EMPOWERING FARMWORKERS, FARMERS, & COMMUNITIES THROUGH FOOD JUSTICE CERTIFICATION

AJP'S SOCIAL JUSTICE FUND

In 2020 we launched a kick-off fundraiser to grow our Social Justice Fund to support our new goal: to make Food Justice Certification FREE for mid-sized and smaller, independent family or community farms and local, independent, small grocers or food co-ops who buy from these farms. AJP’s Social Justice Fund specifically reserves at least 25% of funds raised for BIPOC-led farms, including immigrant farmworker-led farms. If you would like to contribute click here or, to support all of AJP's work, click here.

$17,684.82 funds raised since June 2020

$11,135.26 of which is reserved for BIPOC-led family & community farms

$6,500 awarded to 3 BIPOC-led farms*

$9,200 awarded to all family & community farms*

*Final award amounts dependent upon final certification costs once process is complete.

OVER 45 FARM TEAM MEMBERS SUPPORTED WITH FAIR JOBS

OVER $2,069,000 WORTH OF NUTRITIOUS, JUSTLY PRODUCED, CLIMATE FRIENDLY, TOXIC-FREE FOOD FEEDING COMMUNITIES

OVER 850 FAMILIES NOURISHED WITH WEEKLY BOXES OF FOOD TENDED BY FARM TEAMS TREATED WITH DIGNITY & RESPECT, 320 OF WHICH FED LOWER INCOME FAMILIES
AJP recognizes that the path towards a food system grounded in justice lies in supporting and strengthening community-rooted food systems. You are more likely to see Food Justice Certified food at a farmers’ market, local restaurant sourcing directly from authentically local and community farms, in a weekly community supported agriculture food box, or at a grassroots community meal, than you will be to see it at a big box store or national brand grocery store.

We are not the only ones that recognize that a future that is good for all lies in community food systems that explicitly center justice and sustainable farming practices, not in industrial agriculture. The Good Food Purchasing Program and the Real Food Challenge have paved a pathway for our public institutions, which should be rooted in good-for-all community values, to source from farms that are Food Justice Certified. Our Social Justice Fund, which pays for both certification and technical assistance for these farms, is a pathway to building the population of farms that treat their workforce with dignity, codified by standards created by farmworkers and farmers themselves, and verified by farmworker organizations. It provides support to help level the playing field so that these farms are not at an economic disadvantage from investing in humane practices for the humans that work to feed us. It enables them to be recognized in the marketplace and by institutions for this commitment backed up by verified action. It helps subsidize the costs of improving their employment practices and policies and verifying them, so that it is not impossible to do this work of dismantling long-standing exploitative food system practices.

Donating to AJP’s Social Justice Fund:

- Supports mid-sized & smaller family & community farms that have verified fair labor, trade, & environmental stewardship practices -- good for the people & the planet;

- Specifically supports BIPOC-led farms with fair and just practices;

- Supports farmworkers by providing an incentive for farms to meet AJP’s food justice labor standards, which benefit workers via living wages, health & safety, trainings on legal rights & rights under Food Justice Certification, including the right to organize, & more;

- Supports communities by focusing on farms that invest in their local communities;

- Supports small, independent, authentically local grocers & retail food co-ops that buy directly from authentic local farms & provide them with fair pricing & terms.
Farmer Jennifer Taylor, with her husband Ron, grow organic vegetables, fruits, nuts and cover crops all year on a 32-acre piece of land in Georgia that her grandmother purchased years ago when she was a sharecropper. These days, their produce is sold at farmers markets and health food stores. Jennifer and Ron grow food in a way that nourishes the soil and the community. The ripple effects go far beyond central Georgia, as Jennifer is also a farmer mentor with Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU). She travels throughout Florida building the capacity of small-scale, underserved farmers, particularly those who have shouldered the brunt of the negative impact of social, economic, racial, and justice disparities, climate change and environmental pollution and toxicity. She shares knowledge of a holistic approach to growing nutritious organic food and enabling wellbeing in communities, one that builds resiliences, heals past wrongs and strengthens. Given at her farm, that she does not hire labor, her focus is on using and teaching traditional crop rotations, recycling of nutrients, cover cropping, and attention to soil health, thereby contributing to reducing community dependence on corporate industrial agriculture and it’s food systems and enabling the benefits of inclusive, organic-agroecology food systems in all communities.

“Building a healthy [farm] environment is a good influence on neighbors. It enhances neighboring land through clean air, biodiversity, and good food...[healthy soil improves] the whole community, benefiting bees and other pollinators as well as the farmers and farmworkers. It’s not a vacuum.”

“Most [farm outreach] programs focus on large-scale agribusiness, leaving 80 percent of farmers [globally] underserved,” she said. In the U.S. and Florida, 90 percent of farms are small scale (although many don’t produce crops commercially). “Traditionally, many small-scale farmers—minorities, Indigenous communities, and women—are resource-poor, and outreach and extension programs often don’t reach [them],” Taylor said [in an interview]. These are precisely the folks Taylor focuses on through her efforts.’

–Civil Eats
FEATURED FARM: THE FAMILY GARDEN, FLORIDA - AWARDED SOCIAL JUSTICE FUND SUPPORT IN 2020

"We are trying to treat our workers with respect, we are trying to pay a living wage, we are trying to maintain a safe workplace...I am glad there have been organizations working together to make a certification like this, to be able to have a 3rd party come in and verify that these are not just some claims, some stamp we are putting on saying that this is fairly traded or justly produced, that we actually have some level of accountability to verify what these farms and what these producers are saying...I want to grow some good stuff and I want it to taste good, I want it to be healthy, and I want to do it as respectfully and honorably as I can."

FARMER JORDAN BROWN in 'Hungry for Justice: Spotlight on the South'

The Family Garden farm is a certified organic, 20 acre mixed vegetable and fruit farm in northcentral Florida that feeds 300 families. It was the first farm in the South to become Food Justice Certified seven years ago. Farmer Jordan Brown aims to make farmwork on his farm like jobs in other professions with similar compensation and benefits. To date he has implemented compensation packages workers can live on, workers' comp (which is not required for small farms in Florida), health, safety, and worker rights trainings, paid holidays and 50 hours of paid sick leave, improved communication methods on the farm, and a recently instituted membership in a healthcare co-op, as well as putting himself on the hourly payroll like all the rest of the farm team (often not the case for smaller farms). His commitment to continual improvement is evident in the farm's environmental practices as well, informed by careful data collection and annual re-assessment of practices, such as water conservation, cover cropping, and an on-site composting program that keeps the available fertilizer in the top layer of soil instead of leaching to the aquifer when they get a big rain (a common occurrence in Florida!). In addition to the work he has done over the years to improve labor and environmental stewardship practices and policies on the farm, he has a strong commitment to community engagement. He offers his fields up for local community groups to glean fresh, organic, fair food, which fed 45 lower income neighbors during the pandemic, and you can always find produce at accessible prices, including by using food assistance benefits, at his farmers’ market stand. He also feeds hundreds of children through the farm to school program. Finally, he has worked with local seed savers to grow out endangered heirloom seed varieties, which contribute to the movement to reduce community dependence on corporate-controlled inputs that exacerbate disparities and food insecurity.
FEATURED FARM: ROCK STEADY FARM, NEW YORK STATE - AWARDED AJP SOCIAL JUSTICE FUND SUPPORT IN 2021

"At Rock Steady we think that the Food Justice Certificate is a very important step for all farms in the US. Centering the humans, the farm workers, has too long been neglected in sustainable food movements. It is critical that all farms pay just as much attention to the care for people as they do care for the soil. We are all a part of the same ecosystem. If all workers are not provided with transparent legal rights, a safe working environment and fair labor practices, then what are we even doing? What are our values for "sustainability" and farm "health"? In choosing to go for certification, we chose to value our farmers with respect and dignity. We hope others will too!"

-FARMER MAGGIE CHENEY

Rock Steady Farm is a mixed race, queer owned and operated cooperative vegetable farm rooted in social justice, food access, sustainable regenerative farming practices, and farmer training. The farm team grows food for their community on 12 acres. In addition to feeding 500 families through their sliding scale CSA program (50% of their CSA shares go to lower income community members), they work to increase equity in the food system and create safer spaces for queer and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) farmers to thrive. This past year they launched a pilot apprenticeship program called POLLINATE! for queer and trans beginning farmers. One of the 7 points in their vision is to provide living wages & high quality of life for all workers and worker owners. To date they have been able to: create a worker-owner structure (3 new owners will be added this year), recognizing workers as farmers, 5 days of paid sick leave and 5 of paid personal leave, workers' comp, including for the owners who are on payroll, and profit sharing.

-The Prying Mantis-

'Unto Theyself Be True: A Whole Life Approach to Resilience at Rock Steady Farm'
Soul Fire Farm proudly sought the Agricultural Justice Project’s Food Justice Certification, recognizing that to date, it is the only farm certification that commits to an unequivocal focus on the rights of food systems and food chain workers, centers farmworker led organizations, and was developed primarily by farm workers and farmers in a participatory stakeholder process. As collaborators in a movement that honors the people whose labor has built the food system in this country, we pursued FJC in recognition of the striking significance of a certification that amplifies farm workers’ voices while supporting their lives and livelihoods.

In a food system founded on stolen land and labor that continues to perpetuate structural racism and injustice, we value FJC’s insistence on fair pricing and fair labor practices that challenge food apartheid and the devaluing of the people who steward the land.

At Soul Fire Farm, we go beyond the organic standards and the FJC standards by working to dismantle the racist structures that misguide our food system. Through programs such as the Black-Latinx Farmers Immersion, sliding scale CSA farm share, and youth food justice leadership training, we are part of a network of farms working to foster land stewardship and leadership by Black and Brown people in the food system, reclaim Afro-Indigenous regenerative farming practices, and catalyze the transfer of resources and power from those with food system privilege to those impacted by food apartheid."

The Natural Farmer, 'Food Justice Certification: More than Just an Add-On to Organic'

Soul Fire Farm is an Afro-Indigenous centered, small, diversified, community education farm that provides weekly doorstep deliveries of in-season, farm fresh, Certified Naturally-Grown food to hundreds of individuals in the Albany inner city living under food apartheid and targeted by state violence. Soul Fire Farm is committed to ending racism and injustice in the food system. They provide a variety of trainings in food sovereignty that reached over 65,000 individuals last year and emphasize building capacity of and connections with Black and Brown growers on topics including racial justice, soil health, organic no till, cover cropping, rotations, integration of crops and livestock, medicinal herbs, perennial fruit trees, all rooted in traditional practices from Africa and Haiti that nourish and heal their community. Their approach to healing the world is also applied to the relationships among the team on the farm. They provide living wages, 20 days of paid leave for full time crew members, workers' comp, and on-farm housing and prioritize self-care and compassionate communication, distributed leadership, and personal and professional development.
"I'm really proud that I have employees that actually make really good money and can do things that perhaps they wouldn't be able to achieve if they were working for someone else. I know my employees' names and I get involved a little bit in their lives so that I know what issues they might be facing or how I can help. They're not just a number for me, and they're not just a group of people that are coming in for four months to pick all my strawberries and then go away.

I want to make sure that they feel really good about doing what we do and make sure they can pay their bills so that if they wish they can build a home or send their kids to school, or have an apartment by themselves with their families instead of having to live in a trailer with other people."

-Farmer Jim Cochran in Farm Labor at Swanton Berry Farm

Swanton Berry Farm was the first in the U.S. to become a unionized organic farm and one of the first to become Food Justice Certified. At the time they converted to organic, the industry opinion was that strawberries just could not be done organically on a commercial scale--Swanton Berry Farm proved that to be incorrect. Rather than using toxic chemicals and industrial monocropping methods, the farm engages in soil building, crop rotation. They have continued to innovate by participating in piloting growing starter strawberry plants free from toxic, fumigant-treated soil. On the worker front, their consistent messaging has been: 'Why treat your food with a set of standards but not those who plant and harvest that same food?' Swanton Berry Farm provides living wages, a medical plan, a pension plan, vacation pay, holiday pay, unlimited time off for family needs, and (for 8 of the 10 employees) free or subsidized housing.