



AIM Statement on Racial Equity

Racism is a food and environmental justice issue. For centuries, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) have been forced to bear racial injustices and environmental racism related to the distribution of wealth, land, access to capital, and access to healthy food. “Beginning with the takeover of Indigenous lands in the 1490s and the annexation of Mexican-owned Southwest land in the 1840s, farmers of color have experienced unprecedented land loss.”¹ Black farmers, in particular, have had the largest documented loss of land from the period of slavery through the era of Reconstruction and Jim Crow Laws even as their forced and coerced labor has built unprecedented wealth for the United States. “Discrimination and violence against Black farmers has led to their decline from 14 percent of all growers in 1920 to less than 2 percent today, with a corresponding loss of over 14 million acres of land.”².

The Agricultural Institute of Marin (AIM) acknowledges that our food and farming system is built and maintained on a foundation of historical and current oppression and systemic racism toward Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). We also acknowledge that race intersects with other marginalized identities, such as gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, physical ability, class, and age, with significantly greater impacts on those that hold more than one of these identities.

In California, more than three million seasonal and migrant farmworkers grow and harvest the food we eat. Over 85 percent of farmworkers are immigrants, the majority from Mexico and Latin American countries. A significant portion of farmworkers are undocumented putting them at serious economic, health, and legal challenges while large multi-national corporations benefit from their labor. Generations of immigrant and farmers of color--particularly Asian Americans--founded California's modern agricultural system, while suffering systemic injustices such as the Chinese Alien Laws and Japanese Internment, which has significantly hampered their ability to be successful and sustain farm businesses in California.

One of the greatest injustices to farmworkers is food access. Despite harvesting foods that are sold to others, farmworkers are often unable to afford a healthy, nutritious diet, and rely on the charitable food system for food. Moreover, inequitable access to healthy food is a major contributor to the disproportionately high rates of diet related disease found in populations of Indigenous, African Americans, Latinos, Asians and Pacific Islanders.

A ‘Food Sovereignty’ movement is at the heart of Racial Equity. Indigenous peoples are reclaiming power over the foods they produce, distribute, and consume rather than being subjected to the global influences from multinational corporations that produce cheap, ultra-processed foods. This is happening right here in California among many of the Federally

¹ PolicyLink, Equitable Food Systems Resource Guide

² Leah Penniman, farmer and author of *Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm’s Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land*.



recognized Native American tribes and rancherias that are now growing and harvesting their own foods. It is also important to note that many of our current best practices in food, farming, fishing, and land stewardship were originated by Indigenous peoples and Black farmers. For instance, regenerative agricultural practices were first championed by George Washington Carver, an African American who was born into slavery and later became an agricultural scientist at Tuskegee University. Washington-Carver pioneered crop rotation strategies and moved away from using chemical pesticides. Yet, the credit for these ecological strategies often go to white, mainstream farmers.

The Farmer Equity Act of 2017³ was a first step to begin influencing long standing change in California. The Act requires the Department of Food and Agriculture to include farmers and ranchers classified as socially disadvantaged in the application of agriculture laws, regulations, codes, and programs. Those classified as “socially disadvantaged” include people of racial, ethnic, or gender groups that have historically been on the receiving end of prejudice. These groups include Native Americans, African Americans, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and women.

A Vision for the Future

Racial equity is the fair treatment of people of all races. We will achieve racial equity in the food and farming system when systemic racism does not exist in the production, processing, distribution, and consumption of good food. Racial equity requires that we prioritize the allocation of resources, decision making and power to those who have been most impacted by the injustice of our current food and farming system, specifically BIPOC producers-and when every person, regardless of race, has what they need to thrive.

We see an equitable food system as one path in addressing systemic barriers for people to have access to healthy foods with the shortest supply chain possible. We seek to address these systemic issues by challenging systems of White Supremacy and prioritizing upstream systems shifts that benefit those most directly impacted by inequity. This includes solutions that promote overall health and wellbeing through the stewardship of thriving land-use practices, culturally relevant community education and skills development, and greater ownership within the regional foodscape

We see a future where BIPOC producers are no longer marginalized, considered unimportant, or are oftentimes non-existent at farmers markets. We must ensure farmers markets and food programs provide a culturally relevant platform for BIPOC producers, and we must work to develop and open new opportunities whenever possible so BIPOC farmers and business owners can continue to build wealth and capital.

Given our location in Marin County, a predominantly white and affluent community, we understand that we are part of a system that gives us unearned status and privilege. As an

³ https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB1348



organization, we have a responsibility to use that privilege to connect with and support local efforts led by people of color here in the Bay Area.

We propose a long-term path towards racial equity. We first look inward as an organization and create a space for interrogation, open dialogues, and continuous feedback loops. The changes we make within AIM can then have a broad impact in how we cultivate and grow our external network of producers, partners, and shoppers across California.

Path Towards Racial Equity at AIM

As an organization, we must collectively do the following:

- Learn and publicly acknowledge how racism impacts our work and publicly share how we can advance racial equity in our food and farming system.
- Commit to long-term approaches to diversity, equity, and inclusiveness in all aspects of our internal work from policy-making, human resources, strategic planning, market operations, and program planning.
- Consider the diverse needs of the producers and communities we serve and tailor our programs and policies in a culturally relevant way.
- Ensure that our Board and Staff represent the communities we serve and show commitment to racial equity.
- Schedule time to discuss racial equity as an organization by hosting honest conversations in small groups, and larger workshops.
- Incorporate the voices of communities into our work by listening to and applying their feedback.

Specific Actions

Below are specific goals for AIM to achieve; on an annual basis, the Board of Directors and AIM staff will identify annual plans, tactics, and metrics in accordance with the implementation of our Strategic Plan.

1. The **CEO** must demonstrate a commitment to inclusiveness by committing time, money, and active participation in anti-racist/anti-oppression training for staff, acknowledging privilege and power differentials, seeking out feedback and integrating it into operations and partnerships, creating a culture where staff feel welcomed and appreciated for their individual identities, and engaging in a transparent decision-making practice.



In addition, the CEO must listen and, as appropriate, advocate for policy and systems changes that will generate capital and resources for BIPOC producers. To reduce bias within our farmers markets applications process, the CEO must develop a set of objective standards for who we admit to markets that can endure over time, and track participation over time to ensure standards are being met.

2. The **Board of Directors** must recruit, train, and mentor new Board members who reflect the composition of producers at AIM's farmers markets and the communities AIM serves. As the governing body of AIM and the Farmers Markets, the Board must continuously review and update AIM's Rules and Regulations, so they do not create structural barriers for BIPOC producers to join or participate in AIM's markets. As a collective, the Board must recognize that BIPOC board members are valuable to the organization and continue to diversify Board membership. All Board members must be given an equitable opportunity to apply for leadership and officer roles through training and skills development in non-profit governance.

3. **AIM Senior Management** must recruit and retain BIPOC staff by creating consistent personnel and organizational practices to connect with communities of color; create interview panels with diverse representation to hire staff, interns, and volunteers of diverse backgrounds; and normalize the performance review, quarterly goal-setting, and provide professional development practices create an equitable playing field. Senior Managers must assure that BIPOC staff receive training opportunities (structured or on-the-job) to help them succeed within the organization. Organization-wide racial equity trainings and discussions can help to assure we are learning from each other and other cultures.

4. **AIM Market Managers** must make an intentional effort to recruit and create market space for BIPOC farmers, food purveyors, and artisans and other diverse groups based on gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, physical ability, class, and age into AIM's markets. We cannot wait for applicants to approach us: we must be proactive and create partnerships with BIPOC-led organizations to identify potential new farmers, food makers, and artisans. Market managers must provide technical assistance to help support BIPOC producers' retention at the markets.

Market applications should be available in multiple languages and managers should provide support in helping others to complete their applications, especially among producers who are immigrants or have low literacy.

Markets must be welcoming to producers and shoppers of all backgrounds, abilities, and income levels. Information about CalFresh/EBT, Market Match, and the WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Programs should be available on-site and at individual producers' stalls. Market staff and volunteers should treat all producers and shoppers with dignity and respect, regardless of their methods of payment. Managers must also consider the



entertainment, cultural enrichment, and overall market ambiance so that it is inclusive to all and respectful to the communities in which the market is located.

Pre-admissions farm audits must acknowledge the inherent power differential between AIM and applicants while recognizing that farming practices vary across producers and cultures. Audits should also consider the treatment of farmworkers to ensure fair treatment and safe working conditions as one factor in admitting producers to join AIM.

5. AIM Program Managers must plan, develop, and deliver programming through Diggin' Education, the Rollin' Root, Market Match/EBT, the Bounty Box, and Farmers Market Promotion Program, that is relevant to BIPOC communities, designed with an awareness of the cultural and linguistic needs of program participants.

Program staff must seek out and partner with BIPOC-led public and private organizations to gather meaningful feedback on program design and amplify program reach in an authentic way to empower BIPOC communities to play an active role in co-creating curricula and program strategies.

6. Marketing and Communications staff must demonstrate listening to and learning from BIPOC communities so that we can communicate effectively about opportunities through AIM. Communications materials and messaging must avoid stereotypes and racist language, and ensure representation of BIPOC market participants and communities in program imagery and testimonials. Marketing and outreach materials and curricula should be multicultural and multilingual as needed, and give credit to BIPOC content makers.

7. Development/Fundraising staff must consider the wealth and giving potential of a diverse donor pool across Northern California while applying for grants and sponsorships from foundations, corporations, and institutions that mirror AIM's values. Development staff must create standards for how we use people's stories respectfully in our fundraising materials.

Annually, as a part of an incubator model, AIM will also fundraise for "Racial Equity Funding" to cover a portion of stall fees and provide mentorship to a selected group of BIPOC producers through a competitive process to position them for success at AIM's markets.

8. Evaluation and Tracking: Annually, we will report characteristics of our Board, staff, volunteers, market participants, and program participants with data on race, ethnicity, gender, and other demographics, when available to ensure both internally and externally we are increasing representation of BIPOC individuals across key performance measures, as specified in our Strategic Plan.