



Interfaith Sustainable
Food Collaborative

Faith, Food and Farms Conference 2025 Plenary and Workshop Descriptions

Wednesday, June 11th, 2025

Opening Plenary

4:00 pm - 4:50 pm

We'll introduce our conference theme with speakers describing ways that faith communities support food access during disasters. Hear about U.S. Department of Agriculture programs including Disaster-CalFresh and resources available to help faith groups grow their capacity to serve when the need is highest. Hear about Pope Francis' Legacy in terms of sustainability, food systems and climate change as articulated in the Encyclical Laudato Si. We will touch on religious perspectives on the relationship between sustainability, justice, food and agriculture. Get an update on regional efforts to prepare for future disasters by inventorying resources of diverse faith communities to facilitate connections with the secular community addressing food access and emergency shelter during disasters.

Speakers Include: Michael Downs, Lifelab at Bishop O'Dowd Highschool; Raj Appalaraju, Insight International Center; Steve Schwartz, Interfaith Sustainable Food Collaborative

World Cafe- Small Group Discussions

4:50 - 5:20 pm

Breakout Session (Simultaneous Workshops)

5:30 pm - 6:20 pm

1. Congregational Kitchens - Your Community Resource During a Disaster and Beyond

Congregational kitchens are an important asset held by faith groups large and small. While some are used to cook for the community several days a week, others are used as 'serving kitchens'. Several thousand faith-based groups have licensed commercial kitchens in the Bay Area that are not being used more than a few hours a week. Some of these kitchens have been utilized during floods, fires and the COVID Pandemic. You'll learn about how the Salvation Army works with congregations to step up in disasters to provide food to people in need. Learn about a local catering company's experiences with renting kitchen space from churches in Berkeley and Oakland. Get ideas about how to ensure your kitchen can be a community resource during a disaster such as a fire, flood, earthquake, or power outage. Natural disasters are increasingly frequent as a result of climate change. Congregational sites are crucial resources to help local residents and first responders access food in the wake of a disaster. Commercial kitchens, cold storage, and lists of organized volunteers are all key assets that your congregation can make available to the community. (*Main Event Space*)

Speakers: Dennis Caliyo, Salvation Army; Peter Callis, the Table Catering



2. Faithlands – Growing Vacant Lots into Farms, Farmworker Housing and More

For decades religious organizations have been operating community gardens and farms on their properties, and even leasing large parcels to farmers and ranchers. Since 2017 Interfaith Food has been central to the work of faith groups and farmer advocacy organizations that are looking to coordinate this work and realize the opportunity to serve beginning and immigrant farmers and others with limited access to land to grow food. With the passing of California Senate Bill 4 last Fall, decision-makers for religious community owned properties are increasingly looking at affordable housing properties on their vacant or underutilized land. Hear about the demand for farmland access, and the opportunity to combine a religious mission with producing of food to grow community. (Redwood Conference Room)

Speakers: Bryce Galvan, North Valley Catholic Social Services; Isaac Speath, Canticle Farms, Franciscan Sisters of Allegheny Circle, Sister Judy Carle, Sisters of Mercy

3. Food Waste Reduction - Grocery Rescue, Food Storage, and Gleaning

Gleaning is a tradition that goes back to the old Testament. Learn how modern gleaners work with groups of volunteers to harvest fruit that is not being picked by others, and made available by farmers. The session will also look at food recovery in terms of accessing prepared meals that would go to waste for individuals in need. While feeding neighbors, food waste reduction also serves to reduce climate change. Here about triumphs and challenges of a staff person led the effort to make the most of food scraps at a camp/retreat center supporting the on-site farm animals and creating compost used on site. (Sequoia Conference Room)

Speakers: Mahtab Nikoo, MTO School of Sufism; Mark Kokoletsos, Second Harvest Food Bank; Maddie Kwalasser, Congregation Tsar Zahar and formerly Brandeis-Bardin Institute

Closing Plenary

6:30 pm - 7:30 pm

Faith-based advocates have shaped the outcomes of a range of social and economic policies throughout U.S. history. Learn about how congregations can impact grassroots and national campaigns to influence public policy in 2025, including the “Food For All Campaign” for state funded nutrition assistance. Learn about how faith community advocates can help direct the \$1.4 trillion federal Farm Bill to support food justice and sustainability initiatives. Look into the crystal ball to see key policies we'll be asking faith-based advocates to work on in the coming months. A brief question and answer session will follow. Dinner will be served at start of plenary.

Speakers: Jackie Mendelson, Nourish California; Ambrose Carrol Jr., Bishop O'Dowd High School and Pilgrimage of Hope; Senator Josh Becker (Invited)

Note: Plenary sessions, World Cafe and other sessions are in the Main Event space unless otherwise stated.