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February 23, 2023

Report on the 2022 Food Sovereignty Workshop at Ohio State University
“Community-Centered Approaches for Food Systems Transformation Workshop”

Report by Melinda McClimans, PhD. Assistant Director of the Middle East Studies Center

OSU Units in partnership with Central State University Professor Brandy Phipps organized a professional development workshop on community-partnered research with a focus on food sovereignty on October 13 and 14, 2022. “Community-Centered Approaches for Food Systems Transformation” focused on university-community partnerships and the importance of learning from communities about their local food systems, both historically and in the present moment while conducting research. Several communities involved in food sovereignty efforts were represented at the workshop in addition to 27 different units at Ohio State University. Speakers also represented Historically Black University, Central State, and Menominee Tribal College (see “Who?” below). Five government offices and 6 non-profit organizations were also represented (see “Who?” below).

The food sovereignty workshop resulted in new connections between practitioner, government, and university networks. Contacts were made between urban farming and gardening organizations such as Growing and Growth Collective and Southside Family Farms, Bronzeville Growers Market, city and county agencies such as the Center for Public Health and the Franklin County Board of Commissioners. A team formed at the food sovereignty workshop that is doing work directly relevant to Goal B-10 of the City's Food System's Plan, "Engaging cultural communities in Columbus". The purpose of Goal B-10 is to engage cultural communities in Columbus and address inequities. The team is creating “A Cultural Heritage Learning Place” focused on Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

The workshop opened with an acknowledgement that Ohio State University owes the many tribal communities impacted by its land grant establishment and continued benefits from tribal lands. The workshop served as a call to action to right those historic wrongs and the ongoing harms from disrupted native food systems. We emphasized community-partnered research that puts local communities in the forefront of research and that includes local practitioners. Presentations showed that this approach offers paths forward in various areas of food systems research and university outreach that are both ethical and sustainable (see more below under “What?”). Food sovereignty served as a lens for exploring how these types of research can work and how they can impact our knowledge and mindsets.

We looked at examples from the Menominee Nation in Wisconsin and Yemen, in particular, with Brian Kowalkowski’s presentation and that of Daniel Varisco, respectively. Their examples and those of the other speakers illustrated the benefits of making community sovereignty a top priority in any research agenda. Furthermore, food security supported by local, sustainable sources is critical for the planet and for directly addressing social and economic inequities worldwide. Some of the research findings highlighted showed how a large part of what academia calls “sustainable” or “regenerative” agriculture can’t offer a new or innovative path forward on its own. Indigenous knowledge and food systems from around the world clearly need to be restored.

The Newark Earthworks Center played an important role in the workshop not only as the largest co-sponsor but through their feedback and advice, from the planning stages and throughout its delivery and follow-up activities. Growing and Growth Collective, a local food sovereignty organization in Columbus focused on Black communities, co-sponsored the workshop and played a key role in making the program relevant to many local efforts. Food sovereignty is central to community sovereignty efforts because it draws upon culture and heritage as well as agricultural and foraging practices – these things are intertwined and must work together for a just and sustainable future.

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Who?

The workshop brought together food systems researchers (see [the list of speakers](#)), historians, anthropologists, communications and literature scholars, scientists of nutrition, aquaculture, public policy, and many others, making it a genuinely transdisciplinary event. Institutions present included Central State University, an 1890 Landgrant university, Menominee Tribal College, a 1994 landgrant university. Equally impressive was the number of individuals who are working locally in food systems transformation, in non-profit urban farming, government offices focused on food access, environmental protection, public health, and others.

In total, 37 people attended the workshop, representing 27 different OSU units (see appendix for the full list), 2 government offices (Buckeye Hills Regional Council, Ohio Department of Health), and 6 non-profit organizations (Ohio Food Banks, South Side Family Farms, Bronzeville Growers Market, AIYS, Growing and Growth Collective), in addition to interested local citizens. Three additional government offices have asked to be kept informed about any follow-up activities (SWACO, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and Columbus Public Health), as well as Ohio State's Office of Academic Affairs and the Newark Campus. We also welcomed attendees who watched the keynote address online.



Photo 1 Dr. Phipps testifies before the U.S. House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Biotechnology, Horticulture, and Research (Committee on Agriculture).

Dr. Brandy Phipps, Research Assistant Professor of Food, Nutrition, and Health at Central State University (photo, left), gave the keynote address. Dr. Phipps currently leads a transdisciplinary team focused on food systems transformation, which includes significant support for the food sovereignty efforts of the Menominee Nation.

University Libraries, the Global Water Institute, and the Middle East Studies Center formed a team that made [Community-Centered Approaches for Food Systems Transformation](#) a reality. Dr. Brandy Phipps worked with the planning team to ground the

workshop in real-world collaborative research between universities and the communities impacted by their work. Her research project at Menominee Tribal College, SUSHI, is a model for this type of work. You can listen to her keynote address [here](#).

Core planning team and partner units:

[Rebecca Gianotti](#) and [Amanda Davey](#) of the [Global Water Institute](#), Ohio State University

[Melinda McClimans](#), of the [Middle East Studies Center](#), Ohio State University

[Magda Al-Sherbini](#) of University Libraries, Islamic and Middle East Studies Collections, Ohio State University

Dr. [Brandy Phipps](#), Research Assistant Professor of Food, Nutrition, and Health – Agriculture Research Development Program, Central State University

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Sponsors

We received support from 11 sponsoring units, in addition to the core planning units (see above). They included:

The [Newark Earthworks Center](#) with support from an Indigenous Arts and Humanities Grant by the Global Arts + Humanities Discovery Theme

[The STEAM Factory](#)

The Department of [Near Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures](#)

[CFAES AgroEcosystems Management Program](#) (AMP)

The Department of [Food, Agricultural and Biological Engineering](#)

The [Growing and Growth Collective](#) and [Partners Achieving Community Transformation](#) (PACT) of the Ohio State University

The Department of [Anthropology](#)

The [Knowlton School of Architecture](#)

The Department of [Comparative Studies](#)

The [Center for Latin American Studies](#)

The CFAES Rattan Lal Center for the Study of Carbon Management and Sequestration ([C-MASC](#))

What?

Globally, 27% of people faced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2019, representing more than 2 billion people. Food sovereignty is especially urgent for Native American and other indigenous communities around the world, many of whom continue to bear the burdens of displacement from their native lands. We framed the Community-Centered Approaches for Food Systems Transformation food sovereignty workshop around the question: “how we might reprioritize research and teaching based on community partnership rather than “expertise?” In other words, how might learning from communities take precedence over learning about them. The workshop gave examples from the cultural contexts of food systems in the U.S., the Middle East, and other regions. We examined a variety of practices, including historic food production, projects in urban areas, and others.

Dr. [Brandy Phipps](#), Research Assistant Professor of Food, Nutrition, and Health – Agriculture Research Development Program, Central State University served as the keynote speaker, focusing on the SUSHI food sovereignty project she is leading in partnership with the Menominee Tribal College of Wisconsin. She shared the story of SUSHI and her own journey as both scientist and advocate for food justice in her [keynote address](#). You can learn about SUSHI’s research agenda, intended impacts and technical aspects in [this short video](#). She shared the story behind the project and why food sovereignty concepts played such an important role in her research design.

The prominent scholar of Yemeni history and culture, Dr. [Daniel Varisco](#) (President, American Institute for Yemeni Studies), shed light on the problem of outsiders paying scant attention to the crops and

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agricultural practices going back centuries in Yemen. The roundtable discussion was moderated by Ohio State's own Dr. Mary Rodriguez, herself a leader in community-centered agricultural research. Drs. Varisco and Rodriguez were joined by Mr. [Brian Kowalkowski](#) and Dr. [Kareem Usher](#), who shed light on community-centered research in the Menominee Nation, Belize, and other examples (see under "What?" below).

Dr. [Daniel M. Varisco](#), shared [his thoughts on food sovereignty](#) as a framework for global food justice, his personal experiences with Yemeni farmers, and his expertise on Yemeni food systems. Dr. Varisco is an anthropologist with field research and extensive experience in Yemen regarding traditional agricultural systems and their intersection with policy and politics. He is also a historian and Arabist who has edited and translated mediaeval Rasulid agricultural texts and other Arab scholarship. He is experienced as a consultant to the World Bank (conservation and food security) and USAID. He shared his experiences with community involvement in development projects and the successes of grassroots efforts. Besides Yemen, he has conducted research in Egypt, Qatar, and the UAE.

[Brian Kowalkowski](#), Dean, Department of Continuing Education, College of Menominee Nation, shed light on the importance of indigenous knowledge systems through his accounts of community-partnered archeological research conducted at his college. His research focuses on models of university-community engagement (Kowalkowski, 2022), and he was on the team that wrote the [Menominee e-Fieldbook](#) (2020). He analyzes community data to determine appropriate activities to be undertaken by the department. He also works with different community agencies to establish cooperative working relationships. A major accomplishment has been the creation of a local farmers market on the Menominee Reservation that has coincided with the improvement of access to fresh foods. He is involved with numerous local, state, and federal professional organizations, representing his college and 1994 Tribal Land Grant schools. His presentation showed that university researchers made a "discovery" of forest agricultural practices only to find out that Menominee elders were already well aware of those practices and their history.

Dr. [Kareem M. Usher](#), Assistant Professor, College of Engineering / Austin E. Knowlton School of Architecture City and Regional Planning Section, shared lessons learned from research in Belize that impacted local indigenous communities. His research focuses on urban food systems and he engages this topic at the intersection of food access, social justice, regional governance and community economic development. By working with communities on food systems in real places and in real time, he has developed a body of empirical work that provides the foundation for an emergent research programme at the intersections of community development, theory, and praxis. His work has spanned geographies: rural-suburban-urban, Global South-Global North, Midwestern-Southern United States; cultures and socio-economic groups: African American, Appalachian, Non-Hispanic European, and Indigenous Peoples: Belizean ethnic groups – Kriol, Garifuna, and Maya (Q'echi).

Moderator, Dr. [Mary Rodriguez](#), Associate Professor, Department of Agricultural Communication, Education, and Leadership, moderated the discussion. As a leadership scholar and practitioner, she focuses on supporting communities in change processes at the individual, household, and community levels. Working in this integrated and multifaceted context, it is essential that she work with and support all players in their decision making and problem-solving. She therefore strives to develop research-based solutions to build more sustainable and resilient communities through the exploration of behavior change and leadership development.

Learning Outcomes

Participants reported that they learned about food sovereignty, the role of community partnership in research, and the importance of cultural humility. According to our survey respondents, 38.5% learned a great deal about cultural humility, 57.1% learned a great deal about food sovereignty and 69.2% learned a great deal about community-partnered research. A large portion of the participants in the workshop were Ohio State University faculty members and professional staff. That means 19 of 37, or 51% of the participants are working directly or indirectly on research projects or related interdisciplinary programs. A full 27% of participants or 10 out of 37 were in tenure-track positions in a wide range of departments (History, NESR, Anthropology, SENR, City and Regional Planning, CFAES, and others).

Summary of Q7: The workshop on day one featured four experts on community-partnered research. How much did you learn from them on the following?

Q7: The workshop on day one featured four...did you learn from them on the following?				
	Cultural Humility	Food Sovereignty	Community Partnered Research	Total
A little	7.7%	0.0%	0.0%	
Some	30.8%	28.6%	15.4%	
A great deal	38.5%	57.1%	69.2%	
I learned immensely	23.1%	14.3%	15.4%	
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Figure 1 Food sovereignty workshop evaluation survey

How Did It Come To Be?

The food sovereignty workshop originated from a long-standing relationship between the Middle East Studies Center (MESC) and the Global Water Institute (GWI). When we learned of Dr. [Brandy Phipps’s work](#) we immediately recognized its ability to redirect our work towards environmental justice. We were taking this priority directly [from the faculty forum](#) we convened on February 8th 2019 on global water contexts. She accepted our invitation to keynote a workshop focused on community-partnered research and what that can look like. The food sovereignty work done at Menominee Tribal College illustrates this while her leadership in the project models the mindset required for such research. We then invited faculty doing similar work in other parts of the world, including Belize and Yemen. We also invited local food justice group Growing and Growth Collective to collaborate. University Libraries graciously offered space and became a key partner in designing the program and promoting the event. Soon we had a list of co-sponsoring units that continued to grow (see the full list above, under “Who?”).

The most recent MESC/GWI collaboration prior to the Food Sovereignty Workshop of October 2022, was a virtual session for the Marmara Urban Forum (MARUF), The Role of Relationships and Trust-building in Environmental Justice and Protection.” The online event took place on October 3rd, 2021, and was hosted by the Marmara Municipalities Union, headquartered in Istanbul, Turkiye. The purpose of the event was to connect people and deepen their understanding of the need for trust-building for water access and agriculture projects. Participants included environmental scientists, practitioners working in the field, and locally on multi-disciplinary and cross-cultural team-building. You can download a report about the event here: <https://u.osu.edu/h2oresearch/2021/12/15/the-role-of-relationships-and-trust-building-in-environmental-justice-and-protection/>

Our units co-hosted multiple interdisciplinary conversations about the water crisis prior to that. The u.osu.edu site [“Global Water Contexts”](#) provides additional details and background information about how these discussions have evolved. You can also find additional information about the speakers, topics and main take-aways of the events in the following announcements:

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Announcement Date: Subject:

9/16/2022 –	Food Sovereignty Workshop Announcement
9/24/2021 -	The Role of Relationships and Trust-building in Environmental Justice and Protection
03/21/2019 -	Key Points from Water Forum Feb. 8th
02/06/2019 -	“Strategic Doing”: How we will be facilitating the break-outs
01/31/2019 -	What to expect a week from tomorrow? Here is the detailed agenda...
01/24/2019 -	Water Forum Update: Keynote Speaker
01/12/2019 -	Seeking Speakers for Global Water Contexts Faculty Research Forum - Proposals Due Feb 1
01/07/2019 -	Upcoming Opportunities to Get Involved with the Middle East Studies Center
12/08/2018 -	Global Water Contexts Faculty Research Forum - Fri, Feb 8th, 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
11/04/2018 -	Global Water Contexts Faculty Research Forum - Fri, Feb 8th, 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Resources

If this is the first time you’ve heard of food sovereignty, we have great starting points for you. You can learn more about food sovereignty from [Dr. Phipps’s powerpoint](#), [Dr. Varisco’s thoughtpiece](#), and the food [sovereignty keywords handout](#) from the workshop. We also recommend this Libguide created by Magda El-Sherbini of OSU Libraries: https://guides.osu.edu/ld.php?content_id=68467884 You can find the other speakers’ presentation slides [under their bios](#) on the [event page](#). You can also refer to the [Menominee e-Fieldbook](#).

How to Get Involved?

If you are interested in learning more about food sovereignty or in supporting local food sovereignty efforts in Columbus, Ohio, you can follow updates or offer your support for “A Cultural Heritage Learning Place” on [their Notion page](#). You can also sign up for the Growing and Growth Collective’s [Newsletter](#). They announce upcoming film screenings, educational events and resources related to sustainable/regenerative agriculture, food justice, and volunteer opportunities targeting BIPOC communities, and the two groups coordinate their work. If you are interested in collaborating on global food sovereignty topics in relation to culture, please get in contact with Melinda McClimans, mcclimans.2@osu.edu

Thanks!

Thanks so much for your support and the support of many individuals in the departments and local organizations who organized, co-sponsored or otherwise contributed to making the workshop a success. Thanks to Rebecca Gianotti for her input on this report. Thanks to Brandy Phipps for her leadership and for her commitment to making the workshop a success. Thanks to our speakers for sharing their wisdom during the panel discussion and for staying on to take part in the conversations with workshop participants. Thanks so much to Mary Rodriguez for her expert moderation of the panel. Thanks to the participants who stayed throughout the workshop for in-depth conversations over the course of two days. There was quite a “buzz.” Thanks very much to the staff of the library for all the preparations they did, from planning, to furniture arranging, to tech and media, to make the event a success. Thanks so much to Charlene Brenner and the STEAM factory for the wonderful hospitality. Thanks so much to people worldwide working on food sovereignty every day to make it a reality.

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Citations:

Kowalkowski, B., Frieson, L., & Phillips, J. (2022). Community Engagement at Tribal Land-Grant Institutions: A Tribal Approach to Reimagining the University-Community Relationship. *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*, 14(3).

<https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/jces/vol14/iss3/7>

Gauthier, J., Kowalkowski, B., & Perry, M. (2020). *Kemēcemenaw: Tribal Extension Partnerships That Support Indigenous Food Sovereignty on the Menominee Indian Reservation* (1st ed.). Extension Foundation.

<https://connect.extension.org/db/epublications/record/keme-cemenaw-tribal-extension-partnerships-that-support-indigenous-food-sovereignty-on-the-menominee-indian-reservation>

Food sovereignty report appendix – organizations represented

Sector	Institution	URL	Organization or Department of OSU	Title	Present	Role
Government	Buckeye Hills Regional Council	buckeyehills.org			y	attended
Government	Ohio Department of Health	odh.ohio.gov			y	attended
Higher Ed	OSU	https://anthropology.osu.edu/	Anthro	Assistant Professor	y	attended
Higher Ed	OSU	https://slaviccenter.osu.edu/	Center for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies	Assistant Director	y	attended
Higher Ed	OSU		Communications		y	attended
Higher Ed	OSU		Communications		y	attended
Higher Ed	OSU		Comparative Studies		y	attended
Higher Ed	OSU	https://engage.osu.edu/	Enterprise for Research, Innovation, and Knowledge	Commercialization Education Director		attended
Higher Ed	OSU	https://ashtabula.osu.edu/	Extension	Educator	y	attended
Higher Ed	OSU		History	Professor	y	attended
Higher Ed	OSU	https://ehe.osu.edu/	Human Development and Family Science, CHRR	Professor	y	attended
Higher Ed	OSU		Interior Design	Student	y	attended
Higher Ed	OSU		NESA		y	attended
Higher Ed	OSU		NESA		y	attended
Higher Ed	OSU		Public Policy	Student	y	attended
Higher Ed	OSU	https://senr.osu.edu/	SENR	Professor	y	attended
Higher Ed	OSU		SENR	Student	y	attended
Higher Ed	OSU	https://senr.osu.edu/	SENR		y	attended
Higher Ed	OSU		Anthro		y	Partner
Higher Ed	OSU	https://globalwater.osu.edu/	GWI	Program Manager, Business Development	y	Partner
Higher Ed	OSU	https://globalwater.osu.edu/	GWI	Tanzania Country Director, Senior Research Associate	y	Partner
Higher Ed	OSU		University Libraries			Partner
Higher Ed	OSU	https://library.osu.edu/	University Libraries			Partner

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Higher Ed	OSU		MESC		y	Partner	
Higher Ed	OSU	https://acel.osu.edu/	ACEL		y	Speaker	
Higher Ed	OSU	https://knowlton.osu.edu/	City and Regional Planning			Speaker	
Higher Ed	OSU	https://entomology.osu.edu/	Entomology	Professor Emeritus	y	Speaker	
Higher Ed	CSU				y	Speaker	
Higher Ed	OSU	https://senr.osu.edu/	AMP	Director		Sponsor	
Higher Ed	OSU		Anthro	Chair		Sponsor	
Higher Ed	OSU		CLAS	Assistant Director		Sponsor	
Higher Ed	OSU		Comparative Studies	Chair		Sponsor	
Higher Ed	OSU		Food, Agriculture, and Biological Engineering	Chair		Sponsor	
Higher Ed	OSU	https://knowlton.osu.edu/	Knowlton School of Architecture			Sponsor	
Higher Ed	OSU		NESA		y	Sponsor	
Higher Ed	OSU	https://americanindianstudies.osu.edu/	Newark Earthworks Center	Director		Sponsor	
Higher Ed	OSU	https://senr.osu.edu/	SENr, C-MASC	Professor		Sponsor	
Higher Ed	OSU		STEAM Factory			Sponsor	
Higher Ed	OSU	https://drakeinstitute.osu.edu/	Drake Institute for Teaching and Learning			Table Guide	
N/A	local citizen				y	attended	
N/A	local citizen				y	attended	
Non-profit	Ohio Food Banks	ohiofoodbanks.org	National Service Program Coordinator			y	attended
Non-profit	South Side Family Farms				y	attended	
Non-profit	South Side Family Farms				y	attended	
Non-profit	Bronzeville Growers Market				y	attended	
Non-profit	AIYS			Director		Speaker	
Non-profit	Growing and Growth Collective				y	Sponsor	