

# FALL PROGRAM

This Fall, youth invested a great deal into this next layer of leadership, healing, and growth. This is the season where youth harvest all they have put into the land, their food system and each other.

We reintroduced our staple projects, including our prescriptive farm stand which focused on distributing healthy food to youth patients of Salud Para La Gente. Youth also managed the abundant yield of the farm, led the creation of the Family CSAs, and ran our flower and pie operations.

New this season, youth began joining staff in sourcing ingredients for meals, developing their own new recipes, and helping put together next year's crop plan. Our Farm and Culinary curriculum underwent a total revamp with a deeper focus on cultural relevance, biodiversity, and food justice.

## YOUTH COVID-19 COMMUNICATION PROJECT:

Spearheaded by FoodWhat youth, Lupita, she produced weekly videos with the most updated information about the pandemic and vaccination which were then shared by the school districts with students across the County. Lupita saw her weekly videos as a critical opportunity for youth to have direct access to trusted information delivered by a youth, for youth, that can then support them and their families. Lupita received an award from PVPSA for her leadership in promoting public health during the pandemic



**78%** of youth shared that they felt they had the power and ability to make positive changes in their lives.

**89%** of youth shared that they had been eating more healthy, organic food outside of FoodWhat this Fall than they normally did.

**100%** of youth shared they learned how to show up consistently for a job.

**8,000** lbs of fresh, healthy food was distributed to youth and their families.

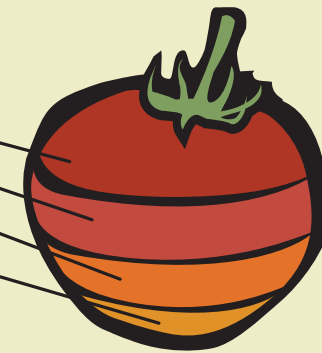
# FINANCIAL REPORT

## INCOME - \$1,174,874



- Foundation Grants **40%**
- Donor-Advised Grants **25%**
- Corporate Grants & Donations **13%**
- Government Grants **12%**
- Individual Donations **10%**

## EXPENSES - \$830,701



- Program - **46%**
- Fundraising - **21%**
- Youth Salaries & Stipends - **18%**
- Administration - **15%**

For 2022, FoodWhat will be undergoing a significant expansion in staffing. In order to support this growth, we secured additional funds this year in the form of multi-year grants.

# OUR MISSION

"Food, What?!" is a youth empowerment and food justice organization. At FoodWhat, youth engage in relationships with land, food and each other in ways that are grounded in love and rooted in justice. We provide meaningful space where youth define and cultivate their empowerment, liberation and well-being.

**THANK YOU** for all of the ways you have met this moment by supporting the young people at the heart of FoodWhat.

## CONTACT US

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"The FoodWhat Farm is really peaceful. That's most important. Especially for the conversations we have together. And coming to the farm each week calms me down. There are no distractions here. I can hear the birds chirping. I have no need to panic here."

# A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Dear Friends,

Our story of 2021 is one of taking the lessons learned from last year and integrating them into this year's programming to meet the needs of youth and families in this time.

At the end of last year's program, we asked the young people in the program how we could best serve youth going into this year. What is most critical? What can FoodWhat do in this time of such great economic instability and mental health crisis?

There were three answers almost universally shared.

1. Youth need to be paid.
2. Youth need to be outdoors.
3. Youth need to meet other young people from outside their normal social circles.

Interestingly, what they were asking of FoodWhat is what we've been doing now for 15 years, and then we stepped it up even more in response.

It feels like a very significant accomplishment to share that this year out of \$830,000 in expenses, \$150,000 went directly into youth pockets supporting them and their families. That's roughly 1 of every 5 dollars that came into FoodWhat this year from our outstanding and responsive community of partners and supporters, that became a critical tool for economic security.

As for being outdoors, when we found out in late February that we weren't able to access our farm site at UCSC due to the campus closure, we leaned into our strong collaboration with Farm Discovery at Live Earth Farm and asked if we could create a new farm space to run our programming there. They generously and expediently found us a half acre piece of prime land that had previously been for fruit trees that had recently been taken out. (Little fun farm fact for a minute--planting row crops on land that was just in organic fruit trees is a nutrient gold mine!) So David, our Farm and Culinary Manager, made magic and in just a few tight weeks created an outstanding new farm location to run 2021 programming. Our Program Team built out an outdoor kitchen and CSA post-harvest handling site and we continued to use the redwood deck overlooking the Pajaro Valley hills for our workshop space. We were fully in business by March 1st to meet youth's second request of being outdoors and in person.

And while there were great obstacles to overcome in terms of Covid-19, we met each one and ran a safe, inspiring, and deeply healing year of programs on the land. Young people got out from behind their screens, got off social media, got out of their homes or rooms, and met other young people. We did what FoodWhat does, and there was great joy in being together. We had our hands in the soil, we built community through growing, cooking, and eating nourishing food, and through this loving, safe space, we tackled mental health. Sometimes that effort came from a workshop on cultural healing remedies passed on from generation to generation in youth families, sometimes it was a circle check in as a group or a long walk on the farm with a staff person ready to listen, and sometimes it was just from being in such a peaceful place. One youth shared with me that "When I'm having a bad day, I could take a deep breath and know I will feel better." Another shared that coming to the farm supported her growth because "the farm is out of town so I'm leaving where everything is at and I don't have to worry about my safety. It's peaceful and quiet here."

This year, FoodWhat youth were getting their basic needs met while earning their wage, guiding their own healing, and gaining skills and knowledge to release their power into the world.

If you're reading this, you are likely someone who played a role in the way FoodWhat was able to meet this moment again to be there for youth. For that we are incredibly grateful and honor you for your contribution.

With love,

*Doron Comerchero*

Doron Comerchero

# SPRING PROGRAM

## 29\* YOUTH COMPLETED THE SPRING JOB TRAINING PROGRAM.

\*Due to COVID-19 restrictions, FoodWhat was unable to serve our usual amount of youth.

**FoodWhat has never had a Spring like this one. In 2020, we moved our entire program online. This Spring, a year later, the FoodWhat Crew stepped foot back onto the farm. In itself, this feels like a triumph. After a year of uncertainty and struggle, the healing, security, and joy the farm brings to young people shone bright. Now back in person, youth were quick to connect to the land, the food, and each other in vivid, new ways.**

**ALUMNI PROGRAM.** Unlike previous years, this Spring we worked with an alumni cohort of youth in addition to our usual cohort of first-year youth. The new youth engaged in our standard Spring Internship. Our alumni engaged in a brand new program. Both focused on farming, culinary arts, and maintaining community to combat isolation.

**NEW FARM PLOT.** Due to land access issues, FoodWhat established a new area of farmland from our partners at Farm Discovery at Live Earth Farm. Settling into the new land included laying a new irrigation system, setting up a new CSA packing area, and putting together a new kitchen. This new land has resulted in high yields and deeper partnership in the Watsonville area.

**NUTRITIOUS FOOD ACCESS.** We expanded our Family CSAs and Meal Kits to begin in Spring. That means, in 2021, youth received nourishing food at home for the entire program year.

**JOB AND WAGES.** In previous years, our Spring program was an internship that focused on job training. In 2021, we advanced our model to deepen job training and also provide a more sustainable hourly wage to youth during the economic downturn.

**HEALING AND MENTAL HEALTH.** Of course, this past year was challenging for many FoodWhat youth. In an effort to meet their needs, we adapted our program to include more healing content, like our "Food as Medicine" workshop, our mental health coping strategy origami project, and our healing herbal tea making session.

**COOK AND GROW AT HOME.** COVID-19 adaptations included "Grow Your Own" and "Cook at Home." Through Grow Your Own, youth received buckets and plant starts that they used to grow produce in their homes. Cook at Home invited youth to transform their Family CSAs and Meal Kits into healthy meals from the comfort of their home, sometimes with their families.

- **93% of youth shared their mental health increased specifically because of being outside on the farm.**
- **96% of youth shared their mental health increased specifically because of being with their peers.**



**"I am way more confident in myself. I speak up and volunteer to do more things. I have opened up way more around people and have been able to work through some things as well."**  
- FoodWhat Youth

**"I was afraid to make any small mistake but now I know not to be shy about asking for help. I feel ready to use my voice."**  
- FoodWhat Youth

# SUMMER PROGRAM

## 25 YOUTH SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED THE SUMMER JOB PROGRAM.

**The Summer is a powerful season here at FoodWhat. Leaning into the lessons of the Spring, the Summer provides an opportunity for youth to focus on meaningful work on the land, build health through food, and cultivate their own empowerment.**

In the Summer, youth continued tending the farm, cooking and sharing meals, and engaging in workshops that focused on subjects from financial literacy to healthy relationships. Youth broke a record by harvesting approximately 4,000 lbs of produce to take home in their Family CSA. This was about 1,500 lbs more than previous years. They also stewarded community and school gardens.

With the healthy food they helped grow, youth continued creating nourishing meals both on the farm and within their households. During our on-site meal-making, youth shared it was the first time they'd eaten a communal meal since before the pandemic. They also continued using their Family CSAs and Meal Kits to make at-home meals through their "Cook at Home" sessions. New recipes made their way through the Summer, including "colifletes" or cauliflower steaks.

FoodWhat also created a new Program Coordinator position which was filled by an alumni. This role focused on assisting program implementation and added another layer of depth to the way youth culture is centered at our organization.



## THE YOUTH RESILIENCE FUND:

We saw another successful year of the Youth Resilience Fund, a crisis cash assistance program that distributed \$1,000 to each FoodWhat family. This direct support played a stabilizing role in the lives of FoodWhat youth who continue to report economic instability as a result of COVID-19. Hear it straight from the youth:

"An immediate family member passed not too long ago. Receiving this check really helped my family and I pay for all the expenses."

"I'm a single parent going to Cabrillo College so getting the check is a big help because it helps me get the stuff that my child needs."

**My biggest accomplishment this Summer was:**

**"...learning to cope with my feelings and not let the negative vibes get to me. I've also worked on my mental health and I was able to cope and handle everything."**

**"...finishing strong along with new friends, getting more job experience and more knowledge about agriculture."**