The 2018 Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group *It Takes a Region* Conference broke the mold. NESAWG has been putting on successful food systems conferences for 25 years, drawing thousands of sustainable food systems leaders from around the Northeast and across sectors to cross-pollinate and engage with the complicated problems we must confront together. Here’s some of what we learned and how we’re applying these lessons to transform the food movement.

#NESAWG18 BY THE NUMBERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendees</td>
<td>384</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scholarships provided</td>
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<td>Youth Scholarships</td>
<td>105</td>
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<td>Scholarship funds</td>
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PLACE MATTERS

As part of our commitment to strengthen our network of food systems leaders in the southern part of our region, we held the 2018 conference in Philadelphia, PA. Philly is easily accessible for food advocates working in the Mid-Atlantic region on up to Boston, as well as home to a number of inspiring sustainable food systems initiatives. We set out with intention and focus: build relationships with Philadelphia practitioners, lift up the local stories in our region, get attendees out into the Philly community to see the work for themselves, and make the conference accessible to those experiencing and addressing race and equity in the food system.

The conference started on Thursday, October 25th with five pre-conferences; half-day gatherings held before the official start of conference sessions that get people out of the conference venue and into the community. One popular pre-conference was Building Farm and Food Policy from the Ground Up, led by NESAWG Policy Manager Nicole Sugerman and partners at the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Just Food, Good Food for All, Rural Coalition, and the Philadelphia Free Library. This session focused on the Farm Bill, bringing policy advocates from throughout the region to strategize how to make the most important federal agriculture legislation favorable to Northeast communities. Others attended a West Philly Urban Farm Tour, led by Malaika Gilpin, our Conference Manager and a West Philly grower. Tour attendees visited the lands cultivated by communities of color to feed their neighbors, maintain access to rich cultural heritages, and educate the next generation of farmers and cooks. Those seeking to build their skills also joined narrative and inclusivity trainings offered by core NESAWG partners.

A unique feature of all the programming was a partnership with Soil Generation, an organization committed to supporting people of color in accessing land and farming. Soil Generation leaders organized trainings and tours, presented on panels, and even led attendees in a Rally to Save the Land at City Hall, the first time a community action has ever been part of conference programming. Soil Generation, and a robust Conference Planning Committee with incredible Philly practitioners, made sure that attendees walked away with a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities in Philly’s local food system.

“I SO enjoyed the West Philly Urban Farm tour! Malaika Gilpin was an awesome tour guide. From the start at Bartram’s Garden (which I have been fortunate to have been to a few times before), to the end of our tour, at One Art, I was so impressed with every farmer we met. Their passion, knowledge, and the love of community, and the land they are working just emanated from them! It was a wonderful day. Thank you NESAWG.”
“Loved having all those strong women up there telling both heartfelt stories AND giving us the real scoop on the state of food/farm issues and what we could do about them. I was excited to learn about specific happenings in Philly as well as learn about larger, movement-wide issues.”

CULTIVATING A TRANSFORMATIVE FOOD SYSTEM

Our theme last year created another chance to build new relationships. In our “Cultivating a Transformative Food System” plenaries, attendees learned about legacies of food system inequities, the current work of communities to transform from their experiences, and the hopeful opportunities that are present even in an adverse political climate. Highly skilled and dedicated luminaries of the food movement, some unheralded until now, packed the podium for conversations with each other that presented a truly unique opportunity for attendees to hear how panelists’ work intersected. Speakers included celebrities like Leah Penniman, a James Beard Foundation Award winning author and farmer restoring the traditions and access of Black people to land; Cristina Martinez, whose debut on the Netflix show, Chef’s Table, premiered shortly before the conference brought attention to her work supporting undocumented immigrants from her popular Barbacoa restaurant in South Philly; Neftali Duran, an Indigenous chef and educator recognized for his work promoting Indigenous food traditions and chefs nationally with I-Collective, Brandy Brooks; a recent candidate for political office in Montgomery County, MD, who roused the crowd with calls for civic engagement; and Lan Dinh, whose work with VietLead in Philadelphia and nearby Camden, NJ, revitalizes Southeast Asian immigrant cultural traditions through intergenerational food access and community garden programs.

The conversations brought up some difficult tensions in the food movement. Neftali called on attendees to truly commit to tackling the legacy of colonization in our food systems, and to support Indigenous sovereignty. Others applauded the diversity and inclusion of the conference but pushed NESAWG to do more, especially concerning the conspicuous absence of farm and food chain workers dealing with the current anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric out of the Trump administration. Even before the conference the Planning Committee wrestled with some of these same questions, such as what it means to “transform” a food system? While we do not individually have all the answers, or even an answer, together we’re growing our collective understanding of how we can connect for transformation, including all of those impacted by the injustices in the food system.

TAKING THESE LESSONS FORWARD

Our 2019 conference in Jersey City will be another great opportunity to highlight a place and its people. We’re looking forward to continuing to deepen our understanding of race and equity; to gathering the groups most impacted by the injustices of the food system; and to supporting the work of those at the frontlines changing how we eat and grow our food, and how we treat each other.

Race and Equity

NESAWG continues to grow as we practice a commitment to race and equity. Last year’s conference offered new opportunities and challenges as we work to dismantle systemic oppression. We started by centering race and equity in our program, including deliberately soliciting session proposals and host committee members from leaders and organizations who share this focus, and sessions that featured people of color, low-income people, LGBTQIA+, and youth. We deepened this commitment with aggressive scholarship fundraising that supported participants from the aforementioned groups. The conference has helped individuals and groups gain access to resources and develop social capital, and we were pleased to make that opportunity available to groups that are normally underrepresented in these kinds of food movement spaces.

We also provided spaces for groups traditionally underrepresented in the food movement to gather for networking and reflection, including a People Of Color Caucus, White People’s Caucus, and Youth Caucus. This was our first effort holding separate identity caucuses, building on our tradition of a People of Color networking caucus the night before the conference begins. We also maintained a youth-only space for our younger attendees (with sessions designed and led by youth).

To learn more about the 2018 NESAWG Conference, visit nesawg.org/conference | To see the conversation on Twitter, search the hashtag #NESAWG18
ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED

CALIFORNIA
- National Dairy Producers Organization
- sweetgreen™
- CONNECTICUT
- CTCORE-Organize Now
- Foodshare, Inc.
- FRESH New London
- Lawson Valentine Foundation
- New Britain ROOTS
- Summer of Solutions Hartford
- United Way of Western Connecticut
- DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
- Common Good City Farm
- Community Foodworks
- DC Central Kitchen
- DC Greens
- Fitzgerald-Canepa Consulting
- FRESHFARM
- National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
- NSAC
- Rural Coalition
- The Nutritional Coalition
- Union of Concerned Scientists
- USDA
- DELAWARE
- The Delaware Center for Horticulture
- FLORIDA
- Agricultural Justice Project
- ILLINOIS
- National Farm to School Network
- MASSACHUSETTS
- 1949
- CISA (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture)
- Commonwealth Land Trust
- Conservation Law Foundation
- Development Renaissance
- Equity Trust
- Farm Aid
- Growing Places/TerraCorps
- Harvard Graduate School of Design
- Harvard University
- I-Collective
- KAS Consulting
- Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition
- Merck Family Fund
- Northeast Organic Farming Association
- Mass Chapter
- Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
- Oldfield Farms Co.
- Strength To Love Farm
- The Chesapeake Table: Your Guide to Eating Local
- The Farmer & The Fisher
- The Nature Conservancy
- Town Creek Foundation
- Waterkeepers Chesapeake
- Xenia Consulting
- MAINE
- Cultivating Community
- Maine Farmland Trust
- MICHIGAN
- Michigan State University
- MINNESOTA
- Free Black Dirt
- NEW HAMPSTEIH
- Food Solutions New England
- Plymouth State University
- Unilever
- NEW JERSEY
- CATA
- Food Industry Employment Program
- Jersey City Department of Health & Human Services
- Newark Beth Israel Medical Center
- Revolution Foods
- NEW YORK
- Antibiotic Resistance Action Center, GWU
- Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship
- Chester Agricultural Center
- Common Ground Farm
- Cornell Cooperative Extension
- Cornell Law School
- Cornell Small Farm Program
- Dirt Capital Partners
- Earthjustice
- East New York Farms
- Farm School NYC
- Field & Fork Network
- Food Chain Workers Alliance & Why Hunger
- Glywood
- GrowNYC
- Honeydane Farm
- Hudson Valley Agribusiness Devel Corp
- Hudson Valley Farm Hub
- Just Food
- Massachusetts Avenue Project
- Here We Are Farm
- National Young Farmers Coalition
- NESAWG
- New Settlement
- North Star Fund
- Northeast Organic Farming Association
- New York
- Peacework Organic CSA
- Poughkeepsie Farm Project
- Ralph E. Ogden Foundation, Inc.
- Randall's Island Park Alliance
- Real Food Challenge
- Red Hook Farms (Added Value)
- Rocky Acres
- Rural Health Network
- Soul Fire Farm Institute
- Syracuse University
- The Laura Flanders Show
- Ujima Company, Inc.
- Victoria Avenue Community Garden
- Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice
- PENNSYLVANIA
- Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative
- Allied Milk Producers
- BCA Natural2
- Black Urban Gardeners & Farmers of Pittsburgh Coop
- Braddock Youth Project
- Buy Fresh Buy Local-GLV
- Chesapeake Foodshed Network
- Chester County Food Bank
- Claneil Foundation
- Crooked Row Farm
- CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute
- Echo Systems
- Edible Philly
- Ephrata National Bank
- Farmshare Newspaper
- Farmworker Legal Aid Clinic
- Food for the Spirit
- Free Library of Philadelphia
- Green Light Plants
- Greener Partners
- Greenplanners
- Greensgrow
- Health Care Without Harm
- Horn Farm Center for Agricultural Education
- Indy Hall
- Josie Porter Farm
- Justice at Mariposa
- K is for Kitchen; West Philly’s Community Supported Kitchen
- Kitchen Table Consultants
- Lancaster East Side Market
- Lancaster Farm Fresh Co-op
- LEAF Project Inc.
- Lehigh Dining
- Lehigh Valley Food Policy Council
- Lost Bread Co.
- MCAF
- Meadow Lake Farm Consulting Services
- Mill Creek Urban Farm
- Muhlenberg College
- New Britain ROOTS
- Norris Square Neighborhood Project
- North Mountain Pastures
- Organic Planet LLC
- PA Department of Agriculture
- PA Farmer Union
- PA Women’s Agricultural Network
- PASA
- Penn State Extension
- Pennsylvania Farmers Union
- Pennsylvania Horticultural Society
- Philabundance
- Philadelphia Area Cooperative Alliance
- Philly Bread
- Philly Urban Creators
- PHS
- Pittsburgh Food Policy Council
- Rebel Ventures
- Roots to Shoots Consulting
- Sankofa Community Farm at Bartram’s Garden
- Share and Jefferson (Philadelphia Univ. + Thomas Jefferson Univ.)
- Share Food Program
- Soil Generation
- Sunset Farms
- Swarthmore Farmers Market
- Temple University
- The Common Market
- The Food Trust
- The Gleaning Project of South Central Pennsylvania
- The John Merck Fund
- The Millworks Restaurant & Brewery
- Thomas Jefferson University / Hospital
- United Way of Monroe County
- Urban Tree Connection
- USDA, NASS
- VietLead
- Wholistic.art
- Xenia Consulting
- RHODE ISLAND
- Farm Fresh Rhode Island
- VERMONT
- Farm to Institution New England
- Intervale Center
- Middlebury College
- Milk with Dignity
- NOFA-VT and VT FEED
- Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund
- VT FEED-Shelburne Farms
- WISCONSIN
- Dairy Pricing Association
- WEST VIRGINIA
- Grow with the Flow