



COLLEGE of ARTS & SCIENCES

# HEALTHY SCHOOLS, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Cultivating an equitable food system in DC.

# D.C. EQUITABLE FOOD SYSTEM

Annual Report

FY2024



**American University's Department of Health Studies**  
**Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities Lab**

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November 2024

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# INTRODUCTION

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American University's Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities Lab (HSHC) focuses on proven strategies of facilitating changes, from the individual level to system-wide policies, that support healthy behaviors, increase access to healthy foods and physical activity, and reduce risk factors that contribute to chronic disease. For over 15 years, the Lab has collaborated with stakeholders and funders to implement and evaluate programs and strategies to improve health.

In-depth knowledge of the challenges and opportunities within and around the city along with a proven record of partnership positioned the Lab to receive a three-year grant of \$2.8 million from Novo Nordisk Inc. for food system transformation. The goal is to improve local food supply chains and healthy foods options for residents with a focus on DC Wards 7 and 8.



# IMPLICATIONS FOR FOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

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- Food insecurity is one of the leading health and nutrition issues in the United States today.
- Chronic disease rates have increased and obesity rates soared over the last 30 years.
- Patterns of food insecurity and chronic disease show up differently depending on one's race, socioeconomic status, and zip code.
- The food system is an interconnected web of processes that ultimately influence the health of individuals and communities.

To achieve an equitable food system that works for all, all stages of the food system have to **collaborate** and **expand**.



# The Equitable Food System Approach

## COALITION ALIGNMENT & COHESION

Enable systemic collaboration through trusted partnerships, productive competition, and innovative practices

### PRODUCTION

- Assist small and BIPOC farmers through technical assistance, land access, and mentorship
- Increase farmers' incomes while reducing environmental pressures
- Amplify programs that educate and change individuals' perceptions of engaging in urban agriculture

### DISTRIBUTION

- Invest in regional infrastructure to support efficient produce distribution models while maintaining safety and nutritional value
- Prioritize support of Black- and Women-owned local businesses that sell fresh food
- Promote and market healthy foods through increased availability and accessibility

### CONSUMPTION

- Host community events and workshops to increase nutrition and cooking knowledge in under-resourced communities
- Disseminate social media campaigns on the benefits of locally grown foods
- Support sustainable programs serving families and older adults who are food insecure

## SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

Codify sustainable programs that increase access to nutritious, local foods & comprehensive health education in D.C.'s marginalized communities

# PROJECT TIMELINE

## 2023

### September

AU HSHC Lab receives funding from Novo Nordisk, Inc.

### October

Sub-award funding processes and application are established

### November

Sub-award application released

### December

Seven sub-award applications are received

## 2024

### January

AU provides transportation for the inaugural Mid-Atlantic Black Farmers Caucus Conference's Farm Tour

### February

The Equitable Food System Project Launch occurs at D.C. Central Kitchen's Klein Center

### March

Seven six-month sub-awards are granted

### April & May

Workplans are finalized; sub-awardee projects begin

### June

AU's first Board of Advisors meeting occurs

### July

An eighth sub-award is given to the The People's Market

### August

AU's first Community Advisory Board meeting occurs; data synthesis and analysis begins

### September

AU submits FY24 Social Impact Report to Novo Nordisk, Inc.

# IMPLEMENTATION

The HSHC Lab is focused on transformative change built around how the food system is organized. To do this, we developed a multi-year workplan to guide our work both internally and externally.

By financially supporting individuals and organizations, evaluating progress, and building stronger alliances, we can ensure all partners are valued and actively involved in defining the changes and work that are needed. An equity lens is underpinning the transformation process, with fair distribution of representation, opportunities, and resources.



## PERSONNEL

We expanded our internal capacity by hiring a Program Manager and Research Coordinator.

With guidance from the Principal Investigator and Program Director, these team members became responsible for daily mobilization of grant activities.



## PARTNERS

We funded eight sub-awardees across the domains of Production, Distribution, and Consumption.

By becoming a grantor to award community-based organizations, we have been able to apply our knowledge and experience as grantees to the entire process.



## PROGRAMS

At the onset, the Program Manager worked with each sub-awardee to determine evaluation metrics.

We held monthly meeting with sub-awardees to review their program implementation updates, outputs, and progress toward intended outcomes.



## EVALUATION

We established methods for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of all program components.

Our responsibility was then to aggregate data, identify trends, assess results, and disseminate findings back to stakeholders and the community.





## Mid-Atlantic Black Farmers Caucus

Mid-Atlantic Black Farmers Caucus (MABFC) is a cooperative network of producers of agricultural products located in the Mid-Atlantic region who aim is to locally produce, process, distribute, and purchase as much food as possible within the region.



## FRESHFARM

FRESHFARM (FFM) facilitates food access, economic development, and thriving communities through hands-on education, farmers markets, and food distribution programs.



## D.C. Central Kitchen

D.C. Central Kitchen (DCCK) prepares thousands of daily meals for food-insecure adults, seniors, and school children while empowering people with histories of incarceration, addiction, and trauma to embark on culinary careers.



## THEARC

THEARC Farm engages residents in growing organic produce and addresses food apartheid through its network of six urban farms, known collectively as Building Bridges Farms, which are spread across SE DC.



## The People's Market

The People's Market (TPM) is a Black-owned, subscription-based delivery service that sources produce and artisan goods from local farms in DC, Maryland, and Virginia.



## Leadership Council for Healthy Communities

Leadership Council for Healthy Communities (LCHC) addresses underserved families' health challenges by providing tools, resources, and services to faith-based groups, residential housing complexes, and the community at-large to reduce health inequities and encourage healthy behavior.



## Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church

Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church (PRBC) is a faith-based organization in SE D.C. invested in delivering consistent health programming via their health ministry to their congregation and surrounding community.



## Urban Outreach

Urban Outreach (UO) is a faith-based community center that aims to enrich the quality of life for residents of SE DC through wellness education classes, life skills trainings, and distribution of goods and services.



## Mid-Atlantic Black Farmers Caucus

MABFC was granted transportation via two Coach buses for nearly 100 members to visit three local farms during their inaugural conference in January.



## FRESHFARM

FRESHFARM was granted funding to increase local produce deliveries to community partners in DC Wards 7 and 8, as well as generate increased revenue for 30 small and mid-sized farmers, of which at least 50% identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC).



## D.C. Central Kitchen

DCCK was granted funding to target older adult hunger through direct meal provisions, increase work with community partners focused on older adults, and community outreach and engagement to draw seniors into programming.



## THEARC

THEARC was granted funding to create a weekly Free Farmers Market. Area residents will have choices of fresh vegetables and fruits, providing true agency to customers.



## The People's Market

Infrastructure and access were enhanced for TPM through funding toward a cooling van, enabling direct purchasing from farms and bypassing of third-party vendors, thereby improving profit margins while delivering produce without compromising its quality.



## Leadership Council for Healthy Communities

LCHC was granted funding to organize and facilitate evidence-based SNAP-Ed workshops. By teach cooking skills and nutrition education, residents in Wards 7 and 8 were empowered to prepare healthier meals at home, promoting self-sufficiency.



## Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church

With the direct support of the HSHC Lab at AU, a 14-week produce program was deployed to the 'Men of Faith' group at PBRC. Participants received a weekly bag of fresh produce, monthly blood pressure screenings and Veggie Meter readings, and two educational workshops.



## Urban Outreach

UO was granted funding to host semimonthly community education events focused on improving food stability and nutrition security. Classes used evidence-based SNAP-Ed curricula to cover a variety of topics including shopping smart, healthy meal planning, and cooking skills.

PRODUCTION

DISTRIBUTION

CONSUMPTION

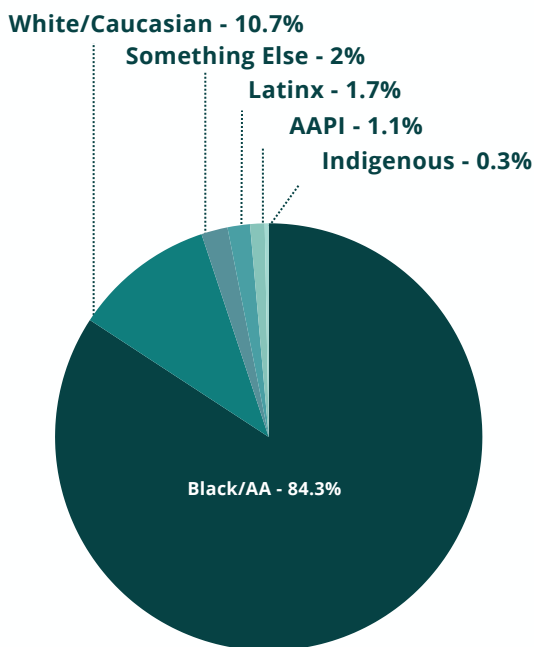
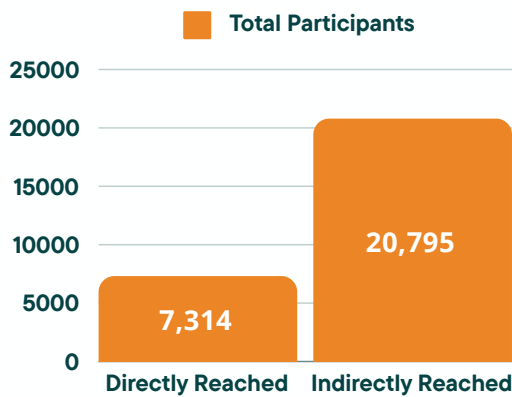
# REACH

The percentage of people served was captured from total participant data provided by all respective sub-awardees through direct survey or estimated household data; they reflect participation at events hosted January through August 2024.

'Directly reached' is defined as all persons that received services first-hand. This includes

- participants in cooking and nutrition education classes,
- farmers that provided produce,
- and seniors that received meals through home delivery.

'Indirectly reached' is defined as a count of all household data provided from directly reached persons. This data was self-reported through registration forms and surveys.



**28,766**

Meals Provided



**21,430**

Pounds of Food Distributed



**1,100**

Produce Bags Distributed



**16**

Nutrition Education Classes



**13**

Cooking Demonstrations



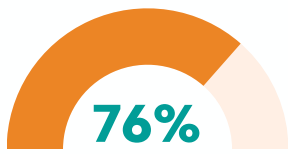
**38%**

of households surveyed qualified for or were actively using a food assistance program (i.e. SNAP, WIC)

# OUTCOMES

The following data reflects outcomes for participants who completed pre- and post-surveys correlate with cooking and nutrition education classes led by Leadership Council for Healthy Communities and Urban Outreach Ministries.

Both organizations utilized the SNAP-Ed **Cooking Matters®** curriculum, as well as corresponding pre- and post-surveys to monitor and evaluate their programs.



often or always use the Nutrition Facts on labels  
a 32% increase from 44%



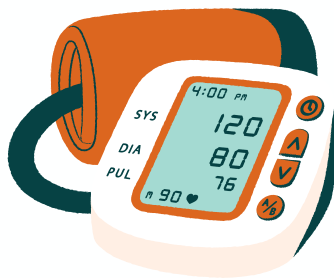
felt very confident about preparing healthy drinks  
a 54% increase from 39%



felt very confident about preparing healthy meals  
a 59% increase from 41%

The following data reflects outcomes from Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church's Men of Faith Produce Project. Participants received monthly **blood pressure screenings** and **Veggie Meter® readings** between May and August of 2024.

The Veggie Meter® is a non-invasive device that measures skin carotenoid levels via Raman resonance spectroscopy (RRS) to assess a person's dietary fruit and vegetable intake. Scores rank from Low ( $\leq 100$  nm or  $\leq 1$  servings of produce daily) to High ( $\geq 500$  nm or  $\geq 5$  servings of produce daily).



## 63%

of men who participated in at least 2 of the 3 health screenings saw a reduction in blood pressure



## 45 nanometers

is the average score change from initial to final Veggie Meter® reading ( $\sim \frac{1}{2}$  a serving of produce), increasing from 255 nm to 300 nm.

# PROGRAMMATIC HIGHLIGHTS

## *Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church*

Building on the success of past collaborations over the last five years, the HSHC lab partnered with Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church, a faith-based organization in Ward 7. This 14-week project was for their Men of Faith group, which is comprised of approximately 70 Black men aged 21 – 86 years. Led by Deacon Terry Proctor, they gather monthly for fellowship and programming.

Each week, members received a bag of fresh, seasonal produce supplied by local farmer Eugene Yarbrough or FRESHFARM, a regional farm aggregator. Members also received blood pressure screenings and had their vitamin A levels measured using a Veggie Meter® at their monthly meetings. At the beginning and end of the project, members heard a lecture from James Tate, a local integrative health coach and founder of Beyond W8 Loss. Tate's own health journey is the foundation for his content and serves as an inspiration for his audience.

One week, an unfamiliar vegetable appeared in their produce bags. The resourceful group of men took to Google to identify their new vegetable – Swiss Chard! Through more Google searches, the group leader learned how to prepare the chard. He passed this recipe on to his fellow members, and the new vegetable quickly became a hit. The members asked if it would be available again, and a few even purchased it from their local grocery stores.

This story was also highlighted in East of the River Magazine in November 2024. [Click here to read more.](#)



*Pictured: Men of Faith members listening to James Tate's presentation*



*Pictured: Produce bags prepared by FRESHFARM for distribution to participants (right); Swiss Chard (left)*

## Leadership Council for Healthy Communities

Approximately one hundred \$10.00 vouchers were distributed to residents of the Copeland Manor community; they were redeemed at the Mobile Market.

Extra vouchers were distributed among residents who attended other workshops. They can be used at any of Arcadia Mobile Market's locations before the end of the season.

## FRESHFARM

By partnering with early child care centers (ECCs), children and their families were able to receive monthly hands-on food education, designed to get young children involved in meal prep and excited about eating fruits and veggies, plus subsidized access to local produce.

## D.C. Central Kitchen

The Senior Meal meal service nearly doubled in households served, growing from 80 to 154. The system is comprised of moving seniors from the Department of Aging and Community Living (DACL) wait list for services to DCKK delivery rolls.



## Urban Outreach

Participants who attended the Nutrition and Cooking workshops received a variety of tools to support their home cooking journeys, such as utensils and recipe books.

## Mid-Atlantic Black Farmers Caucus

In addition to touring the farms, the group was able to share a locally-sourced meal that was harvested and prepared by their peers.

## THEARC

Food & Farm Friday provided access to new and unfamiliar produce for free, making it easier for people to take them home and try.

For example, most didn't recognize purslane, but several reported back that they enjoyed eating it in their salads.

## the People's Market

With their intended increase in pop-up events around metro D.C., access to a refrigerated van increases reach while maintaining product integrity. The purchase of the cooling van will bolster quality control efforts.



# ADVISORY BOARDS

The Equitable Food System project assembled two advisory boards to support our work. We have and will continue to seek and incorporate their input.

The **Board of Advisors** is comprised of nine members representing executive stakeholders across the Washington, D.C. food system. These members offer insight on funding strategies, evaluation, policy, and research.

<b>Enid Borden</b> NFESH	<b>Christopher Bradshaw</b> Dreaming Out Loud	<b>Sarah Frimpong</b> Wellfound Foods
<b>Caroline Howe</b> D.C. Food Policy Council	<b>LaMonika Jones</b> D.C. Hunger Solutions	<b>Alison Powers</b> Capital Impact Partners
<b>Joelle Robinson, Ph.D.</b> RODIA	<b>Lindsay Smith</b> MWCOG	<b>Beverley Wheeler, Ed.D.</b> D.C. Central Kitchen

The **Community Advisory Board** is comprised of ten members representing community activists and leaders working directly in Wards 7 and 8. These members offer insight on the successes and opportunities of the food system, local efforts, and historical context to inform our work.

<b>Mary Blackford</b> Market 7	<b>Mary Douglas-Brown</b> Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church	<b>Ashley Drakeford</b> The Capital Market	
<b>Ekua Hudson</b> Food for Thought Foundation	<b>Ajowa Ifateyo</b> GW Center for Integrative Medicine	<b>Dylan Owens</b> Ounce of Care	<b>Brenton Sandford</b> United Planning Organization
<b>Falani Spivey</b> Byrd's Nest Box	<b>Aja Taylor</b> Bread for the City	<b>Rhonda Watson</b> Roots for Life	

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## THANK YOU

We want to extend our most sincere appreciation and gratitude to our colleagues, organizational partners, and Novo Nordisk, Inc. for making this work possible.

The insights of our Board of Advisors and Community Advisory Board ensured our values were aligned with the broader goals and gaps of the food system.

We also worked closely with fellow AU staff members, Professor Danielle Vogel (Kogod School of Business) and Professor Celeste Davis (Department of Health Studies), as we developed internal processes and best practices.

## NEXT STEPS

### Monitoring and Tracking:

The HSHC Lab team has an important path ahead of developing a system of metrics for tracking and monitoring improvements to the local food system that will achieve greater resilience and equity.

### Support for Farmers:

It is clear that a strong emphasis must be placed on supporting farmers. Without farmers, there is no food. Small urban farms and large rural farms need labor, capital, education, and business support to ensure they are profitable and sustainable.



### Coalition Building and Alignment:

D.C. harbors an abundance of talented individuals and organizations committed to food system transformation across the pillars of production, distribution, and consumption.

Bringing connection and coordination to all the voices around the table will lead to lasting impact.



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