12 COMMUNITY INSIGHTS FOR

A NORTH CAROLINA THAT " DOES FOOD DIFFERENTLY"

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OVERVIEW

The current state of our agriculture and farming industries confirms that there is a serious, ongoing problem within our food system. The heart of this issue—that power is concentrated in the hands of a few—keeps many people, especially vulnerable and marginalized people, from gaining fair access to food.

We wanted to know what could be learned from people across communities in North Carolina with various lived experiences of the food system. We invited over 300 people from our networks to participate in focus groups and respond from their various identities, and 65 people participated. From August 2020 to February 2021, members of the Food Action Plan project team held conversations with stakeholders from different identity groups to learn from their reflections on the food system, their communities, and society as a whole.

The 2009 Farm to Fork process, led by the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS), taught us to trust the expertise of community members' lived experiences. Stories are data. They are the basics of how we communicate. These human truths help us understand how pieces fit together and clarify what's at stake.

"Maybe stories are just data with a soul."

— BRENÉ BROWN

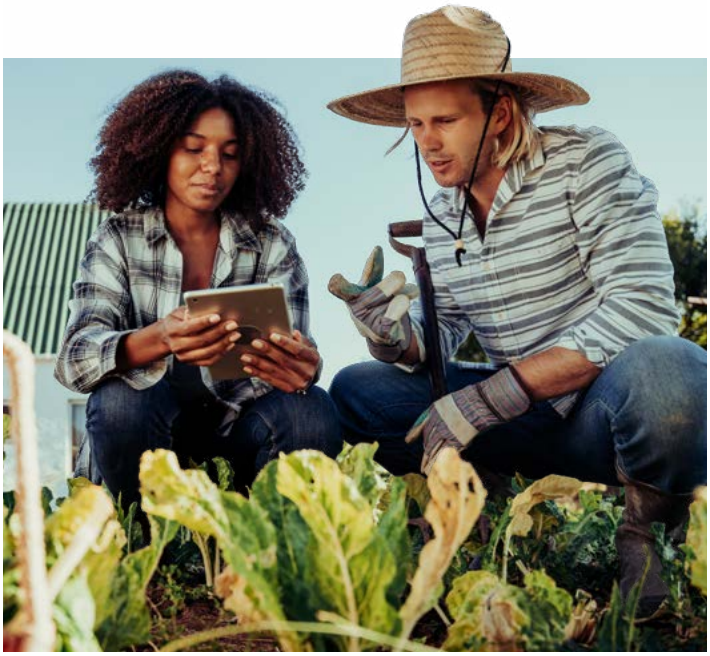
Our twelve leading insights were developed using the information we gathered during each of our identity conversations. Conversation notes and transcripts were analyzed using a blend of qualitative research, human-centered design, and community-based participatory research methods.

The lessons we took away from this work emphasized the desire for a food system that nourishes all people. One that is not driven by profit but by the needs of the community. Change can start with a single conversation and turn into a movement. Now is the time to start finding ways to "do food differently" in North Carolina. We **hope** this report is a springboard for further conversations and action.

WHO WE SPOKE WITH

65 TOTAL PARTICIPANTS

9 IDENTITY CONVERSATIONS



- ➜ **urban communities**
- ➜ **rural communities**
- ➜ **Latino communities**
- ➜ **BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) communities**
- ➜ **white communities**
- ➜ **youth communities**
- ➜ **elder communities**

Participants either shared this identity or, less often, identified as working with or serving that community.

What they discussed

To better understand the needs, interests and concerns of these groups, we asked the following questions:

1. From your perspective, what shifts/innovations/creative/beautiful responses recently [due to the COVID-19 pandemic] have made you feel like "the food system we want is possible?"
2. Given all that has been happening/made clear/highlighted, what has made you say "wow" about the responses and innovations in our food system since COVID?
3. What should we do more of in order to do food differently?

WHAT WE HEARD

01. Space to consider and process emotion is critical in moving forward. (pg 16)

Emotions are an essential part in understanding people's lived experience. They came up often in our conversations, though we never asked about them directly. Similar emotions, including **hope**, **fear**, **pride**, **frustration**, **excitement**, **passion**— were expressed across groups. However, the reasons for these emotions and the ways they were expressed differed.

02. An intersectional approach to food is foundational. (Pg 22)

The connections between food and other aspects of society are undeniable. When we talk about food, we're always talking about more than just food. Communities of color often associate food with heritage/tradition, economic tradeoffs, and historical **pain** related to farming, wealth, and opportunity.

03. Mismatches of available resources in the current system increase existing disparities. (pg 24)

Funding sources, opportunities, and resources across North Carolina are available but are inaccessible for some communities. Rather than reinventing the wheel, we should create equitable distribution processes.

04. Power and gatekeeping tactics that impede access to opportunity for communities of color need to be acknowledged and addressed. (pg 26)

To make marginalized voices heard, we must understand how power is structured in the food system. Some conversations focused on how power can be given to those who have been historically silenced, and how this power must be made available to them. Others focused on building on existing power within communities.

05. Address the need to pay farmers fairly and desire to see food as a right. (pg 28)

Our conversations often focused on the harm and **frustration** caused by prioritizing profit over people. Farmers and agricultural workers need to be paid equitably for their labor. Creating a food system that provides good economic opportunities for farmers and also views access to food as a human right is one of the biggest challenges we face.

06. There is a need for a stronger and shared analysis on charity vs. justice as it relates to food systems change. (pg 30)

What is the difference between charity and justice? Intention. When resources are given without asking what a community needs, it's often seen as charity. Mutual aid responses were discussed as an example of justice-oriented giving. In other words, resources are given out of solidarity, and the community guides their distribution.

07. Small farms are a desired solution but struggle with viability. (pg 32)

Although 2020 brought **excitement** around supporting small farms, there was **fear** that it would be short-lived and unsustainable. In order for small farms to be a viable part of the agricultural system, consumers have to become invested in supporting them as small businesses. Because it's the "right thing to do."

08. Youth voices drive the future and need to be consulted. (pg 34)

Youth brings new **energy** and perspective that the current food system needs. Yet, how do we motivate young people to get involved in agricultural work in school and encourage farming as a viable career path? While there was **tension** between the priorities of youth compared to elders, a commitment to farming was expressed across conversations.

09. Community-generated solutions hold the keys to progress. (pg 36)

Change comes from within communities. Developing community-based solutions requires local leadership and partnerships, as well as existing resources and assets. A larger shift in societal values is also needed to support these solutions.

10. Both big "P" and little "p" policy changes are necessary. (pg 38)

Our communities have **energy**, **passion**, knowledge, experience, and creativity to design the system we need. Legislative, programmatic, and cultural changes are intertwined and necessary. But without community input, the actions of decision makers often do not reflect community needs and realities.

11. Identify and focus on what drives innovation outside of a crisis. (pg 40)

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, rigid policies and a lack of awareness among some and lack of willingness to change things among others led to fewer innovations. Crisis and necessity forced quick action, collaboration, and easy approval to meet needs. Using their creativity and resilience to make up for a lack of institutional resources, rural communities led the way in this innovation.

12. Leverage the current momentum to create a new food system. (pg 42)

Participants expressed a strong desire to leverage the momentum created by the COVID-19 pandemic to "do food differently." They asked for a food system that upholds community values and innovates for a more equitable future.

" ...i have hindsight, insight, and foresight," which all come with aging. with hindsight, insight and foresight, we are likely to be better equipped to navigate currents of change in our lives and in our organizations"

-HUILAN KRENN, WKKF[1]

INTRODUCTION

Food should be a basic human right. But there is an ongoing inequality within our food and agricultural systems that prevents this simple fact from being a reality. Access to food is not equal, and many times, the people who provide food for the greater community are most affected by this imbalance.

The systems we seek to change were poorly and harmfully designed. The current system prioritizes maintaining power for those who already have it. Our work to create a more just food system requires us to take our shared history into account. Through this, we can examine and correct the imbalance of power, resources, and opportunity that benefits some and oppresses so many of us.

Southern civil rights activist and leader Ruby Sales suggests there is a need for what she calls, "complete sight. Hindsight, insight and foresight." These three perspectives allow us to acknowledge our past, apply any lessons we learn to our present, and inform our collective future.

With the past, present, and future in mind, we met with leaders and community members who could offer insights into these inequities. Our goal was to bring those who have been most impacted by the failures of our current food system to the front of the conversation. These conversations were the first steps in developing our theory of how change happens that became the guide for our systems change work (defined below) via the North Carolina Food Action Plan project.

1 https://www.gih.org/publication/evaluation-for-hindsight-insight-and-foresight-to-navigate-chanfge/

HIND•SIGHT

/ˈhīn(d)ˌsīt/

"the ability to look back at a situation or an event and have a clearer understanding of it and how things could have been better or different."

Our planning team, which included representatives from Community Food Strategies, Food Insight Group (FIG) and Fountainworks organized a kickoff event for the NC Food Action Plan project in November 2019. This was the start of a process that would deeply connect us over the next three years. One that would start us on the path to capture, track, and analyze systems change in order to "do food differently."

Little did we know, our process would come to a screeching halt only a few months later with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This, plus the senseless murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor by the hands of police, left us angered and shaken.

Our plan for this work in 2020 had to shift significantly. We needed to align with the new, more vulnerable realities our communities were facing. The solution? Transitioning from in-person conversations to virtual meetings and breakout rooms. This change allowed us to capture the perspectives and experiences of real-time food systems change through a process called **Identity Conversations**.

Although COVID shifted our methods, it did not keep us from our vision. The goal of identifying and learning from those most impacted by food system inequalities became more crucial than ever. In the end, COVID offered us another lens through which we could view the disparities that already exist in our food system. We found that many of the communities suffering most from COVID were those already harmed by this imbalance. The collective vulnerability of the experience also became a way for us to build shared understanding and a deeper sense of purpose.

History has provided us a roadmap for how to navigate past injustices. For this process, that meant exploring the needs, interests and concerns of the people who are historically undervalued, underserved, and underrepresented. These are the people who are often building solutions but rarely involved in the development of mainstream policy-driven solutions. As well as involving individuals and groups who can be—and should be—held accountable for making those shifts happen at the institutional and organizational levels.

We believe that to address the root causes of ongoing disparity within our food and agricultural systems, we must focus on systems change. Our team views listening to and working with the people most impacted in order to identify problems, issues, and barriers at their root as a key step in going about systems change. In turn, this helps to shift power structures that cause these imbalances in a long-term, sustainable way.

Centering our focus on BIPOC, Latino, elder, youth, and rural voices was key. We wanted to uplift and validate the experiences and emotions of those most impacted by imbalances and gatekeeping tactics. We also invited identities that can claim some accountability for the current state of the system and can take responsibility in starting necessary shifts.

This report draws from the 4 R's of Social Transformation framework[2]. This framework outlines four different forms of social change: reform, resist, re-imagine, and re-create. "Reform" seeks to create change in the current system, "resist" works against the current system, "re-imagine" envisions a new and just system, and "re-create" creates the models for this just system. It is important that this report is viewed with this framework in mind, with an understanding that not all conversations fit together within one social change form.

2 https://www.ncclimatejustice.info/our-approach

Heavy Whipping Cream 3.99
BUTTER 5.29
PURE IRISH BUTTER 3.49

IN•SIGHT

/ˈinˌsīt/

the capacity to gain an accurate and deep intuitive understanding of a person or thing. "the ability to empathize and connect with human suffering"

Ruby Sales

People with the greatest challenges are often closest to the solutions. We set out to conduct virtual conversations we called "identity conversations," to ask important questions to individuals who represented specific communities. These included urban, rural, Latino, BIPOC, white, youth, and elder populations. Our planning team discovered important and thoughtful insights into the food system from these stories and from the people who lived them.

THESE INDIVIDUALS INCLUDED 65 TOTAL PARTICPANTS ACROSS 9 "IDENTITY CONVERSATIONS"

3 urban/rural conversations

- 16 participants identified as rural
- 8 participants identified as urban

3 generational (youth/elder) conversations

- 3 participants identified as elders
- 3 participants identified as supporters of elders
- 1 participant identified as youth
- 10 participants identified as supporters of youth

2 racial (white/BIPOC) conversations

- 4 participants identified as white
- 3 participants identified as BIPOC

1 Latino conversation

- 12 participants identified as Latino
- 7 participants identified as working with Latino communities in food-related work

There was a slight overlap in participants between conversations, where a couple of participants were in more than one identity conversation. Importantly, there was representation of thirteen farmers and growers throughout our identity conversations.

METHODOLOGY

To guide these conversations, our team used the following questions:

1. From your perspective, what shifts/innovations/creative/beautiful responses recently [due to the COVID-19 pandemic] have made you feel like "the food system we want is possible?"
2. Given all that has been happening/made clear/highlighted, what has made you say "wow" about the responses and innovations in our food system since COVID?
3. What should we do more of in order to do food differently?

Our process drew from the fields of qualitative research, human-centered design, and our own process of community-based participatory research (CBPR).

One member of the Food Action Plan project team facilitated each conversation, while a second team member took detailed notes during the call. Conversations were also recorded when possible. Call notes were uploaded into Dedoose, a qualitative research analysis tool, for coding and analysis.

All coding was done using our team's interview notes rather than interview transcripts. The team reviewed video recordings of the conversations when there were gaps in the notes or we needed additional context or clarity about how participants phrased particular statements.

From the identity conversations, we created an extensive codebook[3] to perform thematic analysis. Our team of six contributed to three iterations of data coding, where at least two team members coded each identity conversation. Weekly team meetings allowed us to discuss emerging themes and refine our codebook as needed.

An important part of this project's process was re-engaging the identity conversation participants with the report. We asked participants to review an initial draft report for clarity, authenticity, and impact. The feedback of seven participants was incorporated into the final version of this document.

Upon review of the draft report, one participant stated "It's such a large system, bureaucratic, filled with policies and people and wealth that drive so much practice and inequity. It's also generations in the making. People have big reactions and big visions. This document reflects all of that."

The NC Food Action Plan project team took the big visions and reactions we heard from identity conversations and created this section of the report to reflect what we heard. Those critical perspectives led to these 12 key insights.

Not all identity conversations are reflected in these insights as the topics were created after the initial conversations. These insights are not ranked or ordered based on priority/importance. Additionally, the insights have a "calls to action" section, consisting of suggestions made by the project team based on the identity conversations. Though the insights themselves reflect value, they do not necessarily require direct action.

3 Full list of codes can be found here

LEADING INSIGHTS

01. Space to consider and process emotion is critical in moving forward.

02. An intersectional approach to food is foundational.

03. Mismatches of available resources in the current system increase existing disparities.

04. Power and gatekeeping tactics that impede access to opportunity for communities of color need to be acknowledged and addressed.

05. Address the need to pay farmers fairly and desire to see food as a right.

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07. Small farms are a desired solution, and struggle with viability.

08. Youth voices drive the future, and need to be consulted.

09. Community generated solutions hold the keys to progress.

10. Both big "P" and little "p" policy changes are necessary.

11. Identify and focus on what drives innovation, outside of a crisis.

12. Leverage the current momentum to create a new food system.

This report will now take a deeper dive into each of these insights from the perspective of the different groups we spoke with.

INSIGHT 01

SPACE TO CONSIDER AND PROCESS EMOTION IS CRITICAL IN MOVING FORWARD.

Participants' emotions provide greater context into the food system and how communities have been impacted differently. This section highlights the prominent emotions first, followed by the thought or belief that caused the emotion.

"White farmers are then able to invest resources into the land [because they have resources from generations of free labor and exploitation]. Black people look at the land and see the history of slavery and violence and murder and don't want any part of it"

- BIPOC

BIPOC COMMUNITIES

We heard participants in BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) communities express emotions such as **pain**, hurt, and **frustration**. These emotions were caused by **pain** from the post-slavery era, **frustration** that some members of these communities have a lack of interest in land ownership and farming, and hurt regarding the cycle of disenfranchisement of Black labor and land.

Specifically, much hurt resulted from the fact that white people have historically seen opportunities in farming where Black people saw historical **pain**. However, conversations about **pain** and **frustration** shifted to healing when youth were involved early in agriculture and consideration was given to the ways in which the Black church can serve the community.

Additionally, youth were inspired by their possibilities in the food system and encouraged to create awareness about the power of federal policies such as the Farm Bill to mobilize the community. We heard **pride** described in discussing small communities and there was a desire to see the narrative shift to reflect their assets.

WHITE PEOPLE

In contrast to the participants in the BIPOC identity conversations, those in the white community had less emotion related to **pain** and **fear** due to historical trauma. However, this group expressed sentiments of challenge, **frustration**, and **fear** regarding power dynamics and imbalances.

Many participants expressed **fear** and **tension** about how to fight power imbalances, let go of power, and acknowledge how the food system has historically impacted communities of color. However, they also shared feelings of **hope** and **passion** for embedding racial equity work in the system and coming to terms with privilege and power.

Discussions of power were coupled with statements of power dynamics due to race and positionality in food work. **Passion** and **excitement** were also represented in envisioning the future of the food system post-pandemic. One participant stated, "we planted seeds that might blossom later," regarding the shift towards innovation for the future.

Passion was heard in connecting the different levels of food work between community, local, state, and federal efforts. Participants, however, expressed **frustration** with the lack of coordination of efforts and long-term planning across organizations.

"... the place that is hardest for White people is understanding power dynamics. They are scared, and that's understandable. White people should be caucusing about power dynamics and white supremacy, and that's the work we need to be doing."

- WHITE

LATINO COMMUNITIES

Participants from the Latino community expressed emotions ranging from **frustration** and fear, to **hope** and **pride**.

The barriers and miscommunications faced by members of their community were some of their biggest **frustration**s. These challenges were only made worse by the pandemic, which created deeper inequities. Additionally, there was **frustration** about the treatment of farmworkers. Many struggle with access to food, despite the fact that they are part of the system itself. The lack of conversation about the root causes of food insecurity in the community was another point of **frustration**.

However, we heard participants express **hope** for the future and **pride** in their community. Especially in a community that is "all united to provide" and that innovated in a crisis. Participants expressed **hope** that there would be future research to help understand the needs of the Latino community, and to grow the availability of culturally relevant foods.

There was also **pride** from participants in the history and culture of food within the Latino community. **Passion** was represented in an increased desire for community representation within policy and advocacy for Latino needs.

There was **passion** and **tension** heard regarding education as a potential solution to addressing issues in the food system. According to some participants, increased awareness is needed to influence better food choices and policy engagement. Others stated that the solution must address the root causes of food inequity, including low wages, discrimination, immigration, and poverty.

"We are a culture of tradition and memories from our ancestors - we continue those memories."

-LATINO

"Sometimes families have fear due to immigration status. It hasn't helped during COVID that relief is often for families who have status, and eliminated for those who are not documented."

- LATINO

RURAL COMMUNITIES

Emotions from the rural communities' identity conversations ranged from **pride**, **love**, **hope**, and excitement to **frustration**. **Pride** and **love** dominated the conversations. To these participants, "rural" meant a place and the story of home, not just a population density. Participants felt that being in a rural community provided them with a stronger sense of community and connectedness.

The idea that struggles bring future opportunities created **hope** and **excitement**. There was a feeling that now is the time to seize the momentum from the pandemic.

Fear and **stress** came from the lack of profits and control experienced by rural farmers. However, there was also **tension** between the need to make a profit from farming as their livelihood and the current level of capitalism in food. Participants expressed a desire to move away from the profit-guided capitalist system. But there was uncertainty about how to do so.

"I'd like there to be more work that does things that scare people. We have a system of monetizing and capitalizing everything."

- RURAL

Additionally, these participants felt **frustrated** by how few people want to stay in rural communities. Yet, the food that is grown in these areas is disproportionately consumed by those in urban areas.

Getting youth involved in food work and integrating agriculture into the education system was a point of **passion**. There was also **excitement** about youth and Black people regaining an interest in agriculture, leading to a return to rural areas to farm and grow.

Participants expressed **hope** in community-driven solutions that focus on improving infrastructure and the capacity of local and regional food suppliers. Some ideas included a direct-to-consumer agricultural model and collaboration between rural and urban spaces to strengthen the food supply chain.

Policy solutions that support these examples include increasing broadband access and providing resources for regional food markets. Others noted that grants beyond low-interest loans were effective for creating innovation outside the current models.

URBAN COMMUNITIES

In these conversations, the key emotions represented were **frustration** and **hope**. Participants in the urban communities' conversations felt confused by what the term "urban" meant to them. There was **frustration** with the term, due to its implicit association with race and socioeconomic status.

Participants felt **frustrated** trying to balance their personal beliefs with those of the organizations that they represent. **Frustration** was also expressed about the strict and racist policies that stall collaboration and innovation.

In contrast to rural conversations, our team noticed urban participants felt disconnected to place and were more connected to their organization.

Hope was felt regarding the desire for collaboration sparked by the pandemic. The pandemic also created **hope** for shedding light on long-term disparities and inequities.

"As a white woman, I can't remember ever having been identified as 'urban'. Has this word ever been neutral, or has it always been coded for suburban/ urban; white/black; rich/poor?"

- URBAN

YOUTH & ELDERS

Youth and elders were interviewed both together and separately, so their emotions expressed in conversations have been grouped together. However, there are key distinctions between the two groups that will be discussed later in the report in insight #8. In these identity conversations, we heard emotions similar to other group conversations. They ranged from **excitement** to **frustration** to **sadness.**

We heard **frustration** within the youth group around the disinterest of agriculture in the Black community. Additionally, they were **frustrated** by elders' lack of innovation and creativity in farming. The idea that local food is seen as "boutique" or exclusive was also frustrating to this group. Our participants felt that eating local food needs to be a normal part of food consumption. Participants also expressed **frustration** about the disproportionate investment from the state towards hemp production instead of food production.

There was a specific feeling of **sadness** related to the **isolation** and lack of connectivity in the elder populations. This was only made worse by the pandemic. One participant explained that feelings of **isolation** are not specific to age, but to active vs. homebound senior populations.

A lot of **excitement** was generated by youth engaging in food work and the chance for youth and elders to work more strategically together. This connected directly to the feeling of **hope** that youth are the future and elders need to give them the platform to build the future.

"You get to hear the perspective of what the future wants." Our youth is our future; if we cultivate their needs/ desires, we're building the future."

- YOUTH/ELDER

Calls to Action:

- ➜ For change to happen, we need to seek out and encourage emotional intelligence training and understanding.
- ➜ All leadership can benefit from more emotional awareness. This includes community leaders, organizational leadership, and institutional leadership.
- ➜ "Doing food differently" is both head and heart work.
- ➜ Deepening food-related organizations' and leaders' ability to work from a place of emotional awareness/justice/intelligence allows us to value our experience. The emotions that are invoked during this process can be used as important guides in what to do and how to do it.

INSIGHT 02

AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO FOOD IS FOUNDATIONAL.

An intersectional approach to food recognizes how societal issues — like representation, transportation, living wage, health, and career growth — connect and overlap. Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a civil rights activist and research scholar. It describes the ways in which identities interact and impact lived experiences. An intersectional approach to food involves understanding the role that racial identity plays in how participants experienced food work.

This approach to food also brings together different groups to achieve a common goal. Participants noted that food and related points are often seen as separate. Yet, a holistic approach can shed light on how things are linked and the new opportunities those links create. The identity conversations discussed food and its connections to many issues, including healthcare, immigration, and education.

There was also discussion about adding food to preventative care as a way to "pay for health" instead of paying for healthcare. Additionally, the Latino community conversation touched on how food plays a role in establishing safe working conditions, wages, and access to education. This point was not only important for farmworkers, but for the wider community as well. The Latino community and youth/elder community were natural leaders in seeing the intersectionality of food.

"People can have plenty of food and still be depressed. It's not just food; food isn't just food. It's a whole thing that happens around food and what you do with food, how it makes you feel and all that. Food is so personal and there are so many associations with it that's more than just the food itself."

- ELDER

"Health policy view - health is more than healthcare; food access is part of health, well being, quality of life. There are way more aspects of health, and food is part of it."

- URBAN

02

Calls to Action:

- More intentional work and collaboration are required to view food through an intersectional lens. This work is already underway across the state, but needs to be expanded upon, with a focus on better addressing gaps in health and wealth.
- Adding food access into Medicaid expansion in North Carolina would bring the health and food systems together to create preventative solutions.
- Providing safe and equitable working conditions to the agricultural workforce will lead to a more just food system.
- Any solution addressed within communities needs to take into account the different impact on each identity group.

INSIGHT 03

MISMATCHES OF AVAILABLE RESOURCES IN THE CURRENT SYSTEM INCREASE EXISTING DISPARITIES.

The distribution of wealth, resources, and opportunity for growth was an important topic across conversations. North Carolina has the resources available, yet they are not equitably distributed within communities. These mismatches lead to opportunity gaps in regional food systems that otherwise would succeed.

Rural communities felt that while they have access to land for farming, the food they produce rarely stays within the community. Additionally, a digital divide between urban and rural communities creates barriers to innovation. Farmers and small growers lack opportunities, especially around technology, to grow the scale of business and stay viable.

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification also has financial barriers. GAP is a voluntary program that verifies the safe growing, handling, and packing of produce. GAP certification can open farmers into more selling markets but can be costly to get and renew.

Race showed up in the Latino conversations while discussing the mismatch of resources available to Latino farmworkers. Additionally, BIPOC participants stated that agricultural land is being used to build wealth for the few rather than to nourish the many.

"Most of them [small farmers], they either have no option and they're going to a farmers market or they're doing a little stand so that most of them are too small to try to get into and now it's almost impossible to be GAP certified for small farms because they can't generate enough income for that, there are very few opportunities for them so being able to have access to a developing food hub that can purchase from local farmers is another option where we're going."

- YOUTH/ELDER*

03

Calls to Action:

- We need to redistribute resources instead of reinventing the wheel.
- Government subsidies should support small farmers that can't compete with large farmers or can't access facilities needed to grow their production (food hubs, aggregators).
- Audits of community resources should be conducted regularly, so that they are equitably divided depending on a communities' needs.
- Continued investment into farmers of color —beyond that which was available in 2020— is crucial.

"They [people in farming communities] don't eat well even though they are surrounded by this resource. Most farms are commercial and raise food to ship it elsewhere, people are growing cotton, soybeans, peanuts that get shipped out and profits go to a small proportion of the people."

- RURAL

INSIGHT 04

POWER AND GATEKEEPING TACTICS THAT IMPEDE ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY FOR COMMUNITIES OF COLOR NEED TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED AND ADDRESSED.

This leading insight most aligned with our codes of racial equity, white supremacy, and power. As expected, these concepts varied across the identity conversations.

Participants within the white group had the most contributions to this insight. They discussed having to grapple with race through self-reflection. Some white people strongly acknowledged the importance of collaborating with BIPOC communities to create changes in the food system.

However, the response to this acknowledgement was not consistent. Some white participants wanted to have BIPOC voices lead the change, with white people in the background to support and provide space. Other participants expressed apprehension with addressing power dynamics. They suggested white people and BIPOC people working together to innovate for the future.

There were many areas of discussion around power and gatekeeping within the BIPOC and Latino groups. Structural racism, unequal access to funding, culturally appropriate food, and the desire to maintain self sufficiency were issues that came up the most. The Latino group discussed gaining voice and power through representation, such as community educators and policy advocates.

It is important to note that some participants in the Latino identity conversations were white people working alongside and/or serving Latino communities. To create contrast between the groups, we made two separate breakout rooms. One for people who specifically represented the Latino community and one for individuals who worked with or served the Latino community.

"Black people look out at the woods and we see our people hanging, White people look out and see possibilities for making money and connecting with the land."

- BIPOC

The BIPOC conversations discussed how historical oppression has caused **pain** and trauma within the Black community towards agriculture. These participants noted that the current agricultural system is built upon white supremacy. Land ownership creates a wealth gap between white and Black people. Black farmers now rent land from white people that was previously Black-owned.

Although the discussions of power and gatekeeping were predominantly within the white, BIPOC, and Latino conversations, this topic was brought up in the rural communities' conversations as well. One participant expressed their association between the term "'rural" and structural racism due to the limited opportunities available to those who live in rural communities.

Calls to Action:

- Leaders across the food system should build power analysis into their work as a decision making tool. The power analysis tool helps create a common language and understanding amongst your community so you can work together effectively.
- Understanding power dynamics helps you make strategic decisions about which actions to take. Taking a step back and thinking strategically about collective power is one way we can begin to make necessary changes.
- People of color need to have space in roles of leadership and influence within their communities and at the local, state, and federal government levels. To create this room for opportunity, white people must step down from some seats of power.
- Shifting power isn't a binary system. One can both shift power without being powerless, just as someone can gain power while still experiencing oppression.
- Emotional fortitude (see insight 1) is necessary to reconcile feelings within white identity conversations about white folks stepping away from the table versus white folks working alongside folks of color.

"If we're going to vision how to do this differently, a group of privileged White people can't do the visioning. That's the real value of caucusing...maybe. Build multi-racial coalitions that build trust and be truthful about shifting power and resources to move into a system that we want. We have to grapple with race, and in order to do that we have to caucus."

- WHITE

INSIGHT 05

ADDRESS THE NEED TO PAY FARMERS FAIRLY AND DESIRE TO SEE FOOD AS A RIGHT.

Capitalism as part of the food system was a major concern. There was **tension** between the desire for fair compensation and support for those in the food industry and the belief that food is a human right. For the sake of this report, we define capitalism in the food system as the private ownership of food and its production.

One participant mentioned the desire for "more work that does things that scare people." Another mentioned the **fear** of naming policies and strategies as socialist. The ways in which state and federal dollars are spent to support minority and small farmers was also discussed. Specifically, we heard that state and federal programs provided less support and funding to small and minority farmers.

Participants from the youth group aligned most with rejecting capitalist ideals. Their **excitement** and **energy** to innovate the current system requires a shift away from seeing food as a commodity. On the other side, participants from the rural group explicitly stated the need for farmers to be paid fairly for the products and to be financially supported because it is the right thing to do. This leading insight relates closely to the next insight—understanding charity vs. justice in relation to food systems change.

"I still struggle with the dichotomy of wanting to create a vibrant agricultural economy (attractive to younger farmers, making small farming viable) vs. having to put a value on food (we want to think of food as more of a right)."

- RURAL

"Empowering...finding federal dollars to empower minority farmers, small farmers, not in a microloan format....finding more equitable ways to approach support for small farmers. Removing capitalism out of agriculture."

- YOUTH/ELDER

05

Calls to Action:

- We need to shift towards work that is bold, regardless of whether it elicits **fear** and apprehension.
- The food system is ready to move away from short-term innovations. We need to move towards long-term changes in the system that pay farmers for their production and make food accessible to consumers.
- Rather than using temporary solutions such as micro loans, there is a desire to use equitable strategies to fund communities.

INSIGHT 06

THERE IS A NEED FOR A STRONGER AND SHARED ANALYSIS ON CHARITY VS. JUSTICE AS IT RELATES TO FOOD SYSTEMS CHANGE.

During this process, we developed two codes that often overlapped. "Charity" is defined as the giving of food and/or financial resources. "Saviorism" is working to uplift or help others while denying the agency and leadership of those they aim to help.

Although charity is sometimes considered the opposite of justice, that is not necessarily true. This insight explores the differences and similarities between the two concepts. It is also important to differentiate between charity and rapid response within the food system.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there were several programs that provided financial support and food to businesses, individuals, and communities across the state. However, the North Carolina Food System Resilience Strategy Report[4] highlights that even short-term charitable deeds take accountability off of state and federal governments to create solutions that would alleviate the need for rapid response.

How charity is perceived depends on the intent of how food and compensation is given. Charity can be seen as problematic, or it can be considered mutual aid. If the voice that is guiding the work isn't from inside the community, the perspective is clouded and usually leads to charity work. Charity work in the system often perpetuates more charity. It creates a cycle of dependency within communities by not addressing long-term inequities.

Youth/elder identity conversations revealed differences in how charity was viewed. Elders would rather work for what they have than receive charity. In contrast, youth emphasized the importance of charitable giving when discussing the success of donating food to different communities.

"A truly equitable food system is where we're supporting the farmers because they're selling the produce we want, not just doing it for charity work."

- YOUTH*

"There is certainly hope for that [paying for health instead of healthcare] but we all know this is a systemic problem, which means it has to have a systemic solution. The food banks, speaking from our [local food bank] point of view, should not be part of the system, but we've [local food bank] become part of the system."

- ELDER*

4 https://wfpc.sanford.duke.edu/sites/wfpc.sanford.duke.edu/files/NCFoodResiliencyStrategy-August-2021_0.pdf

Recognizing historical and systemic oppression, and providing the access to resources that communities ask for to support themselves, was seen as the first step towards justice.

The quantity of resources, collaborations, and volunteers for emergency food programs have increased in response to COVID 19. The quality has shifted with funder flexibility, delivery format, types of foods offered, etc. Although we heard sentiments of gratitude, there were also concerns expressed about how to leverage the innovation from the pandemic into future action.

Some participants stated being proud of this service, without connecting the failures within the system that create and perpetuate the need. Race was discussed by participants regarding the support of BIPOC farmers in 2020 as justice in response to recognizing historical disinvestment and disproportionate investment.

A societal conversation is needed to address the size of our charitable food systems and how we can shift towards solutions to hunger centered around justice. We have to stop viewing food as an independent/ individual problem and see it as a societal issue. There is a systemic and historical context related to hunger, and it's time to make the shift to seeing food as a right. This raised the question, what if we expected people to have access to food as a right that is not determined by your ability to work or produce? Additionally, in what ways are gatherings, collaborations, or group programs perpetuating ideas of a charity mindset or serving as opportunities to create systemic shifts?

Calls to Action:

- We need a cultural and policy shift towards viewing food as a fundamental right and fair wages/compensation for agricultural work as a priority.
- Representation of community needs at the policy level by individuals that are members of those communities is crucial.
- We need to have a framework for food justice and mutual aid that benefits communities more than charity and reliance on rapid response. Promoting small farms was also a suggested approach to responding to future disasters and crises.

INSIGHT 07

SMALL FARMS ARE A DESIRED SOLUTION BUT STRUGGLE WITH VIABILITY.

Small farms were one of the most prominently mentioned solutions to the current food system. For use in this report, we use the USDA's definition of small farms: a farm that has a gross cash farm income under $250,000. Within that definition, there are commercial and noncommercial small farms.

The shift to a direct-to-consumer model during the COVID-19 pandemic was seen as a positive shift that resulted from the crisis. Although small farms were discussed as a potential solution, participants recognized that they can struggle to make a profit. One participant mentioned that small farmers often work extra jobs to stay afloat. Especially when they are first starting their businesses.

Similarly, some participants expressed **frustration** that big agricultural industries and farms receive a larger share of state and local funding, leaving small farms and those in rural areas under funded and under supported.

Farmers and growers also expressed the need for consumers to become more educated about eating locally. Understanding the seasonality of North Carolina's agricultural system is a key part of consumer education. Direct-to-consumer models of buying local food need to be a long-term commitment, not a trend or a short-lived interest.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, participants expressed **tensions** about small-scale operations abruptly shifting and trying to meet large-scale demand. This leading insight was similar to that of taking capitalism out of food due to the continued duality of monetizing food/agriculture and the shift toward viewing food as a right.

"If we're going to have a true food system that supports small farmers, it can't be a lifestyle and it can't just be selling into wealthy markets. People have to be buying from local markets because it's better, it's fresher, it's closer, it's easier for them to do than buying from wherever."

- YOUTH

"Farming profitability and farmer stress are big issues now – among systems, places, small and big farms. The farmers right now aren't making profits; it's an untenable situation. In a conversation just this morning, one farmer who would appear successful noted he is considering hanging it all up because he's not making any money."

- RURAL

07

Calls to Action:

Supporting the viability of small farms requires direct action. Specific actions include:

- Investing in and financing regional food systems infrastructure.
- Including small and minority business owners in decision making about that financing.
- Creating more capital for food-oriented development.
- Encouraging contracts with small farmers to provide food for local institutions.
- Increasing access to education on how to maintain farmland for small farmers.
- Promoting the increased awareness and support for buying local after COVID-19.

INSIGHT 08

YOUTH VOICES DRIVE THE FUTURE AND NEED TO BE CONSULTED.

This insight was most frequently discussed in the youth/elder and rural identity conversations. However, youth were described as driving the future across other identity conversations.

Participants from BIPOC, rural, youth/elder groups acknowledged the difficulties of persuading young people to "return to the land" and view agriculture as a viable business. All three identity conversations **stressed** the importance of integrating food and agriculture into early education so that youth can maintain a lifelong interest in the work.

Differences in the working styles and ideals of elders and youth are one obstacle to keeping youth in agricultural work. In the youth/elder group, participants discussed the challenges of working across generations while still acknowledging the value of intergenerational collaboration. In contrast to older generations, youth were more likely to value creativity, innovation, and flexibility. Elders preferred traditional values and conventional working styles. Even though youth and elders have different priorities, both groups expressed value in farming.

Youth were described as the voice of the future by many identity conversation participants. In addition, this identity valued racial equity and social justice principles as part of its work. Elders and adults need to give youth the platform to be involved and use their voices within the food system.

Youth have a new perspective on the system compared to those that have worked in food and agriculture for years. For example, youth ideals were most aligned with the insight that capitalism should be taken out of the food system. Working across generations presents a unique opportunity. Youth have the **energy** and **passion** to innovate while elders have wisdom, experience, and knowledge.

"It can be a great idea to collaborate with the positive and creative thinking of youth when trying to tackle age-old issues."

- YOUTH/ELDER

"There's a belief that younger generations aren't as hard working as older generations. I think that's a complete misunderstanding about how younger people work and where we allocate our time. I think younger people choose to pursue things they care about. Rather than trying to shift younger people to get them to conform to the traditional way of work, embrace the change, and embrace a different culture of work."

- YOUTH/ELDER

08

Calls to Action:

- Support youth involvement in all aspects of the food system.
- Food should be incorporated into the education systems to promote interest in agriculture careers early on.
- Intergenerational collaboration is necessary for youth to be fully supported within the system.
- Although there are generational differences between elders and youth, the hindsight and foresight perspectives of both identities are necessary to craft the future of the food system.
- Identity conversation participants emphasized the need for youth to receive agricultural education from grade school through early adulthood.

INSIGHT 09

COMMUNITY GENERATED SOLUTIONS HOLD THE KEYS TO PROGRESS.

The participants in all identity conversations discussed solutions based on the needs of their respective communities. However, it was noted repeatedly that continued collaboration is necessary to make this work move forward.

The white identity conversation expressed a desire for space for visioning. To build community leadership and voice, BIPOC and Latino identity conversations highlighted the importance of embedding racial equity and shifting power dynamics. In addition, there is a call for both a structural and cultural shift. This recognizes that a shift in culture can cause a shift in food system structure. The goal of this shift was to change how communities and larger institutions spend and share their dollars to provide food and support small farmers' businesses at the same time.

A successful model mentioned throughout identity conversations was food hubs. Food hubs are central to community-generated solutions, as they provide infrastructure, marketing, jobs, and connect farmers with the community. The solution, however, must be accompanied by infrastructure investment to make food hubs a realistic option.

"More institutional procurement, schools purchasing, more money in the system to sustain it to make sure we don't have a scarcity mentality."

- URBAN

Other solutions include redistributing resources to communities and farmers who need them. This way, you are not reinventing the wheel but mobilizing existing resources. Additionally, a collective impact model was needed to push solutions forward. By doing so, efforts are coordinated instead of duplicated. A collective impact model is a method of intentionally collaborating and sharing information and resources to address a complex social issue.

There were discussions specific to engaging youth and rural farmers in agricultural work. These included stronger connections between the education system and food system, and more education about land access, wholesale selling, and profitability.

In particular, the Latino identity conversations advocated for the establishment of effective channels and methods of sharing information. Specifically, this group highlighted creating awareness of healthy food options and honoring their existing healthy cultural traditions.

Participants in the Latino identity conversation specifically emphasized the need for engagement in policy and advocacy. A discussion of the various policy influence positions individuals can hold in their communities and at the state and federal levels followed.

"We are a unique group of people due to our culture; the specific food we cook. It would be beneficial to organize ourselves and to invest in growing locally the ingredients we need for our dishes instead of importing them. There should be a focus group who research and invest in farming those specific ingredients that are part of our culinary needs, while at the same time finding a way to support and celebrate our roots and culture."

- LATINO

Calls to Action:

- ➜ Institutions and local governments should be funding community-generated solutions.
- ➜ We need to develop mechanisms to hold funders more accountable for how they spend their money and for which programs or solutions they are supporting.
- ➜ Projects/organizations should be funded in a way that reflects the interests of those most impacted by the system.

09

INSIGHT 10

BIG "P" AND LITTLE "P" POLICY ARE NECESSARY.

Different types of policy solutions were mentioned throughout many of the conversations. For this insight, we heard big "P" policy reflecting federal, state, and local level legislation. Small "p" policy reflects growth building efforts, cultural shifts, and changes in policy and procedures. In combination, these policies promote a community-based food system where everyone has a role to play.

Small "p" policy was mostly discussed in the urban and rural identity conversations. Participants had concerns about the impact policy change can have if communities aren't given the ability to enact change. Success of policies is often measured by the impact. However, if organizations lack capacity, it will lead to poor implementation of policy.

Influencing local and community policy is often the starting point for people who want to become involved in policy and advocacy work. Some people want to work within the system, while others want to create entirely new processes. Yet community members need an entry point for their work and a foundation of knowledge to get started.

It was noted that program and policy changes must put people's voices front and center. There is often a disconnect between the needs of grassroots groups and the actions of the people in leadership. Community members also need to be informed and educated about policy before they can advocate for change.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic created an opportunity for short-term changes to the red tape often found in policy. We need to learn from these changes and shift towards long-term innovations. The desire for transformative systemic change was apparent during the conversations, with suggestions at both the community and policy levels. There was also a sense among participants that we have the "human capital" we need to envision a system we need. Our communities have **energy**, **passion**, knowledge, experience, and creativity.

"Farm Bill is crucial – how it drives what we grow in this country. Not sure what to do about it, but the first step is awareness. Our federal dollars are being spent on food that is making people sick."

- BIPOC

"Local government needs to invest in food security for all, importance of local government budgets reflecting the needs of the Latino community"

- LATINO

10

Calls to Action:

- We need to address all sides of the policy spectrum, including organizational partnerships and collaborations, changes in procedures, advocacy and mobilization, and legislation at local, state, and federal levels.
- For policy reform to be effective, communities must have a voice and resources to share information and act upon changes.
- By embracing transformative policy change, communities can leverage their existing assets and strengths.
- Develop communication and learning strategies about how policy and politics intersect. This helps to educate communities of how their voting decisions and advocacy are tied to federal, state, and local spending on the food system.

INSIGHT 11

IDENTIFY AND FOCUS ON WHAT DRIVES INNOVATION, OUTSIDE OF A CRISIS.

One of the highlights of all identity conversations was the focus on the innovations and collaborations that happened during the COVID-19 pandemic. While there was a lot of **energy** and **passion** around what crisis made possible, our team wondered, "What drives innovation outside of a crisis?"

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, people have become more aware of the injustices and inequities that exist across and within different communities. With unreliable supply chains and a shift to buying from small farmers, the pandemic also exposed the fragility of our current food system.

Within the current system, rigid policies result in limited room for innovation. Necessity was the major driver of advancement during the pandemic. Participants discussed different ways to innovate beyond a crisis while considering different strategies for the future. Multiple groups discussed the movement of food to people who need it. They also discussed taking aspects of emergency food and integrating it into a future system. For example, food trucks selling traditional foods, delivering food boxes, and utilizing buses to transport food.

The shift from competition to collaboration among organizations was seen as a major innovation. Some organizations were no longer as driven by profits. They were also focused on equity and strategically distributing food and resources to those who needed it. Rural communities can be a source of resilience and creativity, as they have needed to innovate long before the pandemic.

"When you have chaos, people begin to do things that they weren't doing before. Little things like having your own garden. It is a little thing, but unrest is making people think differently and they are doing so from the standpoint of survival. Necessity is positioning us to think about what we are doing everyday and why we are doing it."

- BIPOC

"Sometimes it takes a tragedy to come together."

- LATINO

11

Calls to Action:

- ➜ Explore what strategies promote innovation outside of crisis response.
- ➜ Create tools for long-term change based on those strategies.
- ➜ Build upon the momentum and innovation created by the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ➜ Work in multi-racial coalitions that are grounded in power analysis (see insight #4) as a step in crafting a better food system beyond crisis.

INSIGHT 12

LEVERAGE THE CURRENT MOMENTUM TO CREATE A NEW FOOD SYSTEM.

This project's key research question asked "what could be done to 'do food differently?'" Throughout the identity conversations, there was a strong desire to create a food system that upholds community values, leverages momentum from crisis, and innovates for a more equitable future.

Participants also expressed a **passion** for being part of the work but asked for guidance on how to take their next steps. Many solutions that came up during the discussions overlapped between different identity conversations. As a result, there were multiple suggested avenues for taking action.

Rural conversations focused on the development of a regional food economy. Small and minority business owners were seen as critical voices to the decision-making process. Urban conversations expressed ideas for shifting the current system through policy change. They also focused on how institutional dollars can be spent more equitably.

The Latino conversation centered around solutions that increased representation and inclusion of Latino people and culture. BIPOC participants discussed the importance of community organizing around policy issues, the role of the Black church in healing the community, and involving youth in agriculture.

The youth and elder conversations emphasized the importance of intergenerational collaboration and community resources in supporting small farmers.

A lot of hope in creating the food system we imagine on an equitable level, connecting with folks on local and regional levels, seeing ideas are similar, trying to start a coop. Aligning paths"

- RURAL

"We could feed ourselves and not destroy the planet at the same time. Vision is something y'all could do. I'll help. But it's hard."

- WHITE

12

Calls To Action:

- The first step is to find your place within the 11 actionable insights above. You have a place either as an individual, as part of an organization, or as part of an institution.
- Each person, regardless of affiliation, must recognize their multiple intersecting identities.
- Accountability is not limited to one institution. Many of us are members of multiple communities and have accountability to those communities as well.
- Work with community leaders, community members, and emerging leaders to keep momentum for change moving forward.

FORE·SIGHT

/ˈfôrˌsīt/

Care or provision for the future. The ability to judge correctly what is going to happen in the future (based on past occurrences) and take care to plan accordingly

These identity conversations revealed a shared **passion** for a food system that "does food differently." Participants expressed their desire for a food system that sees food as an intersectional, fundamental, and relational part of a larger whole. Latino participants, in particular, indicated that more research and conversations are needed to build upon the current momentum.

To move forward on these desires for the food system, we must learn from emotion in our work, collaborate instead of compete, and recognize and address power and racial dynamics.

In terms of transforming the food system, even COVID didn't have a lasting impact. This work must be carried on past crises. As stated in the hindsight section of this report, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected our research. This included the methods by which identity conversations could be held and the ability of participants within their respective organizations to take part. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has helped clarify the distinction between charity-centered models needed in times of crisis and those that foster systemic change. We need long-term, sustained change to shift conditions in our frontline communities. Charitable models don't create this change.

We uncovered perspectives specific and relevant to our shared experiences as North Carolinians. However, we acknowledge that our identity conversations were not designed to reflect every identity in North Carolina. Although Indigenous communities were invited to participate in the BIPOC conversations, there were not any participants that identified as Indigenous. Additionally, conversations were not held based on gender identity and future work should examine the perspectives from that lens. In addition, conversations highlighting differences in perspectives between community-based organizations and larger institutions or across the political spectrum were not represented. A total of 65 people took part in the identity conversations. Unfortunately, this number is unable to represent all communities within the state.

There is a need for continued work that uplifts community narratives as a way forward. In order to achieve this shared vision of a different food system, we need to create actionable steps and recommendations that can be taken at all levels of power and influence. We invite community members, institutions, and funders across the state to continue this work to create a system that truly does food differently.

Resources/Funding: Community Food Strategies was funded by the Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of North Carolina (BCBSFNC) as a result of a partnership extending several years. Community Food Strategies is an initiative of the Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS) which led a 2009 process that resulted in a statewide plan for NC food systems change called Farm to Fork, also supported, in part, by BCBSFNC. Fountainworks, one of our previous partners in the NC Food Action Plan project , was instrumental in facilitating focus groups that resulted in the 2009 report. That connection, along with Fountainworks' extensive network of relationships to municipalities throughout the state led to an invitation to be a part of this current process. An additional invitation was extended to partner organization, Food Insight Group (FIG), due to their extensive background and expertise in measurement and accountability.

APPENDIX

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Graphic Design & Illustration, Shanthony Art & Design

Loop Creative

Shelli Grogg from FountainWorks
Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of North Carolina (BCBSFNC)