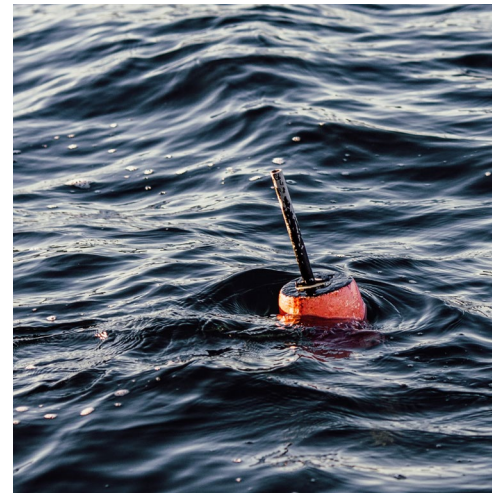




MAINE FOOD CONVERGENCE

Forging Connection for Collective Action

2021-2022 REPORT



Introduction

In 2019, a group of five grassroots initiatives working on food systems issues in Maine began planning a statewide event. They secured some funding, developed a work plan and then 2020 hit. COVID-19 disrupted plans for in-person meetings and a series of tragic events evolved into a great deal of energy building in support of the Black Lives Matter movement and focused public attention in new ways on systemic racism and the need to examine how historically marginalized and oppressed groups were being included and centered in conversations and leadership on a broad range of issues.

From these dramatic events, the simple concept for a statewide event to bring people working on food system issues together evolved into the 2021 Maine Food Convergence, a month-long series of virtual discussions aimed at centering racial justice and equity in work sessions related to food systems and communities, the climate, and local economies.

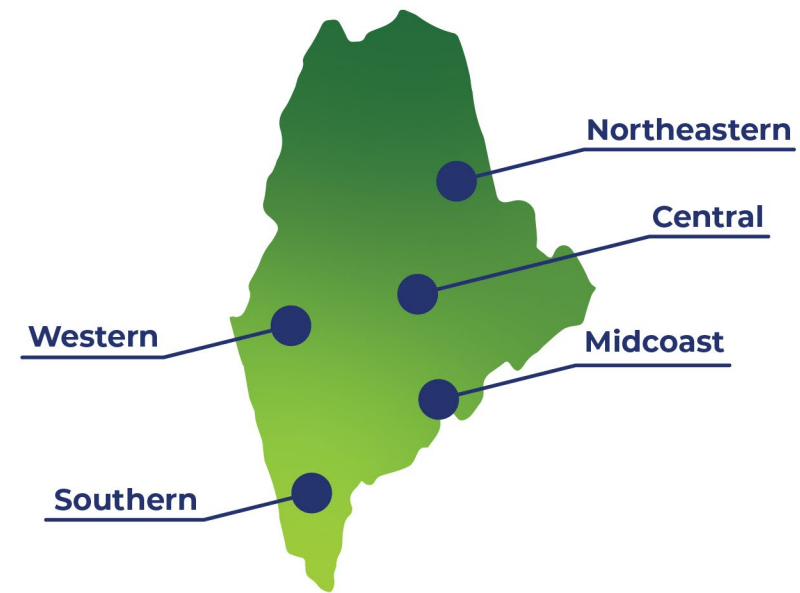
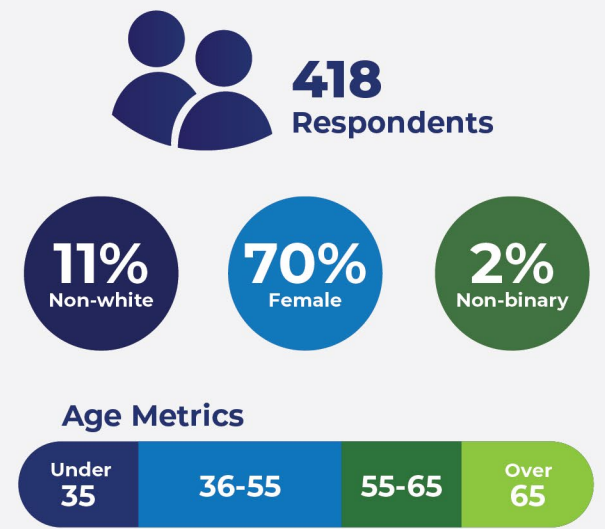
The following report recaps the purpose of the Convergence, collaborations that developed through and following the event, challenges we continue to

confront and areas groups working in the Convergence space see as opportunities moving forward. The authors of this report recognize that by opening these conversations, we are only at the very beginning of supporting shifts in power and leadership in Maine's food movement. Over time, our hope is that the Convergence space will become more inclusive and support advances in social and racial equity within organizations involved in the movement and in the ways our entire food system looks and operates.



5
Maine networks
guiding this work.

Statewide Survey



5 Regional Dialogues informed the Convergence.

Convergence



Overview of the Convergence

Our Vision

A Maine food system that fosters the well being of people, planet, and communities.

Genesis

In the fall of 2019 members from four Maine food system networks (Maine Food Strategy, Maine Farm to Institution, Maine Gleaning Network and Maine Network of Community Food Councils), met to discuss how we might collaborate for greater impact. Given the crucial relationship between food and climate, we invited Maine Climate Action NOW to join in the conversation and they ultimately became a lead partner.



We were inspired by the growing understanding of the role and power of networks. We conceived of a statewide gathering beyond the scope of what each individual organization has convened in the past – a convergence of the local food community – to build stronger connections, richer relationships and powerful alliances around a shared vision – to create the conditions for positive systemic change to emerge. We also envisioned this event as a way for multiple networks to collectivize and focus their energies towards a single gathering that would take the place of many smaller gatherings. When we presented this

idea to the Quimby Family foundation they generously provided seed funding to launch The Maine Food Convergence Project. We knew we wanted to involve people working in communities on food system issues and to focus the event around issues they felt were important. At that time, we did not imagine the influence that input would have on the event.

Through a year-long planning process, dozens of community food council members in Maine and hundreds of people overall contributed to developing the event through: **A statewide survey, Community Food Council coordination and support of five Regional Dialogues, a planning session with over a hundred participants, an expanded and diversified event organizing team.**

The following report reflects on the process involved in designing, planning and hosting the Convergence, what was shared and reflected by the participants, and where collaborations and new projects are developing after the event.

For more on our mission, vision, values, visit: mainefoodconvergence.org.

Convergence Event Organizing Team

Meet our core organizing team, forging connections for collective action!



Annie Doran
Project Coordinator



Heather Augustine



Stephanie Cesario
Maine Farm to Institution & Healthy Communities of the Capital Area



Rachael Emus
Healthy Acadia & Maine Gleaning Network



Amara Ifeji
Maine Environmental Education Association & Maine Youth for Climate Justice



Tanya Swain
Maine Food Strategy



Harriet Van Vleck
Maine Network of Community Food Councils



Scott Vlaun
The Center for an Ecology-Based Economy



Karlë Woods
Maine Climate Action NOW!

SUPPORT TEAM



Lori Gibson
USM Food Studies Program



Shannon Brenner
Community Food Matters

Statewide Survey

Informing the Dialogues

During the spring of 2020, Convergence organizers and their networks designed a statewide survey and format for a series of dialogues. Although the original vision was to have community food councils host small regional gatherings, COVID-19 forced the events online and enabled a much larger attendance. The online survey was administered during the spring and early summer and collected input from over 400 respondents. The survey results shaped the issue areas and format of the regional dialogues and Convergence.

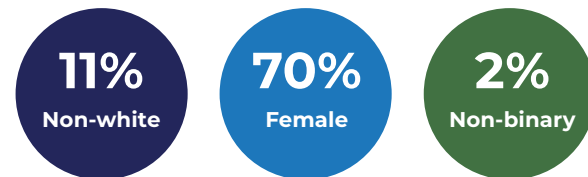
The statewide survey informed the shape of the Convergence. Limitations of the information included under representation from people involved in production or food supply chain business / activities and a high concentration of respondents from certain parts of the state.

Metrics



A majority of respondents came from the Southern region, with a concentration in Cumberland county. The fewest respondents came from the Western region.

Age Metrics



Top connections to food system

#1 Eater

#2 Other

(Non-for-profit volunteer, Farmer, gardener, gleaner, Food industry workers [incl. retailer and wholesaler])

#3 Nonprofit/Community Group

(Nonprofit /community group that works on food systems issues/planning)

#4 Production

(and/or harvesting for commercial / consumer sales)

#5 Nonprofit/Community Group

(that provides services to food/ag/fisheries)

Highlights from Survey

What individuals or groups would you like to have a greater connection with or introduction to, to help your farm / food business or food systems work?.

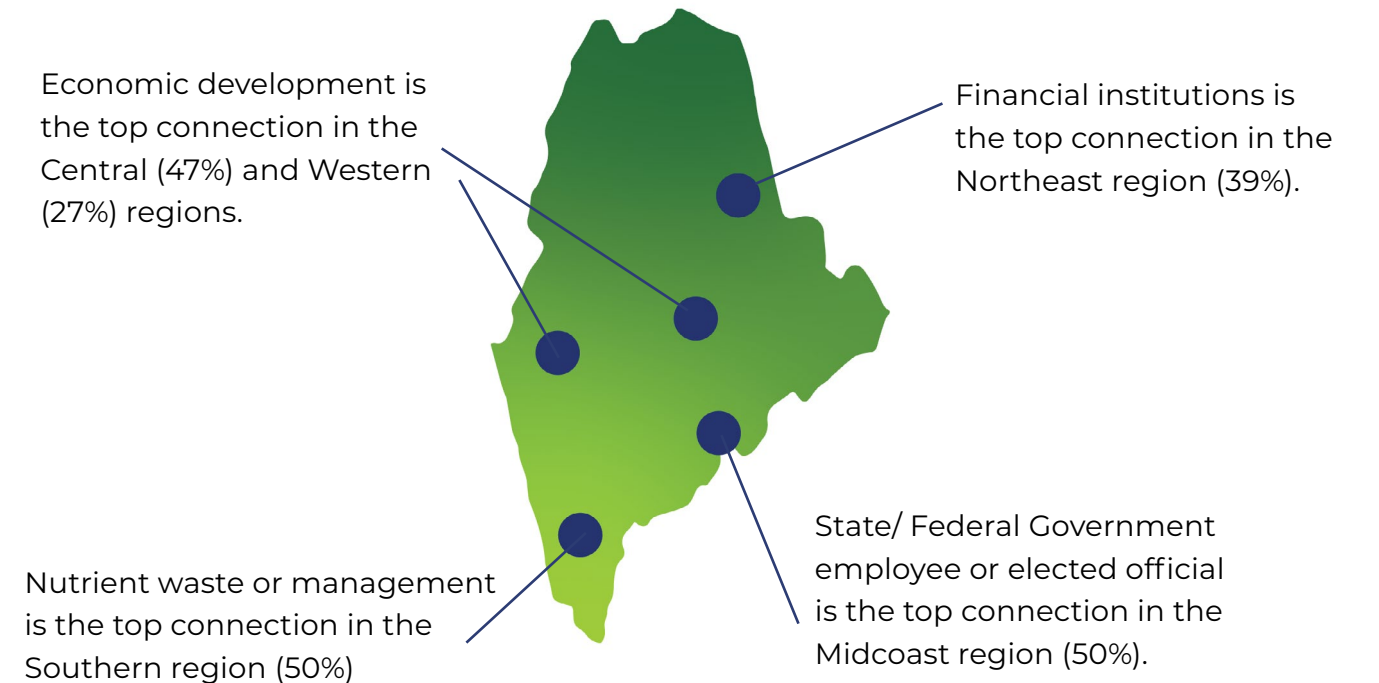
#1 Local Farmers/Producers

#2 State and Federal Government

(incl. Institutional Contacts, employers, health care providers)

#3 Distributors

Top connections for each region



The top 3 changes for impact on Maine's food system

#1 More local food is served at Maine institutions

(such as schools and hospitals)

#2 More local food is available in supermarkets

#3 Government subsidies

(to lower the price of locally produced food)

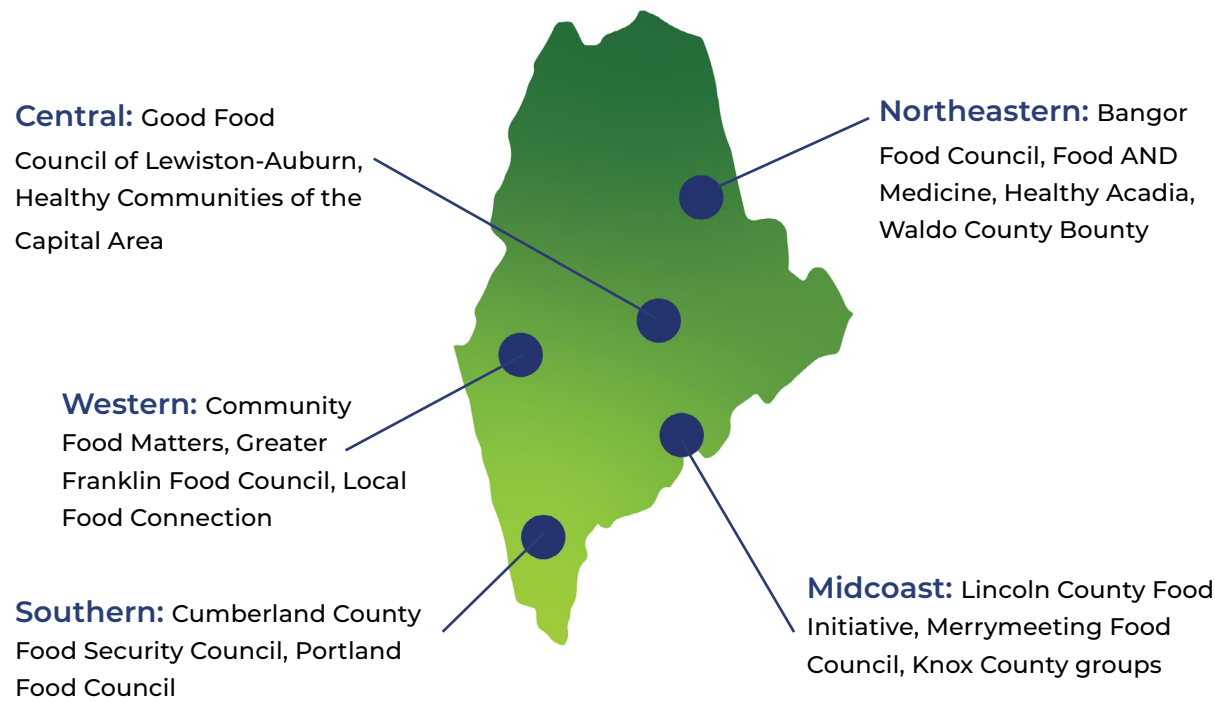
Regional Dialogues

Informing the Convergence

Over 160 people participated in the virtual Regional Dialogues. Data from the sessions was used to develop topic areas for the Convergence event and to prioritize intended outcomes such as opportunities for relationship building and to encourage new collaborative responses to barriers and challenges.

Each Regional Dialogue was organized and facilitated by local Food Councils and other community organizations. Approximately 25 event facilitators received formal training from Aaron Frederick Consulting, a consulting firm based in Portland, Maine. The facilitation training, along with a detailed Facilitation Guide, provided the event organizers with concepts, tools, and techniques for group facilitation; technical guidance on Zoom and online events; a thorough overview of the agenda (each Dialogue followed a similar agenda template); and a roadmap for important follow-up after the Dialogues.

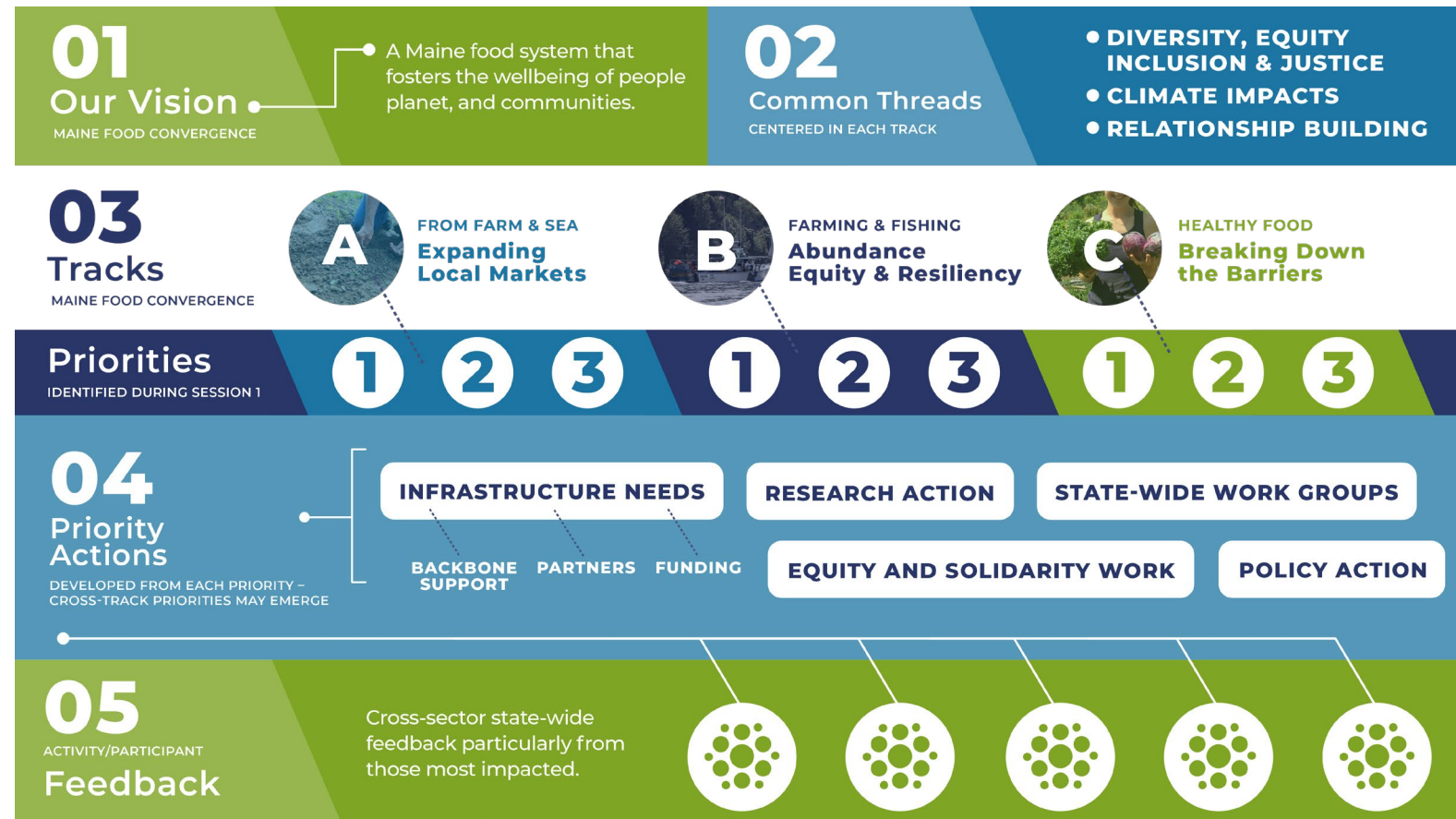
Regional Dialogue Hosts & Facilitators



Participants reviewed the survey data and worked in breakout groups to identify areas of shared significance and opportunities for collaboration. Following the Dialogues, notes and survey results of all five Regional Dialogues were painstakingly analyzed by a data analyst from the Catchafire program the Sewall Foundation supports for its grantees. Catchafire volunteers helped organizers identify themes that became the three Convergence Tracks, as well as common threads that were woven throughout each track (see visual on page 8).

Convergence Format & Metrics

The organizing team set out with the following framework for the Convergence. The “outcomes and priorities” were expressed more as “priority actions.” Some of these actions are already in motion by other efforts across the state, others have been sparked by collaborations with Convergence partners, and some have yet to be embarked upon.



Convergence Sessions



Age range: dispersed across all ranges.

90 Registrants 35 and under

90 Registrants 36 - 55

65 Registrants over 55

Various Sectors of the Food System Participated

23% of participants from nonprofit and community organizations working on food systems and agriculture.

12% from production and/or harvesting for commercial and/or consumer sales.

11% from education and academic research.

24% selected 3 or more sectors, signifying that cross-sector collaboration is in place.

Race & Ethnicity

Most participants were of White or European-American descent. When compared to the overall state population demographics, we saw greater representation of diversity. Still, there was an underrepresentation of those who are impacted by the inequities in the food system. These are the voices that are shifting the landscape in this movement.

Hours of Programming

Breakout Group
Facilitation Training & Prep

4+
Hours per
facilitator

Volunteer hours

1400
Hours

Convergence

31
Hours

Breakout Group Format

“The break out session was fantastic. Thoughtful ideas, deep commitment, varied life experiences and masterfully facilitated”



“Truly collaborative discussions with people across sectors I might not have known otherwise.”

Each “Track” explored a topic area followed the format below. Information from the breakout groups was collated and used to develop a work plan that has guided the Network Partner’s collaboration over the past year. Contact us if you would like more information.

Session 1: Small groups worked with trained facilitators to discuss and vote on topics they were most interested in focusing on throughout the Convergence.

Session 2: Participants identified actions that would advance these priorities.

Session 3: Participants “organized for action” by identifying resources, funding, people power, research, and policy needed to support this work moving forward.

Convergence Storytelling

“The storytelling session was truly magical and inspiring! The speaker’s stories were all so touching and had great insight.”

perspectives during the event. For many participants, the storytelling panels were a major highlight.

The Convergence stood apart from other virtual events for its unique focus on relationship-building through collaborative group work and storytelling. Approximately 20 people from a variety of different backgrounds and experiences shared stories and

With support and leadership from [Maine Environmental Changemakers Youth Network](#), panelists answered questions about their experience with Maine’s food system. Storytellers received a stipend for their time, free registration to the event, an opportunity to strengthen their storytelling skills, and build relationships with other food system stakeholders.

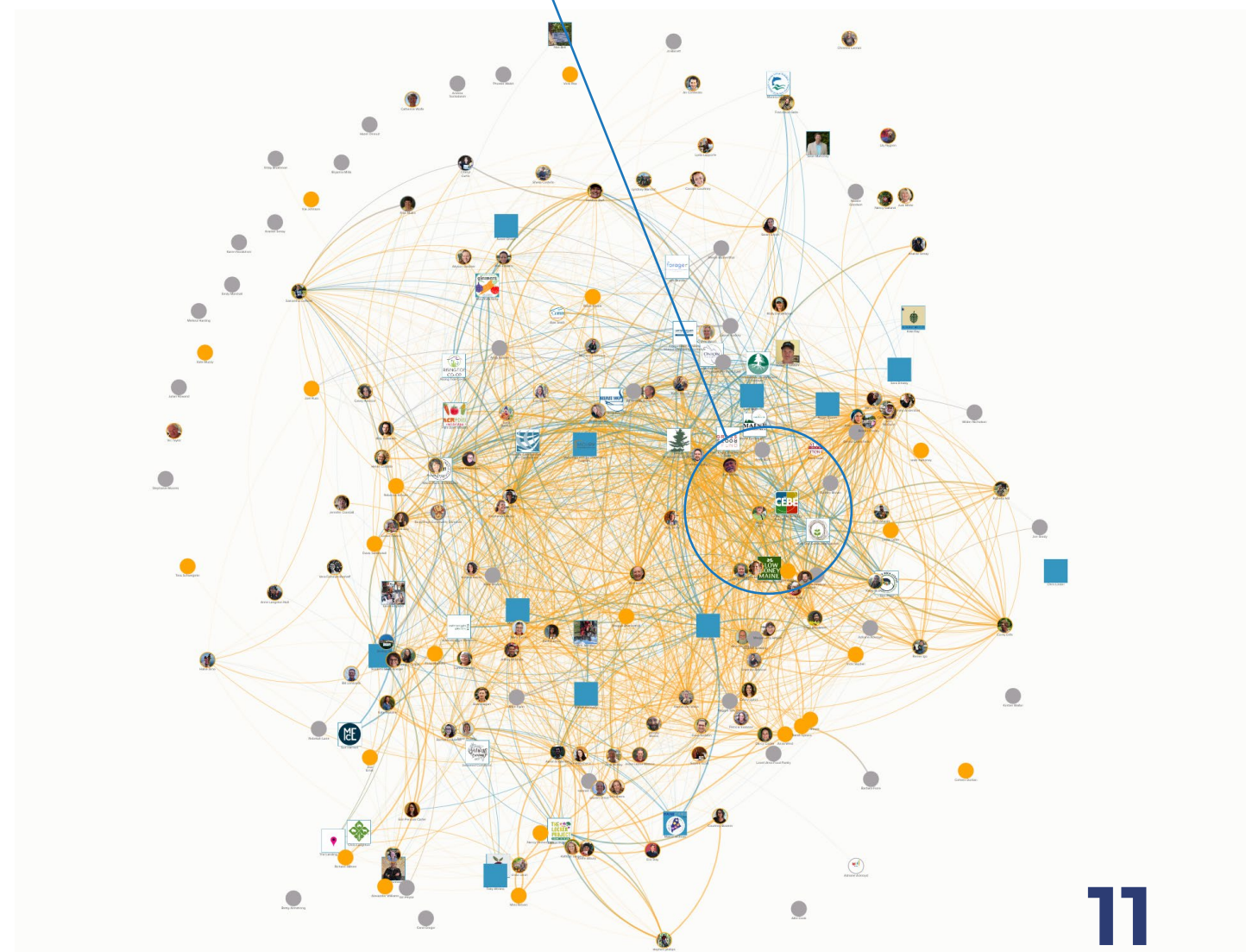
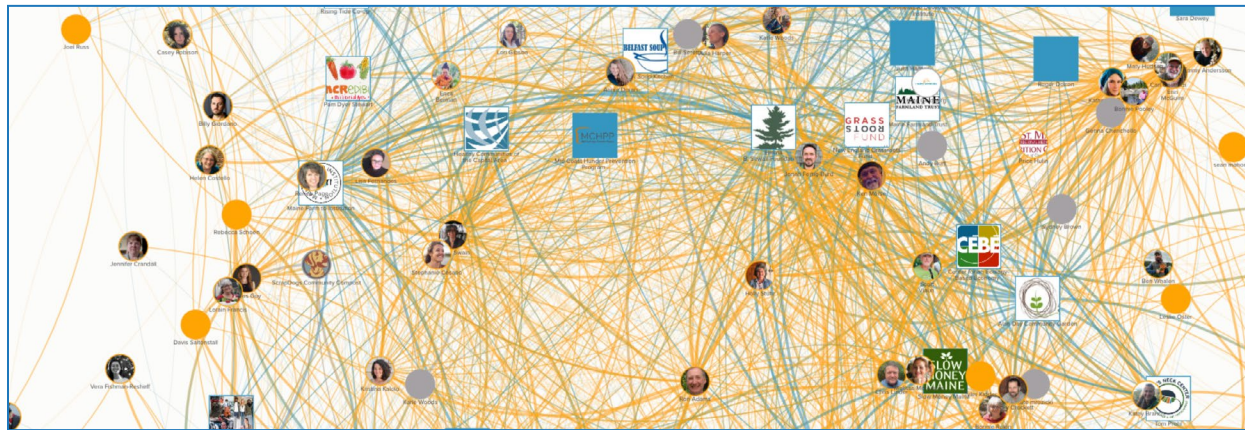
“My experience comes from helping others navigate food security systems and then experiencing those same systems as a client in need. I feel the strength of my story comes from its common nature. I am the face of the person next door, not the exaggerated stereotyped version of a person in need.” – *Storyteller Panelist*



Maps

Convergence Network Map

This network map was created for Convergence participants to connect with each other in the midst of a virtual event. You can find people and organizations by sector, issue areas, counties, skills needed and skills have. We will continue to grow and use this map. [Click to opt in and view the NETWORK MAP](#)

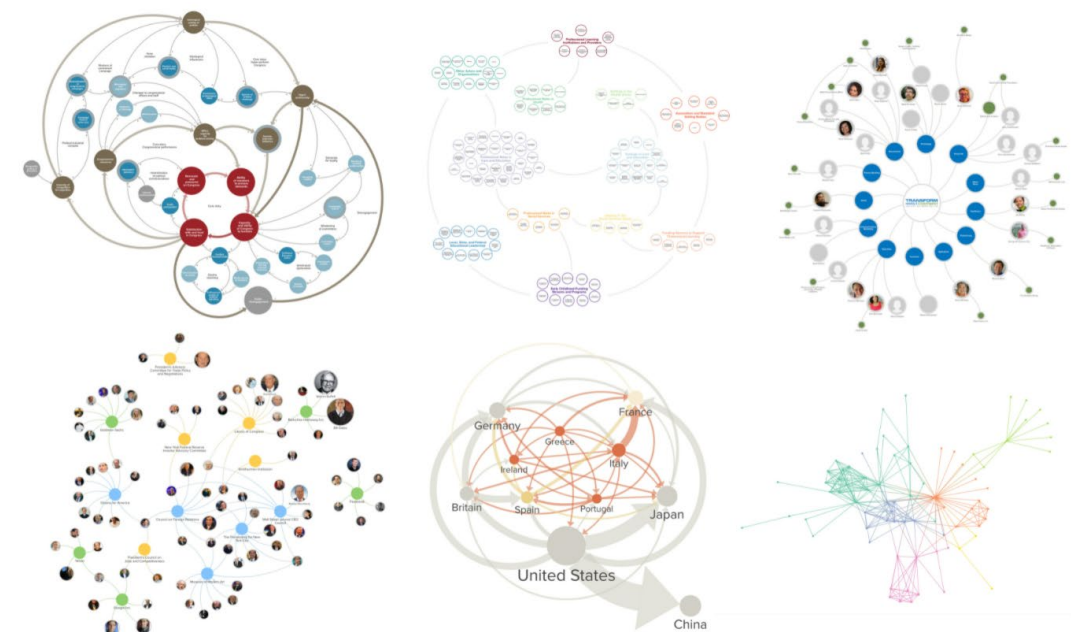


Systems and Network Maps

Two drivers of systems change are transparency and the ability to shift mindsets, which requires connections and understanding between different parts of a system. Systems maps are a tool that helps illuminate where these connections and relationships exist, and where they are weak. With mapping expertise and guidance from Peter Woodrow, an independent consultant in Maine, we created three systems maps, one for each Convergence track. Time and capacity prevented organizers from applying these to their full potential during the Convergence, but the process of creating them helped increase our understanding of the system and where important levers of change might exist. The maps serve as a snapshot in time and a record of a thread of conversations with a myriad of Maine food system stakeholders. They will evolve and change over time based on the evolution of the food system, as well as who participates in these conversations. Systems maps for the tracks are found in the next section, "Convergence Tracks."

We also worked with participants in the Convergence to create a network map that illustrates how individuals and organizations working in different parts of the food system were connected before and after the event. It enabled participants to explore organizations, be "introduced" to individuals in the network, and identify areas of overlap for potential collaboration.

We believe that over time these systems and network, or similar maps, can be used to help us and others better understand where important stakeholders are missing from conversations and where strong relationships already exist and can be leveraged to more easily support collaboration.

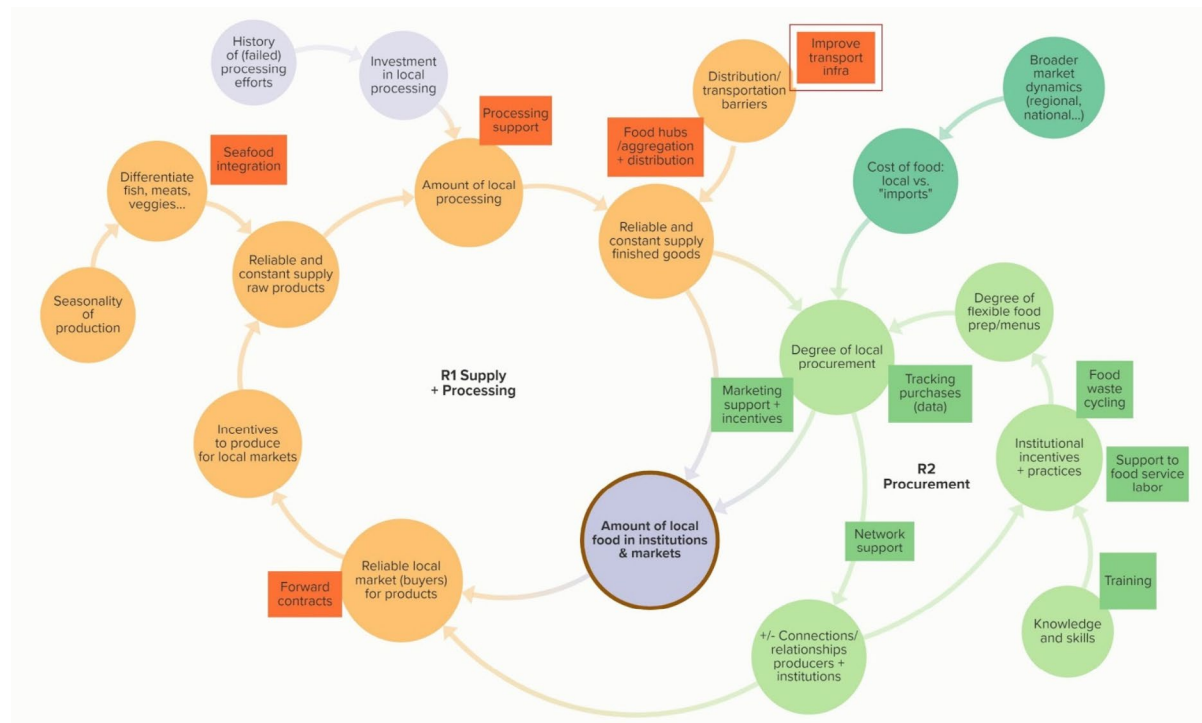


Convergence Tracks

Track A From Farm & Sea: Expanding Local Markets

Increasing the amount of healthy local food in our schools, institutions, and retailers is imperative to the health of Maine's communities and economy. **How can we expand local procurement to meet the capacity and consistent demands of these markets? How can we afford not to?**

Track A Systems Map



Presentations

An inspirational group of speakers showcased some of the collaborations and initiatives that are happening in our state:

- **Bill Seretta**, Fork Food Lab Executive Director and serial entrepreneur, fostering value-added producer incubator hub
- **Yannick Bizimana**, Cultivating Community, Community Urban Agriculture project
- **Matt Chin**, Harvesting Good at Good Shepherd Food Bank, building midscale vegetable processing facility in Maine
- **Nate Drummond**, Six River Farm owner/manager, Bowdoinham ME; midscale diversified vegetable production
- **Jenn Lignini**, Turtle Rock Farm owner/manager, Brunswick, ME; small-scale food processing initiative and USDA Value Added Producer Grantee

Top action areas identified by participants

Support the statewide development of collective/cooperative processing infrastructure

Convergence Outcome: following the event and with coordination support from Maine Farm to Institution, a new processing infrastructure workgroup of 30 stakeholders has started meeting monthly, working to build collaborative/collective infrastructure and mobilizing around [AIIP](#) funds.

Expand participation & breadth of the local produce fund (& other policy incentives that support farm to institution)

Convergence Outcome: Increased awareness of important policy initiatives mobilized more people to advocate for the Local Produce Fund to become the Local Foods Fund. The change has enabled schools to be reimbursed by the state for double the amount of local sourcing and use it on protein, value-added dairy, and other local products

Since the expansion of the fund, just in the first half of the school year (September, October, November 2021) Department of Education Child Nutrition reimbursed 60 school nutrition programs (double from the previous year) a total of \$55,507 for local food purchases. This means that Maine school cafeterias spent a total of \$166,521 on local foods in just 3 months since the expansion of the fund!

Develop opportunities for relationship-building between buyers & producers & seafood suppliers

Convergence Outcomes: Priorities identified during the Convergence prompted Training for a cohort of Maine Ag Service Providers to implement a Selling to Schools support program for Maine producers. Funding for the program is currently being sought.

Support for MEFTI's launch of the 1st Annual [Maine Farm & Sea to School Institute](#) which will connect 6 school districts per year per year directly with their surrounding farmers/producers.

Increase consumer awareness of and demand for Maine food products through cross-sector promotion

Progress as a result of an organization in Maine's food system: Real Maine, a program of ME Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry launched a successful new website with an institutional market component.

"I care deeply about strengthening farm-to-institution in Maine and beyond, but cannot seem to get past the fact that both the family farm and the institutions doing the purchasing (schools, prisons, hospitals) exist due to settler colonialism. Moving forward with building this market and these partnerships will lead to more wealth and power going to these settler colonial institutions unless Indigenous leaders are not guiding the work... Track A should reckon with this deeply." – Anonymous

Track B Farming & Fishing: Abundance, Equity & Resiliency

As an unstable climate and resource depletion jeopardize the global food supply, **meeting our food needs locally will be critical to a sustainable food future for Maine.** Track B set out with this complex question: How can we increase the quantity and quality of Maine-grown food while supporting our fishing and farming communities; protecting our waters; regenerating our soils and biodiversity; and providing living wages, land and water access, and dignity for food system workers?

Track B Systems Map



Presentations

The three sessions of Track B hosted many speakers from diverse viewpoints covering a range of topics pertinent to the track theme as developed through the Regional Dialogue process and as it evolved during the sessions.

Panel Kessie Kimball Mi'kmaq farmer and organizer at Eastern Woodlands

Rematriation, teamed with **Jesse Watson** of Midcoast Permaculture to explore the complex relationship between indigenous foodways and permaculture and the notion of decolonizing permaculture

- **Sarah Simon** from Maine Farmland Trust shared information about the trust and the nascent Soil Heath Network, and climate resilience in agriculture

- **Kate Wallace** of the Resilience Hub and Portland Permaculture Meetup spoke to the efforts of these two groups to regenerate our food landscapes
- **Ethan Miller** of Land in Common, spoke to importance of equitable land access, community land trusts, and land back strategies
- **Josh Royte** of the Nature Conservancy spoke to the importance of river restoration to the food system and the greater ecology
- **Josh Woods** a racial justice organizer and member of Maine Youth for Climate Justice spoke to the intersectionality between food systems, racial justice and climate work
- **Ken Morse** Founder and Lead team member of Maine Network of Community Food Councils, shared the development of a Food Policy working group.

Top action areas identified by participants

Farmland & Water Rights, Access

- Dam removal; land and sea sovereignty; aquaculture; and land trusts: all were all discussed in breakouts and shared with the wider group

Climate resilience and adaptation in fishing, farming, and local food supply chains

- This work is being led in part by MOFGA and MFT, both track B participants, as well as other participant groups

Building bridges between tribal and permaculture/regenerative agriculture communities

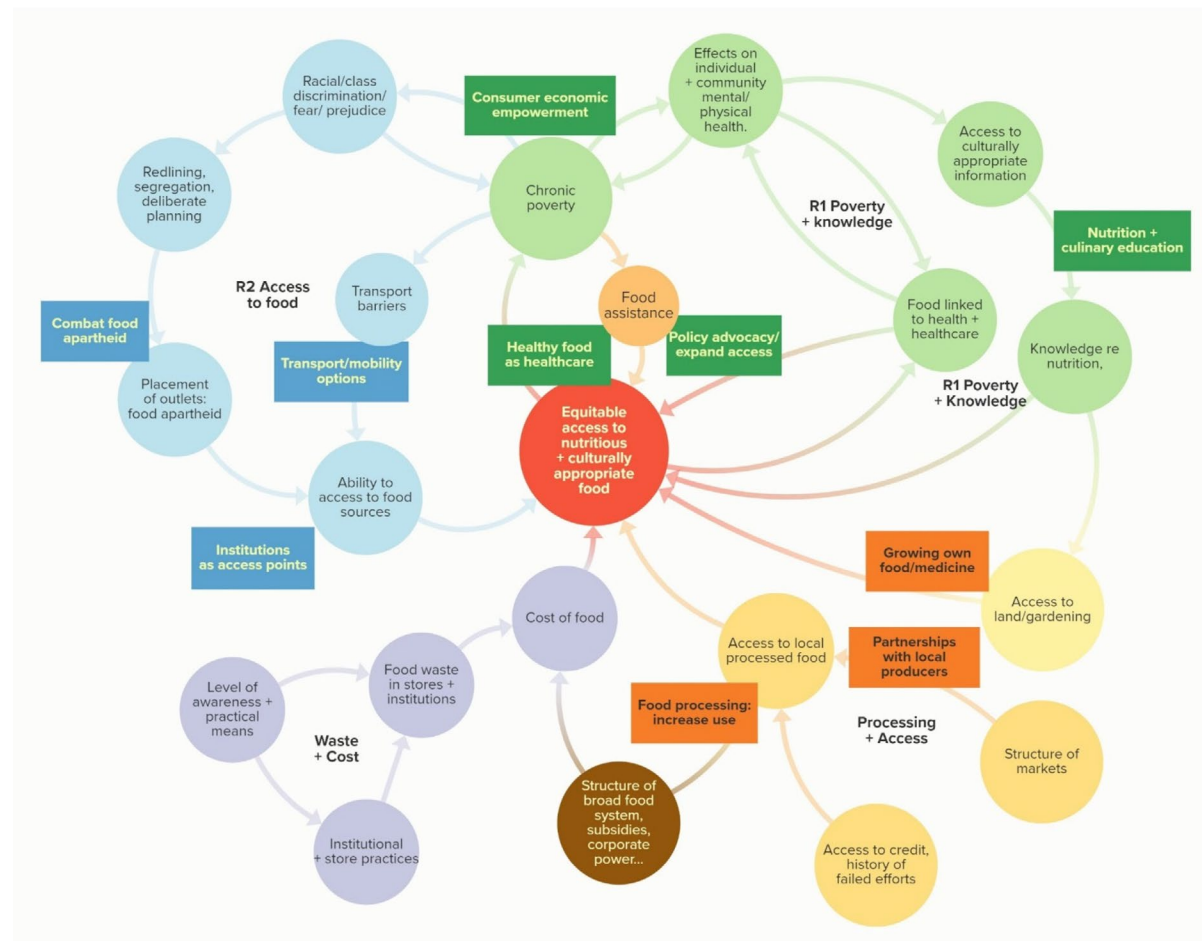
- Issues explored were cultural appropriation; decolonization of permaculture and regenerative agriculture, the potential harms of teaching “primitive” skills, “rewilding,” etc.
- This action has been continued by Wabanaki and white settler track participants. They have met as a Wabanaki-led Forest Gardening collaborative.



Track C Healthy Food: Breaking Down the Barriers

Eating nutritious, culturally appropriate food is critical for unleashing human potential. Access to healthy food in Maine is inequitable for reasons from income to geography, stigma and more. **With thousands of Mainers experiencing food insecurity, what partnerships, policy, or advocacy can break down the barriers to healthy food for all?**

Track C Systems Map



Presentations

An inspirational group of speakers showcased some of the innovative collaborations and initiatives that are happening in our state:

- **Jessica Richards** Health Educator with Bucksport Regional Healthcare Center. Jessica works with patients and the local community to provide education, resources and programming for improved health and wellbeing.
- **Ben Martens** Fishermen's Feeding Mainers; Executive Director of Maine Coast Fishermen's Association. Ben works with Maine's community-based fishermen

to develop projects, policies, and ideas to strengthen Maine's fisheries for today, tomorrow, and forever.

- **Erin Callaway** co-founder and Executive Director of the Piscataquis Regional Food Center in Dover-Foxcroft
- **Ken Morse** Coordinator of the Maine Food Policy Work Group. By monitoring and sharing Food Policy updates, Ken helps to demystify the legislative process so that grassroots activists can make their views and voices heard.

Top action areas identified by participants

Advocate for consumer economic empowerment

- Living wage, worker justice, job training, advocacy for social services such as healthcare, childcare

Address infrastructure barriers to access, such as community development and transportation, using the lens of food apartheid

- Public transportation, city planning, walking and biking, universal design, support networks for seniors

- Healthy corner store initiatives, community gardens, accessible farmers' markets, support for community retailers, advocacy and leadership in local governance by affected community members, access to finance

Develop partnerships between local producers & fisherfolks and organizations & institutions to increase access points and distribution centers

- Gleaning, farm to food pantry, Mainers Feeding Mainers, Fishermen Feeding Mainers
- School nutrition programs, school food pantries, school meal programs, Good Shepherd Food Bank food boxes at health centers, programs at other institutions such as daycare centers, correctional facilities, universities, senior centers, veggie prescriptions

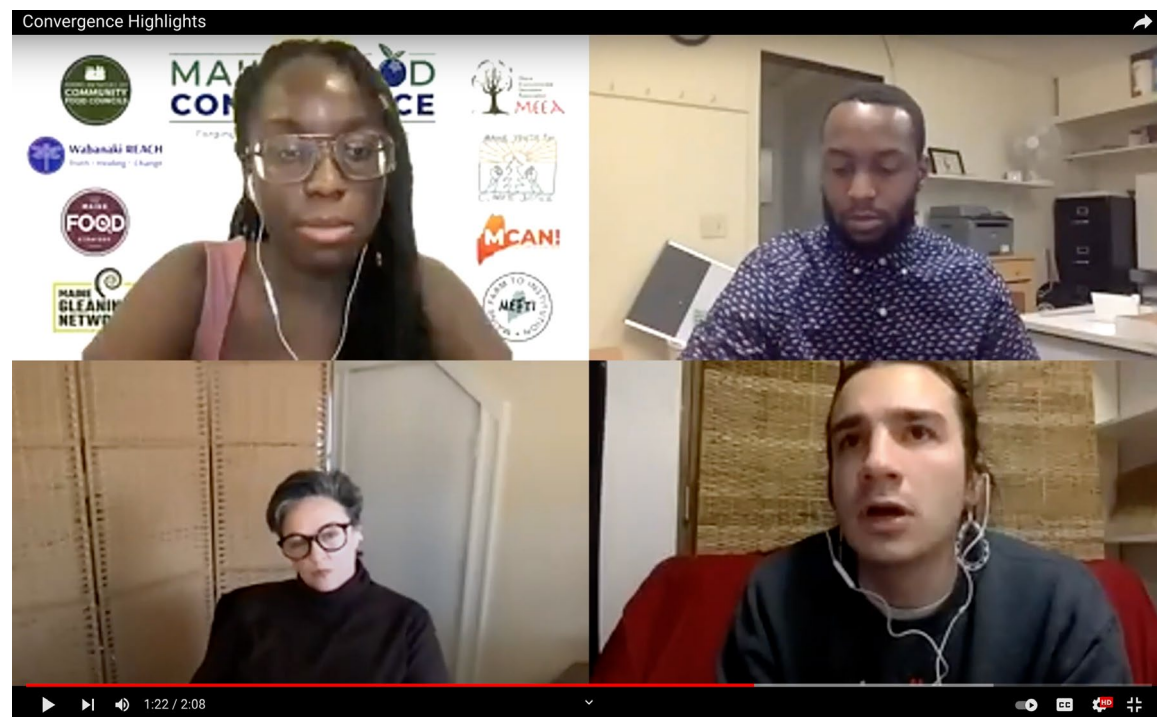


Lessons Learned

“Meaningful collaboration both relies on and deepens relationships – the stronger the bond between people or groups in collaboration, the more possibility you can hold...I find that my best work has happened during my most challenging collaborations because there are actual differences that are converging and creating more space, ways forward that serve more than one worldview.”

– Emergent Strategy, Adrienne Maree Brown

We learned a great deal through designing, preparing, hosting, and following up after the Convergence. When our networks set out to host the Convergence, what we did not anticipate was that it would transform from a discussion of our current food systems work into a very real, raw conversation about food justice in our state. Although there were many other lessons learned, our reflections have mostly centered on how we can best collaborate to build real and lasting equity in Maine’s food systems. In particular, how to make changes so the work being done to improve Maine’s food systems is guided by those most impacted by the inequities of our current system.



This video is a compilation of voices who helped us learn these lessons (in order of appearance): Alivia Moore from Eastern Woodlands Rematriation, Heather Augustine, Tanvi Koushik, Lily Nygren, Lokotah Sanborne from Bomazeen Land Trust, Lisa Fernandes from UNH Sustainability Institute, and Ethan Miller from Land In Common.

Several themes emerged from the presenters and storytellers, and through the acts of designing preparing, hosting, and following up after the Convergence:

- There is historic & current colonization and oppression in Maine institutions that denies the role and greatly limits the ability of Indigenous communities to steward and preserve the land and waters.
- Some of the “innovative” ways white organizers approach healthy food systems such as “regenerative agriculture” or “permaculture” are Indigenous technologies that are not recognized as such.
- There isn’t a shared vision yet across all communities in Maine for what a food system that works for communities and the environment should really look like.

Coordinators of the Regional Dialogues and Convergence event believe it created an important space to raise issues from communities whose priorities and perspectives are frequently missing from conversations and initiatives aimed at improving the food system. But if the goal of people who come to this space is to improve social and racial equity and inclusivity in the food system, we recognize the immense work that is yet to come. Network Partners realize that in order for the policies, investment, and other infrastructure gains to stick, our everyday actions and interactions must reflect our values and that we must continue to build awareness personally, transform organizational cultures, and shift how we collaborate across regions and sectors. Lessons throughout this process are helping build the awareness and momentum across our networks to do so. We know that we will continue to make mistakes and cause harm – and that it will take a great deal of time, effort and support to truly transform.

Challenges Convergence organizers learned from during the Regional Dialogues and Convergence convenings include:

- Circumstances pushed the event and its organization to be more complicated and involve more people than was originally envisioned. This put an excessive burden on volunteer partners, including members of community food councils who put a tremendous amount of time into helping with coordination and facilitation.



- Expectations around roles and affiliations wasn't clarified as the event was being organized and led to miscommunication.
- It would have been helpful to have a dedicated team of people focused entirely on inclusion efforts (researching groups most impacted, connecting with stakeholders, addressing barriers to participation).
- Additional thinking and planning was needed to determine better ways to apply funding to increase event accessibility, for example by better promotion of participation stipends, hiring interpreters, technology stipends, and alternative participation options.

Organizers of the Convergence event made a sincere attempt to center concepts of racial and social justice and equity. However, in many ways it was still geared toward white professionals and this was reflected in the fact that the vast majority of participants were white professionals.

Some of the questions this prompts for everyone working on food systems in our state:

- How do we create spaces and organizations where all people can bring their full selves to the table and contribute?
- How do current food system leaders show up for and respectfully support efforts led by BIPOC, youth, and other people impacted by systemic inequities?
- What concrete actions can organizations and initiatives in Maine do to attract leadership and engagement from outside their existing networks?
- What conversations do we need to undertake with partners to help clarify our expectations of each other and avoid miscommunications?
- What language / materials / descriptions may we be using that deny the experiences or are offensive to the people we're trying to help, serve or partner with?
- What histories or challenges have people around us experienced that we need to better understand in order to partner with them in thoughtful and meaningful ways?
- How do we build coalitions of all interconnected sectors while valuing and supporting different approaches?
- How do we shift the narrative of the food system away from placing blame on individuals for experiencing food insecurity to placing responsibility on the system for supporting us all to thrive?

Priority Actions Identified Across All Tracks

Many ideas emerged from the Convergence. A limited number of priority actions were identified after participants at the Convergence a) signaled there was a great need and b) offered leadership for action. Collaborative groups have already organized around some of these areas. In others, Convergence Network Partners are exploring where interest and capacity exists to convene groups interested in working together (see "Next Steps").

Promote equity and support tribal sovereignty:

Increase awareness across the state of the importance of expanding diversity in leadership across all sectors, increasing equity in Maine's food system and supporting tribal sovereignty. Contact: [Maine Food Convergence](#)

Processing Infrastructure & Food Hubs:

Small to Medium Scale formal cooperatives and informal cooperation, equitable workforce development, access to culturally appropriate food sources, support for existing and emerging processing models (includes aggregation & storage). Ex: [Maine Grains](#) aggregation & grain processing. Statewide workgroup has been initiated. Contact: [Maine Farm & Sea to School Network](#)

Advocate for a thriving wage for all:

What is a thriving wage? Address misinformation and misunderstanding about what a thriving wage means, understand policy, dispel myths about poverty and food insecurity. Contact: [Maine Food Convergence](#)

Increase Promotion and Consumer Awareness of Local Foods:

Leveraging and further developing statewide local foods promotion programs (Dept. of Ag's Real Maine, Dept. of Ed's Harvest of the Month, MFFM's Bumper Crop, etc.) to food-serving institutions across sectors. Contact: [Maine Federation of Farmers Markets](#)

Building Relationships Between Local Buyers and Local Producers and Seafood:

Developing more collaborative efforts between buyers/institutions, producers & seafood folks, and support organization to increase access points and distribution centers. Expand the promotion of Maine foods to reach more and larger buyers. Contact: [Healthy Communities of the Capital Area](#), [Maine Farm & Sea to School Network](#)

Maine Food Policy Advocacy Alliance:

The Maine Food Policy Work Group is a collaboration of organizations and people working to promote good food policies in Maine. Opt-in to receive the newsletter [HERE](#).

Collaborations Following the Convergence

The following are collaborations that ensued following the Convergence, and focus areas our networks hope to organize around moving forward. You can see all priority actions identified at the Convergence on our [website](#).

Development of Network Partner Agreements.

Using best practices of Network Organizations, partners involved in the Convergence worked through developing a formal agreement and memorandums of understanding that outline the partners' expectations of each other, formalizes commitments to the shared work of the Convergence and details the specific work each Partner agrees to undertake on behalf of the Convergence.

Identification of how the Convergence intersects with Network Partners' work.

The Convergence holds promise as a space that Network Partners and others involved in the broader network can mobilize to ensure diverse perspectives are considered in policy and program development. For example, Maine Food Strategy participates in a New England (NE) Food System Planners Partnership, a collaborative of state-level food system planning initiatives that works regionally to build policies and investments that support and connect local and regional food value chains. This NE Partnership wants to see resilient food supply chains that ensure stability and access for all communities in NE. By connecting communities through the Convergence to the Partnership's research and recommendations, Maine Food Strategy hopes to see the project's priorities reflect the interests of low income, rural and communities of color in our state.

Solidarity Work

More equitable resource sharing and collective power starts by building relationships with new partners to understand how best to approach and implement change. Following the Convergence, our network partners began a "solidarity process," aimed at finding meaningful ways to connect with historically and currently oppressed groups. We have started this work with consultants from [Racial Equity & Justice](#) and [Maine Youth Action Network](#), and



will continue to work towards relationships with groups focused on advancing equity and justice. Many white-led food organizations are asking similar things of the same organizations and people. We want to collectivize our outreach, ask for less time and emotional energy from those most impacted by the inequities in our system, and use our network to share the lessons learned widely.

Cross-state, Cross-sector Work Groups

Beyond the development of a formal Convergence partnerships and the solidarity process, partners have been facilitating work groups focused on advancing specific areas across the state and across sectors in our food and economic system that were identified throughout the convergence as major areas in need of improvement. Contact us for more information and/or to get involved.



Workgroups currently in action/development:

- Collective/Cooperative Food Processing Infrastructure
- Maine Food Policy Work Group & Advocacy Alliance

Workgroups we are exploring:

- Working with the Ending Hunger by 2030 report work (particularly to address Thriving Wage, a Track C priority)
- Elevate Equity & Support Tribal Sovereignty
- Food Hubs



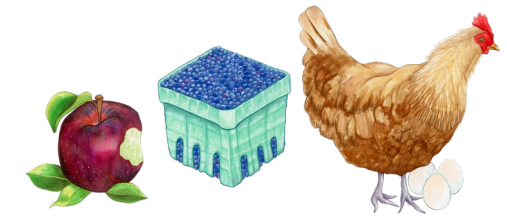
Networked Communications

Communication - internal and external - is critical to any network. Network Partners are exploring how to leverage the capacity of our individual initiatives to develop collaborative systems and processes that support network-wide communication for the project and initiatives connected to the Convergence. In conjunction with this, we are developing a regular statewide event to create consistent opportunities for:

- relationship building
- multiple perspectives to come together
- all participants to identify partners for collaboration
- Inspiration to center collective liberation/ equity & justice in all our work



Maine Food Policy Work Group & News



The Maine Food Policy Work Group was formed by Maine Farm to Institution in 2019. The Work Group ramped up its work early in 2021 with the publication of almost weekly Food Policy News. The News tracked about 100 Bills in the Maine Legislature, with info and links to the Bills, the Committees and the online hearings and work sessions. The News is being sent to about 1700 subscribers.

The Work Group worked very closely with the Maine Food Convergence to weave policy into many of the Convergence sessions. This broadened support for good food policy in Maine. The Work Group submitted a proposal to the Sewall Foundation to expand this work into a more powerful Food Policy Alliance. Sewall provided funding for the Alliance Project that began in September 2021. Following an initial policy landscape analysis phase conducted by the Food Studies Class at USM, the Project moved into the 2nd Phase focused on Design of the Alliance. A Design Team has been recruited and will begin working on vision, values, goals, operating procedures and alliance home, structure, membership and funding with the aim of completing this design work so that the alliance can be launched in late summer/early fall. The aim is to convene alliance members at a Maine Food Policy Summit in the fall, partly to set priorities for Food System Bills for the 131st Legislature that begins in December 2022.

As this project evolves, focus is on diverse participation across the food system, with a strong commitment to BIPOC and youth engagement, to strengthen the voices of folks who are often marginalized. Many groups including farming, fisheries, food security groups and others have stepped forward to support this work.

Calls for Collaborative Action

“There is an art to flocking: staying separate enough not to crowd each other, aligned enough to maintain a shared direction, and cohesive enough to always move towards each other.”

– Emergent Strategy, Adrienne Maree Brown

We are working towards collaborating and connecting Maine grassroots organizers with regional and statewide food system planning efforts: [Ending Hunger by 2030](#), [Food Solutions New England](#), [New England Feeding New England](#), [Lessons from the Pandemic](#), and [Maine Food Policy Workgroup & Alliance Project](#).

Please connect with us to learn more about collaborating on any/all of our next steps and to find other ways to mutually support the Convergence and your organization’s efforts.

[Sign up for our Convergence news here](#) to keep an eye out for inspirational events and other learnings and opportunities.

Follow us on [Facebook](#) for news from the Convergence & all of our network partners

Join our [network map](#)!

Sign Up for the [Maine Food Policy News](#).

[Connect](#) with us to explore collaborations.



Exploring Existing Work in Key Areas

Another action our convergence partners have been engaging in is that of trying to learn from groups/municipalities/etc. Who are already doing good work in some of the key areas we hope to create change. Below are some examples of some of the great work we have come across. As you can see, our research is only beginning. We are enjoying this research process and being continuously inspired as we go!

Processing infrastructure.

This was a need highlighted in several Food Convergence meetings, and the first work group coming out of the Convergence to gain real traction. Licensed, inspected food processing infrastructures are a requirement for food producers to be able to sell their goods in stores and markets, particularly perishable items such as dairy products. This MOFGA FAQ sheet gives more detail on what is required for food sellers to legally sell their goods in Maine: [FAQ on Kitchen Licensing](#).

Getting the proper equipment, food sellers' licenses and inspections can be a prohibitive cost that stops many 'would be' Maine food producers before they start. An idea that has been gaining traction, and is even being put into practice in some areas, is that of shared, or community, food production facilities. There is one such facility in Portland, the Fork Food Lab. The Fork Food Lab's members produce such items as take and bake pastas, granola, sweets, soups and snacks. This is a strong example of how access to a licensed kitchen has made food business entrepreneurship possible for some folks who lack the seed money to purchase equipment on their own. There are additional specific infrastructure needs though, such as dairy facilities or meat processing facilities, that are lacking throughout the state. Another great, albeit not local example of shared processing infrastructure is the use of mobile meat processing units in Washington state, as discussed in this article: [Rancher Co-ops offer meat processing solutions for small farmers](#).

Food hubs.

Processing infrastructure concerns itself with making it easier for food producers to create their products in a legally sellable way. Food hubs deal with making it easier for small to medium food growers, fishers and producers to sell their products w/o relying solely on CSA's and farmers' markets. This article is from 2013, but provides a solid definition of what food hubs are and how they benefit small to medium sized farms, as well as communities. [What is a Food Hub?](#)

This short blog by the Maine People's Alliance highlights a few food hubs already in operation in the state, and why the creation of more hubs will help new, young farmers thrive. Food Hubs- Maine People's Alliance

This Sunrise Guide blog from 2017 also looks at some existing food hubs in Maine, and includes some groups that might not fit the typical "food hub" bill, but are

providing farm support through some sort of aggregation. Food Hubs: Connecting farms to forks

Here is a Maine Farmland Trust [article](#) that covers a variety of newer food systems/sales models.

Changing the narrative

This short film, [WE UNITE](#) highlights an annual protest in Germany led largely by farmers demanding better land access for local, organic farms, and is supported by many other citizens and organizations. WE UNITE.

[Common Table Creative](#) is a group that does a lot of filmmaking/storytelling around better, healthier food systems

For Maine sources/projects, especially regarding food insecurity, the review done by Resources for Organizing and Social Change (ROSC) of the Ending Hunger in Maine by 2030 draft is excellent: [IMPacted Communities Recommendations and Review on the Interim Report on Ending Hunger in Maine by 2030](#)

The [GSFB Building Advocates](#) Leadership program is focused on training people affected by food insecurity to become leaders and advocates by sharing their own stories.

Advocating for a thriving wage

Although we have not located an organization in Maine whose work is specifically focused on advocating for a thriving wage, there is very strong research being done by the [Economic Policy](#) Institute which will be helpful in these conversations moving forward.

Supporting Tribal Sovereignty

The [Wabanaki Alliance](#) is a group formed by the tribes in Maine (Aroostook Band of Micmac, Houlton Band of Maliseet, Passamaquoddy Tribe and Penobscot Nation). This group is doing education around issues that affect the sovereignty and well being of the tribes in Maine. The convergence partners are following their information. Recently we wrote a letter in support of LD 1626, a bill to restore the inherent right of the Wabanaki tribes in Maine to self-govern within their respective territories in accordance with the same federal laws that generally govern tribal lands elsewhere in the United States.



Forging Connection for Collective Action

mainefoodconvergence.org