



Interfaith Sustainable  
Food Collaborative

# Summer Newsletter

2023

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## Message from the Executive Director

Friends,

Coming off our successful Food, Faith, and Farms Conference in March, and a smaller Regional Faithlands Gathering in May, Interfaith Food has gone through several transitions this Summer. These include: staff changes, program changes, and a change of our fiscal sponsor.

First, I want to share the very sad news that Paula Downing passed away 8/7. Paula worked part-time on the staff of Interfaith Food from June 2022 through June 2023, and served as a volunteer at our annual conference for several years before that. She believed deeply in our mission and appreciated the diversity of religious and racial groups that are part of our network. Paula was someone I had the pleasure of knowing for over 20 years, first as the manager of the Sebastopol Farmers Market and then through other roles. Paula was a visionary farmers market manager. She dedicated dollars from a small market budget to support low-income seniors getting healthy produce long before government grant funds were available to do this. During the last year at Interfaith Food she focused on running the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program working with over 20 partners in Sonoma, Marin, and Alameda counties. She elevated our work through her 'get it done' no fooling around attitude; her deep commitment to helping low-income individuals get the healthiest food; and her funny comments and stories.

From June, 2022 to May, 2023 we distributed over \$105,000 in cash scrip to low-income seniors in Sonoma, Marin, and Alameda County. This was our biggest year since starting the program in 2018. Early in the year we decided to let go of the Senior Farmers Market Bonus Bucks program to focus more on advocacy, Faith community land access, and other programs. We have now transferred the Marin Senior Bonus Bucks work to a strong organization Extra Food, and are glad to see Petaluma Bounty taking over the programming in Sonoma County.

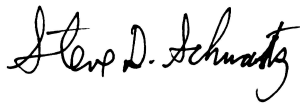
We have had additional staff transitions. I want to express my gratitude to Keegan Horton who worked on advocacy, outreach and conference organizing through the Winter and Spring. I am excited to welcome Jocelyn Mobley to the team. (see her bio below).

The other important transition is the behind the scenes transition of our fiscal sponsorship from Multiplier to (Inquiring Systems Inc.). Special thanks to Carolyn, Kristin, Tenzin and all our friends at Multiplier who have added to our success over the years.

The transitions with our programming and administration are leading to a bright future for Interfaith Food, but they also create challenges. In 2023 while transitioning fiscal sponsors we could not pursue grant funding as we normally would have. We are fundraising now. This means that individual donations or a donation from your congregation is especially impactful in September and October.

Thank you,

Steve Schwartz



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## Farm Bill Is Moving Quickly! Urge Congress to Support \$'s for Land Access

In June, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced \$300 million in grant awards for the Increasing Land, Capital, and Market Access program, which aims to create more equitable land access for minority farmers. While the one-time funding has been committed, advocates seek to continue to support community farm land access initiatives with \$100 million a year through the coming Farm Bill. We ask that your faith-based group engage to show congress we believe equitable land access is of top priority.

This is one of several initiatives Interfaith Food will support this year as we build on our history of Farm Bill advocacy by activating faith-based clergy and lay leaders to contact Congress. The next Farm Bill will define food and agriculture programs, funding levels and policies for the next 5 years. It will authorize over \$1 trillion in government spending. You can join this campaign over the coming months in a variety of ways including: participating in a meeting with a Congressional office locally; hosting a farm bill forum for your congregation; or flying to Washington, D.C. to lobby. To join this work or learn more, please reach out to Jocelyn at [jocelyn@interfaithfood.org](mailto:jocelyn@interfaithfood.org) for more information.

Here is a link to an article highlighting the opportunities for food system change in the 2023 Farm Bill.

<https://bit.ly/3PdTiX4>

To show support for more equity in the food system this week sign on to the letter of support from partner group

the National Young Farmers Coalition.

<https://youngfarmers.quorum.us/campaign/48690/>



## Conferences Empower Faith Leaders to Grow the Local Food System



Thank you to all who participated in Interfaith Food's conferences earlier in the year! The Faith, Food, and Farms Conference in March brought together 139 food justice and sustainability leaders representing 40+ religious communities. For the first time we gathered in Oakland at the beautiful Preservation Park. The conference included two separate and popular tours: 1. Farms and Garden; and 2. Commercial Kitchens.

The conference included plenary speakers, networking opportunities, and seven sessions addressing produce marketing, access, production, and processing.

Most of the participants came from the North Bay and East Bay, however, attendees came from other areas of California as well as Washington, New York, North Carolina, and Washington D.C.

The conference included tours of farms and gardens at 2 different faith-community sites, and a church and a Buddhist Temple utilizing their respective commercial kitchens for entrepreneurial and community food projects. Speakers included farmers growing food on lands owned by religious institutions, and policy advocates.

A new and popular session addressed the crisis in farmworker housing and introduced the faith-community owned lands to be part of the solution. Speakers included: a developer focusing on affordable housing at church sites, and



community leaders from Half Moon Bay where the shooting deaths of several farmworkers in January drew attention to the farmworker housing crisis.

The most common thing attendees liked about the conference was getting a chance to meet a diverse set of people and participating in a variety of topics. Popular sessions included: A full 90% of attendees agreed or 'strongly agreed' that they learned about a project for their congregation they had not considered before.

The "Farming Opportunities on Faith Community Owned Lands" mini-conference was held May 1st through 3rd. This smaller, more intensive conference focused on specific opportunities and challenges for specialty crop production at faith-based sites. Attendees included farmers, gardeners, and non-profit farmer resource providers from 8 California counties, as well as experts on the topic working on projects in 7 states, and Washington, D.C.



### Workshops Highlight Resources for Landowners Seeking Partnership with Farmers

On August 2, 2023, California FarmLink held a "Land Access in California: Making Your Land Part of the Solution". Interfaith Food helped promote the webinar to faith community landowners that had indicated interest in leasing land to farmers. This webinar stressed the importance of developing the next generation of farmers because 50 percent of agricultural land is projected to change ownership in the next 10 years. Two government programs highlighted in the are designed to provide equity in access to financing and land while protecting farmland. FarmLink staff described their easy-to-use portal that connects landseekers with landowners. Both landowners and land seekers can register for the Land Access portal here: (<https://www.californiafarmlink.org/services/land-access>).

Mary Chambers, an agricultural specialist with the Sonoma County Agriculture and Open Space District spoke about the current land access equity crisis and gave tips on how to create an inclusive and easy to understand Requests for Proposals (RFPs). They stressed the need for creating more diversity among farmers as BIPOC landownership has disproportionately decreased in the last 100 years. Links to additional trainings were provided for those who want to learn more about institutional racism in the food system. The key take-away was don't let your RFP process be a barrier to working with great farmers. *If your congregation or faith-based organization would like help with planning or technical assistance to make land available to a farmer or gardener please contact the Interfaith Food office.*

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## Remembering Paula Downing

Paula Downing was 82 and died earlier this month in her Sebastopol home, overlooking the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

Paula attended our first conference in 2013 and volunteered several times to advance Interfaith Food's work. In Summer 2022 she began working on the staff team to lead implementation of the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program Bonus Bucks program. This included coordinating with over 20 partner groups. Partners were saddened to hear of Paula's passing, and our staff received several comments about her warm hugs, and sense of humor which she didn't hesitate to bring to work! Monina Hamilton, shared "I loved Paula's generous spirit and her down-to-earth approach to life's challenges."

Paula transformed Sonoma County farmers markets," wrote Michelle Anna Jordan in the Santa Rosa Press Democrat. "Sonoma County lost a fierce and vibrant woman ... an unapologetic defender of and advocate for small farmers in our beautiful agricultural community. Every generation of market gardeners henceforth will be better off for the profound impact she had on building a vibrant market community," Jill Adams who had a small farm in Santa Rosa for several years wrote.



## Paula Downing Obituary (by Her Sister Barbara Iannoli)

10/15/41 - 8/7/23

Paula was at her happiest running an apple press, fussing around in her yard, advocating for our environment, our farmers, clean air and water, trees, teenagers, knitting, and collecting articles about whatever you might need. Her greatest loves were her four daughters, Susan Zemanek, Sybil Ajay Sanford, Chloe Downing and Elizabeth Corsini. And her wild and wacky grandchildren, Alex and Liam Beard, Lucy and Emma Corsini. She died in her own home, in her own bed, on her own terms, with her daughters, Sybil and Elizabeth and her sister Barbara Iannoli right by her side.

Anyone who met Paula knew she was a force of nature. She managed the Sebastopol and Santa Rosa Original Farmer's Market for over twenty-five years and guided each into the robust markets they are today. She was the historian and a dedicated member of Slow Food Russian River.

Paula Iannoli Downing was born and raised in Rhode Island, then landed into a vibrant communal life in the Haight Ashbury and then to her communal community in Oregon. In Oregon, she and Art Downing formed an organization called Headwaters, laboring to save critical headwaters in Southern Oregon and around the state, to fight the use of deadly DDT and to successfully save acres of old growth trees on Roundtop.

Finally, she arrived in Sebastopol. She was forever a champion for the environment, clean local food, as well as a lifelong peace activist. She sometimes drove us bananas, but she carried on following her heart and so what could a person do? Thank her and bless her. A life well lived. She leaves behind her children and grandchildren, her sister Barbara, her niece Hallie Iannoli, Ondine and Dasia, and nephew Ivan Iannoli, Thea, Maceo and Frankie and Marghi, and her children Cristiana and Alessandra. Close family guys, Blake Sanford, Joe Corsini, Jonathan Beard and Art Downing. She also leaves an array of lovely and loyal friends who were party to all her daily shenanigans. We are deeply grateful for our time with her. There will be a memorial to celebrate her life at a later date.

Link to Press Democrat article on Paula:

<https://www.pressdemocrat.com/article/lifestyle/remembering-paula-downing-a-force-for-farmers-markets/>

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## New Funding Available to Support Large Scale Faith-based Gardens and Funds

Last week the California Department of Food and Agriculture released a Request for Proposals for a new grant program Interfaith Food has been anticipating applying for. We are developing a proposal that will allow significant sub-awards to a small number of partner groups. These will sub-awards will range from approximately \$5,000-\$50,000. Sub-awards would allow for: a. development of a garden or community farm; or b. preparing to lease faith-community owned land to a local farmer. We also anticipate being able to provide funds to partners developing smaller garden projects if awarded the grant. *If your faith group would like to be part of our proposal, please contact Steve or Jocelyn at the Interfaith Food office within the next month.*

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## Welcome Jocelyn!



As the new Program Associate, Jocelyn Mobley is excited to be involved with the newsletter, social media, and developing grants at Interfaith Food. She recently earned her Master of Public Health degree from UC Davis. “My research and past experiences working in community nutrition and urban agriculture grew my dedication and enthusiasm for food equity,” says Jocelyn. She interned with Butte County CalFresh Healthy Living as a community nutrition education intern and completed her graduate practicum with the Center for Land-Based Learning where she documented their pilot Community Food Ambassador program and proposed data-informed changes. In her free time she enjoys gardening and cooking.

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### Upcoming Events:

Many people in our network just learned about the USDA Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships this year. We were happy to welcome Alex Cordova to speak at our March conference and the Center’s Director, Samantha Joseph, to present at the May Regional Faithlands Gathering. The Center is hosting two events over the coming weeks. ***Travel scholarships may be available.*** To learn more contact Interfaith Food or visit the center’s web-site.

The Farm Stress and Suicide Prevention Briefing will be held in Washington D.C. from 9/19-9/21. Attendees will receive a toolkit of practices and prevention techniques to reduce farm stress and suicide.

The USDA Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships and Tri-Faith Initiative are partnering to host a 3-day summit October 17th-19th to focus on how to counteract and support religious groups who face

antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of religious discrimination. This summit will be held in Omaha, Nebraska.

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