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LETTER FROM CO-DIRECTORS





Dear Friends and Supporters,

Change is a constant in agriculture and local food systems—sometimes exhilarating, sometimes disorienting, always demanding our full attention. At the Wallace Center, we've embraced this reality by staying in the ring: adapting our strategies, shifting our structures, and evolving our leadership to remain grounded, relevant, and effective in the face of both disruption and opportunity. Whether it's political turbulence, climate volatility, or community-driven innovation, we're committed to being both proactive and responsive—letting go of what no longer serves while doubling down on what does. This approach has shaped a year of bold transitions and strategic pivots aimed at building the kind of nimble, resilient infrastructure that today's food system leaders need.

With this in mind, we eagerly began the process of creating a new strategy to leverage our strengths across Winrock to effect change in food systems and in agriculture. In partnership with our Winrock colleagues, the Wallace Center led the process to create a domestic agriculture and food systems strategy that centers the communities of people who work to strengthen regional economies in the country. It's guided by a vision where interconnected networks of farmers, communities, businesses, and governments collaborate to create equitable and regenerative farming and food systems that honor human rights, strengthen regional economies, and nurture the environment. We're excited to share it with you in 2025.

Our co-directorship model, which you'll read more about on the following page, fostered shared leadership and helped us transform the Wallace Center into what it is today and will be moving forward. Moreover, this year revealed how important it was to evolve our organizational structures to meet the needs of the moment. It's in this spirit that, after years of planning, the Food Systems Leadership Network (FSLN) took steps to become its own independent organization in 2024. Since its inception in 2018, the FSLN has grown rapidly under the Wallace Center's stewardship, evolving into a vibrant, national peer action-learning community. This transition marks a significant milestone, empowering the FSLN to fully live into its mission—led increasingly by the food system leaders and organizations it serves, a long-term goal of the network. With the transition underway and happening in summer 2025, Susan will become the Network's first Executive Director and Pete will continue as sole Director of the Wallace Center.

Looking ahead, we are excited to expand our reach and deepen our impact. We know that to be truly successful in this evolving landscape, we must continue to adapt and remain nimble to best serve the communities in our network. Thank you for your continued support. We look forward to what we can achieve together in the coming year, as we work toward a brighter, more prosperous future for those who are dedicated to the land and the people who steward it.

In solidarity,

Pete Huff and Susan Lightfoot Schempf

WALLACE CENTER CO-DIRECTORS

REFLECTIONS ON SHARED LEADERSHIP

By Pete Huff and Susan Lightfoot Schempf

When we stepped into shared leadership at the Wallace Center in 2020, the world—and our organization—was navigating uncertainty and change. The COVID-19 pandemic was upending our projects and routines at a time when longstanding inequities in the farming and food system were being magnified, causing real harm to the people and communities we serve. Witnessing how the collaborative and relational work of local and regional food system practitioners stepped up to feed and support communities, we affirmed that a similar approach was best for the Wallace Center. Our decision to lead together was not just a practical response to the moment—it was a deeply intentional act, born out of the belief that leadership can-and should—look different in times of transformation.

Stepping into shared leadership after decades of singular leadership at the Wallace Center was no small task. We were acutely aware of the successful, multi-decade legacy we were inheriting and remained committed to leading in a way that reflected our shared values: equity, trust, transparency, and care. Our partnership became the foundation for a new chapter in the Wallace Center's 40-year story—one defined by a cultural shift toward collective wellbeing and a deeper commitment to justice. We each brought distinct and complementary strengths and perspectives: Susan with a passion for deeply collaborative, emergent work through networks; Pete with a passion for methodical, strategic work rooted in organizational structures. What made our partnership thrive was a mutual respect for the fact that while either of us could lead alone, we chose to lead together to focus on our complementary strengths and grow together through shared leadership. We learned to step up and step back with fluidity, recognizing when one of us was better positioned to lead. And while we didn't always agree,

we were intentional about presenting a united front, guided by clear processes and explicit agreements (ask us about this – we're happy to share what did and didn't work) that helped us navigate both alignment and tension.

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Shared leadership has been the most meaningful professional experience of my life. It pushed me to lead with humility, center relationships, and grow in ways I never expected. What Susan and I built was rooted in trust, consistency, and a deep commitment to the people and values we serve. Her strengths created space for me to grow my own—and vice versa. That mutual growth made me a more dynamic leader and showed me what's possible when you lead with someone toward a shared vision.

- PETE

"

Shared leadership, we've learned, is an art and a science. It can be a powerful model—but it's not one-size-fits-all. Its success depends on timing, context, and, most critically, the relationship between co-leaders. That relationship must be intentionally built and continually nurtured. For us, that meant investing time to truly get to know each other—not just as colleagues, but as whole people. This commitment to relationship-building, paired with ongoing support from an external coach, paid off in meaningful ways.

Our human-centered approach to leadership expanded across the organization, leading to individual coaching and professional development opportunities, and the co-creation of the Wallace Center's "human-centered cultural agreements." It also gave us the capacity to anticipate and respond to challenges with a level of dynamism and care that can be lost in more traditional leadership models where consolidating decision-making in one executive leader can sometimes create unhelpful and unhealthy pressure.

"

Being Pete's co-pilot at the Wallace Center these past four years has been an extraordinary learning experience that has profoundly changed me and my leadership style. Through our relationship, I was able to see and work through my own learning edges, with Pete providing both support and accountability along that journey. Together, we worked through tough times, celebrated successes, leaned on each other, and shared both laughter and tears. I'm forever grateful for the gift of shared leadership, the new skills I learned along the way, and for the lifelong friendship that Pete and I forged through this experience.

- SUSAN



We're proud of what we've built together. Over the past four years, we've helped transform the Wallace Center. We've centered equity, nurtured a more resilient and values-aligned team culture, and made intentional space for self-care in leadership. This evolution paved the way for the Wallace Center's next bold step: supporting the Food Systems Leadership Network in becoming a fully independent, member-led organization. Shared leadership was the foundation for this milestone—and many other meaningful shifts along the way.

For those considering a shared leadership path, here's what we've learned:

INVEST IN THE RELATIONSHIP.

Trust doesn't happen by accident. It requires time, intention, and ideally, support from a coach. Get to know each other beyond your roles—so individual and collective shared growth become central to the partnership.

BE EXPLICIT.

Create shared agreements, clearly defined roles, and decision-making practices structures and processes that you can return to when challenges arise. Write them down. Revisit them often. Let them live and evolve, supported by investments in stronger communication and conflict-resolution skills.

KNOW YOURSELF.

Understand and communicate your strengths, needs, and boundaries—and respect those of your co-leader. Growth happens when you lead with self-awareness, vulnerability and confidence, while also acknowledging your limitations and blind spots.

LEAD TOGETHER.

Share power. Be transparent.

Communicate how decisions are made
—even when you don't fully agree.

Your team benefits from seeing both
your individuality and your alignment.

Clarity and consistency are essential.

Shared leadership isn't a universal solution, but when it's rooted in care, intention, vulnerability, and deep trust, it can be a powerful force for individual and collective transformation. Our shared leadership chapter at the Wallace Center is coming to a close not because it fell short, but because it succeeded. We're excited to see what leadership emerges next to carry this work forward into a more just, equitable, and connected future.





OUR VALUES

Systems-based and intersectional approaches

Practitioner knowledge and leadership Fairness and multi-culturalism

Ecological resiliency and regeneration

Economic justice and fair markets

Local and regional solutions and self-determination

Human-centered and joyful organizational culture

These values serve as the foundation for our work, guiding us in how we show up to one another and to our partners, building trust-based relationships as we work toward building healthy farms, fair economies, and resilient food systems.

2024 TEAM





Andrew CARBERRY Lebanon, IL



Dana CHRISTEL Mount Horeb, WI



Melony EDWARDS Port Townsend, WA



Pete HUFF Menomonie, WI



Lucy JODLOWSKA Washington, DC



Jane JORDAN Chicago, IL



Michelle MATHEW New Orleans, LA



Juan
QUINONEZ
ZEPEDA
Como, MS



Susan
LIGHTFOOT
SCHEMPF
New Orleans, LA



Elisabeth SPRATT St. Louis, MO



Esha TARIQ Olney, MD



Kelsey VERGIN Charlottesville, VA



Megan WALL Reston, VA



Jen VAZQUEZ Traverse City, MI



Jon WINSTEN Shelburne, VT

WALLACE ADVISORY GROUP

We're honored to work in partnership with the Wallace Center Advisory Group (known as the WAG). Distinct from a board of directors, these six esteemed farming and food systems leaders offer strategic guidance and hold us accountable to our mission to bring together diverse people and ideas to co-create solutions that build healthy farms, equitable economies, and resilient food systems.



Renee Catacalos
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC
INVESTMENTS FRESHFARM
University Park, Maryland



John Fisk
PRESIDENT, BLUESTEM
CONSULTING GROUP
Lansing, Michigan



Martin Jennings
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
NORTHWEST INDIAN
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
CENTER
Bemidji, Minnesota



Angel Mendez
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
RED TOMATO
Providence, Rhode Island



Brennan Washington
SOUTHEASTERN OUTREACH
COORDINATOR,
SOUTHERN SARE
Lawrenceville, Georgia



Sally Worley
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
PRACTICAL FARMERS
OF IOWA
Ames, lowa



PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Reviving Rural Economies: How Low-Overhead Grazing Can Transform Dairy in the Great Lakes Basin	11
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REVIVING RURAL ECONOMIES: HOW LOW-OVERHEAD GRAZING CAN TRANSFORM DAIRY IN THE GREAT LAKES BASIN

The dairy sector has been the backbone of rural communities across the Dairy Belt (from Maine to Minnesota) since early in the 20th century. The decline of small grazing dairy farms that characterized the region in the early part of the 20th century has contributed to the weaking of rural economies through the dairy belt. An important driver of this trend has been extreme volatility and a downward trend in real (i.e. inflation adjusted) farmgate milk prices. In response, many remaining dairy farms have greatly increased herd size and milk production per cow, resulting in the dominance of confinement dairies.



Unfortunately, there are a host of issues associated with this trend toward large modern confinement-feeding dairy farms. These farms require significant amounts of financial capital to operate, and the resulting level of assets (and debt) requires farmers to maximize milk production per cow. The high capital requirements also preclude most farm workers from becoming farm owners. Farmers have to feed dairy cows relatively more grain (as opposed to forage) to maximize milk production with can lead to more health problems, greater antibiotic use, and higher rates of animals being removed from the herd. From an environmental perspective, large modern dairy farms often import more nutrients (e.g. grain and fertilizer) onto the farm than the farm's land base can assimilate. The more extreme the nutrient imbalance, the greater the risk for nutrient loss to ground and surface water.



A different model for dairy production is needed, one that allows pasture-based dairies to remain competitive and continue delivering environmental, economic and social benefits. In 2024, the Wallace Center team launched a new collaborative project focused on expanding the use of low-overhead dairy grazing in the Great Lakes Basin. Low-overhead dairy grazing has a different financial structure than traditional dairies, allowing it to avoid many of the problems faced by traditional and large modern dairy farms.

Low-overhead dairy grazing aims to maximize profitability by prioritizing feed, labor, and capital efficiency. Farms with this system should be able to greatly reduce both variable and fixed (overhead) costs of production and be profitable over a much wider set of milk and feed prices than traditional or large modern confinement dairy farms.

Wallace Center is working with agricultural economist Dr. Jon Winsten, Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship, Food Finance Institute, and a team of experts to provide a range of services to a cohort of farms to move towards more efficient. larger-herd, low overheard dairy grazing operations. The team will assess the full set of potential benefits of the system in the Great Lakes Basin, including water quality and net GHG reduction, animal health and food safety, rural community health, farm worker safety and pathways to ownership. We are also working to map and influence broader systems and structures – including finance, policy, rural development - to incentivize dairy grazing adoption long-term in the Great Lakes Basin. We're eager to connect with those working on similar or adjacent issues in the region, so reach out if you'd like to learn more!

ADVANCING CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR FUTURE IMPACT

In 2024, the Wallace Center made progress in its USDA-funded Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities (PCSC), a groundbreaking initiative aimed at scaling the adoption of climate-smart practices in agriculture. This USDA investment is designed to create market opportunities for commodities produced using practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve soil health, and increase resilience to climate change. Through partnerships with agricultural producers, businesses, nonprofits, and Tribal organizations, PCSC is building a more sustainable and equitable agricultural economy.

The Wallace Center is administering a PCSC project, leading partners in a collaboration focused on climatesmart rice and beef supply chains. This year was foundational, marked by several key milestones and the forging of deeper relationships with long-standing and new partners.



2024 HIGHLIGHTS & MILESTONES

FULL PROJECT PARTNER ONBOARDING

All core partners—Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC), Riceland Foods Inc., Arva Intelligence, and Blue Raster—were officially signed on and onboarded, cementing a cross-sector collaboration essential for the project's success.

AGRICULTURAL REGISTRY NEARING COMPLETION

The development of an Agricultural Registry, a central tool for tracking climate-smart practice implementation, reached 80% completion. This progress was driven by inclusive design sessions with Riceland Foods in Little Rock, Arkansas, and the IAC in Hualapai Springs, Arizona. These sessions ensured that stakeholder input shaped the registry's functionality. In tandem, a communications and marketing plan for the registry was finalized to support future engagement.



2024 HIGHLIGHTS & MILESTONES (CONT.)

NATIONAL NETWORKING AND VISIBILITY

Wallace Center staff engaged with other PCSC project teams through USDA-hosted Network meetings, sharing lessons learned and building alignment across projects. The team also promoted the project at the Annual Intertribal Agriculture Council Conference in Las Vegas, helping increase awareness among Tribal producers and partners.

INDUSTRY RESEARCH AND MARKETING PLANS

Winrock International's Sustainability Services team developed two Scope 3 emissions research briefs, offering insights into industry trends and carbon accounting challenges. The team also collaborated with Riceland and IAC to draft targeted marketing plans for climate-smart rice and beef, supporting future outreach and adoption.

PRACTICE ENROLLMENT AND OUTREACH

Approximately 20,000 acres of rice production land were identified for climate-smart practice enrollment, originally planned for winter 2025. The IAC began program outreach to beef ranchers, using surveys, field days, and conference events to engage producers and assess interest.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING SECURED

This year, the team successfully secured \$1.5 million in additional funding in 2024—an investment that demonstrates the momentum and potential impact of this work.

A YEAR OF RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING AND STRATEGIC PREPARATION

The most important outcome of 2024 was how we deepened our partnerships. The Wallace Center strengthened collaborations with existing allies and established new connections that will fuel long-term impact. The groundwork laid in 2024 represents a meaningful step toward more resilient agricultural systems—and Wallace Center remains committed to advancing this mission in the years ahead.



GROWING LEADERSHIP, BUILDING POWER: THE FOOD SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP NETWORK (2018-2024)

Since its inception in 2018, the Food Systems Leadership Network (FSLN) has been dedicated to building a more equitable food system in this country by investing in and building relationships among the people doing the work. In 2020, we grounded our strategy in a bold vision that stated:

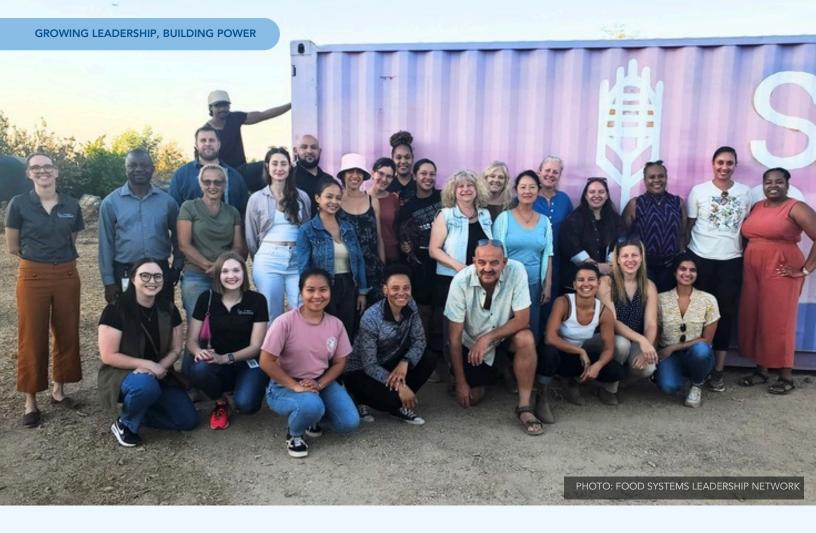
By 2025, 5,000 food systems leaders will have more resources, relationships, and power to realize equitable food systems that generate good food, health, and opportunity for all.

This vision became our compass and call to action. As the Wallace Center prepares for the FSLN to become its own entity, we want to take a moment to reflect on a couple of major milestones in 2024 that led us to this moment.



By 2024, we engaged in **9,470 touchpoints** with food systems leaders through opportunities for mentorship, trainings, leadership retreats, capacity-building cohorts and communities of practice (CoPs). These connections sparked new relationships, ideas, and collaborations, leading to transformative change in communities across the nation.

One notable opportunity for this kind of transformative change came in the form of a \$900M federal investment for the USDA-funded Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement (LFPA) Program. This program encouraged state agencies, Tribal governments, and their community partners to collaboratively source and distribute food, benefiting local producers in underserved communities.



In support of this initiative, the FSLN played a national leadership role in advancing this work, known as Farm to Food Assistance (F2FA). As the movement to connect farmers with food assistance programs gained momentum, we supported the field through providing technical assistance, research, and facilitating the first-of-its-kind F2FA Learning Lab cohort to resource and connect ten F2FA teams across the country to learn with and from one another. In 2024, we published this comprehensive report documenting lessons, models, and impact from across the country.

Our journey over these eight years has demonstrated the power of relationship-centered leadership development. FSLN members consistently name connection, community, and camaraderie as the most valuable parts of their experience—affirming that transformation is rooted not only in strategy, but in shared purpose, solidarity, and care.

As we look beyond 2024 and to the FSLN transition to a standalone peer of the Wallace Center becoming its own entity, the network remains committed to nurturing the people and partnerships that will continue driving food systems change together. The Wallace Center is incredibly proud to have incubated this powerful network and we are excited to see how it grows in the years to come!

In October 2025, the Food Systems Leadership Network will move under the fiscal sponsorship of Multiplier to continue their work of supporting food systems leaders around the United States.

PHOTO: ELISABETH SPRATT

2024 FEATURED PUBLICATIONS



ADVOCACY TOOLKIT: CONSERVATION GRAZING ON PUBLIC LANDS IN THE UPPER MIDWEST

This toolkit, rich in resources on conservation grazing practices for public lands, serves as an essential advocate's guide across the Upper Midwest. Tailored to empower passionate advocates, this toolkit consolidates resources and strategies necessary for championing sustainable management through managed livestock grazing. Equipping land managers, policymakers, stakeholders, and conservationists with actionable insights, this toolkit facilitates informed decision-making, offering guidance on land management approaches, policy development, and community engagement for successful conservation grazing initiatives on public lands.

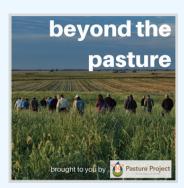
READ THE TOOLKIT



ROADMAP FOR EXPANDING REGENERATIVE GRAZING IN INDIANA

This action-oriented roadmap captures a shared vision and strategy for how to increase and sustain more grass and forage-based agriculture through regenerative livestock grazing in Indiana. It was developed by the Wallace Center in collaboration with Indiana partners after several years of conversations, meetings, interviews, and strategic planning sessions.

READ THE REPORT



BEYOND THE PASTURE PODCAST

In the Beyond the Pasture podcast, we spoke with an amazing group of regenerative grazing practitioners and advocates about how they're using regenerative grazing to build culturally relevant food value chains, improve environmental outcomes of agriculture, and support Black, Indigenous, and Farmers of Color and communities.

LISTEN TO THE PODCAST

Click the images below to read the Farm to Food Assistance Learning Lab Team Profiles:





















Click the images below to read the USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Program State Spotlight Series:

















2024 CONFERENCE REFLECTIONS: A YEAR OF CONNECTION, LEARNING, AND COMMUNITY

Wallace Center team members attended a number of conferences and gatherings this year across the country—a commitment to the importance of creating and maintaining in-person connections. Here's a look back at some of the key gatherings from the past year.

In May, Juan Quinonez Zepeda attended the NCAT Growing Hope Conference in Fayetteville, Ark., where he toured a sustainable livestock production operation and connected with subawardees and advisors who are a part of the Wallace Center's EPA Farmer Conservation Leaders Subaward Program. "There's nothing like the ideas you get from being in person," Juan reflected. "It's so special to sit in a room with local agriculture advocates who are thinking collectively about what a sustainable and just agricultural system could look like in the South."





In August, Andrew Carberry traveled to Ohio for the FaithLands National Conference, organized by the Interfaith Sustainable Food Collaborative. Set on Seminary Hill Farm at the Methodist Theological School, the event highlighted faith-based approaches to land stewardship and food justice.

In October, Susan Lightfoot Schempf attended the Come to the Table Conference in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Hosted annually by our partners at RAFI International, the 2024 conference theme "Food, Land, and Sacred Stories" was the perfect backdrop for a workshop session about the Food Systems Leadership Network's Community Food Systems Mentorship Program, which Susan presented in partnership with FSLN mentor Bevelyn Afor Ukah and her mentee, Lola Gibson-Berg.

In November, we attended the National Ag Marketing Summit in New Mexico. The event spotlighted the growing landscape of farm-to-food assistance (F2FA) programs, many of which have been scaled thanks to the USDA's \$900M LFPA program. We had the chance to share insights from our work with the Wallace Center's F2FA Learning Lab and Community of Practice, learning how various initiatives are building sustainable markets for small farmers.

Juan attended the 10th Annual NCAT Latino Farmers Conference in Monterey Bay, Calif., which convened Latinx producers from across the country to share their individual experiences with beginning and operating coops. This multi-lingual conference included sessions where attendees could connect with federal and state resources. "As a Latino farmer myself, it was amazing to be in a room with so many other Latinx producers," said Juan. "Hearing about how hard it is to operate a co-op isn't usually part of the conversation, but it was at this conference. Being in these conversations made me reflect on Wallace Center's work and how we can center our commitment to supporting value chain coordination and place-based partnerships more explicitly."

Also in **November**, Wallace Center staff participated in the **Carbon Accounting in Ag Supply Chains Summit** in Chicago. It was an important space to exchange knowledge with representatives from Sustainability Services, ACR, and Wallace Center staff, as well as private sector stakeholders and farmers. The insights gained were instrumental in advancing the Agriculture Registry being developed under our **PCSC (Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities)** project.

The year concluded in Las Vegas at the Intertribal Ag Council Conference in December. A standout session centered around the USDA Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities (PCSC) initiative, offering an opportunity to promote and share updates on the four PCSC subawards, including our own Wallace Center project. The dialogue underscored the importance of Indigenous leadership and sovereignty in agriculture and climate-smart policy.



FUNDERS AND FINANCIALS

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FUNDERS

WE'RE GRATEFUL TO THE FOLLOWING FUNDERS WHO MADE OUR WORK IN 2024 POSSIBLE:

- Arkansas Community
 Foundation
- Builders Initiative
- Cedar Tree Foundation
- Deere & Company
- Great Lakes Protection Fund
- NoVo Foundation
- Regenerative Agriculture Foundation
- Skoll Foundation

- The Rockefeller Foundation
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Division
- USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
- Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation



2024 FINANCIALS

WALLACE CENTER FUNDING SOURCES

The Wallace Center staff were responsible for generating over 80% of 2024's budget. Through collaboration with partners and strongly written proposals, the Wallace Center team leveraged funding from private foundations and government agencies to subcontracts from partner organizations. The Wallace Center also drew support from our long-standing endowment and from other sources provided by our parent organization, Winrock International. These efforts resulted in a total budget of \$2,391,967.

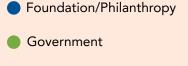
Foundation/Philanthropy	\$1,185,651
Government	\$787,279
Wallace Endowment	\$152,850
Winrock Operating Funds	\$266,188

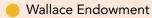


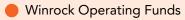
To accomplish its work in 2024, the Wallace Center team allocated its budget to develop strong partnership and high-quality programming. Personnel & Benefits costs were the most significant allocation and include staff benefits. We dedicated a significant portion of our general operating funds to our staffing costs so that team members could feel free to provide their time - without charge - to partner and network efforts over the course of the year.

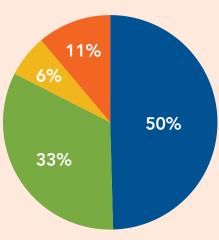
Partnership costs include consultancies, sub-awards, and other payments to fuel collaboration. Direct program costs include our travel, events, communications, and other expenses that helped us achieve our program goals. Our overhead costs helped to pay for our general operating expenses like liability insurance and administrative staff.

Personnel & Benefits	\$1,076,489
Overhead	\$340,514
Direct Program Costs	\$340,862
Partnerships	\$634,103



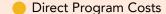


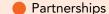


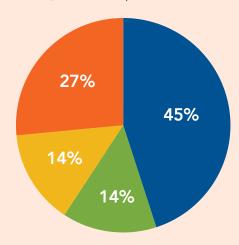






















JOIN OUR NETWORKS

The Wallace Center cultivates multiple peer learning networks and topical communities of practice that spread innovation, build capacity, and foster collaboration across the country. Join these networks to access resource libraries, online trainings, event calendars and connect with your peers.

FOOD SYSTEMS LEADERSHIP NETWORK

REGENERATIVE AG IDEA NETWORK

SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER

