter Creek Watershed in Wisconsin. The work in each watershed is rooted in a location-specific needs assessment, and ranges from farmer technical assistance and education to developing a geospatial decision support tool for informing conservation practice selection. This work expands regenerative land use, builds the capacity of place-based organizations, and provides critical learnings for overcoming barriers to regenerative grazing in other places. The Pasture Project also coordinates statewide efforts to expand grazing in Illinois and facilitate grazing public lands in Wisconsin, working in close partnership with organizations and state agencies.

"I honestly have learned so many things [during this training] ... I've been involved with animals and livestock my whole life, but I'm new to regenerative grazing. These sessions have had so much new and interesting information!" - Participant in Farmer Educator Training



Understanding Grass-fed Value Chains in Illinois

Throughout 2020, the Pasture Project team continued coordinated statewide work in Illinois to support regenerative grazing with a deeper look at the state of grass-fed value chains in Illinois. In collaboration with the Delta Institute, the project team examined the entire system and value chain of beef producers. The project identified watersheds in the greater Chicago area where grazing might have the greatest value proposition due to environmental or economic benefits. Through a collaborative process, the project team and key stakeholders developed a [set of recommendations](#) to facilitate further development and expansion of grass-fed markets in the state, including connecting with small grain value chains, developing a working group of institutional buyers and learning from emerging models.



Building the Case for Cover Crop Grazing in the Upper Midwest

The Pasture Project team is continuing to work with partners in the Upper Midwest to make the case for grazing cover crops as a way for farmers to diversify revenue streams and build soil health. In coordination with ground-level partners and a cohort of six cooperating farms in Illinois and Missouri, the Pasture Project team conducted soil sampling on control and treatment fields of each farm over three years. In January 2021, the project team completed an interim analysis of the data on the economic and soil impacts of grazing cover crops, finding soil health benefits but limited economic benefits thus far due to weather conditions. The Pasture Project will continue to work with these farms in 2021 to better understand the economic realities of grazing cover crops. To further support grazing pasture and cover crops in the Upper Midwest, the Pasture Project and Practical Farmers of Iowa launched the [Midwest Grazing Exchange](#). The site allows livestock farmers and landowners to find each other to establish contract grazing agreements, reducing land access barriers to expanding crop livestock systems.



PHOTO: HARLIN MILLER

Strengthening the Culture of Food Safety and Quality

For the past 10 years, the Wallace Center has worked to create accessible food safety and quality trainings, audit programs, and tools that help all farms, regardless of their size, implement a culture of food safety and quality. This year, we partnered with Fresh Systems, LLC to create [Quality Management Systems: A Guide for Food and Farm Businesses](#) to build understanding of the benefits of implementing a QMS and to provide a framework for implementation, and with La Montañita Cooperative in New Mexico to produce a [case study on the Four Corners GroupGAP](#) Group. The past year also saw an increase in contribution to and activity within the Wallace Center's Food Safety & Quality Community of Practice. Through facilitating monthly calls, developing an online resource library, and managing a food safety discussion group, we continue to foster connections within this network of food safety practitioners.

Networking and Learning at the 2020 National Good Food Network Conference

In early March, the Wallace Center, guided by a dynamic and diverse Advisory Committee, convened food systems practitioners for site visits, workshops, and plenaries during its fifth biannual National Good Food Network Conference in New Orleans. Inspired by entering a new decade, the theme of NGFN 2020 was "A More Just Vision: Collaborating on the Future of Good Food" and explicitly sought to amplify the voices of frontline communities and Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other leaders of color. Speakers and content centered around reflecting on past decades of food systems work, examining models and practices that are working, and co-creating new strategies for food systems change.

Exchanging Knowledge and Building Relationships through the Community Food Systems Mentorship Program

This year marked the fourth cohort of food systems leaders supported through the Community Food Systems Mentorship Program. Thirty emerging leaders from communities across the country were matched with seasoned food systems experts to develop relationships of solidarity, deepen leadership capacities, and engage in intergenerational learning. Ten mentors coached mentees on topics like organizational, programmatic, and partnership development, effective and intentional community engagement, and racial equity. Ninety percent of mentees reported leaving the program feeling more confident in their capacity as a food systems leader and one hundred percent stated they would make changes to their practices based on the experience.



PHOTO: ANDREW CARBERRY

Accelerating Systems Change through the Inaugural Gamechangers Lab

Between 2019 and 2020, the Wallace Center's Gamechangers Lab offered three teams the opportunity to embark on a six-month creative journey to design new strategies for tackling food insecurity through community-based food systems. Each team received \$25,000 in direct financial support, coaching from a dedicated Gamechangers Lab Advisor, and access to additional tailored Technical Assistance and experts in systems thinking and human-centered design to support their work. As a result of participation, teams strengthened relationships amongst each other, developed and piloted community engagement strategies, and shifted organizational structures to be more community-led.

"Gamechangers made us feel less alone; it illuminated a whole community of people with brilliant ideas and best practices that could actually help change the world for the better!"
 – Marguerite Green, Executive Director, Sprout NOLA



PHOTO: NOAH E. THOMAS

Documenting Stories of Resilience and Community Power in the COVID-19 Era

To illustrate the strength and resilience of community-based food systems in the face of COVID-19, the Wallace Center and partners created a multimedia piece highlighting how community-led, food-focused organizations were supporting their communities throughout COVID-19. *The Power of Community-based Food Systems: Lessons in resilience, carrying on deep-rooted traditions, and building community power in the COVID-19 era* features eight case studies exploring how community-based food systems are critical for catalyzing resistance and resilience, self-determination and sovereignty, and connection and liberation.

BY THE NUMBERS

Webinars and Calls



14 COVID-19
Response Calls,
1700 participants



31 Food Systems
Mentorship Program
participants



20 Webinars and
eLearning Trainings,
3500 views



> 24,000 hours
of watch time on
trainings, webinars,
and tutorials

Membership Numbers



1028 COVID-19
ListServ participants



2500+
FSLN members



180 REGAIN members
from **28** U.S. States



43 farmer and landowner
listings on the Midwest
Grazing Exchange

All of this work is made possible through the ongoing partnership and collaboration with the following individuals and organizations:

FUNDERS

- Cedar Tree Foundation
- Food:Land:Opportunity
- Garfield Foundation
- Kresge Foundation
- McKnight Foundation
- Northwest Area Foundation
- NoVo Foundation
- Regenerative Agriculture Foundation
- Ryan D. "Jume" Jumonville
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- USDA Agriculture Marketing Service
- USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture
- USDA Natural Resource and Conservation Service
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation
- Walton Family Foundation

KEY PARTNERS

- 10 Circles Consulting
- Center for Good Food Purchasing
- Champaign County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Colorado State University
- Common Future
- Community Services Unlimited
- Croatan Institute
- DAISA Enterprises, LLC
- Delta Institute
- Detroit Black Community Food Security Network
- Detroit Food Policy Council
- Dream of Wild Health
- Duke World Food Policy Center
- Ecotrust
- Farm Credits' Trade Association
- Farmers Market Coalition
- First Nations Development Institute
- Food Driven Strategies, LLC
- Fresh Systems LLC
- Grassland 2.0
- GrassWorks
- Grazing Lands Coalition, Illinois
- Green Lands Blue Waters
- Illinois Stewardship Alliance
- Intertribal Agriculture Council
- Island Press
- Kitchen Sync Strategies
- Kitchen Table Advisors
- Kitchen Table Consulting
- Lake County Community Development Corporation
- Land Stewardship Project
- Louisiana State University
- Mandela Partners
- Michigan State University
- Michigan University Center for Regional Food Systems
- Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service
- Midwest Perennial Forage Working Group
- National Family Farm Coalition
- Natural Resources and Conservation Service Illinois
- Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development at Penn State University
- Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance
- Practical Farmers of Iowa
- Real Food Media
- Red Tomato
- Resist Reimagine
- Rise and Root Farm
- Savanna Institute
- Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota
- Tainter Creek Farmer Led Watershed Council
- Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation
- Terra Elossa
- Texas Center for Local Food
- The Common Market
- The Food Corridor
- The Land Connection
- Tuskegee University
- Understanding Ag, LLC
- University of Illinois Extension
- University of Kentucky
- University of Wisconsin
- University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems
- USDA-Agricultural Marketing Service
- Valley Stewardship Network
- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources



PHOTO: ELISABETH SPRATT



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